

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE
TEACHER

WINTER 2023–2024
FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD

► International Sunday School Lessons

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

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WINTER 2023–2024 FAITH THAT PLEASURES GOD

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Faith That Pleases God

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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. Naomi said that she was too _____ to have a husband. *Ruth 1:12*
2. Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the end of the barley harvest. T/F. *Ruth 1:22*

Lesson 2

1. David fought which animals? (Choose two: boar, bear, lion, snake) *1 Samuel 17:34*
2. The Philistine came to David with a sword, a spear, and a _____. *1 Samuel 17:45*

Lesson 3

1. Jesus is “the son of David, the son of _____.” *Matthew 1:1*
2. Matthew’s genealogy is grouped into three sets of fourteen generations. T/F. *Matthew 1:17*

Lesson 4

1. After the baby leaped in Elisabeth’s womb, who or what filled her? (wisdom, peace, the Holy Ghost) *Luke 1:41*
2. Mary stayed with Elisabeth for six months before returning home. T/F. *Luke 1:56*

Lesson 5

1. Jesus was born when _____ was king. *Matthew 2:1*
2. When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with fear. T/F. *Matthew 2:10*

Lesson 6

1. Who offered “a more excellent sacrifice” to God? (Abraham, Cain, Abel) *Hebrews 11:4*
2. Who gave deathbed instructions regarding his bones? (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph) *Hebrews 11:22*

Lesson 7

1. The son is commanded to bind what around his neck? (Choose two: grace, peace, mercy, truth) *Proverbs 3:3*

2. The son is commanded to “trust in the Lord” with all his strength. T/F. *Proverbs 3:5*

Lesson 8

1. The people of Judah were reminded that “the _____ is not yours, but God’s.” *2 Chronicles 20:15*
2. Levites stood up and praised the Lord with a loud _____. *2 Chronicles 20:19*

Lesson 9

1. Members of the body do not have the same “office.” T/F. *Romans 12:4*
2. Believers have different gifts according to the _____ that is given. *Romans 12:6*

Lesson 10

1. What is another given title for “the everlasting God, the Lord”? (Creator, Sustainer, Provider) *Isaiah 40:28*
2. Those who wait on the Lord will be renewed. T/F. *Isaiah 40:31*

Lesson 11

1. Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the furnace be heated how many times hotter than normal? (three, seven, fourteen) *Daniel 3:19*
2. Nebuchadnezzar described the fourth man in the fire as appearing like an angel. T/F. *Daniel 3:25*

Lesson 12

1. Daniel kneeled and prayed four times a day. T/F. *Daniel 6:10*
2. Daniel told the king that God had sent “his _____” to shut the lions’ mouths. *Daniel 6:22*

Lesson 13

1. Habakkuk will stand watch on the _____. *Habakkuk 2:1*
2. The just person will live by his _____. *Habakkuk 2:4*

Quarter at a Glance

by Jon Miller

This quarter's lessons examine how individuals from Scripture lived faithful lives that pleased God. Their stories reveal how we can honor God through our lives of faith. Without faith, our attempts to please God will fall short (see Hebrews 11:6).

Profiles in Faith

This quarter begins by exploring the faith of various people from Scripture. One person who demonstrated unwavering faith is Ruth the Moabite. Because of her faith, she had confidence that the Lord would be with her and her mother-in-law, even in desperate circumstances (see Ruth 1:16-17, lesson 1).

Demonstrating faith is not easy; sometimes faith requires that people stand alone. The young shepherd David faced this reality as he confronted the Philistine (see 1 Samuel 17:45, lesson 2). In doing so, David went against the expectations of his people and his king (see 17:31-33).

Likewise, it was not easy for Mary, a young, unwed pregnant woman in the first century AD. After receiving a word from God, she joined her pregnant relative Elisabeth. Together the women expressed faith in God's plan and His promises (see Luke 1:39-45, lesson 4). Similarly, certain wise men faced threats to their lives as they followed God's directives (see Matthew 2:1-12, lesson 5). Living with faith requires boldness to act and a trust that God will sustain.

Faith and Confidence

Faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, lesson 6). Faith demands that we trust the Lord rather than ourselves (see Proverbs 3:5, lesson 7). King Jehoshaphat demonstrates one example of confident faith. Enemies had come against Judah, resulting in the people's fear. However, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the Levite, who reminded King Jehoshaphat that the battle belonged to the

Lord and the Lord alone (see 2 Chronicles 20:15, lesson 8).

Christians have another reason to be confident: despite life's challenges, we do not live that life alone. The apostle Paul taught that through faith, Christians become "one body" with other believers (Romans 12:5, lesson 9). As members of that body, we receive spiritual gifts that we can use to serve and encourage the whole body (12:6-8).

Living by Faith

The final unit highlights the role of faith in challenging situations. The prophet Isaiah encouraged Israel to consider how creation reveals God's power (Isaiah 40:26, lesson 10). The all-powerful God who created everything is worthy of receiving our trust, even when we may feel insignificant.

Faith demands that we trust the Lord rather than ourselves.

Living with faith does not mean we will never face trials. Instead, living with faith means trusting that the God of creation will never leave us. After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused the king's command to worship an image of gold, they were thrown into the flaming furnace (see Daniel 3:19-23, lesson 11). They had confidence that God would be faithful to them, even if He chose not to save them. In the same way, Daniel demonstrated a life of faith as he continued in prayer, even though doing so might have significantly cost him (see 6:10-11, lesson 12). He trusted in God's power, even when grave consequences seemed inevitable.

When life's hardships overwhelm us or when we can't make sense of the world, Scripture tells us that "the just shall live by . . . faith" (Habakkuk 2:4, lesson 13). God's people are marked by their faith, even in situations that seem entirely out of control.

Get the Setting

by Jon Miller

Travel woes have always beset people. Though we have many innovations today that make travel easier than ever before, travelers still face abundant frustrations. Bad weather, canceled flights, mechanical problems, poor roads, closed gas stations—any number of factors make travel more interesting than we would prefer.

Our modern problems pale in comparison to the difficulty and danger of travel in the ancient world. We can broadly consider travel before the Roman Empire (times recorded in the Old Testament) and then in the time of the Empire (times recorded in the New Testament). The influence of Greek culture and Roman ingenuity changed travel. Comparing the two can help us better understand the preparation and effort people had to make even to complete a short trip.

Travel in the Old Testament

Travelers in the Old Testament faced many challenges, so people did not venture far from home without good reason. One primary reason for travel was finding land for livestock to graze. Joseph's brothers traveled about 60 miles to Shechem and later to Dothan to find pastures for their father's flock (Genesis 37:12-17). Another motivation for travel was a natural disaster or famine at home, such as what drove Joseph's brothers to Egypt (Genesis 42). People also traveled for religious reasons (Psalm 122). Longer trade journeys grew in the Bronze Age, and Solomon brought the Israelites into international commerce (1 Kings 10:20-29).

For those who could afford them, several beasts of burden could make travel easier. Donkeys were used to transport provisions (example: Genesis 22:3). Oxen would pull carts or wagons (example: Numbers 7:3-8), though most roads were not suitable for heavy traffic. Camels were also a great benefit (examples: Genesis 24:61; 30:43; 31:17).

A trip in ancient times required much plan-

ning and preparation (example: Judges 19:19). The Bible mentions lodging, but it was usually out of the way for travelers and insufficient for large groups of people and animals (example: Exodus 4:24). Thus, travelers often were at the mercy of the people residing in the towns and villages they passed through (examples: 2 Samuel 17:27-29; Isaiah 21:14-15). One part of Job's defense of his righteousness was his practice of hospitality for travelers (Job 31:32). Besides these difficulties, travelers were in danger of thieves (whether in a strange town or on their way) and wild beasts (consider Genesis 19:1-11; Judges 9:25; Isaiah 30:6).

Travel in the New Testament

Rome changed the ancient Near Eastern world, including travel. With the rule of law and improved roads in Rome, travel became much safer, and people traveled long distances. Modes of transportation came to include horses, chariots, and ships in addition to the camels and donkeys of before (Matthew 21:2; Acts 8:25-38; 23:23-24; 2 Corinthians 11:25-26). Ordinary people still traveled by foot.

Business and commerce were the primary reasons for traveling in the New Testament. People might also travel great distances for religious reasons, as seen at Pentecost (Acts 2:5-11).

Given what we now know about travel from the Old and New Testaments, we can read differently the passages in this quarter that approach travel. We still travel for many of the same reasons that we read about in the Bible. However, a great gulf separates our present-day world from theirs. Their travel took longer, required fastidious preparation and trust in the hospitality of strangers, and was very frequently dangerous. When we read that someone in the Bible traveled from one place to another, it was a decision not made on a whim. They traveled with purpose!

Mon, Feb. 12	Fear God, Not Pharaoh	Exodus 1:8-21
Tue, Feb. 13	Why Are You Afraid?	Matthew 8:18-27
Wed, Feb. 14	Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled	John 14:1-11
Thu, Feb. 15	Earthly and Heavenly Authority	John 19:1-11
Fri, Feb. 16	God Cares for the Flock	1 Peter 5
Sat, Feb. 17	Unfazed by a Blphemous Law	Daniel 6:1-15
Sun, Feb. 18	Delivered from the Lions	Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16, 19-23, 26-27
Mon, Feb. 19	God's Plan for Welfare and Hope	Jeremiah 29:8-14
Tue, Feb. 20	In Christ, All Things Were Created	Colossians 1:13-20
Wed, Feb. 21	God Will Complete God's Work	Philippians 1:3-11
Thu, Feb. 22	God Works for Our Good	Romans 8:19-28
Fri, Feb. 23	God Plans Our Steps	Proverbs 16:1-9
Sat, Feb. 24	God's Consuming Judgment	Habakkuk 1:5-17
Sun, Feb. 25	Living by Faith	Habakkuk 2:1-5

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 114

- Lesson 1**—1. old. 2. False. **Lesson 2**—1. shield. 2. lion, bear.
- Lesson 3**—1. Abraham. 2. True. **Lesson 4**—1. Holy Ghost. 2. False. **Lesson 5**—1. Herod. 2. False. **Lesson 6**—1. Abel. 2. Joseph. **Lesson 7**—1. mercy, truth. 2. False. **Lesson 8**—1. battle. 2. voice. **Lesson 9**—1. True. 2. grace. **Lesson 10**—1. Creator. 2. True. **Lesson 11**—1. seven. 2. False. **Lesson 12**—1. False. 2. angel. **Lesson 13**—1. tower. 2. faith.

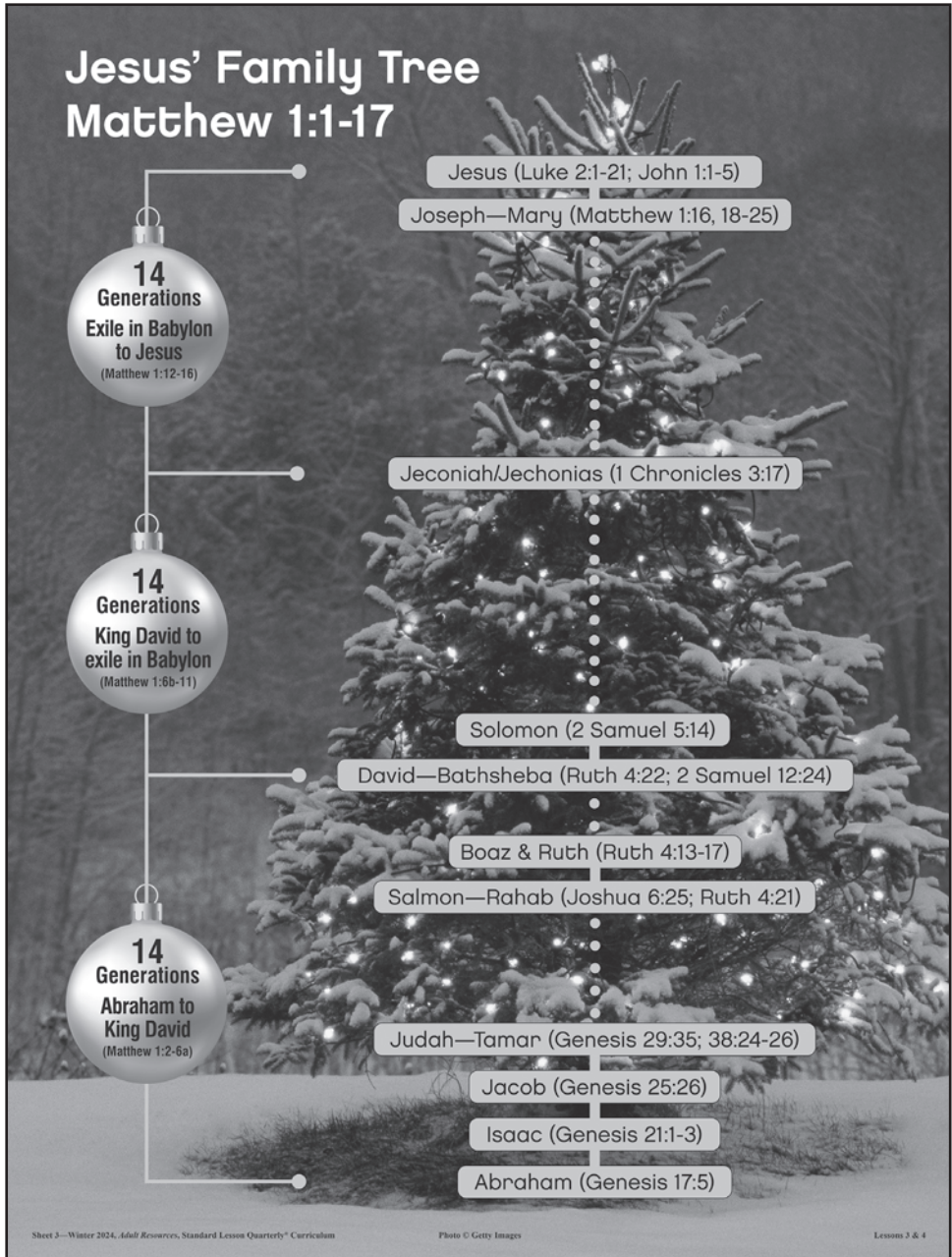
This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Nov. 27	A Faithful Friendship	Proverbs 17:17-22
Tue, Nov. 28	Peter's Test of Faith	Matthew 26:31-35
Wed, Nov. 29	Hear God's Voice	Hebrews 3:7-19
Thu, Nov. 30	Faith in Action	Leviticus 19:30-37
Fri, Dec. 1	God Honors Genuine Faith	Acts 10:34-48
Sat, Dec. 2	Naomi Becomes a Grandmother	Ruth 4:13-22
Sun, Dec. 3	Ruth's Compassionate Faith	Ruth 1:6-18, 22
Mon, Dec. 4	Faith and Courage	Joshua 1:1-9
Tue, Dec. 5	The Son of Man Came to Serve	Matthew 20:25-34
Wed, Dec. 6	Ask in Faith	Matthew 21:18-22
Thu, Dec. 7	The Faithful Will Wait on the Lord	Psalms 27
Fri, Dec. 8	Rekindle God's Gift and Stand Firm	2 Timothy 1:3-14
Sat, Dec. 9	Israel's Wavering Faith	1 Samuel 17:1, 3-4, 8, 20-30
Sun, Dec. 10	Faith That God Will Act	1 Samuel 17:31-37, 45, 48-50
Mon, Dec. 11	Risk-taking Faith	Genesis 38:6-11, 13-18, 24-26
Tue, Dec. 12	Rahab's Faith	Joshua 2:1-6, 8-16
Wed, Dec. 13	Patient Faith	James 5:1-11
Thu, Dec. 14	God's Grace Overflowed	1 Timothy 1:12-17
Fri, Dec. 15	Bathsheba's Challenged Faith	2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-12:1, 4-7a, 15-16, 24
Sat, Dec. 16	The Stronghold for the Oppressed	Psalms 9:1-14
Sun, Dec. 17	A Family Tree of Faith	Matthew 1:1-17

Mon, Dec. 18 **Contentment in Every Situation** *Philippians 4:10-19*
 Tue, Dec. 19 **God Is My Refuge** *Psalm 91:1-16*
 Wed, Dec. 20 **The Lord Has Done Great Things!** *Joel 2:18-27*
 Thu, Dec. 21 **The Announcement to a Priest** *Luke 1:5-17*
 Fri, Dec. 22 **Doubt and Rejoicing** *Luke 1:18-25*
 Sat, Dec. 23 **Believe!** *John 20:19, 24-29*
 Sun, Dec. 24 **Women Express Faith** *Luke 1:36-45, 56*
 Mon, Dec. 25 **Christ the Savior Is Born** *Matthew 1:18-25*
 Tue, Dec. 26 **Mary's Exultant Faith** *Luke 1:46-55*
 Wed, Dec. 27 **Reject Imitations of Faith** *Deuteronomy 18:9-14*
 Thu, Dec. 28 **Make Disciples in Faith** *Matthew 28:16-20*
 Fri, Dec. 29 **God's Salvation for All the Earth** *Isaiah 49:1-6*
 Sat, Dec. 30 **Arise, Shine; Your Light Has Come** *Isaiah 60:1-6*
 Sun, Dec. 31 **Worship the King of the Jews** *Matthew 2:1-12*
 Mon, Jan. 1 **The Lord Is Our King** *Isaiah 33:15-22*
 Tue, Jan. 2 **Show Favor to Your People** *Psalm 106:1-12*
 Wed, Jan. 3 **The Faith of Israel's Ancestors** *Hebrews 11:20-29*
 Thu, Jan. 4 **The Victory of Faith** *Hebrews 11:32-40*
 Fri, Jan. 5 **God's Covenant Prevails** *Psalms 106:13, 26-27, 42-48*
 Sat, Jan. 6 **Righteousness Through Jesus Christ** *Romans 5:12-21*
 Sun, Jan. 7 **Assurance and Conviction Through Faith**
Hebrews 11:1-4a, 7a, 8, 17-18, 20-23, 32, 39-40
 Mon, Jan. 8 **God's Word Lights My Path** *Psalm 119:97-112*
 Tue, Jan. 9 **Rest to the Weary** *Matthew 11:25-30*
 Wed, Jan. 10 **I Put My Trust in God** *Psalm 56*
 Thu, Jan. 11 **Trust in the Unchanging Lord** *Hebrews 13:5-16*
 Fri, Jan. 12 **I Will Not Leave You Orphaned** *John 14:18-27*
 Sat, Jan. 13 **God's Surpassing Wisdom** *1 Corinthians 2:6-16*
 Sun, Jan. 14 **A Father's Teaching** *Proverbs 3:1-12*

Mon, Jan. 15 **Praise the God Who Comforts** *2 Corinthians 1:3-11*
 Tue, Jan. 16 **God Delivers Me from My Fears** *Psalm 34:1-10*
 Wed, Jan. 17 **God's Eyes Are on the Righteous** *Psalm 34:11-22*
 Thu, Jan. 18 **Encourage One Another** *1 Thessalonians 5:1-15*
 Fri, Jan. 19 **Rejoice, Pray, and Give Thanks** *1 Thessalonians 5:16-28*
 Sat, Jan. 20 **Remember God's Power and Might** *2 Chronicles 20:5-12*
 Sun, Jan. 21 **Do Not Be Dismayed** *2 Chronicles 20:13-20*
 Mon, Jan. 22 **A New Spirit and Heart** *Ezekiel 11:17-21*
 Tue, Jan. 23 **A Transforming Testimony** *John 9:17-25*
 Wed, Jan. 24 **Be Holy, for God Is Holy** *Leviticus 20:22-26*
 Thu, Jan. 25 **A Prayer for Transformation** *Psalm 51:1-15*
 Fri, Jan. 26 **God Breathes New Life** *Ezekiel 37:1-14*
 Sat, Jan. 27 **From Death to Life** *1 John 3:14-24*
 Sun, Jan. 28 **God Gives Different Gifts** *Romans 12:3-8*
 Mon, Jan. 29 **Christ Dwells in Your Heart** *Ephesians 3:14-21*
 Tue, Jan. 30 **Sing of God's Might** *Psalm 89:1-13*
 Wed, Jan. 31 **Rely on God** *1 Chronicles 16:8-22*
 Thu, Feb. 1 **God Reigns in Power** *Revelation 11:14-19*
 Fri, Feb. 2 **The Power of God for Salvation** *Romans 1:8-17*
 Sat, Feb. 3 **Be Strong in the Lord** *Ephesians 6:10-18*
 Sun, Feb. 4 **Wait on God, Who Gives Strength** *Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31*
 Mon, Feb. 5 **Misdirected Worship** *Daniel 3:1-7*
 Tue, Feb. 6 **Defying an Immoral Command** *Daniel 3:8-18*
 Wed, Feb. 7 **Works That Proclaim Truth** *John 10:24-38*
 Thu, Feb. 8 **When Faith Comes Under Fire** *Acts 4:7-20*
 Fri, Feb. 9 **We Must Obey God Alone** *Acts 5:17-29*
 Sat, Feb. 10 **You Will Not Be Burned** *Isaiah 43:1-7*
 Sun, Feb. 11 **Delivered from the Flames** *Daniel 3:19-28a*

Chart Feature



Flexible You?

Teacher Tips by Ronald L. Nickelson

Under what circumstances, if any, should teachers of the Bible be flexible in their teaching? This question can be answered differently depending on whether we're asking about the *content* or the *form* of our lessons. A cup of coffee illustrates the distinction: the word *content* speaks of what's in the cup—the coffee beverage itself; the word *form* deals with the nature of the cup—its size, shape, etc.

Lesson Content

The content of our lessons is always the same: it's the Bible as to its proper meaning and significance. In this regard, our teaching is to be inflexible. The general command here is from Jesus himself in the passage known as the Great Commission:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. . . . Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded.
—Matthew 28:19-20

The most densely packed instructions on the specifics of things to be taught and not taught are found in the pastoral epistles of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.

Unlike the contents of a cup of coffee, however, our flexibility in teaching Bible content is limited by the fact that we are neither to add to nor take away from that content (Revelation 22:18-19). Even so, there must be a bit of flexibility within this inflexibility when we consider the nature of our audience. If our learners are already Christians, we focus on passages that promote spiritual growth (see Ephesians 4:1-16), and the level of their growth will determine whether we focus our teaching on the “milk” or “meat” of the Bible (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12). But if our learners are unbelievers, the teaching focus would be on evangelistic passages (Acts 2:36-39; etc.).

An example of flexibility in content-focus is the apostle Paul. He taught directly from Scriptures to those who already believed them (Acts 17:2). But

to pagan philosophers, he taught on various Scripture themes in a way that did not presume that his audience accepted the reliability (or even existence) of those Scriptures (Acts 17:22-31).

Lesson Form

There are various forms (methods) for teaching Bible content. The *Standard Lesson Commentary* offers three such possibilities in every lesson: lecture, discussion questions, and learning activities. Offering examples of flexibility in this regard are the teaching methods of Jesus. He often used a lecture format; examples are Matthew 5:1-12 and Mark 12:38-40. Examples of a discussion-question method are seen in Matthew 17:25-26; Luke 9:18-20; and John 14:9; 21:15-19. Examples of learning activities are Matthew 14:28-33 and Luke 10:1-17.

At this point, we should pause to consider four cautions. First, we should realize limitations in using Jesus as a model; His being the Son of God means that He was able to do things we cannot. Second, the examples offered above all involve interacting with people who were favorable or at least neutral toward Him; we are not considering methods He used when interacting with opponents. Third, the teaching methods under consideration are not “either/or” but “both/and,” as we see elements of two (or all three) methods together in some examples. Fourth, others have analyzed Jesus' teaching methods differently, seeing as few as two and as many as nine methods.

Flexible You?

Are you frozen in one teaching method? Or are you willing and able to adjust your method as situations call for? Flexibility must be part of being “apt to teach” (2 Timothy 2:24). Consider:

Those who are victorious plan effectively and change decisively. They are like a great river that maintains its course but adjusts its flow. . . . They are skilled in both planning and adapting.
—Sun Tzu

The Faith of Ruth

Devotional Reading: Acts 10:34-38
Background Scripture: Ruth 1; 4:13-22

Ruth 1:6-18, 22

6 Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;

13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown?

would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

18 When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Key Text

Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. —Ruth 1:16

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 1: Profiles in Faith

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the three named people in the text.
2. Summarize their situation in light of the period of the judges.
3. State a way that he or she can imitate Ruth's model of courage and faithfulness.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Before and After
- B. Lesson Context

I. First Exchange (Ruth 1:6-10)

- A. Naomi Reasons (vv. 6-9a)
- B. Daughters-in-Law Respond (vv. 9b-10)

II. Second Exchange (Ruth 1:11-14)

- A. Mother Pleads (vv. 11-13)
Dressed in Christ
- B. Daughters Diverge (v. 14)

III. Third Exchange (Ruth 1:15-18, 22)

- A. Naomi's Final Plea (v. 15)
- B. Ruth's Promise (vv. 16-18)
- C. Outcome (v. 22)
Catching the Vision

Conclusion

- A. Walk with One Another
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Before and After

Tragedy creates a “before” and an “after”—before the job loss, the accident, the fight; after the break-up, the death, etc. When tragedy strikes, we might question God's sovereignty or fear that He is using His strength to punish us through our pain. No matter how strong our faith, tragedy can leave us raw and feeling that we are merely surviving.

Reading the stories of tragedy found within the Bible can offer comfort. When we see examples of how others remained faithful to God, we are inspired to persevere. And even more, when we see how God demonstrated His faithfulness to others, we can regain confidence in His provision no matter our current circumstance. We don't need easy answers in pain; we need God's love, often expressed through the love of other believers. Ruth's story is one biblical example of love expressed in the after time of tragedy.

B. Lesson Context

The author of the book of Ruth is unknown. The date of composition has been proposed as early as King Solomon's reign (approximately 970–930 BC) to as late as 250 BC, long after the return from Babylonian exile. This huge range speaks to the many factors one might point to as evidence of an earlier or later date as well as the text's own ambivalence concerning these questions.

The setting of the events within Ruth are comparatively much better defined as occurring during the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1), that is, sometime between 1373 and 1043 BC. The conquest of Canaan was completed with the Israelite tribes settled in the land (Joshua 23). But the Israelites experienced oppression from outside nations, Moab occasionally being one of them (example: Judges 3:12-31). The Moabites were descended from Abraham's nephew Lot (Genesis 19:33-37). Conflict with Moab was already ancient by the time the time of the judges in Israel (Numbers 22–25). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the Moabites were banned from entering the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 2:26-30; 23:3-6), though marriage to Moabites was not banned specifically (contrast 7:1-3).

Despite these deep antipathies, a persistent famine in Israel motivated a certain Naomi's Israelite family to leave Bethlehem and settle in Moab (Ruth 1:1; see commentary on 1:6, 22, below). Ten years are covered quickly in the text, apparently beginning with the death of Naomi's husband, Elimelech, and ending with the death of her sons (1:3, 5). In the meantime, these two sons had married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, before leaving them childless with their untimely deaths.

What Do You Think?

What circumstances could entice you to start your life over away from home?

Digging Deeper

What faith challenges and opportunities for growth could you anticipate experiencing?

Widowhood was an especially precarious state for women. In the ancient Near East, including both Moab and Israel, men had far more economic power than women. A woman left without male relatives to care for her could be reduced to abject poverty, and prostitution might result. Fathers or sons were the best lines of defense to protect widows; in the case of younger widows, this protection lasted until new husbands could be found (compare Genesis 38:11; Leviticus 22:13). God had given Israel specific instructions for caring for widows, both within the family and the larger community (examples: Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 24:17; see commentary on Ruth 1:11, below).

I. First Exchange

(Ruth 1:6-10)

A. Naomi Reasons (vv. 6-9a)

6. Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

Regarding the journey *from the country of Moab* to Bethlehem, see commentary on Ruth 1:22 (below). Returning to her people was Naomi's best option to be cared for in her widowed state.

And God's renewed provision in her homeland meant that her family's legal obligations to care for her (see Lesson Context) would not burden an already famished community. The inclusion of *her* (Moabite) *daughters in law* might surprise us, as their families of origin would be expected to care for them in their widowhood. This tension drives the action to come.

7. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

There is no clear indication regarding how soon after her sons' deaths Naomi received news that the famine in Judah had ended (Ruth 1:6, above). For Naomi, the journey *unto the land of Judah* was a return to her family and the safety net they represented. But using the same rationale of familial obligation and care, Naomi's *two daughters in law* would have been expected to stay in their homeland, Moab.

That the Moabite women began this journey with their mother-in-law speaks to the depth of their love for and devotion to her (compare Ruth 1:11-13, below). Traveling with Naomi potentially put her well-being over the younger widows' own future prospects for marriage and family. Following her initially may also indicate that the daughters-in-law were not thinking clearly, stricken as they were by grief at the tremendous loss they had suffered with Naomi (contrast 1:14, below).



Visual for Lesson 1. Ask the class to consider this question with the first pair of discussion questions and again before closing the class with prayer.

8a. And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house.

We might have expected Naomi to urge the young widows back to their fathers' homes (see Lesson Context). But returning *each to her mother's house* might mark a subtle shift in focus from the material benefit of marriage to the relational (Genesis 24:28-38, 67; Song of Solomon 3:4; 8:2). Or it may be a tacit acknowledgement of polygamy. In this case, the mother's house would be a separate dwelling from the father's primary residence.

More than these options, though, the language suggests that Naomi was relinquishing her rights to any support *her two daughters in law* might offer her. She was not their mother, and because of that, they were not obligated to share in the difficulties that widowhood would represent for Naomi.

8b-9a. The LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them.

As Moabite widows, Ruth and Orpah would be incredibly vulnerable in Israel (see Lesson Context). Naomi's words *deal kindly with you* have a ring of covenant language. She intended to leave the women in the Lord's care even though she also intended to leave them in the land of Moab. Naomi did not explicitly say but clearly believed that *the Lord* was not only able but also willing to bless the younger widows, even outside of Israel. As is true throughout the book, the Lord's kindness would be experienced through human relationships (example: Ruth 2:4-12). *Rest* for the widows was expected to be found in their mothers' homes before moving on to new families in the houses of new husbands.

Naomi's future was far from assured (compare Ruth 1:11-13, below); the gift she felt she could

give her daughters-in-law was to free them to find more likely sources of stability than she could offer. In a typical farewell gesture, Naomi sealed her hopes for them with a kiss. It signified her love in what she expected to be her final act of care for them (compare 1:14, below).

B. Daughters-in-Law Respond (vv. 9b-10)

9b-10. And they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

They lifted up their voice, and wept is clearly lament language. In context it could be for the general position in which they all found themselves—husbandless and with uncertain futures—or it could specifically have been in response to the pain these two younger women felt at the thought of separating from Naomi. *Surely we will return with thee unto thy people* does not constitute a binding oath but does communicate great devotion to Naomi. It was not a pragmatic response or a thought-out plan; it was the pleading of two daughters-in-law who didn't want to see their mother-in-law leave.

II. Second Exchange

(Ruth 1:11-14)

A. Mother Pleads (vv. 11-13)

11. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

Naomi asked her *daughters* (a subtle change from the “daughters in law” designation up to this point) literally to turn from their current course and return to their mothers' homes.

Naomi emphasized the darker, more painful truth about her motivation to send them away: she could not bear *any more sons* to grow up and care for her dead sons' wives. This concern was in keeping with a provision within the Law of Moses concerning care for widows. The brother of the widow's deceased husband was required to marry the widow in a levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; example: Genesis 38:6-14). This not only ensured care for the widow but also allowed her

How to Say It

Chemosh	<i>Kee</i> -mohsh.
Elimelech	<i>Ee-lim</i> -eh-leck.
Moabites	<i>Mo</i> -ub-ites.
Orpah	<i>Or</i> -pah.

dead husband's lineage to continue. Due to Naomi's own widowhood and age, she knew that her *womb* would not provide new *husbands* for Orpah and Ruth. Naomi saw clearly (if erroneously; see Ruth 4:16-17) the end of her family line.

12-13a. Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have a husband also to night, and should also bear sons; would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands?

The phrase *I am too old to have a husband* continued the “reality check” for the two daughters. Naomi's childbearing years were behind her, such that no man of her times would be inclined to marry her. And even if she had hope that she could remarry that very day and conceive *sons* that night, how could the widows be expected to wait years for those sons to be old enough to marry? These hypothetical sons wouldn't be ready for marriage until their early 20s, likely putting Ruth and Orpah somewhere in their 40s. Even today, a pregnancy is considered geriatric after the age of 35. Back then as now, pregnancy at that age and beyond was increasingly unlikely and dangerous.

Turn again emphasizes the benefit of Ruth and Orpah's returning to their families of origin in Moab (see commentary on Ruth 1:11, above). Remarriage in Moab was thus the best option for Ruth and Orpah's flourishing after being widowed. Their families were invested in their well-being and could arrange marriage contracts for their widowed daughters. Naomi's own care would be more easily obtained if she did not come home with two grown female dependents (compare Ruth 4:1-6).

13b. Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

The hand of the Lord can refer to God's blessing, guidance, and protection (examples: Ezra 7:6, 9; Nehemiah 2:8). But His hand conversely can refer to curse, discipline, and judgment (examples: Exodus 9:3; Judges 2:15). *Gone out against me* illustrates Naomi's feeling that God had not so much abandoned her; rather, He was judging her. The writer doesn't outright confirm or deny Nao-

mi's feeling. But when she returned home, Naomi asked to be called *Mara* (which means “bitter”), “for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20, not in our printed text). We can make too much of the fact that the writer never called Naomi *Mara*. But it subtly suggests that the writer didn't accept that Naomi's life was bitter, or at least that it wasn't irretrievably bitter.

Ascribing motivations to God is a dangerous business—we need only read Job to be reminded of this. But in the middle of so much grief, one way of arriving at meaning, either legitimately or illegitimately, is to find God's judgment in pain. We do well to remember that we cannot know why God allows hard circumstances in our lives (Job 42:1-6). We are wise to remember that His ways are not ours and His thoughts are above ours (Isaiah 55:9). And we can rest in the hope that God uses all things to our benefit if we place our hope in Him, regardless of our circumstances (Romans 8:28-35).

What Do You Think?

When have you interpreted God's hand in your life as punishment?

Digging Deeper

Have circumstances since then changed your mind about God's intentions for you? How, or why not?

Dressed in Christ

At the end of our street, my trick-or-treating children and I met an elderly woman sitting in a lawn chair, a bowl of candy in her lap. “Trick or treat!” the children called. Unexpectedly, the woman began to cry. “Oh, what's wrong?” I asked. She replied, “My husband passed away. This is my first time passing out treats without him. He loved seeing the children in their costumes.” My children spontaneously hugged the woman, and we prayed for her.

I had been reluctant to allow my children to go trick-or-treating. But even in costumes, we were all dressed in Christ to meet our new friend. Who in their distress needs to experience Christ through you?
—A. W.

