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2022  
KJV

Standard LESSON  
QUARTERLY®

# KJV BIBLE TEACHER

GOD FREES AND REDEEMS  
*DEUTERONOMY, EZRA, MATTHEW,  
JOHN, ROMANS, GALATIANS*

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**March • April • May**

## GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

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# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Special Features

	Page
Quarterly Quiz .....	226
Quarter at a Glance.....	Mark Hamilton 227
Get the Setting .....	Mark S. Krause 228
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings) .....	229
Lessons of Liberation (Map Feature).....	231
Teaching Is More than Talking (Teacher Tips).....	Mark A. Taylor 232
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only) .....	481
Activity Pages (free download) .....	<a href="http://www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages">www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages</a>
In the World (weekly online feature).....	<a href="http://www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world">www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world</a>

## Lessons

### Unit 1: Liberating Passover

March 6	Freed from Captivity .....	<i>Ezra 1:1-8, 11; 2:64-70</i>	233
March 13	Free to Worship .....	<i>Ezra 6:1-12</i>	241
March 20	Free to Celebrate .....	<i>Ezra 6:13-22</i>	249
March 27	Free Because of the Lord .....	<i>Deuteronomy 8:1-11</i>	257

### Unit 2: Liberating Gospels

April 3	Triumphal Entry of the King.....	<i>Matthew 21:1-11</i>	265
April 10	Passover with the King.....	<i>Matthew 26:17-30</i>	273
April 17	Resurrection of the King .....	<i>Matthew 28:1-10</i>	281
April 24	Freedom in the King .....	<i>John 8:31-38</i>	289

### Unit 3: Liberating Letters

May 1	Freedom from Sin .....	<i>Romans 6:1-14</i>	297
May 8	Freedom for the Future .....	<i>Romans 8:18-30</i>	305
May 15	Freedom and the Law .....	<i>Galatians 3:18-29</i>	313
May 22	Freedom, Love, and Faith .....	<i>Galatians 5:1-15</i>	321
May 29	The Fruit of Freedom.....	<i>Galatians 5:16-26</i>	329

# 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. The Lord “stirred up the spirit” of Cyrus, king of \_\_\_\_\_. *Ezra 1:1*
2. To rebuild the “house of the Lord,” Cyrus permitted some Jews to return to what city? (Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerusalem?) *Ezra 1:5*

## Lesson 2

1. The temple’s gold and silver vessels were stolen and brought to Babylon by whom? (Darius, Nebuchadnezzar, Xerxes?) *Ezra 6:5*
2. Israel’s priests were to offer prayers for the king and his sons. T/F. *Ezra 6:9-10*

## Lesson 3

1. The exiles rebuilt following the commands of Kings Cyrus, Darius, and \_\_\_\_\_. *Ezra 6:14*
2. After exile, the elders of the Jews slaughtered the passover lamb. T/F. *Ezra 6:20*

## Lesson 4

1. How many years in the wilderness did God lead His people? (4, 14, 40?) *Deuteronomy 8:2*
2. The fathers of the Israelites previously knew of manna. T/F. *Deuteronomy 8:3*

## Lesson 5

1. The crowd that went before Jesus shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of \_\_\_\_\_.” *Matthew 21:9*
2. Crowds called Jesus a “teacher” from Nazareth. T/F. *Matthew 21:11*

## Lesson 6

1. During the meal, Jesus said one of the Twelve would \_\_\_\_\_ Him. *Matthew 26:21*
2. Before going to the mount of Olives, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn. T/F. *Matthew 26:30*

## Lesson 7

1. Who rolled away the stone that sealed Jesus’ tomb? (a disciple, an angel, a guard?) *Matthew 28:2*

2. The women at the empty tomb experienced fear and \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew 28:8*

## Lesson 8

1. Jesus taught that knowing (truth, justice, peace?) would set people free. *John 8:32*
2. Jesus’ audience claimed they had never been in bondage to anyone. T/F. *John 8:33*

## Lesson 9

1. Baptism into Christ Jesus is baptism into His death. T/F. *Romans 6:3*
2. Followers of Jesus are to offer themselves to God as instruments of \_\_\_\_\_. *Romans 6:13*

## Lesson 10

1. Present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory to “be \_\_\_\_\_ in us.” *Romans 8:18*
2. God’s predestination leads to being conformed to the image of His Son. T/F. *Romans 8:29*

## Lesson 11

1. Why did Paul say the law was added? (transgressions, punishments, services?) *Galatians 3:19*
2. Paul compared the law to a schoolmaster. T/F. *Galatians 3:25*

## Lesson 12

1. Paul taught that people who tried to be “justified by the law” have fallen away from grace. T/F. *Galatians 5:4*
2. The law is \_\_\_\_\_ by showing love to one’s neighbor. *Galatians 5:14*

## Lesson 13

1. People under the Spirit’s leading are not “under the \_\_\_\_\_.” (flesh, Spirit, law?) *Galatians 5:18*
2. Love, joy, and peace are considered among what? (fruit of the Spirit, works of merit, fruit of the flesh?) *Galatians 5:22*

# QUARTER AT A GLANCE

by Mark Hamilton

**H**OW CAN HUMANS LIVE freely? The concept of freedom can have different meanings for different people. For some people, freedom means unchecked following of a person's impulses and desires. In this regard, there is no concern for how so-called freedom affects others. Undisciplined living destroys freedom rather than enhancing it. This quarter's Scriptures address three themes of true freedom in God: the power of memory, the significance of right belief, and the role of responsibility.

## Memory and Freedom

As ancient Israel remembered their liberation from Egypt, the memory reinforced the nature of their relationship with God. Centuries after they left captivity, they remembered God's act of liberation. Three lessons from the Old Testament book of Ezra describe how they rebuilt the temple and experienced liberation. As a result of their freedom, they were filled with joy and celebration, an acknowledgment of God's faithfulness to His people.

However, in the midst of their freedom, Israel was called to submit. The Law of Moses reminded them of the great blessings they would receive if they obeyed God's call on their lives (Deuteronomy 8:1-11). This obedience was rooted in their memory of God's liberation in their history. As they remembered and followed God's commands, they would experience true freedom. All God's people must remember their story as a people called out of bondage and into a new life.

## Right Belief and Freedom

Christian freedom requires right belief and faithful action. When either is lacking, freedom is defined by made-up rules or self-indulgent expressions. This quarter's lessons from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11) and His Passover feast with His disciples (26:17-30) show how the world had certain expectations of free-

dom. However, as Jesus followed His Father's direction, He brought a new kind of freedom, one established in His resurrection (28:1-10).

Jesus triumphed over the bondage of death and sin. As a result, His Father frees all who follow Him. His disciples knew this, as Jesus had already called them to "know the truth" (John 8:32). As disciples follow Jesus, they can be "free indeed" (8:36). Those who follow Jesus' life, death, and resurrection gain freedom. True freedom comes through right belief in the work of Jesus Christ.

## Responsible Freedom

Finally, true freedom is not null of responsibility. Instead, because of Christ's resurrection, Christians are to live freely and responsibly through submission. This comes as we imitate His life and "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Through baptism, Christians join Him in death so that they may join Him in a new life, freed from the power of sin (Romans 6:3-4).

*Proper expression of freedom is rooted in ethical concern for others.*

As a result, Christians are called to use their freedom in Christ to show love toward their neighbors (Galatians 5:14). Proper expression of freedom is rooted in ethical concern for others. To empower this, God gave the Holy Spirit to His followers. Through the Spirit, Christians live free and responsible lives, expressing the fullness of the Spirit in their actions (5:16-25).

This quarter's lessons will show that true freedom comes through the sustained acceptance of God's leading in our lives. When the people of God remember His work, they experience true freedom. Through this quarter, may we be reminded that God invites us to live freely and responsibly for Him and for our community.

# GET THE SETTING

by *Mark S. Krause*

**O**PPRESSION FOLLOWED BY freedom followed by oppression. The history of Israel stretched for two millennia and followed a similar cycle, with seasons of oppression and freedom. Through this context, the nation of Israel understood God's liberation.

## Oppression in the Old Testament Era

God's call sent Abraham and his family of nomadic herdspeople from Mesopotamia, located in modern-day Iraq, to the land of Canaan, located in modern-day Palestine. Famine eventually led Abraham's descendants to relocate to Egypt. After the famine, Abraham's descendants stayed in Egypt but retained a separate identity. Egypt's pharaohs exploited their separatism and subjugated the people. The cycle of oppression began, and the people experienced brutal slavery as they were exploited for royal construction projects.

Through Moses' leadership, God delivered the people from bondage. This act serves as the grand narrative of the Old Testament. However, oppression continued. Against the guidance of God (see 1 Samuel 8:11-18), the emergence of a Jewish king provided some freedom. King David dealt with localized threats and brought peace to the people. However, the peace Israel desired was short-lived. Invasions from the Assyrians (734–721 BC) and from the Babylonians (586–539 BC) brought oppression to Israel again.

## Oppression in the Intertestamental Era

The intertestamental era consists of the roughly 400 years between the events of the Old and New Testaments. During that time, Israel continued to experience oppression and limited freedom. In 331 BC, the Greek King Alexander the Great (reigned 336–323 BC) took control of the Jewish land and people. However, his rule tolerated expressions of relative autonomy among the Jewish people.

At Alexander's death, his kingdom was divided into smaller kingdoms. Israel's central geographic location was advantageous for the kingdoms. As a result, Israel experienced turmoil and strife as rival kingdoms sought to control the area. Eventually, the Seleucids came to power. The tensions between the Seleucids and Jews came to a head when Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV (reigned 175–164 BC) looted Jerusalem, desecrated the temple, and killed thousands of Jews.

As a result, the Jews responded in what is known today as the Maccabean Revolt. The Jews took control of the Jerusalem temple area in 164 BC. The revolt eventually freed Jews from oppression. After a series of smaller conflicts, Seleucid rule was removed from Israel in 142 BC. Israel was free and a period of peace was established. For 79 years they lived free from oppression. However, that changed in 63 BC when the Roman general Pompey invaded Jerusalem, entered the temple, and ended nearly a century of Jewish independence. The cycle of oppression continued.

## Oppression in the New Testament Era

Roman oppression was a defining reality for the writers and the audiences of the New Testament. As Jerusalem was located far from Rome, the Romans established local rulers—"client kings"—to oversee the will of the empire among Jews. Through Herod the Great (ruled 37–34 BC) and his successors, Roman rule was expressed to the Jews.

Tensions between Jews and Romans simmered for a time, but came to a head in a series of conflicts between the Jews and the Romans that spanned 70 years (AD 66–136). The conflict culminated in the annihilation of Jewish influence in the region. Oppression had led to eviction, and by the second century, Jews were banished from Jerusalem.

The story of Israel is one of a constant cycle of oppression and freedom. Against this context, Scripture declares God's freedom and liberation.

Mon, May 16 **Children and Heirs Through God** Galatians 4:1-7  
 Tue, May 17 **Losing All for Christ** Philip­pians 3:1-8a (end with “my Lord”)  
 Wed, May 18 **Press Toward the Goal** Philip­pians 3:8b-14 (begin with “For his sake”)  
 Thu, May 19 **Let Us Love One Another** 1 John 4:7-13  
 Fri, May 20 **Love and Pray for Your Enemies** Matthew 5:43-48  
 Sat, May 21 **Avoid Strife; Love Always** Proverbs 17:13-17  
 Sun, May 22 **Faith Working Through Love** Galatians 5:1-15  
 Mon, May 23 **The Righteous Yield Fruit** Psalm 1  
 Tue, May 24 **Abide in Christ and Bear Fruit** John 15:1-8  
 Wed, May 25 **Wisdom’s Harvest of Righteousness** James 3:13-18  
 Thu, May 26 **The Spirit Produces a Fruitful Field** Isaiah 32:9-20  
 Fri, May 27 **Known by Their Fruits** Matthew 7:15-20  
 Sat, May 28 **God’s Presence Brings Fruitfulness** Ezekiel 47:1-7, 12  
 Sun, May 29 **Live by the Spirit** Galatians 5:16-26

### Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 226

**Lesson 1**—1. Persia. 2. Jerusalem. **Lesson 2**—1. Nebuchadnezzar. 2. true. **Lesson 3**—1. Artaxerxes. 2. false. **Lesson 4**—1. 40. 2. false. **Lesson 5**—1. David. 2. false. **Lesson 6**—1. betray. 2. true. **Lesson 7**—1. an angel. 2. joy. **Lesson 8**—1. truth. 2. true. **Lesson 9**—1. true. 2. righteousness. **Lesson 10**—1. revealed. 2. true. **Lesson 11**—1. transgressions. 2. true. **Lesson 12**—1. true. 2. fulfilled. **Lesson 13**—1. law. 2. fruit of the Spirit.

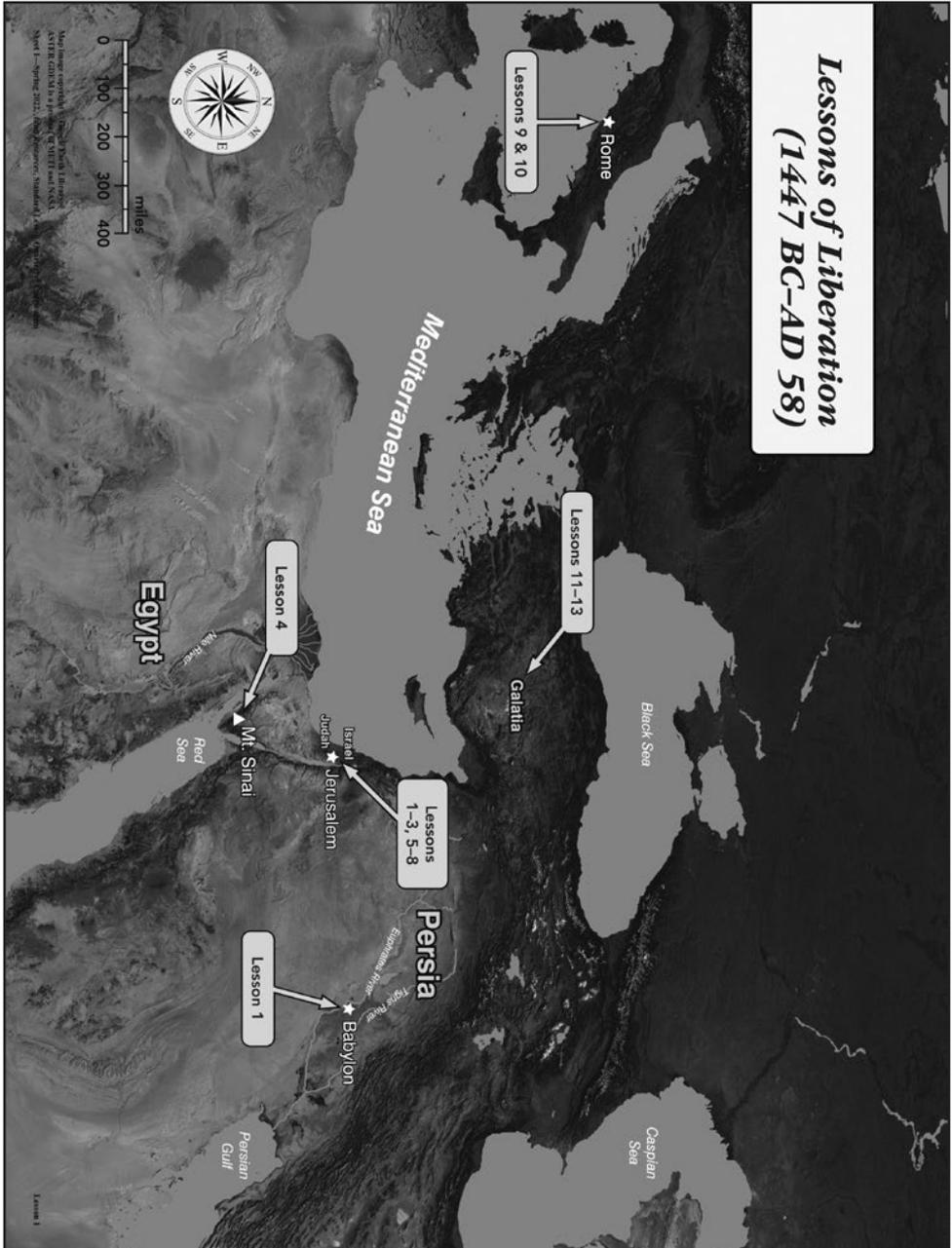
# THIS QUARTER IN THE WORD

Mon, Feb. 28 **Prepare the Way of the Lord** Isaiah 40:1-11  
 Tue, Mar. 1 **Being God’s Instrument** Isaiah 45:1-10  
 Wed, Mar. 2 **God Will Provide for Every Need** Philip­pians 4:10-19  
 Thu, Mar. 3 **Lift Up Your Eyes to God** Isaiah 40:12-15, 21-31  
 Fri, Mar. 4 **Live Freely but Responsibly** 1 Peter 2:13-17  
 Sat, Mar. 5 **Light Dawns for the Righteous** Psalm 97  
 Sun, Mar. 6 **Cyrus Permits Jews to Return Home** Ezra 1:1-8, 11; 2:64-70  
 Mon, Mar. 7 **Rebuilding the Temple and Praising God** Ezra 3:8-13  
 Tue, Mar. 8 **Jews Discouraged from Rebuilding** Ezra 4:1-5  
 Wed, Mar. 9 **Worship at the Heavenly Throne** Revelation 5  
 Thu, Mar. 10 **Bowing in Praise** Psalm 138  
 Fri, Mar. 11 **The Time to Rebuild Has Come** Haggai 1  
 Sat, Mar. 12 **The Temple’s Foundation Laid** Haggai 2:1-9, 15-19  
 Sun, Mar. 13 **God Provides Through King Darius** Ezra 6:1-12  
 Mon, Mar. 14 **Keep Holy Convocations** Leviticus 23:4-8  
 Tue, Mar. 15 **God Institutes the Passover** Exodus 12:1-14  
 Wed, Mar. 16 **Instructions for the Passover** Exodus 12:21-28, 50-51  
 Thu, Mar. 17 **Praise the Name of the Lord** Psalm 113  
 Fri, Mar. 18 **Christ Our Passover** 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 10:1-4  
 Sat, Mar. 19 **Praise for God’s Liberation** Psalm 114  
 Sun, Mar. 20 **Returned Exiles Keep the Passover** Ezra 6:13-22

Mon, Mar. 21 **Remember God's Blessings** Deuteronomy 8:12-20  
 Tue, Mar. 22 **Hear and Act** James 1:19-27  
 Wed, Mar. 23 **Show Humility and Resist the Adversary** 1 Peter 5:5-9  
 Thu, Mar. 24 **Bless the Lord, O My Soul** Psalm 103:1-10  
 Fri, Mar. 25 **God's Love Is Everlasting** Psalm 103:11-22  
 Sat, Mar. 26 **Remember Christ and Endure** 2 Timothy 2:8-13  
 Sun, Mar. 27 **Keep the Lord's Commandments** Deuteronomy 8:1-11  
 Mon, Mar. 28 **Help Comes from the Lord** Psalm 121  
 Tue, Mar. 29 **The First Will Be Last** Matthew 20:1-16  
 Wed, Mar. 30 **The Greatest Must Be a Servant** Matthew 20:17-28  
 Thu, Mar. 31 **Faithful Appear Before God** Exodus 34:23-27  
 Fri, Apr. 1 **Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem** Luke 19:41-44  
 Sat, Apr. 2 **Trust in the Lord** Psalm 125  
 Sun, Apr. 3 **Hosanna to the Son of David!** Matthew 21:1-11  
 Mon, Apr. 4 **God Is Gracious and Righteous** Psalm 116:1-15  
 Tue, Apr. 5 **Celebrate Where God Chooses** Deuteronomy 16:1-8, 15-17  
 Wed, Apr. 6 **Jesus Anointed** Matthew 26:1-2, 6-16  
 Thu, Apr. 7 **Do This in Remembrance** 1 Corinthians 11:23-26  
 Fri, Apr. 8 **Disciples Love One Another** John 13:31-35  
 Sat, Apr. 9 **God's Care Endures Forever** Psalm 118:1-9  
 Sun, Apr. 10 **Jesus Shares Passover** Matthew 26:17-30  
 Mon, Apr. 11 **John Proclaims the Lamb of God** John 1:29-36  
 Tue, Apr. 12 **Jesus Prays in Gethsemane** Matthew 26:36-46  
 Wed, Apr. 13 **Jesus Is Arrested** Matthew 26:47-56  
 Thu, Apr. 14 **Jesus Is Crucified** Matthew 27:35-43, 45-50  
 Fri, Apr. 15 **Why Have You Forsaken Me?** Psalm 22:1-9, 14-19  
 Sat, Apr. 16 **God Is My Salvation** Psalm 118:14-17, 19-29  
 Sun, Apr. 17 **Jesus Is Risen!** Matthew 28:1-10

Mon, Apr. 18 **Remember You Were Slaves** Deuteronomy 15:12-15  
 Tue, Apr. 19 **Children of the Promise** Galatians 4:21-31  
 Wed, Apr. 20 **Anointed to Proclaim Good News** Isaiah 61:1-3  
 Thu, Apr. 21 **The Light of the World** John 8:12-20  
 Fri, Apr. 22 **Jesus Is from Above** John 8:21-30  
 Sat, Apr. 23 **I Delight in Your Commands** Psalm 119:41-56  
 Sun, Apr. 24 **Jesus Brings True Freedom** John 8:31-38  
 Mon, Apr. 25 **Out of the Depths I Cry** Psalm 130  
 Tue, Apr. 26 **Go and Sin No More** John 7:53-8:11  
 Wed, Apr. 27 **Righteousness Disclosed in Christ** Romans 3:19-31  
 Thu, Apr. 28 **The Justified Have Peace with God** Romans 5:1-11  
 Fri, Apr. 29 **God's Free Gift Brings Life** Romans 5:12-21  
 Sat, Apr. 30 **Seek the Lord and Find Joy** Isaiah 55:6-13  
 Sun, May 1 **Baptized into Christ's Death** Romans 6:1-14  
 Mon, May 2 **No Longer Slaves of Sin** Romans 6:15-23  
 Tue, May 3 **God Bestows the Spirit** Ezekiel 36:25-30  
 Wed, May 4 **We Have Died to the Law** Romans 7:1-13  
 Thu, May 5 **A Struggle to Obey** Romans 7:14-25  
 Fri, May 6 **No Condemnation for Heirs** Romans 8:1-4, 10-17  
 Sat, May 7 **Receive the Holy Spirit** John 20:19-23  
 Sun, May 8 **All Things Work Together for Good** Romans 8:18-30  
 Mon, May 9 **Receiving the Spirit Through Faith** Galatians 3:1-5  
 Tue, May 10 **The Blessing Comes Through Christ** Galatians 3:6-17  
 Wed, May 11 **God's Power Grants Life and Godliness** 2 Peter 1:2-4  
 Thu, May 12 **Betrothed in Faithfulness** Hosea 2:16-23  
 Fri, May 13 **A Wise and Faithful Builder** Luke 6:45-49  
 Sat, May 14 **Walk Blameless Before God** Genesis 17:1-8  
 Sun, May 15 **No Longer Subject to the Law** Galatians 3:18-29

# MAP FEATURE



# TEACHING IS MORE THAN TALKING

## *Part 3: Let Them Talk Too*

*Teacher Tips by Mark A. Taylor*

**S**tudying the Bible is more than learning facts. For example, learners may need to wrestle with the subtleties of the biblical text to consider how they will respond to its demands. For adults, this type of learning can happen through dialogue. Here are a few ways to encourage discussion and deepen understanding in your Bible study groups.

### **Get Them Talking**

There's nothing wrong with asking questions that have only one answer. For example, you might ask, "What three points does Paul make in this chapter?" But questions like this do not promote discussion—they may stifle it!

A better practice is to ask open-ended questions. For example, you might ask, "Which of Paul's points has the most relevance for today's readers?" By asking open-ended questions, you invite deeper reflection of your learners.

Ask an open-ended question and set a time limit of two minutes. Ask the class to shout out answers as you write their answers on the board. Don't rephrase or correct the answers; write them as they are stated. After the time limit, ask the class to choose the best answers.

Divide the whole class into three small groups. Have the groups discuss questions before you ask for their answers. This will get all learners, not just the most vocal ones, thinking and talking.

### **Give Them Time**

Ask a question and be willing to say nothing afterwards. Some learners are internal processors and won't answer until they've had adequate time to think. If no one answers after 60 seconds, restate the question using different words. In some cases, silence can provoke a quiet learner to answer. However, never answer your own question. If you're willing to answer your own questions, the class will let you!

### **Keep It Going**

When learners ask a question, do not answer it—at least not at first. Other learners may be willing to answer and discuss the question. Imagine class discussion as learners tossing a ball between themselves. The most fruitful discussions occur when learners toss the ball back and forth between each other, rather than catching the ball—answering a question—that comes from you.

### **Keep Control**

If a learner says something that doesn't seem to relate to the conversation at hand, ask the learner to explain the statement further. Their explanation may help you and the group make a connection between their comment and the conversation.

If a learner asks a question that's off subject, compliment them for their contribution, then say, "This isn't really what we're talking about now, but it's important." If the whole discussion gets off track, apologize, don't criticize, and politely return conversation to the main topic. If conversation seems out of control, say, "Let's take a break for five minutes. When we return, we'll move forward with the lesson."

### **Show the Progress.**

As the study proceeds, remind learners of what the class has discussed up to that point, then lead the class to the next topic. The goals of Bible study are twofold: First, learners should conclude what the Scripture text meant for original audiences and what it means for modern audiences. Second, in light of that knowledge, learners should decide how they will act in response.

As the teacher, before class begins, know where you want to take learners. To be successful in this regard requires thorough preparation, sometimes more than what is required to plan a lecture. Invest in your class, and your learners will come to love and know God better through the experience.

# FREED FROM CAPTIVITY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ezra 1:1-18, 11; 2:64-70

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ezra 1; 2:64-70

## EZRA 1:1-8, 11

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth

by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.  
.....

11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

## EZRA 2:64-70

64 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women.

66 Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five;

67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

68 And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place:

69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

## KEY TEXT

*Some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place. —Ezra 2:68*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 1: Liberating Passover

LESSONS 1–4

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. Recount the who, what, when, where, why, and how of Cyrus's proclamation and its result.
2. Explain the significance of King Cyrus's proclamation.
3. Write a prayer of thanks for release from a personal "captivity."

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Rebuilding a Home
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Persian Decree (Ezra 1:1-4)
  - A. The Author (v. 1)  
*Longing for Home*
  - B. The Proclamation (vv. 2-4)
- II. Preparation for Travels (Ezra 1:5-8, 11)
  - A. Assembling Leaders (v. 5)
  - B. Accepting Resources (vv. 6-8, 11)
- III. People Returning (Ezra 2:64-70)
  - A. Their Composition (vv. 64-67)  
*A Socially Distant Melody*
  - B. Their Offerings (vv. 68-70)

#### Conclusion

- A. Rebuilding for the Future
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Rebuilding a Home

Tornadoes ripping through rural Oklahoma communities. Fires engulfing whole buildings and homes in the Pacific Northwest. Storm surges flooding homes in the gulf coast of Louisiana. Behind these tragic events are the stories of whole communities that lost everything. When losses include family photos, treasured heirlooms, or even favorite toys, these disasters can hurt deeply and such losses might be irreplaceable! However, out of the ruins, memories remain and can provide a foundation for beginning the rebuilding.

The first chapters of Ezra tell the story of a grand reconstruction project for Israel. Older Israelites had vivid memories of their preexilic life (Ezra 3:12); however, memories alone would not complete the reconstruction project. Israel needed help from an unlikely source. Their memories, combined with unlikely assistance, set Israel on the path of following God's requirement as they resettled their homeland.

### B. Lesson Context

The text of Ezra tells the story of the Jewish people during the sixth and fifth centuries BC. In 586 BC, the Babylonian Empire, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, laid siege to Judah and destroyed Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:10-14; 25:1-10; 2 Chronicles 36:17; Jeremiah 52:4-5, 12-16). The siege's culmination was the destruction of the Jewish temple and the removal of its treasures (2 Kings 24:13; 2 Chronicles 36:18-19; Jeremiah 52:13). The removal of the treasures and the people of Judah was prophesied by Isaiah (2 Kings 20:16-17). The Babylonians carried the people of Judah—with the exception of the poorest individuals—into captivity (24:14; 2 Chronicles 36:20; compare Deuteronomy 28:36).

However, Babylon's rule was short-lived. In 539 BC, the Persian King Cyrus destroyed the Babylonian Empire. He solidified the Persian Empire's dominance in a region that extended from modern-day Greece to modern-day India.

Cyrus demonstrated tolerance of the religious practices of his subjects. A notable decree in this

regard was written on a clay cylinder and is known as the Cyrus Cylinder. This decree detailed Cyrus's conquest of Babylon and the favor he sought from Marduk, the patron god of Babylon. The decree culminated with the command to repatriate exiled peoples and rebuild their houses of worship. Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus, commissioned by the Lord, would provide an opportunity for the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland (Isaiah 44:28).

Cyrus's decree fulfilled a promise made earlier by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10, 14). However, the prophecy's fulfillment did not necessitate the return of all exiles, only a "remnant" (Isaiah 10:22).

## I. Persian Decree

(EZRA 1:1-4)

### A. The Author (v. 1)

**1a. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.**

That the decree was announced *in the first year of the reign of Cyrus king of Persia* indicates the year 538 BC. As the author of 2 Chronicles indicated, the results of Cyrus's actions were foretold *by the mouth of Jeremiah* (2 Chronicles 36:22; see Lesson Context).

**1b. The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,**

While the *proclamation* came from *Cyrus*, it was only because *the Lord* anointed Cyrus as a tool for His will (see Isaiah 45:1, 13). Cyrus was just one of many rulers throughout history whom God *stirred* and used to work out His divine plan (2 Chronicles 36:22; see 1 Chronicles 5:26; 2 Chronicles 21:16; Jeremiah 51:11).

#### What Do You Think?

How do you recognize the Lord's call to action?

#### Digging Deeper

What questions will you ask to test that you are hearing from the Lord? How might Romans 12:2 and 1 John 4:1 support your answer?

In 1944 the Soviet government accused the Tatars, an ethnic minority located around the Black Sea in a region known as Crimea, of traitorous actions against the government. The Soviets ordered that the Tatars be removed from their homes and sent to distant regions of Asia. With little warning thousands of Tatars were detained and sent away from their homeland.

The surviving Tatars told their descendants about their homeland of Crimea. Generations of Tatars developed a love for a homeland they never experienced. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the exiled Tatars slowly returned to Crimea. Their longing for home had been fulfilled.

Followers of Jesus experience a similar longing for home as they await the day when the kingdom of God will be fully realized over all creation. Are you ready to settle yourself in the kingdom that is "not of this world" (John 18:36)? While you may be a stranger in this world (1 Peter 2:11), remember your true citizenship (see Philippians 3:20)!

—L. M.-W.

### B. The Proclamation (vv. 2-4)

**2. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.**

While *Cyrus* recognized the role of *the Lord* in ordaining his leadership (see 2 Chronicles 36:23), *Cyrus's* decree was also politically motivated. He wanted to honor the many gods of the people of his empire. Ultimately, the exiles' good fortune did not come from a human ruler, but from the

## HOW TO SAY IT

Babylon	<i>Bab-uh-lun.</i>
Babylonian	<i>Bab-ih-low-nee-un.</i>
Cyrus	<i>Sigh-russ.</i>
Diaspora	<i>Dee-as-puh-ruh.</i>
Marduk	<i>Mar-duke.</i>
Mithredath	<i>Mith-re-dath.</i>
Nebuchadnezzar	<i>Neb-yuh-kud-<b>nez</b>-er.</i>
Nippur	<i>Nih-poor.</i>
Sheshbazzar	<i>Shesh-baz-ar.</i>

gracious God who oversaw the political movements of *all the kingdoms of the earth* (see 2 Kings 19:15; Isaiah 37:16).

The title *God of heaven* is a distinctive of the text of Ezra, where 9 of its 22 Old Testament occurrences are found (here and Ezra 5:11, 12; 6:9, 10; 7:12, 21, 23 [twice]). The title combined with *hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth* recognized God's sovereignty as the creator of both the heavens and the earth. While God is all-powerful as creator, He is active in His creation (see Genesis 24:7; Nehemiah 1:4-5; 2:20; Daniel 2:19).

Cyrus proclaimed new building plans, as Cyrus himself would help the exiles build God's *house*, His temple. That the temple would be rebuilt in *Jerusalem* reflects certain importance. Ancient Israel had illegitimate worship in other locations (1 Kings 12:28-33; Amos 4:4). However, because of God's declaration and King David's leadership, Jerusalem became the political and religious center for Israel (2 Samuel 5:6-9; 6:1-17; 1 Kings 11:36; 2 Chronicles 6:6; 7:12; see Psalm 78:67-72).

**3. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.**

The decree did more than provide orders for the exiled people. It oriented their perspective of God. God had not abandoned them, but His presence was *with* them as they rebuilt the temple.

That God was *in Jerusalem* did not imply that the presence of God was limited to this city alone (1 Kings 8:27; Isaiah 66:1; compare Acts 17:24). Instead, it indicated that God was present to His people in a special way in Jerusalem, especially in His *house*, the temple (Deuteronomy 12:5; 14:23).

**4. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.**

Two major interpretations exist as to the identity of *the men of his place*. One interpretation describes these people as non-Jewish individuals living in Persia. The other interpretation recognized them as Jews who decided against returning

to Jerusalem. That these individuals were asked to *help* the returning exiles reinforces the second interpretation.

Recent archaeological discoveries also support the second interpretation. Clay cuneiform tablets from the fifth century BC describe business dealings of a non-Persian family in the city of Nippur. Some of the family names were Hebrew in origin, leading scholars to believe that many Jews stayed in Persia and continued their already established livelihood. The Jews who stayed behind were known as the Diaspora. This title is an English transliteration of a Greek noun meaning "scattering" (see Isaiah 11:12; James 1:1).

The gifts included *silver* and *gold*, important resources for the economy and the establishment of the place of worship (compare Ezra 2:69; 6:5; 8:26-27). *Goods* implied necessary resources for community building. And the *beasts* were necessary as flocks and herds. A *freewill offering* was an additional gift for the people of God (see Leviticus 22:23; 23:38; Deuteronomy 12:6). The offering provided for proper worship in *the house of God in Jerusalem* (Ezra 7:16-17).

#### What Do You Think?

What are some ways Christians might live as exiles in the world?

#### Digging Deeper

How, if at all, would this reality shape your interactions with your neighbors and coworkers?

## II. Preparation for Travels

(EZRA 1:5-8, 11)

### A. Assembling Leaders (v. 5)

**5. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.**

In this patriarchal culture, the heads of the tribes consisted of the *fathers* of the family. Therefore, tribal decisions were made by the tribal *chief*. Tribal leadership was intact, even in the midst of exile. The specification of *Judah* and *Benjamin* is notable because these tribes made up the

southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:17, 21-24; 2 Chronicles 11:1) and were the specific tribes taken into exile by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:2).

*Levites* were members of the tribe of Levi. They were tasked with overseeing Israel's worship, holy places, and holy objects (Numbers 1:47-53; 3:6-16; Deuteronomy 10:8; 1 Chronicles 15:2). The author of Ezra often listed Levites alongside *the priests* and lay people to clarify the scope of *all* the exiles (see Ezra 3:8, 12; 6:16; 8:29; 9:1; 10:5).

While Cyrus issued the decree to rebuild the temple, it was ultimately God's plan that those *whose spirit God had raised* would return to *build the house of the Lord* (compare Psalm 127:1). That the text mentions *Jerusalem* seven times in these early verses indicates the importance of that city (Ezra 1:2, 3 [twice], 4, 5, 7, 11). That city, not others, would be a location of importance for the exiles.

