

INTERMEDIATE

Bible Teacher



March, April, May 2013

SPRING QUARTER



COVER:

Ebenezer Baptist Church
728 Effingham Street
Portsmouth, Virginia 23704

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY:

Deacon Frank James Jr.

Ebenezer Baptist Church was organized in 1865 by seven former slaves. The structure was built in April 1871.

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WRITER'S FORECAST

Christians understand that this earthly life is not all that there is. But this life is important! In the series of Bible studies you are about to begin, you and your students will look "Beyond the Present Time" and apply what you learn to life here and now.

Lesson 1 presents an awesome vision God gave to the Prophet Daniel. It should comfort and encourage us to know that a Day of Judgment is coming and that God is the Supreme Judge.

In lesson 2 we will learn about prayer from Daniel's example. When he prayed, he relied on his knowledge of the character and will of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Lesson 3 will consider another of Daniel's mysterious visions. He foresaw the suffering of God's people under the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes and under the antichrist, whose career is still future.

In lesson 4 we will study Jesus' last supper with His apostles before He went to the cross. On that occasion He taught by word and example that serving others is an honored privilege in His kingdom.

Lesson 5 looks at the experience of two disciples whose hope was restored when the risen Jesus visited them. He affirmed to them the Old Testament Scriptures as God's true witness to Himself.

In lesson 6 we will consider Jesus' first appearance to His gathered apostles after He rose from the dead. We also will study His Great Commission

and His ascension to His Father in heaven.

Proclaiming the gospel to the world was the daunting assignment Jesus gave His followers. Lesson 7 will take us to the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, where the Holy Spirit empowered them for the task.

Lesson 8 teaches us to look beyond death and to comfort one another as we watch and hope for Jesus' return. All who have died in Christ will rise again to live for eternity with Him.

Teachers of false doctrine sometimes trouble and confuse God's people. In lesson 9 we will be instructed to stand firm in the truth, trusting God to strengthen and establish us in His ways.

Lesson 10 reminds us that our faith is forward-looking. We rejoice in our salvation as we anticipate the reward reserved for us in heaven even as we endure many hardships on earth.

Lesson 11 considers the abundance of provision God has made for us to live the godly life. As we diligently seek to develop the Christian virtues, we gain assurance that our salvation is genuine.

Lesson 12 will teach us to live in light of Jesus' suffering and the promise of His return. That means living a sober, prayerful life in the service of our fellow saints, in accordance with the gifts God has given us.

God's perspective on time and eternity is different from ours. In lesson 13 we will be reminded to patiently and diligently live the godly life as we look beyond Judgment Day to God's new heaven and earth.

PLEASE NOTE: The Incorporated Trustees of the Gospel Worker Society, Union Gospel Press Division, most earnestly endeavors to proclaim fundamentally sound doctrine. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and yieldness to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

We Need One Another

The Bible describes several occasions when Jesus summoned people to follow Him. Each time He was speaking to individuals. But the journey He called them to would not be traveled with Jesus alone. Life with Christ is designed to be lived in fellowship with other believers.

It is true that the gospel of Jesus Christ calls its hearers to *personal* faith and obedience. It is just as true that we cannot properly live the Christian life as isolated individuals. When Jesus calls us, He calls us into the life of a body. Our fellowship is not only with Jesus but also “one with another” (1 John 1:7).

Often the world around us does not encourage us to think in terms of community and fellowship. In the American tradition, for example, the emphasis is on individual effort and success. People are encouraged to strive and achieve on their own. The popular culture glorifies the rugged individualist. The efforts and triumphs of the lone hero are praised and rewarded.

Furthermore, our modern, mobile society tends to weaken our sense of belonging. Sociologists have observed that Americans are becoming less connected than ever. The bonds that united communities, churches, and even families are no longer cherished and honored as they were in earlier generations.

Meanwhile, technology continues to transform the ways we live and interact. The social media Web sites enable us to have an unlimited number of Internet “friends”—without having personal contact or true friendship with any of them. These innovations affect the world of young people most of all. Now more than ever, the generation gap is a technology gap!



These trends tend to erode the vital, active fellowship that should thrive among Christ’s followers. As a teacher of intermediates, you are a significant adult in the lives of adolescents at a crucially important age. As you guide them in Christian discipleship, are you helping them learn to live in fellowship with the people of God?

Your students are learning to think critically and independently. They are developing values and seeking to make decisions on their own. Although you may encounter negativism and rebellion in your students, remember that the influence of parents and teachers remains vitally important during these formative years.

What should a teacher of intermediates do? Start by fortifying your own understanding of what God has said about Christian community. Use a concordance to look up all the New Testament references that include the phrase “one another” (there are forty-three) or “one to another” (there are

twenty). Most of them give us instruction for living in dynamic fellowship with other Christians.

You will find that the supreme principle that governs Christian community is the law of love. Jesus instructed His disciples, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

That is a tall order, but the Bible teaches us to take Jesus’ sacrifice as our model: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

Do you find that such self-sacrificing love is not in you? The only way to have this love for your brothers and sisters in the Lord is for God to give it to you: “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5).

Amazingly, we stand in a line of love that is eternal. Before creation existed, there was love among the Persons of the Godhead. Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven, “Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. . . . And I have declared unto them thy name, . . . that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:24, 26).

Living in Christ’s love means both giving and receiving. It means submitting, serving, admonishing, exhorting, forgiving, restoring, forbearing, comforting, humbling ourselves, confessing our faults, praying for others, building them up, and showing hospitality.

You must decide that you will not go it alone in your task as a teacher. Enlist a partner who will support your labors with faithful, fervent prayer. Our efforts as teachers will produce the results we seek only as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and in the hearts of our students.

Try to connect with a few of your fellow teachers for mutual encourage-

ment. Maybe you could meet occasionally for coffee and informal conversation. Attend the next teachers’ meeting or training seminar. Even if you do not expect to gain from it, your presence and input may provide just the uplift another teacher needs.

If you have many years of experience in the classroom, make yourself available to a younger teacher who would benefit from your wisdom and insight. Or maybe you are that younger teacher who would benefit from having a seasoned mentor. Do not hesitate to take the initiative.

Next, look for ways to inject into your weekly lessons the importance of being connected in Christian fellowship. You want your students to develop the disciplines of the spiritual life and to live righteously amid a defiling culture. Emphasize that these essentials of the Christian life are best developed with the support and accountability of fellow believers.

Make sure your students understand that they have much to give to the family of God—not just in the distant future but now. Encourage them when they participate in volunteer service to the church and its members. Let them know that when they are present and involved in the life of the congregation, they provide great encouragement to the older people.

Finally, aim to make your class a place where hospitality and kindness prevail. Many teens and preteens endure harsh conditions at home, cruelty from their peers, and dangers in the street. By your example, seek to make your class a friendly, welcoming shelter for the lonely and needy ones among your students.

In this quarter’s lessons we look forward to wonderful things that will happen when Jesus comes. In the meantime, the company of our fellow believers is where He calls us to worship and pray and work and wait.

Scripture Lesson Text

DAN. 7:9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

11 I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld *even* till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.

12 As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

A Glorious Reign Ahead

Lesson: Daniel 7:9-14

Read: Daniel 7:1-28

TIME: probably 553 B.C.

PLACE: Babylon

GOLDEN TEXT—“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

Lesson and Its Truth

In all times and places, people yearn for a world where everything is just and good. All around us we see violence, injustice, and suffering; we long to see these wrongs made right.

That day is coming! Since ancient times, God’s people have confidently looked forward to the reign of the Prince of Peace. Let us find comfort and hope in the promises of God as we wait and pray for the glorious reign of King Jesus.

A JUDGE TO BE FEARED—

Dan. 7:9-10

It was “the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon” (Dan. 7:1). Daniel, an Israelite man from the tribe of Judah, had served the kings of Babylon since his youth. Now he was an older man of perhaps seventy years.

There were times in Bible history when God used dreams and visions to reveal His word and will to His people. The Holy Spirit gave the dreams and visions, and He also gave the ability to interpret them.

Daniel knew that his ability to interpret dreams came from God, and he gave God thanks: “I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might” (Dan. 2:23).

While dreams occur during sleep, vi-

sions engage the senses while awake. In this lesson we are studying Daniel’s firsthand account of both a dream and visions that he experienced.

Our study begins at a point where Daniel’s dream was already under way. He had seen four great beasts arise from the sea. These represented four great kingdoms that would, each in its own turn, flourish for a time. (It seems certain that these beasts represented the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.)

In his dream, Daniel continued watching until “the thrones were cast down” (Dan. 7:9). Some older Bible commentaries interpret this as meaning the thrones were overturned or discarded, symbolizing the end of the kingdoms they represented. More likely, “cast down” means that the thrones were set in place. The prophet saw a judgment hall being arranged for a formal session of the court. This interpretation is consistent with the next thing Daniel saw: the Supreme Judge, the Ancient of Days, was seated.

“Ancient of Days” is one of many titles for God found in the Bible, and it occurs only in this chapter (Dan. 7:9, 13, 22). Like God’s other titles, it ex-

presses a basic truth of His character—namely, His eternal existence. He is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2).

This sets God apart from all created things. The Bible opens with the statement “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Natural curiosity asks, “What was before the beginning?” The answer is “There was God.”

The white robe of the Judge is symbolic of the purity and holiness of God. His white hair suggests maturity and wisdom. His appearance compels all to honor and revere Him.

The Judge whom Daniel saw can make no compromise with evil. He is the one to whom Habakkuk prayed, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab. 1:13). Throughout Scripture, white symbolizes sinless purity, as in God’s gracious offer of forgiveness: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18).

The image of the Ancient of Days was filled with fire. He sat on a throne of flame with flaming wheels and a fiery stream flowing from it.

It is fitting that the Judge’s throne was a throne of fire. Fire punishes and purifies. It follows from God’s holiness that He must ultimately destroy all that is contrary to His character. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). Therefore, we worship and serve Him “with reverence and godly fear” (vs. 28).

The fiery stream flowing from the throne reminds us of another vision in which a stream poured from the throne of God. The Apostle John saw “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

The God who is a consuming fire, taking vengeance on all who hate Him, is also the Water of Life. He graciously gives new life to all who come to Him. The Bible concludes with this invitation: “Let him that is athirst come. And

whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

In his vision the prophet saw a multitude of servants attending the Ancient of Days. God is attended by an army of angels too numerous to count, and one of their ministries is to serve His children on earth. They are “all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb. 1:14). The fact that God commands vast armies of angels is indicated in His title “Lord of Hosts,” a frequent Old Testament name for God.

“The books were opened” (Dan. 7:10). The Judge would render justice based on perfect knowledge; nothing would be hidden from Him. When a guilty man stands accused in a court of law, he hopes that the evidence against him is weak and incomplete.

That will never happen when our all-knowing God is the Judge.

The things Daniel saw assure us that Judgment Day eventually will come and that God Himself will be the Supreme Judge. We can be comforted and encouraged, knowing that there ultimately will be justice. We can be sure “the Judge of all the earth [will] do right” (Gen. 18:25).

To all who seek to please God, who are distressed like righteous Lot (II Pet. 2:7) by the wicked conduct of those around them, this picture is extremely satisfying and consoling.

DEATH TO THE BEAST— Dan. 7:11-12

Special attention is given to the doom of the fourth beast in Daniel’s vision, for this is the dominant kingdom that will be overthrown when Jesus comes. This represents the final destruction of wicked human government. (We understand this beast to represent a revived Roman Empire; evidently, it will be the cultural descendant of that great empire and will occupy the same territory.)

Even in the presence of the Judge of

all the earth, with His books opened, the horn of the fourth beast continued to speak boastfully (Dan. 7:11; cf. vs. 8). The kingdoms of this world flourish for a time, and they may continue to defy God even after their doom is sure. But their day will end. “The beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame” (vs. 11).

Daniel’s vision also saw the fate of the three earlier kingdoms. Their dominion was taken away, “yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time” (Dan. 7:12). Each of these great empires lost its dominance as a world power, but its culture and influence continued long thereafter.

It is easy to become discouraged when we see that earthly governments are corrupt and unjust. It is comforting to know that Almighty God is the sovereign Ruler of the earth. Remember that “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1).

Rest in the knowledge that God’s ways are perfect. Any earthly kingdom can continue only as long as He allows. “The most high God [rules] in the kingdom of men, and . . . he appointeth over it whomsoever he will” (Dan. 5:21). “He changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (2:21).

DOMINION TO THE SON OF MAN— Dan. 7:13-14

Daniel’s vision did not end with the defeat of evil human government. The final event he saw was the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom of righteousness and peace. This is a major Bible doctrine that should give us great comfort and hope.

The “one like the Son of man” (Dan. 7:13) whom Daniel saw was Jesus the Messiah. At His trial before Israel’s highest court, Jesus explicitly applied these words to Himself: “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on

the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). The high priest understood what Jesus was saying and in outrage “rent his clothes” (vs. 65). Indeed, Jesus’ words would have been blasphemous if they had not been true.

We observe several things about this new kingdom. First of all, its origin will be divine. In contrast to all the preceding kingdoms, which gained their dominion by ruthless conquest, the Messiah will receive His “dominion, and glory” (Dan. 7:14) by God’s decree.

Second, we see that this kingdom will truly be universal. There will be no limit to its domain and authority. People from every nation, culture, and language will serve the new King.

Finally, this new kingdom will have no end. The great empires of Daniel’s vision would come to an end, as all earthly kingdoms do; but Messiah’s kingdom will not. “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away” (Dan. 7:14).

This echoes the promise God made to King David centuries earlier: “Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever” (II Sam. 7:16). Jesus will continue the dynasty of His ancestor David forever.