B. Daughters Diverge (v. 14)

14. And they lifted up their voice and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

At first *Orpah* and *Ruth* had responded in unified lament following Naomi's goodbye kiss (Ruth 1:9a-10, above). But then Orpah *kissed* Naomi. As with Naomi's previous gesture, this was a kiss goodbye (see 1:15, below). We might be tempted to conclude that Orpah acted faithlessly toward Naomi. But the text does not indicate here or elsewhere that Orpah made a poor decision. She acted in keeping with the wisdom of her time and with Naomi's greatest hopes for Orpah's future thriving.

By contrast, Ruth would not be swayed by any argument Naomi could make. Ruth *clave unto her* and would not change her mind.

What Do You Think?

How do you discern whether to move forward with a risky plan or fall back on a more conventionally wise action?

Digging Deeper

What biblical examples can you find of both moving forward and retreating as faithful action?

III. Third Exchange

(Ruth 1:15-18, 22)

A. Naomi's Final Plea (v. 15)

15. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

Naomi made one last plea to Ruth to turn back. Returning *unto her people* would be a comfortable cultural fit for Ruth, complete with a return to worship of Moabite gods. In the ancient world, gods were often associated not only with certain spheres of activity (agriculture, military, etc.) but also with geographic regions (see commentary on Ruth 1:8b-9a, above). The principle deity worshipped in Moab was the detestable Chemosh (Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7, 33). The Israelites were meant to be distinct from their neighbors by rejecting all gods other than the Lord—never

worshipping a pantheon of multiple deities (Exodus 20:1-6). Ruth's choice was between what she had known before and what she had come to know in her husband's household.

B. Ruth's Promise (vv. 16-18)

16-17a. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.

The introductory statement is an emphatic statement of Ruth's immovable will to follow Naomi, strengthened by Ruth's listing her commitments to Naomi. Ruth's response reflected Naomi's hopes for Ruth but unexpectedly anticipated their fulfillment to be found in a future that included the two women together. The commitment to Naomi's people and God directly tied back to Naomi's plea for Ruth to follow Orpah's example (see Ruth 1:15). The commitments to *go* and *lodge* with Naomi tied Ruth's future to Naomi's. Whatever provision Naomi would find among her people, Ruth would accept as well. Naomi would expect to die well before Ruth. Yet Ruth's commitment was to *die* in Judah and *be buried* there (compare and contrast Genesis 50:1-6). In these ways, Ruth declared Naomi to be her mother and outlined the devotion that she would demonstrate as Naomi's true child.

What Do You Think?

What did you leave behind when you made the decision to follow God?

Digging Deeper

What habits from your old life still need to be broken?

17b-18. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

Unlike Orpah and Ruth's spontaneous declaration in Ruth 1:10 (above), this is the most solemn of vows (compare 1 Samuel 3:17; 20:13). Ruth had carefully considered the cost of going with Naomi

(compare Luke 14:26-33). Realizing this, Naomi stopped trying to convince Ruth to take a different journey.

What Do You Think?

How easy do you find it to accept God's provision that comes through other believers' care for you?

Digging Deeper

What attitudes or circumstances might be preventing you from experiencing God's care through His people?

C. Outcome (v. 22)

22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Bethlehem (in Judah; Ruth 1:1) can be literally translated as “house of bread,” giving an ironic cast to the famine that had occurred there. Drought was a likely cause of the famine, as rain clouds would sometimes pass straight over Bethlehem and climb to higher elevations—such as in *Moab*—before bursting. The women's westward journey from Moab around the northern shore of the Dead Sea apparently passed without incident.

The mention of the *barley harvest* confirmed that the famine was broken (Ruth 1:6, above). The beginning of that harvest took place sometime in mid-March to mid-April. In later Jewish tradition, the book of Ruth was read at the feast of weeks in celebration of God's provision of the harvest (compare Leviticus 23:15-22).

Catching the Vision

Janice and Wendy met in a widows' support group and became friends instantly. Janice had not been active in her faith for many years until Wendy started inviting her to church events. Together they joined a women's Bible study and served on their church's missions team. There, they started to catch a vision for world missions.

A visiting missionary who had served many years in Turkey began sharing with them how many widows and orphans had migrated from

Syria and Iraq as a result of the civil wars. Neither of the women had formal training as missionaries or in the Bible. But they could give smiles and hugs and share tears with women who had been through losses similar to their own. Janice and Wendy departed for Turkey and began learning the language and culture. They bonded with dozens of women who had endured severe hardship.

God fulfills His promise to set “the solitary in families” (Psalm 68:6). Are you in a position now to be brought into a family or to invite others into yours? Ask the Lord for eyes to see the harvest He has set before you (John 4:35). —A. W.

Conclusion

A. Walk with One Another

We are created to be in community with God and with others. Ruth's faithfulness to the Lord and to Naomi is an example to all of what living and loving in community might require of us. Ruth's words and actions demonstrated true commitment to carrying Naomi's burdens (compare Galatians 6:2). Showing up in the midst of pain and anguish is difficult, especially if we are dealing with our own feelings of loss. How we respond to tragedy will determine whether we are following Ruth's example as she followed Christ's example without even knowing her many-times great grandson (see lesson 3; 1 Corinthians 11:1).

B. Prayer

Lord, help us to demonstrate Your love in our relationships and in our communities, that we may be active in Your plan to bless others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Remain steadfast in your love for the Lord and His people.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 123) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Winter Quarter. Order No. 9780784739631 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask three or more volunteers to use a whiteboard or large pad of paper and markers to play a “Major Life Changes” drawing charades game. Have a volunteer draw a clue while the class guesses the event. Some clue suggestions are baptism, graduation, moving, marriage, parenthood, death, or divorce. Following the activity, give the class the opportunity to share memories of relevant personal life events. Be prepared to ask questions to encourage students to speak about their feelings and how their lives changed from the events.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “How Do You Shop?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete the exercise as indicated before discussing conclusions as a whole group.

After either activity, say, “Today we’re going to look at the life of Ruth and how love motivated her to take a leap of faith.”

Into the Word

Set the stage for today’s lesson by sharing some background on Naomi’s family using the Lesson Context. Recruit participants to act out Ruth 1:6-14 in reader’s theater style. Be sure to cover the roles of a narrator, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth. Encourage the use of drama and vocal inflection to help the Scripture come to life. Ask the class to discuss the motivations of the women to this point before continuing the activity with Ruth 1:15-18, 22.

Distribute handouts (you create) of the following questions for in-group discussions. Divide the class into two groups: **Naomi’s Perspective** and **Ruth’s Perspective**. Each group should answer the questions from their assigned perspective: 1–What motivated you to leave Moab? 2–What concerns did you have for the woman you were traveling with? 3–How did your experience

of God’s care influence your decision-making? 4–What hope and future possibilities did you have in Moab? 5–How did your hope and future possibilities change for the better or worse in Judah?

Bring the class back together to share their viewpoints. Be prepared to emphasize the following points if the discussion doesn’t bring them out: Naomi was traveling *toward* her community, where she could expect to be cared for, even in the face of what she believed was God’s punishment. Ruth was traveling *away* from her community, against conventional wisdom, thus lessening her prospects of starting her own family.

Option. Distribute copies of the “What Would You Give Up?” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions with the class.

After either activity, talk through how Ruth’s courage and faithfulness helped both her and Naomi deal with their situation.

Into Life

Distribute index cards to the learners and ask them to write *Naomi* at the top of one side. Challenge participants to write down the biggest and most fearsome challenge they, or someone close to them, are facing. On the other side, ask them to write *Ruth* at the top of the card and list at least three reasons for hope in this situation. They might think of past similar experiences God has led them through, abilities and resources God has provided, or others in their lives who love them. Then ask them to conclude with one courageous action they can take in response to their reasons for hope. Challenge learners to concentrate on the “Ruth” side of the card during the week.

Lead the class in a closing prayer thanking God for the people He has placed in our lives to remind us of our hope in Him and to carry our burdens with us.

The Faith of David

Devotional Reading: Psalm 27
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:1-58

1 Samuel 17:31-37, 45, 48-50

31 And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him.

32 And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

33 And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

37 David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out

of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

48 And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

49 And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

Key Text

David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. —1 Samuel 17:37a

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 1: Profiles in Faith

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Give the reason for David’s confidence.
2. Explain the most important parts of David’s initiative.
3. State one or more ways to have the courage of David when facing the figurative Goliaths of life.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Courage Without Risk?
- B. Lesson Context

I. David’s Initiative (1 Samuel 17:31-37)

- A. Bold Volunteer (vv. 31-32)
- B. Skeptical King (v. 33)
Weak Believer, Strong God

- C. Confident Rejoinder (vv. 34-37)

II. Battle’s Outcome (1 Samuel 17:45, 48-50)

- A. David’s Taunt (v. 45)
The Christian’s Source of Courage
- B. Combatants’ Movements (v. 48)
- C. David’s Victory (vv. 49-50)

Conclusion

- A. Faith and Responsibility
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Courage Without Risk?

Many individuals in history are known for their courage. One such person is Rosa Parks (1913–2005), a Black woman who lived in the segregated South. On December 1, 1955, she challenged segregation laws by refusing to take a different seat on a city bus after the seat she was sitting in was redesignated from “Black” to “White.” This turned out to be a key incident in the American Civil Rights Movement.

Rosa believed in having the courage to do what is right. Courage by definition is exercised at the risk of something—a person’s freedom or even one’s very life. If there’s no risk involved, then there’s no courage involved.

B. Lesson Context

The events of today’s text occur sometime before 1010 BC, the year that Israel’s kingship transitioned from Saul to David. Prior to the events of this lesson’s text, the prophet Samuel had anointed David to be Saul’s successor as king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Having been rejected by the Lord, Saul’s days as king were numbered (see 1 Samuel 15). Even so, Saul looked on David with favor and employed him in personal service (16:14-23)—at least for a time.

David entered the army encampment in 1 Samuel 17 as part of an episode of an Israelite war with the Philistines. David was a late arrival due to the fact that he had been left to tend sheep while his older brothers went off to war (1 Samuel 17:13-14). After several weeks, the war degenerated into something of a stalemate. But the Israelite army seemed ready to break due to low morale (17:11, 24). The reason was the relentless taunts of a Philistine named Goliath,

How to Say It

Philistines	Fuh-liss-teenz or Fill-us-teenz.
Goliath	Go-lye-uth.
<i>terminus ad quem</i> (Latin)	tur-muh-nus ehd kwem.
<i>Sabaath</i> (Hebrew)	Sab-a-oth.

who stood about 9'9" tall (17:4-10). As our text begins, David had heard the taunt (17:23) as well as the promise of reward for defeating Goliath (17:25-27). David had also just borne the criticism of his oldest brother for an apparent neglect of duty to attend to sheep left in David's care (17:28).

I. David's Initiative

(1 Samuel 17:31-37)

A. Bold Volunteer (vv. 31-32)

31. And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him.

The words . . . which David spake seem to be that of his volunteering to accept Goliath's challenge to a one-on-one duel (1 Samuel 17:8-10). King Saul had been looking for just such a volunteer (17:25), and David's inquiry was promptly passed up the chain of command to the king himself. Saul, for his part, seemed to waste no time in sending for David.

32. And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

This verse is linked to 1 Samuel 17:11, 24, which reveal the emotional state of the army. History is witness to many instances where low morale was the decisive element in an army's defeat (compare Deuteronomy 20:3; 1 Samuel 14:15). Low morale leads to (and results from) fear, fear leads to panic, and panic leads to rout. David, a shepherd and a musician, was also "a man of war" (16:18). As such, he instinctively knew all this, thus the direct and immediate offer we see from him in the verse at hand.

B. Skeptical King (v. 33)

33. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

This was not the first time that King Saul had encountered David. The two were actually well acquainted, given David's service in the king's court heretofore (1 Samuel 16:14-23). Saul's refer-

ence to David's *youth* may indicate that the young man was under the age of 20, thus ineligible to be in the army (Numbers 1:3; 26:2). We know that David was age 30 when he became king (2 Samuel 5:4); this fact establishes what is called a *terminus ad quem*, which is a final limiting point in time. But David's ascension to the throne is at least several years away at this point in the text. This lends credence to the "under age 20" proposal.

King Saul could only see the contrast between David as a weak youth and the Philistine as *a man of war from his youth*. But David stepped forward with a confidence that seemed to defy this logic.

What Do You Think?

What current situation requires you to show brave leadership?

Digging Deeper

Can you choose to grow in courage? How, or why not?

Weak Believer, Strong God

Janna identified as a "young Christian." She began to profess belief in Jesus just a few years ago, so when an idea popped into her head to start a Bible study with her non-Christian friend Sammie, she suppressed it. Sammie, who had been a friend since their freshman year in college, noticed a change in Janna. Aware of Janna's weekly church attendance, Sammie would occasionally ask questions about her friend's faith.

Janna had been praying for the courage to dive deeper with Sammie and others regarding Christianity. But leading a Bible study sounded like a job for . . . well . . . *leaders*. Janna had never taught anyone anything before.

Saul's feedback to David on his chance of defeating Goliath echoed Janna's self-talk. David was young in years; Janna was young in Christianity. But their weaknesses are infinitely less relevant than God's strength. As the apostle Paul noted centuries after the life of David, God's power is made perfect in human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). When have you experienced this personally—if ever?
—D. D.

C. Confident Rejoinder (vv. 34-37)

34. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock.

David's salutation *thy servant* reveals self-awareness of his status as being subservient to King *Saul*. David maintained this respectful attitude consistently, even when being hunted down later by an increasingly irrational and paranoid Saul (see 1 Samuel 24; 26). Even so, the statement in the verse at hand indicates a pushback against Saul's skepticism. Those who think that it's safer to tend sheep rather than being in the front line of battle should think again (17:13-15)!

35. And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

David established his capabilities by explaining encounters with predators that are often more dangerous than human adversaries. The sequence of events is noteworthy in being *smote/delivered/slew*, not *smote/slew/delivered*. The actual sequence indicates David's focus had been to deliver the victim lamb from the jaws of a predator that he had only wounded, which increased the danger to David. The *smote/slew/delivered* sequence would have indicated an intent to ensure the predator was dead first; the additional time this would have required before the rescue of the lamb put the lamb at greater risk while decreasing the risk to David. His choice reveals something about his character (compare John 10:11-13).

36a. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them.

David believed his work as a shepherd warding off predators had prepared him to act quickly, skillfully, and decisively, more than qualifying him for battle. The phrase *uncircumcised Philistine* is thoroughly derogatory and dismissive (see also Judges 14:3; 1 Samuel 17:26; 2 Samuel 1:20).

36b. Seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

The phrase *the living God* is a favorite of biblical writers, appearing more than two dozen times across both Old and New Testaments. It stands

in direct contrast to lifeless idols representing fictitious gods (Leviticus 26:30; Psalm 106:28; Jeremiah 10:14; 16:18; 51:17; Habakkuk 2:19). There is only one God, and the Philistines in general and Goliath in particular oppose Him. How foolish!

Joshua had declared hundreds of years previously that the Israelites would know that the living God was among them when He drove out their enemies (Joshua 3:10). Hundreds of years after David, the prophet Jeremiah equated "the living God" with "the true God" (Jeremiah 10:10). David was within this stream of faith, confident of the Lord's present, powerful, and ongoing involvement in history.

37a. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.

Here, David can be said to be using a "from the greater to the lesser" type of argument. Lions and bears are often more dangerous than human opponents, especially in an era before gunpowder. A lion may weigh between 265 and 550 pounds; bears may weigh about the same. Their paws conceal deadly claws. Both predators are well equipped for and inclined toward pawson combat. Biblical writers sometimes compare God's wrath to the tactics of lions and bears (Lamentations 3:10-11; Hosea 13:7-8). Other passages use bear-and-lion imagery to make vital and radical points (Proverbs 28:15; Amos 5:19; Revelation 13:2). Since *the Lord* had *delivered* David from these more dangerous foes that specialize in ambush, would the Lord also not do so regarding a non-ambush situation with *this Philistine*?

The situation at hand involved a change of tactics by the Philistines from their previous war against King Saul and the Israelites. Rather than being characterized by relative sizes of forces (1 Samuel 13:2, 5, 15; 14:2), maneuvers (13:3, 16-18), and quality of weapons (13:19-22), the outcome of the current war was to be decided by a one-on-one combat (see 17:8-10). Victory in a previous war against the Philistines had been set in motion by two Israelites defeating at least 20 Philistines (14:6-14). The Lord had been behind

that victory (14:15), and David expected Him to be behind the victory to come as well.

What Do You Think?

What situations from your past give you confidence in your own abilities?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance confidence in yourself and in the Lord so that it doesn't become arrogance or yield dependence on yourself?

37b. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

King *Saul* didn't attempt to challenge David's logic and passionate belief. Although Saul realized that he himself no longer had the favor of *the Lord* (1 Samuel 15:10, 26; 16:14), his entreaty on David's behalf seems genuine. The expressed desire is therefore a reaffirmation of what Saul had previously been told regarding David's favor with the Lord (16:18; compare 20:13). This prayer expression gives us insight into Saul's belief that the Lord would still act on Israel's behalf. Later, the Lord's favor toward David and disfavor toward Saul will become a source of fear for the king (18:12).

What Do You Think?

How can you encourage young people to exercise wise leadership?

Digging Deeper

What cautions need to be considered when empowering a leader of any age?

II. Battle's Outcome

(1 Samuel 17:45, 48-50)

A. David's Taunt (v. 45)

45. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

In the intervening verses not part of our lesson text, *David* rejected wearing battle gear; instead, he chose to take his staff, stones, and sling (1 Samuel 17:38-40).

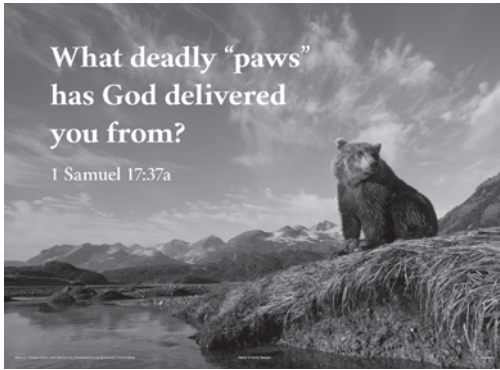
David's identification of each combatant's support is insightful. For David to *come . . . in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel* indicates reliance on protection from a divine source. Note that David did not say, "I come to you with a sling and a stone!" By contrast, mention of Goliath's *sword, spear, and shield* indicate that man's reliance on his own skills. The nature and dimensions of his weapons as described in 1 Samuel 17:5-7 do not seem to have intimidated David in the least.

The title *the God of the armies of Israel* is unique to this passage in the pages of the Old Testament. *The name of the Lord of hosts* is also military language. The underlying word translated "hosts" is *Sabaoth*, which you might recognize from the second stanza of the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God":

You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

The Hebrew word *Sabaoth* occurs hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Used as a verb, it occurs in contexts of fighting or doing battle. Used as a noun, it often refers to elements of an army (divisions, etc.). The word is also part of the phrase "the host of heaven" in Deuteronomy 4:19 to refer to literal stars in the sky (similar are 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5; Isaiah 40:26; etc.). Some passages seem to use the word *host* to refer to angelic beings (examples: 2 Chronicles 18:18; Psalms 103:20-21; 148:2-3).

Whichever sense is intended here, the one true God is highest in the chain of command over them. David had great assurance in the fact that His Lord, the God of Israel, was the God over all things and beings. This is the same God whom Goliath had blasphemed, as evident in the phrase *whom thou hast defied*. This isn't David's conclusion; Goliath himself had said he was defying "the armies of Israel" (1 Samuel 17:10). To do so was tantamount to defying the God to whom those armies belonged (compare 2 Kings 18:28-35 with 19:4-6, 22-23).



Visual for Lesson 2. Pose this question as the class discusses today's key verse, 1 Samuel 17:37a.

The Christian's Source of Courage

Only an inch of playground separated the two second-grade boys at recess. Stepping furiously into Lucas's personal bubble was Jackson. Moments earlier, Lucas had shoved him to the ground during a game of tag. And it wasn't the first time.

"Stop touching me," Jackson growled.

Jackson—all 3'6", 45 pounds of him—made his threat looking up at his much taller, stronger classmate. Lucas appeared taken aback by Jackson's boldness. "Wait until my cousin sees you after school," Jackson continued.

The confusion on Lucas's face turned to anger, but he backed away. Jackson's cousin starred on the fifth-grade football team. For the rest of recess, no one tagged Jackson roughly.

Where did Jackson's confidence lie? Certainly not in his own ability to protect himself. He still had trouble opening heavy doors. He knew someone, however, whose strength was superior to his enemy's. Jackson looked not inside, but outside of himself for confidence—to a protector who just so happened to be family.

Christians in the trials of life do not work up courage by looking in the mirror. They look to the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Heaven (Matthew 26:53; Revelation 19:14). When a threat arises, where do you look to first for deliverance—to your own abilities or to God? Before you answer, read 2 Kings 6:15-17 carefully! —D. D.

B. Combatants' Movements (v. 48)

48. And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

The nature of the weaponry (1 Samuel 17:6, 40, 45) and the contents of the combatants' "trash talk" (17:44-46) indicate that a relatively close-range battle was to come. No archery would be involved (contrast 2 Kings 9:23-24). So each combatant moved to close the distance, presumably to reach the optimum range for their respective weapons. Goliath's sword would be useful only within arms' length; but both the sword and his arm were quite long! He might have been able to throw his spear a few yards.

David's sling, by contrast, was a type of artillery, able to launch a projectile. Under certain circumstances, a sling could out-range a bow and arrow, but only if the stone was slung in a high trajectory. This tactic (known as "indirect fire") would be suitable against a group of enemies who were close together in a tight formation; accuracy would be relatively unimportant—the stone was likely to hit *someone*. The effective range of a sling launching a stone on a low-trajectory range ("direct fire") depended on many factors but was perhaps between 50 and 100 yards.

David therefore may have seemed to have an advantage over Goliath because David's weapon had greater range. He could start to fight from further away than Goliath was able. But that advantage could be negated by Goliath's armor (1 Samuel 17:5-6). But in the final analysis the ultimate advantage was with David—the Lord was on his side.

C. David's Victory (vv. 49-50)

49. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

David's tremendous courage is matched by his skill with a sling. To hit a forehead—which is only a few square inches—with a sling involves incredible marksmanship! Expert slingers would come to be seen as the snipers on ancient battlefields.

The weapon is deadly when slinging a stone with enough force, as here (compare Judges 20:16). Before Goliath even knew what was happening, the stone hit the very spot that his armor didn't cover. He had received the penalty due for his blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16).

With David's skill and courage duly noted, the battle was ultimately between the one, true God of Israel and the fictitious gods of the Philistines; we take special note of how each combatant saw it this way (1 Samuel 17:43, 45-46). Goliath's falling *upon his face to the earth* is somewhat mirrored in an earlier incident where the Philistines' idol Dagon fell on its face (twice!) in the presence of the ark of God (5:1-4).

50. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

This passage again notes the minimal weaponry of *David*. As the encounter had begun, David had predicted that he would cut off Goliath's head (1 Samuel 17:46), *but there was no sword in the hand of David*. This meant that for David to cut off the head of *the Philistine*, he would have to use Goliath's sword to do so. And that's exactly what happened (17:51).

This battle validated David's anointing as the king to replace Saul (1 Samuel 16:1-13). And it would not be the last time David would use Goliath's sword (21:9-10).

What Do You Think?

What are some spiritual weapons Christians have that the world might consider weak or ineffective (consider 2 Corinthians 10:4)?

Digging Deeper

What Bible verses inform your answer?

Conclusion

A. Faith and Responsibility

Faith and responsibility are key aspects of walking with God. Faith is our decision to follow the Lord, and responsibility is how we live out our faith on this earth. If we step out in confidence

to bring the living God to others, we love as the Lord loves us.

My own faith and responsibility shined bright when I was a life skills educator for teenage mothers. I worked with teen moms to prepare them for life, school, and work. The mothers were often judged for being pregnant, and many people did not see their potential.

My role was not an easy one because of their lack of self-confidence and support. However, I brought my love of the Lord to work every day to show them that God's love for them was mine as well. Many times the love I demonstrated led to conversations about God's loving them. The young mothers opened up to me and appreciated my company, which I attributed to the presence of the living God in my life.

What made the job harder was the fact that many teen moms were foster children or had been sent to us by the court system. They had experienced many childhood traumas; they didn't trust adults. But that was all the more reason to show them the love of God. That was my fundamental reason for coming to work every day. I wanted them to know whom I was following as I served as His hands and feet. And that is the key factor of the violent encounter of today's text: there was no doubt whom David served and whom Goliath served. Can the same be said of you?

What Do You Think?

Consider the cautions discussed with verse 37b (above). What situation(s) might call for throwing caution to the wind?

Digging Deeper

How can you discern when caution is the less faithful choice?

B. Prayer

Lord, may we grow in courage in our faith. May people see the love of Jesus as He guides our steps through the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Make sure others know whom you serve.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Poll your class regarding which animals they think they could fight off bare-handed: a rat, a house cat, a goose, an eagle, a large dog, a king cobra, a crocodile, a lion, a grizzly bear. Jot notes on the board as you go. Ask volunteers to share why they feel confident about defeating one animal but not another. Then compare their responses to the results of a 2021 poll that asked a group of Americans the same question: a rat (72%), a house cat (69%), a goose (61%), an eagle (30%), a large dog (23%), a king cobra (15%), a crocodile (9%), a lion (8%), a grizzly bear (6%). Which results surprised the class? Where did the class differ significantly from these other polling results?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Lions, Tigers, and Bears?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it as indicated.

Next, say, “David, as a shepherd boy, was able to expertly fight animals that threatened his flock. Let’s see how he brought down a giant with just one stone.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read today’s Scripture aloud. Following the reading, divide the class into thirds, designating one group as the **David Group**, the second as the **Saul Group**, and the third as the **Goliath Group**. Have each group read 1 Samuel 17:1-37 among themselves. Distribute handouts (you create) of the following questions for in-group discussion based on the information found regarding their assigned person. Some questions might require research beyond the assigned Scripture: 1—How would you describe this man’s character overall? 2—Does this man command respect? Why, or why not? 3—What accomplishments can this man brag about? 4—What made this man feel confident or insecure? Ask the groups to give a summary of their assigned characters based on their discussion.

Then have the same groups read 1 Samuel 17:38-50 and consider whether their answers changed based on the events recounted there.

Option. Distribute copies of the “David and Goliath Acrostic” exercise from the activity page. Give groups time to complete as indicated before discussing their conclusions as a whole class.

Ask learners to recall examples from Scripture 1—of situations in which people trusted in God in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulty and 2—of similarly difficult situations in which people did not trust God. Did faith or lack thereof make a difference in the outcome? *Option.* Point readers to Hebrews 11 as a starting point, using a concordance to find these examples in their original context; examples of faithlessness are likely also found nearby in these Old Testament texts.

Into Life

Ask the class for examples of times when faithfulness (or a lack of faith) has made a difference in their own lives. Though this could include miracles, encourage the class to highlight seemingly more ordinary ways God shows His care for His children. With partners, have learners discuss how these times have encouraged them in their own skills and in their trust in God’s plans and care.

Distribute a note card and pencil to each learner. Give learners one minute to write down at least one personal “Goliath” they can anticipate facing during the coming year. Then ask each learner to write down personal experience(s) they can recall to reinforce why they can trust God with those situations. Explain to learners that they will not be required to share these answers.

Allow time for participants to write a prayer to use during the week that encourages them to face their Goliaths with faith and trust in the Lord. Ask a volunteer to end the class in prayer that each member would have the courage of David’s faith while facing their Goliaths.

The Family of Faith

Devotional Reading: Psalm 9:1-14

Background Scripture: Genesis 38; Joshua 2; 6:22-25; 2 Samuel 12:24;
Ruth 4:13-22; Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew 1:1-17

1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

6 Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

7 And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;

8 And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;

9 And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;

10 And Ezekias begat Manasses; and

Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;

11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;

13 And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

14 And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

15 And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Key Text

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. —Matthew 1:1

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 1: Profiles in Faith

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the “three 14s” of the text.
2. Explain the purpose of documenting Jesus’ lineage.
3. State a way to value personally his or her own genealogy in Christ while avoiding the danger noted in 1 Timothy 1:4 and Titus 3:9.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Big Business of Genealogy
- B. Lesson Context

I. From Abraham to David (Matthew 1:1-6a)

- A. Introduction to Jesus (v. 1)
- B. Pre-Nation of Israel (v. 2)
- C. Pre-Monarchy of Israel (vv. 3-6a)
What a Mess!

II. From David to the Exile (Matthew 1:6b-11)

- A. Unified Kingdom (vv. 6b-7a)
- B. Kingdom of Judah (vv. 7b-11)

III. From the Exile to Christ (Matthew 1:12-17)

- A. In Babylon (v. 12)
- B. In Judah (vv. 13-16)
Family Legacy
- C. Generational Summary (v. 17)

Conclusion

- A. Jesus’ Family
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Big Business of Genealogy

Genealogical research has become big business worldwide. Tools for genetic testing can identify anyone’s unique DNA sequencing. These tools, combined with vast computing power, have allowed for the compilation of an ever-growing database of millions of individuals’ genetic information. The digitization of massive amounts of genealogical records going back many centuries allows individuals to trace family traits. One leader in this area claims to have billions of records in its database to help with any given search. For a price, individuals can learn details of their ancestors that were inaccessible even a few decades ago.

B. Lesson Context

Biblical genealogies are not necessarily lists of ancestors in exhaustive detail. Differences within two accounts of the same family tree are born not out of error but instead of the writer’s intention. We need only consider that Luke’s genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:23-38) contains 56 generations between Abraham and Jesus compared to Matthew’s 42 generations (see Matthew 1:2-17, below) to understand that something other than precise family history is intended in these lists.

The chronology of the two (in reverse order of one another) further affirms that each writer had priorities beyond mere recitation of family facts. Differences between Matthew and Luke’s genealogies of Jesus could be explored. But we will remain focused on Matthew’s genealogy, keeping in mind that Matthew had valid reasons for organizing Jesus’ genealogy as he did.

Considering who is included in Matthew’s genealogy prepares the careful reader for important themes that recur throughout that Gospel (see commentary on Matthew 1:1-2, 6, below). The curious inclusion of four women (plus Mary; see 1:3, 5-6, 16, below) introduces two other themes that will be found in Matthew’s Gospel (examples: 9:18-25; 15:21-28; 28:16-20). Furthermore, the episodes associated with these women (and others) highlight God’s continued willingness to work through sinful people and imper-

fect circumstances (examples: 4:18-22; 16:13-23; 26:69-75; 28:16-20).

I. From Abraham to David

(Matthew 1:1-6a)

A. Introduction to Jesus (v. 1)

1. The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Right away we can sense Matthew's primary reason for writing this Gospel: to reveal who *Jesus Christ* is and why His life is significant. The Hebrew word for *messiah* and its Greek equivalent, *Christ*, mean "anointed one." *Messiah* also referred at various times to both priests and kings (examples: Exodus 28:41; 1 Chronicles 29:22). Sometime after the fall of David's royal line, the phrase came to more explicitly refer to an anticipated savior of the Jewish people (example: Isaiah 61:1). This hope grew out of the expectation that God continued to care for Israel and would reverse the nation's painful circumstances (compare Matthew 1:20-22, not in our printed text). All of the New Testament expands on what it means for Jesus to be the Christ (Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-14; 1 Peter 2:21; Revelation 1:5-6; etc.).

As *the son of David, the son of Abraham*, we anticipate that Jesus is important to the nation of Israel (see Matthew 1:2a, 6a, below). Matthew's original readers (likely Christian Jews who were still active in their synagogues) knew of promises made to Abraham and David. Jesus fulfilled these promises, though how He did so will take the rest of the Gospel to answer (example: 21:5, 9). One subtle way Matthew emphasizes this point is by referring to Jesus as "son of David" 10 times, more than all the other Gospels combined.

B. Pre-Nation of Israel (v. 2)

2a. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob.

Matthew 1:2-6a is the first third of the genealogy, covering approximately 1,100 years. The three men listed here are Israel's patriarchs and the subjects of Genesis 12–50. They represent the time following God's choosing of *Abraham* to God's creating the new nation of Israel. Perhaps

most notable for themes found in Matthew, Abraham received the promise from God that "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3; see Galatians 3:8).

Isaac was a miracle baby, born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age when it seemed they would not have a family through which to establish God's promise (Genesis 21:1-3). Unexpectedly, the promise was carried out through Isaac's second son, *Jacob* (25:23). Jacob was renamed *Israel*, a designation meaning "struggles with God," because "as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (32:28). This made Israel the namesake of the nation from which Jesus came.

2b. And Jacob begat Judas and his brethren.

The "founding fathers" of Israel were the 12 sons of *Jacob*, here presented as *Judas* (Judah; Genesis 29:35) and *his brethren* (46:8-24). These brothers became the ancestors of the tribes of Israel (35:22-26; Deuteronomy 27:12-13).

C. Pre-Monarchy of Israel (vv. 3-6a)

3a. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar.

Despite not being the oldest brother, a descendant of *Judas* would fulfill the words Jacob spoke: "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet" (Genesis 49:10; see Matthew 1:6, below).

We note Matthew's first deviation of the pattern from male to male (so far, father to son). *Thamar* (Tamar) was Judah's daughter-in-law, assumed to be a Canaanite given Judah's own marriage and his physical location when Tamar married into the family (Genesis 38:1-6). She was left a childless widow when her husband, Er, died

How to Say It

Esrom	Hezz-rom.
Jechonias	Jek-o-nye-us.
Joatham	Jo-thum.
Josaphat	Jos-uh-fat.
Naasson	Nah-shahn.
Roboam	Ruh-boe-um.
Salathiel	Sa-la-tee-el.
Zorobabel	Zeh-rub-uh-bul.

and his brother, Onan, refused to fulfill his duty according to what would come to be known as Levirate marriage (38:7-8; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; see lesson 1). When Judah proved unwilling to care for his daughter-in-law, Tamar devised a plan to become pregnant by Judah himself (Genesis 38:11-18). The result was twin boys, *Pharez* (Pharez; 38:29) and *Zara* (Zarah; 38:30).

From this spotlight, we can anticipate two themes in Matthew: God’s concern for Gentiles (any non-Israelite) and for women. This hints at the hope of salvation beyond Israel, as well as the need for a more robust understanding of salvation than mere political independence (see Matthew 1:5-6, below; compare Acts 15:7-11). Furthermore, we see God’s care and concern in the mess of this real human family. The juxtaposition between the Christ and His family cannot be missed. Nor can we miss God’s willingness to work through sinful people to fulfill His promises.

What a Mess!