## B. Accepting Resources (vv. 6-8, 11)

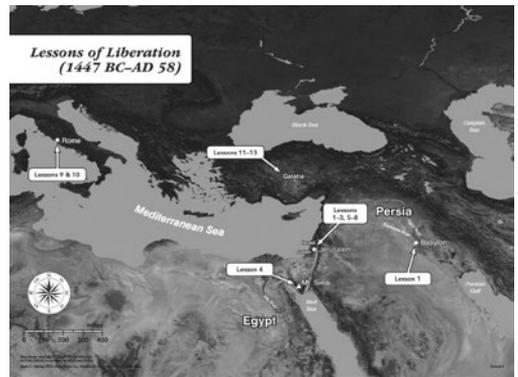
**6. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.**

Cyrus's previous commands came to fruition (see commentary on Ezra 1:4, above). A similar example of unselfish support occurred when people gave generously and *willingly offered* to the construction of the temple (1 Chronicles 29:9).

**7. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods.**

After he conquered Babylon, *Cyrus* took control of the royal treasury. The treasury contained *vessels of the house of the Lord* from the campaign of *Nebuchadnezzar* against *Jerusalem* (2 Kings 24:13; 25:13-15; 2 Chronicles 36:10, 18; Jeremiah 52:17-20). Apparently, Cyrus had not melted down the vessels into valuable bullion. Instead, the vessels were kept and placed in the temple of *his gods*, perhaps at the temple of *Marduk* (see Lesson Context).

Ancient texts describe other instances when Cyrus returned sacred artifacts to sacred cities. By concerning himself with the sacred artifacts of his subjects, Cyrus acted as a pious king who honored



Visual for Lesson 1. *Keep this map posted throughout the quarter to give participants a geographic perspective.*

all gods of his empire. However, his actions did not necessitate a particular attachment to those gods, including the God of Israel.

**8. Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.**

Cyrus needed *Mithredath the treasurer* to release the artifacts from the treasury. Ezra mentions another individual by the same name (Ezra 4:7). It's unclear whether these are the same person, since several years have passed between the two events.

In a report to King Darius, *Sheshbazzar* was described as the "governor" of Judah (Ezra 5:14). His only mention in Scripture is found in the book of Ezra (1:8, 11; 5:14, 16).

**11. All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.**

*The vessels* brought from the treasury consisted of utensils and resources made of *gold* and *silver* (see Ezra 1:9-10, not in this lesson's printed Scripture text). The book of Ezra shows interest in numbers that detail the return to Judah (see 2:2-61, 64-67, 69, 6:17; 7:21-22; 8:1-14, 26-27, 35). These numbers reflect a desire to tell precisely the story of Israel's return.

Like many ancient temples, Israel's temple served as the treasury in which royalty and priests

stored valuable materials. The mention of *five thousand and four hundred* vessels describes the relative wealth to be housed in the rebuilt temple. Temples were considered to be safe because ancient peoples believed theft would offend the temple's divine occupants.

### III. People Returning

(EZRA 2:64-70)

#### A. Their Composition (vv. 64-67)

**64. The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore.**

The second chapter of Ezra begins by listing the family groups of exiles that returned to Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1-62). A close inspection of those lists determines that they do not add up to *forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore* (compare Nehemiah 7:66). Perhaps some family units were left off the list (compare Ezra 2:59; Nehemiah 7:8-62) or the list included men of a certain age (compare Numbers 1:19-46). The list highlighted three observations about the returning people: (1) the exiles formed a family of the people of God, (2) the exiles preserved family relationships during the exile, and (3) the exiles returned to their homeland in sufficient numbers to rebuild.

#### What Do You Think?

How can you build relational unity with other believers, especially where unity may be lacking? Does Paul's appeal in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 affect your answer in this regard?

#### Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances should you avoid working for unity? Why?

**65. Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women.**

The included *servants* might refer to indebted Israelites (Leviticus 25:39-40) or to foreigners (Exodus 12:44; Deuteronomy 20:14). The prophet Isaiah called on Israel to accept strangers (Gentiles)

who loved God, kept the Sabbath, and adhered to God's covenant stipulations (Isaiah 56:3, 6-8).

#### What Do You Think?

How might you serve neighbors who have worldviews different from yours?

#### Digging Deeper

How does "brotherly love" inform your answer (see Hebrews 13:1-2)?

#### ✿ A SOCIALLY DISTANT MELODY ✿

The soft melody of a flute, accompanied by the bright timbre of an oboe, wafted through the streets of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The husband-and-wife duo of Simon and Sofia sat on their balcony and serenaded neighbors with pleasant melodies. Their musical performance united the neighborhood.

Neighbors playing music for their neighborhood is not uncommon, but the practice took a new meaning for Simon and Sofia. Stay-at-home orders for the COVID-19 pandemic had been established, and people around the world found themselves confined to their homes. Amid the fear and anxiety, talented (and even not-so-talented) musicians used their skills to bless their now homebound neighbors.

The singers who returned to Jerusalem were invaluable. Their talent reminded the exiles of the beauty and enjoyment of God's creation. What talents has God given you to build His kingdom? Are you following the psalmist by serving the Lord with gladness (see Psalm 100:1-2)? —L. M.-W.

**66-67. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.**

The resources the exiles needed for their return was surely a reminder of their ancestors' exodus from Egypt (Exodus 3:21-22). As those Israelites left Egypt, they requisitioned the necessary wealth (11:2; 12:35) and livestock (12:38) for the journey. The exodus defined Israel and its relationship with God (see Deuteronomy 5:6; compare

Nehemiah 9:9-15, 24-25). God repeated history for Israel's benefit, providing the exiles with sufficient resources for their return home.

### B. Their Offerings (vv. 68-70)

**68. And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place.**

Although the temple had not been rebuilt, its ruins were likely accessible and its altar would be rebuilt (Ezra 3:2). *The chief of the fathers* took on the responsibility to encourage their household to give toward the reconstruction. That the people *offered freely* was reminiscent of giving for the construction of the tabernacle (see Exodus 35:5).

**69. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.**

The *gold* and *silver* formed an endowment for *the work* of reconstructing the temple and for the work of the priests. The elaborate *garments* of the priesthood were made of gold, fine linen, and precious stones (Exodus 39:1-31). Because of the garments' value, they were counted as part of the temple treasury. The book of Nehemiah describes the same event, but gives further detail on the families' contributions (Nehemiah 7:70-72).

#### What Do You Think?

What are one or two ways you can ensure a generous heart when giving?

#### Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 6:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 9:7 shape your answer?

**70. So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.**

The repatriation efforts would not occur at one time but would take time as *some of the people* began to settle throughout the *cities* of Israel. The leaders of Israel's religious practice would stay near the soon-to-be rebuilt temple, but the others would begin to build a new life in the land.

*The Nethinims* were individuals who had given their lives to serve the temple in a non-priestly capacity (see 1 Chronicles 9:2; Ezra 8:20). Their specific roles are unclear.

## Conclusion

### A. Rebuilding for the Future

After a 2019 fire destroyed parts of the cathedral of Notre-Dame, an international competition redesigned the building's destroyed rooftop and spiral. Architects had to keep in mind a variety of concerns: rebuilding costs, the cathedral's history, and the relationship between the cathedral and the city.

Similar concerns are present in the narrative surrounding the return of Jewish exiles to their homeland. This week's lesson speaks of the exiles' history, their promised return, their relationships, and even their economic needs. While their return could have been disastrous, God provided direction through a decree of Persia's King Cyrus.

Modern readers of Ezra may face major rebuilding efforts. These may be physical buildings, like a house, business, or church. However, the rebuilding effort may be less tangible, like relationships. These rebuilding projects invite the participants to envision a new reality, something wholly different from what was before. In those moments, we have to be available for God's provision and work.

### B. Prayer

God, we have seen our dreams shattered and our relationships lost. Restore us and give us courage to rebuild in Your name so that we can celebrate Your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Rebuilding requires courage and envisioning a new reality.

## VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 237) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Spring Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 3629122 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](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Divide the class into four groups to design a dream home for a hypothetical couple in their mid-30s who have three pre-teenage children. The designs can include floor plan sketches, ideal appliances, storage ideas, etc. After several minutes, have groups share their designs. With the help of the whole class, award the following superlatives: Most Expensive, Most Creative, Most Attractive, and Most Frugal.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Famous Projects” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work individually or in pairs to complete as indicated in less than one minute.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “Today’s lesson from the Old Testament repeats itself in the New Testament in certain ways. See if you can remember passages as we go.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 1:1-4. Then divide the class into four groups: “Who?” Group / “What?” Group / “Where?” Group / “Why?” Group. Ask each group to write down three questions that start with their group name that can be answered from these verses. (Example: The “Who?” Group might ask, “Who prompted Cyrus that the Jerusalem temple should be rebuilt?”)

After no more than 10 minutes, have each group pass its list to another group. Each group is to write the answer to one of the questions on the paper it receives. Repeat this process until all four papers include three answers each.

Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 1:5-8, 11. With the help of the whole class, make a list of the materials described in these verses. Ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 6:7, 14-36 and make a list of materials that were used in the construction of the first temple, then lead the class in comparing and contrasting the lists.

Follow the compare and contrast by discussing implications.

*Alternative.* Extend the discussion by focusing on spiritual elements as you distribute copies of Parts A and B of the “Construction Proposal” exercise from the activity page. Depending on the size and nature of your group, the questions can be discussed in small groups or as a whole class.

Follow by asking a volunteer to read Ezra 2:64-70. Divide the class into four groups: **People Group** (vv. 64-65) / **Livestock Group** (vv. 66-67) / **Riches Group** (vv. 68-69) / **Specialists Group** (v. 70). Have each group make a list of the people or resources described in their verse(s) and identify in ensuing whole-class discussion the purpose(s) fulfilled by each.

*Alternative.* If you used Parts A and B of the “Construction Proposal” exercise above, distribute Part C now. As above, the questions can be discussed in small groups or as a whole class, depending on the size of your group. **Important:** be sure to come prepared with answers of your own. Your preparations should include a readiness to give an example if learners seem stumped as well as additional responses to those of the learners.

## Into Life

Return to your earlier statement that today’s lesson repeats itself in the New Testament in certain ways. Ask if anyone has a passage in mind in that respect (*example:* Luke 14:28 in a physical sense). Then distribute handouts (you prepare) that feature the following questions, all questions on every handout.

- 1—From what bondage have you been freed that you might do God’s will more fully?
- 2—What caused that bondage in the first place?
- 3—How will you keep from reentering that bondage?

Due to the personal nature of these questions, you may wish to distribute these as a take-home.

# FREE TO WORSHIP

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ezra 6:1-12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ezra 5; 6:1-12; 10:1-5

## EZRA 6:1-12

1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;

4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:

5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

6 Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.

9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:

10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.

12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

## KEY TEXT

*The God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. —Ezra 6:12a*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 1: Liberating Passover

LESSONS 1–4

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. List the main points of the decree.
2. Compare and contrast the decree of Darius with that of Cyrus (last week's lesson).
3. Commit to praying for opportunities to practice faithfulness in the tasks that God has assigned.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Worcester v. Georgia
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. The Conduct of a Search (Ezra 6:1-2)

- A. Regarding the Archives (v. 1)
- B. Retrieving the Scroll (v. 2)

#### II. The Content of the Decree (Ezra 6:3-12)

- A. Reestablishing the Temple (vv. 3-5)
- B. Restraining Local Leadership (vv. 6-7)
- C. Releasing the Royal Treasury (vv. 8-10)  
*Effective Incentives*
- D. Risking the Curse (vv. 11-12)  
*Unholy Interference*

#### Conclusion

- A. Surprising Circumstances
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Worcester v. Georgia

Samuel Worcester (1798–1859) was aware that it was against Georgia state law for a white person to live among the Cherokee Indians. But in 1825 he and his wife did so anyway because his mission work required it; he was translating Scripture into the Cherokee language. Additionally, he advocated for the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation.

At the same time, the state of Georgia prohibited non-Cherokees from being present or doing business on native lands without the state's approval. Worcester did not have the state's approval to live and work on the Cherokee lands. For this violation, Worcester was found guilty by the state. An appeal was heard before the US Supreme Court. *Worcester v. Georgia* ruled in favor of the Cherokee Nation. The ruling stated that Georgia's laws interfered with the federal government's authority. Therefore, the state had no force over the Cherokee Nation. While not always honored by the US government, *Worcester v. Georgia* allowed the Cherokee Nation to self-rule.

The once exiled residents of Judah and Jerusalem tried to exert their sovereignty in their homeland as they reconstructed the temple. However, certain forces delayed and prevented the construction. Instead of giving up on construction or acting violently against their opposition, the resettled Jews found support for their construction efforts from a surprising place.

### B. Lesson Context

This lesson contains the text of a decree of Persian King Darius I (reigned 522–486 BC). He came to power after several years of internal strife. Darius strengthened the Persian government, established a new method of taxation, and further organized the empire. The decree continued a policy established by Cyrus (reigned 539–530 BC). His policy allowed for the return of Jewish exiles to Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Jewish temple (Ezra 1:2-5, last week's lesson).

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the exiles returned to Jerusalem and Judah (Ezra 2:1-2; see Zechariah 4:9). Two years after the exiles

returned, reconstruction began on the temple in Jerusalem, in 535 BC (Ezra 3:8-9). However, the reconstruction was delayed several times by local opposition and regional authorities (4:1-5, 24).

Today's Scripture text comes as a response to questioning from Persian officials Tatnai and Shetharboznai. After seeing the efforts at reconstruction, they questioned Zerubbabel and the local leaders concerning whose authority granted them rebuilding rights (Ezra 5:3, 9). The builders noted that their authority came from God and Cyrus. A letter was sent to Darius to inquire on the nature and authority of Cyrus's decree (5:5-17). Today's lesson concerns Cyrus's decree and Darius's response to the Persian officials.

While Darius was concerned with following Cyrus's decree, he also had a pragmatic reason to support the temple's reconstruction. By allowing agreeable Israelites to return to their homeland, Darius would have loyal subjects located in a geographically expedient place near Egypt, a region known for its rebellions and insurrections. Additionally, Darius would be able to institute a new tax system among the repatriated Jews in the regions of Judah, thus increasing his coffers.

Ezra 4:8-6:18 is written in the Aramaic language (unlike the Hebrew of Ezra 1; compare 4:7). Aramaic was used for business and government dealings of the Persian Empire. As our lesson text records official government documentation, the use of Aramaic is understandable.

## I. The Conduct of a Search

(EZRA 6:1-2)

### A. Regarding the Archives (v. 1)

**1. Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.**

Archaeological remains of Persian archives reveal detailed reports of taxes, expenditures, and local government occurrences throughout the empire. However, not all official records were stored *in Babylon*. Other cities held local and national records and *treasures*. Therefore, a search for Cyrus's records would extend outside the capital (next verse).

### What Do You Think?

How will you ensure thoroughness when following the tasks God has placed before you?

### Digging Deeper

How might you respond differently if you were met with opposition?

## B. Retrieving the Scroll (v. 2)

**2. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written.**

The search for Cyrus's decree took investigators to *Achmetha*, a city located about 285 miles northeast of Babylon. The city served as the summer *palace* for Persian royalty, so it is possible that Cyrus issued his decree there during the summer of 538 BC (see Ezra 1:1).

## II. The Content of the Decree

(EZRA 6:3-12)

### A. Reestablishing the Temple (vv. 3-5)

**3a. In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem.**

The focus of Cyrus's decree expands on a directive given in previous text (see Ezra 1:2-4). Cyrus had given permission for the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland. Now the text elaborates on a key detail of their return: the reconstruction of *the house of God in Jerusalem*.

**3b. Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits.**

Prior to Darius's decree, the altar *where they offered sacrifices* had been reconstructed (Ezra 3:2-3). Now the temple would be rebuilt to provide a space for worship. The temple's *height* and *breadth* were to be *threescore cubits*, or approximately 90 feet each way. (A cubit equals about 18 inches.) These dimensions differ from those of Solomon's temple. That temple had a length of 60 cubits, a width of 20 cubits, and a height of 30 cubits (1 Kings 6:2).

The decree did not include the temple's length. One might assume that its length would match its height and width. If this assumption is correct, then the building would form a perfect cube. This shape would echo the dimensions of the most holy place of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:20).

**4a. With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber.**

Archaeological discoveries in modern-day Syria have shown that the use of *timber* after several rows of *stones* helped buildings survive earthquakes. This practice was utilized in the construction of the inner courtyard of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:36) and the courtyard of Solomon's palace (7:12). Both mention the use of cedar wood, but Cyrus's decree does not elaborate in that regard.

**4b. And let the expenses be given out of the king's house.**

Those remaining in exile contributed to the temple's reconstruction (Ezra 1:4, 6). But in an act of goodwill, the decree placed part of the financial burden on *the king's house*, another term for the public treasury. These funds came to the treasury via new taxation practices (see 6:8, below).

**5a. And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon.**

The centrality of the sacred *vessels*, their removal from *the house of God*, and their eventual return to the temple is again made evident by Cyrus's repetition (compare Ezra 1:7-11). These vessels were made by Solomon and were used at *the temple* for worship (see 1 Kings 7:48-51). However, *Nebuchadnezzar* confiscated them and took them to *Babylon* following the destruction of Judah and *Jerusalem* (2 Kings 25:13-17; 2 Chronicles 36:18).

**5b. Be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.**

These vessels had been used in unholy ways during the exile (see Daniel 5:1-4). Therefore, they would need to be reconsecrated before they were *restored* and *brought* into *the temple, the house of God*. The restorative act required sacred anointing oil (see Exodus 30:22-29; 40:9). The presence

of these items in the newly restored temple represented the restoration of Israelite life as the holy people of God.

*What Do You Think?*

How can Christians show the new life and restoration found in Christ Jesus?

*Digging Deeper*

How can Isaiah 58:1-14 and Luke 4:14-21 inform your answer?

**B. Restraining Local Leadership (vv. 6-7)**

**6. Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence.**

What follows are the direct words of Darius to his officials, *Tatnai* and *Shetharboznai* (see Lesson Context). *Beyond the river* refers to the area west of the Euphrates River and east of the Mediterranean Sea. This area was a satrapy, or province, of the Persian Empire, of which *Tatnai* was *governor* (see Ezra 5:3).

The identity and role of *the Apharsachites* is unclear. Their name is an English transliteration of an Aramaic term. They were either an ethnic group from Samaria, the region north of Judah, or Persian officials who accompanied the governor of the satrapy. Their only mention in Scripture comes in Ezra (here and Ezra 4:9).

*What Do You Think?*

How can Christians make sure they are not hindering the work of God?

*Digging Deeper*

In what ways, if any, can God's work be hindered? How does Genesis 37:12-36 and 50:15-20 inform your answer?

**7. Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.**

Zerubbabel served as *the governor of the Jews* who had returned from exile (see Ezra 5:2). The governor coordinated local affairs with the Persian authorities. Another group of localized leadership

consisted of *the elders of the Jews*. These were leaders who handled local affairs like family disputes or village conflicts (see Deuteronomy 21:1-9; 25:7-10).

This division allowed the leaders to respond to the internal challenges of the community and maintain good relationships with the Persians. Additionally, it allowed the Persians to maintain control over the satrapy without overt concern in all local matters.

#### What Do You Think?

How might the government use its authority for the good of the governed?

#### Digging Deeper

How do Luke 3:14 and Romans 13:3-4 shape your answer in this regard?

### C. Releasing the Royal Treasury (vv. 8-10)

**8. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.**

Darius's *decree* concerned the financial burden of rebuilding the *house of God*. The Persians provided space for its reconstruction. They also provided a financial backing, following Cyrus's precedent (see commentary on Ezra 6:4, above).

Specifically, Darius committed to funding part of the temple's construction *expenses* from taxes and *tribute* money from the satrapy *beyond the river* Euphrates. This action reflects a larger policy to restore and provide for local temples and cults in the empire. Darius's financial generosity highlighted his desire to honor the temple, whether or not he believed in the temple's God.

#### ✠ EFFECTIVE INCENTIVES ✠

On the morning of January 17, 1994, the heavily trafficked Santa Monica Freeway lay in ruins. That morning an earthquake had rocked Los Angeles and the surrounding region. A portion of the freeway, known for its heavy traffic, was no longer passable. As a result, traffic delays and congestion increased throughout Los Angeles.

Because the freeway was crucial for the livelihood of the region, local officials offered a financial incentive for the freeway's rapid reconstruction. As a result, the project was completed two months ahead of schedule. The financial backing encouraged workers to rebuild rapidly. Without a restored freeway, the livelihood of Los Angeles was at stake.

As unexpected as that financial backing was, the backing by Darius was all the more so. A pagan king who offered to help subsidize Israel's temple! Through what unexpected measures has God provided for you to do His work? How can you cut through opposition in order to continue toward the goal God has set for you? —L. M.-W.

**9. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail.**

In addition to financial backing, Darius ordered officials to provide the necessary resources for regular sacrifices in the temple. *Young bulls, rams, and lambs* were valuable livestock for *the burnt offerings* required of Israel (see Leviticus 1:2-13; 22:27; Numbers 7:87-88; 1 Chronicles 29:21). With these animals the returning exiles would eventually offer sacrifices (Ezra 8:35).

Flour made of *wheat* was used alongside daily sacrifices and burnt offerings (see Exodus 29:40; Leviticus 2:1-2; 5:11; 6:20; etc.). *Salt* accompanied grain offerings (2:13) and burnt offerings (Ezekiel 43:24). The preservative properties of salt served as a reminder of the preserving nature of God's covenant (Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5). *Oil* accompanied the sacrifices, and *wine* was presented as a drink offering (Exodus 29:40; Leviticus 23:13).

Darius's use of the title *God of heaven* acknowledged the power and scope of the exiles' God (see Ezra 1:2; 5:11-12; 6:10; 7:12, 21, 23). This God is the creator of all things and omnipotent (all-powerful) over all creation, even the Persian Empire (see Genesis 14:19; Isaiah 37:16; Daniel 2:44).

**10. That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.**



Visual for Lessons 2 & 3. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “How do God’s acts of goodness surprise you?”

Darius’s motives for backing the reconstruction became evident. He desired that the returning exiles have a location where they might *offer sacrifices* rightly. As a result, their sacrifices would be considered pleasing. Darius hoped that the *God* of the Jews would be content and would hear their prayers, specifically those for *the king* and *his sons*.

That these sacrifices are described as *sweet savours* refers to the rich ingredients included in the sacrifices (see commentary on Ezra 6:9, above). When Israel offered sacrifices in the way God desired, they were considered pleasing (Numbers 28:24; contrast with Isaiah 1:11; Jeremiah 6:20; Hosea 8:13).

Leaders asking that their constituents *pray* to their gods was not inconceivable. Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484–425 BC) described how Persians would offer a prayer for the king while offering sacrifices to their pagan gods. The practice continued through the New Testament era (see 1 Timothy 2:1-2). Sometimes rulers recognized Israel’s God as a supreme God (Daniel 2:47; 6:26-27). As a result, Israel fulfilled the promise that they would be a blessing to Gentiles (Genesis 12:3).

#### What Do You Think?

▶ What prayer can you offer for leaders of your local, state, and national governments?

#### Digging Deeper

How can Jeremiah 29:7 and 1 Timothy 2:1-4 inform your prayers?

### D. Risking the Curse (vv. 11-12)

**11. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.**

As with an ancient covenant or a royal inscription, the *decree* ended with a warning or curse for anyone who might disregard or *alter* the words of the king. The dramatic and violent conclusion would not have shocked ancient audiences. Worshipers and leaders would have thought it appropriate that anyone not honoring the temple of a god should have their own *house* destroyed and turned to refuse (compare Jeremiah 26:1-6).

As for the form of punishment, the underlying Aramaic text is unclear whether the punishment referred to being *hanged*, crucified, or impaled. While gruesome, the act of hanging an individual as punishment would not be unprecedented for a Jewish audience (see Genesis 40:22; Joshua 8:29). However, the Law of Moses restricted the practice of hanging (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Persian audiences would be familiar with the punishment of hanging, as Persian officials suffered a similar gruesome fate after a failed assassination attempt of the king (Esther 2:21-23). Further, Haman, a high-ranking Persian official, was hung after he attempted to massacre Jews in Persia (5:14; 7:10).

#### ✿ UNHOLY INTERFERENCE ✿

“Ouch!” My husband let out a shriek as I investigated a small blemish on his forehead. The surrounding skin was hot to the touch. He thought it was infected, but I was unsure. Maybe he was overreacting? I was skeptical that it was anything serious. I told him to take some ibuprofen. Maybe the blemish would improve in the morning.

The next morning, the blemish had not improved. In fact, his face was so swollen that his eye was almost shut. A few hours passed and the swelling only got worse. Finally, I admitted concern and took him to the emergency room. The doctors diagnosed him with a staph infection! Contrary to my skepticism, my husband had been right; the blemish was serious. I had to apologize for not taking his concerns to heart sooner.

While others expressed doubt and opposition to the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, Darius confirmed the project's legitimacy. When have you let doubt or opposition interfere with the work God has for you? Or might you be opposing God's work in someone else's life? If so, why?

—L. M.-W.

**12. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.**

Following the format of a curse, the decree's final line acknowledges the presence of *God* and the protection of all under His domain. This is the same God who promised to choose a place at which He would “cause *his name to dwell there*” (Deuteronomy 12:11; see Exodus 20:24). This promise referred to the unique place where God met His people, the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:29; 9:3; 2 Chronicles 6:2).

Darius anticipated that Israel's God would protect His holy place and all within its premises. By calling a curse to *destroy all kings and people*, Darius followed an ancient Near Eastern tradition that taught that the gods would protect that which was considered precious and divine. This protection was notable for all people and items located within holy places.

While unlikely that Darius was influenced by ancient Hebrew literature, the psalmist warned against the “kings of the earth . . . and the rulers” who “take counsel . . . against the Lord, and against his anointed” (Psalm 2:2). The Lord would “break them” and “dash them in pieces” (2:9).

## HOW TO SAY IT

Achmetha	Ock- <i>mee</i> -thuh.
Darius	Duh- <i>rye</i> -us.
Herodotus	Heh- <i>rod</i> -uh-tus.
Shetharboznai	<i>She</i> -thar- <b>boz</b> -nye.
Tatnai	<i>Tat</i> -nye or <i>Tat</i> -eh-nye.
omnipotent	ahm- <i>nih</i> -poh-tent.
Zerubbabel	Zeh- <i>rub</i> -uh-bul.

Those who would go against the Lord and the His intentions would be destroyed. Those who would stand against and defile the temple of God would suffer destruction. While the temple of God that Darius envisioned no longer stands, God's promises to watch over His “temple” remain true (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

## Conclusion

### A. Surprising Circumstances

The ruling of *Worcester v. Georgia* did not improve the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation. Seven years after the decision, US President Andrew Jackson oversaw the forced removal of the Cherokees from their homelands through the Trail of Tears. Even as the U.S. Supreme Court (surprisingly) ruled in favor of the Cherokees, the sovereignty they won was short-lived.

The sovereignty the Jews gained under Cyrus and maintained under Darius was short-lived. In the centuries that followed, the Jewish people experienced many years of occupation. However, in that specific season under the reign of and support from Darius, the Jews survived and even flourished as they resettled their homeland.

Especially in difficult circumstances and trying situations, God calls His people to be faithful to His purpose for their lives. That Cyrus and Darius, two Gentile leaders, allowed for the resettlement of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the temple showed the surprising ways God provides for His people. How has God called you to obey Him? Through what unexpected circumstances is He calling you to obey Him?

### B. Prayer

God of Heaven, You are the creator of all good things. You bring life and joy, laughter and healing, peace and plenty. You provide for Your people in unimaginable ways. Surprise us! Show us how we might follow You in ways unimaginable. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God can work through surprising circumstances to bring restoration and renewal.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Before the lesson, write three different creative projects on three different notecards (examples: “Grow an orchard,” “Install a shower,” “Restain an outdoor deck”). Divide the class into three equal groups. Give each group a pen, paper, and a creative project notecard. Instruct the groups to discuss the creative project and make a list of the challenges they might face if they were to complete the project. After each group completes their list, have them pass their notecard and list to another group. Instruct groups to consider the challenges listed and write a solution to each challenge. When complete, have groups return the cards and lists to the original groups for review.

Make a transition to the Bible study by saying, “It’s easy to become overwhelmed when all we see are problems and obstacles in front of us. But we serve a creative God who is all-powerful and provides for His people. Today’s lesson will show us one example of how God provides for His people in circumstances that seem impossible.”

## Into the Word

Divide the whole group into six equal groups. Assign each group one of the following sets of verses from 2 Kings to read: 24:8-13; 24:14-20; 25:1-7; 25:8-12; 25:13-17; 25:18-21. While the groups are reading, write “What Nebuchadnezzar Did” at the top left of the board. Ask each group to report on the damage that Nebuchadnezzar did as indicated in their verses. List responses on the board.

Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 6:1-7. Write “What God Did” at the top right of the board. Ask, “In what ways did God use the decree of Ezra 6 to redeem what was lost or destroyed in 2 Kings 24–25?” Invite the class to offer responses.

Before class, put together a box full of items to symbolize the resources mentioned in Darius’s decree: money (“goods”), bulls, rams, lambs, wheat, salt, wine, and oil. Provide multiples of

some items to ensure that all learners will have at least one item. Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 6:8-10. Pass the box around to all learners and ask them to take an item at random until the box is empty.

Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 6:8-10 again slowly. Set aside a space (like a podium, basket, or chair) where items could be collected. Invite learners to come forward with their item(s) as they are mentioned in the verses. Say, “This represents the abundant generosity required by the decree.”

Have one volunteer represent the “people of God.” After all items have been brought forward, have the volunteer stand up and collect the items. Say, “This person represents the people of God who have received the abundance of gifts from God.”

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Rebuild and Redeem” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Assign each learner a word or phrase from the box on the activity page. Have learners complete the activity as indicated.

## Into Life

Give each learner a notecard. Have them write on it one task they believe God is asking them to do. Then have learners write challenges that prevent them from obeying.

Read Ephesians 3:20. Ask learners to get in small groups with one or two others and share their notecards. Have group members offer encouragement in the tasks God has for the other group members. Close class by asking group members to pray for each other regarding their faithfulness in the tasks that God has given them.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “God’s Resources” exercise from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete Part 1 but work independently on Part 2. Ask learners to consider sharing their responses to Part 3 at the beginning of the next lesson. Conclude class by praying for opportunities to grow in trust of God’s faithfulness and promises.

# FREE TO CELEBRATE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ezra 6:13-22

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ezra 6:13-22; Leviticus 23:4-8

## EZRA 6:13-22

13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy,

17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,

22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

## KEY TEXT

*The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. —Ezra 6:16*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 1: Liberating Passover

LESSONS 1–4

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. State the emotion that characterized the celebrations of Passover and Unleavened Bread.
2. Compare and contrast the dedication of the second temple with that of the first (1 Kings 8:62-66).
3. Suggest and help plan a church-wide celebration to commemorate an occasion of God's provision and faithfulness.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. The Challenge of Joy
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Obedient Dedication (Ezra 6:13-18)

- A. Leaders and Associates (v. 13)
- B. Elders and Prophets (vv. 14-15)  
*Exceptional Examples*
- C. Priests and Exiles (vv. 16-18)  
*Dedication and Celebration!*

#### II. Celebratory Fellowship (Ezra 6:19-22)

- A. Passover (vv. 19-21)
- B. Unleavened Bread (v. 22)

#### Conclusion

- A. Building a Joyful Community
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. The Challenge of Joy

In 1936 the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer established and taught at a secret seminary in Finkenwalde, located in modern-day Poland. Establishing a seminary that ran against the state-supported church was risky. At any time, the German secret police could close the seminary. Even worse, they could put its leaders in prison. Despite the risk, Bonhoeffer held to his convictions that the seminary was crucial. On the verge of a worldwide crisis, the seminary developed church leaders.

At the seminary Bonhoeffer taught on the Old Testament text of Ezra. He thought that the text offered a model for faithfulness to God during times of crisis. During difficult times, God's people must maintain hope that the promises of God will remain true. This hope is evident no matter the time period, whether post-exilic Israel or pre-war Europe—or today.

### B. Lesson Context

Today's lesson continues the narrative of Ezra 6:1-12 (see lesson 2). The resettled Jewish exiles, under Zerubbabel's leadership, rebuilt the foundation of the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 3:8). After the work began, Persian officials questioned under whose authority they rebuilt (5:3-5). Persian King Darius responded and reiterated a declaration of King Cyrus. Only then were the exiles free to rebuild without fear of interference (6:1-5). Further, King Darius made allowances to financially support the reconstruction (6:8-9). The exiles were able to rebuild a place fit for the Lord's worship.

Humans often attach importance and significance to specific places. So it should be of no surprise that the exiles would value the temple and celebrate its reconstruction. The temple marked the place where God's presence was with His people (1 Kings 8:27-30). But if Israel were to disobey God, then His presence would leave the temple (Ezekiel 10:1-18). The temple (and its predecessor the tabernacle) allowed the Israelites to experience God's presence in their midst. It even allowed Israel to rightly follow the commands of God (see Deuteronomy 12:11).

Construction of the temple was just the first step. The building had to be dedicated to signify its holiness before God. Previously, the temple of Solomon's time underwent the same. Sacrifices were offered and God's people celebrated His goodness (1 Kings 8:62-66; 2 Chronicles 7:4-11).

In numerous instances the temple had undergone changes. For example, the unfaithful King Ahaz removed certain parts (2 Kings 16:17-18). In response, faithful leaders reinstated certain practices (23:21-23). It was important for the temple to be ritually cleansed (see 2 Chronicles 29). Even when used improperly, the temple's importance was not lost. It stood as a holy place where the presence of God was declared to Israel.

## I. Obedient Dedication

(EZRA 6:13-18)

### A. Leaders and Associates (v. 13)

#### 13a. Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river.

*Tatnai*, the *governor*, oversaw the region on the west *side of the river* Euphrates. His patience is notable. He waited until Darius's reply before responding to the reconstruction in full (see Ezra 5:5).

#### 13b. Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

Little is known about the *companions* who joined Tatnai and *Shetharboznai*. They likely consisted of numerous groups of people (see Ezra 4:9). The leaders inquired of the Jews, reported to *Darius*, and received his support (see 5:6; 6:6-12). Previous opposition to the exiles dissipated because of the patronage shown by *the king* (see 4:1-5).

Patronage was a socioeconomic relationship between a benefactor and a client. The benefactor provided materials and financial support for the client's needs. In return, the client pledged loyalty to the benefactor. In this example, Darius served as the benefactor for the temple and provided for its reconstruction. In return, he hoped to quell any possible uprising among the exiles.

### B. Elders and Prophets (vv. 14-15)

#### 14a. And the elders of the Jews builded, and

## they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.

Work on the temple's reconstruction began in 536 BC (Ezra 3:8). For a time, work did stop due to opposition. However, it began again in the second year of Darius, 520 BC (4:24). The repatriated exiles and *the elders of the Jews . . . prospered* in their rebuilding efforts. However, their flourishing occurred only as they followed the exhortations of prophets (5:1).

Decades after the events of Ezra 6, Jerusalem's population was sparse (see Nehemiah 7:4). Eventually 10 percent of the repatriated population moved to Jerusalem (11:1-2). Still, the city was not a massive metropolis like other major cities. Therefore, the prophets were likely familiar with each other and each other's teachings.

For a time, the exiles avoided work on rebuilding the temple (Haggai 1:2). However, in August of 520 BC, *Haggai the prophet* urged rebuilding efforts, which soon occurred (1:1, 8, 14-15). Haggai's exhortation was not a one-time occurrence. Over the months that followed, he appealed to the people of Judah. He was most concerned with the glory of the temple and the actions of its priests (2:1-23).

The first address of *Zechariah* came two months later, in November of 520 BC (Zechariah 1:1). He warned the exiles of repeating the past mistakes of their people (1:4). The mercy of the Lord was emphasized among the people (1:16; 3:1-10). In response, they were to seek just and compassionate treatment of the community's vulnerable members (7:8-10).

## HOW TO SAY IT

Abib	<i>A-bib.</i>
Adar	<i>Ay-dar.</i>
Ahaz	<i>Ay-haz.</i>
Artaxerxes	<i>Are-tuh-zerk-seez.</i>
Haggai	<i>Hag-eye</i> or <i>Hag-ay-eye.</i>
Nisan	<i>Nye-san.</i>
Pentateuch	<i>Pen-ta-teuk.</i>
Purim	<i>Pew-rim.</i>
Zechariah	<i>Zek-uh-rye-uh.</i>

*What Do You Think?*

How can you build relationships with your neighbors that lead to their prospering?