SIDELIGHTS

Son of man. This term occurs 108 times in the Old Testament. It is the title by which God addressed the Prophet Ezekiel; this accounts for 93 instances. The Angel Gabriel, speaking for God, also addressed Daniel as “son of man” (Dan. 8:17).

In most other instances, “son of man” is used in poetic language and corresponds to the word “man” in the parallel clause that precedes it. One example is Psalm 8:4: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” In

other words, it is essentially a synonym for “man.”

It is also the title Jesus used to speak of Himself; there are eighty-four instances in the four Gospels. “The title ‘Son of Man’ would suggest that He was one through whom God would reveal His truth, as He had done through Ezekiel and Daniel (cf. Dan. 8:17)” (MacRae, *The Prophecies of Daniel*, Christian Life Publishers).

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Encourage your students with the knowledge that God is the supreme Ruler and Judge of the earth.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Cut out some newspaper headlines about strife, corruption, and tyranny within earthly governments. Attach them to a poster board.

Your students are growing in their awareness of social issues, and they may be thinking about how conditions in the world affect their lives. Prepare to show them that God promises His children a future in which the highest ideals will be realized.

Presenting the Lesson

Use the poster you have prepared to show how imperfect human governments are in this sinful world.

Allow the students to share what they have learned in school about the great empires of ancient times. Show that the Prophet Daniel foresaw the course of history centuries into the future and delivered God’s promise of a righteous kingdom to come.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Let Daniel’s vision shape your awareness of God. He is the awesome and all-powerful Sovereign of the universe. Therefore we “fear God, and keep his commandments” (Eccles. 12:13).

Do not become discouraged when wrong prevails. Rather, take comfort and hope from the promises of God. The Judge of all the earth will come, avenge all wrongs, and establish His kingdom of righteousness and peace.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. **A JUDGE TO BE FEARED**—Dan. 7:9-10
- II. **DEATH TO THE BEAST**—Dan. 7:11-12
- III. **DOMINION TO THE SON OF MAN**—Dan. 7:13-14

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Who is the Ancient of Days? What does that title suggest about Him?
2. Who are the “thousand thousands” (Dan. 7:10) who served the Ancient of Days? What does the book of Hebrews say about the ministry of angels (1:14)?
3. How does knowing that God rules and overrules in the affairs of this world affect you?
4. Who is the Son of Man who was presented to the Ancient of Days?
5. What features of the future kingdom are described in Daniel 7:14?

Scripture Lesson Text

DAN. 9:4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

7 O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Ju'dah, and to the inhabitants of Je-ru'sa-lem, and unto all Is'ra-el, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

8 O Lord, to us *belongeth* confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

9 To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

10 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

11 Yea, all Is'ra-el have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that *is* written in the law of Mo'ses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

12 And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Je-ru'sa-lem.

13 As *it is* written in the law of Mo'ses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

14 Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

Daniel's Prayer of Confession

Lesson: Daniel 9:4-14

Read: Daniel 9:3-19

TIME: 539 B.C.

PLACE: Babylon

GOLDEN TEXT—"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him" (Daniel 9:9).

Lesson and Its Truth

Do you remember why Daniel was sentenced to death in the den of lions? It was because of his faithfulness in his habit of prayer. Even when King Darius issued a decree prohibiting all prayers (except prayers made to the king), Daniel continued in his habit of praying three times a day.

Daniel was well studied in Scripture and devoted to prayer. In both of these disciplines, he has left us an excellent example to follow.

THE GOD TO WHOM WE MUST ANSWER—Dan. 9:4

Daniel was an older man of perhaps eighty years when the Medo-Persian Empire took control of Babylon in 539 B.C. (Dan. 5:31). As one of the king's prime officials, he was a busy man with many responsibilities. Yet he still found time to be attentive to the Scriptures and faithful in his habit of prayer.

"I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession" (Dan. 9:4), Daniel testified. This prayer was made with single-minded effort: "I set my face unto the Lord God" (vs. 3). To set one's face is to show strong intent and resolve.

The prophet accompanied his prayer with fasting. There are many occasions

in the Bible when God's servants fasted as a spiritual discipline. Often fasting is part of a season of fervent prayer (cf. Matt. 17:21; Acts 13:3). Daniel also sat in sackcloth and ashes, a sign of deep mourning and brokenness.

Obviously, Daniel was a man who knew the Bible. His prayer was guided by the Scriptures, and his hope was based on God's promises.

Daniel had studied the word God had given to the Prophet Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2); on that basis, he knew that the exile of his people from their homeland would soon end. Understanding that God works through the prayers of His people, he poured out his heart in prayer.

Daniel was confident that God would keep His promise and end His people's disgrace. But he knew there was something more important than returning to the homeland and rebuilding Jerusalem. The hearts of the people, individually and as a nation, needed to be renewed.

It is fitting and important to begin prayer with adoration of God. He is glorified when we adore Him, and we are transformed in our minds and hearts by considering His greatness and goodness.

Daniel's prayer began with adora-

tion. He prayed to “the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him” (Dan. 9:4). In these few words, he acknowledged the awesomeness, faithfulness, and mercy of God.

God deals with mankind in terms of covenants: He binds Himself with solemn vows to act in certain ways. He makes His will known to us in His commandments. His covenants and commandments are made known to us in the Bible.

Many of God’s blessings are conditional; that is, we receive them only if we obey Him. Daniel’s prayer reflects this understanding; he spoke of the blessings that are promised “to them that love him, and . . . keep his commandments” (Dan. 9:4).

There is always a connection between loving God and obeying Him. Jesus said, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:21).

THE SINS WE MUST CONFESS— Dan. 9:5-6

Repetition makes for emphasis in the language of the Old Testament, and Daniel made confession for his people with a variety of terms. They had “sinned, . . . committed iniquity, . . . done wickedly, . . . and . . . rebelled” (Dan. 9:5). The prophet comprehended the depth of his people’s failure, and his words show it.

Their offenses were not due to ignorance. God had revealed His “precepts and . . . judgments” (Dan. 9:5). Israel, like no other nation, was blessed with knowledge of God’s laws. God had delivered His law to Moses at Mount Sinai. Generation after generation, He had sent His prophets to call the people to righteous living.

The Apostle Paul acknowledged the gifts God had entrusted to the people of Israel (Rom. 9:4-5). In our relationships with our Jewish friends and neighbors, let us always express our gratitude and reverence for the bless-

ings God has bestowed on mankind through His chosen people.

God’s mercy and long-suffering were evident in the calls to repentance He delivered through His faithful messengers. “Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets” (Dan. 9:6), Daniel prayed. The people of Israel had a long history of persecuting God’s prophets.

If we are truly sorry for our sins, we will make a generous and unconditional confession as Daniel did—with no hedging and no excuses.

GOD’S GOODNESS, OUR SHAME— Dan. 9:7-9

It is fitting that Daniel inserted a statement of God’s righteousness in the midst of his confession of sin. “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee” (Dan. 9:7), he prayed. We begin to comprehend our sinfulness only when we contemplate the righteous character of God.

“Guilt” is the actual condition of being inwardly blameworthy; “shame” is the inward distress and outward disgrace that results from guilt. “Confusion of faces” (Dan. 9:7) is a literal translation of an expression that means “shame.” Shame compels us to hide our faces, while we show our faces without discomfort when we are free of shame.

Daniel made confession on behalf of all the people of Israel in all the places to which they had been scattered; not all of the exiles were in Babylon. He recognized that the hand of God had driven them to those places.

In confessing his people’s sins, Daniel made special mention of “kings, . . . princes, and . . . fathers” (Dan. 9:8; cf. vs. 6). Those to whom God has given authority have a special duty to maintain faithfulness. They ought to provide a righteous example and leadership.

Now that the nation was living under the curse they had brought on themselves, their only hope was in God, to whom “belong mercies and forgivenesses” (Dan. 9:9).

NO ONE CAN PLEAD IGNORANCE—Dan. 9:10-13a

Again Daniel confessed his people's sin and acknowledged that God had spoken through "his servants the prophets" (Dan. 9:10). His confession was made more emphatic by its repetition.

Here again we see that Daniel knew the Scriptures and that he prayed according to that knowledge. He confessed his people's sins and then acknowledged, "Therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses" (Dan. 9:11).

When God gave His law to Moses, He promised that blessings and well-being would follow faithful obedience. Likewise, curses and troubles would result from persistent disobedience: "Ye shall be plucked from off the land. . . . the Lord shall scatter thee among all people" (Deut. 28:63-64).

God's judgment on Jerusalem was without precedent "under the whole heaven" (Dan. 9:12). It was unique because God was making an example of His chosen nation. In the eyes of the surrounding nations, the disgrace of Israel was well-known; they had "become a reproach" (vs. 16).

"He hath confirmed his words, . . . by bringing upon us a great evil," Daniel confessed. "As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us" (Dan. 9:12-13). God will confirm His words in what He brings to pass; we can be sure He will do as He has said.

GOD'S JUSTICE DEMONSTRATED—Dan. 9:13b-14

God's chastening ought to lead to repentance, but Daniel had not seen that happen among his people. The penitent prayers, the turning from sin, and the embracing of God's truth were

lacking. True repentance would include all of these.

Speaking of his people's defeat and disgrace, Daniel said, "Therefore hath the Lord . . . brought it upon us" (Dan. 9:14). Even the wicked empire that oppressed them was under God's command. His justice was demonstrated before the watching nations. Therefore Daniel could say, "The Lord our God is righteous in all his works."

SIDELIGHTS

The great and dreadful God. The words "dreadful" and "terrible" can be used to describe things that are offensive or obnoxious. When the Bible speaks of God in these terms, of course, it does not mean that. It is saying that He and His works are splendid and awe-inspiring.

Our understanding of God is incomplete if we do not consider how awesome are His Person and works. God revealed Himself to Moses as "Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible" (Deut. 10:17). The Psalms teach us to praise the amazing works of God: "Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men" (Ps. 66:5).

Mercies and forgivenesses. Some people wrongly perceive that the Old Testament gives a message of judgment and vengeance, while the New Testament is full of mercy and forgiveness. Actually, the Old Testament abounds with declarations and examples of God's mercy.

When we plead for God's mercy, we make our appeal to Him on the basis of who He has declared Himself to be. We see this in the prayers of King David: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Ps. 51:1). "For thou, Lord, art good,

and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (86:5).

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Focus on Daniel’s example as a man of the Scriptures and prayer. Emphasize that it is by God’s mercy, not our self-improvement, that we may be reconciled to God.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Plan to present, simply and clearly, the basic gospel of salvation. Daniel’s emphatic statements of God’s righteousness provide a good starting point. His humble confession of sin contains hope; with God we find mercy and forgiveness (Dan. 9:9).

Presenting the Lesson

Ask your students whether they have been taught to pray according to the acronym ACTS: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Help them define each of these terms. Ask which of these components we tend to neglect.

Draw a vertical line dividing your chalkboard in half. Ask the students to scan the lesson text for things Daniel said about God (list these on the left) and things he confessed about his people (list these on the right). If your class is large, consider dividing into committees for this task.

Emphasize that God has spoken and made His will known. Show that our situation is much like that of His ancient people; we have a debt of sin we cannot overcome, and God reaches out in mercy to reconcile us to Himself.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Take a lesson from Daniel’s example. Living in an alien culture, often amid conflict and hostility, he took time to know the Scriptures and to pray faithfully. Let these spiritual disciplines sustain you in challenging times.

Like Daniel, make your prayers on the basis of what God has made known in the Bible. Approach God with reverence and fear; He is awesome in His power and holiness. Confess your sins in light of His perfect righteousness—with no excuses—remembering that He is merciful and forgiving.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. THE GOD TO WHOM WE MUST ANSWER—Dan. 9:4**
- II. THE SINS WE MUST CONFESS—Dan. 9:5-6**
- III. GOD’S GOODNESS, OUR SHAME—Dan. 9:7-9**
- IV. NO ONE CAN PLEAD IGNORANCE—Dan. 9:10-13a**
- V. GOD’S JUSTICE DEMONSTRATED—Dan. 9:13b-14**

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How did Daniel know that the Exile was coming to an end (Dan. 9:2)?
2. What actions demonstrated that Daniel’s prayer was serious and heartfelt (vs. 3)?
3. What is meant by “confusion of face” (vs. 8)?

Scripture Lesson Text

DAN. 8:19 And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end *shall be*.

20 The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Me'di-a and Per'sia.

21 And the rough goat *is* the king of Gre'cia: and the great horn that *is* between his eyes *is* the first king.

22 Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

23 And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce

countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

24 And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.

25 And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify *himself* in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

26 And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told *is* true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it *shall be* for many days.

Daniel's Vision Explained

Lesson: Daniel 8:19-26

Read: Daniel 8:1-27

TIME: about 551 B.C.

PLACE: Babylon

GOLDEN TEXT—"The vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days" (Daniel 8:26).

Lesson and Its Truth

The Prophet Daniel recorded several mysterious visions God gave him. We are studying a vision in which he foresaw events in the Near East nearly four centuries into the future.

The vision is so accurate in its detail that skeptics insist it must have been written after the events occurred. For the believing mind, however, the divine origin of the Scriptures is confirmed. Only God, who is sovereign over world events, could foretell history so precisely.

AN INTERPRETER SENT—Dan. 8:19

After seeing a terrifying and perplexing vision, Daniel was met by the Angel Gabriel, whom God had sent to interpret the vision.

"I will make thee know" (Dan. 8:19), Gabriel assured Daniel. God desires that we have knowledge and understanding of His mind and ways. When He created man "in his own image" (Gen. 1:27), He made a creature with an amazing capacity to learn and understand. God reveals and makes plain to man His mind and will.

Gabriel's message was about "what shall be" (Dan. 8:19). There was no doubt or uncertainty; these things

most surely would happen. God can bring to pass the words He has given through His prophets because He is sovereign over world events. What He has said He is able to fulfill.