Why does the genealogy of Jesus emphasize the fact that He is descended from Pharez, born after Tamar posed as a prostitute to entrap her father-in-law (Genesis 38)? Several possibilities come to mind, all indicative of God’s love. No matter how serious our sins, or how they compound with one choice after another, God can redeem those situations and offer grace. None of us are doomed to follow our parents’ flawed paths, nor guaranteed

that we will follow their faithful examples. And we can find comfort in the pain of our own messy families because Jesus’ family was also a mess—and look what God did through them!

When you read about Tamar and Judah and the other messes up and down Jesus’ family tree, what encouragement do you experience? Who else will benefit from that encouragement and meeting Jesus in the middle of His messy family? —A. W.

3b. And Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram.

Phares and *Esrom* (Hezron) journeyed to Egypt during the famine in Canaan (Genesis 46:12). Their father’s complicity in the sin of selling his own brother Joseph into slavery (37:12-36) was redeemed through Joseph’s God-given work of mitigating the effects of a transnational famine (45:4-8).

4. And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon.

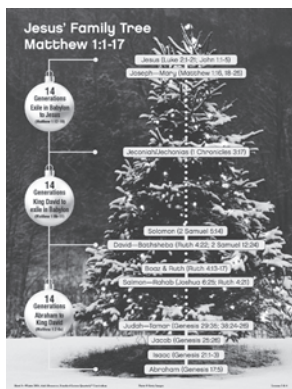
Aram and *Aminadab* (Amminadab) represent generations born in Egypt who experienced part of the 430 years there, culminating in the exodus from slavery in 1447 BC (see Exodus 12:40). Amminadab is further associated with the 40-year wandering in the wilderness, as is *Naasson* (Nahshon; see Numbers 1:7; 7:12; 10:14). *Salmon* represents the first generation that was tasked with conquering Canaan in the days of Joshua, about 1400 BC (Joshua 1; see Matthew 1:5a).

5a. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab.

Rachab (Rahab) is the second Gentile woman to be named. Specifically, she was the Canaanite prostitute who became a heroine in Israel’s conquest of Jericho (Joshua 2; 6:25; compare Hebrews 11:31). Her inclusion reinforces the reality of sinfulness in Jesus’ family tree as well as God’s continued redemptive work through this less-than-ideal family.

5b. And Booz begat Obed of Ruth, and Obed begat Jesse.

The story of *Booz* (Boaz) and *Ruth* comprises the four chapters of the biblical book named after this Moabite heroine (see lesson 1). She is the third Gentile to be named in this genealogy. The birth



Visual for Lessons 3 & 4

Allow students to refer to this image as they reacquaint themselves with Jesus’ family tree.

of her son, *Obed*, relieved her mother-in-law of her great sorrow (Ruth 4:13-17).

6a. And Jesse begat David the king.

Jesse originally offered his older sons as candidates for kingship. But the Lord chose *Jesse*'s youngest son, *David*, instead (1 Samuel 16:7, 11-13; see lesson 2 for more on *David*).

Referring to *David* as *the king* and emphasizing his position in *Jesus*' family tree (see Matthew 1:1, 16) calls to mind promises God made to *David*. Chief among these promises was that *David*'s throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:5-15; 1 Kings 2:45; Psalm 89:35-37; see commentary on Matthew 1:11, below).

What Do You Think?

How might a family's faith be enriched by the perspective of believers from other cultures?

Digging Deeper

What opportunities exist in your community to experience enrichment from different groups of Christian believers?

II. From David to the Exile

(Matthew 1:6b-11)

A. Unified Kingdom (vv. 6b-7a)

6b. And David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias.

Matthew 1:6b-11 represents the second third of the genealogy, covering about 400 years, from 1000 to 586 BC. We can hazard some educated guesses as to why *Bathsheba* is referred as *the wife of Urias* (*Uriah*; 2 Samuel 11:3) instead of by name. Given that the other women in this list were Gentiles, it's possible that giving this title to *Bathsheba* highlights that she was likely a *Hittite* as was *Uriah*. And the designation emphasizes her first marriage that was destroyed after *David* called her to his house (11:4-27). Reminding the reader of *David*'s grave sins serves to temper any hero worship that the king's status—especially having been hand-picked by God and received incredible blessings from Him (see Matthew 1:6a, above)—might otherwise inspire.

7a. And Solomon begat Roboam.

David had several wives and many children (1 Chronicles 3:1-9); at his death, *Solomon* became king (1 Kings 1:31-34). He was the last king of the united monarchy of Israel, due in large part to his own faithlessness later in his reign (see 11:9-13). His son *Roboam* (*Rehoboam*; 11:43) acted foolishly by listening to his friends instead of wise advisors (a warning to us all!). This precipitated the division of the kingdom that the Lord decreed following *Solomon*'s faithlessness. Even so, God left a remnant to *David*'s family in light of God's promise to that man (12:1-24).

What Do You Think?

What takeaway should believers have from *Solomon*'s life of early faith and late apostasy?

Digging Deeper

What other biblical texts affirm or challenge that takeaway?

B. Kingdom of Judah (vv. 7b-11)

7b-8. And Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa. And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias.

This verse and a half lists the names of King *Roboam* and his successors who ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah in Jerusalem from 931 to 740 BC, following the revolt of Israel's 10 northern tribes. *Abia* was not a righteous king (*Abijah*; 1 Kings 15:1-3). But his son *Asa* and grandson *Josaphat* were righteous (*Jehoshaphat*; 15:11; 22:42-43). *Joram* stepped out of his father and grandfather's footsteps and "wrought that which was evil" (*Jehoram*; 2 Chronicles 21:5-7). *Ozias* (*Uzziah*) was again characterized as doing "that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (26:1-4; contrast 26:16-21). Matthew skipped three kings and a queen between *Jehoram* and *Uzziah*.

9-10. And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; and Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias.

The kings listed here represent some of Judah's best—*Joatham* (*Jotham*; 2 Kings 15:32-34); *Ezekias* (*Hezekiah*; 18:1-4); and *Josias* (*Josiah*; 22:1-2). Assyria conquered Israel during the reign of

Hezekiah (722 BC). Judah's survival of that crisis is attributed in part to Hezekiah's continued faithfulness to the Lord (19:14-36). Later, Josiah was credited with reinstating the worship of the Lord and teaching the book of the law (probably a copy of Deuteronomy; see 2 Chronicles 34:15).

These kings also represent some of Judah's worst—*Achaz* (Ahaz; 2 Kings 16:1-4); *Manasseh* (Manasseh; 21:1-9); and *Amon* (21:19-22). The prophet Jeremiah attributed the eventual fall of Jerusalem in part to the disastrous reign of Manasseh (Jeremiah 15:4).

What Do You Think?

Why isn't a God-fearing parent like Hezekiah guaranteed to have a God-fearing child (consider wicked Manasseh)?

Digging Deeper

What support can you offer parents whose children have rejected godly living?

11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

Josiah's wicked (grand)son *Jechonias* (Jehoiachin; 2 Kings 24:8-9) and his brethren were exiled in the first wave of captives (24:15-16). Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in the final Babylonian siege in 586 BC (25:8-12). Many residents were killed; most survivors were carried away to *Babylon*. The exile marks the end of the second set of 14 generations (see Matthew 1:17b, below).

III. From the Exile to Christ

(Matthew 1:12-17)

A. In Babylon (v. 12)

12. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel.

Matthew 1:12-16 is the final third of the genealogy, covering just under 600 years. *Babylon* was the low point of Jewish history. The people had been forcibly removed from the promised land by

God's own plan (Jeremiah 20:4-5; etc.). And the throne was never reestablished in Jerusalem.

This time also gave rise to the messianic expectations of a Davidic king to come, which Jesus fulfilled in unexpected ways (see lesson 5 on the importance of prophetic fulfillment in Matthew). *Jehoiachin*, *Salathiel* (Shealtiel; 1 Chronicles 3:17), and *Zorobabel* (Zerubbabel; 3:19) represent the 70 years of Babylonian exile. After Babylon was conquered by the Persians, King Cyrus allowed the people of Judah to return to Jerusalem in 538 BC (Ezra 1:1-4). Zerubbabel was instrumental in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple (3:2; 5:2; 6:13-18), completed about 516 BC.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does remembering family history, including successes and failures, help younger generations?

Digging Deeper

Why might shared history of trauma (like exile) be especially important or instructive?

B. In Judah (vv. 13-16)

13. And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor.

With *Zorobabel*, the Old Testament account of the kingly line ends. Matthew includes nine names in verses 13-15 that come from a source unknown to us.

14-15. And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob.

Again, nothing is available in the biblical record about these men, whose lives cover the time from the rebuilding of the temple (see Matthew 1:12, above) to Jesus' own adoptive paternal grandfather, *Jacob*.

Family Legacy

Photos from the past help us remember tidbits about family we never met. Maybe Great-Grandpa Sam had a silver dollar collection, or Great-Great-Aunt Lucy was the first woman to leave the family farm for a job in town. An Uncle Deet (short

for Dietrich) and his first wife (whose name was forgotten) passed down the German Bible they brought when they immigrated.

We may forget the details of their lives, but no doubt our ancestors' influence continues in our families. If you can leave only one legacy for your descendants when you are only a photograph, what do you hope it to be? How can you live today so that this hope can come to be? —A. W.

16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

The final entries in the genealogy are carefully worded. Matthew breaks his pattern of “begetting” with *Joseph*. He is *the husband of Mary*, not a biological relative of Jesus (Matthew 1:18, not in our printed text). Jesus' belonging in Joseph's family was a matter of choice, like adoption, instead of natural heritage.

Mary is the fifth and final woman in the genealogy. Unlike the others, she was not a Gentile and was a virgin when she conceived. Mary accepted God's plan for her with faith and humility (Luke 1:26-38; see lesson 4), demonstrating why He chose her to raise Jesus. Calling Jesus *Christ* bookends the genealogy (see commentary on Matthew 1:1, above).

C. Generational Summary (v. 17)

17. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Numbering *fourteen generations* between *Abraham* and *David*, *David* and *the carrying away into Babylon*, and the Babylonian exile to Jesus is an organizational tool that emphasizes the roles of Abraham, David, and the exile as formative people/events in Israel's history.

This summary serves to emphasize the fulfillment of God's promises. Abraham received the first promises specific to the nation of Israel and blessing through the nation for the world (see Matthew 1:2a, above). David received promises for a kingly

line in Israel (see 1:6a). *The carrying away into Babylon* marked the end of kingship in Judah and seemingly of the nation itself, thus throwing into question God's continued intention to fulfill His promises, especially toward David (Psalm 89:46-52). But only 14 generations later *Christ* was born!

Conclusion

A. Jesus' Family

Some of us learn very early, others later on, that it is challenging, sometimes heartbreaking, to belong in a family. For all of us, being reminded of the mix of righteous people (like David) along with those who famously fell in sin (also like David) in Jesus' own family line is a word of comfort: no matter who we come from, we can look for God's hand at work in our families.

More than this, Jesus' genealogy is a word of comfort because it is a word about our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, God fulfilled promises He made (by Matthew's count) as early as 42 generations prior! The lineage of Jesus shows how God moved beyond people's sin and selfishness to use them in His plan for His Messiah. This genealogy is the first evidence Matthew presents of Jesus' Messiahship, and certainly not the last (example: Matthew 16:16).

What Do You Think?

Who in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus do you most identify with?

Digging Deeper

What comfort do you find in God's working through that person for His promises to be fulfilled in Christ?

B. Prayer

Lord God, may we be reminded that You use all sorts of people to accomplish Your will. May You use us, in spite of our sins and weaknesses. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plans.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Engage the class in a discussion of genealogy. Possible questions to ask are: 1—How have you researched your family heritage? 2—What ancestors are you most proud of? Why? 3—Which ancestors would you rather forget? Why? 4—What family legacy has been handed down to you from your ancestors? Guide the group to consider not only material inheritance but also family traditions, customs, values, educational legacies, occupations, and faith heritage that have been woven into the fabric of the family for generations.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Surprising Ancestors” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work individually on the exercise as indicated for a minute or less before discussing conclusions as a whole group. *Option.* Read the exercise aloud and have the class vote on each statement.

Next, say, “Jesus’ genealogy includes a lot of characters who might surprise us—if we forget that God works through surprising people. Let’s see what we can learn from Jesus’ ancestry and how we can be encouraged by it.”

Into the Word

Distribute a handout (you create) of Matthew 1:1-17. After reading verse 1 aloud to the class, ask three volunteers to read the three genealogical divisions (vv. 2-6a, 6b-11, 12-16); close by reading verse 17 yourself. As you and the volunteers read, have the rest of the class circle names they recognize, write question marks by names they don’t recognize, and put stars by people they are surprised are named. Allow one minute for learners silently to reread the genealogy to complete their mark-up. Ask the class what themes they can identify from the genealogy that are present throughout Matthew’s Gospel. See the Lesson Context for possible answers.

Alternative. Invite the class to pick out any

familiar names they know from the genealogy and tell biblical stories they remember about these characters. They may want to use their phones or the concordances or glossaries in the back of their Bibles to find some details. What good and bad qualities did Jesus’ ancestors have?

Divide the group into three groups: **Father Abraham** (Matthew 1:2-6a), **King David** (1:6b-11), and **Exile in Babylon** (1:12-16). Allow 10 minutes for the groups to explore the importance of their respective person or event in Israel’s history, as well as any names within their verses they identified in the previous exercise. Use the lesson commentary to find starting points for learning more about the men and women listed. When the class comes back together, ask each group to summarize their main character/event and disclose one surprising or eye-opening fact they discovered. Ask whether this exercise yielded any new insight regarding themes in Matthew.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Genealogy Puzzle” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it as directed in groups of three.

Conclude with a discussion about why Matthew started his Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus. What is Matthew claiming in 1:1 and again in 1:17? Why is that important? Refer to the commentary as desired.

Into Life

In pairs, have learners share themes in their own genealogies that show God’s work in their families. Then have each learner share ideas about how to value his or her own genealogy in Christ. After a few minutes, bring the class back together and ask one volunteer to read 1 Timothy 1:4 and another to read Titus 3:9. Discuss how to avoid the dangers noted in these two verses.

Close the class in prayer, praising God for making us part of His family lineage.

Expectant Mothers' Faith

Devotional Reading: Philippians 4:10-19
Background Scripture: Luke 1:1-25, 39-45, 56-60

Luke 1:36-45, 56

36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped

in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.



Key Text

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women. —Luke 1:41-42a

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 1: Profiles in Faith

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the relationship between the two expectant mothers.
2. Explain the significance of Elisabeth's greeting.
3. Suggest one way that he or she can move closer to having a faith as one or both expectant mothers had.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Infectious Joy
- B. Lesson Context

I. Acceptance of the Message (Luke 1:36-38)

- A. Encouragement to Believe (vv. 36-37)
- B. Belief and Submission (v. 38)

II. Joyous Meeting (Luke 1:39-45, 56)

- A. Hope-Filled Journey (vv. 39-40)
- B. Blessed Be the Mother (vv. 41-44)
When the King Comes to Us
- C. Blessed Be Your Faith (vv. 45, 56)
The Greater Blessed

Conclusion

- A. Two Models, Two Paths
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Infectious Joy

Early in our marriage, my wife was not certain whether she ever wanted children. That was something I had to work through because I was certain that I *did* want children to be part of our family. I ultimately decided that I hadn't married her for her ability to have children, and I had to leave the question in God's hands. However, she was interested in birthing as a profession, and she completed her training to become a *doula* (a Greek word meaning "female servant"), which is a labor and birth support worker. This means she was with women having babies a lot.

My wife's job had her working both with new parents and parents who were having their fifth or sixth child. In both cases, she witnessed a lot of pain but also the boundless joy of the parents as their babies were born. Her reluctance about having children changed, and now we have three. She desires more, saying that she would happily have six children if she could. This has even led us into looking at adoption. All of this happened because the joy of other parents was infectious.

In this lesson, we will see how joy can be infectious, from the unborn John the Baptist to his mother Elisabeth, to even the shared joy between Elisabeth and Mary.

B. Lesson Context

Early church tradition unanimously identified Luke, a physician and traveling companion of Paul, as the writer of the third Gospel and the book of Acts (Colossians 4:11-14). While the evidence is slim, there is a chance that Luke was the only Gentile author in the New Testament. Some scholars put the date of writing at around AD 60. This most likely occurred while Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea Maritima (as recorded in Acts 23:33; 24:27), which would have freed up Luke to interview the eyewitnesses of Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 1:1-3). The accuracy of the resulting research puts Luke in the company of the very best ancient Greek historians.

One of the eyewitnesses that Luke could have

interviewed was Mary, the mother of Jesus. Such an interview would not be surprising, for the Gospel of Luke has more material regarding women than either of the other synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Mark. One example of this material unique to Luke's Gospel is Jesus' interaction with Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Another example is today's text. As the text opens, the birth of the person who came to be known as John the Baptist has been foretold (Luke 1:5-25), as has been the birth of Jesus (1:26-35)—both by angelic visitation.

I. Acceptance of the Message

(Luke 1:36-38)

A. Encouragement to Believe (vv. 36-37)

36. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

The one speaking is the angel Gabriel, and the one being spoken to is Mary (Luke 1:26-27). Exactly how Elisabeth and Mary were related is not certain since the Greek word translated *cousin* simply means “female relative.” Although the birth of Elisabeth’s son, John the Baptist, had already been foretold, the news apparently didn’t reach Mary until this point, six months after the conception (compare 1:24). That conception was miraculous, given that Elisabeth had been through menopause (1:7, 18). She and her husband had been childless to this point, given the *barren* state of Elisabeth (compare and contrast Genesis 11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Judges 13:2-3; 1 Samuel 1:2).

There is uncertainty as to exactly how old John’s parents were. His father, Zacharias, was a priest, and priests were from the tribe of Levi. Levites had to retire at age 50 (Numbers 8:25; compare 4:46-47), but no specific age limit is found for priests. (All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.) Thus we should not be surprised that Zacharias was still serving in his priestly role (Luke 1:8-9). Additionally, the high priest typically served for life (see Joshua 20:6).

This information about Elisabeth’s pregnancy would have strengthened Mary’s faith. It confirmed what the angel Gabriel had just said about the child Mary would be bearing.

37. For with God nothing shall be impossible.

This verse would have reminded the original reader of Abraham and Sarah’s struggle with infertility, for it is an allusion to Genesis 18:14: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (See also Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27.)

What Do You Think?

How does Luke 1:37 encourage your trust in God’s Word?

Digging Deeper

How does Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture in Matthew 4:1-11 inform your response?

B. Belief and Submission (v. 38)

38. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Both the elderly priest Zacharias and the young virgin *Mary* asked the question, “How?” (Luke 1:18, 34). However, Gabriel’s responses to each of them differ. Zacharias asked skeptically for a sign—an inappropriate response from a person of his status. God responded with a sign, though probably not the kind Zacharias had

How to Say It

Caesarea Maritima	Sess-uh-ree-uh Mar-uh-tee-muh.
eulogy	you-luh-jee.
Gabriel	Gay-bree-ul.
Galilee	Gal-uh-lee.
Hebron	Hee-brun or Heb-run.
Levi	Lee-vye.
Levites	Lee-vites.
Nazareth	Naz-uh-reth.
synoptic	sih-nawp-tihk.
Thessalonians	Thess-uh-lo-nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Zacharias	Zack-uh-rye-us.

expected (see 1:19-20). Mary’s reaction, on the other hand, was one of innocent inquiry, given her subsequent humility, as seen in the verse before us. She was willing to do whatever service that God would require of her. Young Mary’s faith surpassed that of an old priest! Mary’s faith can be compared and contrasted with Hannah’s (1 Samuel 1:10-20).

There is nothing in Gabriel’s response to suggest that God’s plan was contingent on Mary’s agreement with it. Even so, her statement of submission is important. In describing herself as a *handmaid*, Mary used a term that refers to servants (the same Greek word noted in the Introduction, above; also in Luke 1:48 and Acts 2:18). In so doing, so she expressed her intended obedience to the Lord.

II. Joyous Meeting

(Luke 1:39-45, 56)

A. Hope-Filled Journey (vv. 39-40)

39. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda.

Mary lived in “a city of Galilee, named Nazareth” (Luke 1:26), while Elisabeth and her husband, Zacharias, lived in an unnamed *city of Juda*. The exact location of their home is unknown, but *the hill country* would have included the city of Hebron, which was given

to the priests (see Joshua 21:11). A journey from one to the other would have been about 100 miles. The two villages were located in different areas that later would have different rulers (see Matthew 2:22; Luke 3:1). But, in the time of the event depicted in this verse, Herod the Great ruled both (see 1:5).

Hilly Juda is the district that included Jerusalem. If Hebron was not the unnamed city, then the trip would still be at least 35 miles, assuming that the city is at the northern tip of Judean territory. Either way, it’s a long trip by foot! Mary most likely made the trip with a caravan or a companion for safety. Luke indicates that Mary traveled to see Elizabeth with a sense of urgency that may reflect that difficult travels are more manageable in the early stages of pregnancy. The haste in which she did so seems to reflect her eager desire to see this wonder that the angel told her of.

What Do You Think?

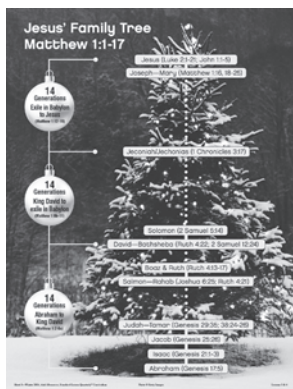
What steps will you take to be a relative who your family can turn to during confusion, crisis, or need?

Digging Deeper

How will you improve your margin with time and money so that you can better help family members?

40. And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

Luke made no mention either of distance or exhaustion. Instead, he focused on the interactions of those present. On entering *the house*, Mary began a normal exchange of greetings with *Elisabeth*; the word translated *saluted* occurs elsewhere in terms of normal greetings (examples: Romans 16:3, 6, 8, 11). There were several common greetings from that period, such as, “The blessing of Yahweh be upon thee,” or, “Be thou blessed of Yahweh,” or, “May peace be yours” (compare Luke 24:36; John 20:19-26). We don’t know which of these salutations Mary used, if any. Greetings in antiquity often included some type of kiss (examples: Exodus 18:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:26).



Visual for
Lessons 3 & 4

Encourage learners to pray for God to work through their families this holiday season.

B. Blessed Be the Mother (vv. 41-44)

41. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.

While no details are given as to exactly when *Mary* became pregnant, time factors indicate that she was not far enough along to be showing. Even so, *Elisabeth* realized that her younger relative was with child when the two met, provoking a startling reaction!

There is nothing inherently unusual about a baby moving about in the *womb*, of course. But the timing of that reaction here is significant in view of the relationship that later emerges between Jesus (*Mary's* child) and John the Baptist (*Elisabeth's* child). The latter was to be “filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb” as empowerment “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:15-17). Even before his birth, John began to fulfill his role by signaling to his mother that the anticipated Christ, himself yet unborn, was present. At the same time, *Elisabeth* was filled with the Spirit to confirm the message Mary had received from the angel (next verse).

The Holy Ghost is a key figure throughout the Scriptures written by Luke. His Gospel and the book of Acts combined feature about 60 percent of the New Testament’s usages of this designation.

42. And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

While *Mary* possibly would not have been showing as pregnant yet, her state was revealed to *Elisabeth* by the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but the identity of the child was also revealed to her. *Elisabeth* could not be silent concerning the events that were transpiring. She may have been in seclusion concerning her own pregnancy, but when the mother of the Lord shows up on her doorstep, *Elisabeth* became a *loud* proclaimer of the truth.

The word *blessed* occurs three times in today’s text: twice here and once in verse 45. However, different Greek words are behind the translations. The word behind the two instances of “blessed” in

the verse at hand is also our English word *eulogy*. As we use that word today, we refer to statements in honor of someone who has died. But we should not take the modern way we use this word and “read it back” into the Bible! There it means “to speak well of,” “to celebrate with praises,” or “to extol” someone, but not just at funerals. *Elisabeth* was speaking well of *Mary* while the latter was still very much alive!

Given the importance of this verse in certain religious circles, it is essential to note that these two statements do not speak to why *Mary* is blessed (but see Luke 1:45, below). We can note at this point that doubled expressions of blessing have precedent in the Old Testament (see Deuteronomy 28:3, 6; Judges 5:24).

What Do You Think?

What is one action you can take in the upcoming week so that others feel blessed when they are with you?

Digging Deeper

How does Galatians 5:22-23 affect your response?

43. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Elisabeth was the first person to acknowledge Jesus as *Lord*, even though Jesus was still in *Mary's* womb. In Scripture, the designation *my Lord* is used for both God and Jesus and is preferred by Luke. For comparative purposes, Mark uses the phrase *my Lord* 6 times, and Luke uses the designation 27 times! While it is uncertain precisely what *Elisabeth* understood by this address, the fact that she used it highlights her great faith that God was intervening in history. *Elisabeth's* question is one of great humility as well as divinely given insight.

When the King Comes to Us

A king paid a surprise visit to the house of his servant and—to no surprise—left the servant befuddled.

“Sir,” stammered the servant, “What are you doing here?”

The servant’s question and confusion were

understandable. Why would a royal leader show up at the home of a lowly hireling? Was the servant in trouble? Did he do something wrong?

“I wanted to get to know your situation firsthand and see what needs of yours I can meet,” replied the king.

For several minutes, the servant experienced a tidal wave of various emotions—inadequacy, gratitude, relief, joy, etc. Realizing his utter unworthiness to host the king humbled him.

Do you, Christian, experience a similar range of emotions when you reflect on the fact that the Son of God put on flesh to meet us on our own turf? Are you no less amazed than Elisabeth at the arrival of God’s grace to us in Christ? If not, what deficit do you need to address in this regard?

—D. D.

44. For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

This verse repeats information from verse 41, above, and adds *for joy*. John the Baptist’s prenatal reaction seems somehow to have reflected his sense of anticipation of the coming of the one who would give meaning to John’s mission.

Since Elisabeth was six months along in her pregnancy, the child in her womb was developed enough for Elisabeth to feel movement—and John *the babe* really moved! As John the Baptist would reflect on rejoicing at the hearing of the bridegroom Jesus’ voice some 30 years hence (Luke 3:23; John 3:29), so here John rejoiced at the hearing of Mary’s voice as she carried the unborn Jesus. And Elisabeth herself had some insight to discern that John’s movement was not arbitrary.

It is likely that the Spirit informed the unborn John who this was, and John leaped for joy. The whole reason for John’s existence was now here before him. The filling of Elisabeth by the Holy Spirit is what allowed her to discern what John’s sudden movement meant. She gave voice to the joy that the baby inside her felt.

John 1:29-34 reveals that it wasn’t anything about John himself that caused him to recognize Jesus. Instead, God informed him of Jesus’ identity, and the same must be true here.

C. Blessed Be Your Faith (vv. 45, 56)

45. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Elisabeth stated that Mary was blessed first, not because of Mary’s identity, but because of with whom Mary was pregnant. This is very much the same sort of salutation that Gabriel gave to Mary when he first appeared to her (Luke 1:28).

The Greek word translated *blessed* here and three verses later is not the same word translated that way in Luke 1:42, above. The word under consideration here, occurring 50 times in the New Testament, will be the one that Jesus used later in pronouncing the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11). It carries the sense of “enjoying favorable circumstances” (compare its translation as “happier” in 1 Corinthians 7:40).

While the blessing of Luke 1:42 was based on the fact that Mary was to bear the Messiah, the blessing pronounced here is based on her faith (*she that believed*). Mary’s belief starkly contrasts the unbelief of the elderly priest Zacharias, father of John the Baptist (see Luke 1:5-20). Use of the word translated *blessed* usually includes a reason or explanation for someone to be regarded as blessed. We see such a reason here. Mary was blessed because she believed that *there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord*.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to imitate Mary’s belief?

Digging Deeper

What distractions do you need to remove in order to do so?

The Greater Blessed

Jackie married her high school sweetheart, received an offer for her dream job, bought her dream house, and became pregnant in the same year. Every conversation she had with her friends resulted in the response: “You are so blessed!” Her sister, Jasmine, did not hear the same pronouncement nearly as often. Jasmine remained single and made less than half as much money as Jackie.

But Jasmine was a Christian and a member of a church, while sister Jackie was not. Which of these two women was the greater blessed?

The answer to that depends on which lens you use in viewing their situations. Viewed strictly through a worldly lens, Jackie was the greater blessed; but viewed through the heavenly lens of eternity, the greater blessed is Jasmine.

Which lens do you use to view your own status and situation?

Have you forgotten how blessed you are to believe in Christ? It's easy to do in a world that casts God to the side and enthrones His gifts as gods themselves. But let Elisabeth's pronouncements of blessing remind you of the true nature of blessedness. —D. D.

56. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

The *three months* spent with Elisabeth were undoubtedly an additional blessing for *Mary*. Here was a safe place for this young woman to adapt to her changed situation as Elisabeth provided support. Mary also was undoubtedly a blessing to Elisabeth in return, as the older woman in the latter stage of her pregnancy probably needed the help of a younger person.

Since the six months of Luke 1:26, 36 plus the three months of the verse before us equals nine months, Mary would have left just before John's birth or just after it. Relatives were at the naming ceremony (see Luke 1:58), and these could have included Mary. But ultimately, this is speculation—the text does not say.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways you can provide hospitality and support to expectant mothers?

Digging Deeper

How is James 1:27 relevant here?

Conclusion

A. Two Models, Two Paths

When it comes to belief and faith, I have often wondered whether I am more in the mold

of Zacharias, with his doubts, than I am in the role of Mary, with her faith and acceptance. As I write this, there are multiple degrees in biblical studies hanging on my office wall, and I have 20 years of teaching experience at a Bible college under my belt. As a seasoned priest, Zacharias was similarly well-educated in the things of God. You would expect him to have the greater faith. But the greater faith is found with Mary.

Now I genuinely believe my education is a blessing and helps my faith. Yet there are times when I wonder whether my education distracts me from having faith like Mary's. Perhaps we trust in our learning and understanding to figure things out rather than trusting God, and in so doing violate Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Mary wasn't as formally educated as the learned priest. Yet, her belief was genuine. What Mary was asked to accept was not an easy thing, and God understood this. In encouraging Mary's faith, the angel pointed her both backward to the story of Abraham and Sarah and forward to what was happening to Elisabeth. God may call you to a role similar to that of the angel as you point another person backward to a champion of faith and forward to an example of how God is now working.

The joy experienced by John the Baptist and Elisabeth resulted from Mary's faith, at least in part. The ripple effect of this joy is also seen in passages such as Matthew 2:10 and Luke 2:10, 21-38 (contrast Matthew 2:3). That ripple effect reaches us here in the twenty-first century—or at least it should!

B. Prayer

Lord, thank You for the example of Mary's trusting belief. Show us how Mary's example can inform our own faith. Help us move ever more toward belief and faith! Thank You for the encouragement of Your faithful people of the past as recorded in Your Word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Faith with obedience leads to great joy.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask volunteers to give examples of ways that children have unique insight. You may want to write responses on the board.

Transition to another topic by asking, “What are some of the funny or clever things you have heard children say?”

Transition to a third topic by inviting any parents to share about times when their baby kicked in the womb more than usual or reacted to particular sounds or experiences. Ask, “What might the baby have been communicating to the mother?”

Option: Before class, do an online search for insights by kids. Share with the class the results of your search.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Baby Talk Translator” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions with a partner.

After either activity, say, “When Mary visited her relative Elisabeth, the unborn baby of Elisabeth reacted when hearing Mary’s voice. In today’s lesson, we will explore the significance of Elisabeth’s response.”

Into the Word

Ask three volunteers to play the parts of the angel, Mary, and Elisabeth. Have another volunteer read aloud Luke 1:36-45, 56 and have the three volunteers reenact the events depicted in the Scripture. After reading, pause for a time of prayer to thank God for the miracle of the birth of Jesus.

Divide the class into two groups: **Mary Group** and **Elisabeth Group**. Ask each group to use the Scripture reading to develop a profile of the faith of their group’s namesake. Write these questions on the board to guide the groups:

1. What was the role of the Holy Spirit in each mother’s reactions?

2. How did each woman’s age affect her response?
3. What gave the women courage to accept and share their joy?
4. In what ways would the women have felt encouragement by having a relative who was also pregnant?
5. In what ways did the women respond with faith and courage to the call that God placed on their lives?
6. In one word, how would you describe the faith of Mary? of Elisabeth?

After 10 minutes, reconvene groups to share their profiles with the whole class.

Into Life

Ask learners to spend one minute in silent consideration regarding how they might respond in courage and faith to a call that God has given each of them.

Say, “One way that we can move closer to the kind of faith that both women had is through praising God in all circumstances, no matter how unusual or uncertain those circumstances may be.” Divide learners into pairs. Allow time for each learner to share with his or her partner three reasons for praising God despite any challenging circumstances that learners may be experiencing.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Write Your Own Song” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before sharing their prayers of praise with a partner.

Conclude class with a time of worship and praise. Play Christmas songs that are related to today’s Scripture and meaningful to your congregation. Display the song lyrics for students to sing or read along as they choose.

Option. If learners wrote their own songs in the previous activity, ask volunteers to read what they wrote as prayers of praise to God.

The Faith of the Wise Men

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 49:1-6

Background Scripture: Micah 5:2-4; Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called

the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Key Text

Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. —Matthew 2:2

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 1: Profiles in Faith

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe the historical setting of the encounter between Herod and the wise men.
2. Contrast God's guidance of the wise men on their mission with His guidance of Christians today.
3. Identify one area of ministry where God is leading him or her and discuss with a church leader the best way to follow that path faithfully.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Still Seeking Jesus?
- B. Lesson Context

I. The New King Is Born (Matthew 2:1-2)

- A. Coming to Jerusalem (v. 1)
- B. Seeking the King (v. 2)
"The Star"

II. The Old King Is Troubled (Matthew 2:3-8)

- A. Consulting the Scholars (vv. 3-4)
- B. Pinpointing Bethlehem (vv. 5-6)
- C. Plotting Murder (vv. 7-8)
The Great and the Terrible

III. The Child Is Worshipped (Matthew 2:9-12)

- A. Following the Star (vv. 9-10)
- B. Presenting Treasures (v. 11)
- C. Exiting Another Way (v. 12)

Conclusion

- A. Offer Thy Heart
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Still Seeking Jesus?

The Christmas season reveals many sayings that try to encapsulate the meaning of the holiday in just a few words. Near my neighborhood, one house always displays a banner that reads, "Christ is the reason for the season." Another neighbor annually displays a sign proclaiming, "Let's put Christ back in Christmas." These sayings are self-explanatory. After all, why have a season bearing the name of Christ without consideration of Christ himself?

Even asking that question shows the absurdity of some secular Christmas traditions. Should Christmas remind us of cola-drinking polar bears in red mufflers? Clydesdales hauling a beer wagon? A snowman come to life? Or is there something more important?

Another saying requires a bit of knowledge of the biblical Christmas story to make sense: "Wise men still seek him." This saying is based on the account in today's text.