*Digging Deeper*

How do Romans 15:1-7; Galatians 5:13; 6:2 inform your answer?

✿ **EXCEPTIONAL EXAMPLES** ✿

Millard Fuller (1935–2009) wanted something more from life. The self-made millionaire found life lacking. Millard and his wife, Linda, sold their possessions and began the search for something meaningful. After spending five years in the international mission field, the Fullers returned to the United States. They were led to help create a housing ministry. The ministry sought to solve housing disparities by building houses on a profit-and-interest-free basis. From that foundation, Habitat for Humanity began its work in 1976. Through the Fullers' exceptional example, others have participated in the vision of Habitat for Humanity.

The prophetic voices of Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the exiles to continue their reconstruction work. When the exiles followed, they were filled with hope. The glory of God would soon fill the temple! How can you serve as an example to others for God's work? Is your vision of God's work clear so that you might become an exceptional example? —A. S.

**14b. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.**

The decrees of *Cyrus* and *Darius* commanded that the Jerusalem temple be rebuilt (Ezra 1:2-3; 6:7). Their decrees came to fruition as the exiles *builded* and *finished* the temple. While there were several rulers with the name *Artaxerxes*, this one was Artaxerxes I (reigned 464–423 BC). In 457 BC Artaxerxes paused the reconstruction efforts of Jerusalem (4:7-23). He tasked Ezra with visiting the city on his behalf (7:1, 8, 11-26).

Artaxerxes's inclusion shows that Ezra 6 was written at a later time than the events it described.

Persian support for Jerusalem and its temple did not stop with Darius. Artaxerxes's inclusion with Cyrus and Darius showed the continuation of Persian patronage toward the Jewish temple.

**15. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.**

The year 516 BC marked *the sixth year of the reign of Darius* (522–486 BC). *The month Adar* marks the final month of the Jewish religious calendar. This month corresponds to late February or early March. Seventy years after the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, it was rebuilt.

Furthermore, Adar marked an important time for exiles remaining in Persia. The festival of Purim was celebrated during this month. That festival was established around 470 BC; therefore, it did not exist during the reign of Darius I. Purim commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies (Esther 9:20-32).

**C. Priests and Exiles (vv. 16-18)**

**16. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.**

Acts of dedication were central throughout Israel's history. Large crowds of *the children of Israel* joyously dedicated Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8).

In a similar manner, a crowd gathered to dedicate the rebuilt temple. *The children of the captivity* acknowledged that "the Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel" (Psalm 147:2).

*What Do You Think?*

How will you joyously celebrate God's work in the lives of other believers?

*Digging Deeper*

What prevents believers from experiencing the joy of the Lord?

**17a. And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs.**

The *offered* sacrifices were much smaller in number than those offered at the dedication of

Solomon's temple (see 1 Kings 8:62-63). The discrepancy could be due to the fewer number of people. Or, perhaps the exiles' poverty prohibited them from amassing larger numbers of sacrifices.

Their offerings were not chosen randomly but were consistent with the people's history. The law required *bullocks* (bulls) to be offered during the burnt sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3, 5). In addition, bulls were offered as a part of the sin offering (4:3, 13-14). A sacrifice of *rams* was required during the trespass offerings (5:14-15; 6:6). The peace offering (3:6-8), the sin offering (4:32), and the trespass offering (5:6) all made allowance for the use of *lamb*s. The text of Ezra does not indicate whether these specific offerings were made at the dedication.

These animals were offered as Israel celebrated the blowing of trumpets (see Numbers 29:1, 13, 17-18, etc.). Also, when Israel dedicated the tabernacle altar (7:10), these animals were offered (7:87-88).

That the animals were offered *at the dedication* of the rebuilt temple reflects two major points. First, it showed a concern to uphold the stipulations God required of the people. Second, the offering followed precedent made by previous generations.

Ritual purification and repentance were prerequisites for Israel to offer proper worship to God. Furthermore, Israel saw no contradiction between repentance and joyfulness before the Lord (see also Nehemiah 8:9-12). The repatriated tribes experienced joy as they offered sacrifices before God.

**17b. And for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.**

*A sin offering of goats* purified the people of their sins or ritual violations (see Leviticus 4:22-26; 5:6; 9:3, 15). That *twelve* were offered represented the split nation as a unified 12 *tribes*. As not all tribes had returned from exile, the offerings anticipated a reunited nation. During exile, the Jews had been without proper accommodations to make sin offerings. Their act of purification acknowledged decades of impure and sinful acts. As a new temple was dedicated, the people had a new start before God.



Visual for Lessons 2 & 3. Have this visual on display as you pose the discussion question that is associated with Ezra 6:16.

### ✠ DEDICATION AND CELEBRATION! ✠

My senses were tingling that morning. I can remember the sight of the new sanctuary, the smell of new carpet, and the feeling of new pews. That day marked the dedication of our church's new building. The anticipation of planning, building, and moving into a new building had come to its grand conclusion. I was excited for the work that the Lord would do in that building.

Our church community was filled with joy and gratitude as the dedication ceremony proceeded. We were eager to see God's work in that building. However, we were most excited for how God would work among us.

For ancient Israel, God's presence was made known in the temple. However, God's presence now resides in a different temple: His people (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21). Are you filled with joy and hope for how God might work? Are you living in a way that will show God's presence to others? —A. S.

**18. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.**

A rebuilt temple required a new labor force. The *priests* and *Levites* were tasked with care for the building and overseeing the sacrificial rituals in *service of God*. The prescriptions for their labor are found in parts of *the book of Moses*, the

Pentateuch. There Moses described the consecration and duties of Israel's leadership (Exodus 29; Leviticus 8; Numbers 3:5-13; 18).

The Law of Moses set the boundaries for the priests and the Levites. However, *their divisions* and *courses* were established by King David (1 Chronicles 24; compare Ezra 2:36-40). The renewed focus on worship highlighted the importance of the priesthood for Israel. Even in regard to physical health and well-being, the priests served God and Israel (Leviticus 13:2-44).

#### What Do You Think?

How can your church become more effective in service through the use of organized groups for specific ministries?

#### Digging Deeper

How does the church's ministry depend on the whole "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27)?

## II. Celebratory Fellowship

(EZRA 6:19-22)

### A. Passover (vv. 19-21)

#### 19. And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

Beginning with this verse, the language of the text switches from Aramaic to Hebrew. This marks a transition and a new focus. Previously the text was concerned with the dedication of the rebuilt temple. Now the text focuses on the religious practices of those once in *captivity*. A new focus reinforced Israel's distinctiveness, one that diminished during their time in exile (see Nehemiah 13:24).

The observation of *the passover* gave space for remembrance. Israel was to remember God's deliverance of their nation from oppression in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-14; Leviticus 23:4-8). Proper observation required that it begin on *the fourteenth day* of the month of Abib (Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 28:16; Deuteronomy 16:1-2). Abib was the Canaanite name of *the first month* of the Hebrew religious calendar. During the exile, Israel adopted the Babylonian calendar system. As a result, the name of that month changed to Nisan (Nehemiah 2:1).

#### 20. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

Earlier descriptions of the observance of Passover do not mention *the priests and the Levites*. Instead, the elders of the community of Israel selected and killed the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:21). However, depictions from the time of Kings Hezekiah (reigned 715-687 BC) and Josiah (reigned 640-609 BC) describe a different story. In those cases, the Levites *killed the passover* lamb for the people because of their uncleanness (2 Chronicles 30:17; 35:3-6, 10-11). The practice of having the Levites kill the sacrifice seems to have continued into postexilic Israel.

#### What Do You Think?

How can believers live lives of purity in regard to their daily actions?

#### Digging Deeper

How do Psalm 24:3-6; Galatians 5:16-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; 2 Timothy 2:22-25; and James 1:27 inform your answer?

#### 21. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat.

Proper observance of Passover required eating roasted lamb, seasoned with bitter herbs, and unleavened bread (Exodus 12:8-9; Numbers 9:11). Some of the meal's participants were those who *had separated themselves unto them*. This identification might refer to members of the northern kingdom of Israel or Israelites who did not experience exile. More likely, however, they were non-Israelites who chose to renounce idolatry *to seek the Lord God of Israel* (compare Nehemiah 9:2).

As long as they followed God's requirements, these individuals could *eat* (Exodus 12:44, 48). Distinctiveness as the people of God was most important to Israel. However, that did not imply blind patriotism or nationalistic fervor. Non-Jews, or Gentiles, could participate in Israel's blessing.

This occurred if they followed the stipulations God had for His people (see exceptions in Deuteronomy 23:1, 3-6).

The prophet Isaiah envisioned a future where this occurred. Gentiles were admitted as God's people when they observed the Sabbath and followed His requirements (see Isaiah 56:3, 6-8).

## B. Unleavened Bread (v. 22)

**22a. And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful.**

The one-day celebration of Passover preceded a week long observance of *the feast of unleavened bread*. During this week participants ate bread that was unleavened, or without yeast. This was to remember Israel's salvation and rescue out of Egypt (Exodus 12:14-20; 13:3-10; 23:15; Leviticus 23:6; Numbers 28:17-25; Deuteronomy 16:3-4). The feast was not to be somber but, rather, *joyful* (see 2 Chronicles 30:21). It reminded Israel of the ways *the Lord had* provided. The feast reminded the people how the Lord brought them out of oppression in Egypt. For the exiles, the feast was even more timely. It reminded them of His provision as He brought them out of exile.

**22b. And turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.**

This portion of the narrative reaches its dramatic conclusion as the Lord *turned the heart of the king*. As a result, new life would emerge in Israel. The once exiled people would increase in number, fulfilling the promises made to Abraham (Genesis 12:2; 15:5; compare Isaiah 54:1-3).

The mention of *Assyria* is a puzzling inclusion. The reign of Assyrians ended almost a century prior to the described events of this text. While the Persians adopted aspects of Assyrian government and culture, they were a different force altogether. The best explanation is that the text describes the king in this regard to remind readers of their history. Exile had begun with Assyria and the rule of its king (see Nehemiah 9:32). However, *the God of Israel* showed concern toward His people as He worked through pagan rulers.

### What Do You Think?

What attitude of your heart needs to change for God to work through you?

### Digging Deeper

Who will you ask to help you in this regard?

## Conclusion

### A. Building a Joyful Community

By 1942 the gestapo had shut down numerous underground seminaries, including Finkenwalde. War was in full swing in Europe. Bonhoeffer's former students were scattered around the continent. However, they were still faithful to their calling to serve the underground church. In an effort to encourage the leaders, Bonhoeffer wrote a series of letters calling the leaders to embrace joy. As suffering and indifference had become prevalent, finding joy was a challenge for these leaders.

The rebuilt temple was a result of God's provision and faithfulness toward His people. As a result, the exiles expressed their joyous worship and gratitude to God. These expressions took the form that had been prescribed to them before. The temple's dedication and the celebratory feasts invited the exiles to express proper joy toward God. Once again the people could experience right relationship with God, a true cause for joy and celebration.

Our community of faith may be driven to build new buildings and establish new programs. But our primary challenge when building is to respond joyfully. God's faithfulness to us demands such a response! From that foundation, we are called to build ministries as an outpouring of God's faithfulness. Ultimately, these become a sign for the world to see.

### B. Prayer

God, during difficult times, finding joy is a challenge. Fill us with the joy that comes only from You. May we be a people who celebrate Your work in our lives in a joyous manner. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God's people live in joyous and celebratory hope!

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Invite the class to create a new holiday for the country to recognize. Suggest that it can be serious and honor a significant person or moment, or it can be silly and highlight something they think is special. Once the class decides on the holiday, ask the following questions of the group: 1—On what date will it fall? 2—How it will be celebrated? 3—What traditions will this holiday introduce?

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Holiday Matching” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete the activity as indicated.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “Significant moments are worth remembering and celebrating. Today we will look at a long-awaited moment in the history of God’s people, and how they responded in celebration.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 6:13-15. Divide the whole class into three equal groups. Each group will then assign each group member a character role to act out. Group members will come up with a prop for each character to wear or hold, a statement for each character to say, and an action for each character to demonstrate their role.

**The Governors Group:** Tatnai, Shetharboznai, and their companions

**The Prophets and Builders Group:** Haggai, Zechariah, and the elders of the Jews

**The Commanders Group:** Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes

Invite group members to act out their parts as they interact with other groups. Encourage every character to participate. After no more than 10 minutes, ask participants the following questions: 1—Which group seemed to have the most work? 2—Which group seemed to have the most power? 3—In what ways did each group need the other two?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 6:16-22

and 1 Kings 8:62-66 to compare the two temple dedication ceremonies. Divide the class into two groups: **Similarities Group** and **Differences Group**.

Ask the **Similarities Group** to list all the similarities between the dedication ceremonies. Ask the **Differences Group** to list all the differences between the dedication ceremonies. Give no more than five minutes for each group to make their list. Have a representative from each group read their list to the whole class.

After each representative speaks, challenge the groups to discuss within their teams why there were these particular similarities and differences. Then ask a representative from each group to share their conclusions with the whole group.

*Alternative.* Divide the whole class into small groups of two or three people. Distribute copies of the “Compare and Contrast” exercise from the activity page. Ask groups to complete the activity as indicated. After a few minutes, invite groups to share what they found.

## Into Life

Ask the whole class, “How have we witnessed God’s provision and faithfulness in the history of our church?” Discuss this as a group, letting learners share stories and experiences. After a few minutes, focus on one story or experience that stands out as significant to a majority of the class. Ask the group to develop a plan for a church-wide celebration to commemorate the significant experience.

Ask the group to consider questions: 1—When would be the best time to have this celebration? 2—Where is the best location to have this celebration? 3—What offerings of praise and worship to God could people bring to this celebration? 4—What kind of food (feast) would best celebrate this occasion? Close class by making a plan to bring these ideas to the church leadership for consideration.

# FREE BECAUSE OF THE LORD

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 8:1-11

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 8

## DEUTERONOMY 8:1-11

1 All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.

2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

4 Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

5 Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.

6 Therefore thou shalt keep the command-

ments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.

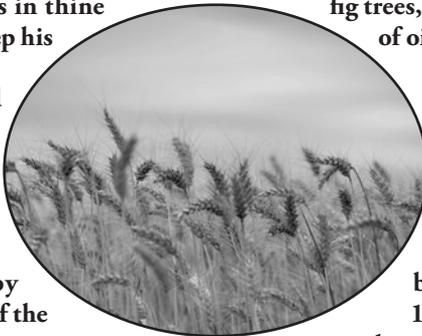
7 For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills;

8 A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;

9 A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

10 When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

11 Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.



## KEY TEXT

*Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day. —Deuteronomy 8:11*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 1: Liberating Passover

LESSONS 1–4

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. List the imperatives in Deuteronomy 8:1-11.
2. Explain the nature of those commandments.
3. Make a plan to practice greater humility in serving the Lord in one particular area.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Negligent Plant Slaughter
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Remember (Deuteronomy 8:1-5)

- A. Who Holds the Future (v. 1)
- B. Who Provided in the Past (vv. 2-5)  
*All Who Wander*

#### II. Anticipate (Deuteronomy 8:6-11)

- A. The Walk to Take (v. 6)
- B. The Land to Take (vv. 7-10)  
*Gratitude and Green Thumbs*
- C. The Failure to Avoid (v. 11)

#### Conclusion

- A. Credit Where Credit Is Due
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Negligent Plant Slaughter

How hard is it to water a plant? As it turns out, very difficult—at least for me. I was home from college for summer break. When my mother had to leave on a business trip, she instructed me to water *one* outside plant. If I didn't and the plant died, I would have to buy a new one. I was confident I could not forget. After all, it was clearly visible through the large window behind the TV!

Not once did I water the plant. Worse yet, it rained very little while my mother was gone. By the time she returned, the plant was a dried husk, and the leaves crumbled to dust at a mere touch.

It wasn't out of rebellion that I didn't water the plant, or even that I didn't care for my mom. The problem was that I never wrote it down, nor did I make a point to include watering the plant in my daily habits. Her instructions just slipped my mind. I still wish I had guarded myself against forgetting—that was an expensive plant!

Through my failure I learned that even *forgetting* to obey has consequences! But would Israel learn this lesson the easy way?

### B. Lesson Context

The setting for today's lesson is “on [the east] side [of the] Jordan, in the valley over against Bethpeor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites” (Deuteronomy 4:46) in about 1406 BC. The recipients were the Israelites of a new generation who were about to enter the promised land. Moses would soon die on Mount Nebo, located in Moab (chapter 34), having been barred from entering the promised land because of his disobedience at Meribah (Numbers 20:7-12).

Deuteronomy is a covenant renewal treaty, delivered by Moses in a series of speeches (Deuteronomy 1:1–4:43; 4:44–28:68; etc.). In these speeches, he recounted the covenant God had made with Israel at Mount Sinai some four decades previously. This covenant is very similar to a specific kind of ancient Near Eastern treaty called a suzerainty covenant. In such covenants, a sovereign king (the suzerain) would write out terms of an agreement with a weaker king (the

vassal). This generally required obedience from the lesser king in exchange for certain protections and benefits from the greater king. Typical suzerainty covenants contained at least six parts: (1) an introduction, (2) a historical basis for the treaty, (3) general stipulations followed by (4) specific stipulations, (5) divine witness, and finally (6) curses for disobedience and blessings for faithfulness.

Deuteronomy 5–11 is the high point of the book. Here the Ten Commandments are recounted (chapter 5; compare Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4). This is followed by an exposition of how to love and obey the Lord (chapters 6–11). Our text today, from Deuteronomy 8:1-11, falls under general stipulations in the second speech.

One helpful way to categorize laws in the Bible is to distinguish between conditional and unconditional laws. Unconditional laws are what we have with the Ten Commandments. They are foundation principles for Israel's covenant relationship. Covenant recognizes a relationship, and adherence to the rules maintains the relationship. Conditional laws rightly begin with a conditional clause (beginning with "if" or "when," either expressed or implied), followed by a declarative judgment (beginning with "then," either expressed or implied; examples: Exodus 21:28-29; 22:26-27).

## I. Remember

(DEUTERONOMY 8:1-5)

### A. Who Holds the Future (v. 1)

**1. All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers.**

This week's passage continues the call to observe *the commandments* God gave Israel (compare: Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 5:1; 6:1-2; 7:11-12). What follows are positive reminders of God's work and the blessings that will follow from continuing to obey *the Lord*. Deuteronomy 8:12-20 (not in our printed text) presents the negative flipside. Curses can and will result from failure to follow the Lord's ways.

Obedying God's commands results in experiencing fulfillment of God's promises (compare John 10:10b). To *multiply* is both a command from

the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:28) and a blessing given by God (Deuteronomy 7:13). Israel had multiplied in Egypt, but their growth resulted in a perceived threat to the Egyptians. They resolved this danger by enslaving the Israelites (Exodus 1:6-13). Possessing the promised *land* would allow the people to multiply in peace. Fulfillment of all these promises was predicated on obedience; the people's failure to obey accounted for their exile in Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:11-21).

*Your fathers* refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:15). God had made a promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham (Genesis 12:6-7). God then formalized His promise with a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17. He renewed the covenant with both Isaac (26:3-5) and Jacob (35:9-12).

### B. Who Provided in the Past (vv. 2-5)

**2. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.**

Though we may not think of *remember* as an enforceable command, it is often given this power in Deuteronomy (examples: 7:18; 15:15; 16:12; 24:22). Festivals, sacrifices, Sabbath rest, and other rhythms of life were meant to help the people keep this command (examples: Exodus 13:2-3; 20:8). In a similar way, the Lord's Supper and baptism remind us of what *the Lord* has done for us, especially through Christ.

Future generations would be well served to learn lessons from the hardships faced *these forty years in the wilderness* without repeating the same sins. Proud people believe they have earned everything they have through their own power; humble people recognize that without the Lord, they would have nothing. Experiencing uncertainty about resources in the wilderness was meant to humble the Israelites, reminding them not only

## HOW TO SAY IT

Sinai      *Sigh*-nye or *Sigh*-nay-eye.  
suzerainty      *soo*-zuh-ruhn-tee.

of their need but of God's ability and trustworthiness to care for them. Though the next generation was going into a land rich with resources, forgetting humility before God would be a dire misstep.

God was able to see the hearts of His people and *prove* their faithfulness. Though God's seeking evidence of faith may seem to contradict the fact that He knows everything, the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah provides precedent for God's proving the people's faith (Genesis 22:1-18). There as here, God wants to be sure that His people remain faithful to Him by keeping *his commandments*. And perhaps as importantly, the people were reassured that God saw their efforts and valued their devotion to Him.

*What Do You Think?*

▶ What have humbling experiences revealed about your character?

*Digging Deeper*

How does remembering these experiences reveal growth areas and God's faithfulness?

**3a. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know.**

Immediately after leaving Egypt, the Israelites moaned that Moses was leading them to their deaths (Exodus 14:10-12). They also spoke against him twice more when they were thirsty (15:22-24; 17:1-3), as well as when they didn't have food (16:2-3). This is an example of how God used their circumstances in an effort to humble them (see Deuteronomy 8:2-4).

Although Israel feared a lack of provision, God provided *manna*, "bread from heaven" (Exodus 16:4, 14-15). This bread "was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" (16:31; compare Numbers 11:7-9). In naming it, the people threw up their hands and said in essence, "Manna—we don't know what this is!" But they didn't need to recognize the food—only that God's provision was a concrete example of His care and capability. The intended effect of humbling the people and teaching them to trust God with a grateful heart, however, does not seem to have taken (see Exodus 16:19-20).

**3b. That he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.**

This explanation falls in the middle of the list of things that the Lord provided for the Israelites while they were in the wilderness. Any time a list is interrupted with explanation, the reader should pay close attention. The interruption is important to understanding what surrounds it.

God's response to Israel's hardships was meant to inspire the people to trust Him. It's not that the people didn't need bread; rather, it's that heeding *every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord* is the only path to life (see Psalm 119:9-16). What good is a healthy body if the soul languishes? Or as Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). If Israel wanted to live, they needed not only food and water, but to obey God and find life in Him (see Isaiah 45:22-25).

Jesus quoted this Scripture when Satan tempted Him to create bread (Matthew 4:1-4). Though Israel struggled with the truth that the Father sought to teach them, Jesus knew it well. Hunger lasts for a time, and God's provision comes when He wills it. But seeking after God's words—His laws, His promises, and His other proclamations of love—ensures life, whether one's stomach rumbles or not. Jesus would wait for God's time. And if we are to heed the wisdom of Jesus' words, we will wait too (compare 6:25-33).

*What Do You Think?*

▶ What evidence of faithfulness to God's commands do outsiders see in your life? What contradictory evidence might they see?

*Digging Deeper*

What practices can you begin or strengthen to live by every word that comes from God?

**4. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.**

The list of God's provision continues. These two preventative measures kept Israel in good health and ensured they could continue the journey, even for *forty years*. Having *raiment* not wear

out was important, given the scarce resources to make new clothing along the way. Swelling in the *foot* often results from injury or disease, though exercise (like lots of walking) can also cause it. Prolonged exposure to heat—a reality in the Sinai peninsula where summer highs hover in the high 90s Fahrenheit—can have the same effect.

### ❧ ALL WHO WANDER ❧

One summer I hiked in the Rocky Mountains for several months with a single pair of hiking boots. This range boasts peaks that rise more than 14,000 feet above sea level. Oxygen is precious, and trees do not grow above about 11,000 feet. The rocky crags above the tree line are exposed to the sun, high winds, and violent thunderstorms.

This unforgiving landscape chewed up my hiking boots. The laces broke, the soles thinned and then tore away from the toe box, the threaded stitching disintegrated, the leather wore through until my toes stuck out. When I retired them, those boots were a stark image of what happens to hard-used footwear.

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, traversing many miles of unforgiving land. But their clothes never wore out. God protected them. And He still protects us, no matter how challenging our environment. How does God provide for you in your current hostile environment?

—W. L.

### 5. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.

The *heart* in the Hebrew language represented the origin of will, or volition (examples: Genesis 20:5-6; Deuteronomy 8:2, above; 11:16). The command here is not about an emotional reaction but, instead, one of considering the facts of what God has done.

Though the people may have felt sorely used, it benefited them to *consider* their hardships as instruction to make them wise and capable of living well (Hebrews 12:5-11; compare James 1:2-5). The familial imagery—God as Father, Israel as *his son*—speaks to the love behind God’s actions. Even the curses contained in the covenant were



Visual for Lesson 4. While discussing the questions with verse 7a, ask the class for examples from the congregation as well as personal experience.

meant to lead the people back to Him (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). And when Israel called out, God delighted in delivering His children (examples: Judges 3:7-9, 12-15; 4:1-7; compare Jonah 3:5-10; Revelation 3:19).

## II. Anticipate

(DEUTERONOMY 8:6-11)

### A. The Walk to Take (v. 6)

#### 6a. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways.

*Therefore* transitions from what God did in the past to what He would do in the near future (see Deuteronomy 8:7a and following, below; contrast 8:2). When we think of *the commandments*, we tend to think of the Ten Commandments. But the command *to walk in his ways* refers to the instruction contained within the entire covenant (contrast Psalm 1:1; see Deuteronomy 8:11, below). The Ten Commandments serve as a summary in many ways, but the rest of the legal code gives Israel further direction in *how* to carry out those fundamental commands. Israel was required to keep God’s commandments by living lives that reflected His ways.

#### 6b. And to fear him.

This phrase called the people to a proper, humble respect of God. Even so, the word *fear* does not lose the connotation of terror (see “terrible,”

which implies “terror inducing” in Deuteronomy 8:15, not in our printed text). When people have a fuller understanding of God’s power and authority, fear is an entirely appropriate response. The righteous do not need to fear God’s wrath; their respectful fear of the Lord motivates them to keep His laws and continue to live rightly (Psalms 34:9; 52:5-7; etc.).

## B. The Land to Take (vv. 7-10)

### 7a. For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land.

The original *good land* was the earth itself (see Genesis 1:10, 12, 25). Canaan was the specific land God promised to Abraham and his descendants hundreds of years before (Genesis 15; 17; 26:1-5; 28:12-15). “Good” is repeated in verse 10 (below) and to describe the houses the people would build for themselves (Deuteronomy 8:12, not in our printed text). In declaring the work of their own hands “good,” they would risk not appreciating that *everything* comes from the Lord (compare Daniel 4:28-37). God is not in the habit of giving mediocre gifts (compare John 2:6-10; 3:16; James 1:17), and the place He set apart for the people’s promised home was no exception (Deuteronomy 6:3; 11:9; 26:9; etc.). To forget this was to invite dire consequences.

#### What Do You Think?

In what ways do you see that God has brought you into a “good land”?

#### Digging Deeper

How can you be better satisfied with God’s provision?

### 7b. A land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.

After wandering in a wilderness where water was not easily found (Exodus 17:1; Numbers 20:2-4), abundance of *water* would seem like an appropriate litmus test for answering the question “Is the *land* good?” Flowing water from *brooks, fountains*, and springs ensured that disease wouldn’t flourish in stagnant water.

### 8-9a. A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil

### olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it.

The northern portions of Canaan were ideal for fields of *wheat* and *barley*. These grains were used to make bread and other food. The southern mountains yielded a more temperate environment that could sustain *fig trees, and pomegranates* along with *olive* groves. Some students propose that *honey* refers to the syrup from fruits rather than to what bees produce.

While this list should not be taken as comprehensive, the elements named illustrate that the people *shalt eat bread without scarceness* and find nothing lacking in the land (see commentary on Deuteronomy 8:3b, above). This once again reversed the scarcity the Israelites had experienced in the wilderness (see 8:3a, above). The 12 Israelite spies had brought back a report of abundance in the land, coupled with information concerning the people who lived there. When the Israelites disobeyed the Lord and gave in to fear, the first generation out of Egypt was barred from entering the land (Numbers 13:17–14:25).

### 9b. A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

Here the focus shifts to materials for crafting tools and weapons. *Iron* was known during the Bronze Age (about 3300–1200 BC) but not widely used (compare Deuteronomy 3:11). As the Israelites were soon to enter the promised land, the year was about 1406 BC, around 200 years before the beginning of the Iron Age (about 1200–550 BC), when iron’s value would be better appreciated. *Brass* is an older word for bronze, an alloy of copper and tin. This metal was still widely used as societies were learning how to work with iron.

### 10. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

God’s provision was meant to teach the people to depend on Him, to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7; see Deuteronomy 8:3b, above). Such abundance might lure the people into believing they were self-sufficient or that the “gods” who were already worshipped in the land had helped them. The people would labor in the fields and

vineyards, but God gave them *the good land* and then the conditions to benefit from His bounty. The only appropriate response to His provision is always to *bless the Lord* (“praise” in Judges 5:2).

**What Do You Think?**

What ordinary blessings do you tend to take for granted?

**Digging Deeper**

How will your life change when you take time to thank God for *all* your daily provision?

✿ **GRATITUDE AND GREEN THUMBS** ✿

I once knew a delighted, delightful gardener. Her yard was a riot of teal lamb’s ear, hollyhock, yellow and white daisies, soft purple columbines, pale catmint, bone white aspen roots, and snow-in-summer. She kept a golden peach tree and an orchard of bright green apple trees. An enormous grapevine scaled the east-facing side of her house. In late fall the vine grew plump clusters of vivid wine-colored grapes that hung down and touched the ground. The garden vibrated with iridescent hummingbirds that shimmered green and pink and silver, fat bumblebees, ladybugs, robins, and great orange monarch butterflies.

I imagine the good land as an alpine garden overflowing with fruit, bursting with color, teeming with life. Just as we are to rely on God in times of trouble, we are also called to praise Him when blessed to sit and eat in a bountiful garden. Give praise today for your own “good land”! —W. L.

**C. The Failure to Avoid (v. 11)**

**11. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.**

Memory is the beginning of obedience (see Deuteronomy 8:2, above). If the people failed to remember, it would be seen in their disobedience to all that *God* commanded them. The repetition of this command makes clear its importance and even models how to remember.

Too fine a distinction can be made between *commandments*, *judgments*, and *statutes*. When

used in quick succession this way, the three are meant to give a sense of the weightiness of all the covenant ordinances Israel had been given to obey. God’s people were responsible not for the pieces they liked or whatever was easy but for the entire law (Deuteronomy 6; Luke 11:42; James 2:10-11).

**What Do You Think?**

Which of God’s expectations do you most struggle to adhere to on a daily basis?

**Digging Deeper**

What memory aids can you use to remember God’s commands and seek to keep them?

## Conclusion

### A. Credit Where Credit Is Due

God has given us words to remember, laws to live by. Our peace depends on remembering what God has commanded and then acting faithfully on that memory (see John 14:21).

Though much has changed between when Israel stood at the boundary of the promised land and the time of the global church, we too are called to remember all that the Lord has done for us. We are not self-sufficient—God has given us all that we have. We must look to Him in times of both need and plenty. Only when we honor and fear Him like this can we call others to the same respect.

And, of course, we bring not only knowledge of God’s law but also the peace of God’s forgiveness through Jesus’ sacrifice. His love has been shown to us; let us show it also to the watching world. Only then will we experience life in our own good land—the world God created—and beyond, in His Heaven.

### B. Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for all the ways that You bless us daily. Help us to remember You in hard times and in times of bounty. Show us opportunities to tell the stories of Your faithfulness to everyone we meet. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

The Lord’s faithfulness to us calls for our faithfulness to Him.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Invite the class to play a memory game called Going on a Picnic. Explain that participants will take turns saying, “We’re going on a picnic and we’re taking...” and add a word. The first person’s word begins with the letter A (example: apples). The second person repeats the A word and adds a B word (example: apples and bananas). The third person will need to remember the A and B words and add a C word (example: apples, bananas, and cheese). The goal is to have a list of items from A to Z, without forgetting any of them! Make this activity competitive (if a participant forgets an item, that person is out) *or* cooperative (everyone can help each person remember all the items).

After this activity say, “Sometimes it’s a challenge to remember things, even things that are important to us. We’ll see in today’s lesson some things God commands His people to remember and why.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 8:1-5. Divide the whole group into three smaller groups and give each group a poster board. Assign different focuses to each group: **Command Group**, **Reason Group**, and **Lesson Group**. Instruct the **Command Group** to write down the command words and phrases in this passage (example: *remember*), the **Reason Group** to write down the reasons the people should obey the commands (example: *that ye may live*), and the **Lesson Group** to write down the lessons the people learn about the character of God through the reasons (example: *to know what was in thine heart*).

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Looking Backward/Looking Forward” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to pairs of participants. Instruct them to only complete Part A.

Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 8:6-10. Continue the previous activity of listing the com-

mands, reasons, and lessons in the three groups. Then post the three posters on a wall, in a triangle pattern: the **Command Group** and **Reason Group** posters side by side, and the **Lesson Group** poster centered below. Give a handful of 24-inch lengths of yarn and a roll of tape to each group. Instruct them to tape the yarn on the wall, connecting the words they listed on their poster to the related words on the next poster. When they are finished, have the whole group study the visual effect and give feedback on what they notice.

*Alternative.* Instruct pairs to complete Part B of the “Looking Backward/Looking Forward” exercise from the activity page. When they are finished, ask them to discuss the results as a whole class and summarize what they notice about God’s character—in both the past and the future. (Possible conclusions may be: God always provides what is needed; God’s provision is abundant and gracious; God cares about the physical well-being and prosperity of His people.)

Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 8:11. Ask the whole group to discuss: If the people did not heed this warning, how would it change their understanding of who God is? Invite participants to cite examples from the Old Testament, as well as the consequences the people faced.

## Into Life

Give participants one minute to write down some of the blessings they have. Allow time to share these things in their previous groups and discuss how counting their blessings can help them practice humility when they serve the Lord. Allow one more minute for participants to write a reminder to serve God humbly.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Remember” activity page to each participant as a take-home to be completed as indicated.

Close class with a prayer of thanks for all that God has done and will do for His people.

# TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF THE KING

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 21:1-11  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:25-28; 21:1-11

## MATTHEW 21:1-11

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the

Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.



## KEY TEXT

*Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. —Matthew 21:5*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 2: Liberating Gospels

LESSONS 5–8

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. List the details of the triumphal entry.
2. Explain Matthew's use of Zechariah 9:9.
3. Express worship to the Lord by writing a poem, prayer, or devotional thought.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Columbo
- B. Lesson Context
- I. The Preparation (Matthew 21:1-5)
  - A. Setting (v. 1a)
  - B. Instructions (vv. 1b-3)  
*Planning the Journey*
  - C. Fulfillment (vv. 4-5)
- II. The Procession (Matthew 21:6-11)
  - A. Obedience (vv. 6-7)
  - B. Reaction (vv. 8-9)
  - C. Identity (vv. 10-11)  
*Cheering for . . . Him?*

#### Conclusion

- A. Faith on Parade
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Columbo

In most mysteries the reader or viewer tries to figure out “who done it” along with the detective in the story. The best stories always have a surprising ending. But the 1970s show *Columbo* turned this formula on its head. The viewer saw the murder and knew the perpetrator from the very beginning, so the tension came from the uncertainty of whether the case could be solved. Inspector Columbo, the detective played by Peter Falk, appears to be bumbling and dull-witted. However, he is actually quite a good sleuth. Each episode followed how the inspector cracked the case. At the end, Columbo revealed proof of the perpetrator's identity.

The proof of Jesus' identity is clear to us because we have all the evidence of history at our disposal. To His disciples and the crowds, however, the mystery was intact: Who was Jesus? What was He going to do in Jerusalem? The triumphal entry was one twist in the plot on His way to the cross.

### B. Lesson Context

Matthew 21–28 is devoted to the final week of Jesus' life through the resurrection and post-resurrection appearances. That week left the world changed forever.

Today's text comes from Monday of that fateful week and covers the triumphal entry. This event is recounted in all four Gospels (see Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19). Matthew, Mark, and Luke frequently overlap in their presentations, so we do not find ourselves surprised by the shared information. But to have an event shared also in John is less expected. Inclusion in all four Gospels speaks to the importance of the triumphal entry.

Several months before, Jesus had warned His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, including His own death, at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes (Matthew 16:21-28). Peter strongly resisted such an idea. He even rebuked Jesus. The idea of Jesus' dying was completely foreign to what Peter and the other disciples understood Jesus' mission to be.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the disciples must have believed that their hopes of establishing Jesus as an earthly Messiah were about to be realized.