All that the Creator has created He also preserves and governs. A traditional spiritual expresses this profound truth in simple terms: "He's got the whole world in His hands."

The message Gabriel delivered was about "the last end of the indignation" (Dan. 8:19). In his vision Daniel had foreseen a time of terrible hardship for God's chosen nation, Israel. But they could take comfort in knowing that God's wrath would have a "last end." It would continue only until "the time appointed."

God's wrath is seen here in light of His justice and mercy. The suffering Israel would endure for her sins would be only for a season.

If God sends difficulty and affliction into our lives, we can be sure these are carefully measured; they will endure only as long as necessary to accomplish His purposes. "In wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2), the Prophet Habakkuk prayed. We can be sure that God will.

HISTORY FORETOLD—

Dan. 8:20-22

The interpretation of Daniel's vision was simple. The ram with two horns represented "the kings of Media and Persia" (Dan. 8:20), and the second horn to emerge became the greater of the two (vs. 3). This was fulfilled when the Persian and Median kingdoms became one empire, with Persia being the dominant power.

In his vision Daniel had seen the ram pushing powerfully to the west, south, and north (Dan. 8:4). No other beast was able to withstand it or be rescued from its control. True to the vision, the Medo-Persian Empire grew dramatically. Under the leadership of Cyrus the Great, its expansion seemed irresistible. No kingdom was able to stop its advance.

In his vision, Daniel had seen a male goat coming from the west, advancing "on the face of the whole earth" (Dan. 8:5) so fast that its feet did not touch the ground. Gabriel explained that this "rough goat" represented the "king of Grecia" (vs. 21).

The single horn between the goat's eyes was the empire's greatest king, Alexander the Great. He expanded his territory at lightning speed. His conquest of the Medo-Persian Empire, in about 331 B.C., was foreseen when the goat in Daniel's vision easily overwhelmed and trampled the two-horned ram (Dan. 8:6-7).

Alexander died as a young man at the height of his power, and his great empire was divided into four smaller kingdoms. This was foreseen in the fate of the goat in Daniel's vision: "When he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven" (Dan. 8:8). Gabriel explained, "Four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power" (vs. 22); none of them would have the might of Alexander's united kingdom.

Of those four kingdoms, two would be important in the history of Israel during the next two centuries. The kingdom of the Ptolemies included Egypt and Libya, and the kingdom of the Seleucids included Syria and lands to the east.

THE WICKED KING'S CAREER—

Dan. 8:23-25

Next the Angel Gabriel explained the "little horn" that arose from one of the goat's four horns and "waxed exceeding great" (Dan. 8:9). This was fulfilled when Antiochus IV rose to power over the Seleucid (Syrian) kingdom in 175 B.C. He ruled until his death in 163 B.C. Scholars regard him as a prototype or forerunner of the "man of sin" (II Thess. 2:3), or antichrist, who will torment God's people in a future time of tribulation (see lesson 9).

He would be "a king of fierce countenance" (Dan. 8:23). This could be understood literally to mean that his appearance was formidable and frightening; it may also describe his ruthless character. "Understanding dark sentences" probably refers to his habit of dealing deceitfully and treacherously.

Antiochus took the surname *Epiphanes* (manifestation of the gods), but he was mockingly called *Epimanes* (the madman). He is regarded as one of the most cruel tyrants of all time.

In fulfillment of Daniel's vision, Antiochus sought to expand his power and territory. He seized control of Egypt (to the south) and invaded Persia (to the east). He also invaded "the pleasant land" (Dan. 8:9). This is a reference to the territory of Israel. God had granted this land to Abraham and his descendants forever (Gen. 13:14-18). God's covenant, the people, and the land were inseparably bound together.

Antiochus would expand his power and territory, "but not by his own power" (Dan. 8:24). Instead of overwhelming force or smart strategy, he would use deceit and treachery. He would destroy "the holy people"; that is, his cru-

elty would be most severe toward the devout within Israel.

Antiochus sought to unify his kingdom with uniform culture, laws, and religion. Therefore he forbade the practice of the religion of the Jews. He profaned their holiest site, the temple at Jerusalem, and dedicated it to Zeus, principal god of the Greeks. Devout Jews who defied his orders were slaughtered cruelly.

Faithful Jews, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, raised a strong resistance against the tyranny of Antiochus, and eventually they were victorious. The Jewish festival of Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem following this victory in 164 B.C.

Gabriel told Daniel that the king would even stand against the “Prince of princes” (Dan. 8:25). In his pride and arrogance, he was actually defying God. But he would be “broken without hand”; that is, no human action would cause his death. God caused him to die of a sudden illness following a military defeat.

On a campaign in Persia, Antiochus suddenly became ill after he tried and failed to plunder the city of Elymais. The book of I Maccabees, a historical chronicle of the Jews, records that he came to regret his plundering the temple at Jerusalem and his cruelty to the people of Israel. Some accounts say that he tried to bargain with the God of Israel to have his life spared.

During their terrible suffering under Antiochus Epiphanes, God’s people would be able to look back on Daniel’s prophecies that had already been fulfilled. They would draw comfort from the assurance that God would bring an end to their distress and remove the cruel tyrant.

The fulfillment of God’s revelation regarding Antiochus confirms this truth: “[God] ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves” (Ps. 66:7).

THE TIME IS FAR-OFF—Dan. 8:26

“Shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days” (Dan. 8:26), Gabriel instructed Daniel. For the time being, the prophet was not to publish the vision and its interpretation. In His wisdom, God directed Daniel to keep this revelation hidden for a time.

Not many years later, “the kings of Media and Persia” (Dan. 8:20) did accomplish the conquest Daniel had foreseen. This fulfilled the vision of the two-horned ram that overcame everything in its path (vs. 4). When the Israelites saw this part of the vision fulfilled, it confirmed to them that the rest of the vision must be true.

God gave Daniel revelation that would give His people comfort and hope centuries later, when they would suffer under the tyranny of Antiochus. We can be sure that God anticipates our future needs and that He has a plan to provide for them.

This vision was a great burden for Daniel to keep to himself. When we receive news that is painful and perplexing, it is hard to bear it alone. We naturally seek the comfort and counsel of others. Imagine the heaviness Daniel endured as he contemplated, all alone, distressing knowledge about his people’s future. He wrote, “I . . . fainted, and was sick certain days” (Dan. 8:27).

SIDELIGHTS

The rough goat is the king of Grecia. This statement foresees the amazing conquests of Alexander the Great.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus of the first century A.D., Alexander learned of Daniel’s prophecy when he conquered the Israelite homeland more than two centuries after Daniel’s vision. He was

pleased when he recognized himself as the Greek king who would conquer the empire of the Persians. He therefore was inclined to be generous in his dealings with the Israelites, and he granted them approval to live under the laws of their ancestors.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Teach your students to draw comfort and courage from the fact that God is sovereign over all events in the world.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Recognize that prophetic Scriptures are difficult to interpret. As you pray and study this week, focus on those truths that are clearly expressed in the lesson text. It contains much that is comforting and applicable to our hearts and minds.

Obtain a variety of colored chalk (or colored markers if your classroom has a dry-erase board).

Presenting the Lesson

As students arrive, invite them to illustrate Daniel's vision of the ram and the goat on the board.

Your students have probably studied the great kingdoms and emperors of ancient times. Allow them to tell what they know about Babylon (the kingdom Daniel served most of his life), Medo-Persia, and the conquests of Alexander the Great. When you show them that God revealed events far in advance, emphasize that He is sovereign over all that happens in this world.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Some basic ideas are affirmed in this lesson. God speaks and makes His mind known. He rules the world. And He has a plan to provide for His people's future needs.

These are not abstract theories. They are very practical truths that touch our lives every moment. Since God has spoken, we must be attentive to His words. Knowing that He rules, we can have joy and hope even in the toughest times. Knowing that He will provide, we can face the future without worry. Challenge and encourage your students with these truths.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. AN INTERPRETER SENT—Dan. 8:19**
- II. HISTORY FORETOLD—Dan. 8:20-22**
- III. THE WICKED KING'S CAREER—Dan. 8:23-25**
- IV. THE TIME IS FAR-OFF—Dan. 8:26**

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Summarize Daniel's vision (Dan. 8:3-9). Briefly explain the events that are symbolized.
2. How does it comfort you to know that this vision was fulfilled?
3. Who was the "king of fierce countenance" (vs. 23)? How did he treat the faithful Israelites in his kingdom?

Scripture Lesson Text

LUKE 22:14 And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.

15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

16 For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

17 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide *it* among yourselves:

18 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

21 But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me *is* with me on the table.

22 And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!

23 And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing.

24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gen'tiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

27 For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

28 Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.

29 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;

30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Is'ra-el.

The Privilege of Serving

Lesson: Luke 22:14-30

Read: Luke 22:14-30

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—“He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26).

Lesson and Its Truth

“Serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps. 100:2), the psalmist wrote. For a child of God, service is duty but not drudgery. It is a *privilege* of membership in His family.

When the Son of God came to earth, He humbled Himself and took the role of a bond servant (Phil. 2:5-8). His followers likewise must prepare to take a humble servant’s role.

As we study Jesus’ last hours with His disciples before He went to the cross, we expect to learn some very important things. At that time, Jesus delivered an emphatic lesson on servanthood among His followers.

JESUS’ LAST PASSOVER— Luke 22:14-20

A deep desire (Luke 22:14-15). The Passover is a solemn yet celebratory feast. It commemorates God’s miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. More than a tradition, its observance was mandated by the law God gave to Moses.

At the appointed time and place, Jesus and His twelve apostles met to celebrate Passover together. Peter and John had been sent in advance to make preparations for the meal. Notice

the discipline and order in Jesus’ ways; He lived according to plans and purposes, not haphazardly.

Jesus intensely desired to observe one last Passover with His disciples. As a devout Jew, He cherished the rich spiritual heritage of Israel. As He anticipated His suffering and death, He would draw comfort from the celebration. The Passover ritual was a reminder of the faithfulness and power of His Heavenly Father.

When we emphasize Jesus’ nature as the eternal Son of God, let us remember that He was in every sense human, “yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Therefore, Jesus would have been comforted by celebrating Passover in the company of His closest followers and friends.

Furthermore, Jesus looked forward to this supper because there were important things to accomplish. There were lessons to teach, and this was one last opportunity to prepare His followers for the frightening and perplexing events they would endure over the next few days.

Looking back, looking forward (Luke 22:16-18). The disciples already understood the Passover as a commemoration of things past. Through the

centuries, faithful parents had taught their children about their ancestors' deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

Now Jesus announced that this would be His last Passover Feast—that is, until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

This gave new meaning to the Passover. It is not only a time of remembrance but also a time of *anticipation*. There is a future fulfillment to come after Jesus returns, when the saints will celebrate their freedom from sin, death, and Satan.

With a prayer of thanks, Jesus passed the cup to His disciples and directed them to share it. This cup symbolized the unity and fellowship that must prevail among Jesus' followers.

The enjoyment of the fruit of the vine belongs to festive, happy occasions. Jesus said He would not partake of it again until the kingdom of God has come. He was about to drink another cup, the bitter cup of God's wrath, as He took upon Himself the sins of the world (Luke 22:42).

Symbols of a new covenant (Luke 22:19-20). Throughout history, God's relationship with man has been governed by covenants. By His word, which cannot be broken, He has bound Himself to act in specific ways for the benefit of His people. When Jesus came, He established a new covenant, or "new testament."

The religion of the Old Testament was full of complex ritual. There was a calendar of feasts and fasts to be observed. Frequent and costly offerings were required. There was a consecrated tribe, the Levites, who performed these rituals at a sacred place, the temple in Jerusalem. All of this elaborate ceremony anticipated the perfect sacrifice for sin that Jesus would make.

How different it is for those who worship God in this age! When Jesus announced the new covenant, He gave His followers one simple ceremony to

observe in remembrance of His sacrifice. He took two common elements from the table to serve as symbols. The bread represented His body; the fruit of the vine represented His blood.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, or holy communion, we remember His death on our behalf "till he come" (I Cor. 11:26). We look back with solemn thanksgiving to a historic event. But we also look forward with joy to His coming and the glorious future that will follow.

A LESSON IN SERVANTHOOD— Luke 22:21-30

A betrayer in their midst (Luke 22:21-23). Jesus' death on the cross came to pass "as it was determined." That is, it was ordered by God for His purposes. Many earthly circumstances came together to make it happen in accordance with God's sovereign plan.

It was Satan who moved Judas to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3), but their conspiracy helped to fulfill the purposes of God. Take comfort in knowing that God is able to overrule even the worst designs of the devil.

Nevertheless, Judas was accountable for his actions; his treachery was sin that would come under God's judgment. Jesus said, "Good were it for that man if he had never been born" (Mark 14:21).

When Jesus announced that the betrayer was in their midst, the apostles began to discuss who it might be. Perhaps they felt distrust and were suspicious of disloyalty. But they did not suspect only one another. The Bible records some self-doubt and self-examination, as one after another asked Jesus, "Is it I?" (Mark 14:19).

Serving is true greatness (Luke 22:24-27). Jesus had been speaking of the betrayal and suffering that lay ahead of Him, but the apostles failed to sympathize. Instead, they renewed their old argument about who should be greatest among them.

It is not surprising that pride and selfish ambition were in the hearts of the apostles; these are natural human tendencies. Jesus turned their dispute into an occasion to correct their attitude. His kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms, where greatness means exercising lordship over others; rather, it is about serving in humility.

“I am among you as he that serveth” (Luke 22:27), He said. Jesus demonstrated the servant principle in a striking way; He took a basin and towel and washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:2-10). The One they called “Master” took on the task of the most lowly servant.