B. Lesson Context

Our text for study involves a mysterious star. This invites a consideration of the distinction between astronomy and astrology. In modern times, we make a clear-cut distinction between those two areas of inquiry. But the two were blended together in the ancient world. *Astronomy* is the scientific study of the sun, moon, stars, planets, etc.; *astrology* combines that study with the belief that the so-called gods orchestrate the appearance, positions, and movements of heavenly phenomena and, therefore, reveal information about divine plans for the future (omens). Astrology is practiced today in the form of horoscopes associated with the zodiac.

In the Old Testament, astrologers are mentioned most notably in the book of Daniel (Daniel 2:2, 10; 4:7; 5:7, 11; see also Isaiah 47:13). The people of Israel were warned about pagan occult practices; astrology, being a type of divination, was one of those (Deuteronomy 18:10-11; Jeremiah 10:2). And moving from consulting the stars to worshipping the stars was an all-too-easy step to take (Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:2-5; Jeremiah 8:2).

The ancient Greek translation of the book of Daniel designates such men as *magoi*, from which we derive our modern word *magician*. But words change meaning over time, and how ancient people viewed *magoi* is not to be equated with the contemporary role of a magician who uses sleight of hand to entertain audiences. Instead, this word describes men of wisdom; we surmise they were astrologer-scholars. This same Greek word *magoi* is behind the English translation “wise men” in Matthew 2:1, 7, 16. It occurs also in Acts 13:6, 8, translated there as “sorcerer.”

I. The New King Is Born

(Matthew 2:1-2)

A. Coming to Jerusalem (v. 1)

1a. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea.

Matthew gives fewer details about the actual birth of Jesus than does Luke. Instead, Matthew relates the nativity story with simplicity: *Jesus was born in Bethlehem*. A few details are added, tying his account to the geography and history of Palestine. *Bethlehem* (meaning “house of bread”) of *Judaea* was a village located a few miles south-southwest of Jerusalem. It is not to be confused with Bethlehem of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15). The Bethlehem noted in today’s text was the birthplace of King David (1 Samuel 20:6).

1b. In the days of Herod the king.

The phrase *the days of Herod the king* sets the context of a specific ruler in an identifiable time frame. This is the king known as Herod the Great, who ruled 37–4 BC as the first Roman puppet-king of Judea. The name *Herod* occurs in the New Testament about 40 times, often referring to different people—it’s a challenge not to get them confused! According to our best records, the Herod in view here died in 4 BC. Therefore, the events in today’s text take place shortly before that (compare Matthew 2:19).

Herod the Great was not an ethnic Jew but an Idumean (related to modern Arabs). He is designated “the Great” because of his extensive building projects. The grandest of these was the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, a project he



Visual for Lesson 5. *Point to the visual after reading verse 2b and ask volunteers to share how they seek, bow, and worship.*

began about 20 BC and that was unfinished at the time of his death (compare John 2:20).

1c. Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

Many legends have arisen in Christian tradition about these *wise men*. These include speculations regarding their occupations (kings?), their number (three?), their names (Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar?), and their place of origin (Babylon? Persia?). Matthew’s account doesn’t answer such questions. See the Lesson Context for background observations regarding the word *magoi*, translated as “wise men.”

We should understand *from the east* as describing their point of origin, not their route; it’s “wise men from the east,” not “came from the east.” This origin reminds us of the lands of Babylon and Persia, which lie 600 miles or more from Jerusalem in a straight line that crosses the Syrian Desert. But it is highly unlikely that the wise men traveled across that intervening desert. Instead, they would have come *to Jerusalem* by following the Euphrates River valley to Syria and then south through Damascus. This was a well-traveled trade route through a region known as the Fertile Crescent. Such a route would have been over a thousand miles, making a grand geographic arc from the Middle East to Palestine. To walk this distance would have taken four months (compare Ezra 7:8-9).

That there are at least two wise men is certain because the term is plural. But beyond that, we

don't know how many there were. (The tradition that there were three wise men seems based on the fact they offer three gifts to Jesus in Matthew 2:11, below.) They likely would have been in a large, well-funded entourage, perhaps a couple of dozen men altogether (compare 1 Kings 10:1-2). These details paint a picture of determination on their part.

B. Seeking the King (v. 2)

2a. Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?

Verse 7, below, indicates that the wise men were granted a personal audience with Herod at some point. But we aren't sure that was the case, as the wise men posed the question in the verse before us. An immediate audience would indicate that they were not a rag-tag group of nobodies! They either had diplomatic letters of introduction, could offer generous bribes, or presented such a regal appearance that Herod agreed to see them sooner rather than later. This access to Herod has led some to speculate the visitors were "kings" in their own right. However, Matthew does not mention this, and it is not implied in their designation as "wise men" or *magoi*.

2b. For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

The reason for the wise men's question is three-fold. First, the fact that a particular *star* caught their attention points to their vocation as learned stargazers. These were astrologers who spent many hours attempting to interpret astral move-

ments as omens from deities. (See the Lesson Context for a deeper dive here.) While the Old Testament connects divination with pagan idolatry (Deuteronomy 18:10; 2 Kings 17:17; Jeremiah 14:14), we should not rule out God's use of a specially prepared star to signal the birth of Jesus.

Second, the wise men's departure point *in the east* yields the possibility that they were Jews from the large Jewish community that remained in Babylon after the exile ended around 538 BC. But that possibility seems unlikely, given their astrological orientation.

Third, the wise men interpreted the new star as a sign that the newly arrived King of the Jews was important enough to be worthy of their *worship*. Although not specified by Matthew, this is often seen as a fulfillment of the "Star out of Jacob" prophecy of Numbers 24:17. Whether these men were Jews or not, this realization had touched them profoundly—so much so that they were willing to come to Jerusalem at enormous cost and considerable danger.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can seeing creation lead you to worshipping God?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond in worship in this regard?

How to Say It

Damascus	Duh-mass-kus.
Euphrates	You-fray-teez.
frankincense	frank-in-sense.
Herod	Hair-ud.
Idumean	Id-you-me-un.
Judaea	Joo-dee-uh.
<i>magoi</i> (Greek)	mah-joy.
myrrh	mur.
Persia	Per-zhuh.
Sadducees	Sad-you-seez.
Zebulun	Zeb-you-lun.

"The Star"

As I was channel-surfing one day, I chanced upon a science-fiction tale. It was a TV adaptation of a short story titled "The Star," written by Arthur C. Clarke in 1954.

The plot involved a spaceship that was exploring the Phoenix Nebula, the remnant of a star that had exploded as a supernova. Aboard the spacecraft was a Roman Catholic priest highly skilled in astrophysics. As the exploration progressed, a horrific truth dawned on him: this supernova had been the star of Bethlehem. The viewer was drawn to the conclusion that an entire civilization that was "disturbingly human" had been exterminated by this supernova. The result for the priest was a crisis of faith.

Such stories can engage the imagination in profound ways, but the imaginative elements are (or should be) easily recognized. When it comes to pondering rightly God’s provisions for humanity, it’s vital to avoid speculations and to stick with established facts: (1) the wise men were guided by a phenomenon provided by God, and (2) the “how” of that phenomenon is not provided. When you are pondering how God may be guiding you, how much effort do you devote to separating fact from imaginative thinking? —R. L. N.

II. The Old King Is Troubled

(Matthew 2:3-8)

A. Consulting the Scholars (vv. 3-4)

3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

The wise men’s inquiry did not sit well with the paranoid *Herod the king*. He was an old man who had sons and wives put to death when seen as threats to his throne. So Matthew, in grand understatement, says Herod *was troubled*. This was not mild irritation! The old family saying is “When Momma’s not happy, nobody’s happy,” and it applies here. In *Jerusalem*, when Herod wasn’t happy, no one in Jerusalem was happy, fearing another murderous rampage. The people of the city would be willing to do about anything to placate the king.

4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

The chief priests ruled Jerusalem’s temple. They had an uneasy alliance with Herod that had enriched them greatly as the party of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17). The *scribes* were the experts in the Jewish Scriptures, often called upon to interpret fine points of the Law of Moses.

Herod was no expert on things such as prophecies concerning coming kings. Even so, he was apparently aware that the Jews believed a *Christ* was coming, the chosen Messiah of the Lord. (*Christ* and *Messiah* both mean “anointed one”; John 4:25.) Herod connected these prophecies with the inquiry of the wise men. Therefore, he

demanded the religious leaders to reveal the birthplace of the Messiah, believing it must be specified in the writings of the prophets. While this would give an answer to the wise men, Herod had a more devious motive in learning the location, as we shall see.

B. Pinpointing Bethlehem (vv. 5-6)

5-6. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

In response, the religious leaders quoted Micah 5:2. On the precise designation *Bethlehem of Judaea*, see commentary on Matthew 2:1a, above. The prophet Micah worked in the eighth century BC, during the time of the prophet Isaiah. So this prophecy was already 700 years old at the time of Herod.

The Gospel of Matthew shows great interest in fulfilled prophecy, so this verse is a highlight. Micah’s prophecy checks many boxes. It recognizes the relative insignificance of Bethlehem, still valid in Herod’s day. It foretells the raising up of a new *Governor* or ruler from this city. And it indicates this person would not be a mere city ruler or district supervisor. Instead, the prophesied Messiah would *rule my people Israel*.

What Do You Think?

How might your congregation’s influence in your community remind people of Jesus?

Digging Deeper

How will your congregation glorify the Lord locally? nationally? globally?

C. Plotting Murder (vv. 7-8)

7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

The word *privily* indicates that *Herod* had dismissed the religious leaders in order to meet with *the wise men* alone. He set aside his rage in

favor of putting on his happy face for this meeting. Ancient astrology was based on keeping precise records, so the wise men would have known the *time the star appeared*. The response of the wise men is not given. But we know the answer must have been at least four months prior to this meeting since that's the time required for the wise men to have walked to Jerusalem. The wise men's response was important to Herod because it determined the time window of his murderous decision in Matthew 2:16.

8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

Since we know Herod's real intent and how things turned out (see Matthew 2:13-18), the story becomes downright sinister at this point. His expressed desire to *worship him also* is a flat-out lie. But since Herod had been helpful to the wise men, they had no reason to suspect ulterior motives. So they took his words at face value.

What Do You Think?

How do believers discern whether to obey or disobey government leaders?

Digging Deeper

How do Daniel 3; Romans 13:1-14; Titus 3:1-2; and 1 Peter 2:13-17 inform your answer?

The Great and the Terrible

Ivan IV was born into the royal family of Russia in the year 1530. At 16, Ivan was crowned "tsar and grand prince of all Russia" by the Russian Orthodox Church and became the undisputed leader of feudal Russia.

Ivan was convinced that he was God's representative on earth. Therefore Ivan saw extending the power of "Holy Russia" over neighboring countries as his duty. Moreover, he thought it was his right and responsibility to punish the sins of his rivals with unspeakable tortures that were fashioned after medieval ideas of hell. Increasingly mentally unstable, he killed his eldest son and heir to the throne in a fit of rage. By his death at

age 53, he had thoroughly earned his reputation as "Ivan the Terrible."

Political leaders such as Herod and Ivan aren't the only ones susceptible to seeing themselves as God's infallible representatives. Many others have fallen (or jumped) into that trap (examples: Numbers 12:2; Ezekiel 22:28). Ordinary people still use the name of Jesus to advance their agendas. As the modern saying goes, "Hands are the window to the intent." However, Jesus had this idea first (see Matthew 7:16-20). To know who follows Jesus, we must look at what they do. And when we look at them, let's make sure to look at ourselves as well.—A. W.

III. The Child Is Worshipped

(Matthew 2:9-12)

A. Following the Star (vv. 9-10)

9-10. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

The wise men would have exited Jerusalem from a gate near Herod's palace on the city's western side. We don't know what time of day it was. But to travel near or after sunset in a pre-electricity era simply didn't happen. The *exceeding great joy* the men experienced is thus understandable if the reappearance of *the star, which they saw in the east* happened as (or if) darkness settles. The wording indicates that the star moved in the same way as the pillar of fire guided the Hebrew people through the wilderness (see Exodus 13:20-22). The wise men could walk to Bethlehem in the dark, reaching *the young child* Jesus without waiting until sunrise.

B. Presenting Treasures (v. 11)

11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

The location of *the young child with Mary his mother* was no longer the manger of Luke's account (Luke 2:16) but a *house*. Therefore, we

may assume that the time spent by Mary and Joseph in the place of the manger was short before they found adequate shelter.

The wise men were not empty-handed in their worship of *the young child*. They presented Him with costly gifts fit for a king (see Isaiah 60:6). We easily understand the value of a gift of *gold*. While Matthew does not specify the form of this precious metal, it was likely coins. These were a vital resource for the family's subsequent flight to Egypt and return to Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-23).

Frankincense was considered the finest incense in the ancient world (see Exodus 30:34; Revelation 18:13). The word comes from Old French and means "pure incense." Made from the resin of the *Boswellia* tree and imported from southern Arabia and Africa, it was prized for its use in religious ceremonies and as a costly sacrificial offering.

Myrrh is an aromatic resin of the *Commiphora* tree. It was (and remains) valued as an ingredient in perfume; it was also used for anointing and in preparing a body for burial (John 19:39). It also had medicinal uses, both as a type of anti-septic for wounds and as a type of pain reducer (see Mark 15:23). Both frankincense and myrrh were extremely valuable and served as a compact treasure for Joseph and Mary, providing further resources beyond the gold.

What Do You Think?

How will you bring your best gifts to Jesus?

Digging Deeper

Who will you share those gifts with as an act of worshipping God?

C. Exiting Another Way (v. 12)

12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

The wise men, unsuspecting of Herod's treachery, needed to be *warned of God in a dream* not to report back to that tyrant. This warning served to protect not only the child Jesus but also Mary, Joseph, and the wise men. Herod's intent all along was to have this potential king killed, and the oth-

ers could have very well ended up feeling the despot's wrath as well (compare Matthew 2:16).

The wise men left Bethlehem by *another way*, a road that would not take them through Jerusalem. For Matthew, this further confirmed that God was orchestrating the birth and protection of the Messiah.

What Do You Think?

How can a believer discern whether a dream is from the Lord or not?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures inform your response?

Conclusion

A. Offer Thy Heart

A favorite Christmas carol of mine about the wise men is the nineteenth-century composition "The Three Kings" by Peter Cornelius. True, it has many of the legendary aspects of their story in presuming that they were kings, that they came from Persia, etc. The lesson of the carol is still powerful, though, and speaks to us today as one stanza implores the audience to travel with the kings to Bethlehem and offers hearts to the infant King of kings.

Most of us don't have much gold to offer Jesus. And if we even had any frankincense or myrrh, how would we offer those? But we can offer Him sincere hearts in worship. He is the Son of God, the true Messiah. At this time of year when we remember and celebrate the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem, may we offer our most precious gift: our hearts.

B. Prayer

Father, help us to emulate the faith of the wise men! As they let nothing stop them from reaching Jesus, may we do so as well. May the faith that allowed them to thwart the plans of a powerful opponent be ours as well. May we offer Your Son, Jesus, no empty-handed worship. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Wise men and women seek to worship King Jesus only and fully.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite volunteers to recall the most exciting baby announcement they ever received. Prompt them to share more by asking: 1–What circumstances made this announcement particularly special? 2–What hopes and dreams did you have for the coming child?

Alternative. Distribute the “Baby Gifts” exercise from the activity pages, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions as a whole class.

Say, “As we study today’s lesson, consider how the baby announcement and gifts reveal the child’s importance to the gift-givers and gift-receivers.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 2:1-4. Divide learners into two groups: **Wise Men Group** and **King Herod Group**. Instruct groups to study these verses from the perspective of their group’s namesake. Write the following questions on the board for groups to answer: 1–How did they get the “baby announcement”? 2–What was their response to the news? 3–Why did they want to know the location of the child? 4–What are one or two additional details about your character(s) based on Matthew 2:1-4?

Write the following headers on the board: *Wise Men* and *King Herod*. Invite volunteers from the groups to list their answers in the appropriate columns. Ask for volunteers to compare and contrast the information in the columns.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 2:5-8. Have the **Wise Men Group** read Isaiah 9:2-7, and have the **King Herod Group** read Micah 5:2-5. Instruct groups to study these verses from the perspective of their group’s namesake. Write the following questions on the board for groups to answer: 1–How does this prophecy connect to your group’s namesake? 2–How might they

have believed these prophecies would be fulfilled compared with how they were? Have a volunteer from each group share their responses. Invite each group to add their responses to the columns on the board.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 2:9-12. Direct the **Wise Men Group** to discuss why they were able to accomplish their goal, then ask the **King Herod Group** to discuss why Herod’s goal was foiled. Again, ask volunteers to write their group’s conclusions on the board under the appropriate header.

Ask the class to look at the board and draw conclusions about God’s guidance in this Scripture passage. Ask volunteers to discuss other examples from the Bible, history, or their own lives when good triumphed over evil plans.

Into Life

Say, “The wise men lived in faith and showed obedience to God by following the star and believing His guidance.” Divide the class into small groups of three learners. Encourage learners to think about a church ministry to which God is leading him or her to volunteer. Ask: “How can you show faith and obedience this week in that ministry?” Invite learners to identify one area of ministry where God might be leading him or her to serve, and have them share these ideas with their small group. Encourage small groups to spend time praying for each other to follow God’s leading faithfully.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Faith in Action” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in small groups. Challenge them to complete the first step of the activity during class, then complete the rest of the activity throughout the upcoming week. Give individuals the opportunity to share about this experience at the beginning of the next class time.

Faith and Righteousness

Devotional Reading: Romans 5:12-21

Background Scripture: Hebrews 11

Hebrews 11:1-4a, 7a, 8, 17-18,
20-23, 32, 39-40

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4a By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

7a By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Key Text

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. —Hebrews 11:1

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. State the definition of faith.
2. Explain the meaning and significance of the key verse.
3. List one change each in the categories of thought, behavior, and speech by which he or she will become more of a stranger to the world.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Listening to the Trustworthy Voice
- B. Lesson Context

I. Faith Explained (Hebrews 11:1-4a)

- A. Definition (vv. 1-2)
- B. Foundations (vv. 3-4a)

II. Faith Lived Out

(Hebrews 11:7a, 8, 17-18, 20-23, 32)

- A. Noah (v. 7a)
The Value of Fear
- B. Abraham (vv. 8, 17-18)
- C. Isaac (v. 20)
- D. Jacob (v. 21)
- E. Joseph (v. 22)
- F. Amram and Jochebed (v. 23)
- G. Others (v. 32)

Faith in a Blessed Future

III. Promises Because of Faith (Hebrews 11:39-40)

- A. Not Received (v. 39)
- B. Something Perfect (v. 40)

Conclusion

- A. The Faith of Imperfect People
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Listening to the Trustworthy Voice

I remember a particular game we played during youth group. Someone would be blindfolded and assigned specific tasks to accomplish; another person would be designated as a guide but was allowed only to speak instructions to the one who was blindfolded. The job of other people in the room was to cause distractions by shouting, making noise, giving wrong instructions, etc. The blindfolded person had to have faith in the guide and listen to only the guide.

God functions much like the guide in that game, and He has proven himself trustworthy. We may desire to do something that our limited vision tells us is edifying and appropriate. But if we are listening to our guide and trusting His voice above all else, we may discover otherwise.

B. Lesson Context

When reading a text, it's always a good idea to know the purpose for which it was written. The natural approach is to look for a clear purpose statement, such as in Luke 1:3-4 and John 20:30-31. The book of Hebrews, however, has no such statement. So the book's purpose must be inferred from its contents. The extended comparisons and contrasts of Jesus with Old Testament personalities, the Levitical priesthood, angels, etc., signify the purpose being to encourage wavering and persecuted Christians of Jewish background to stand firm in Christ and not retreat into Judaism. Beyond this relatively certain conclusion, there is no consensus regarding the authorship and date of Hebrews.

At the very end of the book, the 1611 edition of the *King James Version* has this footnote: "Written to the Hebrews from Italy by Timothy." But whether this is original to the text or the conclusion of the translators is debated.

Regarding the date of writing, we have some certainty that the book cannot have been written after AD 96 because Clement of Rome seems to quote from it up to four times while writing his epistle to the Corinthian church. The book of Hebrews also discusses the worship within the

temple as though such a structure were still in existence, so a date prior to the temple's destruction in AD 70 is likely.

Questions of authorship, date, and provenance aside, what is clear from the contents of Hebrews is that the addressees were in danger of giving up due to their suffering for having faith in Christ (Hebrews 10:32-39). Today's study begins immediately after that danger is addressed.

I. Faith Explained

(Hebrews 11:1-4a)

A. Definition (vv. 1-2)

1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Ancient Greek words translated as *faith*, *faithful*, and *faithfulness* occur some 316 times in ancient New Testament manuscripts. The 37 occurrences of these words in the book of Hebrews comprise almost 12 percent of the 316. However, Hebrews constitutes only about 3.6 percent of the New Testament. Clearly, the subject of faith is vital to the author, thus his offer of the definition we see here.

The concept of faith is complex, not reducible to a single definition. For example, the phrase “the faith” used in Jude 3 refers to a body of doctrine to be believed. But that is not the sense in the text before us now. A key to understanding what the writer of Hebrews intends is the word translated *substance*. This word is translated elsewhere as “confidence” or “confident” (2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17; Hebrews 3:14), and that is the sense here. The author does not say that faith creates reality. Instead, the writer emphasizes faith as the answer to the eternal rewards God has promised. Hope and confidence are also connected in Hebrews 3:6.

The writer emphasizes this in the phrase that follows, using terms that enhance the two ideas in the first half of this verse. One enhancement is the movement from the word *faith* to the word *evidence*; the latter word is to be understood in the sense of “verification” or “certain persuasion.” Another enhancement is the movement from the phrase *things hoped for* to the phrase *things not seen*; the latter more precisely describes the desired

result of hope. The Christian's ultimate hope is not in anything in the present, visible world (John 17:16; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15). Rather, our hope is in the unseen eternal reality yet to come (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Belief and faith are closely related, but faith is the stronger of the two concepts (compare James 2:19). The writer is setting the stage for the numerous illustrations of this fact.

What Do You Think?

How will you live in faith that God will be present with you in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How does the definition of *faith* in Hebrews 11:1 assist you in facing daily circumstances?

2. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

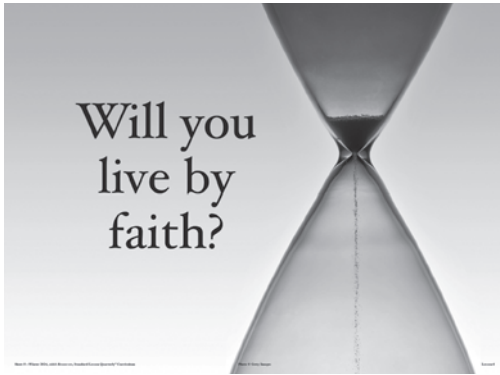
The elders are the Old Testament faithful, and the word *it* refers to their faith as just defined in the previous verse. God is the one who gave them a *good report* (the same word is translated “witness” in Hebrews 11:4b, not in our printed text). With this observation, the writer both begins and ends (see 11:39) what has come to be called the “Hall of Faith.”

B. Foundations (vv. 3-4a)

3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Faith is necessary to understand things that are real but cannot be observed, such as God's creating *the worlds*. This faith is not “blind faith,” which is a belief in something without evidence to support that belief. Instead, what we're talking about is faith based on evidence. Since the evidence of God's holy character and limitless power have been established many times over, we can trust that His account of the creation of the cosmos—unseen by humans—is true. That's faith based on evidence, not blind faith (compare John 20:30-31).

4a. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.



Visual for Lesson 6. While reading Hebrews 11:40, have this posted and ask for specific examples of circumstances that require us to live by faith.

This account is found in Genesis 4. Abel *offered* the best of his flock, while Cain “brought of the fruit of the ground” (4:3). The different types of offerings were in accordance with the brothers’ respective occupations per Genesis 4:2. God’s favor on Abel and not Cain was because Abel brought his best, not keeping it for himself. As a result, he is known as “righteous Abel” (Matthew 23:35), while Cain—who murdered his brother (Genesis 4:8)—is infamous as a negative example (1 John 3:12; Jude 11).

II. Faith Lived Out

(Hebrews 11:7a, 8, 17-18, 20-23, 32)

A. Noah (v. 7a)

7a. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.

Noah’s account is found in Genesis 6–9. Building the *ark* was no small exercise in faith! The expression of *things not seen as yet* is connected with the beginning of Hebrews 11:1. Thus, Noah’s *faith* was based on the word of God concerning the flood, which Noah was not yet able to see.

The Value of Fear

Jason felt increasingly isolated at his high school as more and more of his friends began dabbling in recreational drugs, underage drinking, and pre-

marital sex. As Jason resisted those temptations, his friendships dwindled.

One thing kept Jason from following their path: fear. Jason’s dad repeatedly warned him of the consequences of substance abuse and sexual immorality. Jason feared for his physical health and dreaded the thought of disappointing his father.

The spiritual consequences can be more devastating, however. God sees everything we do, hears everything we say, and knows every thought we think. The Bible speaks of “fearing God,” “fearing the Lord,” etc., at least 80 times. A holy fear of God that directs our actions, speech, and thoughts is as appropriate today as it was for Noah. As Jesus said, “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 12:5). How do we keep from domesticating God so that we give no thought to fearing Him? —D. D.

B. Abraham (vv. 8, 17-18)

8. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

The call of *Abraham* is found in Genesis 12:1-3, with the man’s walk of faith recorded from 12:4 through 25:11 (compare Acts 7:1-7). Abraham had to trust the unseen, invisible God rather than the visible, fictitious gods (idols) of his culture. And he did so as he departed for an unknown land several hundred miles distant. Considering that Abraham was the man who “believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6), it is certainly fitting that he is included on this list.

But that doesn’t mean Abraham never sinned (see Genesis 16:3-4; 12:12-13; 20:2). As we consider the faith-walk of several members of the Hall of Faith, we will remind ourselves that they were not without flaws.

17-18. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

This account of the near-sacrifice of *Isaac* by *Abraham* is detailed in Genesis 22; a much-abridged version is found in James 2:21. Both passages focus on how the man’s faith was evidenced by action. When God commanded him to sacrifice his son, Abraham arose early in the morning in obedience (Genesis 22:3)—no delay. Abraham reasoned that God could raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). While there are certainly resurrections predicted and recorded in the Old Testament, none are noted as occurring as far back as in the time of Abraham, who lived about 2000 BC (see 1 Kings 17:17-23; 2 Kings 4:18-37; 13:21; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2). Perhaps Abraham believed that God was willing and able to do something that Abraham had never seen or heard of. The last line of the text at hand quotes Genesis 21:12.

What Do You Think?

How can you manage the emotions of disappointment, grief, or anger that may arise when God’s will doesn’t make sense?

Digging Deeper

Who can you turn to for wise counsel when God’s will doesn’t make sense?

C. Isaac (v. 20)

20. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

After *Isaac* was born in about 2067 BC, he grew up to become the father of *Jacob and Esau*, twins born in about 2007 BC. Isaac, like his father Abraham, was something of a mixed bag of character traits. Isaac obeyed God *by faith* (see Genesis 26:1-6), but Isaac also adopted his father’s practice of deception (26:7). He was also guilty of the parental error of favoritism (25:28). God sometimes uses people in His service despite themselves.

Jacob and Esau were born to Isaac and Rebekah. This family wrestled with the sins of deceit and favoritism (see Genesis 25:28; 26:7). However, when it appeared that God’s plan might be in danger as a result of these situations, the

author of Hebrews reminds us that God was still at work. Isaac blessed his sons, looking forward to how God used them in His plan (27:27-40). Some scholars believe that Jacob is mentioned before Esau because it was through the lineage of Jacob that the promise would be fulfilled in Christ.

D. Jacob (v. 21)

21. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

This verse is a quotation from Genesis 47:31. The quotation here may not fully match up with 47:31 in your Bible because the writer is quoting from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament. When *Jacob* blessed both of Joseph’s *sons*, he essentially adopted them as his own. As a result, 2 of the 12 “landed” tribes of Israel descend from them: the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Joshua 14:4). Jacob’s *faith* is evidenced by his worship of God, which he continued to his deathbed. His sins involved deception (Genesis 27:18-24), manipulation (25:29-33; 30:37-43), and favoritism (37:3-4)—but the Lord used him in service nevertheless!

E. Joseph (v. 22)

22. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

This verse reiterates Genesis 50:24-26. In about 1899 BC, Joseph’s brothers sold him to Ishmeelites when he was 17 years old; in turn,

How to Say It

Amram	<i>Am-ram.</i>
Barak	<i>Bair-uk.</i>
Canaan	<i>Kay-nun.</i>
Ephraim	<i>Ee-fray-im.</i>
Gedeon	<i>Gid-e-un (G as in get).</i>
Ishmeelites	<i>Ish-me-el-ites.</i>
Jephtae	<i>Jef-the (th as in thin).</i>
Jochebed	<i>Jock-eh-bed.</i>
Manasseh	<i>Muh-nass-uh.</i>

the Ishmeelites sold him into Egyptian slavery (37:2, 28). At age 30, Joseph had been appointed second-in-command in Egypt (41:46), facing numerous challenges to his *faith* in the intervening years.

As we see the phrase *the children of Israel*, we may immediately think of Israel as the organized nation it would become 430 years later, after the exodus (Exodus 12:40-41). But we should not lose sight of the fact that the word *Israel* in this context refers specifically to Joseph's father, Jacob, who had his name changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28; 35:10; 46:8).

Joseph's directive *concerning his bones* was that they not be left in Egypt when the exodus occurred (Genesis 50:24-25). This directive was rooted in God's promise made to his father Jacob, grandfather Isaac, and great-grandfather Abraham concerning possession of the land of Canaan (15:7; 48:3-4; Exodus 6:8; etc.).

What Do You Think?

How can you be a blessing and encourage a younger person this week?

Digging Deeper

What role does sharing our faith have in blessing those around us according to Galatians 3:9?

F. Amram and Jochebed (v. 23)

23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

This passage treats the lives of Abraham and *Moses* as journeys of faith. Thus they are the prominent figures presented in today's lesson. The extended version of the fact noted by the writer of Hebrews is found in Exodus 2. We note that the *faith* of Moses' *parents* is at issue here, not the faith of Moses himself. According to Exodus 6:20, the parents' names are Amram and Jochebed.

The phrase *proper child* is a complex expression. Some think it means "beautiful." It may carry the sense that Moses' parents had an awareness that the child would grow to be someone special. The

Hebrew word behind this phrase in Exodus 2:2 is merely the typical word for "good."

The *commandment* of the "new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8) initially stated that all newborn Hebrew boys were to be killed (1:16). When this directive was disobeyed, the king tried again by requiring that "every son that is born ye shall cast into the river" (1:22). Since baby Moses was put into a waterproof ark before being cast into the Nile River, the parents had obeyed this command—technically speaking!

What Do You Think?

How do you trust God even when you can't immediately see the results of His plans?

Digging Deeper

How do the examples of Hall of Faith encourage you in that regard?

G. Others (v. 32)

32. And what shall I more say? For time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.

The Hall of Faith continues, as the writer ensures that readers don't think the importance of faith ended with Moses. Instead, exercises of faith continued through the centuries. The story of *Gedeon* (Gideon) is found in Judges 6–8. He served as a judge from 1192 BC to 1152 BC. He's most notable for his 300-man force defeating the Midianite army. *Barak*—a contemporary of Deborah, who judged from 1239 BC to 1199 BC—raised an army to defeat the Canaanites, according to Judges 4. *Samson* served as judge from 1075 BC to 1055 BC; his opposition to the Philistines is found in Judges 13–16. The leadership of *Jephthae* (Jephthah) against the Ammonites is recorded in Judges 11–12; his judgeship extended from 1086 BC to 1080 BC.

The extensive record of *David* (reigned 1010–970 BC) runs from 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2. The ministry of *Samuel*—who is pivotal for being the last of the judges and the first of *the prophets*—is found in 1 Samuel 1–25. These individuals of faith were not faultless, however.

Faith in a Blessed Future

Sheila didn't say much anymore. An 80-square-foot room in the local nursing home had become her dwelling. The 93-year-old woman had outlived her husband and two sons, so she didn't have many visitors. Sheila's failing eyesight and memory made Bible-reading increasingly difficult. Her circumstances seemed to be some of the saddest in the nursing home.

Yet Sheila had developed a surprising reputation among the nursing-home staff. In the few times daily that she did speak, she would communicate joy with her soft voice, weathered by life.

"I waited 18 years to marry my husband," she would say. "I won't have to wait that long to see my Shepherd."

Sheila has since joined the great "cloud of witnesses" of Hebrews 12:1, a group whose lives were informed by a future they couldn't see. How does your faith compare with Sheila's? —D. D.

III. Promises Because of Faith

(Hebrews 11:39-40)

A. Not Received (v. 39)

39. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.

The writer repeats the thoughts of Hebrews 11:13 (not in today's lesson text) but in a condensed form. The word translated *having obtained a good report* is the same as that in Hebrews 11:2, above; it carries the idea of "having been witnessed" doing something *through faith*. Since the faith of those being considered looked ahead to the arrival of Jesus, which did not come about in their lifetimes, they *received not the promise* (contrast Matthew 13:16-17). But they had faith nonetheless.

B. Something Perfect (v. 40)

40. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

The *better thing* is the promise fulfilled in the earthly mission of Christ. Both we and *they* are

made perfect in His suffering (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9; 7:28). In combining such facts with the conjunction "wherefore" that begins the next verse, Hebrews 12:1, the author prepares the readers to relate the Old Testament Hall of Faith to themselves.

What Do You Think?

What are some examples of knowledge and resources we have today that the heroes of the past could have never imagined?

Digging Deeper

How do you think God would like you to use these blessings?

Conclusion

A. The Faith of Imperfect People

The writer of Hebrews selected some very faithful people as examples, people who also had some significant imperfections.

We are to walk faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), and this should be easier for us than for the Old Testament luminaries. They lived with only a promise and a hope, while we live with the cross and resurrection as accomplished facts (1 Peter 1:12). But although we are privileged to see much more of God's plan fulfilled, some promises remain to be fulfilled—a resurrection body, a new heavens, a new earth, etc. Many times we must make decisions without being able to see their results. A faith-based decision is based on believing the promises of God and determining to do what God has called you to do, regardless of how it might look in your eyes or the eyes of others. May the Holy Spirit empower us to do so!

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for these faithful servants of Yours whose deeds inspire us in our faith. May we prove to be at least as faithful as they were. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Faith overrides imperfections!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Place learners in pairs, blindfold one person in each pair, and station pairs around the room. Set a container of candies on a table. Instruct the “seeing” partners to verbally guide their blindfolded partners to the container to pick out two pieces of candy and return to their seats. (*Option.* If learners have mobility limitations, set pairs at a table before they are blindfolded. Then put out containers of candy within reach of the blindfolded person.)

