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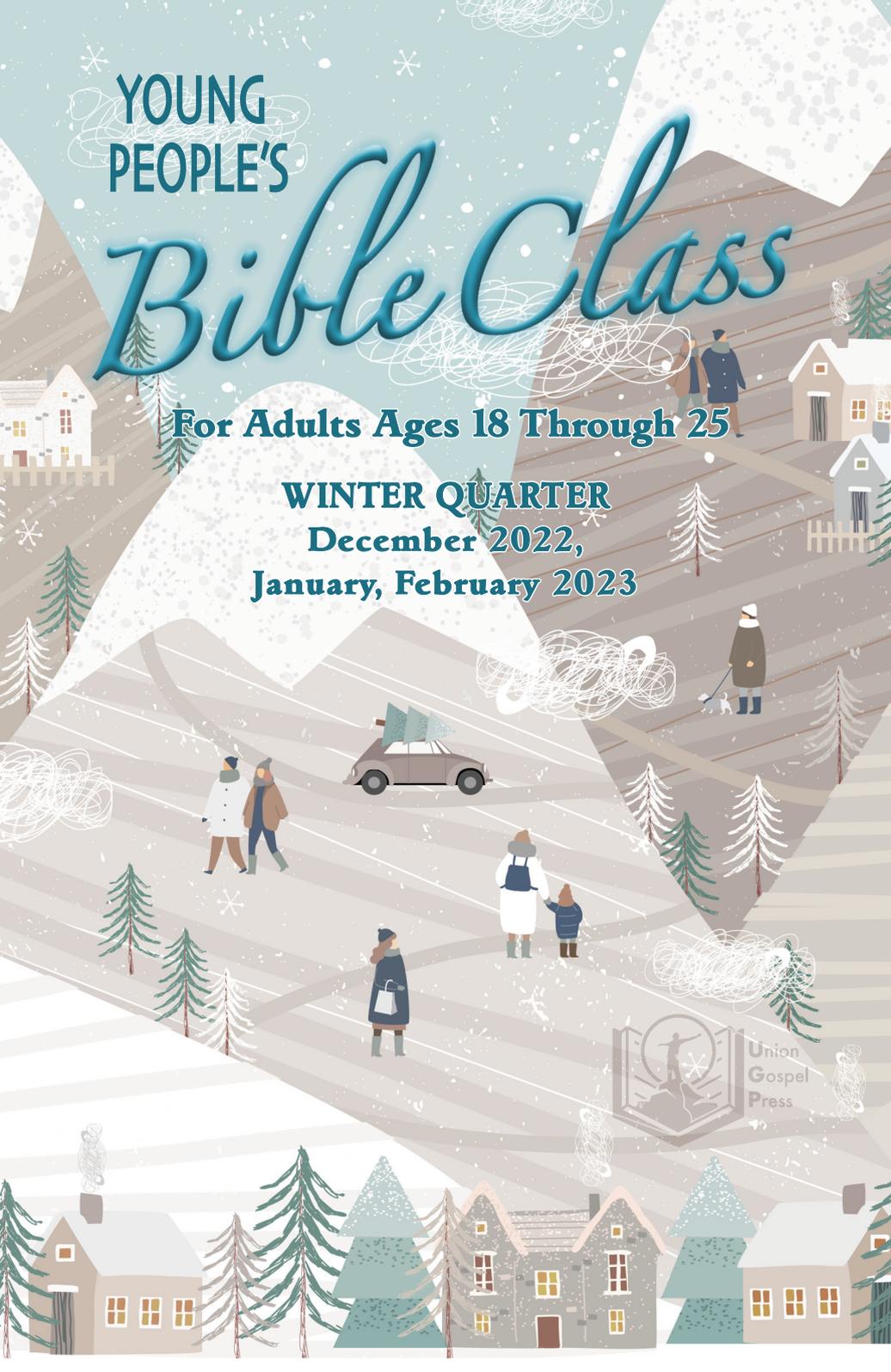
Bible Class

For Adults Ages 18 Through 25

WINTER QUARTER
December 2022,
January, February 2023



Union
Gospel
Press



Young People's Bible Class

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THE QUARTER AHEAD

Everybody likes a blessing. And almost as good as getting a blessing is a whole quarter studying God's blessings! That statement is not meant facetiously; to learn about God's manifold blessings that He has lavished on us in Christ is a blessing itself. Great encouragement can come from looking into what He has done for us, is doing for us, and has planned for us in our eternal future with Him.