Persevering with Jesus (Luke 22:28-30). Jesus had more to say about His apostles’ place in His kingdom. They would not be disappointed; there would be a reward for persevering with Him.

Jesus’ years of ministry were full of temptations, or trials. He was “in all points tempted” (Heb. 4:15). He faced the opposition of men and devils. The religious leaders were hostile and accused Him of being allied with Satan. There were attempts to kill Him, even in His hometown of Nazareth. His family and friends misunderstood Him and thought He was deranged. He endured physical hardship and discomfort.

The Twelve stuck with Him through hardship and reproach while many others fell away. One day Peter asked, “We have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Matt. 19:27). Jesus assured him that any sacrifice made for His sake would be repaid a hundredfold.

Now, under the authority His Father had given Him, Jesus renewed that promise. Soon He would be crucified, but there was no defeat or despair in His words. He spoke as a King about to claim His throne.

His apostles would have special standing in His kingdom. But it would

come by His appointment, not by selfish competition among them. To eat and drink at the King’s table is an honor and a privilege. To sit as a judge is to hold authority.

There is a promise to all who follow Jesus: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (II Tim. 2:12). He calls us to persevere, even through loneliness and hardship.

SIDELIGHTS

The twelve apostles with him. Jesus was a Mentor and Teacher to His apostles, but He was also a Friend. Consider the privilege of enjoying Jesus’ presence.

During the years of His earthly ministry, His closest followers were like a family to Him. On one occasion He gestured toward His disciples and said, “Behold my mother and my brethren!” (Matt. 12:49).

The Passover is traditionally a family feast. It is fitting that Jesus celebrated it privately with the men who had been closest to Him throughout His ministry.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Teach so that your students will understand that a servant’s attitude is essential for a Christian; that the Lord’s Supper is a time for remembrance *and* anticipation; that we gain our place in Jesus’ kingdom by His appointment, not by selfish ambition; and that our calling in Christ is a call to persevere through hardship.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Pray that your students will develop a Christlike servant attitude in all the relationships of their lives.

Read about the origins of the Passover Feast in the Old Testament (Exod. 12:1-14; Lev. 23:4-8). Do some research to learn about present-day Passover customs in Jewish families.

Doctrines and customs regarding the Lord's Supper vary from one church to another. Get an understanding of your church's distinctive practices so that you will be prepared to answer your students' questions. You might invite your pastor or another church officer to speak to your class on this subject for a few minutes.

Contact one student, and ask him to be prepared to read the account of Jesus' washing of His apostles' feet (John 13:2-17).

Presenting the Lesson

Ask some questions to determine how much your students know about the origin of Passover. Can they place it in the history of Israel (at the end of Israel's bondage in Egypt, about 1445 B.C.)? Fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

Students who have Jewish friends may know something about present-day Passover observances. Let them tell what they know.

Jealousy, rivalry, and selfish ambition will be familiar to your students; social dynamics among young adolescents can be harsh. Emphasize that a radically different attitude must rule among Jesus' followers. Illustrate this principle with the account of His washing the apostles' feet.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Sound Christian thinking remembers and anticipates. We look *back* with thanksgiving to Jesus' sacrifice, which accomplished our salvation; we look *forward* with confident expectation to

our glorious future with Him.

Every Christian ought to adopt the attitude of a humble servant. Encourage your students to practice this virtue by befriending the needy and lonely ones among their peers.

Jesus commended His disciples' perseverance. Following Him may take us through hard trials and testing, but we can trust Him to enable us to endure.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. **JESUS' LAST PASSOVER—Luke 22:14-20**
 - A. **A deep desire (vss. 14-15)**
 - B. **Looking back, looking forward (vss. 16-18)**
 - C. **Symbols of a new covenant (vss. 19-20)**
- II. **A LESSON IN SERVANTHOOD—Luke 22:21-30**
 - A. **A betrayer in their midst (vss. 21-23)**
 - B. **Serving is true greatness (vss. 24-27)**
 - C. **Persevering with Jesus (vss. 28-30)**

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Describe the historic origin of the Passover Feast.
2. What is a covenant? What are some ways the new covenant differs from the old?
3. What does the Lord's Supper commemorate? What does it anticipate?
4. How should Jesus' example transform our attitudes about serving others?

Scripture Lesson Text

LUKE 24:13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Em'ma-us, which was from Je-ru'sa-lem *about* threescore furlongs.

14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed *together* and reasoned, Je'sus himself drew near, and went with them.

16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

17 And he said unto them, What manner of communications *are* these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

18 And the one of them, whose name was Cle'o-pas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Je-ru'sa-lem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Je'sus of Naz'a-reth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.

21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed

Is'ra-el: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

29 But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake, and gave to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Je-ru'sa-lem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Si'mon.

35 And they told what things *were done* in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

Hope Restored

(Easter)

Lesson: Luke 24:13-21, 28-35

Read: Luke 24:1-35

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: near Emmaus

GOLDEN TEXT—“As he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him” (Luke 24:30-31).

Lesson and Its Truth

God’s ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). Jesus’ followers witnessed a powerful demonstration of that truth.

One day their hopes were set on Jesus as the Redeemer of Israel their prophets had foretold. The next day they saw Him die a cruel and shameful death. Hope was gone. Grieving and afraid, they scattered and went into hiding.

Then, on the third day, Jesus appeared. He was alive again! Their faith and hope had not been misplaced, although their believing hearts needed to be taught. Hope was restored. In Jesus, God’s promises were being fulfilled in wonderful and unexpected ways.

DISCIPLES IN DESPAIR—

Luke 24:13-21

Shared grief (Luke 24:13-15a). The Bible focuses on the ministry of Jesus with His twelve apostles. But it also tells of a much larger number of devoted followers.

There were women who accompanied Jesus and supported His work with their gifts (Luke 8:2-3). There were faithful men who followed Him throughout His ministry. Matthias was chosen from among these to take Judas’s place (Acts 1:26).

At one time, Jesus commissioned 70 men to travel in pairs to prepare the way ahead of Him (Luke 10:1). After He rose from the dead, He appeared to a gathering of more than 500 followers (I Cor. 15:6). Immediately after He ascended to heaven, about 120 continued in fellowship at Jerusalem (Acts 1:15).

On the day Jesus rose from the dead, two of these lesser-known disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The location of Emmaus is not known today; we only know it was about sixty furlongs, or seven miles, from Jerusalem. Luke’s account emphasizes that they were deeply engaged in conversation; they talked (communed and reasoned) together.

They had many sad and perplexing things to reflect on. Their Master had been betrayed, arrested, tried, and crucified. Now there were reports of an empty tomb and angelic messengers who said He was alive.

A fellow traveler (Luke 24:15b-17).

“Jesus himself drew near” and began to walk with them, but they did not recognize Him. Notice the emphasis. This was Jesus *Himself*—the very same Jesus they knew, not a phantom.

It seemed like a random encounter with a stranger. Even in His resurrected body, Jesus looked ordinary enough to be mistaken for just another traveler. Yet His appearance must have been quite different from before, for they did not recognize Him.

Observing their earnest conversation and their obvious sadness, Jesus gently began to question them. He did not need to ask these questions, for He knows what is in the hearts of men (John 2:25). However, these disciples needed to unburden their grief. Jesus meets the brokenhearted with understanding and compassion.

Disappointed hopes (Luke 24:18-21). One of these two disciples was Cleopas. This is the only occasion he is mentioned in the Bible. We do not know the identity of his companion. The risen Jesus made this early appearance to two little-known disciples. In His sight, there are no unimportant people.

Cleopas responded to Jesus' question with astonishment. The events surrounding the death of Jesus were discussed far beyond the circle of His disciples; they were, in fact, the major news in Jerusalem. Only a stranger newly arrived in town could fail to know of these things.

From their testimony, we can see that these disciples still esteemed Jesus highly. The greatness of His deeds and words could not be denied. It was clear that no one could perform the miraculous works He did except by the power of God (John 3:2). And He taught with authority, unlike their ordinary teachers (Matt. 7:29).

Notice the irony in the disciples' testimony: Jesus, a mighty prophet of God, had been delivered to death by their chief priests and religious rulers. How grievous it must have been to these devout men of Israel to see the corruption and unbelief of their spiritual leaders! This only added to the grief of living under the cruel tyranny of Rome.

God had promised Israel a Deliverer who would bring in an age of peace and justice. Living under Rome's tyranny made that promise all the more precious. Jesus' followers, including the two on the Emmaus road, had set their hopes on Him. Now it was the third day since His death. We wonder why they did not recall His promise that He would rise again the third day. That promise was known even to His enemies (Matt. 27:63).

ENERGIZED BY NEW HOPE— Luke 24:28-35

Opened eyes, burning hearts (Luke 24:28-32). It was late in the day when Jesus and the two disciples, who still did not recognize Him, approached Emmaus. In accordance with the custom of those times, they offered Him a place to stay. They did not simply invite Jesus to stay with them; they "constrained" Him. It was a fervent, almost forceful, request. They did not want Him to leave. He had shown them amazing new insights from the Scriptures concerning Israel's Messiah. Naturally, they were eager to hear more.

At supper, Jesus did a surprising thing. He took the role of host and, with a blessing, broke bread and gave it to the two disciples. The blessing was probably a prayer of thanks, celebrating the goodness of God.

That is when the two disciples recognized Him. Perhaps they noticed the scars in His hands for the first time. It is likely they had seen Him break bread in the same manner at the feeding of the multitudes and on other occasions. Maybe they had heard from His apostles of His breaking bread at their last supper, just days before.

Then Jesus vanished. In His heavenly, resurrected body He related to this physical world in a new and different way. No longer would He be visibly with His disciples all the time, traveling slowly on foot or by boat. Over the next forty days He

would appear to them occasionally, coming and going supernaturally.

The truth they had failed to understand had been made clear as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. They had felt their hearts burning within them; now they knew why.

Likewise, in the heart of every true believer, the Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth (Rom. 8:16). Thus, God confirms to His children the truth revealed in His Word. We look to Him for understanding that our natural minds cannot attain.

Notice the high esteem Jesus had for what we today call the Old Testament. It is the witness to Himself that He upheld. If you seek to know Him, pursue a deeper knowledge of these Scriptures. Otherwise your knowledge of Him is incomplete.

Good news that must be shared (Luke 24:33-35). Without delay the two disciples returned to Jerusalem that same evening. Imagine how different this return trip was! Earlier, their steps had been slowed by grief and disillusionment. Now their pace was quickened by joy and excitement.

In the few hours they had been away, things had changed among the disciples in Jerusalem. Most of them had not seen the risen Jesus, but they were convinced: “The Lord is risen indeed” (Luke 24:34).

Jesus had appeared to Simon (Peter). It was their first encounter since Peter had denied Jesus. The Bible does not describe that meeting, but we can be sure it was the beginning of Peter’s repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.

The disciples from Emmaus had much to tell about their encounter with Jesus. Soon He would appear and present the same teaching to the larger assembly (Luke 24:45).

SIDELIGHTS

About threescore furlongs. Often the Bible uses units of measure that are unfamiliar to us. “Furlong” translates

the Greek word *stadion*, which equals 600 feet. Threescore (that is, sixty) furlongs would be 36,000 feet, or slightly less than seven miles.

The chief priests and our rulers.

These “rulers” were religious leaders, not Roman officials. It was widely understood that Jesus was delivered to death by the corrupt religious leaders of Israel.

“The council” (Matt. 26:59) that condemned Jesus was the Sanhedrin, a body of seventy men over which the high priest presided. The tradition of this ruling body of seventy can be traced to the days of Moses (Num. 11:16).

Not all the rulers agreed to have Jesus put to death. Joseph of Arimathea, who buried Jesus’ body with honor and dignity, was a secret disciple and had not consented to the council’s condemnation of Jesus (Luke 23:51). Nicodemus, who earlier had defended Jesus in the council (John 7:50-51), probably also dissented.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

This lesson will show that a Christian can hope in God even in the most confusing and grievous times, knowing that God is working His perfect will. It will also show that knowing the Old Testament Scriptures is essential to our understanding of Jesus and His mission in the world.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

As always, spend time in prayer for your class and for each student. Read the resurrection accounts from each of the four Gospels—Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20—and the

Apostle Paul's resurrection discourse in I Corinthians 15.

From these chapters, prepare a simple quiz of ten questions about Jesus' resurrection. Include Scripture references to enable the students to find the answers readily. Print a copy for each student (or arrive early to write the questions on the board before class begins).

Practice telling the story of the encounter on the Emmaus road in an engaging manner.

Presenting the Lesson

Expect this week's class to be especially challenging. Students will be excited about family celebrations and distracted by new Easter clothes. Their mood may be affected by the Easter candy they have been consuming.

As students arrive, give each a pencil and a copy of the quiz you have prepared. Have them work silently and independently. That should help you get the class started in a quiet, orderly manner.

In case students become inattentive during your lesson presentation, be ready with some interesting, relevant diversions. For example, ask, "How many is threescore? How far is threescore furlongs in miles? In feet? How long would it take to walk that distance if you were feeling sad and defeated? To run it if you were excited and overjoyed?"

LESSON FOR TODAY

Jesus will walk with us and give comfort at times of grief or loss. Even at the darkest and most difficult times, be confident that God is working His purposes.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into truth as Jesus illumined the Scriptures for the disciples on the Emmaus road. Seek a closer walk with Jesus by

gaining a fuller knowledge of the Bible.