Though the disciples did not yet understand, Jesus' death would fulfill the Scriptures—just not as they had expected. The theme of fulfillment of Scripture permeates Matthew's Gospel. From Jesus' birth, Matthew both alluded to prophecy (Matthew 1:1; compare Isaiah 9:7; Jeremiah 23:5; etc.) and outright quoted it (Matthew 1:22-23). Matthew spells out in his account of the triumphal entry that this event fulfilled prophecy once again and paved the way for other fulfillments to come.

## I. The Preparation

(MATTHEW 21:1-5)

### A. Setting (v. 1a)

**1a. And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives.**

Jesus and His disciples were traveling with many other pilgrims to *Jerusalem* to celebrate Passover (see lesson 6). The people who lived in Jerusalem also were preparing for the festival and the influx of religious visitors. Jesus arrived “six days” before the Passover, spending time in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany (see John 12:1-3). The two small villages of Bethany and Bethphage are on the eastern side of Jerusalem. Bethany served as Jesus' normal base of operation when in Judea. The village was located about two miles southeast of Jerusalem.

The arrival was late Friday afternoon, for Jesus and His fellow Jews would not travel all the way from Jericho on a Sabbath Day, which begins at sundown Friday night. The group arrived at *Bethphage* (meaning “house of unripe figs”), which is near Bethany (see Mark 11:1). *The mount of Olives* is a north-south ridge that flanks the eastern side of Jerusalem. Bethany and Bethphage were on the far side of this mount, somewhat isolated from the city, yet conveniently close to it.

### B. Instructions (vv. 1b-3)

**1b-2. Then sent Jesus two disciples, saying**

**unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.**

The *two disciples* Jesus sent are not named. The expectation that the female donkey (a jenny) was *tied* with her *colt* indicated that the donkey was not out grazing or involved in work, but ready and waiting for Jesus' purposes. She may have been fitted with some type of halter that allowed her to be tied to a post, readily available for being led back to Jesus. All four of the Gospels mention the younger donkey (compare Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30; John 12:14), but only Matthew includes the detail that there was an older female donkey as well.

Jesus' knowledge of the availability of the colt may have come supernaturally. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that the Lord made prior arrangements for the use of the animal.

**3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.**

Jesus anticipated the disciples' being asked about taking the donkeys, and told His followers how to answer. *The Lord hath need of them* functioned as a password or code. This gives us the impression that Jesus had prearranged the availability of the two animals. Many commentators believe that the owner of the colt was quietly making a contribution to Jesus' ministry in his own way. There may have been thousands of such followers in Palestine at that time. The Lord needed some to serve publicly out in front, but He also used many whose ministries were performed quietly behind the scenes.

### ✠ PLANNING THE JOURNEY ✠

After months of quarantine, my wife and I were delighted to attend a family wedding 2,000 miles from home. And planning was part of the fun! Do we drive or fly? We decided to drive. Do we use our camping trailer or stay in motels? We decided on “hoteling.” That settled the “Which car?” question, since my wife's car pulls the trailer and my car gets better gas mileage.

Reservations were made, routes were decided,

and the car was given a thorough safety check. With all that done, all that was left was to pack: travel clothes, wedding clothes, and masks.

Perhaps Jesus had been envisioning this short journey from Bethphage to Jerusalem for a while. When the day of the triumphal entry arrived, His plans were complete and in keeping with the Father's will. How do you seek or recognize God's guidance for your own life's journey? —C. R. B.

### C. Fulfillment (vv. 4-5)

#### 4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying.

Jesus alluded to *the prophet* Zechariah, who prophesied concerning the "King" coming into Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9). His prophecies and others were not fulfilled by random chance. The events they foresaw were pieces of God's deliberate plan, a plan carried out by Jesus.

A key verse in understanding this is Matthew 5:17, which sets the tone for the entire book in the area of prophecy: Jesus did not come "to destroy 'the law, or the prophets' . . . but to fulfil." There is perfect convergence between the prophets—who were given a glimpse of God's plan—and the Messiah, who enacted the plan centuries later (examples: Matthew 1:22-23; 2:5-6; 8:14-17).

#### What Do You Think?

Does your knowledge of the Old Testament bolster your faith? Why or why not?

#### Digging Deeper

How would the apostles answer this question?

Give scriptural examples.

#### 5. Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

So there would be no mistake or ambiguity, Matthew recorded an abbreviated version of Zechariah's prophecy. We noted earlier that Zion (here spelled *Sion*) is equivalent to Jerusalem. (The *daughter of* part comes from Isaiah 62:11.) Though some claim that Jesus never saw himself as the prophesied Messiah, or Christ, Scripture shows otherwise (examples: Matthew 16:17; Luke 24:25-27; John 4:25-26).

Jerusalem was overflowing with Passover pilgrims at this time. This feast temporarily would nearly double Jerusalem's normal population of perhaps 50,000.

Here was their king, entering the royal city. Even though Jesus rode on an animal and was the object of such praise, His humility was actually on display. He was not riding a giant stallion with flaring nostrils, but a lowly donkey. The animal was used primarily for plowing or as a beast of burden, not to announce the presence of royalty. We easily imagine Jesus' legs sticking out from the donkey's round belly, with Jesus' feet barely clearing the ground. He is the humble king—a contradiction of terms in the ancient world, but perfect in God's plan.

#### What Do You Think?

How do you practice humility?

#### Digging Deeper

When boldness is called for, what continued role does humility play in your actions?

## II. The Procession

(MATTHEW 21:6-11)

### A. Obedience (vv. 6-7)

**6-7. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.**

A triumphal procession in the city of Rome could take weeks to prepare. The Roman general or emperor receiving "the triumph" rode in a ceremonial chariot specially crafted for the event. The Roman triumphs consisted of long parades of dignitaries, captured enemy soldiers and kings, and wagons heavy with the spoils of war. Such carefully planned spectacles sometimes included the erection of a new triumphal arch. In contrast, Jesus' entry was much more impromptu.

Saddles as we know them were not commonly used in the ancient Near East. Instead, *the disciples* laid some of their clothing on the back of the animal to cushion Jesus' ride. Without a saddle or stirrups, *Jesus* probably had to be lifted onto the back of the animal. It doesn't seem like a given

that *the colt* would remain docile as Jesus rode it. Perhaps this animal recognized Jesus as the ruler of the universe and behaved accordingly.

## B. Reaction (vv. 8-9)

**8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.**

The description *a very great multitude* can be understood as “the largest of crowds.” Matthew knows of a crowd of 5,000 men (not counting women and children) that came to hear Jesus in Galilee (Matthew 14:21), and this Passover crowd seems to be even larger. This is the biggest thing happening in Jerusalem that day, with perhaps 10,000 or more people lining Jesus’ path to the city. It is likely that many were from the Galilee region.

Speculation was buzzing about if and when Jesus would come (John 11:55-57). Jesus did not stir up the crowd; their celebration was a spontaneous act by the people who had been anticipating His arrival. The nature of this event was contagious, and the crowd responded by paving the triumphal path of Jesus with their own *garments* and with freshly cut *branches*. John identifies those as coming from “palm trees” (John 12:13). The phrase *strawed them* brings to mind the spreading of fresh, clean straw in a stable or in a house that has a dirt floor.

John tells us that the crowd also *cut* palm branches or fronds and waved these as they went out to meet Jesus (John 12:13). Normally this behavior was reserved to honor nobility. Crowds

of people had welcomed the Jewish hero Simon Maccabeus in a similar manner some 110 years before (see the nonbiblical 1 Maccabees 13:51). The people demonstrated their belief that Jesus was more than just another prophet or rabbi.

Since palm fronds grow at the very top of the trees, the people must have gone to considerable effort to cut them for this occasion. This action is the basis for observing the day of Jesus’ triumphal entry as Palm Sunday.

### What Do You Think?

How does it encourage you to be with a crowd of people who are praising Jesus?

### Digging Deeper

What pitfalls do you see if the *only* time you worship is with others?

**9a. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying.**

The acclamation of the multitudes has three parts (see Matthew 21:9b-c, below), all pointing to Jesus as the promised Messiah. All four Gospel accounts record Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see Lesson Context), and these accounts present some interesting variations. Both Matthew and Mark indicate that two groups made up the crowd that accompanied Jesus: those *that went before* came out from Jerusalem to meet Him (John 12:12-13), while those *that followed* had come from Bethany with Him.

**9b. Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**

The word *Hosanna*, a Hebrew term that means “save,” is associated with the Hallel (“praise”) psalms (113–118), especially Psalm 118:25-26. These particular psalms were associated with the Feast of Booths, which celebrated the Lord’s delivering Israel from Egypt. Echoes of deliverance permeated the people’s celebrating Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. They hoped that He would save them from Rome in a way similar to their historic deliverance from Egypt.

The people’s acclamation of Jesus as *the Son of David* was a clear reference to God’s promise to David and his lineage (see 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89:3-4). The crowd seemed to know that Jesus was

## HOW TO SAY IT

Bethany	<i>Beth-uh-nee.</i>
Bethphage	<i>Beth-fuh-gee.</i>
Galilee	<i>Gal-uh-lee.</i>
Hosanna	<i>Ho-za-nuh.</i>
Jerusalem	<i>Juh-roo-suh-lem.</i>
Maccabees	<i>Mack-uh-bees.</i>
Messiah	<i>Meh-sigh-uh.</i>
Nazareth	<i>Naz-uh-reth.</i>
Zechariah	<i>Zek-uh-rye-uh.</i>
Zion	<i>Zi-un.</i>

in the line of David (Matthew see 1:1, 6; contrast the uncertainty of a previous occasion in John 7:41-42). The Gospel of John makes this knowledge even more explicit, recording that the crowd also hailed Jesus as “King of Israel” (12:13).

The people at the triumphal entry clearly anticipated great things from a king who *cometh in the name of the Lord*. But they did not yet realize or appreciate how Jesus’ kingship would differ from every monarch they had ever known. Nor did they know Jesus’ absolute worthiness to receive such praise and worship. The Pharisees understood the threat of the people’s adoration, however, and regarded their behavior as worthy of rebuke (Luke 19:37-44).

#### What Do You Think?

What situations cause you to cry out for God’s deliverance?

#### Digging Deeper

How do you react when God responds to your petition differently than you had wanted?

### 9c. Hosanna in the highest.

*In the highest* refers to God’s dwelling place in Heaven (example: Luke 2:14). The people were asking God to hear them from His home and to act on their behalf. Little did they know that Immanuel was with them, not far removed.

Luke tells us that some of the religious leaders demanded that Jesus silence the enthusiastic crowd. Jesus responded, “If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40). Luke also informs us that Jesus stopped before He entered the city and wept as He predicted the tragic future that awaited Jerusalem (19:41-44).

Jesus did not silence the people, but neither did He take time to explain to them everything they didn’t understand about Him. Then as now, Jesus can truly be known only when we accept the truth that He was crucified, died, and then rose from the grave (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). He brought God’s kingdom close, and He showed through His life, death, and resurrection that citizenship in His kingdom is different from that of any earthly nation. (Consider Jesus’ teaching in

Matthew 5–7.) No amount of preaching to the people would be as persuasive concerning Jesus’ identity and purpose as would the way He died and the miracle of His rising back to life.

### C. Identity (vv. 10-11)

#### 10. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

The Jewish pilgrims who found lodging outside the city for the holiday (as Jesus and His disciples had) would walk *into Jerusalem* each day of the weeklong celebration. On this day, many such pilgrims accompanied Jesus into the city (Matthew 21:9a, above), and the commotion was so great that *all the city* noticed. The question of the day, though, was not “What’s happening?” but “*Who is this?*”

That question is profound and has lasting consequences for faith and discipleship. In order to give His disciples greater insight into His identity, Jesus had asked them who people said He was (Matthew 16:13-14). The disciples mentioned various prophets (see 21:11, below). When Jesus asked the disciples who *they* believed He was, Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:15-16). Even so, Peter did not understand what this meant or how dangerous this confession would prove to be. Still, Jesus declared that on the truth of this great confession the church would be built. Only by accepting Jesus as He disclosed himself—not just as a prophet or teacher but as Savior and Messiah—can a person truly follow Jesus and the church remain faithful to Him.

#### 11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Despite the previous acclamation of Jesus as “Son of David,” *the multitude* gave a somewhat tamer answer to the question of Matthew 21:10, above. The crowd identified Him by name (*Jesus*), by hometown (*Nazareth of Galilee*), and by special vocation (*prophet*), but there is no language of Jesus as Messiah or king. Even so, the designation of Jesus as a prophet seems to have had a powerful effect on the city; it is the reason the Jewish leaders plotted carefully and secretly to have Jesus arrested (Matthew 21:46).

### What Do You Think?

What opportunities does incomplete understanding of Jesus' identity offer in evangelization?

### Digging Deeper

What challenges are presented by the same incomplete knowledge?

### ✿ CHEERING FOR . . . HIM? ✿

P. T. Barnum (1810–1891) of Barnum & Bailey Circus fame was a master showman who entertained Americans for many decades in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His hometown of Bridgeport, Connecticut, has held an annual Barnum festival and parade for the last 75 years to honor their native son.

My friend Len was a banker in the Bridgeport area before he retired. While I was in Bridgeport one year, the grand marshal—Len—invited me to ride with him on the grand marshal's float. No one in the crowd knew me, but they cheered anyway. I was riding with the grand marshal, so I basked in their acclaim as if I deserved it.

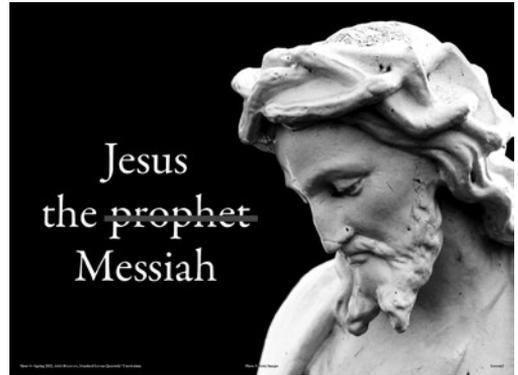
Many joined Jesus' "parade" to Jerusalem. And when the crowd cheered, I suspect that, like the crowd in Bridgeport, many were caught up in the spirit of the celebration. But Jesus deserved their praise, even though many didn't know who He really was. So celebrate Jesus, whatever you know of Him—but also seek to know Him better. You'll find even more reason to cheer. —C. R. B.

## Conclusion

### A. Faith on Parade

Hearing the story of Jesus always leaves us with a question: Who is He? Just a good teacher, basing His lessons on God's laws? No more than a prophet, given insight from the Lord? Or is He the Son of God, the promised Messiah, sent to save the world from sin and death? Based on our answer, we also have a decision to make: Will we follow?

On days like the one described in this lesson, following Jesus is not just the right thing to do; it's the joyful thing! We want to follow Christ when



Visual for Lessons 5. *Before closing the class with prayer, allow the learners one minute to consider how they continue to seek after Jesus.*

He is being celebrated by everyone we know. And indeed, following Jesus is the path of life to the fullest (John 10:10b; 14:6).

But we must not forget that Jesus was heading to the cross. All of us experience great happiness, but sorrow, pain, betrayal, and loss will still befall us, as they did Jesus. This is not an exception to a good life; it is a fact of living in a world marred by sin. Will we still follow when we know that Jesus might be leading us to more pain than if we simply watched Him pass by? What gives us staying power when others lay down their palm branches and reach instead for stones (John 8:59)?

Growing in our knowledge of Jesus and our relationship with Him helps us choose to follow His lead every day. Our preparation for extraordinary struggle begins in ordinary preparations: spending time in the Word and in prayer, seeking the Spirit's guidance; worshipping with the body of Christ, and lamenting too; serving our brothers and sisters, our neighbors, and our enemies. May we celebrate Jesus in all circumstances and follow Him, even to death.

### B. Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for sending Jesus, Your Son, to save us from our sins. May we always praise Him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Hosanna in the highest! Jesus has come.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Set up a scenario in which a celebrity comes to your town and your class is in charge of hosting that person for a weekend. Divide learners into groups of five. Ask each group to decide on a specific reason the visitor is a celebrity. Examples include all-star athletes, award-winning actors, best-selling writers, etc. Each group needs to create an agenda, plan meals, provide lodging, reserve spaces for events, and supply transportation. Give a 10-minute limit for them to come up with a basic weekend plan. Allow time to discuss the plans with the whole class, especially any differences based on the kind of celebrity who was hosted.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Monarch for a Day” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow learners one minute to work individually before pairing up to complete the activity and discuss.

After either of these activities, say, “Important people often are given special treatment. Today we will look closely at a story about how Jesus chose to present himself and the way others received Him.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 21:1-11. Tell the class that they will develop a full issue of a daily newspaper in Jerusalem, based on the events of today’s passage. Invite the learners to brainstorm ideas for the paper’s title.

Once a title is chosen, divide the class into pairs or small groups. Give each group one of these assignments plus a possible article title to get them started:

**Advice Column Group:** “How to Plan Your Royal Entrance”

**Celebrity Profile Group:** “The Prophet from Nazareth”

**Police Report Group:** “Not-Quite-Stolen Livestock”

**Public Survey Group:** “False Prophet or Prophecy Fulfilled?”

**Political Analysis Group:** “Son of David: New King in Town?”

**Traffic Report Group:** “Crowds, Cloaks, Colts, and Cut Branches Create Chaos”

*Option:* If there are any artists in the class, a **Comic Strip** or **Feature Photo Group** can be formed.

Suggest that quotes or statistics can be created as long as they do not contradict the facts in the passage. Allow 15–20 minutes for the learners to create their pieces and submit them to the editorial team (the whole class) for review.

## Into Life

To wrap up the newspaper issue, ask each pair or small group to write a letter to the editor in the form of a poem, prayer, or devotional thought, reflecting on what was seen and reported. The content should be from the learners’ own points of view, as people reading the account of the triumphal entry from many years in the future and who know what happened in the following week. Allow 10 minutes for them to create their pieces before discussing these briefly as a class.

*Option.* Compile all the pieces into an official format (examples: in a binder, folder, or pasted on larger pieces of paper), and invite the whole group to reflect on this creative project.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Who Is This?” exercise from the activity page to be completed according to the instructions. Encourage participants to take the exercise home this week, pray over it, and write down their responses. Also ask them to bring it back to share with the whole group next week.

Close the class by playing “All Glory, Laud, and Honor” (available on the internet) or another appropriate song. Give thanks in prayer for Jesus’ saving work on the cross.

# PASSOVER WITH THE KING

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 26:17-30  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 26:17-30

## MATTHEW 26:17-30

17 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

23 And he answered and said, He that dip-peth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

## KEY TEXT

*I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. —Matthew 26:29*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 2: Liberating Gospels

LESSONS 5–8

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. Summarize what Jesus said at the last supper.
2. Explain the historic significance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover.
3. Suggest a way to improve his or her church's observance of the Lord's Supper.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Memory Food
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Readyng the Passover

(Matthew 26:17-19)

- A. Preparations (v. 17)
- B. Instructions (vv. 18-19)

#### II. The Passover Plot (Matthew 26:20-25)

- A. Fellowship (v. 20)
- B. Betrayal (vv. 21-25)

*Dinner Party*

#### III. Passover and the Kingdom

(Matthew 26:26-30)

- A. Bread and Body (v. 26)
- B. Cup and Blood (vv. 27-29)  
*Remember and Do*
- C. Closing Song (v. 30)

#### Conclusion

- A. The Lord's Supper
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Memory Food

What makes a great chef? Training is often required—to acquire excellent knife skills and other techniques, knowledge of flavor profiles and world cuisine, and so on. But one episode of each season of *Top Chef* highlights the passion behind a meal as the real genius of fantastic food. The episode in question is always a variation on creating a meal based on memory: a traditional holiday menu, the favorite dish of a deceased parent, the national food of one's home country. . . . Those who succeed in this challenge allow their memories to build the meal, and the love they feel translates onto the plate. Both chefs and judges might cry, because a meal is an opportunity to show one's self, celebrate one's heritage, and draw others into friendship.

The Passover meal commemorates the struggles that began in Egypt. When eating it together Jesus and His disciples not only remembered what had happened to their people but also anticipated what was to come.

### B. Lesson Context

Our lesson takes us about midway into the week of Passover, after Jesus and many others had arrived in Jerusalem for the feast. (Other accounts of the meal are found in Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20; John 13:1-30; compare 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). God commanded the Jewish people to observe the Passover Feast in memory of their dramatic deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12). Passover became a national spiritual holiday. God had commanded it to be celebrated in Jerusalem on the 14th day of the first month (Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 28:16). This was the month of Nisan (formerly called Abib in the Hebrew religious calendar), which is late March and early April.

During Jesus' time, groups of pilgrims slew their lambs at the Jerusalem temple, where the blood would be sprinkled on the altar. Then they went to celebrate the meal with their families or other companions in groups of at least 10 people. Despite the lamb's centrality to this feast, the bread and fruit of the vine play much larger roles

in the accounts of Jesus' last supper (see Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-38; contrast John 13:1-30). The symbolism of the animal's absence from the story should not be lost on us. As our lesson begins, the sacrifice was already present.

## I. Ready the Passover

(MATTHEW 26:17-19)

### A. Preparations (v. 17)

**17. Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?**

Jewish tradition made Jerusalem the ideal destination for passover celebrations. The number of pilgrims arriving to celebrate *passover* in Jerusalem in Jesus' time likely exceeded 85,000, or several thousand more Jews than lived in Jerusalem. In this severely overcrowded environment, finding a room in which to observe the meal could be difficult.

Because of the long journey, pilgrims had taken to purchasing sacrificial animals in Jerusalem instead of traveling with the beasts. This was not considered problematic until the merchants moved inside the temple, making the prayerful space into a commercial market (see Matthew 21:12-13). *Jesus* did not own a house or livestock (8:20), so His disciples would have purchased a lamb.

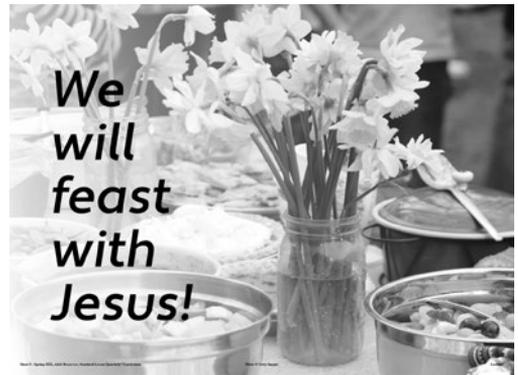
*The feast of unleavened bread* lasted a full week immediately following the night of the Passover meal (Deuteronomy 16:1-8). Baking bread with yeast was a slow process. A piece of dough was set aside and allowed to rise; before the next meal, the leavened dough was worked into a new batch of dough so that it too would rise. The speed of unleavened bread's preparation reminded Jews of the haste of the flight from Egypt (Exodus 12:39).

#### What Do You Think?

How do you prepare yourself to eat the Lord's Supper?

#### Digging Deeper

How does your preparation honor Jesus?



Visual for Lesson 6. *Before closing with prayer, encourage the class to reflect on this promise throughout the week.*

### B. Instructions (vv. 18-19)

**18-19. And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.**

*The city* refers to Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples approached from the neighboring village of Bethany (see lesson 5 commentary on Matthew 21:1a). It seems that Jesus had made arrangements with *such a man* before the festival was upon them. Mark and Luke specify that the disciples were meant to find a man carrying "a pitcher of water" (Mark 14:13; Luke 22:10). Fetching water was typically woman's work, so his carrying the pitcher would make the man easy to spot.

Jesus was called *Master* throughout the Gospel of Matthew (8:19; 12:38; 22:16; etc.). In the mouths of those who respected Him, the term acknowledged Jesus' wise teaching. Others called Him this with sneering contempt. In either case, the term was appropriate of Jesus, but any speaker using it didn't necessarily have a full understanding of Jesus or His ministry and mission.

A form of the word here translated *time* echoes Judas's search for an "opportunity [appropriate time] to betray [Jesus]" (Matthew 26:16). The Greek word is not uncommon. Still, the linguistic echo hints that God would use Judas's betrayal to bring about His purposes in Christ.

Mark 14:13 tells us that Jesus sent two *disciples*. Luke 22:8 reveals that they were Peter and John.

#### What Do You Think?

How does your congregation honor believers who serve behind the scenes?

#### Digging Deeper

What does this recognition (or lack thereof) communicate about the importance of many different ways to serve?

## II. The Passover Plot

(MATTHEW 26:20-25)

### A. Fellowship (v. 20)

#### 20. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

Judas already had agreed to the contract on Jesus' life (Matthew 26:14-16), but none of the other disciples knew that. Therefore, *when the even was come* for them to share the Passover, it was easy for Judas to join as one of *the twelve* with his plan undetected.

In Jesus' time, the seating for special meals like this involved reclining on low couches. Participants leaned on the left elbow with their heads toward the table and their feet away from it, and they would eat with their right hands.

### B. Betrayal (vv. 21-25)

#### 21. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

Prophets introduced what they heard from the Lord with "thus saith the Lord" and close variations (examples: Joshua 7:13; Isaiah 28:16; Zechariah 8:2), while apostles often grounded similar statements with "it is written" (examples: Acts 1:20; 13:33; 15:13-18). Jesus did not appeal to any authority but His own whenever He said *verily I say unto you* (examples: Matthew 5:18, 26; 6:2, 5, 16). In this subtle difference, Jesus asserted His place as God's Messiah, not just a prophet or teacher.

After Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God, the Lord had begun to reveal that He would be rejected by the Jewish leaders, suffer, and be killed (Matthew 16:21; Luke 9:22). This is the first

time, however, that they had heard Him say *one of you shall betray me*.

#### 22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

Jesus' comments hit the group with maximum force. They were extremely distressed, *exceeding sorrowful*. They never dreamed that the cancer of betrayal could infiltrate their group. Judas conducted his charade so flawlessly that no one suspected him.

Out of emotional anguish and with personal urgency, each asked, *Lord, is it I?* Judas had already arranged to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16), but none of the other disciples suspected him. Each man trusted the others, so the only place to look was inward. Each one wondered if some fatal character flaw would be exposed to his own shame and disgrace. Still, each one worded the question with the expectation that Jesus would answer in the negative.

#### 23. And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

As with many cultures still today, the custom was for food to be shared by everyone out of large serving dishes rather than individual place settings. *He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish* could refer to anyone in the room, for all of them were sharing in that activity during the evening meal. In Matthew's telling, Jesus did not narrow down the list of suspects (contrast John 13:26-28). This emphasized a sentiment expressed by the psalmist's lament, "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9). By saying *the same shall betray me*, Jesus reemphasized that the betrayal would indeed come from within their group.

#### 24. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

The phrase *Son of man* evokes Jesus' connection with fragile humans as well as with Daniel's prophesied messianic figure. This one received authority and glory from God, and all nations

worship Him forever (Daniel 7:13-14). In using the title of himself, Jesus chose a phrase that was known but did not have the expectations of *king* or *messiah*. Thus the phrase was more enigmatic, not something that people immediately associated with earthly rule or authority.

Jesus acknowledged His willing intent to fulfill God's plan *as it is written of him* in the Old Testament (example: Isaiah 53). He never dodged the work of giving His life to pay sin's price for our eternal salvation.

But Jesus sternly warned that His betrayer would not be allowed to dodge the consequences of his rebellion either. (See also Acts 1:15-20.) In the terrible judgment he would face, Judas could not argue, "I wasn't warned!" Jesus lamented Judas's choice and the loss of His beloved friend.

*What Do You Think?*

What scriptural warnings do you find difficult to remember or obey?

*Digging Deeper*

In what situations would remembering these warnings change your actions?

**25. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.**

*Judas* addressed Jesus with the same form of question as the other disciples, except that he used the title *Master* rather than Lord (see Matthew 26:22, above). While this was an honorary title for exceptional teachers of the law (23:7-8), when applied to Jesus it missed the heart of His identity. Judas is the only disciple in the Gospel of Matthew to refer to Jesus this way (see also 26:49). Judas may have believed that Jesus was a wise teacher, but there is no record that he confessed Jesus as Lord.

Judas maintained his charade of loyalty to the very end. Knowing full well that he was the one, he still asked, *is it I?* In true prophetic fashion, Jesus threw off the cover to reveal Judas's wicked betrayal. If Judas thought he had successfully hidden his evil work, he found out what he should have known all along: nothing can be hidden from the Lord.

But the Lord's reply fell on deaf ears. Although

Jesus made it clear to Judas that He knew about the nefarious plan, Judas would betray Him anyway. The chief priests and elders had previously planned to wait until after the weeklong feast in order to avoid any riots (Matthew 26:5). Perhaps Judas, feeling exposed, accelerated his plans to betray Jesus that very night (26:45-47).

*What Do You Think?*

Who knows you well enough to point out your spiritual blindspots that can become sinful action?

*Digging Deeper*

What heart changes are required for you to better heed your wise friend's warnings?

✧ *DINNER PARTY* ✧

What ingredients are required for a dinner party? Although many items could be included—background music, table linens and silverware, lighting, flower arrangements, and so on—only two things are really necessary: food and people. And a *successful* dinner party combines good food and great company.

Imagine your ideal dinner party. Who is around your table? What food do you prepare to share with them? Your group might mirror mine, with best friends who have stuck by your side in the hills and the valleys. We might both include family, spiritual mentors, friends of friends, out-of-town visitors, and so on.

Christ's final dinner party included those who walked with Him and learned from Him. The success of the party was in question, though, once Jesus revealed that He would be betrayed. And yet we celebrate this meal and remember Him. How might Judas's presence at Jesus' last supper cause you to reevaluate who a dinner party should include? —L. P.

### III. Passover and the Kingdom

(MATTHEW 26:26-30)

#### A. Bread and Body (v. 26)

**26a. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it.**

Traditionally in the Passover meal, God was *blessed* as the one who delivered Israel from Egypt and provided their bread. The original Greek is less clear about whether *Jesus* blessed *the bread* or the Father here. (A similar issue comes up in Matthew 14:19). Giving thanks for the meal comes closer to later Christian practice of blessing the bread and the fruit of the vine in their own Lord's Supper remembrances (example: 1 Corinthians 10:16).

**26b. And gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.**

The Passover meal was infused with symbolic significance. Eating the bread called for the explicit reminder of God's deliverance. This encouraged feelings of continuity with ancestors—with Jewish participants' knowing that they were part of that same people God had saved.

Jesus didn't do away with that ancient symbolism. He magnified and expanded it, bringing God's salvation to fulfillment. The broken bread took on new significance as the *body* of Christ, a new symbol of God's miraculous salvation to be remembered and shared by the community of believers. Though *the disciples* apparently obeyed Jesus, this symbolism would lead to horrifying rumors in the Roman world that Christians were cannibals.

## B. Cup and Blood (vv. 27-29)

**27a. And he took the cup, and gave thanks.**

It's unclear which *cup* of four drunk at Passover Jesus referred to here. The regulations regarding these cups are found in the Mishnah, an ancient rabbinic text that was finalized around AD 200. Each cup is associated with promises God made in Exodus 6:6-7: "I will bring you out . . . I will rid you out of [Egyptian] bondage . . . I will redeem you . . . I will take you to me for a people."

The third cup (associated with "I will redeem you") was typically a benediction. Jesus likely offered His own *thanks* in place of a more traditional blessing with the third. The "cup of blessing" named in 1 Corinthians 10:16 further suggests that the third cup is in view.

**27b-28. And gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.**

The blood of the Passover lamb had protected the Israelites from God's final plague (Exodus 12:13), and blood was later sprinkled on the people as they entered a new relationship with God (24:5-8). However, nowhere was it suggested that the people should drink the blood; quite the contrary, this practice was explicitly forbidden for *any* animal (Leviticus 17:10-14). The command to *drink ye all of it* intensified the jarring symbolism of eating Jesus' body (compare Matthew 20:22-28).

While symbolism of being covered in the blood of the Lamb persists, ingesting the *blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins* speaks to an inner change, not only an outer show (compare Isaiah 53:11-12; Romans 5:15). (The Greek word translated "testament" is also translated "covenant" elsewhere [Luke 1:72; Galatians 4:24; etc.].) This may remind the reader of God's promise to "take the stony heart out of their flesh, and . . . give them an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19; compare 36:26)—a promise of spiritual renewal, which is fulfilled through faith in Christ. The covenant in Exodus required obedience to God and strict loyalty to Him alone (Exodus 20:1-6), which the Israelites proved unable to do. The prophesied new covenant would be different from the one their ancestors entered into at Sinai (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). This new covenant was enacted by the shedding of Jesus' blood.

**29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.**

The fourth Passover cup traditionally looked forward to the coming kingdom, which differed greatly from earthly kingdoms (consider descriptions from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 regarding His Father's kingdom ethics). Jesus either abstained from the final cup or declared that this was His last time drinking it . . . for now. In doing so He declared by word and deed that the *Father's kingdom* was coming, and Jesus would celebrate in that kingdom with the disciples. This was in keeping with various depictions of God's kingdom being or centering around a feast (examples: Isaiah 24:23; 25:6-8; Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 13:29; Revelation 19:7-9).

### What Do You Think?

What memories of Christ do you focus on when eating the Lord's Supper?

### Digging Deeper

What promises come to mind as you anticipate drinking the cup with Jesus?

## ✿ REMEMBER AND DO ✿

As a young child I knew I could count on Grandpa Ray. He taught me what love is by demonstrating the importance of building and keeping trust, acting humbly, and caring deeply for others.

One day we were downtown together. Grandpa Ray saw a man curled up across the street. This man seemed very distressed. I remember vividly my grandpa going out of his way to get this man some food and pray with him. Grandpa stated afterward, "The best way to remember Christ's love for us is to be Christ's love for others." To this day, Grandpa Ray's words call me to demonstrate that I remember Jesus' love for me through my service to others in obedience to Him.

When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we remember Jesus' sacrifice for us. But we also look forward to sharing the cup with Jesus. Our lives must reflect this expectation. How does your daily life demonstrate your memory of Jesus' work and your hope in His promises? —L. P.

## C. Closing Song (v. 30)

**30. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.**

The Passover meal ended with singing, traditionally from the Hallel, Psalms 113–118. These songs extol the Lord as the one true God of all the nations, among other praises.

*The mount of Olives* lay to the east of Jerusalem. Its elevation gave an excellent view of the city, including the temple. It was here, specifically at Gethsemane, that Jesus would be betrayed and His disciples scattered (Matthew 26:36, 47-56, not in our printed text); He then faced the trials that sent Him to His death on the cross (26:57-68; 27:11-26).

## Conclusion

### A. The Lord's Supper

Jesus knew that His whole life pointed to a final Passover that would be an act of ultimate obedience. He would be preparing himself to fulfill His mission as the perfect Passover Lamb (see John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 5:12; 13:8). His life was given in sacrifice for the sins of humanity, washing us clean in His blood so that our sins are forgiven, never to be brought against us. One last Passover with His closest friends would mark the beginning of a new Lord's Supper that galvanizes Christian worship to this day.

Themes of remembrance and thanksgiving have united Christians worldwide for nearly 2,000 years in a practice that honors our crucified Lord. All Christians are given opportunity to remember God's miraculous salvation—with a new ceremonial meal shared by a new family. We participate together, knowing that we are part of a body in a new covenant with God, forgiven of sins through the body and blood of Jesus. What the prophets dreamed of is the life that we today have been given in Christ.

At the same time, we long for the ultimate coming of the Father's kingdom when we will sit at the table with Jesus himself. We live in anticipation of this joy. Every bite of bread or sip of the fruit of the vine connects us to the past, present, and future of God's story.

### B. Prayer

Father, thank You for sending Jesus as our perfect sacrificial Lamb and for inviting us to Your table. Let the anticipation of sharing the feast with Jesus guide us daily. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

The Lord's Supper reminds us that we are part of God's past, present, and future story.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Abib	<i>A-bib.</i>
Hallel (Hebrew)	<i>Ha-layl.</i>
Nisan	<i>Nye-san.</i>

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Bring a favorite snack that has special significance to you to share with the class. As the learners eat, tell the memory attached to that food. Ask volunteers to share what tastes trigger memories for them. *Option.* In the week before class, ask for volunteers to supplement your snack with their own and to be prepared to share their own memories.