Our first unit looks at the blessings of a Saviour from the perspective of those who were still anticipating His coming. Some, such as Zacharias in lesson 1 and Mary in lesson 3, were close in time; others, such as David in lesson 2, were a long way out. But the promise was equally valid for all of them. Lesson 4, of course, looks at the blessing's fulfillment in Christ's birth in Bethlehem.

We start the new year in the second unit, with a look at the blessings in the gospel. Even as Christians, we need to regularly keep preaching the gospel to ourselves, reminding ourselves of the great blessings that have been brought to us in the good news of Christ.

The first, and perhaps primary, blessing of the gospel is reconciliation with God. As we see in lesson 5, we were once enemies of God, separated from Him in our sin. But in Christ, God reconciled us to Himself and brought us near, making us new in Him. In being reconciled to God, we also received the blessings of forgiveness and new life in Christ (lesson 6). The Apostle John wrote his first epistle to give us full

assurance of that great blessing.

Lesson 7 delves into the unique blessing of Christ's continuing intercession on our behalf. He began that intercession while He lived on earth (cf. John 17), and He continues that ministry faithfully and perfectly in heaven. Lesson 8 wraps up the unit with an examination of the liberty we have in Christ. We are no longer in bondage to the law.

The third unit moves to a consideration of the surpassing blessing we have in the grace of Christ. Lesson 9 explores the blessing of belonging in Christ, that is, of being part of one spiritual body in which we are all members with various gifts to use for building up the whole. All of us are important and vital to the growth and ministry of the church. In lesson 10 we receive very practical counsel on how to deal with the trials of life. We learn how God's blessings come to us even in the midst of difficulties we might rather just avoid.

Lesson 11 takes this idea a bit further in assuring us of the great blessing of God's comfort in trials and suffering. One of those blessings is the ability to pass on that comfort to others. The blessing of godliness is probably not something we have given much thought to, but lesson 12 shows us how important it is to our walk with Christ. Finally, lesson 13 reminds us of the blessing of spiritual fruit. When we see the fruit of the Spirit being produced in our lives, it brings blessing to us and to all those around us.

—Kenneth Sponsler.

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The Blessing of Being a Blessing

KENNETH SPONSLER

When we think of God's blessings, we naturally tend to think first in terms of the blessings we receive—all the ways in which He blesses us. And it is not wrong to remember these ways or even to desire His blessings, for He loves to bless His children and shower us with good things (cf. Matt. 7:7-11). But He does not intend for us to hoard all His blessings for ourselves. Among the greatest blessings we can receive from Him is the blessing of passing on His blessings to others.

The blessing of being a blessing to others is central to the heart of God throughout the Scriptures. When the Lord first called Abraham to follow Him, He not only promised to bless him but also declared, "And thou shalt be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2). He expanded on this thought with the words "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (vs. 3).

Israel was reminded on numerous occasions that God's blessings were not for them alone but would be shared with all the world through them. When their long-awaited Messiah came, God would give Him "for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6).

From the beginning, Israel was told to share their blessings with any and all strangers (foreigners) among them: "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger; for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). "The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself" (Lev. 19:34; cf. vs. 10). God wanted His people to extend His blessings to all who came among them.

The New Testament reminds us of



a foundational principle laid down by Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). We often think of this in terms of giving money, but it rightly extends to sharing all blessings that we have been given, both material and spiritual. Paul was indeed referring to material support when he quoted Jesus here, but he never drew limits around a giving attitude. In the rest of the space we have here, we will be considering the ways God wants us to be a blessing to others.

Undoubtedly, the most important way we can be a blessing to outsiders is by giving them the gospel of Christ. He is God's greatest blessing to us, and if we withhold that blessing from those around us, any other blessing we might give will not meet their greatest and direst need.

That is not to say we should neglect lesser blessings. When we give our unsaved friends, neighbors, and ac-

acquaintances the blessings of our time, assistance, or even just a listening ear, that can open the door to their hearts to a consideration of spiritual matters and the claims of the gospel. The greatest blessing is often built on the foundation of smaller blessings laid down faithfully and diligently over an extended time. If your friends are not open to listening to biblical truth now, don't give up on them!

There are even more ways we can be a blessing to fellow believers, and our quarter's lessons are valuable in bringing some of these ways to our attention. Let us look in particular at three of them.