The Christian life is to be lived in community. Comfort and support your fellow believers in times of sorrow, and share your joys as well.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. DISCIPLES IN DESPAIR—Luke 24:13-21**
 - A. Shared grief (vss. 13-15a)**
 - B. A fellow traveler (vss. 15b-17)**
 - C. Disappointed hopes (vss. 18-21)**
- II. ENERGIZED BY NEW HOPE—Luke 24:28-35**
 - A. Opened eyes, burning hearts (vss. 28-32)**
 - B. Good news that must be shared (vss. 33-35)**

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Imagine you were one of the disciples on the Emmaus road. What would you have been saying to your fellow disciple?
2. If God knows all, even what is in each person's heart, why would Jesus ask questions (Luke 24:17)?
3. How did these disciples regard Jesus at that time (vs. 19)?
4. On what other occasions did Jesus break bread and give it to His disciples with a prayer of thanks (Matt. 15:32-37; Luke 9:10-17; 22:19)?
5. The disciples on the Emmaus road sensed a burning in their hearts as Jesus explained the Scriptures. How is the experience of Christians today similar? How is it different?

Scripture Lesson Text

LUKE 24:36 And as they thus spake, Je'sus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you.

37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them *his* hands and *his* feet.

41 And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

43 And he took *it*, and did eat before them.

44 And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Mo'ses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me.

45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Je-ru'salem.

48 And ye are witnesses of these things.

49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Je-ru'salem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

50 And he led them out as far as to Beth'a-ny, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

52 And they worshipped him, and returned to Je-ru'sa-lem with great joy:

53 And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

Promises Kept

Lesson: Luke 24:36-53

Read: Luke 24:36-53

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44).

Lesson and Its Truth

If you seek to know Jesus, know your Bible! He declared, “The scriptures; . . . testify of me” (John 5:39). The promises God made through His messengers, the prophets, are all fulfilled in and through Christ.

After He rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to His disciples and “opened . . . their understanding” (Luke 24:45); that is, He enabled them to see that He is the Saviour and King whose coming they had waited for.

We might wish that we had been present to hear these things from the lips of Jesus Himself. But God has given us a great and wonderful witness as well. We have the complete Scriptures, and we have the Holy Spirit to illuminate them for us. He will, as Jesus promised, “guide [us] into all truth” (John 16:13).

BRINGING PEACE— Luke 24:36-38

Imagine you were one of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem when He was crucified. You felt alarm and terror the night He was arrested. You were shocked and angry with your fellow disciple Judas, who betrayed Him. You experienced the grief and horror of seeing Jesus die on the cross.

You were dismayed when you heard that His tomb was empty. You stayed in hiding with the other disciples, fearing that Jesus’ enemies would come after you. You became hopeful as you began to hear reports from those who had seen Him alive.

The evening after He rose from the dead, Jesus’ followers were assembled behind closed doors, for they were afraid (John 20:19). Two disciples had just returned from Emmaus with another report of seeing Jesus alive.

Suddenly, in the closed room, Jesus appeared. In His resurrected, heavenly body, He did not submit to physical limitations as He had done while He lived in mortal flesh. From now on, the otherworldly nature of His new body would be evident, and He would come and go supernaturally. Notice the emphasis: it was *Jesus Himself*, not a ghost or an apparition.

Jesus knows when our hearts are not at peace, and He meets us with compassion. He greeted His disciples with words of comfort: “Peace be unto you” (Luke 24:36).

Naturally, the disciples were startled by Jesus’ sudden appearance. They thought they were seeing a ghost, and

they were afraid. “Why are ye troubled?” (Luke 24:38), He asked. There was a gentle rebuke in His words. If they had understood the writings of their prophets and the promises of Jesus Himself, they would have expected to see Him alive again.

PROVIDING PROOF— Luke 24:39-43

When we are slow to learn, God is understanding and patient with us. He will gently bear with us and teach us. He is mindful of our weakness (Ps. 103:13-14).

Jesus dealt kindly with the disbelief and perplexity of His disciples. In fact, He offered threefold proof to settle their doubts and fears.

First, He invited them to touch Him. He made an appeal to their physical senses and their rational minds: “Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39).

Next, He showed them His hands and feet. It is implied that scars remained where spikes had been driven through His flesh, nailing Him to the cross.

Have you ever been overwhelmed by conflicting emotions? The disciples were too filled with joy and amazement to believe. So Jesus offered a third proof. He asked for food. They gave Him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb, and He ate it.

Thus, the risen Jesus showed Himself alive “by many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3). This was just one of those occasions.

EXPLAINING THE SCRIPTURES— Luke 24:44-45

With the phrase “while I was yet with you” (Luke 24:44), Jesus emphasized that His presence with His followers was now very different from before. Indeed He is with us (Matt. 28:20), and we ought to be mindful of His presence every moment; but He is not here in the sense that He was present in the days when He dwelled in mortal flesh. Soon He would

ascend to heaven to continue His ministry at His Father’s right hand, while His disciples would continue His ministry on earth without His physical presence.

Jesus reminded His disciples of things He had said in those earlier times. His mission on earth was to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures (Matt. 5:17). He spoke of “the law of Moses, and . . . the prophets, and . . . the psalms” (Luke 24:44). These represent the traditional divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures (Law, Prophets, Writings). The hope of redemption from sin unto glory pervades all the sacred Scriptures of Israel.

Jesus “opened . . . their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Serious, diligent study of the Bible is essential for equipping us to live the Christian life; but we must rely on the Holy Spirit, whom Christ has sent, to open our understanding.

ISSUING A MANDATE— Luke 24:46-49

“Thus it is written” (Luke 24:46), Jesus said. The Gospel accounts emphasize repeatedly that He honored and upheld the Old Testament Scriptures. “Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day,” Jesus continued. He was “behooved” not in the sense of a moral obligation but rather as a necessity to fulfill the word God had given. God’s promises are sure and cannot be broken. Christ’s mission was to both “suffer” and “rise from the dead” to enter into His glory.

Jesus directed His followers to take His gospel into all the world. We call this mandate the Great Commission. It is recorded, with various emphases, in each of the four Gospels and in the book of Acts (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

Here we have the facts of the Great Commission stated concisely. The content of the gospel was to be “repentance and remission of sins” (Luke 24:47). The messengers’ authority would be Christ

Himself; they would preach “in his name.” Their mission field would be “all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Their message was rooted in historical fact that they could declare with conviction: they were “witnesses of these things” (vs. 48). Finally, it was to be carried out “with power from on high” (vs. 49).

Jesus had told His disciples, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, . . . even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16-17). Now He renewed that promise. They were to wait in Jerusalem for its fulfillment.

In their zeal, Jesus’ disciples might have rushed out to fulfill their task; but Jesus strictly charged them to “tarry” (Luke 24:49). They were to await the coming of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus would send “from the Father” (John 15:26). God’s work is to be carried out in accordance with His timing and in the power He provides.

ASCENDING TO HEAVEN—Luke 24:50-53

Most churches commemorate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. Fewer churches take much notice of Ascension Day, which falls on a Thursday forty days later. Whether we celebrate that day or not, we ought to study and appreciate the event that it commemorates.

While giving His followers a final blessing, Jesus ascended to heaven from the vicinity of Bethany, east of Jerusalem. Now His visible presence was taken from them entirely. Two heavenly messengers appeared and renewed the promise that He would return to earth again (Acts 1:10-11).

Jesus’ death had filled His followers with grief and fear. How different their parting was when He ascended to heaven! Now they were filled with joy and awe. “They worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52).

Consider how Jesus’ ascension benefits all His followers. His return to His

Father was necessary before the Holy Spirit would come to indwell believers and empower the church (John 7:39; 16:7). Jesus is preparing a place in heaven, and He will come again to gather His beloved ones to Himself (14:2-3). Seated at His Father’s right hand, He prays for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

In obedience to Jesus, the disciples remained in Jerusalem and continued to worship God there.

SIDELIGHTS

Peace be unto you. The biblical concept of peace is more than just the absence of conflict or distress. It is a *positive* concept—a state of wholeness, soundness, and well-being.

Nearly all of the New Testament letters begin or end with a greeting or benediction of peace. The Psalms are filled with messages of peace for hearts in distress.

Peace is central in the mission and message of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He has won for His beloved “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1) for all who have been “justified by faith.” “He is our peace” (Eph. 2:14), the Apostle Paul wrote, for He reconciles people who have been separated and alienated.

Christ’s peace is the remedy for fear and conflict in the soul. These words of comfort are for all who love Him: “My peace I give unto you: . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Help students understand the vital relationship of Jesus and the Scriptures. Show that He desires His follow-

ers to have peace, not fear and conflict, in their hearts and that He ministers in heaven for us as we carry out His Great Commission on earth.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

As you pray and study, remember that your students are at various stages in the development of faith and understanding. Ask God to give you Christlike patience and compassion for each one.

Gather a few current calendars for the preclass activity. (Be sure these calendars do not have Ascension Day marked as a holiday.)

Presenting the Lesson

As students arrive, ask each one to calculate the date of Ascension Day this year. (With Easter as day 1, count to day 40.) Offer calendars to help. Have them share their answers when all have finished. Did everyone land on the same Thursday?

Have your students look up the Great Commission in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. (Scripture references are given in Lesson and Its Truth.) On the board, compile a single summary paragraph that includes the details from each account. (If your class is large, you could have two or more committees work separately on this project.)

Emphasize that Jesus desires that we have peace in our hearts.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Jesus wishes us peace in our hearts. Learn to trust Him, moment by moment, with all your conflicts and fears.

If you would know Jesus more fully, study the Old Testament. He emphasized its importance; *all* Scripture is given to instruct us and to equip us to serve Him (II Tim. 3:16).

The Great Commission is the unfinished task of Christ's church and of each individual believer. Look for ways to be a steadfast witness for Jesus in word and deed. Pray for courage, for you may be mocked and bullied because of your witness. Remember to pray for friends and family members who need Jesus.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. BRINGING PEACE—Luke 24:36-38**
- II. PROVIDING PROOF—Luke 24:39-43**
- III. EXPLAINING THE SCRIPTURES—Luke 24:44-45**
- IV. ISSUING A MANDATE—Luke 24:46-49**
- V. ASCENDING TO HEAVEN—Luke 24:50-53**

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Suppose someone says, "I am not interested in the Old Testament; I just want to know Jesus!" What is the fault with such thinking?
2. In His heavenly, resurrected body, how did Jesus relate differently to this physical world?
3. What proof did Jesus give to show that His presence was not just a spirit or phantom?
4. What is the Great Commission? How should Christians seek to fulfill it in this present age?
5. What good things could happen only after Jesus ascended to His Father in heaven?

Scripture Lesson Text

ACTS 2:1 And when the day of Pen'te-cost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Ho'ly Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spir'it gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jeru'sa-lem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7 And they were all amazed and

marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Gal-i-lae'ans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9 Par'thi-ans, and Medes, and E'lam-ites, and the dwellers in Mes-o-po-ta'mi-a, and in Ju-dae'a, and Cap-pa-do'ci-a, in Pon'tus, and A'sia,

10 Phryg'i-a, and Pam-phyl'i-a, in E'gypt, and in the parts of Lib'y-a about Cy-re'ne, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretes and A-ra'bi-ans, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

New Power to Proclaim the Truth

Lesson: Acts 2:1-13

Read: Acts 2:1-36

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4).

Lesson and Its Truth

The Christian life, rightly lived, is a life of courage and victory. "The power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20) is the power of the Holy Spirit, who indwells us. We are called to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (6:10).

Anything that God requires, He will also enable. If He has given us a command, we can be sure He will provide all that we need in order to obey it.

Jesus' final orders to His apostles were daunting. They were to preach the gospel to all nations. But He also promised great power to perform the task. He said, "Tarry ye in . . . Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "Ye shall receive power, after . . . the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE—

Acts 2:1

Exactly seven weeks after Jesus rose from the dead, the men of Israel were celebrating an important religious event in Jerusalem. Its name, "Pentecost" (from the Greek *pentekostos*, meaning fiftieth), simply means that it occurs fifty days after Passover. The origin of this

feast was in the law God gave to Moses, where it is called the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12).

Pentecost was one of three pilgrimage feasts on the calendar of Israel (Deut. 16:16); therefore, Jerusalem was filled with devout men who had traveled far to observe the solemn event. Since the Exile to Babylon in the sixth century B.C., many Jews had lived in scattered communities far from the homeland. There could be no better time to reach them with the news of their Messiah than during a pilgrimage feast at Jerusalem.

In obedience to Jesus, the twelve apostles had remained in Jerusalem, where they devoted themselves to prayer and worship at the temple (Luke 24:53; Acts 1:14).

On the Day of Pentecost they were all together in one "house" (Acts 2:2). It is likely they were in the "upper room" (1:13) that served as their meeting place. If that is so, they soon moved to another location, probably the temple, where they engaged the attention of a large multitude.

The apostles now included Matthias, who had been chosen to

take Judas's place. Like the other eleven apostles, he had been with Jesus throughout His ministry and was an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:15-26).

THE SPIRIT—Acts 2:2-4

Imagine the eager anticipation as the apostles awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. They knew it would happen soon. Jesus had told them, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5).

The apostles remembered the ministry of John the Baptist, which had continued even after Jesus' ministry began. In fact, some of them had been John's disciples (John 1:35-40). John had said of Jesus, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Luke 3:16).

The coming of the Spirit was sudden, with signs that could be heard and seen. There was the sound of a violent wind (evidently no wind was felt), and something that appeared like a flame divided and rested on each of the apostles.

Jesus had likened the wind to the work of the Holy Spirit. The wind blows wherever it will; we cannot capture it or direct it. Its sound is heard; yet we do not know where it comes from or where it is going (John 3:8). Likewise, the Holy Spirit works the will of God—invisibly, mysteriously, and with awesome power.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was invisible, but its effect was very evident. The Spirit-filled apostles began to speak languages they did not know.