Alternative. Distribute a blank piece of paper and copies of the “What Is Unseen” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to half of the class. Instruct them to find a partner that did not receive the exercise and complete it as indicated. Tell learners who received the exercise to read the instructions carefully without showing the page to their partners.

After either activity, say, “Sometimes it is hard to do things before we have all the information or know how it will end. In today’s lesson, notice how each person’s actions were evidence of faith.”

Into the Word

Read Hebrews 11:1 aloud. As a class, use the verse to create a definition of *faith*. Write the definition on the board. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 11:1-4a, 7a. Divide participants into three groups: **God’s Command Group** (v. 3), **Abel Group** (v. 4), and **Noah Group** (v. 7a). Challenge the groups to study their verse and determine how the definition of faith from Hebrews 11:1 relates to their example verse. Reconvene the class and ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “Which of these three acts of faith would you personally find most difficult to do, and why?”

Alternative 1. Distribute copies of “The Hall of Faith” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the first column with a partner before discussing conclusions in small groups.

Write four headers on the board: *He Knew*,

He Didn’t Know, He Wanted to Know, and He Learned. Divide learners into four groups and assign one header to each group. Have groups study Hebrews 11:8, 17-18, and create two to three responses to each heading on the board. Have groups refer to Genesis 12:1-9; 22:1-14 for more details.

Alternative 2. Have pairs complete the second column of the “The Hall of Faith” activity.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 11:20-23. Say, “These verses depict an inheritance of faith passed down from generation to generation.” Divide learners into small groups and have each group discuss the following questions: 1—How was each person mentioned in these verses faithful to God? 2—What was the result of their faith?

Alternative 3. Have pairs complete the third and final column of “The Hall of Faith” exercise.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 11:32, 39-40. Divide participants into six groups and assign the Scripture passage associated with their character: **Gideon Group** (Judges 7), **Barak Group** (Judges 4), **Samson Group** (Judges 16), **Jephthah Group** (Judges 11), **David Group** (1 Samuel 17), and **Samuel Group** (1 Samuel 15:10-16:13). Give each group five minutes to read their assigned passage and give a summary of their group’s name-sake to the whole class. Ask each group to answer the following question: “How did your character demonstrate faith and a lack of faith?”

Into Life

Write the following categories as headers on the board: *Thought, Behavior, and Speech*. Distribute an index card to each learner. Allow one minute for learners to reflect on the definition of *faith* from Hebrews 11:1 and write one way they can each change something in each of the above categories to develop a life of deeper faith and be reminded of our stranger status in this world. End class with prayer.

Faith and Trust

Devotional Reading: Psalm 56
Background Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-12

Proverbs 3:1-8

1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.



Key Text

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. —Proverbs 3:5

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify principles that lead to a blessed life.
2. Explain why fear of the Lord is foundational to other proverbial principles.
3. Make a plan to identify and change an area of life to align more closely with the Lord's will by application of a proverbial principle.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Whose Influence?
- B. Lesson Context

I. One Law (Proverbs 3:1-2)

- A. Remembering Commands (v. 1)
Do Not Forget
- B. Promise of Life (v. 2)

II. Two Virtues (Proverbs 3:3-4)

- A. Bind and Write (v. 3)
- B. Promise of Favor (v. 4)

III. One Trust (Proverbs 3:5-6)

- A. Relying on the Lord (v. 5)
- B. Promise of Direction (v. 6)

IV. Two Actions (Proverbs 3:7-8)

- A. Fear and Avoidance (v. 7)
Wise in My Own Eyes
- B. Promises of Wholeness (v. 8)

Conclusion

- A. Voices of Authority
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Whose Influence?

Who do you regard as an authoritative voice? Perhaps you consider a particular writer, podcast host, or teacher as such an influence. When I think about the voices that influence me, I immediately think of my professors from Bible college. After graduation, I kept and organized all my notes from their classes for future reference. These notes even went with me during my time as an overseas missionary! I trusted the expertise and wisdom of those professors and wanted to ensure that I would not forget their teachings.

One of the earliest authoritative voices in a person's life is a parent. Most parents want to see their children flourish. Therefore, they will teach their children to become kind, thoughtful, and intelligent people. Parents who follow Jesus will also desire that their children seek God's wisdom and experience a personal relationship with Jesus.

The book of Proverbs invites us to hear the teachings of a father to his son. Regardless of whether or not our parents have taught us God's wisdom, we can learn from this father figure and apply his wisdom to our lives.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Proverbs is generally attributed to King Solomon (see Proverbs 1:1). His wisdom was renowned (examples: 1 Kings 4:30-31; 10:24), and over 3,000 proverbs originated with him (4:32), so he was an ideal person to write this book of wisdom literature. Additionally, the text attributes two other sections to Agur (Proverbs 30:1) and King Lemuel (31:1). However, we know nothing about these two men.

The text does not indicate when these texts were consolidated into the form of Proverbs that we read today. Further, the text does not have a direct recipient. The significance of Proverbs is not found in its original writers, date of composition, or original audience. Instead, its importance is in how it communicates what makes up a life of wisdom. All people can learn and apply the wisdom taught in the book of Proverbs.

For some readers, the book of Proverbs reads

like disjointed sets of oracles without any connection. However, five sections divide the book: an introduction to wisdom (Proverbs 1–9), the proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16; 25:1–29:27), the words of the wise (22:17–24:34), the words of Agur (Proverbs 30), and the words of King Lemuel (Proverbs 31).

The first section begins with an explanation of the importance of wisdom (see Proverbs 1:1–7). After the introduction, most of that section is written from the perspective of a father advising his son on the importance of seeking wisdom from the Lord.

With one exception (see Proverbs 3:5), the poetic order of each pair of verses in today’s Scripture follows the same pattern. First, the father gives his son a negative command (example: 3:1a). Second, the father gives a positive command (example: 3:1b). Finally, the father concludes that section with a promise for the son (example: 3:2).

I. One Law

(Proverbs 3:1–2)

A. Remembering Commands (v. 1)

1a. My son, forget not my law.

Although the text leaves the speaker unidentified, we assume that a father is instructing his *son* (see Proverbs 4:1). The book of Proverbs presents wisdom from God as a quality that can be passed from generation to generation through teaching (4:3–7). The commands of a father and the law of a mother are understood to be one of the most influential voices for a child in this regard (see 6:20).

Frequently in the Old Testament, the “law” refers to that given by God to His people (examples: Exodus 24:12; 2 Kings 17:34–37). However, the qualifier *my* indicates that this particular *law* consists of a father’s instruction to his son. Such instruction is a prominent theme in the first section of Proverbs (see Proverbs 1:8; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2).

The son is told to *forget not* his father’s law because of possible risks that such forgetfulness might incur (compare Proverbs 4:5). Similarly, the Israelites were warned the same regarding God’s law and His covenant with them (see Deuteronomy 4:23).

What Do You Think?

How do you ensure you do not forget the wisdom others have given you?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to pass along wisdom to younger generations?

Do Not Forget

“It’s always something. It’s never simple. It’s always late.”

When I was a child, my dad constantly repeated these maxims in moments when I felt exasperated by life’s challenges. At the time, I couldn’t understand what he meant by these sayings. However, after several decades of life experience, my father’s wisdom now makes sense. His point was that life is filled with complications and challenges. He wanted me to expect these challenges rather than become frustrated and angered by them. These days, I share that same wisdom with my children and students. They frequently disregard my counsel because they consider it inapplicable or untimely. But perhaps someday—maybe decades later—they’ll remember what I’ve told them.

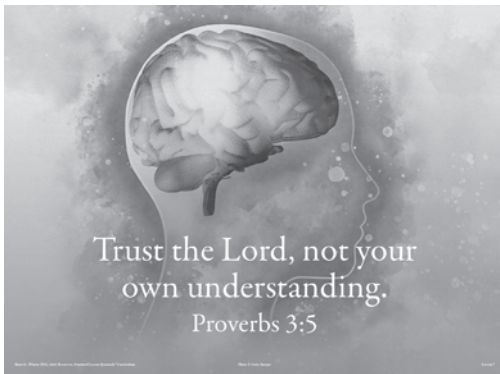
God has surrounded you with wise people—some older than you and some younger than you. What instruction from them do you need to remember, even if you don’t fully understand its importance in the current moment? —N. G.

1b. But let thine heart keep my commandments.

Most modern-day perspectives consider the heart the emotional center of a person. Such views believe this emotional center lacks the capacity for rational guidance or direction. In the Old Testament, however, the *heart* refers to a person’s inner being. Among other aspects, this inner being

How to Say It

Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
omnipotent	ahm-nih-poh-tent.
omnipresent	ahm-nih-prez-ent.
omniscient	ahm-nish-unt.
Septuagint	Sep-too-ih-jent.



Visual for Lesson 7. Display this visual as you discuss the commentary and discussion questions associated with Proverbs 3:5.

includes a person's volition (examples: Genesis 6:5; Exodus 25:2; Proverbs 16:9), emotions (examples: Isaiah 30:29; Nehemiah 2:2), and knowledge (example: 1 Kings 3:9, 12). The centrality of the heart led the father in Proverbs to warn his son regarding its safe keeping (see Proverbs 4:23). The son must be willing and able to receive his father's exhortations and apply them to his life.

One way that the son could *keep* his father's *commandments* would be to commit them to memory and obey them (compare Psalm 119:11). The Law of Moses commanded parents to teach their children about God's law (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Parents honor God when they train their children to follow God. Further, children obey God and receive a blessing when they give honor to their parents and follow their commands (see next verse; see also Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20). Remembrance of the law and commands is the foundation of a life strengthened by God (see Psalm 119:93).

B. Promise of Life (v. 2)

2. For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

When a child honors his or her parents, the days of that child "may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12). The promise of a *long life* stands in contrast to the promise that whoever "pursueth evil pursueth it to . . . death" (Proverbs 11:19). The wicked person does not follow the commands of

God. Such a person "shall not inhabit the earth" (10:30). As a child follows and honors his or her parents, that child is entering a life of wisdom. Later, the father describes wisdom as a woman who holds "length of days . . . in her right hand" (3:16, not in our printed text). While a long life is not inevitable, a flourishing life begins with seeking wisdom from godly parents.

The Hebrew understanding of peace sometimes does imply an absence of conflict (example: 1 Samuel 7:14). However, the Hebrew word for *peace* can also encompass ideas of flourishing (see Jeremiah 29:7), relational harmony (Isaiah 57:18-19), or the completeness of God's work (54:10; Nahum 1:15). It is the first two aspects that this father is most concerned about for his son.

II. Two Virtues

(Proverbs 3:3-4)

A. Bind and Write (v. 3)

3a. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee.

Mercy and *truth* are key words in the Old Testament, especially regarding the attributes of God. *Mercy* frequently refers to God's loyalty and commitment toward His people (example: Psalm 136). God's mercy is rooted in His faithfulness and promises (see Deuteronomy 7:9, 12; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 26:3). His mercy seeks redemption and safety for God's people (example: Exodus 15:13). *Truth* conveys the idea of reliability (examples: 71:22; Isaiah 61:8).

The father's concern is not only his son's behavior; the father also desires to see the son's heart transformed. A transformed heart will result in changed behavior (see Matthew 15:19). A life that appears righteous but lacks a rightly ordered heart is full of hypocrisy and sin (see 23:28). The heart's deception will someday be exposed (Proverbs 26:24-26). The father wants his son to do good actions—actions that come from a heart transformed and oriented toward the virtues of mercy and truth.

A heart filled with mercy and truth should be the foundation for the son's behavior. A life seeking God's wisdom results in that life developing mercy and truth that will bear fruit through righteous and wise actions. These attributes are part of

God's character, so they should be part of the character of His people (compare Proverbs 16:6; 20:28).

3b. Bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart.

In biblical times, necklaces were signs of honor or rank (examples: Genesis 41:42; Daniel 5:29). To *bind* something around one's *neck* revealed the importance and significance of that item to the wearer. The figurative language in this verse highlights the extent that the son should go to develop a life of mercy and truth. The opposite of a life with these virtues would be considered "stiff-necked"—rebellious and disobedient (examples: Exodus 32:9; Jeremiah 17:23; Acts 7:51).

The command to *write* mercy and truth *upon the table of the heart* is another example of figurative language. This verse also alludes to Deuteronomy 6:6-8. In those verses, God commanded the people of Israel to internalize His law and apply it to all areas of life. Such virtues are not to be hidden from the world. Instead, a wisdom-filled life will develop these virtues in the heart. Such lives are "declared to be the epistle of Christ" through God's Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 3:3).

What Do You Think?

How will you continue to "write" these virtues "on your heart"?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you take to ensure you are attentive to the Spirit's leading in this regard?

B. Promise of Favor (v. 4)

4. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

To *find favour* in a person means to hold that person in high regard (example: Daniel 1:9). Even children, when they follow God, can receive favor from other people and God (example: 1 Samuel 2:26). To have a *good understanding* signifies character and integrity of insight that leads a person to act righteously. This character develops when a person seeks the wisdom of the Lord and lives in obedience to Him (see Psalm 111:10).

A life of character will not only be pleasing *in the sight of God*, but other people will also rec-

ognize it (compare Luke 2:52). The apostle Peter admonished believers to live in a way that would lead unbelievers to glorify God (see 1 Peter 2:12; compare Matthew 5:16; 1 Timothy 3:7). A good name and good reputation take time to develop. Not only do these things provide a personal benefit, but they are also avenues to honor God and reveal God to other people.

III. One Trust

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

A. Relying on the Lord (v. 5)

5a. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart.

We tend to place trust in things and people other than God (examples: Psalm 52:7; Isaiah 42:17; Jeremiah 17:5). At best, this misplaced trust can lead to futility. At worst, however, it can lead to destruction (see 13:24-27; 49:4-5). Misplaced trust does not lead to any lasting and eternal wisdom.

However, the father's efforts were intended to result in his son's developing *trust in the Lord* (compare Proverbs 22:19). The Lord is worthy to be trusted because, among other things, He is the source of salvation (see Isaiah 12:2). When people trust the Lord, they experience blessing from Him (see Psalm 37:3-7; Jeremiah 17:7-8).

To display trust *with all thine heart* implies a total commitment. As with showing love and devotion to the Lord (see Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12), this kind of trust is an all-encompassing act; it requires the totality of a person's being, beginning with one's inner being (see commentary on Proverbs 3:1, above).

5b. And lean not unto thine own understanding.

The book of Proverbs contains numerous warnings against pride (examples: Proverbs 8:13; 11:2; 16:5, 18). The reminder to *lean not unto thine understanding* is another warning in that regard. Only foolish people trust themselves more than the wisdom of the Lord (see 28:26). Their downfall is inevitable (see 18:12). When people consider themselves to be wise in the eyes of the world, their so-called wisdom amounts to foolishness in the eyes of God (see 1 Corinthians 3:18-19).

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure you trust the Lord with *all* your heart?

Digging Deeper

How do you establish personal guard-rails when you want to lean on your own knowledge and expertise?

B. Promise of Direction (v. 6)

6. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

To *acknowledge* God means to know Him and give Him proper recognition for His activity in a person's life (compare Proverbs 2:1-5). It involves intimate knowledge of God and a willingness to submit to His will. When people submit to God, they do not forge ahead as though God does not exist. Instead, they recognize God's power and presence (see Philippians 3:7-11).

Those who submit to God can be assured that He will *direct* their *paths* of life (compare Jeremiah 10:23). God is all-knowing (omniscient), all-present (omnipresent), and all-powerful (omnipotent). Therefore, we can trust that He will provide His people with a wise and righteous path (see Psalm 16:11; Proverbs 2:8). This is not a promise of an easy life—trials are inevitable (see James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 4:12). However, God has provided us with an avenue of peace through Christ Jesus (see John 16:33). Through Christ Jesus, we can trust that God will guide and deliver us, no matter the nature of that path.

What Do You Think?

How do you overcome obstacles that prevent you from fully submitting to God?

Digging Deeper

Who will you recruit as an accountability partner in this regard?

IV. Two Actions

(Proverbs 3:7-8)

A. Fear and Avoidance (v. 7)

7a. Be not wise in thine own eyes.

The opposite of trusting in and submitting to God is to consider one's wisdom as the final say. To be *wise in thine own eyes* is to be sure that one's own wisdom is superior and ultimate. When people depend on their own wisdom and do what seems right to them, they are no better than fools (see Proverbs 18:2)—or worse (see 26:12).

God is the source of wisdom (see Proverbs 2:6) and desires to give His people wisdom through His Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; James 1:5). As a result, God's people should avoid lives of pride and arrogance (see Romans 12:16) and seek out wisdom from God (see James 3:13-16).

The example of King Solomon provides us with a warning based on this verse. He received wisdom from God (1 Kings 3:5-14). However, he failed to follow God's wisdom (11:1-8). As a result, he experienced heartache and the promise of consequences that would extend past his lifetime (11:9-13).

Wise in My Own Eyes

I was one of a few high school freshmen who lettered in track; the hurdles were my specialty. One day, three guest coaches came to work with my team. The coaches adjusted familiar drills to force us to change our approach to training. For example, they placed the hurdles farther apart than usual. So, instead of taking three steps between hurdles, the drill forced us to take five or more steps.

I wanted to show off my power and strength. On my turn to complete the drill, I stretched out and only took three steps between hurdles. After the exercise, one of the coaches said that he liked my power and strength but that my form was also essential to develop. Hearing only what I wanted to hear, I drank in his praise, and my ego swelled. The next time my teammates ran the drill, I offered them unprompted advice for their improvement. Eventually, one of my teammates proclaimed an honest-but-harsh opinion about my new attitude. My ballooning ego popped.

In retrospect, I hadn't heard all that the coach had told me. I had ignored the coach's directives regarding my form. I only listened to the coach's praise and considered myself skilled and wise. Is your self-determined wisdom causing you to be unable to hear the wisdom of others? —N. G.

7b. Fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

Scripture provides instances when people were afraid of the Lord and His power (example: Genesis 3:10). In this verse, however, to *fear the Lord* involves having an attitude of reverence, awe, wonder, faith, and trust in the Lord. It is impossible to be wise in one's own eyes and, simultaneously, fear the Lord. Instead, an attitude of humility is required (see Proverbs 22:4). Those who fear the Lord come to have true wisdom (see 1:7), which leads to an avoidance of evil (14:16). God delights in those who show humility and fear Him (see Psalm 147:11). Christians are commanded to live in a way that reflects their fear of the Lord (1 Peter 2:17; example: Acts 9:31).

Fearing God and loving evil are incompatible (see Exodus 20:20; example: Job 1:1). Fearing the Lord requires actively turning from evil (see Psalm 34:11-14). To *depart from evil* involves an attitude of repentance—turning away from sin and turning to God in faith and obedience.

B. Promise of Wholeness (v. 8)

8. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

This verse begins with a Hebrew idiom that provides difficulty to translators. The translation of *navel* is accurate to the Hebrew text. However, the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation) has the word for *body* instead. Perhaps the Hebrew text is an example of a literary practice of using a part of the whole to represent the whole. In this case, the *health* of the *navel* is representative of the health of the entire body.

Marrow is the life-giving tissue located in the cavities of most *bones*. This substance creates blood cells and provides energy for the body. However, the author of Proverbs would have likely been unaware of this fact. A nourished body contains marrow and strength in its bones (see Job 21:24).

A life of humility, fear of the Lord, and obedience to Him results in the complete wholeness of a person. The son is promised health and vitality when he follows his father's teachings (see Proverbs 4:20-22). We know, however, that a person's status in life does not correlate to the quality of a person's heart. While people may

experience wholeness and health in part while on earth, Scripture promises a time in the future when "God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Revelation 21:4).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the claim that this verse cannot be trusted because people "fear the Lord" but still experience ailments?

Digging Deeper

How do Psalms 103:14; 139:13-16; Isaiah 45:7; Luke 12:6-7; John 9:1-7; and 1 Peter 4:13 inform your response?

Conclusion

A. Voices of Authority

A 2022 study showed that most people spend about two and a half hours daily on social media platforms. While this may not seem like a lot of time, it is a significant increase from 10 years prior, when the average daily usage hovered around one hour per day. Social media has become a "voice of authority" for many people, regardless of the actual knowledge, expertise, or wisdom of that voice.

It is easy for believers to say that we are seeking the wisdom of God when in actuality, other voices influence our lives and shape our perspectives. If we're filling our lives with human ideas rather than the wisdom of God, which will have more influence?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the inspired wisdom You have revealed to us in Scripture. Help us to listen and follow Your Word. Show us how we can be more attentive to the direction of Your Spirit so that we might have lives of wisdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's children seek the wisdom of their heavenly Father.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to share their favorite “word of wisdom” or proverb (example: “Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth”). Ask learners where they first heard the proverb. As a whole class, discuss the meaning of these “words of wisdom” or proverbs and how people have applied them to their lives.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Words of Wisdom” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in one minute or less before comparing responses with a partner.

Say, “Most proverbs help us make good decisions and point us to having positive relationships. Today, as we study the proverbs of Scripture, consider how we can apply their wisdom to our lives of faith and trust in God.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 3:1-2. Divide learners into seven equal groups. Distribute a sheet of paper, a stack of index cards, and pens to each group. Ask, “How do you remember to complete important tasks?” Have each group answer by making a list of common strategies (examples: writing the task on a sticky note, setting a cellphone alarm, using mnemonic devices). Challenge groups to write down at least two commands from Scripture and discuss how to apply their memory strategies to remember to follow the commands.

Alternative. Distribute the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in small groups to complete row one as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 3:3-4. Write *Psalm 15:1-3*; *Matthew 9:12-13*; and *1 Corinthians 13:4-7* on the board. Invite the small groups to look up the references and discuss how those Scriptures relate to Proverbs 3:3-4.

Alternative. Instruct groups to complete row two of the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” exercise.

Invite another volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 3:5-6. Assign one of the following Scriptures to each small group: Psalm 18:2; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 11:33; Ephesians 1:11-12; Hebrews 13:8; and James 1:17. Allow five minutes for groups to read their assigned Scripture and discuss how it relates to Proverbs 3:5-6.

Write the following phrase on the board:

We can trust the Lord because He is . . .

With the help of the assigned Scripture, have each group think of one adjective that describes God. Invite a volunteer from each group to share their group’s adjective and write it on the board to complete the phrase.

Alternative. Instruct groups to complete row three of the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” exercise.

Ask a final volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 3:7-8. Have groups answer the following questions in small-group discussion: 1—What does “fear of the Lord” mean? 2—How is “fear of the Lord” foundational for today’s Scripture? 3—As described in these verses, what are possible steps for a healthy life?

Challenge small groups to come up with one example for how to follow the imperatives in Proverbs 3:7 (example: A person might be not wise in their own eyes by asking for advice from a more mature and knowledgeable person).

Alternative. Instruct groups to complete row four of the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” activity.

Into Life

Distribute an index card and pen to each learner. Place learners into pairs and allow five minutes for them to identify an area of their life that they can change by applying one of the principles from Proverbs. Ask learners to write down that change on their index card. Have learners share their plan for change with their partners. Encourage learners to place the index card in a visible location where they can see it in the upcoming week.

Faith and Encouragement

Devotional Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-15

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:5-20

2 Chronicles 20:13-20

13 And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

14 Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation;

15 And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

16 To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salva-

tion of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

20 And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

Key Text

Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

—2 Chronicles 20:20b

Introduction

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the faith actions that led to Jehoshaphat's victory.
2. Evaluate the cause-and-effect tenor of the key text.
3. Notice God's presence and help in facing his or her fears.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Encouragement Passed Along
- B. Lesson Context

I. Facing a Crisis (2 Chronicles 20:13-17)

- A. Solemn Gathering (v. 13)
Families Together?
- B. Inspired Messenger (v. 14)
- C. Reassuring Message (vv. 15-17)

II. "Faith-ing" a Crisis (2 Chronicles 20:18-20)

- A. By Worshipping the Lord (vv. 18-19)
Genuine Worship
- B. By Trusting the Lord (v. 20)

Conclusion

- A. When Uplook Changes Outlook
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

A. Encouragement Passed Along

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African American to take the field for a major league baseball team in the modern era when he started in a game for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Breaking the color barrier was a milestone in moving toward an end to discrimination in baseball and in America as a whole. But it was an uphill battle to reach that point, and encouragement from others helped Robinson contribute to overcoming the racial bias of post-World War II America (with more progress yet needed today).

Robinson's success in baseball and later as an activist in the Civil Rights Movement became, in turn, an encouragement for others to succeed by overcoming prejudice and other obstacles. To offer "you can do it" words of encouragement is good as far as it goes. But to be an example of one who has been through the fire of adversity is encouragement on a whole other level! Encouragement is one of the most positive ways to use words and actions, especially when those who need to be encouraged face times of great uncertainty and challenge.

B. Lesson Context

The book of 2 Chronicles covers the time period 970 BC to 536 BC. This period spans from Solomon, the last king of Israel as a united monarchy, to Cyrus, the king of Persia who ended the Babylonian exile. Readers of the Bible may wonder why the books of 1–2 Chronicles are useful, since their content often mirrors that of 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings. A clue is found in the titles of 1 and 2 Chronicles as appearing in the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. There the titles translate into English as "Things Omitted." That is certainly appropriate regarding the text of today's lesson, which focuses on events during the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (the southern kingdom of divided Israel) from about 872 BC to 848 BC. The text of 2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3 has much more information about him than is recorded in 1 Kings 15:24; 22:1-50.

Uncertainty exists regarding the author of

Chronicles. As a result that person is often referred to merely as “the chronicler.” The priest and scribe Ezra, who led the return from exile in 458 BC, is our best guess for being the author. This is because 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 is virtually identical, letter for letter, to Ezra 1:1-3 in the Hebrew.

Some students propose that Ezra (if indeed he was the author) wrote 1–2 Chronicles to teach God’s people to avoid sin, lest they suffer anew the consequences that led to exile in the first place. A special focus on the importance of faithfulness to the Lord can be detected in 1 Chronicles 22:13; 2 Chronicles 17:3-6; 24:20; 29:6-9; 31:20, 21; 36:15-21—texts with no parallel in 2 Samuel or 1–2 Kings. Ezra would have agreed with the often-quoted statement that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (George Santayana, 1863–1952).

Jehoshaphat reigned during the period of the divided monarchy in Israelite history. He was one of the more godly kings of Judah (see 2 Chronicles 17:3-4). He is noted for his efforts to rid Judah of idol worship and to promote the teaching of God’s law throughout the land (17:1-9). Also noteworthy is the respect held by surrounding people and the attention he gave to various building projects and to administrative reforms (17:10-19).

On the downside, however, Jehoshaphat entered into an ill-advised alliance with ungodly Ahab, king of northern Israel, who enlisted Jehoshaphat’s aid in retaking some territory from the Syrians. At Ahab’s behest, Jehoshaphat wore his royal robes into battle against the Syrians while Ahab disguised himself in an effort to keep the prophet Micaiah’s prediction of his death from being fulfilled (2 Chronicles 18:1-31a). The move nearly cost Jehoshaphat his life, but “the Lord helped him” (18:31b), and he was spared.

After hearing of God’s displeasure with that alliance (2 Chronicles 19:1-3), Jehoshaphat reorganized his government both physically and spiritually (19:4-11). At an unspecified time later, a coalition of enemy forces began to march toward Judah (20:1-2). This resulted in the king and country becoming unified in fasting and public prayer—prayer that confessed utter reliance

on the Lord to defeat this threat (20:3-12). The Lord’s response came next.

I. Facing a Crisis

(2 Chronicles 20:13-17)

A. Solemn Gathering (v. 13)

13. And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

The phrase *all Judah stood before the Lord* reflects 2 Chronicles 20:4, which records that people “out of all the cities of Judah” came to seek the Lord’s help during the crisis at hand (see Lesson Context for details). The place where they gathered was “the house of the Lord” (20:5), meaning the temple in Jerusalem. It seems that representatives from every town were present. The crisis was so severe that it was not only men gathered, but whole families. Having just heard their king’s prayer (see Lesson Context), they awaited God’s response.

Second Chronicles 20:5 states that the king stood “in the house of the Lord, before the new court.” This “court” was likely a new courtyard, perhaps a renovation undertaken during the reigns of either Asa (Jehoshaphat’s father) or Jehoshaphat himself, both of whom are commended for their exemplary devotion to the Lord (2 Chronicles

How to Say It

Ahab	Ay-hab.
Asa	Ay-zuh.
Asaph	Ay-saff.
Azariah	Az-uh-rye-uh.
Benaiah	Be-nay-juh.
Cyrus	Sigh-russ.
En-Gedi	En-gee-dye.
Jahaziel	Juh-hay-zuh-el.
Jehoshaphat	Jeh-hosh-uh-fat.
Joash	Jo-ash.
Kohathites	Ko-hath-ites.
Korhites	Kor-hites.
Mattaniah	Mat-uh-nye-uh.
Tekoa	Tih-ko-uh.
Uzziah	Uh-zye-uh.

14:2-6; 15:17; 17:3-6). Here is where the assembly (including families and their little ones) stood before the Lord following Jehoshaphat's fervent prayer for the Lord's help against the invading forces. Jehoshaphat had closed his prayer with words expressing his and the people's complete dependence upon the Lord.

What Do You Think?

How do you prioritize prayer and worship time within your family?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can you invite your friends and neighbors to join your family in prayer and worship?

Families Together?

When our children were small, my wife and I made an effort to keep them with us as much as possible when we attended church. We wanted to get them involved in worship service, listening to the sermon, and talking with them about both afterward. This paid off in some unexpected ways. My youngest daughter decided she liked worship songs, even the old hymns, and asked me to sing them to her at bedtime. My son watched the worship band intently, developed a love for drumming and is well on his way to becoming a world-class percussionist. My oldest daughter became enamored with missions and is going to Bible college to become a missionary to Germany. Worshipping together as a family is not the only reason they made these choices, but it's a part of a foundation of faith we tried to lay in their lives.

Seeking the Lord through worship, prayer, etc., happens both individually and collectively. For instance, the apostle Paul wrote letters to both individuals and churches. It's important not to let one aspect eclipse the other. Do you? —A. W.

B. Inspired Messenger (v. 14)

14a. Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph.

What an avalanche of names! Consternation multiplies when we discover that the 6 names are

rather common, designating altogether some 67 people with one of those names in the Old Testament (compare 1 Chronicles 1–9). The chronicler has gone to a lot of work to record these *the son of* connections. Being able to prove one's lineage was important to the ancient Jew (compare Ezra 2:59-62; Nehemiah 7:61-64), as it is in establishing the line of Jesus in the New Testament era (Matthew 1:1-17, lesson 3; Luke 3:23-38). Genealogies have their place, but they can be overemphasized (Matthew 3:9; 1 Timothy 1:4; Titus 3:9). In any case, for *Jahaziel* to have his pedigree traced back to the *Asaph* of King David's era some three centuries previous is noteworthy (see 2 Chronicles 5:12; Nehemiah 11:17).

14b. Came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation.

The declaration of the Holy Spirit's "coming upon" someone in the Old Testament era is associated predominantly with the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. In 2 Chronicles, the occurrence is associated with King Azariah (Uzziah), who spoke a message of both encouragement and warning to King Asa (2 Chronicles 15:1-7). Later "the Spirit of God" came upon a different Zechariah, who rebuked King Joash for turning away from the Lord and leading Judah and Jerusalem into idolatry (24:20).

These instances in the Old Testament era seem to have been of limited durations for specific individuals regarding specific tasks and events. On the other hand, the gift of the Holy Spirit for the era of the New Testament is present in all Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 1:13).

What Do You Think?

What does it look like for believers to be empowered by the Holy Spirit? Consider Ephesians 5:18-20 in your answer.

Digging Deeper

How will you continue being attentive to the ways that the Holy Spirit works in and through you?

C. Reassuring Message (vv. 15-17)

15. And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king

Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

The message was not directed to all 12 tribes of divided Israel, but only to the southern kingdom of *Judah*, where *Jerusalem* was located. God intended that everyone receive His message. Therefore, it is addressed to all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, with the king referred to last. Since northern Israel was ruled by ungodly kings (see Lesson Context), the content of the message being delivered was not appropriate for them.

The phrase *thus saith the Lord* occurs over 400 times in the Old Testament. Whether the message that follows is initially targeted toward an individual (Jeremiah 27:2) or a group (4:3), the expected outcome will concern the bigger picture. That is the case here, as Jahaziel directed his words to *all* the people who were assembled (the phrase *unto you* is also plural). Interestingly, the negative phrase *be not afraid nor dismayed* also appears in 2 Chronicles 32:7, where it is preceded by the positive phrase “be strong and courageous” with regard to a different enemy (compare 1 Chronicles 22:13).

King Jehoshaphat, as leader of God's people, especially needed to hear these words. The *great multitude* of the enemy coalition was already at En-Gedi, located on the western shore of the Dead Sea southeast of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 20:2). The distance from En-Gedi to Jerusalem was about 25 straight-line miles. However, since road distances varied, the practical distance between the locations was a bit farther. An army marching at a rate of two miles per hour would be at the gates of Jerusalem in less than three days!

When in a crisis situation, there's always the perceived need to do something as people begin to panic. Yet Jehoshaphat did not need to concern himself with how he and his people would overcome the enemy army, for he was not the real commander-in-chief: *The battle is not yours, but God's* (compare 1 Samuel 17:47; 2 Kings 6:15-17).

16. To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye



Visual for Lesson 8. Point to this visual after reading verse 17 and ask for examples of ways that the Lord fights for us today.

shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

The enemy army's location *by the cliff of Ziz* means that those troops had marched about seven miles to the north from En-Gedi (again, 2 Chronicles 20:2), along the road bordering the western shore of the Dead Sea. This puts that army less than 20 miles from Jerusalem. The *wilderness of Jeruel* was in this vicinity (20:20). Exactly how King Jehoshaphat was to proceed at that point is specified in the next verse.

17. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

This verse essentially repeats the message of 2 Chronicles 20:15, above. The Scriptures witness to the Lord's defeating enemy armies in various ways (examples: Exodus 14; Deuteronomy 3:1-11; Joshua 8; Judges 4, 7; 2 Kings 19). Sometimes the Lord works through human intermediaries in this regard, and sometimes not. The promise *ye shall not need to fight in this battle* is a strong hint that this time it will be the latter.

The commands *stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you* and *fear not . . . for the Lord will be with you* are remarkably similar to Moses' instructions in Exodus 14:13-14 to the Israelites when being pursued by the Egyptian

army during the exodus many centuries earlier: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. . . . The Lord shall fight for you.” The assurance of the Lord’s presence is found in numerous places (examples: Genesis 31:3; Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 41:10).

What Do You Think?

How can each element of the armor of God (see Ephesians 6:10-18) help you stand firm in the contexts in which God has placed you?