*Alternative.* Ask for volunteers to share a memory of a special meal they ate, including the occasion, who was present, and what was eaten. After allowing time for responses, ask what tastes (whether entire dishes, combinations of spices, etc.) can bring this memory to mind without other prompting.

Say, “Our sense of taste is a powerful link to our memories and emotions. In today’s passage, we will see how Jesus takes a traditional meal and gives new significance to it.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 26:17-19 aloud. Divide the whole group into pairs (or small groups). Have the pairs look up the following passages for more context regarding Old Testament regulations and accounts of Passovers: Exodus 12:1-27; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; 2 Chronicles 30; 35:1-19; Ezra 6:19-22. Ask each pair to jot down notes about preparation, celebration, historical context, and anything else they find interesting. After about 10 minutes, ask the pairs to share their responses with the whole class. Supplement with information from the lesson 6 Lesson Context and any pertinent commentary.

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 26:20-25. Have the pairs jot down any connections they hear in this second reading. Tell the pairs they are going to role-play the reactions of Judas and the apostles to Jesus’ declaration; both parties will take a turn as the apostles and as Judas. The pairs

should consider how the emotional reaction differs between the apostles and Judas.

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 26:26-30. Have the pairs once again role-play, this time focusing on how the apostles and Judas would experience the meal, having *already* been told that one of them would betray Jesus. Following this exercise, bring the class together to discuss what they’ve found.

*Alternative.* Distribute to pairs “The Passover Lamb” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have them complete as directed before allowing groups to share their responses.

## Into Life

Allow one minute for personal, private reflection on any sins Jesus would want learners to repent of in order to experience the joy of the Lord’s Supper more fully.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. As the class listens, have them jot down ideas that are important for Christians to keep in mind when eating the Lord’s Supper. Ask specifically for ideas to help both individuals and the congregation be better prepared to eat the meal together. Then discuss these observations.

Next, allow one minute for personal reflection on aspects of joy and gratitude to consider whenever they’re preparing to take the Lord’s Supper. Ask volunteers to share, but do not put anyone on the spot. Discuss the effect of remembering the future feast in which we will see Jesus face-to-face.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Remember!” exercise from the activity page. Encourage learners to complete the activity at home, as directed, and be prepared to share with the class at the start of next week’s time.

Close the class with a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus’ sacrifice and for the meal that we still eat in His memory.

# RESURRECTION OF THE KING

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 28:1-10  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 27; 28:1-10

## MATTHEW 28:1-10

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples,

behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.



## KEY TEXT

*Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. —Matthew 28:10*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 2: Liberating Gospels

LESSONS 5–8

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. List facts of Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance in Matthew's account.
2. Compare and contrast that account with those of the other Gospels.
3. Sing with fellow classmates "Because He Lives" as an act of communal worship.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. When Everything Changed
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. The Empty Tomb (Matthew 28:1-7)

- A. The Women Arrive (v. 1)
- B. The Angel Appears (vv. 2-4)

*God's Fireworks Show*

- C. The Angel Speaks (vv. 5-7)

#### II. The Risen Lord (Matthew 28:8-10)

- A. The Women Obey (v. 8)

*Fear and Joy*

- B. Jesus Speaks (vv. 9-10)

#### Conclusion

- A. He Is Risen!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. When Everything Changed

"Rome wasn't built in a day" expresses the foolishness of expecting change to happen immediately and completely. But people frequently characterize events like the dropping of the atomic bomb, the Apollo 11 moon landing, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and 9/11 as having changed everything. And to some extent, they are right. Events that have worldwide repercussions, test the limits of human ingenuity and technological prowess, and/or expose great hatred or capacity for unity—these often do mark the *beginning* of a shift in how we think of ourselves and our world.

Today is Resurrection Sunday, when Christians around the world focus attention on a Sunday two millennia ago. On that day *everything* actually did change, and the world has never been the same.

### B. Lesson Context

Jesus' followers had hoped He was the one who would redeem Israel (Luke 24:19-21), but He had been brutally executed at the hands of the Jewish leaders and Roman officials (Matthew 26:47–27:50). Ominous events had accompanied His death. A deep darkness covered the land (27:45). The curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom, and an earthquake had split rocks and opened graves in the area (27:51-53). The manner in which Jesus died led a Roman centurion and other guards to acclaim Jesus as the Son of God (27:54).

Matthew 28:1-10 is the first of four resurrection narratives in the Gospels (see Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). These all paint the same picture in broad strokes: Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead. The overarching truth of these three events guides each writer, even when they differ on details. And the differences in emphasis and detail among the resurrection narratives should comfort us. They indicate that the accounts are not the product of a conspiracy created by a group focused on getting their stories straight. The resurrection narratives complement one another as they affirm that witnesses saw an empty grave and the risen Savior.

Every Gospel account counters the disinformation and lies of the chief priests and Pharisees that resulted after Jesus' resurrection. Many Jews anticipated that God would inaugurate His kingdom in its fullness at the end of history. At that time, the righteous would be raised bodily to eternal life (Daniel 12:1-2; John 11:23-26). Because the Jewish leaders feared that Jesus' disciples would steal the body from the grave and then claim Jesus was alive, the religious leaders had convinced Pilate to authorize guards to be placed at the tomb (Matthew 27:62-66).

## I. The Empty Tomb

(MATTHEW 28:1-7)

### A. The Women Arrive (v. 1)

**1. In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.**

Sunset marked *the end of the sabbath*. Dawn of *the first day of the week* (Sunday) was the first opportunity to go to the tomb to care for Jesus' body. *The sepulchre* and the stone to close it had been provided by a wealthy disciple named Joseph of Arimathaea (Matthew 27:57-60). Nicodemus had aided Joseph in placing Jesus in the tomb on Friday, though without any ceremony—the Sabbath and its rest fast approached with sunset Friday (John 19:38-42). The women arrived on Sunday, not out of a sense of morbid curiosity or even simple mourning, but with spices to continue preparation of Jesus' body for burial (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1).

*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary* have key roles in Matthew's passion narrative. In contrast to the apostles, the women were present at Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27:50-56) and saw where He was buried (27:57-61). Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus from the early days of His ministry. Jesus had delivered her from a terrifying case of demon possession (Luke 8:2). We remind ourselves that Magdalene is not a surname in the modern sense. Rather, it designates this particular Mary as being "from Magdala."

The "other" Mary was the mother of James

and Joses (Matthew 27:56) and possibly the wife of Cleophas (John 19:25). Though the other Gospels name additional women (see Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10), Matthew may have focused on these two because of their prominence among those of Jewish background who first read his Gospel.

### B. The Angel Appears (vv. 2-4)

**2a. And, behold, there was a great earthquake.**

*Behold* is used to call close attention to what follows. An *earthquake* had also occurred at Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51). God's presence or work was sometimes accompanied by grand disruptions of nature (examples: Exodus 19:16-19; Acts 16:26). Those who did not know that God was present would be terrified in the face of nature's fury without realizing that the far more terrifying Lord of the universe was present.

#### What Do You Think?

Do displays of natural destruction cause you to fear God? Why or why not?

#### Digging Deeper

What place do calmer natural scenes have in causing you to revere the Lord?

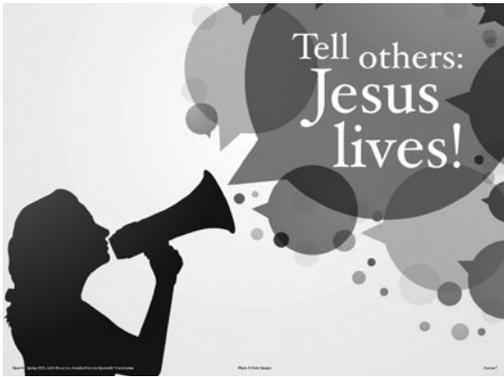
**2b. For the angel of the Lord descended from heaven.**

Angels *of the Lord* had played a pivotal role in Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus, communicating and making clear God's words and intentions (Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19-20). Even without speaking, the angel's presence here suggests the tomb was emptied by divine agency *from heaven*, not by physical, human activity.

**2c. And came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.**

Stones used to close tombs were usually disk-shaped and extremely heavy. For added difficulty in accessing the tomb, those guarding it had placed a seal on the stone (Matthew 27:65-66). That the angel *rolled* it *back* singlehandedly points to his power.

Interestingly, Jesus had already risen and left the grave before any of the Gospels indicate that



Visual for Lessons 7. While discussing verse 1, ask learners how they follow the women's example and what effect their own seeking has on others.

the stone was moved. The resurrected Lord could enter or exit a locked room without opening the door (example: John 20:19-20, 26-27). He did not need the stone to be removed in order to exit the tomb.

**3-4. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.**

The angel's *countenance* was similar to Jesus' own during the transfiguration (compare Matthew 17:2). The angel's physical appearance clearly marked him as a supernatural being and caused *the keepers great fear* (compare 17:5-6). The Greek verb translated *did shake* is related to the noun translated "earthquake" (see Matthew 28:2a, above). The echo of this word makes the stated quaking seem more violent than if it stood alone. This was not a shiver; it was a human quake. Revelation 1:17 describes a similar reaction by John to a vision of the ascended Jesus.

Notice the irony: Jesus is alive, but the guards who thought they were guarding a dead body were themselves like *dead men!*

### ✠ GOD'S FIREWORKS SHOW ✠

I shot awake around 4 a.m. Even with my eyes closed, I kept seeing flashes of light coming in through the windows. Looking out the sliding screen door, I saw not the prowlers I expected but the black sky itself erupting with light!

I had never seen lightning like this—continuous, with no break in the brightness. There was no rain, no thunder. I gasped when the sky brightened nearly to daylight for a brief moment. It was as if God was putting on a fireworks show.

I wonder if this is how the women felt when they saw the angel at the tomb: dazzled, mesmerized. They sought Jesus, and God sent a stunning sight to greet them. Then as now, those who seek Jesus find Him and find themselves in awe. This week seek Jesus without an agenda. Though there probably won't be an angel or a lightning show, know that God is prepared to amaze you when you seek His Son. —K. D.

### C. The Angel Speaks (vv. 5-7)

**5a. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye.**

Earlier in Matthew, an angel had told Joseph not to fear the events around Jesus' conception and birth (Matthew 1:20). Now, even though the guards—whom we would expect to be pinnacles of courage—were incapacitated, the women were called to *fear not*. This *angel* was potentially a much more frightening presence than the guards. The women's reaction to this exhortation is not immediately revealed (see 28:8, below).

**5b-6a. For I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.**

One would expect a crucified man to both be and remain dead. But in Jesus' case, crucifixion and death were the last barriers to fulfilling the Father's plan. *Jesus* had *said* He would rise from the dead on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:9; etc.), although the disciples clearly had not understood what He meant (examples: 17:22-23; John 20:9).

Jesus knew He was not caught up in some tragic accident of history. His death and resurrection confirmed His identity as Lord, Messiah, and Son of God (Acts 2:22-24, 36; Romans 1:4). Death was handily defeated by the Creator, the Lord of life (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). The immediate effects of Jesus' crucifixion—suffering, abuse, humiliation, and painful death—are past (Philippians 2:6-11). The continuing results of

that crucifixion—the forgiveness of sins—endure (Hebrews 10:19-23).

This is the first explicit notice that *Jesus is risen*. The New Testament contains no accounts of Jesus' resurrection per se. Instead, there are records of disciples finding the tomb empty and encountering the resurrected Jesus (examples: Matthew 28:9, below; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8). These serve as part of the validation that the event occurred, even though no one was present to observe it.

Paul's letters consistently emphasize the Father's role in raising the Son (examples: Romans 6:4; Galatians 1:1; compare Acts 5:30). The Son had trusted the Father and submitted to the Father's will even to the point of death (Matthew 26:42; Luke 23:46). As a result, the Father had exalted the Son.

### **6b. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.**

The emphasis on the empty tomb counters any notion that Jesus' followers were only experiencing Christ's spiritual presence. Jesus' resurrection involved the coming to life again of His physical body—even though that body was changed (see Matthew 28:3-4, above; compare 1 Corinthians 15:35-53). Jesus had been dead for three days, but He was alive again. *The place where the Lord lay* was vacant!

### **7a. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead.**

The Old Testament insisted that testimony be confirmed by two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). But women were not considered reliable witnesses and so were normally not called on to bear witness in Jewish courts. No one in the first-century AD world trying to fabricate this story would have made women the lead witnesses to it. How extraordinary that the Lord chose female disciples to be the first witnesses to the resurrection!

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were not called to testify that Jesus' body was gone, which anyone could see by looking in the tomb as they had. Instead they carried the much more wonderful and astounding message that *Jesus is risen from the dead*. From this point forward, the resurrection of Jesus would be the heart of the church's proclamation (example: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The *disciples* to whom the angel referred may

have been the larger group of Jesus' followers that the remaining 11 apostles were a part of (Acts 1:15). However, it is more likely that it was the eleven to whom the women were to *tell* the message (compare Matthew 28:10 with 28:16).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How does your belief in the resurrection of Christ influence your daily life?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What changes might a greater focus on the hope of resurrection make in your routines?

### **7b. And, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.**

Galilee was the area of primary focus in Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:12-25; 9:35-11:1; Luke 8:1-3). The particular city of ministry focus was Jerusalem. The disciples were reminded to leave the *city* of primary focus and return to the *area* of primary focus.

Jesus had earlier told the disciples that He would go before them *into Galilee* after He had risen (Matthew 26:32). Far from Jesus' death throwing off all their hopes and dreams, the disciples would come to know that His death was always part of Jesus' plans. Far from thwarting His intention to meet with them, His death was a necessary step toward that fateful day. Within a few weeks Jesus would commission those who had deserted Him, just where He had said He'd find them (28:16-20).

Just as the Old Testament phrases "the Lord hath spoken" (Jeremiah 13:15; etc.) or "thus saith the Lord" (Exodus 5:1; etc.) emphasized the need for the hearer to heed what was said, *lo, I have told you* lent additional authority and urgency to the angel's message.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Arimathaea	<i>Air-uh-muh-<b>thee</b>-uh</i> ( <i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i> ).
Cleophas	<i>Klee-o-fus</i> .
Magdalene	<i>Mag-duh-leen</i> or <i>Mag-duh-lee-nee</i> .
Nicodemus	<i>Nick-uh-<b>dee</b>-mus</i> .

## II. The Risen Lord

(MATTHEW 28:8-10)

### A. The Women Obey (v. 8)

**8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.**

In obedience, the women left *quickly* in a mixture of emotion. Their *fear* likely stemmed both from awe of their contact with the angel and the magnitude of what they had heard. But they were also awash with joy that was sweeping away the grief of previous days. This *great joy* propelled them to *run* on their mission to tell *his disciples* about Jesus.

For how surprising it would have been to the first-century church that the women were the first to testify to Jesus' resurrection, Matthew had not hidden the importance of faithful women throughout his Gospel. Jesus' genealogy mentioned four ancestresses (Matthew 1:3, 5-6). Throughout His ministry, Jesus had had significant encounters with women (examples: 15:21-28; 26:6-13; 28:1, above). Though women's voices can be lost in history—especially when most believers were illiterate, and those who were not were usually men—their role in this narrative celebrates the very beginning of faithful women's bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection, which has continued through the centuries.

#### What Do You Think?

What prevents you from running to tell others the news of Jesus' resurrection?

#### Digging Deeper

Is testifying about Christ to other believers a precursor to evangelizing? Why or why not?

### ✿ FEAR AND JOY ✿

My mother plans carefully, always has an exit strategy, and researches excessively. She packs extra sunscreen, extra napkins, extra everything. And she always has an emergency fund for unexpected bills.

One day this risk-averse woman decided to go skydiving. It was totally against her character! But

even though she was scared, she wanted to know what it felt like to be completely out of control, just once. Following her safe, though ungraceful, landing, Mom had the biggest grin on her face! It's one of my most joyous memories of her.

My minister likes to say, "The safest place you can be is living dangerously in the will of God." God doesn't always ask safe things of us—just ask the women who were told to report that Jesus was alive! When we're obeying the Lord, even if we're afraid, He'll be with us. What's one scary thing you can do for the Lord this week? Do it, and rediscover the thrill and joy of obedience. —K. D.

### B. Jesus Speaks (vv. 9-10)

**9a. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail.**

As though the honor of announcing the angel's words was not enough, the women were *met* by *Jesus* himself! Their faithfulness to Him was rewarded in His faithfulness and care for them.

*All hail* is a Greek greeting that can also be translated "rejoice" (example: Matthew 5:12). The astute reader might hear more echoes from Jesus' birth: a form of the Greek greeting here described the reaction of the magi when they saw the star over the place where the Christ child was (2:10). Jesus' greeting also echoes the taunts Jesus suffered as He died (27:29). These women would have heard those taunts. Though the soldiers had not been sincere, giving reverence to Jesus was appropriate from His birth forward, and never more so than on the day of His resurrection.

**9b. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.**

The women's actions on encountering Jesus make two very important points. Taking hold of Jesus' *feet* shows that Jesus was present physically, having experienced a bodily resurrection (see Matthew 28:6b, above). He was not a hallucination, vision, or phantom.

Second, they *worshipped* Jesus, and Jesus accepted that worship. The Old Testament Scriptures make clear that worship belongs to God alone (examples: Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 8:19). Neither angels nor apostles allowed people to worship them (examples: Acts 10:25-26; 14:11-

15; Revelation 22:8-9). The women's actions signaled that they rightly believed Jesus was God in the flesh.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do you express your worship of Christ outside of church services?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What Scriptures inform your worship habits?

**10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.**

Jesus' words reinforced the angel's commands to *be not afraid* and to *go tell* (Matthew 28:5a, 7a, above). The call to fearlessness also parallels earlier commands Jesus gave His disciples when they experienced awesome demonstrations of His identity and power (examples: 14:27; 17:7).

While the angel called the eleven "disciples," Jesus emphasized His special familial love for them by calling them *brethren* instead (compare Matthew 12:46-50; 25:40). His command also makes clear that the men's fleeing during Jesus' trial and crucifixion did not result in His abandoning them. All that He had said would happen really would happen.

It appears Jesus spent at least seven days in Jerusalem (John 20:19, 26) before He moved on to *Galilee* for a time of intense teaching with His disciples (John 21; Acts 1:3-11). Isaiah 9:1-2 calls this region "Galilee of the nations," and Matthew 4:15 calls it "Galilee of the Gentiles." Since "Gentiles" simply means "nations," the reference to Galilee here probably alludes to the large numbers of non-Jews who resided in Galilee. It is highly fitting that the resurrected Jesus would launch His program of salvation from Galilee into all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

#### *What Do You Think?*

What fear do you need to set aside in order to faithfully obey God?

#### *Digging Deeper*

In what ways does Christian fellowship bring you confidence to act without fear?

## Conclusion

### A. He Is Risen!

At the center of Christian faith is the affirmation that Jesus rose from the dead. This is the testimony of women who saw the empty tomb and who encountered the resurrected Jesus. We can trust their words, and we can live in the light of the message they were given.

Believers have a new start and new life in Christ. We need not fear the grave. The resurrection of Jesus has changed everything, and we have been entrusted with that message. Because we are released from the fear of death, we are free to live for God. The faithful life requires much of us, but all that we do begins with the joy and awe of Jesus' resurrection. From there we go out into the world to announce His resurrection and the invitation to join in His kingdom.

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that the kingdom of God has broken into history. Its final consummation will come at the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20-24; Revelation 11:15). Believers may be confident that, when Christ returns, the Father will bring with Christ the dead in Christ who also had submitted and entrusted themselves to the Father (1 Thessalonians 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:12). The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of the believers' resurrection and transformation at Christ's second coming (example: 2 Corinthians 4:14). As believers, we live between the ages. The kingdom has been inaugurated, but we await its consummation (Colossians 1:12-13; Hebrews 12:28; 2 Peter 1:10-11). May our lives reflect God's kingdom presence on earth in anticipation of the day we will experience it fully with Him.

### B. Prayer

We praise You, our Father, because You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. We praise You because You raised Him from the dead and You will raise us to eternal life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Our king is risen! Everything has changed!

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Before the lesson, write “Events That Changed the United States” on the board. Record responses on the board. For any events that occurred within the lifetime of the learners, ask for volunteers to share how they experienced the event and how life seemed changed afterward.

After a few minutes, erase “the United States” and replace it with “My Life.” Allow one minute for individual thought about personal events (unlikely to be shared by the larger class) before asking for volunteers to share. *Option.* Instead of sharing with the whole class, learners can be divided into pairs or small groups to facilitate sharing.

After this activity, say, “There are moments that have greatly impacted all our lives. We share some of these, and others are specific to our own lives. But as believers, we can agree that there is one event that changed everything for everyone, everywhere, for all time: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 27:50-66 and another to read 28:1-10. Give learners a handout (you prepare) with the text from these two passages printed side by side. Have the learners highlight people or events that are similar across the two texts. Examples include an earthquake (v. 51), the presence of guards (vv. 54, 65-66), and feelings of terror (v. 54). After 10 minutes, bring the groups back for class discussion of the parallels they discovered. Consult the lesson 7 commentary for more information.

Break the class in half to explore the theme of fear in Matthew 28:1-10. *Option.* Both of the following groups can be split into smaller groups to facilitate more conversation under these two main ideas. **The Paralyzing Fear Group** will consider the negative effects of fear, starting

with the guards at the tomb. **The Faithful Fear Group** will consider the positive effects of rejecting fear, starting with the women at the tomb. Both groups should provide biblical citations of 1) other times people were told not to fear and 2) what resulted when they obeyed or did not obey. Invite each group to share their list with the whole group.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Declaration and Command” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to be completed in pairs as directed.

## Into Life

Allow learners one minute of silent reflection on their own experiences of fear that have resulted in paralysis or in faithfulness. Ask for volunteers to share.

Have learners pair up to discuss what fears they have about spreading the gospel. How do Jesus’ words encourage them to overcome this fear? After a few minutes of discussion, give learners one minute to write down reminders not to give in to fear but, instead, to call others to meet Jesus. Encourage learners to put these reminders somewhere they can be seen daily.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “He Arose!” exercise from the activity page. Play a recording of the song “Up from the Grave He Arose” (available on the internet) and encourage participants to sing along with the chorus. Ask learners to jot down any words or phrases in the song lyrics that are most meaningful to them. Allow time for volunteers to share how the words are meaningful in their testimony.

Close the class by playing “Because He Lives” or another resurrection song and encouraging the class to sing along. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus for His sacrifice and for all the reasons He has given us to overcome our fears. Ask for his help in faithfully calling others to Him.

# FREEDOM IN THE KING

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 8:31-38  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 8:31-38

## JOHN 8:31-38

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.



## KEY TEXT

*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. —John 8:36*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 2: Liberating Gospels

LESSONS 5–8

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. Identify the two referred to as “Father” and “father.”
2. Explain the nature of the freedom available in the Son.
3. Create a list of ways to continue abiding in Jesus.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Freedom Day
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Jesus Speaks (John 8:31-32)
  - A. Word and Discipleship (v. 31)
  - B. Truth and Freedom (v. 32)
- II. Believers React (John 8:33)
  - A. Declaration (v. 33a)
  - B. Question (v. 33b)
- III. Jesus Responds (John 8:34-38)
  - A. Sin and Servitude (v. 34)  
*Smoke and Mirrors*
  - B. Temporary and Permanent (v. 35)
  - C. Son and Freedom (v. 36)  
*Fixing Stitches*
  - D. What and Why (vv. 37-38)

#### Conclusion

- A. True Freedom
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## I. Introduction

### A. Freedom Day

April 27, 1994. For many South Africans, this date marked a new reality and brought a new expression of freedom. On this date the first post-apartheid national election was held. For the first time in decades, all South Africans of voting age were eligible to vote, regardless of their ethnic heritage or skin color. During the apartheid era, indigenous peoples and people of color lacked the freedom to vote. Further, apartheid placed overt segregationist restrictions on non-white citizens of South Africa. Even in their own country, non-white South Africans were not free to live full and flourishing lives.

By the early 1990s, after 50 years of discriminatory and unjust practices, negotiations between governing parties began the long process of undoing apartheid-era restrictions. One result of the negotiations was free elections. On April 27, 1994, millions of newly enfranchised South Africans voted for a new government and, therefore, a freer vision of life. Freedom Day serves to remind South Africans of the decades-long quest for equality and the desire for all South Africans to experience freedom.

Freedom can be looked at from at least four angles: (1) those who have freedom, and they know it; (2) those who lack freedom, and they know it; (3) those who have freedom, but they don't realize it; and (4) those who lack freedom, but they don't know it. Various forms of the words *freedom*, *liberty*, and their synonyms occur dozens of times in the New Testament, indicating the importance of the topic. We need to know which of the four categories we're in spiritually.

### B. Lesson Context

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called synoptic. This designation implies that these Gospels tell the story of Jesus from similar perspectives. (For an example of these similarities, compare Matthew 24:4-8; Mark 13:5-8; and Luke 21:8-11.)

However, John's Gospel is different. While telling the same basic story of Jesus, John often

includes material not found in the synoptic Gospels (example: Jesus' "Bread of Heaven Discourse" in John 6:25-59). In other instances John omits material found in the synoptic Gospels (example: Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-13; and Luke 9:28-36).

Today's Scripture text is an example of the former. The synoptics Gospels do not mention Jesus' teaching found in John 7-9. That John's Gospel has different emphases than the synoptics does not mean that John cannot be trusted. Just as different observers might have dissimilar yet accurate retellings of the same event, John's depiction provides a different yet complementary perspective on Jesus' person and work.

John's Gospel notes the special relationship he had with Jesus (see John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20). Further John was one of three witnesses to Jesus' transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). John was among the closest of Jesus' disciples—he had a front-row seat to Jesus' person and work. Therefore, John's attestation can be trusted (see John 21:24).

Today's Scripture passage is a part of a longer discourse that took place in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles (see John 7:2, 10, 14). The observance was one of Israel's most important celebrations and dated to the time of Moses (see Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43; Numbers 29:12-34; Deuteronomy 16:13-17; 31:10).

The feast began on the 15th day of the month of Tishri, which is in late September or early October. Its significance was twofold. First, it celebrated the end of the harvest season. Second, it commemorated God's provision during Israel's wilderness wanderings. After the Israelites left Egypt, but before they entered the promised land, the people lived in tents. The celebration was to remind Israel of this history. Ultimately the feast thanked God for His daily provision.

The feast provided a backdrop for Jesus to express His divine identity by using items common in first-century observation: water and lamp light. During the feast, a priest took water from the Pool of Siloam, carried it to the temple, and poured it over the altar. On the feast's final day the priest marched around the altar without pour-

ing water. This act demonstrated hopeful expectation that the Messiah would provide water as had been promised centuries before (see Joel 3:18). On the feast's seventh day, against this backdrop, Jesus stated, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37).

Additionally, on each night of the feast, except on the Sabbath, giant oil lamps were lit in the temple's Court of Women. It was against this backdrop that Jesus proclaimed himself to be "the light of the world" and that whoever followed Him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Jesus proclaimed himself to be the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope, speaking the words of His heavenly Father (see 8:28).

## I. Jesus Speaks

(JOHN 8:31-32)

### A. Word and Discipleship (v. 31)

**31. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.**

The focus of Jesus' teaching was on *those Jews* who had "believed on him" (John 7:31). Their belief was due, in part, to His pointed teaching (7:14, 46) and miraculous healing acts (7:21). However Jesus questioned whether they had true belief of "he that sent me . . . whom ye know not" (7:28). Did their belief go no deeper than simple amazement at His miraculous healing acts?

In the verse before us, *Jesus* established the way to distinguish proper belief from improper belief: only those who continued in His *word* were to be counted among His *disciples indeed*. Merely to be amazed at and respectful of His miraculous acts and brilliant teaching was not enough. The test of true and lasting belief was to be found in

## HOW TO SAY IT

Abrahamic	Ay-bruh-ham-ik.
Mishna	Mish-nuh.
Siloam	Sigh-lo-um.
synoptic	sih-naup-tihk.
Tishri	Tish-ree.

persistently following Jesus' words, teachings, and commandments (see John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:4). Fickle faith in contrast to valid faith is a running theme in this Gospel (compare and contrast John 2:23-25; 4:48; 5:24; 6:60; 10:38; also 2 John 9; Revelation 2:26).

The Old Testament described Moses as Israel's teacher (see Deuteronomy 4:1-2). Therefore, Jesus' opponents claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28-29). Their claim was appropriate—God spoke through Moses, so to be Moses' disciple was to be God's disciple. But now God had revealed himself more fully through Jesus, so to listen to the teachings of Jesus was to listen to God (see 7:16; 12:49-50).

God said that He would hold Israel accountable for ignoring the teachings of His prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 18:19). To reject or ignore Jesus' words was the same as rejecting God's words. As a result God would hold people accountable, just as He did with ancient Israel. If God punished Israel for not listening to Moses, how much more will He judge those who don't listen to the teachings of Jesus?

To *continue* implied the intimate knowledge disciples were to have of Jesus' teaching: they were to dwell on and in it. The Greek word behind this translation is used in the writings of John more than all other New Testament writers combined. It indicates closeness and association with Jesus and God and the fellowship of true disciples (see John 15:1-20; 1 John 3:9). They believed based on Jesus' teaching and, in response, followed Him. Such disciples would know His Father (see 2 John 9).

**What Do You Think?**  
How do John 15:11-17 and 1 John 2:3-10 provide a framework for the ways Christians can grow as disciples of Jesus?

**Digging Deeper**  
What prevents Christians from following Jesus' teaching and growing as His disciples?

## B. Truth and Freedom (v. 32)

**32. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**

A discussion on the nature of freedom might lead to different interpretations. For some, an expression of freedom implies unrestrained pursuit of personal desires. For others an expression of freedom may mean nothing more than the ability to refuse to submit to anyone—an attitude of defiance. However, these interpretations do not address the freedom that Jesus implied. The freedom to which Jesus alluded was an eternal freedom, not human expectations of earthly freedom.

As disciples continued to follow Jesus' teaching (see commentary on John 8:31, above), their knowledge of God's *truth* would expand. Old Testament Scriptures describe truth in terms of God's faithfulness and salvation (see Exodus 34:6; 2 Samuel 2:6; Psalms 25:5; 119:142, 151, 160; Isaiah 61:8). John's Gospel continued with this idea and applied truth to the person and work of Jesus, "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6; see 1:17; 18:37). As disciples remained in Jesus' teaching, they would know His truth: a life made *free* through salvation found in Christ Jesus.

### What Do You Think?

How will you evaluate your habits to make sure you're living in accordance with God's truth?

### Digging Deeper

How will you respond to those who see Christianity as merely following "a bunch of rules?"

## II. Believers React

(JOHN 8:33)

### A. Declaration (v. 33a)

**33a. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man.**

Jesus had reminded hearers that He was "not of this world" but was instead "from above" (John 8:23). When He tried teaching on heavenly things, His hearers often misunderstood His point. For example, Jesus taught that a person must be "born again" (3:3), but Nicodemus assumed natural birth (3:4). Jesus had offered "living water" to a Samaritan woman (4:10), but she assumed natural water (4:11). These misunderstandings occurred because people did not recognize that Jesus spoke concerning spiritual realities.

The Jews who *answered* Jesus here fell prey to similar misunderstandings; they assumed Jesus was teaching about physical freedom.

Their response to Jesus acknowledged a particular nationalistic identity but showed disregard for a key part of that identity. Their place as *seed* and descendants of Abraham was a central aspect of Israel's covenant with God (see Genesis 13:15; 17:8). Their identity as a people centered on the promises made by God to Abraham. Therefore, to align with Abraham was an ethnic identification that related Israel to God by means of covenant (see Luke 13:16; 19:9).

However, the declaration that *we . . . were never in bondage* failed to acknowledge previous commands made to Israel. Moses commanded Israel to “remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 5:15; see 15:15; 16:12; 24:18). It was not as if Jesus' audience suddenly suffered amnesia. It is unclear whether they were willfully disregarding their collective history as a people who once lived in bondage, or if they were expressing their own personal status of having never been in bondage themselves. In either case, their declaration showed a failure to follow what Moses had commanded of Israel. But perhaps more significantly, their declaration was a failure to remember their dependence on God.

This narrative includes all 11 references to Abraham in John's Gospel. These references are often an appeal to Abraham as a means to reject the teachings of Jesus (see John 8:39, 52-57). The claim to be of *Abraham's* lineage was undoubtedly true but lacked perspective regarding what was relatively more important (see Luke 3:8-9). An appeal to physical ancestry revealed a failure to grasp the nature of the kingdom of God about which Jesus taught.

#### What Do You Think?

What reasons might nonbelievers give to avoid following Jesus' teaching?

#### Digging Deeper

What excuses do Christians use to avoid following Jesus' teaching? How might Matthew 16:24 address these excuses?

## B. Question (v. 33b)

### 33b. How sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

The Jews questioned Jesus, placing the burden of proof on Him. Their question implied that they believed they were currently free, which disregarded their current status in the Roman Empire. They also failed to realize that Jesus was concerned with a different kind of freedom.

## III. Jesus Responds

(JOHN 8:34-38)

### A. Sin and Servitude (v. 34)

**34. Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.**

Jesus' response instantly upended the Jewish audience's faulty understandings of bondage and freedom. While they were concerned with an earthly sense of bondage, Jesus spoke of a more important form. Jesus applied the bondage metaphor to *whosoever committeth sin*. Such a person was a *servant* to sin. The ironic aspect was that it was one's own sinful desires that bound a person.

Other New Testament texts continue the bondage theme when discussing the influence of sin. The apostle Paul wrote that the bondage of sin leads to death (Romans 6:6, 16-17). Therefore, to find freedom, people should seek to become “servants of righteousness” (6:18). The apostle Peter warned against false promises of freedom that led people to become “servants of corruption” (2 Peter 2:19).

### ☞ SMOKE AND MIRRORS ☞

The boredom had become too much for sixteen-year-old me to handle. I had to do something to pass the time. “Why not? What's the big deal?” I said to myself as I lit my first cigarette. A practice that I intended to pass the time with grew into something larger. As I got older, smoking had a bigger hold on me. I planned my days around each cigarette and each smoke break. When asked, I was quick to dismiss my habit. Everybody smoked, and I thought I could quit at any time.

In reality, I was addicted to cigarettes. Their influence took over my life and affected my



Visual for Lesson 8. *Have this visual on display as you pose the discussion question that is associated with John 8:36.*

health, my job, and my relationships. Often I would rather be late to work than forgo my cigarettes. I was bound captive to a smoking habit I couldn't drop.

People can be bound captive by unchecked sin. Enticing sin seems innocent. It seduces people into believing it's not a big deal—when in fact it brings death. Sin might seem innocent and justified. But the longer you continue in it, the more likely it will send your freedom up in smoke. Don't deceive yourself! Who will you confess your sins to today (see 1 John 1:8-10)? —P. L. M.

### B. Temporary and Permanent (v. 35)

#### 35. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

Jesus continued His response to His Jewish audience through the use of a household metaphor. In a wealthy person's household, a *servant* would work for the master. However, even as a part of *the house*, a servant's presence was uncertain, as he or she could be sold or set free at any time.

By contrast, the master's firstborn son and heir received all the safety, security, and economic advantage of the household. No matter the situation, the son was considered a permanent member of the household and received the blessing of the inheritance to future generations (see Genesis 21:10; Ezekiel 46:16). Jesus pointed His hearers to find permanent freedom from sin through the *Son* of God and the promise of His inheritance.

### C. Son and Freedom (v. 36)

#### 36. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

A primary descriptor of Jesus in John's Gospel is *Son* of God. The title highlights the unique relationship Jesus has with His Father, who sent Him (John 3:16, 18; 5:19). The title stressed the Son's deity even while He was on earth (5:20-25). As the Son of God, Jesus is the source of eternal life (5:26). The Son and the Father are one (14:10-11), and they give glory to each other (17:1).

Jesus taught that only He can *make* people *free* from sin. His audience misunderstood the implications of His teaching concerning the Son and His Father (see John 8:19, 27). With the proclamation in the verse before us, Jesus identified himself with the "truth" (see commentary on 8:32, above) who would bring freedom from condemnation and death (3:18; 5:24).