Learning a foreign language is a slow and difficult task, especially for adults. Clearly, the apostles' ability to speak languages they had never learned was a miracle—just as much a miracle as healing the sick or raising the dead or giving sight to the blind.

Sometimes in the Bible, miraculous events are called "signs" (Acts 2:22). Je-

sus' miracles were signs, or indicators, of His divine authority. They compelled the attention of the people and demonstrated that the power of God was at work in Him.

Likewise, the miracle of languages at Pentecost was a sign: it attracted and awed the multitude and compelled them to hear the apostles' message. It was the first miracle after Jesus' ascension to heaven. There would be many more in the days of the apostles. This was a unique, formative time among the followers of Jesus when God worked in extraordinary ways.

Many centuries earlier, God had divided and scattered rebellious people by confusing their language (Gen. 11:1-9). Now He would use a miracle of language to unite and draw to Himself repentant, seeking souls from many lands.

THE MULTITUDE—Acts 2:5-11

Jerusalem was filled with Pentecost pilgrims from "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). This is a figure of speech, meaning that men from all provinces of the Roman Empire were present. These were "devout men"—reverent, careful to abide by God's laws, and attentive to prayer and worship.

It was a puzzling surprise; each man heard the apostles testifying of God's works in the language of his home district. The amazed witnesses asked, "Are not all these which speak Galilaeans?" (Acts 2:7). Something about the apostles' language, manner, or appearance marked them as men of Galilee. How could they be fluent in languages not spoken in Galilee?

The question might also imply that Galilee was held in low esteem. Bible commentators suggest that Galileans were regarded as coarse, rude, and unsophisticated. Therefore it would be very surprising to meet Galilean men

who were fluent in foreign languages.

The remarkable list of locales shows how widely dispersed the people of Israel were at that time. Parthia, Media, and Elam were far to the east, in the territory of Persia (present-day Iran). Mesopotamia is in present-day Iraq. Judea is the Jewish homeland and is in Palestine. Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia were to the north, in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Egypt and Libya are in north-eastern Africa. Crete is a Greek isle in the Mediterranean Sea.

The multitude included both “Jews and proselytes” (Acts 2:10)—in other words, men who had been born Jewish *and* converts to Judaism. Even in the days of the old covenant, people were drawn to worship the God of Israel. They were compelled by the excellence of God’s law and the truth of the Hebrew Scriptures.

These pilgrims heard the apostles speaking of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). It was not the gospel of Christ, which the Apostle Peter soon would present. The message did not seem novel or strange. It was simply a testimony of God’s mighty works; perhaps the apostles were reciting passages from the Psalms that any devout Israelite would recognize.

For nearly two thousand years, the people of Israel had been God’s channel of blessing to mankind. God had given the Scriptures and the Saviour through that nation. Now, among the Jews and using Jewish messengers, He would establish His church.

SEEKERS AND SCOFFERS—

Acts 2:12-13

No one was converted to faith in Jesus by hearing the apostles speak in the language of his home district. Peter’s great Pentecost sermon, with its thorough presentation of the gospel, would come later that day.

However, a division was already be-

coming evident. Among the multitude were men whom God was preparing to receive the message of Jesus the Messiah. These minds, although perplexed, were questioning what was happening. They asked, “What meaneth this?” (Acts 2:12). They had witnessed God’s miracle, or sign, and desired to know its significance. They were willing to learn more.

Then there were the scornful, closed minds of the scoffers, who ridiculed the apostles and accused them of being drunk. They easily dismissed the miracle they were witnessing.

This is the common response of those who refuse to believe God’s words. God provides evidence of His work that should compel their attention, but they disregard it and mock His messengers.

SIDELIGHTS

Dwelling at Jerusalem . . . out of every nation under heaven. Centuries before Christ, significant Jewish communities were established in lands far from Palestine. Jews residing outside the homeland are called the Diaspora. The word “dwell,” like the Greek word from which it is translated, suggests a permanent residence. However, it may also speak of temporary residents, such as pilgrims attending religious observances. That is the reasonable and likely meaning here, since Pentecost was the greatest of the pilgrimage feasts of Israel.

It is also likely that many religious Jews of the Diaspora had moved to Jerusalem and made it their home. “It is not improbable that many wealthy foreign Jews had a permanent residence in Jerusalem for the convenience of being near the temple. This was the more probable, as about that time the Messiah was expected to appear” (Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, Baker).

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Teach that God abundantly empowers His children for the tasks He gives them. Show the importance of waiting in obedience, as the apostles did. Show that God first established His church among the Jews, building upon the spiritual heritage of Israel.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Try to anticipate your students' questions, and prepare your responses. For example, "Why do we not see miracles like this today?" (The age of the apostles was a unique, formative time in Christianity. God was working in extraordinary ways.)

Prepare to discuss how your students should respond to scoffers as well as to seekers who are willing to hear more of the gospel.

Presenting the Lesson

Ask whether any students have traveled to or lived in a land where their native language was not spoken. How did they react when they unexpectedly heard someone speaking their own language?

To illustrate how great a miracle it was when Jesus' apostles spoke in languages they had never learned, let students tell about their study of foreign languages.

Emphasize the importance of God's chosen people, Israel, to the Christian faith. Help the students identify the Jewish elements in this story: Jerusalem, the temple, the Feast of Pentecost, and the throng of Jews who first responded to the gospel.

Discuss with your students how they should respond to the scoffers and the seekers they meet among their peers.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Do you desire God to do great things? Follow the apostles' example: Obey and pray. In the days before Pentecost, they *obeyed* Jesus' command to wait in the city of Jerusalem (Luke 24:49), and they devoted themselves to *prayer* (Acts 1:14).

In your faithful witness for Jesus, you will meet both scoffers and seekers. Pray for wisdom as you speak to those who are willing to hear. Pray for the scoffers; God may turn them into seekers at any time.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE—
Acts 2:1
- II. THE SPIRIT—Acts 2:2-4
- III. THE MULTITUDE—Acts 2:5-11
- IV. SEEKERS AND SCOFFERS—
Acts 2:12-13

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. After Jesus ascended to His Father, what were the apostles waiting for in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49)?
2. To which events were the men of Israel required to make pilgrimage? Which one became known as "Pentecost" (Deut. 16:16)?
3. What were the various responses to the miracle of languages at Pentecost? How should a Christian respond to scoffers and to seekers willing to learn more?

Scripture Lesson Text

I THESS. 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Je'sus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Je'sus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Je'sus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

Living with Hope

Lesson: I Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

Read: I Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

TIME: A.D. 51

PLACE: from Corinth

GOLDEN TEXT—“God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thessalonians 5:9).

Lesson and Its Truth

Today, Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece. In New Testament times, it was the second city in Europe to receive the gospel of Christ at Paul's hands. Later the Apostle Paul wrote to the saints there to express his joy at their progress in the Christian life, to encourage continued growth, and to provide instruction.

SOUND DOCTRINE GIVES COMFORT—I Thess. 4:13-14

The Apostle Paul addressed his readers as “brethren” (I Thess. 4:13). He did not flaunt or boast about his authority as an apostle. Rather, he humbly regarded these ordinary believers as equally sons of God with himself.

Here we see the apostle's tender, pastoral heart. He did not want these believers to continue in sorrow. A true servant of Christ will have a heart of compassion for the ones he serves, as Jesus did.

The Thessalonians understood that Jesus would return and gather His loved ones to Himself. But what of the ones who died before that came to pass? The surviving saints were sorrowful and perplexed as they puzzled over this question.

Naturally, Christians grieve when a

loved one dies. But ours is not the despairing grief of those who have no hope that their loved ones will live again.

Sleep lasts only for a time; so it is fitting to think of deceased saints as being asleep in Jesus. They will awake to life everlasting.

Jesus' rising from the dead is the guarantee of our resurrection. When He comes to gather His beloved to Himself, Jesus will “bring with him” (I Thess. 4:14) the saints who sleep. Only He can make such a promise. “All power . . . in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18), including power over death, belongs to Him. By rising from the dead, He demonstrated to the world His power over death.

FOREVER WITH THE LORD—I Thess. 4:15-18

At Jesus' coming, believers who remain alive will have no advantage over those who have died; in fact, “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (I Thess. 4:16). The promise is that they will be raised and witness the glory of His return.

Notice all the terms of union and togetherness: “together,” “with them,” “meet the Lord,” “with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:17). Death is a cruel enemy that separates and tears apart. We

long to be united with our loved ones and, most of all, with Jesus. Here is the promise of a union that will never be separated: “So shall we ever be with the Lord.”

We are not simply to take comfort in these words; we are to “comfort one another” (I Thess. 4:18). Our calling in Christ is a calling into community. The Christian life, rightly lived, is a life of giving and receiving in fellowship with other saints.

THE DAY OF THE LORD— I Thess. 5:1-3

As to the timing of Jesus’ return, the Thessalonians already had been taught; they had basic knowledge the apostle could remind them of. In the Christian life, such a foundation of sound doctrine is essential for one’s joy and growth in the Lord.

The Old Testament prophets had prophesied of the Day of the Lord—a future time when God would act in earthly events as never before. It would be a time of judgment upon the wicked, but it would also bring a glorious era of peace and blessing. After Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Day of the Lord came to be identified with His second coming.

Christians in every age naturally wonder when these things will come to pass. The apostle reminded his readers of what they already knew; the Lord’s return will be sudden, coming like “a thief in the night” (I Thess. 5:2) and surprising those who are not watchful and ready. And it will be as inescapable as the pains of childbirth (vs. 3).

CHILDREN OF LIGHT— I Thess. 5:4-8

Next, a series of contrasts illustrates the difference between God’s redeemed people and the people of this world: light and darkness; day and night; watchfulness and sleep; sobriety and drunkenness.

Light symbolizes the holy life into which we are called. Jesus brought light into the world, and His beloved come to the light, unlike the wicked, who flee the light lest their evil deeds be exposed (John 3:19-20). If we live in the light, the Day of the Lord will not surprise us like a thief.

Being children of the day, we ought to be watchful. Imagine living every moment on the alert for Jesus’ return.

Living as children of light in this dark world requires sober self-discipline, not the self-indulgence that often leads to drunkenness. And it calls for protective armor—“the breastplate of faith and love” and a “helmet, the hope of salvation” (I Thess. 5:8)—for this world is hostile to the Christian’s righteous way of life.

REMEMBER THE GOSPEL— I Thess. 5:9-11

It is always good for Christians to be reminded why and how they differ from the children of darkness. The *gospel* is what makes us different. It has given us a new destiny and a new standing with God. We are not under His wrath; rather, we have salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that we may live with Him.

In a healthy community of believers, the gospel is the basis for encouraging and strengthening one another. The Thessalonian Christians were already settled in that habit; the apostle acknowledged that and gently urged them to continue.

SIDELIGHTS

By the word of the Lord. The Apostle Paul’s authority for these statements was “the word of the Lord” (I Thess. 4:15). Were these words spoken by Jesus but not recorded in the Gospels? Or were they given to the apostle supernaturally? We cannot be sure.

We know that the apostles did receive messages directly from God. We

understand that such revelation was unique to that era; it did not continue after the Holy Scriptures were complete.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Show that Bible doctrines of future things are given to comfort us and to motivate us in Christian living here and now.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

As you pray and study, keep in mind your students' individual concerns. Some may be thinking about heaven and the afterlife due to a recent death among family or friends. Prepare to give assurance, on the authority of God's promises, that all who die in faith will be raised to everlasting life when Jesus comes.

The Christian's hope of the Lord's return motivates sober, righteous living. Keep this in mind as you prepare to teach. What we believe about the future defines how we must live today.

Presenting the Lesson

Introduce the lesson's major themes: death, resurrection, afterlife, the Day of the Lord, and living in light of these truths. Students who have been touched by the death of a loved one may want to talk about their experience. Attempt to direct classroom discussion to the practical applications of this lesson.

This lesson may prompt students to ask difficult questions. If you cannot provide an answer, be willing to say so. You might offer to do some research and return with an answer next week. Emphasize that many things must remain mysterious for now; God has not revealed everything about His plans.

LESSON FOR TODAY

You will have great peace if you build your thought life on the truths of God's Word. Take comfort in knowing that Jesus has power over death.

Live in readiness for the Day of the Lord. Christians are called to a sober, watchful manner of thinking and living. Therefore, expect to be different from those who do not claim Jesus as Saviour.

Encourage your fellow Christians, and accept their encouragement as you remind one another of the truths you profess.

LESSON FOR TODAY

- I. **SOUND DOCTRINE GIVES COMFORT**—I Thess. 4:13-14
- II. **FOREVER WITH THE LORD**—I Thess. 4:15-18
- III. **THE DAY OF THE LORD**—I Thess. 5:1-3
- IV. **CHILDREN OF LIGHT**—I Thess. 5:4-8
- V. **REMEMBER THE GOSPEL**—I Thess. 5:9-11

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Think of some specific ways that knowing about God and His works can provide comfort to our hearts.
2. Why is it fitting to speak of those who have died in faith as being "asleep"?
3. What is the Day of the Lord?
4. How does a Christian live in sober watchfulness for Jesus' return?

Scripture Lesson Text

II THESS. 2:1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Je'sus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Sa'tan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spir'it and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Je'sus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16 Now our Lord Je'sus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

Standing Firm in Hope

Lesson: II Thessalonians 2:1-3, 9-17

Read: II Thessalonians 2:1-17

TIME: A.D. 51

PLACE: from Corinth

GOLDEN TEXT—“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, . . . comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work” (II Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Lesson and Its Truth

The gospel of Christ is “the way of truth” (II Pet. 2:2). But sometimes believers become misled and confused by teachers of false doctrine.

This happened in a church newly founded by the Apostle Paul. It was a community of believers with a zeal for truth and godly living, but they needed to be taught and gently corrected.