Digging Deeper

How will you discern whether “battle strategies” are necessary in your context of serving the Lord?

II. “Faith-ing” a Crisis

(2 Chronicles 20:18-20)

A. By Worshipping the Lord (vv. 18-19)

18. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

Clearly, the Lord had heard the king’s prayer! Worship was the only proper response. The king set the example, and the people joined him. He had declared that “our eyes are upon thee” (2 Chronicles 20:12); now he and those same eyes were turned to the ground in reverence. They had been standing “before the Lord” (20:13); they then *fell before the Lord*.

19. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

The *Kohathites* took their name from Kohath, the second of the three sons of Levi (Genesis 46:11). From the Kohathites came the priestly family of Aaron (1 Chronicles 6:1-3). The *Levites* were responsible for “keeping the charge of the sanctuary” (Numbers 3:28).

The *Korhites* refer to the sons of Korah, another Levite from the clan of Kohath, whose father was Izhar, the brother of Amram, Moses and Aaron’s father (Exodus 6:18, 21). Korah is infamous for

organizing a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron during Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness. Korah and those who joined him in his defiance were swallowed up by the earth in a terrifying demonstration of God’s wrath (Numbers 16:25-35). There were, however, descendants of Korah who did not join him in his action, and those mentioned in our passage would be descendants of those individuals. Certainly the difference in attitude between these who *stood up* to join Jehoshaphat in *praise* and worship and their forefathers who “rose up” to defy Moses (16:2) is worth noting. As time moved on and the tabernacle gave way to the temple, the Korhites became gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 6:22; 9:17-19).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you worship God without fear of being distracting or disturbing others?

Digging Deeper

How is your public witness strengthened when you publicly worship God?

Genuine Worship

What does genuine, authentic worship look like? In Italy, day and night at regular hours of prayer, monks gather in robes and chant ancient hymns in a Gothic cathedral. In Iowa, on the stage of a tiny country church, a shaggy-headed guitarist rocks out to heavy metal before a sea of tattooed and pierced motorcycle enthusiasts, singing along to lyrics of devotion to Jesus. In India, an elderly woman prays and worships at a niche in her living room wall that once held pictures and statues of Hindu gods but now features only a cross. In Oklahoma, a well-dressed couple sit in the theater seating of a megachurch and watch a well-rehearsed drama, laughing and thinking soberly about God’s gentle, persistent call in their lives.

Around the world, worship of God is as diverse as God’s people. Love for Jesus can be expressed in any language, as well as by all sorts of music, art, and body language. Regardless of how amateurish various worship expressions might look,

two things matter most: (1) that it is offered from a sincere heart of devotion and (2) that it is offered only to the true God, who sent His Son to die on our behalf (John 4:23). To worship with the first without the second is idolatry; to worship with the second without the first is hypocrisy. Which way might you tend most to err? —A. W.

B. By Trusting the Lord (v. 20)

20. And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

Rising *early in the morning* indicates the king and the people's anticipation to see how the Lord would work on their behalf. It's an 18-mile walk, and they need to get to *the wilderness of Tekoa* before nightfall (see 2 Chronicles 20:16, above). King *Jehoshaphat* took the lead in encouraging his people to demonstrate faith in the Lord—a key theme of Jahaziel's message the day before. (Perhaps Jahaziel accompanied the people as they went forth, but we are not told.) As Jehoshaphat challenged the people to *believe in the Lord* and in His messengers, the *prophets*, it appears the king accepted Jahaziel's message as prophetic.

The link between trusting the Lord and trusting His prophets should not be overlooked. If God's covenant people desired to obey Him, then they must accept the words spoken by His inspired messengers, the prophets. When God's people ignored and even mocked these Heaven-sent messengers, a Heaven-sent judgment came upon them (see 2 Kings 17; etc.).

For the time being, King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah had chosen to heed the words spoken to them. When they raised their voices in praise to the Lord, the Lord indeed came to their rescue and brought about a miraculous deliverance that allowed the people to plunder the possessions of their enemies (2 Chronicles 20:21-25). So the king and the people then returned to Jerusalem as they had left it—in triumphant praise and worship of the Lord (20:26-28).

What Do You Think?

What most challenges you about today's passage?

Digging Deeper

What will you do to respond to that challenge?

Conclusion

A. When Uplook Changes Outlook

King Jehoshaphat had offered a passionate plea to the Lord for help, admitting that neither the king nor his people had any strategy or resources to confront the oncoming threat. Perhaps as his prayer progressed, his voice grew louder, possibly even trembling as he reached the end and declared his utter dependence upon God: "Neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee" (2 Chronicles 20:12). Then came Jahaziel's Spirit-empowered words. The people's uplook changed their outlook.

All of us can probably recall a time when a passage of God's Word was especially reassuring and helped get us through difficult circumstances. We may not have felt as desperate as Jehoshaphat did, but we experienced the energy that comes with God's encouragement. We may not be like Jahaziel, who encouraged a king and his nation when the Spirit of God came upon him. But perhaps during the course of a day, someone will come to mind that we should share a Scripture passage with by a phone call, text message, email, or postcard.

Who might that be?

B. Prayer

Father, our culture and our world are often characterized by speech and actions that oppose Your truth. Keep our eyes on You daily, that we may escape their influence! Thank You for those who have encouraged us over the years through Your promises. May we seek to pass that blessing on to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let your uplook change your outlook.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to list famous battles in world history. Write the list on the board and refer to the list as you ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What was the context of the battle? 2—Who is considered to have “won” the battle? 3—What resulted from the conflict?

Option. Bring a checkerboard and arrange the pieces with one piece of one color in a corner and three “kinged” pieces of another color surrounding it. Explain how this layout demonstrates one-to-three (1:3) odds. Challenge learners to develop a strategy for the one to overcome the three and win.

Say, “It is easy for us to feel overwhelmed, discouraged, and defeated when we feel the odds are stacked against us. That is how King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah felt in today’s Scripture. As we study, pay attention to what God told them and how their response reflected their faith.”

Into the Word

Prepare for today’s Scripture reading by sharing the Lesson Context from the commentary. Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Chronicles 20:13-14. Divide the class in half. Ask one half to list the listeners mentioned in verse 13 and discuss why it was important for each listed group to hear the word of the Lord on that day. Ask the other half to record the lineage of Jahaziel based on verse 14 and discuss why he had the authority to speak. Give the two groups time to discuss and then ask for volunteers to share their group’s conclusions.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Chronicles 20:15-17. Divide participants into pairs or triads. Distribute a sheet of paper and pens to each group. Ask each group to sketch the plan God instructed the people of Judah to follow. Invite groups to use their “sanctified imagination” to fill in the gaps in their sketches regarding strategic battle instructions and other related details. After 10 minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to share their

drawing with the whole class. Discuss any conclusions and insights that groups discovered.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Chronicles 20:18-20. Ask three or more volunteers to act out these verses before the whole class. Choose volunteers to play the roles of King Jehoshaphat, people of Judah, and Levite(s). After the performance, invite the class to discuss what behaviors demonstrated the characters’ faith in what God had told them. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What is significant about the people worshipping God before the battle? 2—How did Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah show their faith? 3—How does v. 20 apply to us? 4—How would you respond if God told you directly that He would fight for you?

Option. Allow one minute for learners to complete the “Asaph’s Psalm” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Then ask learners to pair up to discuss their results.

Into Life

Ask participants to choose a partner. Write the following three questions on the board:

1. What things in your life cause you to experience fear or worry?
2. How does today’s Scripture text encourage you and strengthen your faith?
3. What will you do this week to be attentive to God’s presence in facing your fears and worries?

Allow time for the pairs to discuss their fears and worries and then pray for each other. Reconvene the class and spend the remainder of class time praying and praising God, declaring He is greater than our fear and worry.

Alternative. Distribute the “Your Song” exercise from the activity page to be completed individually. Encourage learners to refer to their song or poem throughout the week to remember God’s deliverance and faithfulness.

Faith and Transformation

Devotional Reading: Ezekiel 11:17-21

Background Scripture: Romans 12:3-8

Romans 12:3-8

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.



Key Text

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. —Romans 12:6a

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. List several spiritual gifts.
2. Compare and contrast the printed text with the gift lists in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.
3. Create a plan to use a spiritual gift more effectively.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Where's My X-ray?
- B. Lesson Context

I. How to Think (Romans 12:3-5)

- A. About Self (v. 3)
- B. About Others (vv. 4-5)

Team Moon

II. How to Serve (Romans 12:6-8)

- A. With Well-Defined Gifts (vv. 6-8a)
- B. With Less-Defined Gifts (v. 8b-8d)

Striking Mercy

Conclusion

- A. All Gifts Matter
- B. Your Gift(s)?
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Where's My X-ray?

My four-year-old son, Valor, is fascinated by the human body. His favorite book to have me read is about the human body and its different parts. He loves opening the little tabs in the book to reveal the internal organs and bones of the "body." A local medical clinic recently provided free medical exams, and Valor was excited. He listened carefully as the doctor's assistant explained how the spine and nerves fit together. He got very excited about getting an X-ray, and that's where things got difficult. He wasn't old enough for an X-ray, but his sister and brother were.

That upset him. He wanted the picture of how his body fit together! For much of the trip home, he begged us to go back to get his X-ray picture taken.

It's too bad that Christians don't concern themselves this much with how the body of Christ fits together. Maybe if we did, we would have healthier churches as members appreciated each other more.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Romans was written by Paul in about AD 58, probably toward the end of his third missionary journey. At that point, Paul had not yet been to Rome, but greatly wished to visit (Romans 1:11-15; 15:23-24). He would do so, but in chains as a prisoner, as Acts 27–28 records.

He made it to Rome by about AD 61 but remained under house arrest, unable to move about the city as he might have wished (Acts 28:16, 20, 23, 30). Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome to introduce himself and his teaching prior to a personal visit there. The church likely had been established not long after the day of Pentecost, some three decades earlier (2:1). Some of the Jews who heard Peter's sermon that day were from Rome (2:10), and it's easy to imagine that they were the ones who started the church after returning home to Rome. There can be little doubt that the Roman church had heard of Paul (28:15) and looked forward to meeting him.

One of the great debates concerning the context of the book of Romans is the demographic composition of the Roman church when Paul wrote. Were the members primarily of Jewish background, of Gentile background, or evenly split? Although it is highly likely that the church was founded by believers of Jewish background, Paul seems to suggest that the church was composed primarily of Gentiles (see Romans 1:5-6, 13). The Roman emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome about AD 49 (Acts 18:2), which would have resulted in believers of Gentile background coming into greater prominence.

But by the time that Paul wrote this letter, Claudius had died and the expulsion order was rescinded, allowing Jews to return to Rome. How many believers of Jewish background constituted the Roman church is uncertain, but Paul does spend Romans 9:1–11:12 speaking about the nation of Israel. Even so, that section depicts a direct address to Gentiles in 11:13. The weight of the evidence therefore points to a Gentile majority in the church in Rome.

The book of Romans falls into two major sections. The first part, Romans 1–11, features some of the most doctrinally heavy thoughts in all of Scripture. A shift comes with Romans 12–16, which addresses how Christians should then live in light of the truth of those doctrines. Today's lesson comes from this second section.

I. How to Think

(Romans 12:3-5)

A. About Self (v. 3)

3a. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

This verse starts with a conjunction by which Paul introduces the logical explanation for what he has already said. The ability to discern the “good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2) begins with the correct thought of ourselves. The word *for* seems to introduce the way people should think of themselves in the appropriate manner: by being “renewed in

the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23). Paul is able to offer this imperative because of *the grace given* to him—an expression he never tires of using (see Romans 15:15; 1 Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:7; 4:7). That phrase establishes his authority as coming from God.

3b. But to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

For a person *to think soberly* is to think rationally and appropriately (compare Mark 5:15; 2 Corinthians 5:13). Paul introduced the common standard of measurement by which to evaluate oneself: it is *the measure of faith*. But there is debate over what kind of faith Paul had in mind. The two main possibilities are the “common faith” that every Christian has (see Titus 1:4) and “distributed” faith, which is given for differing capacities for service (see 2 Corinthians 10:13). There are strong arguments both ways. But notice that in either case, the measure is not that of one person compared to another person—the natural and unhealthy tendency.

What Do You Think?

How do you determine whether you think too highly of yourself or underestimate yourself?

Digging Deeper

How will you use an accountability partner to help consider yourself with sober judgment?

B. About Others (vv. 4-5)

4. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office.

Paul uses this analogy to the human *body* also in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 and Ephesians 4:16. It should be obvious that not all parts of the *body* perform the same function. A hand does not function as an ear and vice versa. We note that the word *office* is not referring to the offices of elder, deacon, etc. The Greek underneath this word is also translated “deeds” in Romans 8:13 and Colossians 3:9, and that is the sense here.

5. So we, being many, as one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Paul desired his readers to think in terms of *one* as a collective singular of *many*. As Christians cannot serve effectively apart from other Christians, so also *one body* cannot operate independently of the head, who is *Christ*. These themes are so important that Paul repeats them in several places (see 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12, 25; Colossians 1:18, 24).

What Do You Think?

How do you discern your function within the body of Christ that is the church?

Digging Deeper

How do Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 inform your process of discernment?

Team Moon

Trivia question: How many people landed *Apollo 11* on the moon in 1969? According to Catherine Thimmesh, the answer is 400,000!

In her book *Team Moon*, Thimmesh highlights the diverse roles that were essential to the mission. Seamstresses stitched 22 layers of fabric on each spacesuit. Engineers designed an array of systems, which were then built by skilled technicians. Safety inspectors, physicians, mission-control personnel, and others made the mission possible and successful. But as people gathered around their television sets to watch the drama unfold, they saw only three astronauts in space and only two of them land on the lunar surface.

My wife and I used to be missionaries in rural Africa, which in some ways felt like being an astronaut in an unknown world. We also stood in the spotlight as we reported to churches. But when our daughter was born with severe cerebral palsy, our roles changed—we became part of the support team based in the United States.

I'm ashamed to admit that I once thought the overseas missionary role felt more important than the roles of the support team. The accountants, trainers, fundraisers, administrators, and media creators are all members of the same body; if they weren't essential, they wouldn't be on the team. Also members of the team are the thousands who pray and donate funds. Which mis-

take are you more likely to make: overrating your role in the body of Christ or underrating it?

—N. G.

II. How to Serve

(Romans 12:6-8)

A. With Well-Defined Gifts (vv. 6-8a)

6. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.

The echo of 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 is quite strong here and in the two verses that follow (compare 1 Peter 4:10-11). With the word *prophecy*, Paul begins a list of seven *gifts differing*, which fall into a group of four and a group of three. The gift of prophecy is also found in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11. Paul prized the appropriate display of this gift (see 1 Corinthians 14).

When we see the word *prophecy*, we often think of predicting the future (as in Acts 11:28; 21:10-12). But that is not its main impulse in the New Testament era; rather, prophecy more often involves proclaiming information divinely revealed for the church's edification (compare 1 Corinthians 14:3, 24-25, 30). Moreover, the message of a prophet was evaluated by others having the same gift (14:29-32).

We pause here for a caution: as Paul begins his listing of spiritual gifts, it is tempting to jump in hastily and compile a list of such gifts according to

How to Say It

Beatitudes	Bee- <i>a</i> -tuh-toods (<i>a</i> as in <i>mat</i>).
<i>caveat emptor</i> (Latin)	ka- <i>vee</i> -ought em-tor.
Claudius	<i>Claw</i> -dee-us.
Colossians	Kuh- <i>losh</i> -unz.
Corinthians	Ko- <i>rin</i> -thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Ephesians	Ee- <i>fee</i> -zhunz.
Galatians	Guh- <i>lay</i> -shunz.
Gentile	<i>Jen</i> -tile.
Pentecost	<i>Pent</i> -ih-kost.
Titus	<i>Ty</i> -tus.

this text and others. But to do so runs the risk of missing the bigger picture. That bigger picture is that spiritual gifts serve as an example of a church that is united in its diversity. Spiritual gifts are not given merely to bless the person receiving the gift, but to build up the church as a whole (Ephesians 4:11-12). Most of all, these gifts are intended to be displays of love between believers (see 1 Corinthians 13).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to either (1) discern your spiritual gift or (2) discern how to use your gift for the church?

Digging Deeper

Who will you ask for insight and guidance in this regard?

7a. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering.

We move to the second gift in Paul's grouping of four. The word translated *ministry* and *ministering* is also translated "serve" in Romans 15:31, and that is the sense here. "Service" was the usual way to describe the work that Christians did on behalf of others. As Paul uses this word, he can refer to various types of service:

- Christian ministry in general (Romans 15:25; Philemon 13);
- The ministry of Christ (Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:17);
- Specific Christian ministries (Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 9:12-13);
- Ministry of the office of deacon (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13);
- Ministry of a secular authority (Romans 13:4).

Since the other gifts Paul names in our text involve specific functions, he was likely thinking of a specific gift of service that qualified a person to be in the office of deacon.

7b. Or he that teacheth, on teaching.

The gift of *teaching* is also noted in 1 Corinthians 12:28-29 and Ephesians 4:11. In the text before us, Paul is focusing on *he that teacheth* rather the gift of teaching as such. Why he makes this switch is unclear. What is clear, however, is



Visual for Lesson 9. Point to this visual and ask for volunteers to share how their spiritual gifts can be used to serve the church.

that teaching is distinct from prophesying. Prophecy is based on revealing the information that God has placed in the prophet's mouth; teaching, on the other hand, involves communicating the truth of the gospel (see 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:10).

Teaching was critical for the first-century church, where many people were not formally educated. They learned from auditory instruction rather than reading. Therefore, it was and is a primary task of the eldership (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17).

8a. Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation.

We come to the fourth gift in Paul's subgrouping of four well-defined spiritual gifts. He uses the verb translated *exhorteth* and the noun translated *exhortation* a total of 80 times across his letters. The ways he uses the verb in 60 occurrences are translated "comfort(eth)" (example: twice in 2 Corinthians 1:4), "beseech" (example: 2:8), or "exhort" (as here). The 20 times he uses the noun are translated "comfort" (example: 1:4), "consolation" (example: Romans 15:5), or "exhortation" (as in this verse).

Putting this all together, we get the idea that Paul is challenging those with this gift to use it in terms of being a bit stronger than merely "requesting" something of someone else but a bit less strong than "commanding" that person.

B. With Less-Defined Gifts (v. 8b-8d)

8b. He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity.

We come now to the first in a subgrouping of three spiritual gifts—gifts that are less-defined than the previous four. To give is to share with another or the church what one has. This is an expectation of all believers (1 Corinthians 16:2). The word translated *simplicity* occurs eight times in the New Testament, always in Paul’s letters. Its translations in other passages are “liberal(ity)” (2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:13), “bountifulness” (9:11), and “singleness” of heart (Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22). Understanding “simplicity” to reflect “singleness of purpose” seems to be the idea. There are to be no ulterior motives for giving (contrast Acts 5:1-4).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can a believer utilize the gift of giving without always focusing on financial giving?

Digging Deeper

Who can be the recipient of your non-financial giving?

8c. He that ruleth, with diligence.

As with the word translated *simplicity* (Romans 12:8b, above), the Greek word translated *ruleth* occurs eight times in the New Testament, always in Paul’s letters. It is used of church leadership (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17), family leadership or household management (3:4, 5, 12), and self-management (Titus 3:8, 14). The overall idea is that of “one who presides.” To be such a person is to be in control in a godly sense.

8d. He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

To show *mercy* requires both action and a proper attitude. As such, showing mercy involves more than merely offering lip-service sympathy (compare 1 John 3:17-18) or forgiveness. In the Beatitudes, Jesus stated, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

No specific ways of being merciful are listed in the text before us, and Paul seems intentionally to want the general sense. As one who had received mercy, the importance of being merciful was quite personal to him (1 Timothy 1:13,

16). Indeed, the mercy we ourselves have received from God is the basis for our own acts of mercy, as Jesus’ parable of the unmerciful servant makes clear (Matthew 18:21-35). We see the *cheerfulness* aspect of showing mercy also reflected in giving (2 Corinthians 9:7), such giving being a specific kind of merciful act.

At this point, this list of spiritual gifts ends. But the very next verse (Romans 12:9) relates love to spiritual gifts in much the same way 1 Corinthians 12–14 does. Love is the touchstone for how any spiritual gift is used.

As we wrap up our consideration of this subgrouping of three gifts, we should consider a possible implication regarding these gifts being less-defined than other gifts. That implication is that these three are expected of *all* Christians. Think about it: Shouldn’t everyone give with sincerity (2 Corinthians 9:7)? Shouldn’t everyone rule or manage at least his or her own life to keep from being unproductive (2 Peter 1:5-8)? Shouldn’t everyone be merciful (James 2:13)?

What Do You Think?

How might you demonstrate the gift of mercy in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

What might prevent believers from wanting to show mercy, even if they have the gift for doing so?

Striking Mercy

One of the earliest displays of mercy that I remember came during recess in the sixth grade. As the group played soccer, two kids ran up to the soccer ball and kicked it at the same time. One child lost his balance mid-kick and fell down to the ground. It was truly an accident—and comical at that. But the embarrassed child did not think so. It seemed that he thought that the other child had committed a grievous error. As soon as the child got off the ground, he stormed to the other child and struck him in the face.

However, the hit child didn’t retaliate; he didn’t show any anger or fear. Instead, he just picked up his glasses and kept playing soccer. No fight

would occur that day. The coach saw the incident and pulled the other kid off the field to address his behavior. What did that youngster need in that moment: correction or mercy? Maybe he needed both! (Compare and contrast Acts 15:36-40.)

Are you in a position of being able to extend mercy to someone else? If so, do so cheerfully!
—N. G.

Conclusion

A. All Gifts Matter

We understand that all spiritual gifts are important. But at the same time, we know that not all such gifts are equal (see 1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1) and that not all believers are equally gifted (see Matthew 25:14-15).

As a result, our natural tendency is to pay more attention to the gifts that are more visible, more “out front” to the public. The highly visible preacher of the church usually gets paid more than the less visible custodian who cleans the church. But here’s where Paul’s illustration of body members working together (unity in diversity) comes in per Romans 12:4-5: I don’t think you would want to go to dirty and smelly church any more than you would want to go to a church with a horrible preacher! The functions of one’s hands are much more varied, useful, and visible than are the functions of one’s elbow. But a nonfunctioning elbow will severely limit how the hand can function (compare 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Pride is a danger to those having the more visible gifts (see Proverbs 16:18). Also a danger is that those who have the less visible gifts won’t use them, perhaps figuratively “burying” them (Matthew 25:25). But just as no human body functions to its highest potential unless all of its parts work together, so also the church—the body of Christ—does not function at full potential until all of its members use their spiritual gifts. The cure (or preventative) for both pride of gifts and non-use of gifts is Luke 17:10: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

B. Your Gift(s)?

A popular tool that churches and ministries have turned to since at least the 1980s is a spiritual-gifts assessment inventory. I took several of these inventories (or “tests”) during my time as a student in Bible college and seminary. Most of the time, they told me what I suspected already: that teaching was one of my spiritual gifts.

Occasionally, an inventory would indicate that I had a secondary gift that I didn’t realize. One such result was that I had the gift of administration. I found that to be exceptionally funny, given the reality of the piles of books, articles, and papers piled on my desk, floor, and couch!

This goes to show that these inventories aren’t perfect—they can even be misleading. The axiom *caveat emptor* (“let the buyer beware”) applies in more ways than one!

An assumption behind those inventories is that helping people identify what their giftings are will mean that those who have been thus enlightened will automatically start using those gifts. But that is not always so. People will need encouragement to use and otherwise develop their spiritual gifts. Sometimes, people need the wisdom and insight of others to help discern which giftings are present.

Another assumption is that such inventories are even needed for people to be able to identify their areas of spiritual giftedness. A more accurate indicator may be personal experience. What types of Christian service do your personal experiences tell you that you have been best at? Where have you fallen flat?

C. Prayer

Father, You have called all of Your servants to serve. Help us to realize our gifts and give us the courage to develop and use them for Your glory. Help us to remember that no matter what our gifts are, we are all members of one body, and that no one is unimportant to Your church and to You. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Know your spiritual gifts and use them with humility.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Bring to class time a game or toy in multiple pieces, such as a jigsaw puzzle, a disassembled toy, or a small model kit. Distribute pieces to each learner so that everyone has at least one component. Instruct the class to work together to assemble the pieces into a complete product. After no more than 10 minutes, lead a whole-class discussion regarding the ease or difficulty of putting together the object with many people involved.

Alternative. Divide participants into groups of three. Distribute copies of the “Common Goal” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have groups work together to complete the activity as indicated before bringing the groups together to talk about their experiences.

Say, “God has given us value and purpose, but He has also designed us to need each other. In today’s lesson, think about how this truth is especially relevant in the church, among the body of believers.”

Into the Word

Option. Divide learners into pairs to play a game of “10 Questions.” Invite each learner to think of a way for a person to serve in the church (examples: play an instrument, teach a class, etc.). Tell learners to keep their examples to themselves. Partners will go back and forth, asking each other yes-or-no questions to determine the service thought of by their partner. Each learner will ask up to 10 questions until one learner can correctly guess. Conclude by challenging learners to identify one thing they can do to serve other church members.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 12:3-5. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—In what ways is the human body a fitting comparison to the church? 2—Why is it essential to recognize what we can do well? 3—What is significant about acknowledging the things we cannot do well?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 12:6-8. Divide learners into seven small groups and assign each group one of the following spiritual gifts to discuss: (1) prophesying, (2) ministering/serving, (3) teaching, (4) exhorting/encouraging, (5) giving, (6) leading, (7) showing mercy. Ask groups to discuss the following questions in their group: 1—What might the church be like without the presence of this gift? 2—What might the church be like if this were the only gift present? 3—How might the church encourage people with this gift? 4—How do 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and Ephesians 4:1-16 help inform the use of this gift? After 10 minutes, have a volunteer from each group share their conclusions with the whole class.

Into Life

Divide learners into groups of three. Distribute index cards and pens to learners. Ask each group member to list spiritual gifts that they recognize in the other members of their group and write examples of those gifts in action in that person. Ask each learner to write down the spiritual gifts others identified he or she has. Give the groups five minutes to brainstorm different ways each group member can use his or her gifts within the church. Challenge learners to consider one gift identified in them and think of a way they can practice that gift more effectively in the coming week. Close class with group members praying for encouragement for their group to use their gifts in service to God in the upcoming week. (*Option.* Set aside time at the beginning of next week’s lesson for learners to share how their plans worked.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Badge of Gifts” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete the activity as indicated. Allow time after the pages have been completed for partners to pray for each other. Start next week’s lesson with participants sharing about how they are sharing their gifts to help the church.

Faith in the Power of God

Devotional Reading: Romans 4:9-22
Background Scripture: Isaiah 40:12-31

Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31

12 Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

13 Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?

25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.



Key Text

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. —Isaiah 40:29

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 3: The Righteous Live by Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. List some characteristics of the Creator that are uniquely His.
2. Explain the implications of those characteristics.
3. Suggest ideas for a plan a worship service that focuses on God as Creator.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Taking God to Court
- B. Lesson Context

I. Supreme Ruler (Isaiah 40:12-13)

- A. Overseeing Creation (v. 12)
- B. Possessing Full Knowledge (v. 13)

II. Sustaining Ruler (Isaiah 40:25-31)

- A. Regarding His Identity (v. 25)
- B. Regarding His Abilities (vv. 26-28)
Creation Sights, Creator Insights
- C. Regarding Our Need (vv. 29-31)
On Being Worn Out

Conclusion

- A. No Shortage Here!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Taking God to Court

Back in 2007, Nebraska state senator Ernie Chambers filed a lawsuit against God. Chambers was seeking a permanent injunction against God, whom Chambers blamed for causing various natural disasters. The lawsuit further accused God of the crime of failing to stop “terroristic threats.” Chambers stated that he had tried to contact God about these matters on multiple occasions, but without success.

This man knew that he had no hope of winning a lawsuit against the Almighty. He filed the lawsuit in an attempt to make a broader point about the wastefulness of frivolous lawsuits.

The Bible offers us various word pictures of God’s heavenly courtroom. Certain passages are narratives regarding the individuals who are present: one or more of judge, jury, prosecutor, victim, defendant, etc. (examples: Job 16:19-21; Psalm 89:37; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 11:18; 19:19–21:8). Also suggested are locations in the courtroom: a judgment seat, a witness stand, etc. (examples: Job 40:2; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). These serve as warnings regarding who is susceptible to judgment and who is not.

B. Lesson Context

Today’s lesson comes from the writings of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. His text is the first in a group of five referred to as the Major Prophets; those five are the books known as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

We may wonder what value the Old Testament books of the prophets still have in the New Testament era. After all, the days of those prophets are long gone, and we’re under the new covenant, not the old (Colossians 2:14). The value of the prophets today is firmly established in how many times they are cited by Jesus and the authors of the New Testament. One clue to their value today is to be aware of how often these books are quoted in the New Testament. By one count, the tallies are Isaiah (67 times), Jeremiah (5 times), Lamentations (0 times), Ezekiel (2 times), and Daniel (5 times).

These figures reveal the continuing relevance

of the book of Isaiah. It has been called “the fifth Gospel” because of its numerous prophecies declared as fulfilled in the messianic era of the New Testament (examples: Isaiah 6:9-10 in Matthew 13:14-15 and Mark 4:12; Isaiah 53:7-8 in Acts 8:32-33).

Isaiah prophesied during some very dismal times for God’s people. His prophetic call came “in the year that king Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1; compare 2 Chronicles 26:22), which would have been 740 BC (see 2 Chronicles 26; Uzziah is also known as Azariah in 2 Kings 15:1-7). The final historical event recorded by the prophet is the death of Sennacherib, which occurred in 681 BC (Isaiah 37:38). That makes for a lengthy period of ministry!

The text under consideration in our lesson follows a prophecy that warns King Hezekiah of Judah regarding a time when Babylon would carry away Judah’s wealth and people to Babylon (Isaiah 39:5-7); more than 100 years would pass before that happened, but it indeed *did* happen. This was a punishment from the Lord for the people’s sins, followed by “comfort” in declaring that that punishment would eventually end (40:1-2). The predictions that immediately follow in Isaiah 40:3-5 shift forward more than five centuries for fulfillment, quoted in Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; and John 1:23.

The passage of time from pronouncement to fulfillment of these prophecies makes for valuable study. But the study in today’s lesson takes us beyond time-bound prophecies in considering the timeless nature of God himself.

I. Supreme Ruler

(Isaiah 40:12-13)

A. Overseeing Creation (v. 12)

12a. Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span?

Today’s text comes to us in the form of Hebrew poetry. This style often involves balanced lines known as *parallelism*. This means expressing the same thoughts across different lines using different words (synonyms).



Visual for Lesson 10. After reading verse 12a, use this visual and ask for specific examples of other things in nature that point to the power of God.

We see that parallelism here regarding the verbs *measured* and *meted out*. Both expressions deal with calculating something. See Isaiah 65:7, where the word translated *meted out* is translated “measure.” Additional parallelism occurs with the phrases *hollow of his hand* and *the span*. The latter refers to the distance from the end of the thumb to that of the little finger when these are extended—in other words, about nine inches (compare 1 Samuel 17:4).

The words translated *waters* and *heaven* occur together about three dozen times in the Old Testament; most closely aligned with their usage here are Genesis 1:20; Proverbs 30:4; and Amos 9:6. Isaiah uses this imagery to call attention to things God can do that humans cannot. The rhetorical questions being posed are similar to those that the Lord confronted Job with (see Job 38–41). Of particular interest in light of the half-verse under consideration is Job 38:5. Modern science allows us to make educated guesses regarding the volume of water in the oceans and the vastness of space in light years. But whatever the unit of measure, no human device can determine those things with exactness. Only their Creator can do that.

Through rhetorical questions, the prophet provides his reader with the proper perspective of God. The human mind cannot fathom the amount of water in the ocean or the distance of one galaxy to another. However, the Creator can measure the distance using His hand. In this verse, Isaiah declares

the greatness of God and lays down the basis of the criteria by which the Israelites may compare their God to the gods of other nations.

12b. And comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

Isaiah's question has an answer so obvious that it should not have to be stated. The verb translated *comprehended* implies something like "hold" or "contain" (compare its translation in Jeremiah 2:13 concerning "broken cisterns, that can hold no water"). Parallelism continues between *mountains* and *hills* as well as *scales* and *balance* (compare Job 38:18).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you be more attentive to God's power and creativity in the natural environment surrounding you?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can your caring for creation be an act of worship to God?

B. Possessing Full Knowledge (v. 13)

13. Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?

The Hebrew word translated *Spirit* has a range of meanings. It can mean "wind" (Isaiah 7:2), "breath" (11:4), or what might be called "attitude" (4:4), among other meanings. Context determines what the writer means at any given point.

The importance of this verse for the New Testament era is seen in the fact that the apostle Paul quotes it twice (see Romans 11:34 and 1 Corinthians 2:16). Paul uses the word *mind* rather than *Spirit* because he is quoting from the Greek version known as the Septuagint. Even so, his understanding of what the passage says about God is entirely consistent with Isaiah's: God has never had to learn anything from anyone. God is omniscient, meaning "all-knowing."

Isaiah 40:14-24, which comes between the two segments of our lesson text, continues the prophet's confrontational questions. These include declarations of the Lord's superiority to the nations (Isaiah 40:15-17), idols (40:18-20), and earthly rulers (40:23-24).

II. Sustaining Ruler

(Isaiah 40:25-31)

A. Regarding His Identity (v. 25)

25. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

The prophet raised this question earlier, in Isaiah 40:18. It reminds us that we should be extremely cautious with statements that start with "God is like . . ." because the next word will result in the Creator's being compared to something He has created.

Even so, Isaiah's question *To whom then will ye liken me* does not forbid certain figurative language from being used as illustrations of God's various roles. These roles include His being a shepherd (Psalm 23:1), a rock (2 Samuel 22:32), a shield and a sword (Deuteronomy 33:29), a fortress (Psalm 18:2), and even that of a winged and feathered creature (91:4). These are not saying that God's essence is similar or *equal* to any of those; rather, such texts illustrate various functions that God exercises.

The designation *Holy One* is used especially by the prophet Isaiah (30 of its 42 occurrences in the Old Testament). This frequency may be linked to the impression that Isaiah's prophetic call made upon him. In that commissioning ceremony, he saw the Lord "high and lifted up" and heard the seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:1-3).

What Do You Think?

How can you prevent past experiences with authority from negatively influencing the way you view God?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to transform any misguided and distorted perceptions of God?

B. Regarding His Abilities (vv. 26-28)

26a. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number.

Isaiah calls attention to the heavens as he did previously in Isaiah 40:12 and will do again in

51:6. The *host by number* refers to the stars. Worship of these was explicitly forbidden (Deuteronomy 4:19), but it happened anyway (2 Kings 17:16; 23:5), with promised punishment that followed (Jeremiah 8:2). Avoiding such idolatry begins with realizing that there's a Creator behind these stars (Nehemiah 9:6). To worship created things rather than the Creator is to invite the death penalty (Romans 1:18-25, 32).