#### What Do You Think?

How does the Son's freedom differ from worldly ideas of freedom?

#### Digging Deeper

How do Romans 6:22; Galatians 5:1-13; James 1:25-27; and 1 Peter 2:16-17 affect your answer in this regard?

#### ✂️ FIXING STITCHES ✂️

Spending hours crocheting with my mom is one of the fondest (and most frustrating!) memories of my childhood. She sat with me and taught me each stitch. Anytime I missed a stitch, I would unravel the yarn and fix the missed spot. Sometimes I would make another mistake in the process of fixing the original mistake! I spent so much time fixing mistakes that I often didn't fully enjoy the final product!

Constantly fixing mistakes is how I once perceived my life with God: if I didn't make mistakes with my life, then I would be right with God. But it felt like mistakes were unavoidable, one occurring right after another.

Jesus' audience thought their law, their history, and their actions made them free and right with God. However, they were in bondage. The truth that provides freedom is found in Jesus. There are

no mistakes that are too much for Jesus. Are you trying to fix the “missed stitches” of your life? Or, instead, have you accepted the freedom that Jesus brings? How will you use your freedom in Christ for the good of others (see Galatians 5:13)?

—P. L. M.

#### **D. What and Why (vv. 37-38)**

##### **37a. I know that ye are Abraham’s seed.**

Jesus confirmed His audience’s earlier assertion that they were *Abraham’s seed* (see commentary on John 8:33, above). However, a valid claim to Abrahamic lineage was not enough. Jesus would remind His audience that “if ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (8:39). True children of Abraham followed in the faith of Abraham (see Romans 4:3, 12). As a result, the people of God expand beyond the scope of an ethnic identification with Abraham (see 9:6-8).

##### **37b. But ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.**

Not only did Jesus’ audience refuse to listen to His teaching; they conspired against Him. This is not the first time Jesus acknowledged this desire in His audience. Previously, He asked the Jews at the temple courts: “Why go ye about *to kill me?*” (John 7:19). In that instance the crowds refused to answer Jesus directly, preferring instead to question the validity of His question, stating that He was possessed (7:20). As a result of their indirect answer, Jesus assumed that they were indeed seeking to kill Him. True disciples would dwell on the *word* of Jesus, which bore witness to the Father who sent the Son (5:36-40).

##### **38. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.**

Jesus pronounced a contrast. On the one hand, Jesus’ word gave witness to His heavenly *Father* who sent Him. On the other hand, Jesus observed that His audience was more concerned with what they *have seen* and heard from their *father*, the devil (see John 8:44).

Jesus’ audience thought that their freedom was inevitable because of their ancestry. However, Jesus stated that they were deceived. As long as

they refused to listen and adhere to the teaching of Jesus, they would not experience true freedom. They would not know their heavenly Father. By failing to heed Jesus, the audience failed to listen to God.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How might the actions and concerns of Christians change as they follow God the Father?

#### *Digging Deeper*

Do Luke 10:27-28 and John 14:15 give insight to the actions necessary to follow God?

## **VII. Conclusion**

### **A. True Freedom**

Modern discussions regarding the concept of freedom revolve around ideas of personal volition, responsibility, and the ability of people to express themselves without interference. But Jesus was less concerned with freedom in that regard. Instead, Jesus was concerned about freedom and liberation from the insidious grip of sin. Jesus’ audience did not realize that they were experiencing this kind of bondage. While they thought their ethnic heritage provided freedom, they were actually experiencing bondage. Their so-called freedom was an illusion based on a lie.

Jesus spoke truth because He spoke the words of His Father—a declaration of true freedom. Freedom that comes from the Father leads to eternal life with the Son. Those who crave this freedom will seek Jesus and His Word and become His disciples. As such, His disciples will know the truth, and the truth will set them free. A new day of freedom has been established.

### **B. Prayer**

Heavenly Father, give us ears to hear Your truth and hearts that love Your truth. May our attitudes, words, and actions reflect Your truth so we can bear witness to Your Son. May the world be illuminated by Your truth shining in and through us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember.**

Freedom is found in the truth of Jesus.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Bring a ball of string to class. Before class, write on strips of paper 10 simple tasks that can be done in the classroom. (These tasks might include gathering certain items, cleaning parts of the room, or moving small furniture.) Place the strips of paper in a bowl. Ask for four volunteers from the class. Place the volunteers in two teams of two people. Using the string, tie together team members' legs and arms, as for a three-legged race. Each team will have three "legs" and three "arms."

At your signal, have each team draw a task from the bowl and complete the task. Once a team completes a task, they are to draw another task from the bowl and complete it. The first team to complete five tasks is declared the winner.

After a winner is declared, use scissors to cut everyone free. Ask teams, "How did being tied up limit what your team was able to do?" Invite team members to share their feelings about being entangled and restricted. Of the rest of the class, ask: 1—What made teams successful in completing the tasks? 2—What made teams unsuccessful in completing the tasks? 3—What real-life scenarios might this situation parallel?

After this activity, say, "We have all experienced the bondage of sin—and no matter what we do, we cannot free ourselves from it. Sin's bondage makes it hard for us to follow God's direction for our lives. Today's lesson will direct our focus to the only one who can truly make us free."

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 8:31-32. Divide the whole class into four equal groups: "Word" Group / "Disciples" Group / "Truth" Group / "Free" Group. Give each group a paper and pen. Ask each group to study these verses, focusing on the significance of their word in these verses. Then each group is to write a dictionary entry for their word, based on its usage in these

verses. The entry should include its part of speech, its definition, and an example sentence. Allow no more than five minutes to complete.

After the groups complete their entry, invite a representative from each group to share their entry with the class. Write these two verses on the board, but replace these four words with the groups' definitions. Ask the class the following questions: 1—How, if at all, do these definitions add clarity to the original verses? 2—How, if at all, do these definitions change the main point of the original verses? 3—How, if at all, has your understanding of these verses changed, based on these definitions?

Give each group a new term: "Abraham's seed" / "servant" / "Son" / "Father." Ask groups to use the same papers as before and write down answers to the following questions: 1—To whom does this role refer? 2—What are the rights of this role in relation to the others? 3—What are the responsibilities of this role in relation to the others? 4—How, if at all, has your understanding of these verses changed, based on these answers?

*Alternative.* Distribute to each group a copy of the "Roles and Expectations" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have groups complete the activity as indicated.

## Into Life

Ask the class to brainstorm ways sin subjugates both Christians and non-Christians, as well as ways Jesus gives freedom from sin. List responses on the board. Ask the class to brainstorm ways that Christians can abide in Jesus and His teaching, and thus better enjoy and exemplify His freedom. Ask learners to write down what steps they will take in their own lives to continually abide in Jesus.

*Alternative.* Distribute to each learner a copy of the "Word Web" activity page. Encourage everyone to complete the activity at home, as directed, and be prepared to share with the class at the start of next week's time together.

# FREEDOM FROM SIN

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 6:1-14  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:1-14

## ROMANS 6:1-14

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.



## KEY TEXT

*If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. —Romans 6:5*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 3: Liberating Letters

LESSONS 9–13

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. State the result of dying with Christ.
2. Compare and contrast the old self with the new self.
3. Make a plan to be a more effective instrument of righteousness.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Set Free
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Dead to Sin (Romans 6:1-5)
  - A. Rhetorical Question (v. 1)
  - B. Emphatic Answer (vv. 2-5)  
*End-of-Life Care*

#### II. Alive in Christ (Romans 6:6-14)

- A. Freedom from Sin (vv. 6-11)  
*Which Adam?*
- B. Freedom to Serve God (vv. 12-14)

#### Conclusion

- A. Who Will You Serve?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Set Free

President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. By this time, the Civil War had raged for nearly two years. According to the president's decree, "All persons held as slaves . . . are, and henceforward shall be free." Of course, words without appropriate action—even the words of a president—cannot create change. The proclamation did not immediately end slavery throughout the nation. This speech, however, did fan the flame of liberation, especially in the North. The Civil War ended in 1865 with a Union victory. The battle for freedom was long and bloody, but ultimately victorious.

We still experience echoes of slavery. Though freedom for slaves was declared, the long process of becoming equal citizens under the law is, in many ways, an ongoing struggle. The parallel is imperfect, but some similarities exist between the fight to end slavery in the United States and Jesus' sacrifice to end slavery the world over. The lesson today focuses not on the moment of victory, but, instead, the work that is still to be done in the aftermath.

### B. Lesson Context

The letter to the Roman church was probably written during Paul's long stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11), in about AD 58 in the midst of his third missionary journey. The church in Rome had been planted by other, unknown missionaries—possibly people who had been present to hear Peter at Pentecost (2:10). Beyond encouraging the believers there, Paul's letter also sought the Roman believers' support for a planned mission into Spain (Romans 15:23-28).

The nature of the church in Rome was influenced by an edict, issued by Emperor Claudius in about AD 49, that had forced Jews living in the city to leave (Acts 18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius tells us that Claudius "banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus," the word Chrestus likely referring to Christ.

This experience probably fostered a certain division within the Roman church between Gentile and Jewish believers, with each group contending that it had better claim on salvation in Christ than did the other (compare Romans 11:13-24).

The expulsion of Jews from Rome resulted in Gentile Christians being in the majority in the church there, if they had not been the majority already (Romans 1:5-6, 13). Their majority status seems to have continued even after the death of Claudius in AD 54 allowed Jews to return to the imperial city (compare Acts 18:2 with Romans 16:3-5a). Much of Paul's letter is therefore directed specifically to the Gentile believers there (11:13).

Paul used this letter as an opportunity to carefully explain the gospel (and his own teaching on it) to an audience who did not know him and had never heard him preach in person. As a result, this letter contains the most thorough and organized defense of Paul's preaching (Romans 2:16; 16:25). He argued that faith in Jesus is the only way to be justified before God. This justification comes by grace, through faith in Jesus, and not by obedience to the Old Testament law (3:21-26). Both Jew and Gentile are alike in sin, and both can be saved only through the redemption of Jesus (3:23-24). To confirm his point that God has always been concerned about faith, Paul used the example of Abraham. Abraham was declared righteous before God on the basis of his faith, not his obedience to the law (4:13).

In Romans 5 Paul again looked closely at the work of Jesus Christ. Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) but gave in to

temptation (3:6). Through the sin of Adam, death came into the world (3:19; Romans 5:12). Jesus, however, has done what Adam could not. Jesus, God himself in the flesh, was sinless despite temptation (Hebrews 4:15). And His death and resurrection brought grace and life to the world (Romans 5:17). Now, in Romans 6, Paul turns to examine the practical effect of Jesus' work in our lives.

## I. Dead to Sin

(ROMANS 6:1-5)

### A. Rhetorical Question (v. 1)

#### 1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

The two questions here are rhetorical (also see Romans 6:2, below). Instead of seeking an answer from the audience, Paul primed the reader for his answer to the question *Shall we continue in sin* (compare 3:8). We can see in the question this flow of logic: (1) Since forgiveness of sin is a sign of God's grace to us and (2) since grace is a good thing, then (3) why not sin all the more so that we may get more *grace* from God?

### B. Emphatic Answer (vv. 2-5)

#### 2. God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Paul is using a technique known as "reduction to the absurd." In this method, an argument is boiled down to a level at which supporting it seems crazy. Anyone who would argue that continuation of *sin* is a good thing because it results in more opportunities for *God* to forgive us has missed the point entirely! Do we think we are doing God a favor by increasing His grace business?

#### 3. Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Though we may read this as a rhetorical question, Paul's Roman audience had never heard him preach and so may not have been familiar with the concept of being *baptized into [Jesus'] death*. Baptism was commonly understood as a ritual washing away of sins, which John linked explicitly to genuine repentance (see Matthew 3:1-2, 6, 11a;

## HOW TO SAY IT

Chrestus	<i>Crest-us.</i>
Claudius	<i>Claw-dee-us.</i>
Colossians	<i>Kuh-losh-unz.</i>
Corinthians	<i>Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).</i>
Ephesians	<i>Ee-fee-zhunz.</i>
Gentile	<i>Jen-tile.</i>
Suetonius	<i>Soo-toe-nee-us.</i>
Thessalonians	<i>Thess-uh-lo-nee-unz</i> <i>(th as in thin).</i>

Luke 3:3). This symbolism was not lost in emerging Christian understandings of baptism but deepened that understanding by tying baptism to faith in Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 19:1-5; 22:16; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). Paul connected baptism to a personal identification of the believer with Christ (see Galatians 3:27).

Notice too that Paul appealed to baptism as a shared experience. The believer has not made a commitment to be carried out in a solitary way but, instead, in solidarity with others who have also taken on Christ. The body of Christ is made up of the many who call Him Savior.

#### **4a. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.**

*Therefore* draws a conclusion from Romans 6:2-3. *Baptism* is a fitting analogy for *death*. Churches have practiced baptism in various ways from early centuries, but it is worth noting that the burial analogy works best if we understand baptism as a full immersion of a person under water. As a dead body is *buried* in the ground, so we are lowered into the water of baptism to symbolize our death to sin. There is a sense of death when one is completely under the water, for normal sensory perceptions are suspended.

By baptism we are brought into Christ so that His death becomes our death. (The underlying Greek preposition also means “through,” as in Romans 2:23.) Baptized persons put sin to death and bury it when they believe, repent, and are baptized (see Colossians 2:12).

#### **4b. That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**

Jesus died, but He was *raised* to life by *the Father*. In the same way, our death in *Christ* is not the end but the means for having new *life*. At the point of conversion (symbolized here by baptism), the believer’s old life of sin ends and a new life begins (Romans 8:6-7). God’s *glory* that has given Jesus new life does the same for us (8:11).

#### **5. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.**

Just as a person goes into the water of baptism and is buried with Christ, so a seed is *planted*

into the soil. In both cases, one expects new life to flourish. Our sharing in Christ’s *resurrection* depends on our unity with His *death*. Christian baptism is a *likeness of*, or a demonstration or reenactment of, the central facts of the gospel message as defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus). Baptism provides a wonderful opportunity to be like Jesus!

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do you strike a balance between your own efforts to be sinless and God’s necessary work in your rebirth?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What other texts inform your thinking?

### ✠ END-OF-LIFE CARE ✠

Terminal disease brings death to the front of one’s mind. Treatments have failed; experimental drugs haven’t yielded a miracle cure. For this person, hospice care is a great mercy. The focus is on the alleviation of suffering. A team of doctors, nurses, social workers, and chaplains work with both the patient and her family to relieve physical, emotional, and spiritual pain in the face of death. Such care allows important conversations to happen. Far from giving up on life, this is an opportunity to enjoy the last days of one’s life and make the most of the fleeting hours.

Those of us who have accepted Christ are already experiencing end-of-life care. We are released from our sin disease and live without the pain of our guilt or the fear of our death. This frees us to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Let us not choose to live with the pain of a terminal sin; choose instead Jesus’ care. How will you make your newness of life a mercy to others? —J. A. K.

## II. Alive in Christ

(ROMANS 6:6-14)

### A. Freedom from Sin (vv. 6-11)

**6-7. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.**

In the remainder of this chapter and in Romans 7–8, Paul continued to describe the ongoing battle in which Christians are engaged—a battle of which we all are keenly aware. As long as we live in this world, the fleshly part of us (*the body*) will be calling for attention; that will be the part of us through which Satan will work the hardest to capture our allegiance and erode our faith.

Here the apostle insists that we no longer take orders from *sin* or from its headquarters. He uses the term *our old man* to describe the individual under sin’s rule (Ephesians 4:22). But now that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17), we live under a new master, or by the “new man” (Ephesians 4:24). By joining with Christ, we no longer *serve sin*. We are not freed from temptation, but we are *freed from sin* as the controlling factor in our lives. God has also given us His Holy Spirit to equip us for the battle, and the Spirit is stronger than Satan (1 John 4:4). Sin will continue to entice, but now it has met its match.

### ✠ WHICH ADAM? ✠

My father was a church leader, a positive example in many ways. His great flaw, though, was his temper. I remember vividly an occasion when my brothers and I were fussing in the car’s back seat. Dad stopped the car and unleashed a verbal torrent. I heard my mother question his reaction later. He justified himself by saying, “Children need to see their dad hopping mad sometimes.”

But when I became a father, I committed not to be controlled by anger. Have I always been successful? No. But my now-adult children are not distressed by memories of my unchecked temper.

All of humankind sins against God, following the example of our parents from Adam on. But we should be following “the last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Christ Jesus leads us to a new life where sins like out-of-control anger no longer dominate us and ruin our relationships. Which Adam are you following? —M. K.

### 8. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

In a sense, we’ve already begun to enjoy resur-

rection life (John 17:3), following our burial *with Christ* symbolized in baptism. But there is still much more to come. We haven’t yet experienced the full resurrection and still experience the temptations of sin. But we hope—not wish—for full life and restoration in faith (Romans 8:29-30; see lesson 10). The sure fact of what Christ has already done for us by His own death and resurrection provides all the confidence we need in order to trust that our own resurrection will follow.

### 9. Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

Although other humans were raised from the dead (examples: 1 Kings 17:17-24; John 11:38-44), their new life was temporary; they died again. *Christ*, however, was *raised from the dead* once and for all, to die *no more*. The Christian faces death knowing that it is a beaten enemy because of Jesus’ resurrection. Thus what is true of Jesus is true of the Christian: *death hath no more dominion over him*. With the death and resurrection of Christ, sin and death have been overturned and the new era has begun (Colossians 1:18).

#### What Do You Think?

How do you balance a natural fear of death with your faith that death no longer has dominion over you?

#### Digging Deeper

How can you face death honestly, confidently, and without fear?

### 10. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

Jesus’ singular sacrifice for our *sin* is sufficient for all time (Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:10). It never will be repeated. While Jesus’ death was *unto sin*, this doesn’t mean that Christ ever sinned but, instead, that He submitted to death, which is the consequence of sin. But He now reigns at the right hand of the Father. His life is *unto God*, as it was before He laid aside His glory to live among us (Ephesians 1:20; Philippians 2:6-8).

### 11. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

United in  
**LIFE.**

United in  
**DEATH.**

United in  
**RESURRECTION.**



Visual for Lesson 9. *Direct learners' attention to this visual as they consider the final set of discussion questions in this lesson.*

Because of what *Christ* has accomplished, we are free from slavery to sin and given the freedom to choose obedience to God. This is the case even if we don't actually feel *dead indeed unto sin*. Because of our new identity in Christ, we can be *alive unto God*, choosing His purposes over our former sinful preoccupations.

## B. Freedom to Serve God (vv. 12-14)

### 12. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Here in the first half of Romans, Paul personifies three spiritual realities as being tyrants; each has dominion as it reigns over us. All this is described with language derived from a king's reigning over his subjects or from a master's ruling over his slaves.

The first of these three is death, introduced as a reigning tyrant in Romans 5:14. The second is *sin*, explicitly seen as the reigning tyrant in the verse before us. The third is the law, spoken of extensively in chapters 2 and 3, but introduced fully as having "dominion" in 7:1 (but see Romans 6:14, below). These three oppress us in different ways. We fear death, we suffer because of sin, and we are judged inadequate by the law (see 2:12).

Paul urged his readers not to allow the ominous spiritual tyrant of sin to exercise any sort of authority in their lives. Although we are dead to sin, we will continue to struggle against it. Paul

was not talking about abstract sins of the intellect, but about real-world acts that involve our bodies. Such sins come from yielding to *the lusts thereof*. The underlying Greek reflects language Paul used elsewhere when talking about sexual sins (Romans 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 4:5). Living under Christ's rule, however, we have been given a path to flee from sin and escape its clutches. Resisting sin is not passive. It requires effort (2 Timothy 2:22). We have been set free from sin, but we must also choose to abandon sinful thoughts and behaviors.

#### What Do You Think?

How do you typically resist the evil desires and lusts that still tempt you?

#### Digging Deeper

What spiritual resources can you employ to fortify yourself against sin?

### 13. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

This command builds on the previous verse, emphasizing that no part of our bodies should remain *members . . . of unrighteousness*. Our body is no longer Satan's possession. The word *members* refers to the parts of the human body, such as hands or ears. This use is reflected in English in the word *dismember*, referring to cutting off an arm or leg. We are to use our eyes, our hands, our feet, our minds, and our mouths in ways that show we are people who *are alive from the dead*. That does not simply mean avoiding wicked uses of those features; it also means putting them to work to serve, to bless, and to draw others to the righteous God. All parts of our bodies are to be used *as instruments* for God's right purposes (Romans 12:1).

Christians live in the era between the moment that God dealt *sin* a deathblow through Jesus' death and resurrection and the day of the final victory that will occur at Jesus' return. During this interval, we are to live under God's authority, reflecting the *righteousness* that He requires

of His people (Ephesians 4:24). We cannot live lives of divided loyalties, serving two masters. We must yield fully every aspect of ourselves to the service of God. We are not partly alive and partly dead. We are completely alive from the dead (2:5). In the new life, we serve only God in acts of righteousness.

#### *What Do You Think?*

▶ What individual parts of your body do you tend to view as irrelevant to practicing righteousness?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How could focusing on these deepen your practice of faith?

### **14. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.**

Paul returns to his language of *sin* as a tyrant, insisting again that it cannot be our master. The reason for this is found in the controlling rule by which we live. If we allow sin to dominate us, then we position ourselves to be subject to the law. Paul certainly had the Jewish law in mind here, but the application is broader if *under the law* is understood to mean “under the old realm.” Paul has already argued that if we are under the law, then we are judged guilty (see Romans 3:19-20). Anyone who attempts to be righteous by rule keeping will fail (3:23). Law does not save; it points out sin. Obeying the law to the best of one’s ability is an exercise of wisdom and will, but that does not provide the answer for mastering sin. If we allow sin to reign over us, we are putting ourselves right back into slavery, despite the freedom given to us by Christ.

Instead, we are to be ruled by *grace*. It is not about which law or set of rules we try to keep, but about which master we serve. Apart from grace, we cannot overcome sinful desire. By grace, death has been destroyed, sin’s hold has been broken, and the law has been fulfilled through the perfect obedience of Jesus. Even when we avoid sinful behavior, we are mastered by sin if we are doing this in an attempt to earn favor with God (the way of law). If our motivation is to serve God, then righteous behavior will follow naturally.

## Conclusion

### A. Who Will You Serve?

With Jesus’ resurrection we see that both the new era of resurrection life and the old era of sin and brokenness exist side by side until Christ’s return. This time of both fulfillment of promises and expectation of future perfection can be called the “Already/Not Yet.” This phrase captures the tension that exists in this age. Through faith in Jesus, believers have the beginnings of resurrection life in the Holy Spirit right now (Ephesians 1:13-14). This is our spiritual resurrection and new life in Christ (2:1, 6; Colossians 3:1). The fullness of this new life will come with the final resurrection from physical death. For the believer, new life is both present and future.

Our baptism has united us with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With His death, we are set free from slavery to sin. With His resurrection, we are given new life. However, we must make the choice of how we will live in this new freedom. We may continue to live in disobedience, becoming slaves to sin all over again. Or we may choose to live in righteousness, enjoying the new life Christ has purchased for us. Out of our knowledge of, and gratitude for, the grace of God, let us eagerly serve righteousness. It’s the best life now—and forever.

### B. Prayer

Father, thank You for Your grace made clear to us through Your Son. May we be encouraged and strengthened to live for You each day. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, by whose blood we have been set free and made new. Amen.

#### *What Do You Think?*

▶ What areas of your life have you been withholding from Jesus’ service?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What change will you make in the coming week to serve Jesus in *every* aspect of your life?

### C. Thought to Remember

Let us live free from sin in the grace of Jesus.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Ask class members to brainstorm a list of signs that require or restrict certain behaviors. Allow 90 seconds for them to shout out as many as they can; write each one on the board. Add some of the following if they do not mention them: Do Not Enter. Stay Off the Grass! Speeders Will Be Ticketed. No Trespassing. Do Not Pick the Flowers. Do Not Tap on Glass.

Then poll the class. For each item on the list, ask for a show of hands from class members who have ever violated that specific rule. Ask volunteers when the existence of a rule made them feel rebellious instead of obedient.

Lead to Bible study by saying, “Today’s passage reminds us of the inability of the law to ensure our obedience. The Scripture shows us a better way.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute a handout (you create) containing each of the following sentences. Ask the groups to examine today’s Scripture with these statements in mind. For each one, they are to mark the sentence true or false and indicate the verse(s) supporting their answer.

Note: Other verse references will be possible for some answers.

1. Something important happens at baptism.
2. Accepting Christ gives us new ways to live in our sin.
3. The more we sin, the more we’re able to experience God’s grace.
4. Freedom follows death.
5. Christ’s death on the cross was just the first of many sacrifices for our sins.
6. Our baptism is a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ.
7. The gospel is all about new life, not death.

*Answers:* 1. True (vv. 3-5); 2. False (vv. 12-14);

3. False (vv. 1-2); 4. True (vv. 6-11); 5. False (vv. 9-10); 6. True (vv. 3-4); 7. False (vv. 8-11).

After about 10 minutes, call the class together and discuss the statements. For the false statements, discuss the best ways to make those statements true. Use this discussion as a framework for discussing today’s Scripture. See today’s commentary for further insight.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Romans Vocabulary Puzzle” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to be completed in pairs as directed. After 10 minutes, reconvene the class to discuss the concepts raised in the puzzle. *Option.* As learners list the answers from the puzzle, write the words on the board. The completed list will include: sin, grace, baptism, resurrection, once, reign, mortal, law, buried, crucified, old, dead, alive. Have the students work in their pairs to write sentences that each contain at least two of these words, based on today’s Scripture. Students should write as many sentences as possible in 10 minutes. Come together as a class and ask for volunteers to read one of their pair’s sentences.

After either activity, use this discussion as a framework for exploring today’s Scripture. See today’s commentary for further insight.

## Into Life

Allow one minute for students to reflect silently on how they can be more effective instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13). Allow a few more minutes for pairs to discuss their plans and write down a simple plan to carry out.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “His Resurrection and Our New Life” exercise from the activity page. Have the students complete this exercise in pairs according to the instructions. Reconvene the class to discuss.

Close in prayer, thanking God for freedom in Christ.

# FREEDOM FOR THE FUTURE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 8:18-30  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:18-30

## ROMANS 8:18-30

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

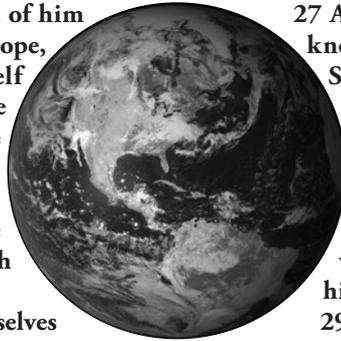
26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.



## KEY TEXT

*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. —Romans 8:18*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 3: Liberating Letters

LESSONS 9–13

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. List ways in which the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of believers.
2. Give an example from Scripture where the Holy Spirit interceded for believers.
3. Write a prayer to thank God for His presence during a difficult time.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Against the Odds
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Present Sufferings (Romans 8:18-25)

- A. Glory to Be Revealed (v. 18)  
*Pain and Reward*
- B. Great Expectations (vv. 19-25)  
*Adoption*

#### II. Present God (Romans 8:26-30)

- A. The Spirit's Help (vv. 26-27)
- B. The Supreme Plan (vv. 28-30)

#### Conclusion

- A. Hope for the Future
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Against the Odds

*Voyager 1* entered interstellar space on August 25, 2012. Scientists estimate, based on its performance, that the space probe will continue operating and gathering information until 2025. When it runs out of power, *Voyager 1* will drift off into deep space, losing momentum every second until it comes to rest somewhere among the stars.

Included in *Voyager 1*'s payload is a gold-plated audiovisual disc with pictures, audio recordings, and scientific data. Although the odds against encountering intelligent life in deep space are overwhelmingly low, this record was considered important enough to be included. As Carl Sagan said, "The spacecraft will be encountered and the record played only if there are advanced space-faring civilizations in interstellar space. But the launching of this bottle into the cosmic ocean says something very hopeful about life on this planet."

In the midst of suffering, the hope of restoration and glory can feel as minuscule as the odds of *Voyager 1* encountering intelligent alien life. What gives us confidence in hope? Our text today gives us the answer.

### B. Lesson Context

The apostle Paul was involved in several important mission trips, the last of which was his trip to Rome for a hearing before the emperor. The book of Acts ends with Paul awaiting this trial (Acts 28:30-31). Rome was a destination he had desired for many years (Romans 1:13), but not necessarily in the status of prisoner!

The letter to the Romans includes Paul's understanding of the Old Testament background for the Christian message, the nature of Christian salvation based on the atoning death of Christ, the centrality of faith as the only path for human salvation, the relationship between Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds in the plan of God, and several other matters.

All this makes Romans both the most challenging of Paul's letters to understand and the richest depository of what he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25). The basis and reality of being jus-

tified by faith is the subject of Romans 1–4 in general and 3:24, 28 in particular. Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 to set the tone for the entire book: “the just shall live by faith.”

This means that faith—complete trust in Jesus—is the only way that eternal life may be found. It cannot be earned by obedience, although obedience is important. It is not inherited by ancestry, although this is not unimportant (see Romans 3:1-2; 9:4-5). True life, eternal life, the life of salvation, is only found in trusting God to save us through His Son.

Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jews, was justified by faith (Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6). Thus the idea of faith in God as the core element of one’s life is not a Christian innovation. Such faith is to be the foundation of our relationship with God. This was intended as central in the pre-Israel period (Abraham), in the nation of Israel itself (Habakkuk), and now is so in the church.

In Romans 5–8, Paul lays out the implications of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through Christ, the reign of sin and death has been overthrown by righteousness and grace (Romans 5:21). With the reign of sin and death defeated, believers are free. New life in Christ also means freedom from bondage to the law (7:1-6).

Romans 8 brings these various elements to a climactic resolution. There is “now no condemnation” for those “in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). What the law failed to do, God himself has done through Jesus (8:3). Righteous living is enabled by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in those who have faith in Christ (8:9-10).

All these wonderful truths, however, raise a painful question: Why do suffering and death still wreak havoc? Paul indicated the likelihood

that Christians would suffer for Christ’s sake. Paul encouraged the Roman believers to keep the big picture in mind: we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17, not in our printed text).

## I. Present Sufferings

(ROMANS 8:18-25)

### A. Glory to Be Revealed (v. 18)

**18. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**

Paul was trained by the respected Jewish teacher Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3). So for Paul to *reckon* was for him to draw on both his faith in Christ and his vast knowledge of Scripture. His thoughts are not to be taken lightly.

Paul was careful to put *the sufferings*—whatever their causes—of *this present time* in proper perspective. Jesus’ resurrection initiated a new era of salvation and restoration (see lesson 9). Because God’s faithfulness to His salvation promise has been revealed (Hebrews 1:1-3), suffering of any kind pales in comparison to *the glory which shall be revealed in us*. Forms of the word *glory* occur here and in Romans 8:21, 30 (see below), further defining what believers have to anticipate. The path of suffering ends with being glorified with Christ and with all who have traveled the same path.

#### What Do You Think?

How do you find a faithful balance in dealing with current challenges without losing sight of hope?

#### Digging Deeper

What barriers prevent you from maintaining this balanced approach to the present and future?

## HOW TO SAY IT

Augustus	Aw-gus-tus.
Caesar	See-zer.
Gaius Octavius	Gay-us Ok- <b>tey</b> -vee- <i>ubs</i> .
Julius	Joo-lee-us.
Michelangelo	Mahy-kuhl- <i>an</i> -juh-loh.
Raphael	Raf-ee-uhl or Rah-fahy- <i>el</i> .
Tiberius	Tie-beer-ee-us.

### ✦ PAIN AND REWARD ✦

The Sistine Chapel nearly defeated Michelangelo (1475–1564). Between 1508 and 1512, the man who considered himself a sculptor faced the frustrating difficulties of painting the Sistine’s ceiling. He fought with the pope on concepts, overcame



Visual for Lesson 10. *Direct learners' attention to this visual while considering the discussion questions associated with verse 18.*

physical challenges in scaffolding, fussed with his helpers, and spent agonizing hours on his back with brush and paint. Throughout the period, Michelangelo carried on personal feuds with painter Raphael and inventor Leonardo da Vinci. But Michelangelo persevered. The result is considered one of the greatest works of art in all the world.

Michelangelo's years of agony led to triumphal ecstasy. Paul's decades of toil and tribulation would lead to a glorious reward from his Lord Jesus. We, too, deal with pain. This may come from our faith commitments or simply from our life's circumstances. But Paul promises a future in which sufferings will give way to glory with our Lord. Are you paralyzed by personal pain, or encouraged by future reward? —M .K.

## B. Great Expectations (vv. 19-25)

### 19. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

*Creature* includes anything and everything God has made (see Romans 8:22, below; compare its use in 8:39 [not in our printed text]; Colossians 1:15; Revelation 3:14). Here it refers to the entire created world with the exception of *the sons of God*. While the adoption of believers is a present reality (Romans 8:14-15, not in our printed text), this fact can be obscured by the troubles of living in a sinful world. The suffering that results from our fallen world can further conceal the reality of redemption that is already present (8:17-18).

### 20a. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same.

Following Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, God cursed the ground as part of the humans' punishment (Genesis 3:17-18). Through no fault of its own, creation was thwarted from flourishing and *made subject to vanity*.

The phrase *him who hath subjected the same* could be taken to refer to Adam as the reason for the curse rather than to the power behind the curse. This would be in error, although the thinking behind the supposition is sound: because humanity was to exercise wise rule over creation (Genesis 1:26-30), the fall revealed that people were not up to the task. As a natural outcome of humanity's foolishness, creation suffers. Its caretakers fell into sin and were no longer capable of exercising proper dominion. However, in context it is clear that God is the one who subjected creation to futility.

### 20b-21. In hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

In the midst of the curse, God made a promise: "I will put enmity between [the serpent] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15; compare Romans 16:20). Creation, despite its suffering, has reason for *hope*! The crushing of Satan's head was good news not only for all who put faith in Jesus but for all of creation.

*The bondage of corruption* further defines the "vanity" of Romans 8:20a (above). Since human sin resulted in creation's fallen state, only when the *liberty of the children of God* is finally and fully gained will *the creature* be released from the curse as well. The Greek word translated *glorious* (compare Romans 8:18, 30) can be interpreted in two ways: as an adjective to describe *liberty* or as a noun standing on its own. This second option would explicitly refer to believers' status as being glorious rather than experiencing a glorious liberty. This goes beyond restoration to a fulfillment of God's plan for people. The fate of creation is inextricably tied to God's fulfilling His promises to those who have been adopted into His family (Galatians 4:4-7).

**22. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.**

The Greek word translated *travaileth* can refer to the intense pain of giving birth. Childbirth is painful (to say the least), but the healthy infant who is born brings immediate joy. The analogy captures a common first-century Jewish belief: that as the salvation of God drew near, conditions on the earth would worsen progressively, like the contractions that get worse and worse until finally the baby is born. Portions of Daniel chapters 7 and 9 helped shape this expectation. Jesus also spoke of the difficulty of the end times, both concerning events that were near at hand and others that would continue until His return (Matthew 24; John 16:1-11, 31-33). His disciples continued to speak of the troubles that would be seen before Jesus' return ended this age (example: 1 Timothy 4:1-3). All that pain, though, is meant to result in joy for the world. It is not a vain struggle.

*What Do You Think?*

How do you respond to the fact that creation suffers because of human sinfulness?

*Digging Deeper*

How can you intentionally care for God's creation this week?

**23. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.**

*Firstfruits* as a concept comes from the Feast of Harvest, also called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 23:16a; 34:22a; Numbers 28:26-31; etc.). The people would make sacrifices to the Lord of the first grains they gathered. This expressed thanks for God's providing the harvest and confidence that God would bless the people with bounty throughout the harvest season. Like the firstfruits of a harvest, the indwelling of *the Spirit* within believers is a kind of down payment, guaranteeing what is still to come (Ephesians 1:13b-14).

*Adoption* in the Roman world differed from our laws and customs. One common scenario would involve a wealthy Roman man who had no sons.