BE NOT DECEIVED—II Thess. 2:1-3a

“Beseech” means to ask earnestly or urgently. The apostle was writing to his brethren in Christ, whom he regarded as equally sons of God with himself.

These believers understood that Jesus would come and gather His beloved ones to Himself. This is His promise and every Christian’s hope. It was part of the instruction they had received.

God’s promises about the future ought to be the believer’s comfort and joy, but false teachers can turn them into a source of confusion. From pastoral concern, the Apostle Paul wrote to settle the hearts of his readers.

In the days of the apostles, God gave His word in various ways. There were prophetic messages directly from

God, and there were the spoken and written words of the apostles. Paul spoke against teachers who would falsely claim to have received truth by any of these means (II Thess. 2:2). “Let no man deceive you” (vs. 3), he warned.

DECEPTION IS OF SATAN—II Thess. 2:3b, 9-12

The apostle provided the best protection against false doctrine—*sound doctrine*.

He assured his readers that the Day of the Lord could not possibly have come, for certain things must happen first (II Thess. 2:3). A great “falling away,” without equal in history, must take place. And the “man of sin” must be made known. He is commonly called antichrist, for he is Satan’s counterpart to Christ. He will use Satan’s supernatural powers to perform signs and wonders and to deceive many.

Just as Jesus brought grace and truth (John 1:14, 17), so the man of sin will bring wickedness and deceit. He will manifest the character of Satan, the father of lies (8:44).

Note the sharp contrast between

two kingdoms and two destinies (II Thess. 2:10). There are those who embrace wicked deceit, and they are perishing. There are those who love the truth, and they are being saved.

It is an act of God's judgment when He sends "strong delusion" (II Thess. 2:11) on the wicked so that they may continue on the path to damnation. He no longer summons them to the truth or convicts their conscience. We all have observed those who take "pleasure in unrighteousness" (vs. 12), perversely delighting in mocking God in their speech and lifestyle.

LIVING IN TRUTH—II Thess. 2:13-15

Suddenly the tone and language brighten as the apostle shifted his attention to his readers. The beauty of their lives transformed by Christ compelled him to give thanks to God. These were his Christian brothers and sisters in whom he delighted.

They were God's beloved, chosen "from the beginning" (II Thess. 2:13), not the objects of His judgment. They had been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, not given over to delusion. They had embraced the truth of the gospel, not Satan's lies. Their destiny was to share the glory of Christ, not enter into damnation.

With such a glorious standing and destiny comes a duty: "Therefore, . . . stand fast" (II Thess. 2:15). These saints were to hold firm to sound doctrine, which the apostles had delivered in person and by letter.

A BLESSING—II Thess. 2:16-17

We can stand firm only in God's strength, not our own. Here we are reminded of the source of every grace that enables us. It is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father.

Remember God's love for you. He knows the needs of your heart, and He abundantly provides "everlasting con-

solation and good hope" (II Thess. 2:16).

Every Christian is called to a fruitful life in work and word. Jesus said, "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16). We are called to stand firm in the truth; at the same time, we rely on God to establish us in good speech and action.

SIDELIGHTS

The traditions which ye have been taught. God has given us the Bible as our rule of faith and life. In Christianity's early years, the Scriptures were still being written; God's people relied on the words, spoken and written, of the apostles.

God entrusted the gospel to the apostles (I Thess. 2:4). This was "the word" (II Tim. 4:2) that Paul instructed Timothy to preach and to "commit . . . to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2:2). It was the message that believers of that time had "learned, and received, and heard" (Phil. 4:9) from the apostles.

Let us thank God for the Bible, our complete and sufficient guide (II Tim. 3:16-17). Study it, meditate on it, and steadfastly order your mind and life by it.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Aim to show the dangers of false doctrine and the importance of being well taught in the truth. Emphasize the consolation and fruitfulness of a life lived according to God's truth.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Pray for wisdom to understand your students' stage of life. They are beginning to think and act independently. The influence of parents is diminishing. This can make them vulnerable to deviant doctrines and movements. Their questions should be treated seriously and respectfully.

This lesson touches on prophecies of the end times, but you do not need to be an expert on that subject. Plan to emphasize the hope of heaven and the importance of standing firm in the truth.

For the object lesson, gift wrap an empty box in beautiful paper and ribbons.

Presenting the Lesson

Have the class watch as a volunteer opens the package you wrapped. Ask them to imagine how they would feel on their birthday if all their gift packages were empty.

Explain that false doctrine is like that empty package. Its teachers make it appear very convincing and promising, but it will leave us disillusioned and empty.

Although you must mention Satan and a future season of evil on earth, be sure to emphasize the positive. We have the Bible, the complete and sufficient guide for life. We have been chosen by God. We are on the side of truth. We have God's consolation even now. We are destined for glory.

LESSON FOR TODAY

False doctrine is a danger to the spiritual and moral well-being of God's people. Often it ensnares young people who are searching and questioning. Therefore, apply yourself diligently to

sound doctrine; it is the best defense against error.

Expect to be different from those who delight in unrighteousness. It may seem that Satan is triumphant, but the Day of the Lord is coming.

Be thankful for faithful teachers and for the truth they have taught you. Now stand firm in that truth.

Enjoy the consolation of the Lord Jesus in your heart. Rely on Him to establish you in a life that is fruitful in word and deed.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. **BE NOT DECEIVED**—II Thess. 2:1-3a
- II. **DECEPTION IS OF SATAN**—II Thess. 2:3b, 9-12
- III. **LIVING IN TRUTH**—II Thess. 2:13-15
- IV. **A BLESSING**—II Thess. 2:16-17

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why did the apostle write a letter of gentle persuasion rather than severe scolding?
2. What should the hope of Jesus' return produce in our hearts? How can it become a source of trouble and confusion?
3. What has God given as our guide to faith and life? What was the standard of gospel truth in the times of the apostles?
4. What would you expect to see in the life of a Christian who abounds in good words and works?

Scripture Lesson Text

1 PET. 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Je'sus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Je'sus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Je'sus Christ:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see

***him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:**

9 Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls.

10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace *that should come* unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spir'it of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Ho'ly Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

A Living Hope

Lesson: I Peter 1:3-12

Read: I Peter 1:1-12

TIME: A.D. 63

PLACE: from Babylon (possibly Rome)

GOLDEN TEXT—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Peter 1:3).

Lesson and Its Truth

The Apostle Peter wrote to Christians in the territory that is modern-day Turkey. In this world they were “strangers,” or aliens, for their true home was in heaven. But in relation to God’s kingdom, they were His chosen ones, set apart for His holy purposes (I Pet. 1:1-2).

This letter teaches Christ’s followers to raise their sights from this evil world and to find comfort in the hope of their everlasting reward in heaven.

OUR HOPE IS ALIVE—I Pet. 1:3-5

Praise is the fitting response of those whom God has redeemed (Ps. 33:1). The apostle began his letter with an outpouring of praise: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:3).

First Peter 1:3 is a verse rich with gospel truth. It is according to God’s “abundant mercy” that we stand in His favor. He has “begotten us again” to new life. This new birth is to a “lively hope,” a confident expectation of abundant life to come. And all of it is assured to us “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

The birth of a child provides an apt word picture of the new, redeemed life

that God gives by the unseen working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7). Without this spiritual rebirth, no one can enter the kingdom of heaven (vs. 3).

The Christian life is a hopeful, forward-looking life. We anticipate great and wonderful things. Every true Christian is a joint heir with Christ of the glory that is to come (Rom. 8:17).

Inheritance is a privilege of membership in a *family*. However, an inheritance of earthly wealth can be wasted or stolen or destroyed. How different is the indestructible inheritance that is “reserved in heaven” (I Pet. 1:4) for God’s children! “The things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (I Cor. 2:9) are more wonderful than anything that has ever been seen or imagined.

Furthermore, God’s children are kept by His power until their salvation in all its glory is revealed. He is the one who on that day “is able to keep [us] from falling, and to present [us] faultless” (Jude 1:24).

The Apostle Peter knew from experience the power of God to keep His chosen ones from falling. Jesus had told him, “Satan hath desired to have you, . . . but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:31-32).

Peter stumbled badly and denied Jesus three times, but God did not forsake him. Soon he was restored to Christ's service. God's true children, though they may stumble for a time, are held securely in His hand until their salvation is fully revealed "in the last time" (I Pet. 1:5).

Here we see the past, present, and future of our salvation. We have been born again, we are being kept, and we look forward to a glory that is yet to be revealed.

OUR FAITH WILL ENDURE— I Pet. 1:6-9

Confident that God will fulfill all that He has promised, a Christian can rejoice even in suffering.

Peter wrote this letter from his tender, pastoral heart. He remembered that he had been commissioned by Jesus to feed His lambs (John 21:15). He knew that his readers were enduring hardships as they strove to do right in an unrighteous world. He reminded them that the basis for their rejoicing was not their outward circumstances but their salvation.

Although no suffering seems brief when we are enduring it, we must remember that our hardships are only for a season, in contrast to our imperishable, eternal inheritance in heaven. The apostle did not dismiss his readers' hardships lightly. He acknowledged that they were "manifold" (I Pet. 1:6) and caused "heaviness," or distress.

Gold is one of the most precious metals. It is proved genuine, not destroyed, by the refiner's fire. Even so, it has no eternal value; it is part of this passing world that ultimately will be destroyed.

Like the refiner's fire, our hardships have a purpose. They are trials designed by God. Our faith in God is proved genuine by the fire of suffering. But, unlike gold, faith has eternal value. Our tested and proven faith will bring glory to God when Jesus returns

to earth.

It is correct to emphasize faith in Jesus. But let us remember that He seeks not only our trust but also our *love*. Although His presence is invisible, it is very real and produces joy that words cannot describe.

How shall we endure our temporary suffering in this world? We must focus on the heavenly and eternal outcome of our faith: the salvation of our souls.

OUR SALVATION WAS FORETOLD—I Pet. 1:10-12

The gospel of Jesus Christ did not emerge as a brand-new message when Jesus came. Throughout the history of Israel, God's prophets had spoken and written of the grace that was to come as the Holy Spirit inspired them (II Pet. 1:21).

Jesus declared that the Old Testament Scriptures are a testimony of Him (John 5:39). He spoke at length of their witness regarding His suffering and the glory that would follow (Luke 18:31-33).

The prophets did not fully understand the message that God was delivering through them. When and how would these things happen? How could the Saviour be both a Suffering Servant and a Glorious King?

In light of the New Testament Scriptures, we are privileged to understand the prophets' words better than the prophets did. When God spoke through them, it was for our benefit.

SIDELIGHTS

Manifold temptations. It is important to understand how the word "temptation" is used in the Bible. It does not always mean "enticement to sin." In that sense, God never will tempt us (Jas. 1:13-14).

Trials and testings are also called temptations. In this sense, "God did tempt Abraham" (Gen. 22:1), for example. These events are under God's sovereign direction and for His purposes.

Spirit of Christ. This is God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. He so directed the writers of the Bible that their writings were exactly as God intended. That process is called “inspiration” (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:21).

The term “Spirit of Christ” does not confuse the Members of the Godhead; it expresses the unity and harmony among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Teach that the Christian faith is forward-looking. The hope of heaven gives us joy even when we must endure many hardships.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Ask God for wisdom as you seek to apply this lesson to your students’ lives. The early adolescent years are a time of change and uncertainty. Anxiety, loneliness, and rejection are common. Young people may be ridiculed, maligned, or excluded due to convictions they hold.

Locate or sketch a map of Bible lands that shows Asia Minor and Rome.

Presenting the Lesson

Introduce the human author of I Peter. Help your students recall incidents from the life of Simon Peter. Conclude with Jesus’ final instructions to him: “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15). Show that Peter’s New Testament letters are part of his ministry that continues to feed Jesus’ followers today.

Emphasize that Peter was writing to people with real-life struggles like ours. Use the map to show their location in Asia

Minor (present-day Turkey). Also point out Rome, where the Apostle Peter wrote (figuratively called Babylon in I Peter 5:13).

LESSON FOR TODAY

The keys to joy in the Christian life are found in our lesson text: Give praise to God. Set your hope on your heavenly inheritance. Adore the Saviour. Keep studying God’s Word.

Do not wait until heaven to enjoy the benefits of salvation. If we set our thoughts on our Saviour and the glorious future He assures us, we can live in joy and hope now, no matter how difficult our situation may be.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. OUR HOPE IS ALIVE—I Pet. 1:3-5
- II. OUR FAITH WILL ENDURE—I Pet. 1:6-9
- III. OUR SALVATION WAS FORETOLD—I Pet. 1:10-12

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the Christian’s heavenly inheritance differ from any earthly inheritance (I Pet. 1:4)?
2. What enables a Christian to rejoice even in the midst of suffering (vs. 6)?
3. Explain what is meant when we say the Scriptures were inspired by God (cf. II Tim. 3:16)?
4. How does the witness of the Old Testament prophets benefit us today?

Scripture Lesson Text

II PET. 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Je'sus Christ.

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Je'sus Christ.

12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know *them*, and be established in the present truth.

13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting *you* in remembrance;

14 Knowing that shortly I must put off *this* my tabernacle, even as our Lord Je'sus Christ hath shewed me.

Equipped for Godliness

Lesson: II Peter 1:3-14

Read: II Peter 1:1-21

TIME: about A.D. 64

PLACE: unknown

GOLDEN TEXT—“His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (II Peter 1:3).

Lesson and Its Truth

Jesus' mission to earth was all about bringing life. He said, “I am come that they might have life” (John 10:10). Through His gospel, we who were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) have been regenerated spiritually.

God equips His children for living their new lives, and He does it perfectly. It is then our duty to use what He has given in disciplined, sober Christian living.