Creation Sights, Creator Insights

Our family enjoys traveling and seeing the creation of God. The mountains are always on our list of favorite places. My love of facts sometimes hinders my enjoying the fantastic view; while family members absorb the sight of the mountain, I am busy searching on my phone for facts to proclaim about the mountain.

We live 114 miles from Denali, the highest mountain in North America. You can see the 20,310-foot mountain from 150 miles away in clear weather. The prophet Isaiah's directives imply that in pondering the majesty of creation, one learns more about the Creator. Pondering creation allows us to come to a proper conclusion regarding our place in it and our relationship to the Creator. Both involve "looking up" (compare Psalm 19). How long has it been since you did so?

—J. M.

26b. He calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

Elsewhere, the Bible records the *names* of some stars and their constellations (Job 9:9; 38:31-32; Amos 5:8). Whether covered by clouds or not, they are in the night sky every night without fail. Modern astronomy sometimes lets us predict with general accuracy the very rarely seen explosion of a supernova (see lesson 5 regarding the difference between astronomy and astrology). By one count, there have been only seven such explosions visible to the naked eye throughout history.

And even these may have involved stars invisible to the naked eye before their demise; thus, the ancients would not have perceived any stars that failed to appear.

27. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

Again we have the parallelism that typifies Hebrew poetry: the verbs *sayest* and *speakest* parallel one another, as do the proper names *Jacob* and *Israel* (see Genesis 32:28; 35:10; 46:2). The parallelism continues with the phrase *my way is hid* mirroring *my judgment is passed over*; then the phrase *from the Lord* echoes *from my God*. Thus one overall thought is expressed, not two. Nothing is hidden from God's sight (Jeremiah 16:17; 23:24; Hebrews 4:13).

What Do You Think?

How should we respond when people say that God doesn't care about them and their problems?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures come to mind to address this concern?

28. Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard are favorite expressions of the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 37:26; 40:21). In this case, they respond to the rhetorical questions of the verse previous to this one. The implication is that nothing is ever concealed from God. It's inconceivable that the reader should plead ignorance to the facts that follow. Even without having the benefit of Scripture, God's characteristics are discernible from nature itself (compare Romans 1:20). Thus, Isaiah should not have to remind the people of truths with which they are already familiar.

The writer offers a rare collection of terms in using different Hebrew words for *God*, *Lord*, and *Creator*. This collection is the only place in the Old Testament where the three words are seen together as nouns; it seems that the writer wants no mistake to be made regarding the identity of the subject! God is not susceptible to human limitations. He does not tire; He never becomes

exhausted; He neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4). That God rested on the seventh day following the six days of creation (Genesis 2:2-3) does not imply that He became *weary*; it simply means that He ceased His creative activity.

At this point, we should take special note of how Scripture uses the word *weary* in different contexts. In the text at hand, that word is used with reference to God’s “running out of energy”—which doesn’t happen. In Isaiah 1:14, on the other hand, the prophet uses the word in the sense of God’s “being fed up”—which definitely *does* happen (also Isaiah 43:24; Malachi 2:17).

These truths expressed in this passage and throughout the Scriptures concerning the Lord and His uniqueness are why prophets such as Isaiah speak so passionately against the sin of idolatry (example: Isaiah 40:18-20). Idol worshipers do no harm whatsoever to God, who remains the same *everlasting* God described by Isaiah. They harm only themselves by following such delusions.

C. Regarding Our Need (vv. 29-31)

29. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

The promise of *strength* from the Lord, especially during times of human frailty and weakness, resonates throughout Isaiah (Isaiah 12:2; 25:4; 26:4; 41:10; 45:24; 49:5) and is found in numerous passages of the psalter (Psalms 18:32; 22:19; 28:7-8; etc.). The issue is one of trust since

God has His own timetable for replacing our weakness with His strength. Trust requires waiting (Isaiah 8:17; 25:9; 33:2; 40:31 [below]; 49:23; 64:4).

Few have experienced more acutely the need for—and receiving of—strength from the Lord as did the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 6:3-10; etc.). His declaration, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13) rings true for us today.

What Do You Think?

How do you seek strength from the Lord when you feel most weary?

Digging Deeper

Who has God placed in your life to whom you can be a source of encouragement in the upcoming week?

30. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.

Youth is often associated with vigor and endurance, something that diminishes with age. But certain situations arise that leave even *youths* disheartened and fearful of what lies ahead. Physical strength is an asset that can prove useful in numerous situations. The ability to do more than expected can last only as long as the adrenaline does. But inner spiritual strength from the Lord is what provides the endurance to resist the temptations frequently encountered in a world broken by sin. Thus could Paul boldly declare, “We faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

31. But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

We now come to some of the most well-known declarations in all of Scripture. We see them displayed artistically on coffee mugs, tapestries, desk mementos, etc. The need to *wait upon the Lord* is found in many places (examples: Psalms 37:9; 123:2; Isaiah 8:13; Romans 8:25). To *wait* implies trust in the *Lord*. An example of impatience and failure to wait is Abraham in Genesis 16. When

How to Say It

Azariah	Az-uh-rye-uh.
Babylon	Bab-uh-lun.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Isaiah	Eye-zay-uh.
Judah	Joo-duh.
Messianic	Mess-ee-an-ick.
omniscient	ahm-nish-unt.
Psalter	Sawl-ter.
Sennacherib	Sen-nack-er-ib.
Septuagint	Sep-too-ih-jent.
Uzziah	Uh-zye-uh.

we wait, we keep faith that He will work His purpose in our circumstances, even when—or especially when!—the way forward is not obvious to us. But waiting does not come easily in our fast-paced society that often demands instant results. Our tendency all too frequently is to act on our own timing and by our own judgment; we want to keep things moving!

The imagery of mounting up *with wings as eagles* pictures an ability to soar into the sky, oblivious to any potential distractions below. The Lord used that same imagery when He established His covenant with the nation of Israel. He contrasted what He did to the Egyptians with “how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Exodus 19:4). Later, Moses used similar imagery to remind the people of God’s special care (Deuteronomy 32:11-12). Isaiah’s words yet apply today.

The concluding *they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint* offers yet more instances of parallelism in expression.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you practice waiting on the Lord so that you can be attentive to God’s Spirit renewing you?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does your waiting on the Lord go against your culture’s expectations regarding waiting?

On Being Worn Out

We recently discovered why God allowed us to have our children only when we were younger. It happened after we agreed to watch our grandson as his parents took a vacation. The two-year-old wore us out, mentally and physically! We love our grandchildren and cherish the time we spend with them. But whenever we’re on “grandchild duty,” we take a rest day from the gym—dealing with the youngsters is enough of a workout!

God challenges us to remember Him as the one who never tires and never needs to sleep. The creator of the universe holds the record for days without sleep! And He grants energy and knowledge

to those who need strength and power when they are at the point of fainting. When you are low on energy, where is the first place you look to for a recharge?
—J. M.

Conclusion

A. No Shortage Here!

When the impact of the coronavirus pandemic began to be felt during the spring of 2020, one result was shortages in various commodities. Issues with business closings and logistical limitations meant that goods were not as readily available as before. Stores simply ran out of certain items, even after limiting purchases per customer. Many consumers found themselves frustrated at being unable to purchase the things they wanted (or outright *needed*) with the convenience to which they were accustomed.

Our passage for today reminds us that the God we worship and serve has never been subject to any kind of weakness, attrition, or scarcity in His resources. The prophet’s affirmations of God’s incomparable sustaining power and of His promise to provide strength to those who grow tired or weary have no expiration date. God’s power and strength are indeed available to us today! But here, a caution must be interjected concerning what the Chronicler records: “The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chronicles 15:2). The only restriction regarding our access to God’s resources is our own sin and unwillingness to trust Him.

B. Prayer

Father, we thank You for the record left to us by the prophet Isaiah! May we realize fully that, with the New Testament, we now have immeasurably more insight into Your nature than Isaiah did! Help us to take neither You nor Your Word for granted. Renew our strength as only You are able to do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

There is never any power shortage with God.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write the following open-ended sentence on the board for learners to see as they arrive:

*If I could spend more time in nature,
I'd want to be in . . .*

Divide the learners into pairs and allow three minutes for them to share their answers and the reasoning behind them with their partners. Ask volunteers to share their responses.

Alternative. Display photos of beautiful nature scenes. (Find pictures online by searching for free stock photos.) Distribute slips of paper to each learner and ask them to write their reactions to the images. Collect the slips and read them back to the whole class. Lead a discussion by asking: “What can nature teach us about God? about ourselves? about the past and future?”

Say, “Throughout history, people have experienced God through the marvelous sights, sounds, and smells found in the world. Today’s Scripture is an example of such an occurrence. As we study, consider how the prophet uses nature to point his listeners to the trustworthiness of God.”

Into the Word

Option. Before class, choose a volunteer to give a brief presentation on this Scripture’s historical and cultural background. The volunteer can use other commentaries and the Lesson Context in preparation. Allow five minutes at the start of class for the presentation.

Distribute a worksheet (you create) with the headings *Who God Is*, *What God Has Done*, *Questions God Asks*, and *What God Promises*. Divide the class into groups of four. Invite the groups to study Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31 and write words or phrases from the Scripture that would go under each heading. Remind groups to provide verse references.

Option. Distribute copies of “The Warning and the Comfort” exercise from the activity page,

which you can download. Have learners work together in groups to complete as indicated. After five minutes, ask for volunteers from each group to share what their group discovered.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—How do you think Isaiah’s prophecy comforted the original audience? 2—What promises and prophecies of God give you the most comfort? 3—What keeps us from hearing or receiving that comfort?

Into Life

Divide learners into four groups to brainstorm ideas for a worship service that would focus on praising God for His creativity, especially as seen in the beauty of His creation. Questions are provided to assist each group’s brainstorming efforts.

Visual Arts. 1—How could the visual arts be used in worship to praise God for His remarkable creativity? 2—What resources or tools would you need in this regard?

Music. 1—How could music be used in a unique way to worship and praise God for His remarkable creativity? 2—What ways can music be used beyond corporate singing?

Spoken Word. 1—How could poetry or short stories be used to worship God and praise Him for His remarkable creativity? 2—How do the Psalms provide an example in this regard?

Your Choice. 1—What other worship components fit your congregation? 2—What skills and talents are needed?

After allowing 10 minutes for planning, ask the groups to share their ideas. Ask, “How would these elements encourage worshippers to remain faithful despite their circumstances?”

Option. Distribute copies of the “This Is My Father’s World” activity from the activity page. Ask learners to complete the activity as a take-home. To encourage completion, allow time at the beginning of the next class for learners to share insights.

Faith in the Fiery Furnace

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7
Background Scripture: Daniel 3:1-30

Daniel 3:19-28

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?

They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Key Text

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. —Daniel 3:28

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 3: The Righteous Live by Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Recall the names of the three whom God rescued from the fiery furnace.
2. Summarize the reasons for Nebuchadnezzar's changes in attitude.
3. Commit to bearing faithful witness to God in facing a personal "fiery furnace."

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Power of Witness
- B. Lesson Context

I. Royal Anger (Daniel 3:19-23)

- A. Heated Response (vv. 19-21)
- B. Urgent Command (vv. 22-23)

II. Divine Presence (Daniel 3:24-28)

- A. The King's Astonishment (vv. 24-25)
Never Alone
- B. The King's Directive (vv. 26-27)
- C. The King's Worship (v. 28)
A Noticed Fearlessness

Conclusion

- A. Faith and Courage
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Power of Witness

Salvadorians remember Óscar Romero (1917–1980) as a hero who advocated for the needs of the people in El Salvador. During his time as the Roman Catholic archbishop of San Salvador, he worked against the unjust treatment of his impoverished compatriots. This work included calling out the frequently violent intimidation tactics by the government and guerrilla groups. His belief that the church should show preferential treatment to the poor served as the basis for his work with Salvadorians. His witness was only as effective as his commitment to loving and following God.

However, his commitment ultimately cost him; he was assassinated by extremist groups while observing Mass. Before his assassination, Romero reflected on the risks he faced as a Christian who advocated for the needs of others. He accepted these risks and expressed hope in the promised bodily resurrection of believers.

Christian history recounts numerous stories of people who stood for their faith. Such people committed to live with complete devotion to God. When we commit to trusting in Him, we will inevitably have our faith tested. Today's Scripture recounts the ultimate example of such testing. How would three Jewish men respond to threats from the most powerful individual in their world?

B. Lesson Context

By telling the stories of the prophet Daniel and his associates, the book of Daniel depicts Jewish life in a foreign land. A series of deportations from Judah by the Babylonians began in 605 BC (see Daniel 1:1-2). These continued until Judah fell in 586 BC (see 2 Kings 25). Among the deported were talented young men selected for their fitness for service to the Babylonian king (see Daniel 1:3-4). Daniel and his associates were taken to Babylon during this time, in approximately 605 BC. The book describes the wisdom of Daniel and his friends as they lived and served in Babylon (example: 2:17-24). Their

positions required that they demonstrate some loyalty to the Babylonian king, evident in their name change (see 1:6-7). This book's events occur from the time of their arrival in Babylon until at least 537 BC, "the third year of Cyrus king of Persia" (10:1).

Part of the book of Daniel is preserved in Hebrew (Daniel 1:1–2:4a; 8:1–12:13), while another part is preserved in Aramaic (2:4b–7:28). The use of two languages indicated the different cultures depicted in the book: Hebrew for the Jews and Aramaic for the Gentile empires (2 Kings 18:26; Ezra 4:7). Today's Scripture comes from the part of Daniel preserved in Aramaic.

Today's lesson Scripture is the second part of the narrative that begins at Daniel 3:1. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (reigned 605–562 BC), had erected a large image of gold at "the plain of Dura" (Daniel 3:1). This location is suggested to have been several miles south of the city of Babylon. Royal subjects, advisors, and kingdom officials arrived for the image's dedication ceremony and to worship it (3:2-5). Refusing to worship the image would result in inevitable death in a "burning fiery furnace" (3:6). But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—men the king had placed in a leadership position (see 2:49)—refused. They had confidence that the Lord would be with them (3:17-18).

I. Royal Anger

(Daniel 3:19-23)

A. Heated Response (vv. 19-21)

19. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

The *fury* of *Nebuchadnezzar* becomes a central point in the early chapters of the book of Daniel. He became angry when his wise men could not interpret his dreams (see Daniel 2:10-13). The refusal of the three Jewish men to bow before the golden image led the king to "rage and fury" (3:13). The king's anger continued. What-

ever goodwill *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* had experienced from the king (examples: 1:19-20; 2:48-49) was lost. The king had once demonstrated some sense of worship of the God of Israel (see 2:46-47). However, when the worship of the true God prevented Nebuchadnezzar from receiving worship, the king resorted to anger and wrath.

The king's command that *the furnace* be heated *seven times more* than usual is a hyperbolic figure of speech. A mention of the number *seven* in Scripture typically indicates fullness, totality, or completion (examples: Leviticus 26:18, 21, 24; Proverbs 24:16; Matthew 18:21-22). There was likely no way to accurately measure the furnace's temperature to know whether it was seven times hotter. The command intended to communicate that the furnace should be heated to the maximum temperature it could reach.

20. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

Nothing in the narrative indicates why Nebuchadnezzar chose *the most mighty men of his army*. These soldiers would have been the best of the best in the king's military. They were likely an elite fighting force valued for their physical strength and power. Perhaps the king anticipated that the Jewish men would put up a fight when they realized their destination.

Furnaces in the ancient Near East were usually made of clay bricks or stone. Their layout consisted of at least two chambers (the main chamber and a fire chamber) and a flue. Large furnaces smelted metals, refined precious metals, or fired ceramics. Simpler furnaces, made of one

How to Say It

Abednego	Uh-bed-nee-go.
Aramaic	Air-uh-may-ik.
Cyrus	Sigh-russ.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Meshach	Me-shack.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud-nez-er.
Shadrach	Shay-drack or Shad-rack.

compartment like a modern-day pizza oven, were used for baking. A large *furnace* to hold *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* reveals the Babylonian empire's vast construction and military needs. The text does not say, but perhaps this furnace refined the gold for the king's image!

What Do You Think?

Who in your life best exemplifies faith while in the "fiery furnace"?

Digging Deeper

What qualities do they have that you can emulate?

21. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

The exact *garments* worn by the three Jewish *men* are unknown because the underlying Aramaic words are relatively rare. Their clothes were likely more in the style of Persia rather than that of Israel. This detail reveals that the king had the men *bound* as they wore flammable clothing. Such wearable "fuel" would have ignited when the king's toughest men *cast* the three Jewish men *into* the superheated *furnace*.

B. Urgent Command (vv. 22-23)

22. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Angry outbursts followed by acts of haste and harshness were typical for Nebuchadnezzar. After the king heard that his wise men could not interpret his dreams, he angrily ordered their execution (see Daniel 2:10-13). When hearing of the king's directive regarding his wise men, Daniel questioned why such a "hasty" decree had been issued (2:14-15).

In this verse, Nebuchadnezzar's *urgent* command toward the three Jewish men again revealed his brutality. The king's *commandment* affected the three Jewish men and led to the death of the "most mighty *men*" (3:20, above).

23. And these three men, Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

The narrative repeats two details already known: the names of *these three men* and the intensity of the *fiery furnace*. That these three men *fell down bound into* the furnace was not the result of an unfortunate accident. They had refused to follow the directive to "fall down" and worship Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold (Daniel 3:5). Now, the king forced the three men to "fall down" to a *burning* death—or so he thought.

II. Divine Presence

(Daniel 3:24-28)

A. The King's Astonishment (vv. 24-25)

24. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

Throughout the book of Daniel, the leaders in Babylon reacted with fear and amazement when God demonstrated miraculous power (examples: Daniel 2:46-47; 5:1-8; 6:19-23; see lesson 12). Nebuchadnezzar's response before us continued that trend. *Nebuchadnezzar* intended to execute the three Jewish men. However, something unique and miraculous caused *the king* to be *astonied*. As in the other examples, this occurrence was something only God could bring about.

The king's *counsellors* consulted with the king on various kingdom matters. The book of Daniel lists this group alongside other regional rulers of Babylon (example: Daniel 3:27). It is unlikely that they held positions of political power. Instead, they consulted and advised the king, in the same way that cabinet members might consult a head of state (see also 6:7). In this instance, their consultation simply confirmed what the king already knew regarding the *three men bound* (compare 3:23, above).

25. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

The identity of the *fourth figure in the midst*

of the fire has long been a subject of discussion among students. The capitalization of the title *Son of God* indicates one possibility: this fourth person was the preincarnate Christ. However, this option provides interpretive difficulty and more questions than answers. For example, it leads us to question what Nebuchadnezzar did to merit this unique vision of the preincarnate Christ. Although we cannot rule out this possibility, this option is challenging to hold.

It is notable, however, that the title comes from the lips of the Babylonian king and not from one of the Jews. Nebuchadnezzar worshipped many pagan gods (example: Daniel 3:14). He likely did not recognize that this figure was the one true God. From his perspective, this figure was a member of the pantheon of pagan gods that he worshipped.

The phrase “son(s) of God” can refer to angels (examples: Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) or presumed deities (example: Genesis 6:2, 4). This option explains the likely identification of this mysterious figure (see Daniel 3:28, below). This angelic presence protected the three men amid their fiery trial (compare Exodus 23:20; see also Psalms 34:7; 91:11). The Babylonian king received a sign. The God who sent this angelic presence protected His people from being *hurt*.

What Do You Think?

How has God made His presence known to you in times of danger or distress?

Digging Deeper

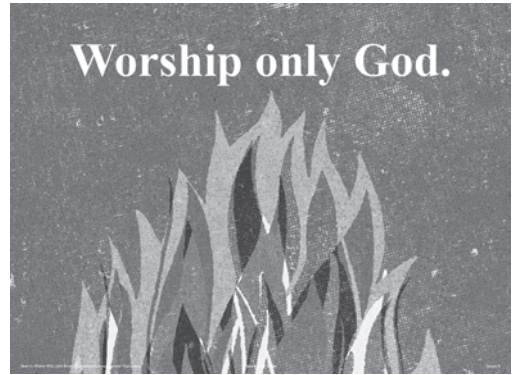
How can you witness about God’s presence either during trials or following them?

Never Alone

Pandemic-related restrictions would prevent Elise’s husband from being present at the birth of their next child. When Elise heard this news, she began researching other countries where she could give birth.

“Canada? No . . . France? No . . . What am I going to do?” she thought.

Elise’s husband always held her hand, sang to



Visual for Lesson 11. Refer to this visual as the class discusses the questions associated with verse 28.

her, reminded her to breathe, and advocated for her needs. She couldn’t imagine enduring the pain of labor and delivery alone. Who would bring her delicious meals so she wouldn’t have to eat the bland cafeteria food?

“What do you think about a home birth, honey?” she asked her husband.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not experience the trials of the fiery furnace alone. God showed His faithfulness to them by rescuing them from the fire.

Jesus promised His followers that they would never be alone (Matthew 28:20). No matter our circumstances, we can confidently echo the psalmist’s prayer: “Thou has holden me by my right hand” (Psalm 73:23).

But here’s a question: Do you face trials confidently, knowing that you’re not alone? —D. D.

B. The King’s Directive (vv. 26-27)

26. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth of the midst of the fire.

A furnace of this size would have likely had multiple openings. These may explain how *Nebuchadnezzar* could go *near* the *mouth* of the *furnace* and not be killed (compare Daniel 3:22, above).

Upon seeing the fourth figure, the king experienced a change of heart. His rage (see Daniel 3:13) diminished, and he addressed the men by their (Babylonian) names. Although they received these names from the king, their ultimate allegiances lay beyond Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, they were *servants* of God (compare 3:20). In this proclamation, Nebuchadnezzar admitted the folly of his previous statement regarding the power of God (see 3:15).

The title *most high* refers to the God of Israel (examples: Daniel 4:17, 32, 34; 5:18, 21; 7:25). Surrounding nations may have used the title to refer to the primary god of their pantheon of gods. However, the people of Israel applied the title to the one true God, knowing there was no other God. The same title refers to God's power (see Genesis 14:18-22; Psalm 83:18) and transcendence (see Acts 7:48). The title is also used when referring to God's work (example: Deuteronomy 32:8) or as a reference to the Son of God (see Mark 5:7; see also Luke 1:32).

Nebuchadnezzar's announcement of this title indicates some level of acknowledgment of the superiority of the God of Israel. However, the king had an imperfect understanding of the Lord's power. The king's admission that the Lord was "most high" still allowed him to accept other pagan gods (compare Daniel 2:47). It would take a humbling experience before Nebuchadnezzar gave praise and honor to the one true God of Israel (see Daniel 4).

What Do You Think?

If you could not verbally proclaim your faith, what evidence could others provide that you are a servant of the Most High God?

Digging Deeper

In what situations can your faithful actions speak louder than your words?

27. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

While the furnace had killed the king's strongest men, the three Jewish *men* showed no evidence of exposure to fire or smoke. The *princes, governors, captains, and counsellors* had bowed before the king's image (see Daniel 3:2-3). But they ended up seeing the limits of the king's power and the miraculous act of deliverance by the God of Israel.

C. The King's Worship (v. 28)

28. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

The stories of Daniel 1–6 reveal a pattern to the ways that Babylon's royalty regarded the work of God. First, Babylon's king experienced a miraculous work of the God of Israel (Daniel 2:45b; 4:28-34a; 5:1-6; 6:19-22). Second, the king acknowledged the work as coming from the God of Israel. Third, in most instances, the king proclaimed the supremacy of Israel's God (2:47; 4:34b-37; 6:25-27; contrast 5:26-31).

This verse reveals that the same pattern occurred in today's Scripture. Nebuchadnezzar saw God's miraculous work of deliverance (Daniel 3:24-27). As a result, the king proclaimed that God be *blessed*. The king *changed* his *word* and acknowledged that God's power to save was unparalleled (3:29, not in our printed text). However, the text does not indicate that the king believed *the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* to be one, true, only God. Total and complete worship by the king to the one true God would eventually come (see 4:34-37).

The king's confession of worship resulted from the character and faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They refused to bow before the king's image, even if their decision led to martyrdom, because of their commitment to the one true God. Their commitment to trust God was anchored in their rightly held belief in God's faithfulness (see Daniel 3:16-18). The Lord had promised to be with His people (example:

Leviticus 26:12-13), and that promise came to fruition for these three Jewish men. The promises made to the prophet Isaiah applied to the three men: “When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour” (Isaiah 43:2-3; compare Psalm 66:12).

What Do You Think?

What false gods does our society expect us to worship?

Digging Deeper

What are some specific ways you demonstrate that you will not worship these idols?

A Noticed Fearlessness

Marissa’s boss, Jack, called her into his office.

“You can close the door,” he said, waiting until it shut before adding, “Our biggest client needs a favor.”

He explained how their accounting firm needed to ignore a client’s unpleasant financial numbers so the firm could appease stockholders. If Marissa complied with the request, nothing would stand between her and a long-awaited promotion.

However, Jack had asked the wrong accountant. He should’ve known Marissa was a believer whose allegiance lay with Christ alone.

“Risking my promotion and receiving some cold shoulders will be hard,” Marissa told her Bible study group. She asked the group to pray that she would continue trusting God, even if she experienced harassment or pressure. Most of all, Marissa wanted her boss and coworkers to notice her commitment to behaving as the gospel requires. She prayed that they would see how she lived differently and ask her about the reason for her behavior.

After seeing God’s deliverance of the three Jewish men, Nebuchadnezzar noticed the commitment of the men and praised God in response. How do you need to live so that others see your behavior and look to God? —D. D.

Conclusion

A. Faith and Courage

Two options face believers when we experience the testing of our faith. One possibility is that we succumb to the testing and quite possibly commit apostasy. The other option is to maintain faithfulness to God, despite the testing. Even when faced with death, the men in today’s Scripture chose the latter option. They refused to bend their faith and go along with the king’s demands for worship. Their faith in God—rooted in His long history of faithfulness—provided the courage they needed to withstand the testing and resist committing evil.

Although we may never experience the same testing these men faced, all believers will likely experience some amount of testing of our faith. However, we can be encouraged. Our victory has already been established (see 1 John 5:4). Even though our enemy seeks to devour, we can stand firm in our faith. God is faithful to His people, even when they are tested. When we face these experiences, we can have trust and respond with faithfulness to Him (1 Corinthians 10:13).

What Do You Think?

How do you react to global reports of the persecution of Christians?

Digging Deeper

What does the faith of persecuted Christians inspire you to do?

B. Prayer

Most High God, You are the one true God. You are faithful to Your people, and You continue to show your faithfulness to us. Through Your Spirit, fortify our faith and trust so we can resist the temptation to worship other “gods”—large and small. Show us how we might support other believers in their trials of faith. Give us encouragement and strength no matter where You have called us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Because of God’s faithfulness, we can be faithful to Him.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask pairs of learners to brainstorm historical instances of dramatic changes in fortune. Encourage them to think of both positive and negative examples. Then have each pair focus on one example they came up with and go into as much detail as possible regarding how relationships, social standing, finances, faith, etc., were transformed as a result of the change. Bring the class together and ask for volunteers to share briefly their examples.

Tell learners, “Everyone has problems, but none of us has faced a trial like the one we’ll read about in today’s text. Let’s examine it to discover how faith in God made the difference for three men in this story.”

Into the Word

Remind class members of the background for today’s text by preparing a short lecture on Daniel 3:1-18. Consult the Lesson Context as desired for more information.

Alternative. Provide Bible concordances to look up any names or terms found in these verses with which learners are unfamiliar.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Keys to Context” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs or groups to complete as indicated. Have learners add concepts or notes to the exercise as you discuss the lesson.

Distribute a handout (you create) with each of the following statements. Ask students in pairs to decide whether each is true or false based on Daniel 3:19-28a. Beside each, they should write the verse reference to support their conclusion. (Note: Each of these statements is false.)

1. Nebuchadnezzar was forced by his advisors to throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace.

2. Nebuchadnezzar cooled the furnace down to prevent any fatalities.
3. One of Nebuchadnezzar’s advisors went into the furnace with the Jewish men to help them.
4. Nebuchadnezzar’s most mighty men had a hot tale to tell their families that night!
5. No one acknowledged that anything unusual happened in the furnace.
6. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace smelling smoky, with scorched clothes.
7. Nebuchadnezzar dismissed the whole affair as some sort of joke or magic trick.

After calling time, ensure that the groups found all these statements to be false.

Into Life

Brainstorm answers to this question with the class: “What trials do people face today?” Write as many suggestions as possible in one minute on the board. With the class, decide on three to five trials that are the hardest to bear. Have a second brainstorming session, this time talking about ways to be a faithful witness to God both as a person facing that trial and as a person giving support to the sufferer.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Advice for Those Facing Trials” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it in pairs before discussing conclusions with the whole group.

Following either activity, divide the class into pairs. Distribute note cards and pens to each person. Give learners one minute to write down a personal “fiery furnace” they are currently facing. Then, with the help of his or her partner, have each learner write down one or two ways to be a faithful witness to God while dealing with the difficulty. Encourage the partners to close class by praying for one another that each will be able to act faithfully in the middle of the fiery furnace.

Faith in Times of Trouble

Devotional Reading: Matthew 8:18-27

Background Scripture: Daniel 6:1-28

Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16, 19-23,
26-27

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

11 Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king

spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

23 Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

26 I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

27 He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

Key Text

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. —Daniel 6:22

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 3: The Righteous Live by Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Daniel's personal conviction of faith in God in the midst of injustice.
2. Compare and contrast Daniel's faith-expression with those of his three colleagues in last week's lesson.
3. Commit to bearing faithful witness to God in facing a personal "lions' den."

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Authentic Prayer
- B. Lesson Context

I. Violation and Consequence

(Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16)

- A. Daniel's Prayer (vv. 10-11)
Consistency
- B. Darius's Problem (v. 14)
- C. Den's Predators (v. 16)

II. Release and Vindication

(Daniel 6:19-23, 26-27)

- A. The Question (vv. 19-20)
Flooded with Faithfulness
- B. The Innocent (vv. 21-23)
- C. The Decree (vv. 26-27)

Conclusion

- A. Confession as Celebration
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Authentic Prayer

Would you feel comfortable "correcting" someone who was praying in a way that seemed wrong? My guess is that a majority of Christians would instantly respond *No! Prayer is personal between God and the person praying! Who am I to criticize or correct the prayer of another?* Alongside that reaction, however, we can place Scripture passages that *do* direct the form, content, and motives of our prayers. See, for example, Matthew 6:5-13; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14; and James 4:3.

Personal motives that stand behind prayer practices vary widely. Prayer has been used as a tool to gain political clout, as a public act of remembrance, or as a habitual nicety before meals. These kinds of prayers are often little more than exercises in ceremonial theism. Such "window dressing" prayer may achieve the desired earthly outcome, as it motivates people to act. The danger of such prayer is that it treats God as a kind of cosmic vending machine: insert the right words, get the right publicity, and receive the vended outcome. We know better in that regard, but do we *do* better?

A first step in doing better with regard to prayer is to remind ourselves that God is already aware of our needs (Matthew 6:32)—we can't tell Him something He doesn't already know. The foundational part of prayer, rather, is that it orients us to God's faithfulness and ability to provide and protect. In prayer, we address the God who loved us enough to give His Son for our sins. And He wants to hear from us!

B. Lesson Context

The context for this lesson is generally the same as for lesson 11. However, several years had passed between the events of Daniel 3 (see lesson 11) and today's Scripture. The most notable is that a new empire replaced the Babylonians: the Persians (2 Chronicles 36:15-20).

After a hand wrote a message of warning to Babylonian king Belshazzar, the king died (see Daniel 5:1-30). Scripture does not reveal exactly how he died, only that it occurred and that the

62-year-old “Darius the Median” (5:31), “son of Ahasuerus” (9:1), replaced him in power. Outside of Scripture, there is no mention of this particular “Darius,” and it was a common name; therefore identifying him is nearly impossible. He is likely not the same as the Persian king Darius I (also known as Darius the Great) (reigned 522–486 BC) mentioned in Ezra 4–6; Haggai 1–2; Zechariah 1, 7; and perhaps in Nehemiah 12:22. One proposal identifies our “Darius” as a regional governor of Babylon, installed under the oversight of Cyrus. Another proposal hypothesizes that “Darius” was another name for a Persian commander who led the Persian army into Babylon.

Today’s study has as its backdrop the appointment of 120 “princes” under the oversight of three “presidents” that included Daniel (see Daniel 6:1-2). Daniel’s reputation with previous kings influenced Darius. The king “preferred” Daniel over all the other princes and presidents and “sought to set [Daniel] over the whole realm” (6:3). However, the king’s high regard for Daniel led Daniel’s peers to scheme against him. Although they tried to find fault with Daniel, they could not find grounds to file charges against him (6:4-5). Instead, they developed a trap that Darius could not overturn.

Their plan encouraged Darius to establish a statute that whoever should pray to any deity or man, except the king, for 30 days would be thrown into the den of lions (see Daniel 6:7). Prayer *for* a monarch was standard in the ancient Near East. But prayer *to* a monarch was exceptional. Further, the officials maneuvered the king to issue the decree “according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not” (6:8). There would be little Darius could do to prevent the enforcement of the statute after it he “signed the writing and the decree” (6:9).

I. Violation and Consequence

(Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16)

A. Daniel’s Prayer (vv. 10-11)

10. Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his win-

dows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Daniel experienced a high level of privilege (and wealth) as an official of the king (Daniel 6:1-3). Houses in ancient Babylon would have had a flat rooftop that functioned as another room or patio. Frequently, these rooftop patios would have included walls and windows for privacy. However, for a man in Daniel’s position, his prayers could not have remained secret, even if he desired (compare Matthew 6:5-6).

The Law of Moses includes general commands regarding the people’s daily remembrance of God’s commands (example: Numbers 15:37-41). However, it did not command kneeling and praying *three times a day*.

At the dedication of Solomon’s temple, the Lord commanded the people to pray toward *Jerusalem* and the temple at various times of distress (see 1 Kings 8:35-38, 44-45, 48-49). Kneeling and bowing are mentioned together in Psalm 95:6 as parallel postures of worship.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can a consistent daily prayer time be beneficial to your relationship with God?

Digging Deeper

How can you guard against this practice becoming only a dry ritual?

Consistency

When I think of the word *consistency*, a deacon in a church where I ministered immediately comes to mind. Numerous crises had affected his life, including the death of his wife and his cancer diagnosis. Despite these tragedies, he kept a calm demeanor and a faithful presence in our congregation. His commitment to our community revealed his consistency in character and his consistency in his love for God and others.