He would adopt a promising young man from a poor family, paying the natural father for rights to bring the son into the new, adoptive household. This adopted son would be groomed to take over the family business, continue the good name of the adoptive father, and become the adoptive father's heir. Such adoption is seen in the history of the Caesars, who frequently adopted a nephew or other male to inherit their title. Examples include Julius Caesar's adoption of Gaius Octavius, who was later called Caesar Augustus, and Augustus's own adoption of Tiberius. Adoptions such as these were familiar to everyone in the Roman world, but especially to residents of Rome itself.

Although believers are already children of God, we still await *the redemption of our body*, victory over physical death (Romans 6:8; see lesson 9).

✂ **ADOPTION** ✂

I was perplexed by the parents of my childhood friends. The children were my age, but their parents were much older than my own parents. I continued to wonder about this for years, not learning until I was a teenager that these were my friends' grandparents. The couple had adopted their grandchildren as toddlers due to tragedy with the children's natural parents. This godly couple had given them their name, their home, and their love. Other than the ages of those parents, I might never have realized their family was different from mine; my friends were secure in their family, just as though it had never been otherwise.

Paul used adoption imagery to describe our future reward as sons and daughters of God. Christians become "joint-heirs" with Christ (Romans 8:17), heirs to the glory of salvation promised to believers. We assume the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christian, as our identifying mark to the world. And we continue our Father's business, seeking the lost for salvation. Are you living so that others recognize that your Father is raising you in His image and you are secure in His love? —M. K.

**24-25. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth,**

**why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.**

Christian *hope* is not wishful thinking or anticipating a probable outcome; rather, it is assured because hope is based not on our own faithfulness but on God's faithfulness to His promises (Titus 1:2-3). Still, we *see not* what we *hope for*, because in that case we would no longer require hope. When Paul declares that "faith, hope, [and] charity" abide and the last is the greatest (1 Corinthians 13:13), it is not because faith and hope are of dubious value. Instead, it indicates that when faith and hope are realized in Heaven, we will not need them as we do now, to anticipate our promised future. But love will still be required, even in Heaven. God has given us every reason for confidence, which gives us the *patience [to] wait for* our hopes to be realized (see Romans 5:3-5).

**What Do You Think?**

How does impatience affect your relationship with the Lord?

**Digging Deeper**

What opportunities has God placed before you to grow in patience?

## II. Present God

(ROMANS 8:26-30)

### A. The Spirit's Help (vv. 26-27)

**26. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.**

The state of the world can leave us so completely horrified that we are left speechless. *Our infirmities* include every piece of evidence that we live in a sin-sick and dying world. But when *we know not what we should pray*, the Spirit steps in on our behalf. This comes as no surprise since Jesus promised the Spirit would be His disciples' "Comforter" (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). Paul built on this, giving believers confidence that *the Spirit . . . maketh intercession for us*. When words fail us, the Spirit does not.

*Groanings* is the noun form of the verb "groan" in Romans 8:23 (above). This context suggests

that the Spirit's intercession also happens within ourselves. This is supported by the fact that creation does not speak in language but does groan in brokenness (see 8:22, above).

**27. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.**

*He that searcheth the hearts* refers to God (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalms 7:9; 139:23; etc.). Note that, like Jesus, *the Spirit* only speaks *according to the will of God* (John 14:10; 16:13). Though we may not always pray according to God's will—especially since we do not *knoweth what is the mind of* Father, Son, or Spirit—nevertheless the Spirit will only intercede in keeping with God's plans.

**What Do You Think?**

How do your prayer practices reflect that the Spirit intercedes for you?

**Digging Deeper**

What changes can you make to remain aware of the Spirit's help when you pray?

### B. The Supreme Plan (vv. 28-30)

**28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.**

Even the darkest night of the soul does not mean we are cut off from God. Paul had an unshakable faith that all things are under the control of God, *that all things work together for good to them that love God*. Faith in the sovereign God means believing that He is in control of all things. Even the evil in our world that causes the suffering of righteous people is not beyond His control.

Our problem is that of limited perspective. Only God can see how all things work together for good. The question about suffering, then, is not *why* (compare Judges 6:13), but *how long*. The *why* is because of human decision to turn away from God (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:19; 6:3; Romans 1:21, 28). The question can only be *how long*—

how long will the suffering continue until my soul is flooded again by God's love and comfort (compare Psalms 6:3; 94:3; Revelation 6:10)?

#### What Do You Think?

How would you respond to Christians experiencing despair in their circumstances?

#### Digging Deeper

What other Scriptures would you cite to bolster faith, hope, and love in your fellow believers?

**29. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

While doctrines of foreknowledge and predestination are important to consider, Paul's letter precedes by centuries debates about these terms and does not address the arguments that future Christians would engage in. Rather, Paul's point is that God is working within a plan, not haphazardly throwing people or events together in some sort of cosmic or salvific experiment (compare Ephesians 1:11-14). Though chaos or chance may seem to rule the day, we take comfort that the Lord knew us long before we accepted the call to join Him in His ultimate purpose for people: *to be conformed to the image of his Son* (Psalm 139:13). This is both a new creation and a re-creation, for to be made in the image of Christ is to be restored to our unsullied state of having been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

As the first to rise from the dead into glory, Jesus' bodily resurrection made Him *the firstborn* from the dead (Colossians 1:18). Because of His resurrection, we expect to be *among many brethren* who will also return to life (contrast 1 Corinthians 15:12-19). The promise of our own resurrection is the ultimate hope we have in the midst of our sufferings (compare Acts 23:6; 1 Corinthians 15).

**30. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.**

Although elaborate and confusing doctrines have been offered to explain the concept of predestination, it is a rather straightforward idea as

presented by Paul. The word translated *predestinate* in this context means that God has made an earlier decision about our future (see commentary on Romans 8:29, above).

This predetermined plan has three stages. First, God has *called* us, giving us the opportunity to respond to the gospel by faith. Second, a positive response leads to being *justified*, declared righteous through our faith in Christ because of His sacrifice on our behalf (Romans 3:24-26). The final stage is our being *glorified* when our own resurrections take place and we join Christ in Heaven for all eternity (compare 1 Corinthians 15:42-58).

## Conclusion

### A. Hope for the Future

Christians have a hope that persists through the ordeals of life. Outside of faith in Christ, this hope is not possible. Still, we observe and experience suffering. Focusing on these things makes a person nearsighted. Only with an eye on our future glory can a Christian not only endure hardship but also thrive in the hope of God's promises.

While we hope for the glorious future in Christ, we still have work to do. Though our minds turn to evangelism—and rightly so—these verses remind us that we also have a responsibility to *all* creation. God has made us stewards of His good earth. While people suffer, all creation suffers. Likewise, believers' peace is the peace of the world; our glory will be the glory of creation.

We wait in hope for the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises. May we, as people who have died with Christ and live again in the Spirit, be beacons of God's wonderful intentions for all creatures, great and small.

### B. Prayer

Father, help us view suffering through the perspective of faith. Teach us to depend on Your Holy Spirit. Thank You for Your Son, who has purchased our freedom. In His name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God is working all things together to accomplish His perfect will.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Read each of the following statements, asking class members to raise a hand each time they hear a sentence they agree with. Pause after some or all of these and allow volunteers to explain why they raised their hand or, if no one raises a hand, why they did not.

1. I remember a time when life seemed hopeless.
2. The older I become, the more difficult life becomes.
3. This year has been hard for me.
4. I expect to have trouble in this life.
5. Even when things are bad, I have hope.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Prayer Requests” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to be completed as directed. After one minute, ask volunteers to share their responses, especially to the final question.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “Life can be difficult. But Jesus offers hope in all situations. Today we’ll examine one passage that explores this idea.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Romans 8:18. Divide the class into small groups (or pairs). One half of these groups should find examples of suffering that the New Testament church endured, while the other half should focus on Paul’s own life experiences. After a few minutes, list these examples on the board as groups call them out. Be sure to include instances from the Roman Christians’ experience (see the Lesson Context sections of lessons 9 and 10 for more information).

Discuss these answers; then ask a volunteer to read Romans 8:19-30. Have the groups discuss what impact Paul’s words would have if Paul had *not* suffered or if the Roman Christians had *not* experienced hardships.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Patterns in God’s

Will” exercise from the activity page, to be completed in pairs (or small groups) as directed. Bring the class back together after 15 minutes to discuss what they found. Supplement their answers with information from the lesson commentary as needed.

Following either activity, have volunteers call out ways that creation’s suffering is seen, and write their responses on the board. After a few minutes, have the students break into pairs to focus on one of the examples and come up with as many connections as possible between nature’s suffering and humans’ suffering. After about three minutes, ask them to imagine what a glorified resolution to the suffering might look like. For instance, how do both nature and humanity suffer because of pollution? Answers will vary but could include an end to respiratory diseases, clearer skies, etc.

Allow one minute for learners to reflect on their past and present struggles. Ask volunteers to share. Ask for some answers before discussing as a class how focusing on the Spirit’s intercession rather than the struggle itself can change their attitudes. Can they sense the Spirit’s presence in these struggles? What practices would help learners find peace and hope in the Spirit’s help?

## Into Life

Ask volunteers to share examples of their experiences of the Spirit’s presence in a challenging situation. After a few minutes, allow one minute for the students to write a prayer of thanks for God’s presence during a difficult time. Allow the students to pair up to pray for one another about any current difficult situations or in thanks for God’s past care.

Encourage students to reflect on or complete the activity page in the week ahead. Encourage the students to come to class next week prepared to share either what action in addition to prayer they have taken on to address their concerns or how this lesson encouraged them in the struggles they faced.

# FREEDOM AND THE LAW

DEVOTIONAL READING: Galatians 3:18-29  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3

## GALATIANS 3:18-29

18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.



21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

## KEY TEXT

*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. —Galatians 3:29*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 3: Liberating Letters

LESSONS 9–13

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. Summarize what makes a person a child of God through faith in Christ.
2. Compare and contrast life under the law with a life of faith in Christ.
3. Write out the promises God has made to him or her as an heir.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. All Skate
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Inheritance (Galatians 3:18-19a)

- A. Given by Promise (v. 18)  
*The Audacity of Faith*

- B. Questions of the Law (v. 19a)

#### II. Law (Galatians 3:19b-21)

- A. Added for Transgressions (vv. 19b-20)
- B. Limitations of the Law (v. 21)

#### III. Faith (Galatians 3:22-25)

- A. Promised in Christ (vv. 22-23)
- B. Deficiencies of the Law (vv. 24-25)  
*Advanced Coaching*

#### IV. Unity (Galatians 3:26-29)

- A. Resulting by Faith (vv. 26-27)
- B. Regardless of the Law (vv. 28-29)

#### Conclusion

- A. Time to Grow Up
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. All Skate

By putting on roller skates, a person's movement is transformed as he or she glides across the pavement. One of the best settings for roller skating is at a roller-skating rink. In addition to being an easy place to skate, rinks often include colorful lights and engaging music.

Rinks might have times set apart for particular groups of skaters—times designated specifically for boys, girls, parents, grandparents, and so on. There may even be times for singles or couples to skate. After a few minutes of the special skate, the announcer proclaims over the loudspeaker, "It's all-skate time! Everyone, come skate!" No longer does anyone feel left out. All skaters are welcome to participate!

In this week's lesson, the apostle Paul made a sweeping declaration. This declaration invited all people to hear and experience the promises of God's transforming good news.

### B. Lesson Context

The Galatian Christians were a community of believers in the region of Galatia, located in modern-day Turkey. Paul's missionary journeys took him through this region and its cities. Depending on whether "Galatia" is understood in a political sense or a demographic sense, it was during either Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) or his second (16:1–18:22) that he first taught the gospel message to the Galatians (see 4:12-13).

The year Paul wrote the Galatian epistle is unknown. Some research has proposed that it was written as early as AD 48 or as late as AD 57/58. The latter would imply that Paul wrote this epistle after the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. If this were the case, part of Galatians includes Paul's retelling of the council's key concerns: circumcision as part of adherence to the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:1-10; see Acts 15:5). These same concerns were of importance among the Galatian churches.

The Galatians had received the gospel message from Paul (Acts 16:6; 18:23; Galatians 1:11-12), but there were some among them who tried to add to the message. These individuals taught that circum-

cision as part of adherence to the Law of Moses was a requirement for salvation; Paul declared that to be “another gospel” (1:6; see 2:14). Advocates for this approach were known as Judaizers because they called for Gentile believers to adhere to the distinctions of Jewish law. The Judaizers’ beliefs were understandable. From their point of view, Israel was and continued to be the distinct people of God. It was to Israel that God had revealed himself, given His law, and prescribed circumcision as a mark of His covenant (Genesis 17:7-14).

Paul urged the Galatian churches to reject the Judaizers’ addition to the gospel message (Galatians 1:7-9). Paul reflected on his own “exceedingly zealous” experience in Judaism (1:14) as he highlighted his inability to follow the law to the point of justification (2:15-21). Through Christ, the promise of salvation was to be revealed to the whole world (3:6-9). Paul went on to show the unifying nature of that salvation for all who would believe in Christ.

## I. Inheritance

(GALATIANS 3:18-19a)

### A. Given by Promise (v. 18)

**18a. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise.**

That Paul began with *for* indicates a continuation of his preceding discussion on *the inheritance* from God (Galatians 3:15-17). This inheritance implies eternal life and being counted righteous by God—for those having faith in Jesus (see Acts 20:32; Hebrews 9:15). Paul’s concern was the means by which the inheritance was received.

If the promised life and righteousness came via *the law*, then God’s promises—especially His promises to Abraham—would be of little value (see commentary on Galatians 3:18b, below). The law’s role was not to provide entrance into God’s *promise*. The law, given to Moses, was introduced

long after God’s promise (see 3:17). This fact provided a distinction for God’s relationship with His people; He desires relationship, not regulation. If God’s inheritance was received by following the law, then His promises would be of no value and faith would be irrelevant (see Romans 4:13-16).

**18b. But God gave it to Abraham by promise.**

God’s *promise*, made to *Abraham* centuries prior, designated a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3), a reward and heir (15:1-6), and a guarantee of descendants (17:1-8). In contrast to the demands of the law, God’s gracious act was in giving the promise. Ultimately, God’s promises would be fulfilled in Christ (Galatians 3:16). This observation led to Paul’s essential question, next.

#### What Do You Think?

How do God’s people live differently in light of God’s promises?

#### Digging Deeper

How do 2 Corinthians 6:16b–7:1 and 2 Peter 1:3-11 inform your answer in this regard?

### ✧ THE AUDACITY OF FAITH ✧

Unbeknownst to the girl, her father was quite busy. Little did she know the weight of her request when she asked him, “Do you promise you’ll come to my game?” Her father hated breaking promises, so he paused before answering. The demands of his day weighed heavily in his mind, but those demands paled in comparison to supporting his daughter. He didn’t make promises lightly. He could not and would not break his word!

The Old Testament tells how the Lord made promises to Abraham, an obscure herdsman in the ancient Middle East. Abraham was promised land, numerous descendants, and the presence of the Lord. The audacity of these promises required Abraham to accept them by faith—an equally audacious act. God’s word would come true so long as Abraham faithfully followed God in all circumstances.

Unlike earthly fathers, God never fails on His promises. Have you claimed God’s promise of new life? If so, how will you now live? Will the audacity of faith now guide your life? —M. S. K.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Galatia	Guh-lay-shuh.
Galileans	Gal-uh-lee-unz.
Judaizers	Joo-duh-ize-ers.

# We are *all* in Christ Jesus.

Visual for Lesson 11. *Have this visual on display as you pose the discussion question that is associated with Galatians 3:28.*

## B. Questions of the Law (v. 19a)

### 19a. Wherefore then serveth the law?

By asking this question, Paul anticipated the Galatians' response regarding the promise. If God's inheritance came through His promise, then why should people of God continue to rely on *the law* for salvation? The practice of anticipating the readers' questions is common in Paul's writings (examples: Romans 3:1, 3, 5, 7; 6:15; 7:7). It was his way of addressing their (assumed) concerns since he couldn't be with them in person.

## II. Law

(GALATIANS 3:19b-21)

### A. Added for Transgressions (vv. 19b-20)

**19b. It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.**

The word *transgressions* indicates a violation of a boundary. In this instance, the boundary transgressed is the law (see Romans 2:23). The law *was added* to reveal the nature and extent of human transgression (4:15; 5:13, 20). As a result, people became conscious of their violations (3:20; 7:12-13). Through the Law of Moses, the Israelites had common language for understanding their transgressions and enforcing discipline. However, the law's application was limited as it served to reveal, rather than heal, transgressions.

The law would apply till a specific time ordained

by God. Galatian Judaizers required obedience to the Law of Moses to become an heir of Abraham's promise (see Lesson Context). However, Paul nullified their argument by noting a temporal aspect: the law was fulfilled by the coming of Abraham's *seed*, Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:16).

**19c. And it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.**

The law's inferiority was due, in part, to its mediated nature. While Scripture never calls Moses a *mediator*, God gave him the law and placed it under his care, as if in his *hand* (see Exodus 20:19-22; 21:1; 34:29; Leviticus 26:46). Other Scriptures indicate a belief that *angels* served a role in revealing the law (see Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2). However, God's promise is without angelic mediation. Therefore it is more enduring.

**20. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.**

That the law was given through *a mediator* did not strengthen its influence. In fact, the opposite occurred. The mediated nature of the law differed from God's direct interaction with Abraham (Genesis 12:1). For believers, Christ Jesus serves as the mediator between God and humans (1 Timothy 2:5). As a result, there exists a new relationship between God and humanity, mediated through the "better promises" of Christ Jesus (Hebrews 8:6; see 9:15; 12:24). The law differentiated Jew from Gentile. *But God is one* and His people are one through faith in Christ (Romans 3:29-30; see commentary on Galatians 3:28, below).

### B. Limitations of the Law (v. 21)

**21a. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid.**

Paul again anticipated a rebuttal, so he cited a possible concern for the Galatians. *The law* and *the promises* are not against each other. Both are of *God* and both are holy (see Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8). However, each serves a different purpose.

The Greek phrase behind *God forbid* is a favorite expression of Paul's (see Romans 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 2:17; 6:14). It is an expression of emphatic rejection.

**21b. For if there had been a law given which**

could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

The *law* was never intended to give eternal *life*. This is why Paul emphasized that the giving of the law came years after God’s covenant and Abraham’s faith (Galatians 3:17). If *righteousness* could come *by the law*, then the work of Christ, particularly His death, would be “in vain” (2:21). As the law shows humans their sinful ways, it follows God’s holy intention (see Romans 7:7-10).

#### What Do You Think?

In what ways do Christians use good behavior to earn favor with God and with others?

#### Digging Deeper

What should be the role of good behavior and good works in the lives of believers?

### III. Faith

(GALATIANS 3:22-25)

#### A. Promised in Christ (vv. 22-23)

**22. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.**

It is unclear which *scripture* Paul has in mind. Perhaps he recalled the Law of Moses that called “cursed” those people who did not conform to “all the words” of the law (Deuteronomy 27:26). The law *concluded* that both Jews and Gentiles were “*all under sin*” (Romans 3:9), and all people were thereby guilty (3:10-18).

Because Paul declared that all were guilty under the law, all were unfit to receive life on the basis of the law. The imagery serves to contrast the law’s condemnation with the life provided by *the promise*. Only those who believe will be counted righteous. The righteous person will be considered a recipient of the promise (Romans 4:3, 13, 16), conveyed by the “seed” of Abraham, Jesus (Galatians 3:16, 19).

God’s plan never depended on the law. Through the *faith of Jesus Christ*—His faithfulness to follow the call of His Father—Jew and Gentile can experience the blessed promise of redemption. Those *that believe* become God’s children, regardless of their ethnic identity (see John 1:12-13).

**23. But before faith came, we were kept**

**under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.**

For Paul, *faith* was more than a person’s mental trust or a deep-seated hope. Instead, he attributed faith to God’s way of dealing with humanity. Jesus’ faithfulness in following His Father was the way God revealed His righteousness to the world (see Romans 1:17; 4:16; Ephesians 3:12).

Before Christ’s arrival, the law *kept* humans *shut up*. This might imply that the law served as a restraint, showing the extent of sin through Scripture (see commentary on Galatians 3:22, above).

Paul envisioned a new era of God’s working among humanity. This era was one in which God’s promise was *revealed* through faith. Paul drew demarcations between the era of law and the era of faith, with Christ’s faithfulness in His work being the moment of transition.

#### B. Deficiencies of the Law (vv. 24-25)

**24. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.**

Paul’s next metaphor softened the description as he described *the law* as *our schoolmaster*. The illustration referred to the duties of certain servants in ancient Greco-Roman culture. These servants supervised the education of the household heir, keeping a close eye on the heir’s behavior, character formation, and discipline. Eventually the heir would mature and no longer need this overseer.

Similarly, the law was only needed for a time. It served its purpose until *Christ* came and brought an end to the law’s power for justification (Romans 10:4). The law could only do so much for humanity in regard to the promises of God. Humans could never be *justified* by the law (see Acts 13:39).

**25. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.**

Paul’s Galatian audience held that justification was a “both-and” construct. Their understanding of justification required both following the law and expressing faith in Christ. To that end, Paul highlighted the superiority and finality of *faith* in bringing justification. Now that faith has *come*, the law—serving as a guide—is no longer needed.

This fact is because the law has been fulfilled in

Christ (see Matthew 5:17). Because the law could do only so much, God sent His Son to fulfill the requirements of the law (see Romans 8:1-4). What the law could not accomplish, God accomplished through Jesus.

### ✠ ADVANCED COACHING ✠

If a visitor came to the Feller family farm in Iowa during the 1920s and '30s, the visitor was likely to see young Bob Feller (1918–2010) throwing a baseball with his father, Bill. While other boys were learning the family farm, Bob was under the focused tutelage of his father. As they played catch, Bob learned to be a skilled pitcher, undoubtedly set for the major leagues.

As a high schooler, Bob's fastball pitch impressed numerous scouts. Before he turned 19, Bob signed a contract to pitch for the Cleveland Indians. As a result, he left his family's farm and his father's unofficial coaching to play in the major leagues. Had he decided to stay home, would Bob have experienced baseball success? Likely not. But because of his decision, Bob found great career success as a pitcher for the Cleveland Indians.

Whether they were fully aware or not, the Galatians had outgrown following every stipulation of the law. Paul taught that the law, while holy, could not bring spiritual life. Are you seeking life by your law abidance—trying to be “good enough” by your own efforts—or are you finding life in the one who fulfills the law (see Matthew 5:17)? —M. S. K.

## IV. Unity

(GALATIANS 3:26-29)

### A. Resulting by Faith (vv. 26-27)

#### 26. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Previously, Paul had been speaking to an audience that would identify with his Jewish background, a collective “we” (see Galatians 3:23-25). Regarding knowledge and observance of the law, Paul was an expert (see Philippians 3:3-7).

Paul's *ye . . . all* included every believer in his Galatian audience, Jew or Gentile. The Judaizers' insistence on adherence to the Law of Moses was of great concern for Paul. Regardless of whether a

person followed the law, all people could be considered the *children of God*. This was a phrase first used to describe the biological descendants of Abraham, those who were given the Law of Moses (see Deuteronomy 14:1-2). However, a new era had arrived, one in which God's children were no longer marked by their observance of the law. Instead, they were marked by their expression of *faith in Christ Jesus* (see Romans 8:14-16).

#### What Do You Think?

How do children of God act in ways that make their status obvious to nonbelievers?

#### Digging Deeper

How can children of God support each other and bring about love and good works?

#### 27. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

So the Galatian Christians might demonstrate their faith in Christ, Paul reminded them that they had *been baptized into Christ*. Paul often stressed the importance of baptism for the believer. Baptism unites the believer with the death of Christ and the glory of His resurrection (Romans 6:3-7). Further, baptism brought unity and a transformation “into one body, whether . . . Jews or Gentiles, . . . into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The result of faith, demonstrated by baptism, was that Jewish and Gentile believers would become unified. To *put on Christ* implied putting to death the sinful nature and being renewed with a new nature, transformed by Christ (Romans 13:13-14; Colossians 3:5-14). The prophet Isaiah rejoiced when God “clothed me with the garments of salvation” (Isaiah 61:10). For Paul the garments of salvation were the work of Christ and the expression of faith in Him.

#### What Do You Think?

How do people identify with a sports team or a community organization when they wear those parties' logo?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps can believers take to ensure that they identify with Christ?

## B. Regardless of the Law (vv. 28-29)

**28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.**

The result of baptism into Christ is the formation of a new self in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). This resulted in unity with others also in Christ. To reinforce this reality, Paul upended notable social structures of a first-century audience.

First, Paul addressed concerns of ethnic divisions centered on the Law of Moses. Of main concern for a *Jew* was adherence to the law, most notably the law's prescriptions for circumcision. However, the law would not have been binding for a *Greek* Gentile. As a result of God's new economy of salvation, though, circumcision was no longer applicable for God's people. The identity of God's people expanded to include Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 7:19; Colossians 3:11).

Second, the structure of the Roman Empire required an economy of slavery. In the structure of God's economy of salvation, though, the servant in *bond* and the *free* person are equal; both find eternal life in Christ Jesus. Under Christ, a servant was counted as "a brother beloved" (Philemon 16).

Third, Paul's statement that there be *neither male nor female* is not meant to disregard gender distinction or address fully the varied beliefs on the roles of men and women. Given his audience, Paul was likely addressing the limitations of circumcision. Both men and women, created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), are baptized into the unified fellowship of believers.

Regardless of any differences, through faith all can become God's children (Galatians 3:26). The children of God are *one* through the peace of *Christ Jesus* (see Ephesians 2:14-18).

### What Do You Think?

How can Christians reconcile disputes that may arise due to differences in economic status, gender, or ethnicity?

### Digging Deeper

How do 1 Corinthians 12:4-27; Ephesians 2:11-22; and Colossians 3:1-17 inform your answer in this regard?

**29. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

Having confirmed the diverse yet unified nature of God's people, Paul explored the implications of this diversity. All people who express faith can *be* a part of *Christ's* body.

As a result, the promises made to Christ are applicable to all people who have faith (see Galatians 3:16). The promises made to *Abraham's seed* are fulfilled through those people in Christ as they become heirs with Him (Romans 8:17).

*Heirs according to the promise* will attain more than an earthly heir might attain (see Galatians 4:7). Being in Christ implies having full access to the promise of His blessing. Further, it means His Spirit would be present in the lives of believers (see 2 Corinthians 1:20-22).

## Conclusion

### A. Time to Grow Up

It was time for the Galatian church to mature. First, they needed to acknowledge that they were no longer under the law as the way to attain God's righteousness. They were heirs of God with full familial rights to God's promises.

Second, they needed to realize that following the Law of Moses no longer marked the children of God. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female—all could inherit God's blessing.

Is there something in which we place our faith that is other than the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Embrace Christ and live confidently as sons and daughters of God! When it comes down to it, do we stand with Paul on the bedrock that all believers are one in Christ Jesus?

### B. Prayer

Our Father, thank You that we are Your children through faith in Christ Jesus. Help us to live in the freedom we have as heirs according to the promise of Your Son. Show us how to live in unity with all of Your children. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Through Christ we are offered a life that the law could never provide.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Before class recruit two volunteers to participate in an interview concerning their family upbringing. Have each volunteer introduce themselves and describe their family of origin. Then ask the following questions: 1—What were some ways your family expressed its identity? 2—Was there a time when you felt unworthy to be part of your family? 3—As a child, were there any promises made to you by your family? 4—What steps did you take to claim those promises?

Allow 10 minutes for the interview. Then lead to Bible study by saying, “Today’s lesson will explore the nature of God’s family and the reasons we can rejoice as God’s own sons and daughters.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups and assign the associated Scripture text: **Added Group (Galatians 3:18-20) / Promised Group (Galatians 3:21-22) / Revealed Group (Galatians 3:23-25)**. At the top of the board, write, “Why the law fails to save.” Then say, “In today’s Scripture Paul explained the law’s limitations for salvation. However, Paul highlighted another, better way.”

Give each group a sheet of paper on which they can answer the following questions, based on their assigned verses: 1—How does Paul describe the limitations of the Law of Moses? 2—Using what imagery, if any at all, does Paul describe these limitations? 3—Through what steps has God fulfilled the law through Christ Jesus? 4—Why is faith in Christ not only better, but necessary for salvation?

After no more than 10 minutes, have a representative from each group read aloud the group’s assigned Scripture text and explain the group’s answers in whole-class discussion.

*Option.* Divide the class into three groups. To each group distribute copies of the “What About Baptism?” exercise on the activity page, which you can download. Have groups complete the activity

as indicated. Ask a volunteer from each group to share their final definition.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 3:26-29. Using the same groups as the previous exercise, distribute a list of believers (you prepare) with the following descriptors:

**Added Group:** a recovering drug addict, a teenager, a person whose native language is not English

**Promised Group:** a single parent, a paroled criminal, an affluent business owner

**Revealed Group:** a senior citizen, a person from an ethnic minority, a college student

Have each group answer the following questions about each individual described on the list: 1—How might this person struggle to feel united in our church congregation? 2—What steps can we take to ensure that this person might be united with other believers?

After no more than 10 minutes, have groups share their insights for how children of God can live unitedly.

## Into Life

On the board write, “God has promised \_\_\_\_\_.” Encourage learners to work in small groups to determine possible answers to fill in the blank. After five minutes, ask a representative from each group to offer an answer.

After each group has answered, write, “What promises have been given to us by God as His heirs and children?” Allow no more than five minutes for whole-class responses. As volunteers share their responses, point out the differences between God’s timeless promises made to all His heirs and promises that are applicable only generally.

*Option:* Distribute copies of the “Adopted to a New Life” exercise on the activity page as a take-home. As a motive to complete it, state that you will begin the next class session by reviewing volunteers’ results.

# FREEDOM, LOVE, AND FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: Galatians 5:1-15  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:1-15

## GALATIANS 5:1-15

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty where-with Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

8 This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

10 I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

12 I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.



## KEY TEXT

*All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

—Galatians 5:14

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 3: Liberating Letters

LESSONS 9–13

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. Identify the key tenets of a life free in Christ.
2. Explain the connections between the law, faith, and love.
3. Plan one way to serve his or her neighbors as a practice of living a life of freedom in Christ.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Spiritual Parenting
  - B. Lesson Context
- I. Fight for Freedom (Galatians 5:1)
    - A. Accomplished by Christ (v. 1a)
    - B. Abandoning the Yoke (v. 1b)
  - II. Searching for Freedom (Galatians 5:2-6)
    - A. Looking to Law (vv. 2-4)  
*Fully Binding Agreements*
    - B. Looking to Love (vv. 5-6)
  - III. Obstacles to Freedom (Galatians 5:7-12)
    - A. Persuasion (vv. 7-10)
    - B. Persecution (vv. 11-12)  
*Offensive!*
  - IV. Paradox of Freedom (Galatians 5:13-15)
    - A. Denying the Flesh (v. 13)
    - B. Fulfilling the Law (vv. 14-15)

#### Conclusion

- A. They Will Know Us by Our Love
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Spiritual Parenting

Teaching a child to seek good for others remains a difficult part of parenting. A child's behavior highlights the intrinsic selfish nature of humanity. A child may fight over toys, demand the last cookie, or balk at household chores. Parenting involves more than telling scriptural truths; it also involves modeling ethical behavior for children.

Yet even mature adults have trouble overcoming selfish practices. Adults are often no better than children regarding love for others. The churches in Galatia were wrestling with the tension of personal freedom and what was required of them as God's children. Divisions had been formed; Paul, like an attentive father, offered a new perspective on the nature of law, liberty, and love.

### B. Lesson Context

Today's Scripture text marks a transition in Paul's teaching to the Galatian Christians. To this point, Paul defended the nature of his ministry (Galatians 1:9-11) and offered a new understanding on the nature of the law (3:21-22), especially for God's children (3:26-29).

Among the Galatians were individuals who required Gentile believers' adherence to Jewish religious customs and practices. Paul called out these Judaizers for compelling "Gentiles to live as do the Jews" (Galatians 2:14). Judaizers emphasized faithfulness to the old covenant—the Law of Moses—for salvation. They taught that Gentiles should show faithfulness to the works of the law to find salvation (Galatians 1:6; see Acts 15:1-5). The most visible way such faithfulness could be shown was by the act of circumcision (see Genesis 17:7-14). What resulted among the Galatians was a tension between the works of the law and expressions of faith (Galatians 3:1-14).

Prior to today's Scripture text, Paul refers to the story of Abraham's wives, Hagar and Sarah (Galatians 4:21-23; see Genesis 16:15; 17:16-21; 21:2). Paul retells the birth narratives of Isaac (by Sarah) and Ishmael (by Hagar). One might assume that Paul would connect the physical descendants of Isaac and Ishmael to that of Jews and non-Jews,

respectively. However, Paul relates the spiritual descendants of Isaac to individuals in freedom from the old covenant, children of God's promises (Galatians 4:28). By contrast, Paul describes the spiritual descendants of Ishmael as those in bondage to the old covenant, never to experience the inheritance of God's children (4:30). The retelling made Paul's point clear: through faith, not law adherence, is God's blessing inherited.

## I. Fight for Freedom

(GALATIANS 5:1)

### A. Accomplished by Christ (v. 1a)

#### 1a. Stand fast therefore in the liberty where with Christ hath made us free.

Paul's previous discussion—concerning liberty and inheritance (Galatians 4:21-31)—has come to its fulfillment. Paul reminded his audience to *stand fast therefore* in light of that *liberty*. Paul's retelling of the story of Sarah and Hagar served to show that individuals who express faith in Christ—whether they be Jew or Gentile—live in liberty (4:31; see Lesson Context).

Liberty in this regard was the result of a believer's life made new in *Christ*. But liberty is not without cost. That Christ *made* believers *free* indicated the cost: He “gave himself” for humanity's sins (Galatians 1:4; 2:20), becoming “a curse for us” as He “hangeth on a tree” (3:13; see Acts 5:30-31).

### B. Abandoning the Yoke (v. 1b)

#### 1b. And be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Throughout the letter, Paul emphasized the limitations of the Law of Moses as it related to the children of God (Galatians 2:16-20; 3:10-14, 19-26). Paul's directive to avoid *again* becoming *entangled* in this regard was due to the teachings of the Judaizers (see Lesson Context).

That Paul described the law as a *yoke* high-

lighted the law's demands, especially those placed on Galatian Gentiles (Acts 15:10). A yoke indicated the submission of a weaker power to a stronger power (see Genesis 27:40; Leviticus 26:13; Isaiah 9:4; 1 Timothy 6:1).

God desired that His people live freely (Colossians 2:16-23), following Jesus' reminder that “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). Believers are to be burdened by the needs of others (see Galatians 6:2).

#### What Do You Think?

What steps can believers take so they don't become entangled by sin?

#### Digging Deeper

How might the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18) provide an effective response to sin's entanglement?

## II. Searching for Freedom

(GALATIANS 5:2-6)

### A. Looking to Law (vv. 2-4)

#### 2. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

In at least one other letter, Paul dictated the letter's contents to an amanuensis. This individual wrote down Paul's dictated words (see Romans 16:22). It is unknown whether the letter to the Galatians was composed in the same manner (compare Galatians 6:11). If it was, we can imagine Paul taking over the pen or quill in an effort to stress the importance of the point at hand. The Galatians might have noticed a change of handwriting when they read *behold, I . . . say*.

The present tense of *if ye be* indicated that some Galatians had not yet been *circumcised*, but they were considering it because of the Judaizers' influence. To that end, Paul warned that their outward practices—circumcision and uncircumcision—were considered *nothing* of value (see 1 Corinthians 7:18-19). Neither practice automatically allowed a person to experience God's promises (see Galatians 3:26-29; 4:28).

When a person depended on the works of the law—including circumcision—for their salvation, that act served to “frustrate the grace of God”

## HOW TO SAY IT

amanuensis	uh-man-yoo-en-sis.
Hagar	Hay-gar.
Judaizers	Joo-duh-ize-ers.

# Love your neighbor.

## Galatians 5:14



Visual for Lesson 12. As the class discusses Galatians 5:14, ask them how they might follow this command. In closing, pray for opportunities to do so.

(Galatians 2:21). Paul desired that a person show faith in *Christ*, not righteousness by the law. If the Galatians accepted the requirements of circumcision as mandatory for salvation, Christ's work in freeing people from the curse of the law, sin, and death would provide them no *profit*.