The passage for lesson 9, I Corinthians 12:24-31, touches on the blessing of belonging in Christ, specifically in His body, the church. We see a discourse on the various spiritual gifts within the body, all of which are vital to its functioning. Each member of the body is given a gift, and that gift is not for his or her own benefit but for the good of the whole body. In Christ's church, we are each to be a blessing to all the others in how we use and pursue our gifts.

Lesson 11 (II Corinthians 1:3-11) shows us another way we can be a blessing to others, no matter what our particular gifts may be. That way involves providing comfort, or encouragement, to others. We are told that God's comfort is abundantly given to us when we face trials or suffering, and one of the purposes of receiving that comfort is to pass it on to others: "that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (vs. 4).

A believer who has gone through the sorrow of losing a loved one and found God's comfort through the loss is much better able to comfort someone else going through the same experience than one who has not yet been touched by that kind of grief. A parent

whose child has fallen into sin knows what another parent in a similar situation is going through and can offer genuine comfort and encouragement.

The Apostle Paul endured much affliction during his ministry—so much that at one point he felt under "the sentence of death" (vs. 9)—but he knew that one of its major purposes was for the benefit of others: "It is for your consolation and salvation" (vs. 6). If we can grasp that even our trials and hardships can become a blessing to others, we will grow immeasurably in our faith to the glory of God.

The final lesson of the quarter (Gal. 5:18—6:10) focuses on the blessing of spiritual fruit. Although it is encouraging to us to see the fruit of the Spirit developing in our lives, the character qualities listed in 5:22-23 are by definition more to the benefit of others than ourselves. That can be readily seen with such fruit as "love," "longsuffering," "gentleness," "goodness," "faith," "meekness," and "temperance." We might think "joy" and "peace" are more for us to enjoy. We do enjoy them, but in the context of the passage, it would seem the emphasis is at least as much on the joy and peace we bring to others through the Spirit's work.

The passage continues in the same vein, exhorting us to bear one another's burdens (6:2)—another way of bringing blessings to each other—and culminating in the call, "Let us not be weary in well doing: . . . let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (vss. 9-10).

Running through all these lessons is the truth that we cannot be a blessing to others apart from the blessings we receive from God. We do not bless others in order to receive blessings from Him, but the fact remains that we are blessed immeasurably by Him in Christ. Let us not neglect to share these blessings!

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

LUKE 1:8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's

womb.

16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

NOTES

The Promise of Messiah's Forerunner

Lesson Text: Luke 1:8-20

Related Scriptures: Genesis 18:9-15; 25:20-28;
Malachi 4:1-6; Matthew 11:9-15

TIME: 7 or 6 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth" (Luke 1:13-14).

Lesson Exposition

FAITHFULNESS AT THE TEMPLE— Luke 1:8-10

A priest in his course of duty (Luke 1:8). We all have roles in life—duties to others and assignments from God. Zacharias had a sacred trust he occasionally was called on to fill. As a priest, he was one of twenty thousand or more called by lots from time to time to serve in the temple. His role might have been a small one, but his service had been added to that of others in such a way that millions could come to the temple through the year to pray, worship, sense the presence of God, and be blessed by God's goodness.

A priest's assignment (Luke 1:9).

The lot that fell to Zacharias on this day was perhaps the most holy assignment for an ordinary priest. He was selected to enter the holy place of the temple, where the altar of incense was located. This small altar was placed right by the veil into the innermost room of the temple, the Holy of Holies.

Zacharias's job was to bring coals from the outside altar to the inside altar. As Zacharias brought in the hot coals

from the altar of burnt offering, placed them on the small golden altar in front of the veil, and poured incense powder on them, smoke rose up in the holy place and filled it with a beautiful fragrance.

A faithful crowd (Luke 1:10). The other priests on duty gathered daily for worship in the temple courts. Levites and others joined them. According to one ancient source, ordinary Israelites also formed themselves into divisions and some people from various tribes came on prescribed weeks to be among those praying in the temple courts. Some devout Jews came every day (such as Anna and Simeon in Luke 2). While some of Israel's leaders were corrupt, there were plenty of believers gathered for a ceremony on Zacharias's day of service.

ASTONISHING APPEARANCE AT THE TEMPLE—Luke 1:11-12

A sudden appearance (Luke 1:11). As Zacharias ministered in the holy place, an angelic messenger appeared. Perhaps he came from the presence of God through the incense cloud and out from the Holy of Holies.