That man was our church’s Daniel. How do you practice consistency in the ways that you follow God? You might never know whose faith you



Visual for Lesson 12. Ask learners to reflect on the king's question in verse 20 and whether they question God's ability to save in certain situations.

strengthen as they watch the character of your faith!
—J. M.

11. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

These men were those who had pushed Darius to pass the decree that only the king was to be worshipped (see Lesson Context). Daniel's open windows made catching him in the act quite simple (see Daniel 6:10, above). He was *praying and making supplication* as was his habit without regard for any danger it posed (compare 9:2-3).

B. Darius's Problem (v. 14)

14. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

The phrase *these words* refers to Daniel 6:12-13 (not in our printed text), in which the king's officials reminded Darius of his decree and then revealed Daniel's disobedience to it. After hearing this, Darius realized how his officials had manipulated him for their selfish gain. They had used deception and Darius's naivete to launch their plan. He had inadvertently been a pawn in their scheme against Daniel. Rather than direct his displeasure toward Daniel, the king was *displeased* with his own behavior. The king had failed to see

the underlying reason for the officials' request for the decree.

The king exerted himself in order to find grounds *to deliver* Daniel from the consequences of breaking the decree. "The law[s] of the Medes and Persians" are only mentioned in this narrative (Daniel 6:8, 15, not in our printed text) and in the book of Esther (Esther 1:19). The exact stipulations of these laws are unknown because there is no nonbiblical reference to them. Simply revoking the decree was out of the question (see Daniel 6:15; compare Esther 8:8). For the king to provide a way out for Daniel seemed impossible.

What Do You Think?

How does hoping for God's deliverance from harm differ from expecting a worldly authority to help?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance expecting God's deliverance with acknowledging that He might have other plans?

C. Den's Predators (v. 16)

16a. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions.

The officials had forced the king's response, and he could not revoke the decree that initiated this chain of events. If Darius had responded in any way other than to approve the punishment, he would have revealed a disrespect for his culture and law. So he *commanded* that the previously determined consequences were to be leveled against Daniel.

The Lion Hunt of Ashurbanipal, an excavated Assyrian relief from the seventh century BC, depicts the sport of hunting lions and its importance for the Assyrian royals. The *den* was a place to hold trapped *lions* for use in a royal lion hunt. Lions remained there until the appropriate time when they would be released into an arena for the king to "hunt" and kill.

16b. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

Darius likely practiced a form of polytheism—

the belief in many gods. As a result, if he believed in the same *God* that Daniel served, it was not a belief in God as the only true God. The text is unclear whether we should interpret the word as a form of skeptical sarcasm or a genuine prayer, though the latter is more likely.

Darius's response should prompt comparisons to Nebuchadnezzar's reaction when the three Jewish men refused to bow before the golden image (see Daniel 3, lesson 11). In that example, Nebuchadnezzar doubted that any god could rescue the three men (see 3:15). Only after seeing how God saved them did the king proclaim that "there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (3:29). Darius, however, believed that God could *deliver* Daniel, even without him having evidence.

What Do You Think?

How do you encourage others as they wait for God's deliverance?

Digging Deeper

What verses encourage you when you are waiting on the Lord?

II. Release and Vindication

(Daniel 6:19-23, 26-27)

A. The Question (vv. 19-20)

19. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

The king's rising *very early* the next *morning* reveals his urgency and distress regarding Daniel's fate. Darius's anxiety regarding what he had done to Daniel led to a restless night (see Daniel 6:18, not in our printed text). Additionally, *the den* had been sealed with the royal signet and the signets of the other officials (see 6:17). No one would dare break the seal and save Daniel. The only way for Daniel to have survived the night with the *lions* would have been if God had intervened.

20. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel; and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

A night without sleep or food would have escalated the king's anxiety regarding the life of one of his most trusted presidents. As Darius approached the sealed den, he called out *with a lamentable voice*, assuming the worst possible outcome.

The king's address to *Daniel* revealed his deepening understanding of the one true God. The pagan gods, idols, and images of Babylon (example: Daniel 3:1; 5:4) were lifeless (see Psalm 135:15-18). They were incapable of giving life to their worshippers. In contrast to these so-called gods, Darius recognized that the God of Daniel was *the living God* (also Daniel 6:26). Scripture uses this title regarding possible doubt (examples: Deuteronomy 5:26; 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; Isaiah 37:4; Matthew 16:16; John 5:26) or regarding God's provision (example: Psalm 84:2) and power (example: Jeremiah 10:10). The people of Israel survived because the living God was in their midst (see Joshua 3:9-10) and He made them His people (see Hosea 1:10). When the other nations trusted in their idols, the Israelites could trust the living God, the Lord who was their help and their protection (see Psalm 115:1-11).

Daniel's faithfulness to God was evident. The presidents and princes acknowledged that Daniel was free from fault and was entirely trustworthy (see Daniel 3:4). He behaved as a *servant* of the living God by showing honor and respect as a servant of the king.

Flooded with Faithfulness

My wife and I decided we would serve as foster parents. After completing the state's screening process, which included an inspection of our rental house, we were approved to foster. As we waited for the arrival of the children, a rainstorm flooded our house. Although we had no control over the flooding, we were evicted and told that we had caused the flooding.

Our dreams of being foster parents seemed dashed. However, after an extensive search, we found a new rental house. Much to our relief, it passed the state inspection. We were again approved to be foster parents! God's plan for our lives continued, despite us experiencing an apparent injustice.

Everything was outside Daniel’s control, but it wasn’t outside God’s control. The next time you experience injustice, will you respond so that people call you a “servant of the living God”?
—J. M.

B. The Innocent (vv. 21-23)

21. Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

The king’s advisors, direct reports, and even the queen wished for the king’s good health and long life (Daniel 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6). However, this is the first and only time in the book that an Israelite greeted the *king* in this manner. Even though Daniel’s situation came about because of the king’s lack of insight, *Daniel* still greeted him with respect and honor.

22. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Daniel first attributed his survival to the intervention of an *angel* from *God* (see also Daniel 3:28). Angels are heavenly beings who serve God and follow His commands (see Psalm 103:20). Their ministry includes serving God’s people (see Hebrews 1:13-14; example: Numbers 20:16), including protection (see Psalm 34:7; example: Acts 12:11). This angel miraculously *shut the lions’ mouths*, though precisely how is unknown (see also Hebrews 11:32-33).

Second, Daniel noted that he survived because he was innocent before God and the *king*. Innocence does not mean that Daniel lived perfectly. Later, he confessed before God the ways that he had been a part of the sin of his people (Daniel 9:1-19). Instead, Daniel could claim innocence in this matter because he had followed God and was faithful to God’s law.

23. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

The king’s distress changed to joy and gladness

upon seeing God’s deliverance at work (compare Isaiah 25:9). Daniel escaped his ordeal without being *hurt* or wounded (compare Daniel 3:27). Although God saved Daniel, Scripture is clear that faithfulness does not obligate God to save believers from death by martyrdom. For some believers, martyrdom is possible (see Luke 21:16; examples: Acts 7:54-60; Hebrews 11:35-38). Anyone who remains faithful to God in the midst of suffering has been promised eternal rewards (see Revelation 2:10). Public displays of faithfulness will have a transforming influence on the community. This transformation can occur individually, such as how Darius became exceedingly *glad* for Daniel. However, it can also occur for a whole kingdom, as the following verses indicate.

C. The Decree (vv. 26-27)

26a. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

After hearing from Daniel and observing how God had saved him from the lions, Darius proceeded with two actions. First, he commanded that the officials who had accused Daniel face the same punishment they had intended for him (see Daniel 6:24, not in our printed text). Second, Darius wrote *a decree* to “all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth” (6:25). Such wide-reaching language suggested the scope of *every dominion* of the *kingdom* (see also 3:4).

Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had decreed that no one speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:28-29). Darius’s decree went further—it legislated that all people *fear* the *God of Daniel*. Coming from the mouth of a pagan king, this kind of fear could include being afraid of the consequences of God’s righteousness (see Genesis 3:10; Isaiah 33:14; Luke 12:4-5; Hebrews 10:31). It could also refer to a respectful sense of worship to God (see Deuteronomy 6:2-3; 1 Samuel 12:24; Psalms 2:11; 147:11).

26b. For he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

The decree provided several reasons why the

king's subjects should fear Daniel's God. First, Daniel's God is *the living God*, and He alone can give life and sustenance to all who would receive it (see commentary on Daniel 6:20, above). Second, God's kingdom would never be destroyed and would never end (see Psalm 145:13). Earthly kingdoms, like the Babylonians, will end. However, God is the eternal king, and His kingdom will be eternal (see Exodus 15:18; Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 27; Luke 1:29-33; etc.).

What Do You Think?

How do you refute the idea that God is not active in His creation?

Digging Deeper

Do you have any habits that might suggest God is not active in creation? If so, what change will you make to acknowledge His continued work?

27. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

The decree also emphasized how God had done miraculous work for His people. God showed His power to His people by delivering and rescuing them (examples: Exodus 20:2; Psalm 34:4; Daniel 3:26-29; Jeremiah 15:11). When God rescued His people, He frequently did so through miraculous *signs and wonders* (see Exodus 14:13-30; Jeremiah 32:19-22). The way God *delivered Daniel* was no exception.

Conclusion

A. Confession as Celebration

Public confessions model something meaningful for today's Christians. It's easy to think of "confession" as an admission of sin, especially in a lurid, tell-all fashion. But that is not what the word means when describing the texts in Daniel. Here, the confession tells good news. The Lord chose to deliver Daniel, which resulted in the king's surprising new edict. Daniel's confessing what happened with the lions and the king's reaction reoriented both the characters in the

story and those reading about them to a larger truth. God's reign is both eternal and full of goodness. God's loyalty to His people reflects His divine character and the large-scale divine plan to redeem humanity. Daniel knew that, and eventually, so did Darius.

So do we. The church continues to confess its sins but also God's redemption. Our life of celebration begins where Darius ended his learning experience. By repeatedly confessing God's goodness, we bring those outside within hearing distance of the gospel itself. Daniel did so by his faithfulness in this story, and we do so too when we confess the gospel of our salvation.

What Do You Think?

What would you say is the greatest "wonder" God has worked in your life?

Digging Deeper

How will you confess this wonder in order to edify both believers and unbelievers?

B. Prayer

Living God, You care for Your people and have promised to be with us no matter what we face. Give us the courage to face adversity and maintain faithfulness to You. Help us behave with mercy to those who have sought to harm us. Show us how to follow You in a manner that brings other people closer to You. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our faithfulness to God has personal and public implications.

How to Say It

Ahasuerus	Uh-haz-you-ee-rus.
Ashurbanipal	As-shure-bah-nee-pahl.
Babylon	Bab-uh-lun.
Belshazzar	Bel-shazz-er.
Hosea	Ho-zay-uh.
Medes	Meeds.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud-nez-er.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Divide learners into groups of four. Challenge each group to compile a list of deep convictions that a person may have about a particular assigned issue. Depending on the temperament of your class, you might choose trivial categories (the best TV show of all time, the best place to vacation or what to do on vacation, etc.) or more serious topics (best strategies for managing money, importance of education, etc.). *Option.* Write several categories on the board and facilitate a whole-class brainstorming session to list convictions under each heading. Remind learners that they don't have to agree with the convictions.

After five minutes, ask each group to report on convictions they discussed as well as what factors play into those convictions (for instance, a TV show might be best because of the story line, strength of acting, number of seasons it was produced, etc.). Ask the whole class to brainstorm a list of factors that prompt people to abandon their convictions, either temporarily or permanently. Ask the class to agree on the top two or three factors.

Alternative. Distribute copies of “My Daily Habits” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have individuals complete it as indicated.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study by saying, “Today we'll look at a story about a faithful follower of God who would not renege on his convictions or his faithful habits, even though this refusal threatened his very life.”

Into the Word

Before class, prepare a summary of the sections of Daniel 6 not included in today's printed text. Be ready to answer these questions: 1—Where were the Jews living and why? 2—Who was the king? 3—What happened between last week's lesson (in Daniel 3) and today's lesson regarding government? *Option.* Assign this task to one or several

learners. Then present the whole story of Daniel in the lions' den by alternating between the volunteer summaries and reading aloud the printed text (Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16, 19-23, 26-27).

Alternative. Divide learners into groups of four to read Daniel 6 and to outline and summarize the chapter. After five minutes, compare the groups' answers.

Divide the class into small groups. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following questions for in-group discussion: 1—What is surprising about Daniel's reaction to the king's decree? 2—What other choices might Daniel have made? How could these other decisions have been justified? 3—How does Daniel's situation compare with that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? 4—How did the king feel about Daniel, and why? After several minutes, have groups present their findings. Then discuss what impact Daniel's faithfulness may have had on the other exiled Jews.

Into Life

Divide learners into pairs. Have them share with each other an obstacle, fear, or pressure that feels as strong as a lion. Invite them to share the following: 1—How is that “lion” threatening your faith today? 2—What encouragement do you receive from today's story to help you resist it?

After a few minutes of sharing time, call the pairs together. Invite volunteers to share about their “lions” and how Daniel's story helps them face the difficulties. *Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Daniel's Example and New Testament Teaching” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in groups to discuss.

Ask individuals to pray for the needs revealed in this discussion. Take time for a series of prayers, mentioning specific problems that learners are comfortable sharing. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the example of Daniel and the opportunity to stand up for God today.

Faith in God's Purpose

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 29:8-14
Background Scripture: Habakkuk 1:5-2:5

Habakkuk 2:1-5

1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.

2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

5 Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.



Key Text

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. —Habakkuk 2:3

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 3: The Righteous Live by Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe the dialogue between Habakkuk and God.
2. Contrast the first half of Habakkuk 2:4 with the second half of that verse in light of Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:37-38.
3. State a commitment of “yet I will rejoice in the Lord” in spite of some lingering and personal negative situations.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. “Can You Hear Me Now?”
- B. Lesson Context: The Man and His Times
- C. Lesson Context: The Book

I. One Conversation (Habakkuk 2:1-3)

- A. The Prophet Waits (v. 1)
- B. The Lord Responds (vv. 2-3)

Make It Plain

Breakup

II. Two People (Habakkuk 2:4-5)

- A. The Prideful, Part 1 (v. 4a)
- B. The Faithful (v. 4b)
- C. The Prideful, Part 2 (v. 5)

Conclusion

- A. Questioning God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. “Can You Hear Me Now?”

No one likes spotty cell phone service. When a phone call seems to drop out, you ask, “Can you hear me now?” hoping that the other party will respond. In the early 2000s, a wireless network provider used that question as the foundation for a series of ubiquitous television commercials. The advertisements were intended to conjure a sense of trust from the audience toward this particular wireless network provider. The commercial implied there was no need to ask *that* question with *this* wireless provider.

Faced with the unjust behavior of Judah’s enemies, the prophet Habakkuk questioned the Lord. Habakkuk wondered whether the Lord heard his questions or if the Lord had left the conversation altogether. The prophet asked his own version of the question, “Can you hear me now?” The Lord responded, but would His answer be the message Habakkuk wanted to hear?

B. Lesson Context: The Man and His Times

The book of Habakkuk gives us virtually no personal information regarding “Habakkuk the prophet” (Habakkuk 1:1). His name occurs only one other time after the first chapter (see 3:1). Even then, the text provides no further information about the man. Compared to other Old Testament prophets (examples: Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 1:1-3), we know nothing regarding the exact details of the life of Habakkuk.

However, some clues in the text of Habakkuk inform our educated guesses regarding the man and his times. Early in the book, the Lord promised to raise “the Chaldeans” (another name for the Babylonians) to punish the kingdom of Judah (Habakkuk 1:6). Using the then-future Babylonian exile of 586 BC as a historical marker, Habakkuk likely served sometime during the last decade of the seventh century BC; that would have been during the reign of evil King Jehoiakim (609–598 BC).

Following the split of Israel into two kingdoms in about 931 BC (1 Kings 11:43–12:24), things went pretty much downhill for both. The kingdoms of “Israel” (10 tribes to the north) and

“Judah” (2 tribes to the south) glared at each other for about 200 years until the Assyrians conquered and exiled the northern tribes in 722 BC (2 Kings 17). The southern kingdom of Judah narrowly escaped the same fate (18:13–19:36), even though they were also guilty of the same behavior that led to the destruction of their northern kin (17:18-20).

About a century later, the Babylonian Empire became the regional superpower after defeating the Assyrians and Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (Jeremiah 46:2). King Josiah of Judah unwisely interfered, contributing to the Babylonian victory; Josiah’s action also cost him his life (2 Chronicles 35:20-27). Just as Habakkuk 1:6 promised, Babylonian forces invaded Judah and overthrew its king (see 36:5-8).

For a few years, Judah’s kings served as vassals to the Babylonians. However, this arrangement didn’t last. During the final year of the reign of King Zedekiah (586 BC), Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians after about a decade of conflict (see 2 Kings 25).

There was a series of deportations from Judah by the Babylonians—one each in 605, 594, and 586 BC. Habakkuk likely served prior to the first of those, given the future tense of Habakkuk 1:6. This places Habakkuk as a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. Both prophets received a warning that the people of Jerusalem would face dire consequences because of sinful behavior.

C. Lesson Context: The Book

An outline of the book of Habakkuk reveals a conversation between the prophet and the Lord. Two sections of the book consist of the prophet’s questions to the Lord (Habakkuk 1:2-4; 1:12–2:1). Following each round of inquiry, the Lord responded (1:5-11; 2:2-20). In Habakkuk’s first section of questioning, he expressed discontent that the Lord had seemingly not heard the prophet’s call for correction of sin. In his complaint, the prophet’s conclusion for this uncorrected state of affairs was that “the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth” (1:4). The Lord answered that He was going to use the Babylonians to punish Judah and Jerusalem (1:5-11).

This response left Habakkuk even more con-



Visual for Lesson 13. *Point to this visual as you ask how learners can watch for God's message and ensure that it is sent out into the world.*

fused. In his lengthy rejoinder, the prophet asked why the Lord would use a less-righteous nation to punish a more-righteous nation (Habakkuk 1:12–2:1). Today’s text picks up at the very end of Habakkuk’s second complaint.

I. One Conversation

(Habakkuk 2:1-3)

A. The Prophet Waits (v. 1)

1. I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

This verse completes Habakkuk’s second section of questioning that began at Habakkuk 1:12 (see Lesson Context). In the verse before us, the prophet shifts from questioning the Lord to waiting for the Lord’s response. When people call out to the Lord, the timing of His response is always perfect, but it is not always as fast as we desire. Habakkuk himself has been impatient in this regard (Habakkuk 1:2).

Habakkuk had no idea how long it would take—if ever—for the Lord to answer his second question. But he wasn’t willing merely to toss his prayer to Heaven and then go about his daily tasks. Instead, we see a determination to stay focused as he waited for a response. In this determined concentration, the prophet envisioned himself as a lookout who would *stand upon his watch*

as he performed the duty of a person responsible for sounding an early warning of something that was approaching.

In describing the task of a lookout, the phrases *I will stand upon my watch* and *set me upon the tower* are similar to Isaiah 21:8: “I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights.” In Habakkuk’s day, lookouts were stationed at vantage points such as high towers. From such vantage points, lookouts were in a position to see things that others could not yet see. Thus, they warned of approaching enemies (example: 2 Kings 9:17-20) or visitors (example: 2 Samuel 18:24-28).

The Old Testament prophets were spiritual lookouts for the people they served. The prophets were to proclaim the arrival of the Lord’s reign (example: Isaiah 52:8-10) and warn the people of the consequences of their disobedience (example: Ezekiel 3:16-17). In most cases, the people failed to heed the warning of these prophetic watchmen (example: Jeremiah 6:17). But if their failure to heed was due to the prophet’s failure to warn, then the prophet would be accountable (Ezekiel 3:20).

The distressed prophet was obviously concerned for the welfare of his people. However, he also acknowledged that he might be rebuked (as the word *reproved* is translated in Proverbs 27:5) by the Lord.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can a believer “stand watch” to receive God’s word?

Digging Deeper

How do the directives of Colossians 3:15-17 inform your answer in this regard?

B. The Lord Responds (vv. 2-3)

2. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

As Habakkuk anticipated, *the Lord answered* the prophet’s complaints. The content and form of this *vision* the prophet experienced are uncertain.

When prophets wrote messages from the Lord, they frequently did so on rolls (scrolls) of papyrus

(see Isaiah 8:1; Jeremiah 36:2-4, 28). However, the *tables* commanded of Habakkuk were likely made of stone, similar to the “tables of stone” on which the law was divinely etched and given to Moses (Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16; Deuteronomy 4:13). The content of this vision, etched plain and legible in stone, was, therefore, an almost-permanent medium for the message. Ancient scrolls were fragile and could be burned (Jeremiah 36:22-23); the same cannot be said of stone.

The Lord sometimes commanded that His prophets write down His message as a witness for the people (examples: Exodus 34:27; Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 36:2-3). At other times, however, the Lord sealed His message until its fulfillment (examples: Daniel 8:26; 12:4). Because the Lord did not seal this particular message, the people of Judah would have immediate knowledge of its content and implications.

In ancient times, a messenger might *run* to proclaim the content of vital, time-sensitive messages (Joshua 7:22). Without modern-day wireless communication, running messengers were the quickest way to convey information over distance. The speed with which the message needed to travel highlighted its importance.

What Do You Think?

How could the practice of writing in a journal provide insights into the ways that God has answered your prayers?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to begin this practice?

Make It Plain

I had just begun serving as a preacher when a more experienced preacher approached me with counsel: strong sermons are short, simple, and straightforward. A preacher should be able to communicate the sermon’s main point in one clear, concise sentence.

This advice also applies to other communicators, not just preachers. Consider Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, given from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. One line can summa-

size the 17-minute address: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” This one line reflects the speech’s clarity of vision.

The Lord had an urgent message to give Habakkuk and the people of Judah. The urgency of that message required that it be clear and easily communicated. Even today, the Lord’s message to us is urgent and sharp (see Hebrews 4:12). What steps are you taking so that you might communicate that message? —J. M.

3. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Habakkuk had waited for the Lord (Habakkuk 1:2; 2:1), and now part of the waiting concluded as the prophet received the Lord’s response. But there was more waiting to come for Habakkuk to see the fulfillment of *the vision at an appointed time*. God’s promises would eventually be fulfilled, but not on a timetable that Habakkuk desired.

We frequently become impatient when we have to wait. Rather than wait for God to act, we may take steps to expedite God’s promises (examples: Genesis 16:1-4; see also Psalm 106:13). Rather than see God as longsuffering (see Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:8-9), we interpret God’s silence as His refusal to act or hear (compare Lamentations 3:8, 44). Habakkuk needed to trust that the Lord would respond to wickedness in the Lord’s own time and manner (see Nahum 1:3).

What Do You Think?

How can you practice patience regarding the Lord’s answers to your prayers?

Digging Deeper

How might the Holy Spirit use other people in your life to help you develop patience?

Breakup

To an Alaskan, the word *breakup* implies the unofficial start to summer. Breakup is the day when the river ice breaks up and begins moving down-

stream to the sea. After breakup day, the river opens for various summer activities, but not before multiple celebrations commemorate the day.

After the celebrations, rural Alaskans begin to wait for the day when the river will again freeze over. For these Alaskans, a frozen river provides improved access to remote villages. Late-summer weather in Alaska can be unpredictable, and the specific date of the river freeze can span weeks. A waiting season precedes that day, just like the weeks before breakup day.

Waiting can seem at best like a waste of time. But the breakup day will be when it will be. There are times when we must wait for the river ice to melt and times when we must wait for the Lord.

While we’re at it, let’s look at things the other way around: How often has God had to wait for you to produce the kingdom fruit expected of you? —J. M.

II. Two People

(Habakkuk 2:4-5)

A. The Prideful, Part 1 (v. 4a)

4a. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.

The Lord’s message distinguishes two types of people. The first type is the person whose *soul* is *lifted up* with self-assured pride and arrogance. Such a perspective was indicative of Judah’s enemies during this time. The military strength of the Babylonians was undeniable, leading them to count their power as a god (Habakkuk 1:11). Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar saw the expanse of the kingdom as the result of his power (see Daniel 4:28-30). Even as the Lord raised the Babylonians to conquer Judah, He acknowledged their pride (see Habakkuk 1:7). Similarly, when the unnamed king of Assyria looked out over his conquest, he proclaimed the strength of his hand (see Isaiah 10:12-13).

Even the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were guilty of arrogance (see Jeremiah 13:9; Hosea 5:4-5; 7:10; Amos 6:8). This behavior was part of the reason that enemies conquered them. The Lord detests those whose thoughts and behavior are grounded in pride (Proverbs 16:5). Such people

will inevitably face dramatic consequences (see Leviticus 26:19; Luke 18:14).

B. The Faithful (v. 4b)

4b. But the just shall live by his faith.

This half-verse offers an immediate contrast between two types of people. One type—the prideful—has just been discussed. The second type—the *just*—lives with an entirely different outlook, an outlook of *faith*. Their lives are grounded in righteousness. Such a person follows God’s standards regarding their relationships with God and others. This person lives with integrity and without blame for wrongdoing (see Proverbs 20:7).

Psalms 15, attributed to King David, depicts the mindset and behavior of a righteous person. This type of person speaks well of others (Psalm 15:2-3), keeps a trustworthy word (15:4), and treats others fairly (15:5). God expresses great pleasure when His people live justly and righteously (see Hebrews 11:7). This is because His nature is righteousness (Ezra 9:15; Psalm 116:5), and His rule over creation is one of justice (see Hebrews 1:8).

The Hebrew word translated *faith* is also translated as “truth” in Jeremiah 5:1, 3; 7:28; 9:3. To be a person of faith goes hand in hand with being a person of truth. Unfaithful people depart from the truth (2 Timothy 2:17-18; 3:8-9). In the book of Habakkuk, God calls His people to have faith in the truth of His plans, even when those plans seemed unbelievable (Habakkuk 1:5). Although the Babylonians would prosper for a time by placing faith in themselves, the people of Judah were to depend on the Lord. The apostle Paul connected the concepts of truth and faithfulness in applying them to his ministry as an apostle (1 Timothy 2:7; Titus 1:1). We must proclaim truth and live with faithfulness as we follow God and trust Him.

How to Say It

Assyria	Uh-sear-ee-uh.
Assyrians	Uh-sear-e-unz.
Carchemish	Kar-key-mish.
Ecclesiastes	Ik-leez-ee-as-teez.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.
Habakkuk	Huh-back-kuk.

Elsewhere, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4b in explaining the nature of the gospel with regard to righteousness, which is a characteristic of God that is to be ours as well (Romans 1:16-17). In a preliminary sense, to be righteous is to do what is right in God’s eyes. But having a right standing with God can’t be based on mere good behavior because, as Paul later noted, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (3:10, drawing on Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; and Ecclesiastes 7:20). Instead, a right standing before God is imputed on the basis of faith (Romans 3:21-26). This basis is reaffirmed in Galatians 3:11-14, where Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4b again.

In a section of Hebrews that teaches the importance of the perseverance of faith, the author also quotes from a portion of Habakkuk 2:3: “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith” (Hebrews 10:37-38a). We live by faith because we can trust that God will also be faithful to His promises.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you live by faith in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How does the Hall of Faith passage in Hebrews 11:1–12:3 inform your answer in this regard?

C. The Proudful, Part 2 (v. 5)

5a. Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied.

In a continuation of Habakkuk 2:4a, above, the Lord’s message returns to the behavior of the *proud* person. Becoming drunk, perhaps on *wine*, might follow a successful military campaign (example: 1 Samuel 30:16). Babylon’s military successes were intoxicating, leading the nation to desire more through military conquest. Babylon was incapable of staying at rest in her homelands (compare and contrast the behavior of the “Babylon” depicted in Revelation 14:8; 17:3-6; 18:3).

The Hebrew word translated *hell* is a vague

word that occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament. In contexts involving *death*, it is translated as “hell” about half the time and “grave” about half the time. As such, it may not refer to hell as the New Testament uses that word in Matthew 5:22, 29-30; James 3:6; and elsewhere. The word in the original language has a similar spelling to the Hebrew word for *ask*. This association brings to mind a place that is always asking for more but is never satisfied. Similarly, the desires of the proud and arrogant never cease; they never say, “Now I have enough” (compare Proverbs 30:15-16; Ecclesiastes 5:10; Luke 12:15-21).

The Bible addresses the danger of pride and arrogance more than 200 times. By proportion, the greatest concentrations of these are found in the texts of Psalms and Proverbs. Arrogant, prideful people always incur God’s disfavor (examples: Psalms 18:27; 31:23; Proverbs 15:25; 16:5).

5b. But gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.

One way that the proud expand their power is through military conquest. As a planter gathers fruit at harvest, prideful rulers gather *all nations* under their authority and conquest (compare Habakkuk 1:15-17). During these campaigns, enemies took captives into exile and slavery (see 2 Kings 15:29; 17:6; Jeremiah 50:33).

However, such prideful behavior will not go unpunished. God will reverse selfish ambition. In response to the arrogant and destructive behavior of Judah’s enemies, the Lord predicts punishment in terms of five sets of “woe” (Habakkuk 2:6-19, not in today’s text). Although Judah was to suffer for its arrogant disobedience, its prideful and arrogant enemies would also experience a downfall equally devastating, if not more so (see Jeremiah 51:6-8).

Conclusion

A. Questioning God

Is it OK to question God’s (apparent) actions or inactions? The dependable answer is, “It depends.” We see God tolerating, even welcoming, questions in numerous places (examples: Judges 20:18; James 1:5; 4:2). One thing God does not tolerate, however, are inquiries that question His justice (see

Job 40:8; Ezekiel 18:25-29; Jeremiah 2:29). The prophet Habakkuk came close to doing that. Consider the following thumbnail sketch of the book:

Question 1: Why do you, O God, tolerate the sins of Your people?

Response 1: Don’t worry about it—I’m sending the Babylonians to punish them.

Question 2: How is it fair to use the less-righteous to punish the more-righteous?

Response 2: Don’t worry about it—the Babylonians will get theirs too.

God’s ending of the discussion: Be quiet!

When our suffering does not seem “fair,” there are a lot of questions we might naturally ask. God was under no obligation to answer Habakkuk’s questions, and He is not obligated to answer ours. Habakkuk needed faith to trust the Lord’s plans, regardless of whether or not those plans made human sense.

God reminded Habakkuk that a life of faithfulness was most important. And the faith we are talking about isn’t “blind faith”—a faith where one merely believes. Instead, the faith we are talking about is a faith based on evidence. God has a long track record of faithfulness to His promises. Upon that track record is where our faith is based. Such faith trusts God’s control in all circumstances. As a result, we can be secure in Him, regardless of whether or not we understand His plans.

What Do You Think?

What do you find most challenging about today’s lesson?

Digging Deeper

What change in thought, word, or behavior will you make based on that challenge?

B. Prayer

God, as we face life’s hardships and want to question You, help us have the confidence of faith. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The righteous will live by faith.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Begin today's session by writing *WAIT* vertically down the center of the board. Ask the class to create an acrostic based on the word to express commonly held feelings about waiting.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—Why is waiting difficult? 2—When was a time that you were unhappy because you had to wait? 3—When was a time when waiting resulted in something good?

Say, "Today, we will consider what Scripture says about waiting on the Lord. Let's learn how the book of Habakkuk can inform our waiting in faith and trusting in God's timing."

Into the Word

Before class, choose a volunteer to give a brief presentation on the historical background of the book of Habakkuk. The volunteer can use other commentaries and the Lesson Context in preparation. Before the presentation, write the following questions on the board: 1—When did Habakkuk live? 2—Who was the audience of his prophetic ministry? 3—What was happening in their lives? Allow five minutes at the start of class for the presentation and an additional five minutes for a whole-class discussion of the above questions.

Divide the class into three groups: **Habakkuk Group**, **Old Testament Group**, and **New Testament Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the assignments below and allow 10 minutes for groups to answer the questions.

Habakkuk Group: Read Habakkuk 1:2–2:5. 1—What was Habakkuk's first complaint? 2—How did God respond? 3—What was Habakkuk's second complaint? 4—How did God respond?

Old Testament Group: Read Habakkuk 2:1–5. 1—Compare and contrast this Scripture with Psalms 27; 37. 2—Compare and contrast this Scripture with Lamentations 3. 3—Compare and contrast this Scripture with Isaiah 40:27–31;

64:4–7. 4—What messages are common to all these Scriptures?

New Testament Group: Read Habakkuk 2:1–5. 1—Compare and contrast this Scripture with Romans 1:14–20. 2—Compare and contrast this Scripture with Galatians 3:1–14. 3—Compare and contrast this Scripture with Hebrews 10:19–39. 4—What messages are common to all these Scriptures?

After 10 minutes of in-group discussion, reconvene the class and ask a volunteer from each group to discuss their group's findings.

Into Life

Write these phrases on your board:

Wait on the Lord.

The righteous will live by faith.

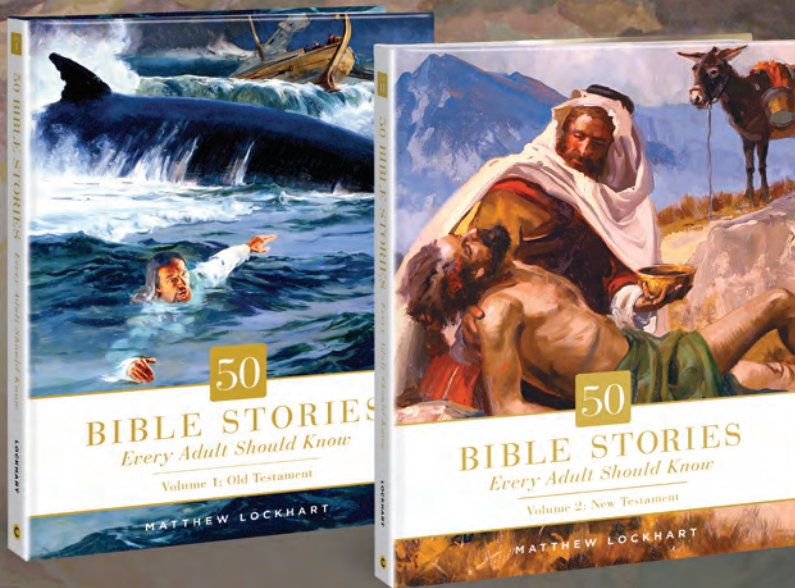
Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—Why do we need faith when we're waiting on God? 2—Is waiting on God easier or more difficult than the situations we discussed during Into the Lesson? 3—What does it mean that the righteous will live by faith?

Divide learners into pairs and ask each person to share with their partner about a current situation where they feel they are waiting on God. Then have each person brainstorm how they can continue to practice commitment and faithfulness to the Lord in light of this negative situation.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Praying, but Still Suffering" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Write *FAITH* vertically down the middle of the board. Challenge pairs to create a new acrostic that expresses the truths discussed in today's lesson.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Personal Prayer from One Who Waits" exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less. Give them one minute to jot down thoughts under each of the two headings.



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