While Paul warned of circumcision to the Galatians, elsewhere he asked Timothy to undergo the practice (Acts 16:1-3). Because of Timothy's Jewish heritage, Paul wanted to remove all possible distractions to their proclamation of the gospel message. (See Galatians 2:1-3 for an example of the opposite scenario.)

**3. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.**

If the Galatian believers were to be *circumcised*, then they would be required to follow the entirety of the Law of Moses. It was not as though they could pick and choose which parts of the law to observe. They would become like a *debtor*, giving their life to *the whole law*. Obedience to the law was an all-or-nothing requirement! If people disobeyed the law at one point, they were guilty of disobeying the whole law (Romans 2:25).

**4. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.**

Paul reiterates a previous point: A person cannot be *justified* by both *Christ* and *the law* (see Galatians 5:2-4). Only faith can bring justification (Romans 3:28).

The phrase *fallen from grace* served as a warning: the Galatians' acceptance as children of God was entirely dependent on God's grace. Any attempts to find justification in the law would be equivalent to falling out of grace's realm.

### ✧ FULLY BINDING AGREEMENTS ✧

If you've ever downloaded a smartphone application or computer software, you've seen (and perhaps ignored) the lengthy End User's License Agreement (EULA). Developers require users to accept the agreement before using the application or software. The text of these agreements is often indecipherable for the average person. As a result, many people fail to read the whole agreement, and they bind themselves (and their device) to the agreement's intricacies. There is no way to opt out of parts of the EULA—acceptance is all or nothing!

Paul reminded the Galatians that trusting in their adherence to the law for salvation was not a matter of preference. If they followed one aspect of the law for salvation (like circumcision), they were bound to the entirety of the law. Even though the law was from God, no one could obey it entirely.

However, God now invites people to accept the terms, conditions, and benefits of a new covenant. If you have not accepted this agreement, why not? If you have, how will you live in light of God's eternal terms and conditions to gain the benefit?  
—M. S. K.

### B. Looking to Love (vv. 5-6)

**5. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.**

The identifier *we* introduces a direct contrast to the “ye . . . fallen from grace” of the previous verse. Paul included himself among those who based their *hope* on justification apart from the law. Their hope was instead based on *faith* and *the Spirit*.

The concept of justification refers to believers being declared, or counted, righteous before God as their sins are forgiven. The concept has roots in the judicial system—as a judge might declare a person righteous or condemned (see Deuteronomy 25:1). Some people argued that justification could only come about through following the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1-5).

However, Paul opposed that perspective (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16). Instead, he taught that *righteousness*—for both Jew and Gentile—was attained only through faith in Christ (Romans 3:30; 5:1; compare John 14:6). By a person’s faith, God would declare them righteous (Romans 4:5; Philippians 3:8-9).

While justification is a one-time occurrence, believers have hope that the Holy Spirit will transform and sanctify the justified (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Timothy 1:7-11; Titus 3:5). This transformation begins when a believer is justified (1 Corinthians 6:11) and progresses until the end of our time on earth (see Ephesians 4:22-24; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 10:14).

#### What Do You Think?

How can believers wait for the fullness of God’s righteousness in the midst of daily life?

#### Digging Deeper

Whose support will you invite so that waiting can become a daily, proactive practice?

### 6. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Because Paul had already expressed the failures of *circumcision*, some Galatians might have highlighted their own *uncircumcision*. Paul reminded them that *neither . . . availeth any thing* regarding God’s righteousness. By highlighting the limitations of both, Paul reinforced that “there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (see lesson 11 on Galatians 3:28; compare Galatians 6:15).

Instead, what counted was a person’s faith in *Jesus Christ* (see Galatians 2:16; 3:11-12, 23-25). This *faith* is not passive; it is not mere believing or hoping. Instead, faith has an active component *which worketh* in the lives of those who express it.

This outward expression is demonstrated *by love*—a love rooted in God’s love (1 John 4:19). The element of love highlights faith’s superiority over the law. Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8, 10; see Matthew 22:38-40). And as a result, it was the crux of the law (see commentary on Galatians 5:14, below).

## III. Obstacles to Freedom

(GALATIANS 5:7-12)

### A. Persuasion (vv. 7-10)

#### 7. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

The metaphor of running a race is common in Paul’s writings (see 1 Corinthians 9:24-25; Philippians 2:16). The metaphor described the Galatians’ pursuit of Paul’s teaching (see Galatians 1:11; 2:2). They had started the race *well*; they had followed what he taught! But Judaizers, teaching a different message, obstructed the Galatians’ obedience. That Paul asked *who did hinder you* was likely a rhetorical question; he knew the Galatians’ situation. He wanted them to recognize the problem in their midst (compare 3:1).

#### 8. This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

Paul called the *persuasion* of the Galatian Judaizers “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6), which would “pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:7). Their message distracted other Galatians from following the gospel *that calleth* them to faith, obedience, and love.

#### 9. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

This verse could be a part an ancient proverb familiar to many of Paul’s audiences (compare 1 Corinthians 5:6). The proverb described the effect *a little leaven* would have on *the whole lump* of dough. The New Testament uses the word *leaven* figuratively elsewhere (example: Matthew 16:6-12). To Paul, the teachings of another “gospel” served as leaven among the Galatian believers. As they allowed a little of opposing persuasive teaching to take hold, specifically the alleged need for circumcision, the rest of the false teachings would take hold. The result would be division among the Galatians.

#### What Do You Think?

What small acts can serve as a negative influence on the lives of Christians?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps can Christians take to positively influence unbelievers for the advancement of God’s kingdom (see Matthew 13:31-35)?

**10. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.**

Against the influence of the other teachings, Paul had *confidence* in the Galatians' mindset toward faith. The resulting positive reinforcement served to motivate the Galatians, like a parent encouraging a child. Paul hoped they would not become *otherwise minded* away from the gospel of Christ Jesus. The individual teacher (*he that troubleth*) who taught a different gospel than Paul's would face God's *judgment* and be considered cursed (Galatians 1:8-9).

### B. Persecution (vv. 11-12)

**11. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.**

Without further contextual clues, we are left to assume that the Judaizers claimed Paul had continued to *preach circumcision*. Perhaps their claims were based on Paul's former zeal in Judaism (Galatians 1:13-17), or his seemingly casual approach toward the issue (see 5:6).

Before his conversion, Paul had used *persecution* against followers of Christ (see Acts 9:4-5; 22:4; 26:11; 1 Corinthians 15:9; etc.). However, Paul was now the one to *suffer* the hardships he caused others to experience (compare 2 Corinthians 11:24-27).

This is not the only time when Paul wrote on *the offence of the cross*. For messianic expectations, a crucified Messiah was "a stumblingblock" (1 Corinthians 1:23). To the Judaizers, salvation without the merit of the law was equally as offensive.

### ✠ OFFENSIVE! ✠

While I pursued my graduate degree, my family and I lived in Cambridge, England. On my way home from my studies, I would walk through the Cambridge central square. Street performers known as buskers would usually fill the square. One day a certain busker played a bagpipe. The instrument's drone could be heard from many blocks away. While the performer's skill was evident, I preferred hearing bagpipes from a distance. Apparently, I was not the only person with this

preference. Others complained; the bagpipes were displeasing and offensive to their ears!

In Paul's day, a cross used for crucifixion was an offensive image. It served as a reminder of the shame of a criminal's execution. Advocates of the Law of Moses could not imagine a crucified Messiah. In this sense, the cross was a blatant offense!

However, through Christ's death on a cross and His resurrection, new life by faith was possible. Have you embraced fully the new life brought through the offense of the cross? —M. S. K.

**12. I would they were even cut off which trouble you.**

The crescendo of Paul's defense hit an unexpected (and graphic) climax. Regarding the teacher(s) who had been pushing for circumcision, Paul wished *they* would *cut* themselves *off*. While this could mean Paul wished their teaching would be cut off, more likely he was referring to a literal cutting off part of one's body! Pagan sects and empires of antiquity sometimes required emasculation, or castration, of certain followers or captives (see 2 Kings 20:18; Matthew 19:12; Acts 8:27). Paul seems to say sarcastically that if the Judaizers are so impressed with circumcision, then they should go even further (see also Philippians 3:2-4).

## IV. Paradox of Freedom

(GALATIANS 5:13-15)

### A. Denying the Flesh (v. 13)

**13a. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty.**

Paul's Galatian *brethren*—believers who expressed faith—were *called* from the yoke of the law's demands. They were henceforth to live *unto* the *liberty* that Christ had given. The Lord had worked in the Galatians, and the time had come for them to move forward in His Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 3:17)!

**13b. Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.**

But Paul extended a caution. The word *flesh* describes human nature that acts in sinful ways contrary to God's Spirit (Romans 8:1-12; Galatians 6:8; Ephesians 2:3). *Liberty* is not an *occa-*

sion for believers to indulge their personal desires, especially sinful ones. In short, liberty does not mean license.

Christian liberty requires outward-facing action, dealing with a believer's treatment of other people. The remedy for living under the flesh is to *serve* others in *love*. As the Spirit brings liberty, a believer is required to use that liberty responsibly, concerned for the good of others (see Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7).

If Paul had desired an example of this teaching, he could have referred to the life and ministry of Jesus (see Mark 10:45; John 13:4-16, 34-35; Philippians 2:3-8). Further, Paul's own life and ministry was an application of this verse (see 1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

#### What Do You Think?

How might an inaccurate understanding of freedom hinder a Christian's witness?

#### Digging Deeper

How, if at all, does 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 inform your answer?

### B. Fulfilling the Law (vv. 14-15)

**14. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.**

Paul was likely referring to *the law* of Moses and *all* that it required. The law's teachings did not culminate in customs and rituals like circumcision. Instead, the law was *fulfilled* and found complete through a person's overt concern for others (Romans 13:10).

Paul continued in the tradition of Jesus' ethical teaching, reminding believers of the importance of *love* for *neighbour* (see Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-28). Both Jesus and Paul expanded on the law's teaching, applying it broadly (see Leviticus 19:18). God is most loved when His children show love toward others (compare Romans 13:8; 1 John 4:19-21).

**15. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.**

A tense conflict might lead a person to say or

act in a manner that serves to *bite and devour* other people, like the actions of a predator toward a weaker animal. If believers are not filled with love (see Galatians 5:14, above), their actions may tear others down.

If the Galatians attacked one another, the result would be mutually assured destruction. They would be *consumed* by fleshly desires.

#### What Do You Think?

How might a Christian's response to unfair treatment give testimony to the Spirit?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to prevent conflict with a person who you find difficult to love?

## Conclusion

### A. They Will Know Us by Our Love

As Peter Scholtes (1938–2009) directed his South Side Chicago youth choir in the 1960s, he wanted a song that would unite the varied experiences of his church's youth group. After a day of work, Scholtes composed "They'll Know We Are Christians." The song, now made popular in numerous hymnals, reflected the sentiment of Jesus' teaching that "all men [will] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

While believers might be free from the demands of the law, Paul taught the Galatians that such freedom requires active love for others. Showing this love is the litmus test for a believer's love for God. Self-examination regarding love is prudent for followers of Jesus. Does anything prevent or distract from your expression of love to God and others? Might your own definition of freedom stand in the way of love?

### B. Prayer

Our Father, thank You for the freedom You have given us because of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us use that freedom to express neighborly love to all people that we encounter. Focus our hearts to love as You have loved us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Christian liberty always seeks the good of others.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

Have the following displayed on the board, and ask for responses as learners arrive:

*What are some ways a person might use their freedom for their own good or the good of others?*

Jot responses on the board. You may need to come with your own examples to encourage thought. Some examples might include: an athlete (using her freedom to train and practice for their own athletic successes), a musician (using his freedom to perform for the enjoyment of others), or a parent (using her freedom to provide for their children's well-being).

Lead into Bible study by saying, "For several weeks now we've been talking about different kinds of freedom. Today we will look at how people are to use their freedom."

## Into the Word

Announce a Bible-marking activity. Provide copies of Galatians 5:1-15 for those who do not want to write in their own Bibles. Provide handouts (you create) with these instructions:

- 1—Underline everything Paul said about liberty.
- 2—Put an asterisk beside everything Paul said about the law.
- 3—Put a heart beside everything Paul said about love.
- 4—Put an exclamation point beside everything Paul said about faith.

Read the Scripture aloud (or ask volunteers to do so) slowly 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 four equal groups for class discussion. Provide each group a handout with the following questions: 1—How does Paul define liberty? 2—How are law and faith related? 3—How are the law,

faith, and love related? 4—How are faith, liberty, and love related? Have groups discuss the questions, based on their observations from the Bible-marking activity.

After 10 minutes, have a representative from each group answer one of the questions, until all the questions have been answered. Finally, ask for volunteers to share what they find especially helpful and challenging from the text.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the "Love Your Neighbor" activity from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners divide into pairs and complete the activity as indicated.

## Into Life

Write at the top of the board, "Free to Love." Ask the class, "How can a Christian use their freedom to love and serve others?" Jot down answers on the board. You may need to come with your own examples to encourage thought. Some examples might include: loving a person recovering from addiction through sponsorship or loving church members through works of benevolence.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 5:13-14. Divide the class into pairs and have each pair make a list of possible "neighbors." (These can include friends, coworkers, or literal next-door neighbors.) Have the pairs write down ways to use their freedom in Christ to serve and love each neighbor in the coming week. Allow no more than five minutes for pairs to complete the task. Without giving away the identity of the neighbor, have each pair give an example of how they might serve and love neighbors. Discuss how a Christian's freedom provides the opportunity to show love and service.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the "Who's My Neighbor?" exercise from the activity page. Encourage everyone to complete the activity at home, as directed, and be prepared to share their experiences with the class at the start of next week's time together.

# THE FRUIT OF FREEDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING: Galatians 5:16-26  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:16-26

## GALATIANS 5:16-26

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.



## KEY TEXT

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.* —Galatians 5:25

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 3: Liberating Letters

LESSONS 9–13

### LESSON AIMS

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

1. List characteristics of life in the flesh and life in the Spirit.
2. Explain how elements of “fruit of the Spirit” and “works of the flesh” can be rank-ordered as to importance or why such an attempt should not be made.
3. Identify a sinful tendency most besetting and commit to developing one specific fruit of the Spirit to counteract it.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Familiar Narrative
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Stating the Sides (Galatians 5:16-18)

- A. Spirit and Flesh (vv. 16-17)
- B. Spirit and Law (v. 18)

#### II. Chasing the Flesh (Galatians 5:19-21)

- A. Acts (vv. 19-21a)  
*Obsession and Discipline*
- B. Warning (v. 21b)

#### III. Showing the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26)

- A. Fruit (vv. 22-23)  
*Unsociable Media*
- B. Expectations (vv. 24-26)

#### Conclusion

- A. Narrative Conflict
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Familiar Narrative

Any great story—word or film—will include components of plot development and narrative flow. These components include the beginning, rising action or conflict, a climax, falling action or conflict, and the conclusion.

Yet narrative flow is not enough to hold a story. Gripping stories have engaging, almost lifelike, characters. When conflict exists between such characters, the story’s narrative builds toward its breathtaking climax.

A story’s narrative conflict and climax usually reflect an inner turmoil we can identify with. Paul understood that his readers experienced spiritual turmoil. In what serves as the dramatic climax (but not the end) of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, the conflict between Spirit and flesh comes to a head.

### B. Lesson Context

Central to Paul’s argument in this lesson is the nature of “the flesh.” However, the nature and implications of the flesh are not static in the New Testament. Even the dozens of uses of the word in Paul’s writings indicate slight differences and nuances. To claim a singular understanding of “Paul’s view of the flesh” would be mistaken.

Paul uses the word to speak of physical matter of living creatures generally (1 Corinthians 15:39) and the human body specifically (6:16). In other instances, flesh is regarded negatively. Paul referred to it in the context of circumcision (Galatians 6:12; Philippians 3:3), rebellious human nature and desires (Romans 8:3-12; Ephesians 2:3), and temporal lineage in contrast to an eternal one (Romans 4:1; Galatians 4:23, 29).

As used in today’s Scripture text, flesh refers to the carnal, unredeemed self and its rebellious nature and desires (see Romans 13:13-14). In order for believers to live fully as children of God, the ways of the flesh must die (see Galatians 2:19-21).

The entire epistle to the Galatians has been building to this lesson’s Scripture text. With a proper understanding of God’s law and promises (Galatians 3:1-22) and true freedom in God’s Spirit (4:21–5:14), Paul puts all the pieces together.

## I. Stating the Sides

(GALATIANS 5:16-18)

### A. Spirit and Flesh (vv. 16-17)

**16. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.**

Paul envisioned one option for the Galatian believers: to *walk in the Spirit* of God. By using a metaphor, Paul described the kind of life required of disciples as a walk (see Romans 13:13; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 2:6-7). The metaphor referred to the ways first-century students might follow in the steps of their rabbis (teachers of the Jewish law). As students did so, they would listen to the teaching and allow it to change their hearts and minds. If the Galatians followed Paul's exhortation, their whole way of life would change.

As the Galatians walked in God's Spirit, they would avoid defilement that comes from a heart out of tune with the Spirit. This would consist of *the lust of the flesh* (see Mark 7:18-23; 1 John 2:16). Paul did not suggest that the Galatian believers should invite the Spirit of God into their already established way of life. Rather, he wanted them to allow the Spirit to determine their motivations and behaviors (see Galatians 5:25, below).

#### What Do You Think?

How can Christians measure whether they're living in the direction of God's Spirit?

#### Digging Deeper

How will you follow another's example of a Spirit-filled walk in the coming weeks?

**17a. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.**

The way of *the flesh* desires that the working of *the Spirit* in a believer's life would be thwarted. That Paul described this as *lusteth against* alludes to the sinful acts of coveting (see Romans 7:7; 13:9) and lust (Matthew 5:28). Acts of the flesh involve more than these two sins, but all acts of the flesh imply the flesh's sinful desires.

The conflict between the flesh and Spirit was evident to Paul. The desires of the flesh lead to death, but the desires of the Spirit lead to life (Romans 8:5-8). In other letters, Paul described this conflict

as being between the old, sinful self and the new, righteous self (Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:9-10). Without the presence of God's Spirit working *against the flesh*, a person will act in sinful and self-ish ways (see Galatians 5:19-21, below).

**17b. And these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.**

A person cannot at the same time embrace fully the ways the flesh and the ways of the Spirit. Their ways *are contrary . . . to the other*. As a result, a believer—while filled with God's Spirit—may experience a spiritual frustration (see Romans 7:17-25). God's Spirit has already provided a way out: freedom from the ways of the flesh (8:10-11, 16).

In this sense, the battle has been won and believers are to follow the Spirit (see Galatians 5:25, below). Therefore Paul's conclusion is clear: believers are not to *do the things* that the flesh desires. Instead, believers follow the Spirit's way of life.

#### What Do You Think?

How can Galatians 6:1-5 assist a believer's battle against the desires of the flesh?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to "bear . . . one another's burdens" with a "spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1-2)?

### B. Spirit and Law (v. 18)

**18. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.**

Paul introduced a new point of conflict between *the Spirit* and *the law*. Given the context of the epistle (see Lesson Context, lesson 11), Paul was likely speaking of the demands of the Law of Moses.

Paul previously connected the demands of the law and the ways of the flesh (Galatians 3:2-5). He had reminded the Galatians of their freedom from the law. As a result, they were no longer "under the curse" (3:10) nor "kept under the law" (3:23). As they followed the Spirit's leading, they would not experience the bondage of the flesh and the law (5:1).

Paul's exhortation was the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Jeremiah. God's people would

## Are you in step with the Spirit?



Visual for Lesson 13. *Have this visual on display as you pose the discussion question that is associated with Galatians 5:22.*

be marked by their following of God's law on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). This promise took hold through a life committed to be in tune "with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

## II. Chasing the Flesh

(GALATIANS 5:19-21)

### A. Acts (vv. 19-21a)

**19. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.**

To provide examples of how *the flesh* might be made *manifest* in people, Paul gave further examples of these kinds of *works*. What follows are lists of vices (Galatians 5:19-21a) and virtues (5:22-23). Such lists were never intended to be an exhaustive catalog for the readers but were representative (compare Roman 1:29-31; Colossians 3:5-9).

Indulgent and self-gratifying sexual acts with another person outside of a marriage relationship make up *adultery* and *fornication* (see 1 Corinthians 5:1). In addition to hurting others, these acts harm the guilty person (6:18). *Uncleanness* results from improper sexual acts. This term was also used in conjunction with purity codes of the Law of Moses (Leviticus 5:3; 7:21; etc.). God desires that His people acknowledge the holiness of their bodies and act accordingly (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Extravagant sexual vice, uncontrolled and

shameless, is *lasciviousness*. The term implies lack of self-control, even to the point of shocking others without regard for decency (see Ephesians 4:19).

### ✻ OBSESSION AND DISCIPLINE ✻

With a few quick clicks of the mouse, the internet has made pornography accessible (and frequently, unsolicited) for people. Even church-going people also admit to viewing pornography. All society seems saturated with sexuality.

Paul's cultural context was also obsessed with sexuality. Sites of pagan worship, such as temples to the goddess Aphrodite, utilized practices of sexual exploitation. Religious festivals frequently encouraged public and graphic expressions of sex.

Paul called Christians to a life of self-discipline, contrary to the ways of their culture. Indiscipline and excessiveness were not suitable for a life in God's Spirit. Invite the Spirit to develop in you an attitude of self-discipline, even more than what you might expect (see Matthew 5:28)! —M. S. K.

### 20a. Idolatry, witchcraft.

Paul's second grouping concerned idolatrous acts of worship. *Idolatry* involves replacing worship of the one true God. In essence, this act exchanged God for a lie (see Exodus 20:3-6; Leviticus 19:4; Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:14; Romans 1:25).

Modern audiences need not think of idolatry strictly in terms of acts of worship to physical images. Rather, idolatry should be considered in terms of what diverts peoples' attention, effort, and resources away from the desires of God (see Isaiah 2:8; Jeremiah 1:16; Micah 5:12-13; Acts 17:29).

*Witchcraft* is the attempt to use physical objects and rituals to manipulate the spiritual world. Examples would include ancient pagan practices of magic, incantations, and drug use.

**20b. Hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies.**

Paul's final grouping concerns a person's treatment of others. *Hatred* refers to a spirit of hostility toward another person, God, or both. *Variance* is a general description for the feelings of hostility among people—quarreling and disharmony

(see 1 Corinthians 1:11; 3:3). *Emulations* speak to the jealous passions that may arise from seeing the success of another person. *Wrath* is a strong burst of anger stemming from an impetuous mindset. *Strife* results when hostile groups advance their own interests. These kinds of acts are the opposite of the self-giving love initiated by God's Spirit. *Seditious* continue interpersonal strife to the point of causing division (see Romans 16:17-18). *Heresies* point to false beliefs that lead to destructive differences within the community.

### 21a. Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.

*Envyings* continue the trend of selfishness that is at odds with the good of others. These acts result in disagreement and conflict. *Murders* are the ultimate deprivation of the good of others—life itself!

Paul ends the list of vices by describing two public displays of overindulgence and self-destruction. *Drunkenness*—intoxication from alcohol—harms the body and clouds a person's mind. A drunk person might lose control of his or her better judgment and participate in *revellings*. These are public displays of indulgence, gluttony, and immorality (see Romans 13:13; 1 Peter 4:3). The underlying Greek text reflects the name of the mythical Greek god Comus, the god of festivities. The Roman festival Bacchanalia was observed in honor of the gods and celebrated through rampant drunkenness and sexual immorality.

That the vice list concludes with *such like* confirms that Paul had not compiled a comprehensive list. Rather, he wanted to highlight specific works of the flesh applicable to the Galatians.

### B. Warning (v. 21b)

#### 21b. Of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The first two phrases of this partial verse indicate that this was not the first time Paul had taught the Galatians concerning these topics. Perhaps he had instructed their behavior during his initial encounter with them on a missionary journey (Galatians 1:9; see Acts 13:4–14:28; 16:1-3).

To those people who *do such things*, the listed

vices of the flesh, a strong warning is evident. People gain their eternal inheritance of life through faith, not ethical behavior (Galatians 3:11-12, 18). But right behavior serves as an indication of the presence of God's Spirit. People who fail to act in accordance with the Spirit *shall not inherit the kingdom of God*.

Occasional failure to live in this regard was not Paul's concern. He was concerned with individuals who mock God's Spirit as they continually live in the flesh (Galatians 6:7-9). Persistent disregard for the Spirit indicates that transforming faith is not present. A life led by the Spirit will not continue the status quo of living apart from God's path.

#### What Do You Think?

In what ways is the kingdom of God already established, but not yet fully realized?

#### Digging Deeper

How do Mark 1:14-15; 4:26-32; 10:13-15; Luke 11:2-4; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, 50-54; and Revelation 11:15-19 inform your answer?

## III. Showing the Spirit

(GALATIANS 5:22-26)

### A. Fruit (vv. 22-23)

#### 22a. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.

Having given his list of vices, Paul now provides an in-depth listing of virtues appropriate to the life of a Spirit-filled believer. Greco-Roman philosophers created virtue lists based on the cardinal values of their culture. However, Paul's virtue list had a different basis: love for others indicative of the presence of God's *Spirit* (Galatians 5:13-16).

Paul described the Spirit-filled life in agricultural terms, calling the attributes of such a life *fruit* (compare his other "fruit" thoughts in Ephesians 5:9; Philippians 1:11, 22; see John 15:1-17). The metaphor alludes to the Spirit's role in producing this harvest—a shift from human striving to the Spirit's supplying. Only through submission to God's Spirit will these fruits be evident in a believer's life (see Matthew 7:16-20).

This list of spiritual fruit begins with the greatest of all Christian virtues: *love* (1 Corinthians 13:13).

This love is different from the feelings of affection between friends, family members, or romantic partners. This kind of love demonstrates itself by sacrificial self-giving (see John 15:13; Romans 5:8). The entire law was fulfilled by this love (Galatians 5:13-14; compare Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43-45a). The destructive ways of the flesh are neutralized by radical, self-giving love.

A Spirit-filled sense of *joy* does not depend on circumstances. Rather, this joy remains steadfast and prevalent during difficult situations (see 2 Corinthians 8:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Hebrews 10:34; James 1:2-3).

Spirit-filled *peace* does not imply the absence of distress. Rather, peace finds its basis in the conviction of God's all-sufficiency. Believers demonstrate peace as they work toward taking part in God's restoration of the world. This begins with the restoration of the relationships within the church (compare 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Corinthians 13:11).

### **22b. Longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.**

The next grouping of spiritual fruit describes a person's attitude toward others. *Longsuffering* expresses patient treatment of others, even in response to wrongful treatment.

*Gentleness* speaks of a person's loving disposition toward others. People can show this temperament because God's actions toward humanity provide the ultimate example (see Romans 2:4).

*Goodness* is an attribute that marks the collective people of God (see Romans 15:14). The concept might imply a willingness to do good for others by acts of radical generosity (see Matthew 20:1-16).

Such fruit addressed the difficult work of building right relationships among believers and establishing appropriate witness to unbelievers (Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:12). That Paul's teaching emphasized this work was because of factions that had formed among the churches of Galatia (see Galatians 1:6-9). Therefore, formation by the Holy Spirit was required for the Galatians to become one in Christ.

Because of the immediate context—the working of the Spirit—this usage of *faith* does not refer to saving faith in Christ Jesus. Rather, it refers to

the faithfulness required between believers (see Galatians 4:12-16; compare Philemon 5).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How are the Spirit's gifts (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11) similar to the Spirit's fruit? How are they different?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How is love the means for applying the Spirit's gifts and fruit (see 1 Corinthians 13)?

### ✂ UNSOCIABLE MEDIA ✂

Many positive interactions have resulted from social media. However, social media's power has also contributed to the spread of division and hate. The perpetrator of a 2019 shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, spread his radical ideologies through a platform that allowed the gunman to easily (and anonymously) broadcast his ideas.

Shocking cases like this are easy to identify. However, have you seen or engaged in lesser (but still dangerous) forms of contention and strife while online? Scrolling through any social media platform will highlight name-calling, attacks, and harassment. While these may seem innocent and a way to let off steam, why should Christ followers engage with or encourage such behavior?

Paul's antidote to strife is love, a feeling of overt concern for others' good. This feeling applies even to people with whom we have a disagreement. Love presents itself as believers are filled with peace, joy, and patience. Hateful rhetoric springs from a heart out of tune with God's Spirit. Objectively, are your comments and "likes" on social media more like "hates"? —M. S. K.

### **23. Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.**

While the previous grouping of fruit focused on a person's treatment of others, the final grouping concerns a person's demeanor. *Meekness* implies self-restraint, even in the midst of a disagreement (see 2 Timothy 2:25; 1 Peter 3:15-16). Paul would encourage the Galatians to put this fruit into practice as they worked to restore their community (see Galatians 6:1). When the fruit of *temperance*

(self-control) is present in a believer's life, desires and passions do not rule that person.

## B. Expectations (vv. 24-26)

### 24. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Christians are not to be passive while bearing the Spirit's fruit. While the Spirit has a role in the growth of the fruit, the Christian must end anything that might hinder the growing conditions of the fruit. This requires that Christians put to death selfish desires (see Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5).

Paul's imagery unites Jesus' followers with His experience on the cross. Following Jesus and expressing faith in Him requires believers to *have crucified* the desires and ways of *the flesh*. Doing so does not require that believers experience physical crucifixion. Rather, the language reminds believers to put to death sinful practices so that new life might be found (Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 2:20). Paul wanted the Galatians to live not for themselves, but for the one who died for them (2 Corinthians 5:15). As we live in the Spirit, we avoid all sinful tendencies, including *the affections* and "fleshly *lusts*, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

### 25. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Considering Paul's similar imperative in Galatians 5:16 (above), this statement serves as the bookend to this section of the letter. By including himself in the subject (*we . . . us*), Paul identified with the situation of the Galatians. What he asked of them applied to himself as well. To *live in the Spirit* necessitates a resulting *walk in the Spirit*. Following the Spirit's lead brings a life of righteousness, demonstrating the transformational fruit of the Spirit (Romans 8:4-5).

### 26. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Paul's concern for the Galatians' unity is evident. If they lived by the flesh, the Spirit's fruit would be absent and divisions would deepen. The *vain glory* sought by some Galatians would lead to discord among the whole community. When this *provoking* occurred, people were diverted away from the ways of the Spirit and resulting good works (contrast

Hebrews 10:24). Selfish acts of our sinful nature are contrary to the humility required of Christ followers, demonstrated by Christ (see Philippians 2:3). A life filled with God's Spirit would show fruit and build unity among believers.

#### What Do You Think?

How does Jesus' garden prayer (John 17:6-26) reinforce Paul's exhortation to the Galatians?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to live in peace and unity with other believers?

## Conclusion

### A. Narrative Conflict

If the Galatian epistle were a narrative, Flesh and Spirit would serve as the main characters. In this scenario, the conflict between the two played out in the lives of the Galatians. However, the Spirit has already won—the resolution of the story has been made complete! Therefore, Paul wants his hearers and readers to act accordingly.

As followers of Jesus live in step with the Spirit, we will bear the Spirit's fruit. When this life is demonstrated in a community of believers, the result is a unified people of God. Mutual submission in love becomes the ultimate example of the Spirit's presence. This narrative is timeless; it is just as applicable for modern audiences as it was for the first-century Galatians!

### B. Prayer

Our Father, thank You for Your Spirit. We want the Spirit to guide our lives and our interactions. Strengthen us to avoid sinful distractions so that we might live holy lives filled with unrelenting joy and love for others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

The sweetest fruit comes from walking in God's Spirit!

## HOW TO SAY IT

Bacchanalia Bah-keh-nail-yuh.  
Greco Greck-oh.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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

## Into the Lesson

As class members arrive, write “Look out for number one” on the board. Begin today’s lesson by asking students to answer the following questions: 1—How often have you seen this philosophy in action? 2—Who do you usually view as being “number one”? 3—In what ways do the implications of this phrase shift if we adjust who we identify as “number one”?

Lead into Bible study by saying, “We might hear that the secret to a person’s success is for them to ‘look out for number one’—themselves. However, today’s Scripture text reevaluates that statement.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into five groups. Have a volunteer read aloud Galatians 5:16-26. Distribute handouts (you create) of the following group assignments and questions. Give groups 10 minutes to complete the questions.

**Love Group:** 1—How can Christian love be an antidote to sexual immorality? 2—How might this love’s self-sacrificial nature address sexual immorality? 3—How can Christians develop this love?

**Faith Group:** 1—How does faithfulness overcome idolatry? 2—What idols take away from our faithfulness to Jesus? 3—How can Christians further develop faithfulness?

**Peace and Longsuffering Group:** 1—How do peace and longsuffering overcome feelings of hatred, hostility, or anger? 2—What causes people to show hatred, hostility, or anger? 3—How can Christians develop peace and longsuffering?

**Meekness, Goodness, and Gentleness Group:** 1—How do meekness, goodness, and gentleness overcome feelings of envy and strife? 2—What are common reasons a person might experience envy or strife? 3—What steps can Christians take to develop meekness, goodness, and gentleness?

**Temperance and Joy Group:** 1—How do tem-

perance (self-control) and joy overcome desires related to lasciviousness and drunkenness? 2—Why might joy be necessary along with self-control? 3—How can Christians develop self-control and joy?

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “What Kind of Fruit?” activity from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated

After calling time for either activity, have each group present their findings for whole-class discussion. Use the lesson commentary to correct misconceptions regarding the Spirit’s fruit.

## Into Life

Before class, recruit two or three class members to prepare two-minute testimonials they will share with the whole class at this time. The testimonies will tell how another Christian displayed a fruit of the Spirit and provided an example for others to “live in” and “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

After each testimony, ask class members to tell what they found most convicting or helpful about it. Ask how each testimony provided a practical insight for ways Christians might display the Spirit’s fruit.

On sheets of paper you provide, have each class member write down a sinful tendency most in need of correction. Then have class members write down a fruit of the Spirit they wish to display in the following week to counteract that tendency. Allow no more than one minute for completion. Because of the personal nature of this assignment, some group members may not wish to share aloud.

*Option:* Distribute copies of the “Read All About It!” exercise from the activity page. Have learners work in small groups to complete the activity as indicated. After 10 minutes, have each group share their findings.

End class with a prayer asking God to help each class member demonstrate the Spirit’s fruit in the coming week.

# Rethinking Christian Clichés

We hear and say Christian clichés all the time, such as “just have faith” or “it’s not my place to judge.” But have you paused to rethink what those tired statements actually mean? Join Dr. Jeff Myers to discover the deep meaning and biblical truth in ten of these unquestioned answers.



**Dr. Jeff Myers**, PhD, has become one of America’s most respected authorities on Christian worldview, apologetics, and leadership development. He is the author of several books and president of Summit Ministries. Jeff and his family live in Colorado.

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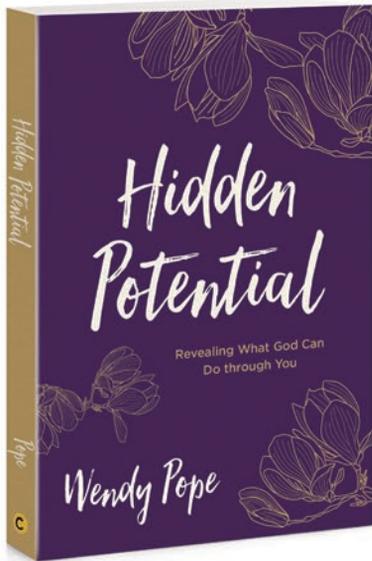
## Unquestioned Answers



*Rethinking Ten Christian Clichés  
to Rediscover Biblical Truths*

**Jeff Myers**

# Discover What God Can Do



*Hidden Potential* helps readers who feel weighed down with fears realize that God sees their struggle and He considers them worthy to do what He is calling them to do—not despite their weaknesses, but because of them. As Wendy Pope writes, just as God used Moses in the middle of his doubt, fear, and shame, God can use each of His children to reveal His solid truth, amazing power, and beautiful grace.

**Wendy Pope** is a speaker with Proverbs 31 Ministries which reaches over 1 million readers each day. She is the author of *Wait and See*, and *Yes, No, and Maybe*. She teaches thousands of women worldwide online through the *One Year Chronological Bible*.



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