GOD HAS EQUIPPED YOU— II Pet. 1:3-4

There is nothing ordinary about the Christian life. It is by God's divine power, not by our own might or wisdom, that we are equipped to live in godliness. We possess these resources through our knowledge of Him who has called us. To know God and Jesus Christ, whom He sent, is to possess life eternal (John 17:3).

Contemplate the awesome concept of knowing God. We are created in His image; our finite minds can, in a limited way, learn of His power, mind, and ways.

God has “called us to glory and virtue” and to be “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:3-4). This does not mean that we acquire His infinite perfections, in this life or in heaven, for we shall always be finite creatures. It does mean

that He will develop in us, in a true and substantial way, qualities that reside in Him: holiness, justice, truth, faithfulness, wisdom, mercy, and goodness.

NOW DO YOUR PART—II Pet. 1:5-7

The marks of true Christians do not develop without effort on our part. God is at work within us (Phil. 2:13), but our role is not passive. He has provided “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3), and we ought to “[give] all diligence” (vs. 5) to developing Christian character.

“Faith” is listed first, and it is necessary for all that follows. This is not the popular concept of faith, which is merely a confident optimism. Biblical faith is always centered on its *object*, the God whose promises never fail.

“Virtue” is inward moral excellence that is manifested outwardly. It produces a reputation that is above reproach. “Knowledge” is gained as we study and inquire to know God's mind and will. This means that no Christian has a right to be mentally lazy; rather, we all must seek to have well-taught and discerning minds.

“Temperance” is self-discipline. It means our natural appetites and pas-

sions do not rule us; rather, we gain mastery over them, not giving in to laziness or self-indulgence. “Patience” is more than just enduring minor annoyances graciously. It is persevering long in the Christian life, even when we are strongly tempted to quit.

“Godliness” speaks of the inner, Godward focus of our attitude and affections that ought to govern our thoughts, words, and actions. “Brotherly kindness” is godliness expressed in relationships with fellow believers. A sacrificial mercy and generosity should prevail among God’s children (Gal. 6:10; I John 3:16).

Finally, “charity” is the selfless love described in I Corinthians 13. Like God’s love for us, it is given freely, not in response to being loved. This love is seen in the deeds it produces.

KEEP MAKING PROGRESS— II Pet. 1:8-11

For Christians, character development should never be at a standstill. Our desire should be to develop character in which these virtues “abound” (II Pet. 1:8). The apostle’s words speak of life and growth. This is a flourishing inner goodness that makes us “neither . . . barren nor unfruitful.”

Contrast the professing Christian who is indifferent to these things. He lacks spiritual vision. The basic gospel truth is that we were cleansed from our former sins, and this should never be forgotten. Rather, it should energize us with joy and gratitude. Now that we have been saved, we ought to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

The apostle gave another pastoral exhortation to “give diligence” (II Pet. 1:10, cf. vs. 5). God has provided the means for us to live the Christian life (vs. 3); now we are to apply ourselves with discipline.

We do not guarantee our salvation when we make our “calling and election sure” (II Pet. 1:10); it is God who calls and saves and keeps us from

falling. Rather, this verse speaks of our own assurance of our standing with God. Growth in Christian character (with the good works that it produces) assures us and confirms to others that we are His. “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (I John 2:3).

Always keep in mind the goal: “entrance . . . into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:11). The hope of heaven should not make us indifferent to this world and its needs. Rather, it gives us comfort and strength as we diligently fulfill our calling here and now.

A PASTOR’S LAST COUNSEL— II Pet. 1:12-14

Jesus had commissioned the Apostle Peter to feed His sheep (John 21:17). Many years later, knowing that his death was near, Peter remained diligent in his duty. Let us resolve to follow his example of faithfulness to the end of our days.

He was not now teaching new truths but rather reminding his readers of what they had been taught. He felt impelled to stir up these believers regarding things already stored in their memories.

Let us acquire a rich store of God’s truth in our memories, for it is vitally important in the Christian life. Let us also listen to Christian teachers and friends who will stir up these truths in our hearts.

Peter referred to his physical body as a mere tent. This earthly body is a temporary dwelling, a tabernacle. Life is brief, and soon it will pass. We look forward to our permanent dwelling, which is “eternal in the heavens” (II Cor. 5:1).

For many years Peter had understood that he would die a martyr’s death; Jesus had told him so, in veiled language (John 21:18-19). Now a more definite word from the Lord had come, telling Peter that the time was near.

SIDELIGHTS

As long as I am in this tabernacle.

The apostle's words remind us that the opportunities of this life are limited because our time on earth is short. Peter resolved to fill his remaining days with obedience to the task Jesus had given him.

Moses contemplated the shortness of life and prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Learn to regard each day as a God-given set of opportunities to seek and do His will.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Teach that God's power is released to transform our lives as we apply His provision in diligent Christian living.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Prepare to explain each character quality in terms meaningful to your students. For example, "self-discipline" will be understood better than "temperance." "Unselfish love" will be more meaningful than "charity."

Create some realistic anecdotes about youngsters practicing (or failing to practice) these virtues in real-life situations among family and peers.

Presenting the Lesson

Have the students think about their various interests and hobbies (for example, fishing or baseball or music). Let them describe the equipment they cannot perform without. Explain that God has outfitted His children perfectly for the life He has called them to. Challenge them to identify what is right or wrong in the anecdotes you have prepared.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Christian character is developed in small steps. In light of this lesson's list of Christian virtues, urge each student to identify one point for improvement. It might be a need to show compassion toward a classmate (charity) or to abstain from unworthy entertainments (virtue, godliness).

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. GOD HAS EQUIPPED YOU—
II Pet. 1:3-4**
- II. NOW DO YOUR PART—II Pet.
1:5-7**
- III. KEEP MAKING PROGRESS—
II Pet. 1:8-11**
- IV. A PASTOR'S LAST COUNSEL—
II Pet. 1:12-14**

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. In what ways can we become more like God? What are some qualities of God that we will never attain?
2. List some influences in your life that oppose the Christian character qualities listed in II Peter 1:5-7.
3. Suppose someone says, "God will accomplish His purposes without my efforts." How would you answer him?
4. Why is it important to be reminded of Bible truths that we have long known and understood?

Scripture Lesson Text

1 PET. 4:1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

2 That he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

3 For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gen'tiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you*:

5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be

judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

10 As every man hath received the gift, *even* so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God; if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Je'sus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Serving One Another

Lesson: I Peter 4:1-11

Read: I Peter 4:1-19

TIME: A.D. 63

PLACE: from Babylon (possibly Rome)

GOLDEN TEXT—“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Peter 4:10).

Lesson and Its Truth

When we think about God’s grace, we think about salvation. Grace is God’s undeserved favor by which we are saved (Eph. 2:8-9). We are delivered from God’s wrath and adopted into His family as joint heirs with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Less often we think of God’s grace as something entrusted to each believer to manage in the service of his fellow saints. Yet the Bible teaches exactly that. If a Christian does not regard himself as a steward of the grace of God, his understanding of grace is incomplete.

FORSAKING SIN—I Pet. 4:1-6

Say no to old passions (I Pet. 4:1-2). “Forasmuch . . . as” simply means “therefore.” It introduces an idea that follows logically from what precedes. The subject was the suffering of Jesus Christ, who “once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (3:18).

His suffering “in the flesh” (I Pet. 4:1) provides the attitude we should adopt. Since we are identified with Him and He has dealt with sin once and for all, we too ought to be finished with sin. As the Apostle Paul taught, “Reckon . . . yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God” (Rom. 6:11).

We are instructed to arm ourselves with this attitude. We must train and discipline our inner selves, because the fruit of our lives issues from within. It is by the renewing of our mind that we are transformed to do His will (Rom. 12:2).

We need armor (Eph. 6:11-17) because there are enemies of the Christ-centered way of life. Satan and his hosts, the influence of a wicked world, and the sinful tendency of our own hearts all must be resisted.

No matter what a Christian’s past life has been, God teaches him to focus on “the rest of his time” (I Pet. 4:2). Life is always from now on. What will you live for in your remaining days on earth? There are just two ways: “the lusts of men” (selfish human desires) and “the will of God” (vs. 2).

Say no to the world’s ways (I Pet. 4:3-6). To paraphrase the apostle’s words, Enough of past wickedness! The list that follows names the corrupt habits of “the Gentiles,” that is, people who lived outside the influence of God’s laws. The Jewish nation was rightfully mindful of the moral excellence of their law, which God had given to Moses.

The list of vices encompasses degenerate behavior of all kinds, includ-

ing gluttony, drunkenness, and sexual immorality. Such revelry often was related to the idol worship of the surrounding pagan culture; therefore the list concludes with “abominable idolatries” (I Pet. 4:3).

Those who live degenerate lives “think it strange” (I Pet. 4:4) when one of their number forsakes his old ways and his old friends to embrace righteousness. Not surprisingly, they speak abusively of such a person. They will someday “give account” (vs. 5) to God, the righteous Judge.

It is good for God’s people to remember that Judgment Day is coming. It assures us that all our efforts at righteousness will be vindicated and rewarded and that the wrongs we suffer will be judged.

The language that follows (I Pet. 4:6) is difficult to interpret. “Them that are dead” probably refers to saints who had died physically but who first had received the gospel and been saved. They experienced the judgment of death just like all mortals, but in spirit they were very much alive.

EMBRACING SERVANTHOOD— I Pet. 4:7-11

A new outlook (I Pet. 4:7). “The end of all things is at hand.” When we say the Lord’s return is imminent, we simply mean it could occur at any time. That is what the apostles taught to their generation, and faithful Christians have lived with that expectation for nearly two thousand years.

In anticipation of the Lord’s return, Peter emphasized three essentials of the Christian life. Be sober-minded, for it is a serious matter to stand at the threshold of eternity. Be watchful, for being on the alert for the Lord’s return will keep you faithful to His commands. Be prayerful, for He accomplishes His will through the prayers of His people.

A fellowship of love (I Pet. 4:8-11). Love for one another should govern all relationships among the saints. “Charity” is unselfish love. “Hospitality . . . without grudging” is the performance of charity.

Christians ought to be willing to bear expense and inconvenience to help a brother or sister in need. Remember that Peter was writing to Christians facing hostility and hardship (I Pet. 1:6; 2:12). At such times, the need for Christians to help and support one another is especially great.

Besides the duty to show love to the saints, which binds every Christian, there is a duty that is unique to each individual. Within God’s family, “there are diversities of gifts” (I Cor. 12:4) When God gives a gift, a duty always comes with it. We are gifted so that we may “minister . . . one to another” (I Pet. 4:10). This is an aspect of the grace of God, and His gifts are “manifold,” or varied.

When we use our gifts, we are to remember God, who gave them (I Pet. 4:11). If your gift is to speak, speak in accordance with the words of God, who has first spoken to us. If your gift is to minister, or serve, be mindful that God enables you. Remember always that the Christian life is purpose-oriented, “that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (cf. I Cor. 10:31).

SIDELIGHTS

Without grudging. Your attitude matters. The apostle urged his readers to show not just hospitality one to another but hospitality without grudging. The underlying Greek word suggests a reluctance or resentment that is not entirely hidden—in other words, a murmuring or muted complaining.

Remember that God loves a cheerful giver (II Cor. 9:7). If you are tempted to resent the burden of serving others, ask Him to give you a heart of “fervent charity” (I Pet. 4:8).

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Show that Christians are to live in anticipation of the Lord's return. This means living soberly and prayerfully and using God's gifts in loving service to our fellow saints.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

Consider how readily your students may identify with the original readers of I Peter. Some of them may endure mocking and bullying when they take a stand for righteousness amid a defiling youth culture.

Intermediate students are not too young to serve in significant ways. Prepare to discuss how they might show God's grace in informal settings and in organized church ministries.

Presenting the Lesson

Part of the lesson must be presented in negative terms: the rebel's way of life must be forsaken and avoided. Caution against a self-righteous attitude, which might provoke undue scorn and hostility.

Emphasize the important role that young students fill among the Lord's people. When they are present and serving in the church, it is a great encouragement to the older saints.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Your mental habits are important. Seek to develop a thought life that is finished with sin and looking forward to Jesus' return.

Prepare to be different from the sin-

ners around you, who may turn hostile and abusive. Beware of self-righteousness; rather, pray for those who mistreat you (Matt. 5:44).

Aim to develop more sober, disciplined, and prayerful habits of living. Pray for a generous, loving spirit that is willing to serve others in ways that may be costly and inconvenient. Seek to use your gifts in the service of your fellow Christians.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. **FORSAKING SIN—I Pet. 4:1-6**
 - A. **Say no to old passions (vss. 1-2)**
 - B. **Say no to the world's ways (vss. 3-6)**
- II. **EMBRACING SERVANTHOOD—I Pet. 4:7-11**
 - A. **A new outlook (vs. 7)**
 - B. **A fellowship of love (vss. 8-11)**

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. A Christian "should live the rest of his time" for "the will of God" (I Pet. 4:2). What are the advantages of starting on this path early in life?
2. What specific steps can a young Christian take to arm himself against influences that would entice him into defiling behavior?
3. How should our attitude and behavior be affected by remembering that Jesus could return at any time?
4. How can we discover and develop the unique gifts God has given us for service among His people?

Scripture Lesson Text

II PET. 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.

5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should per-

ish, but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

11 *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

15a And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation.

The Hope of His Coming

Lesson: II Peter 3:3-15a

Read: II Peter 3:1-18

TIME: about A.D. 64

PLACE: unknown

GOLDEN TEXT—“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

Lesson and Its Truth

Ever since Jesus ascended to heaven, His followers have looked expectantly for His return. This is the blessed hope of the Christian.

How can we keep this hope alive when His coming is long delayed? Where can we find reassurance when we are surrounded by scoffers who ridicule the promise of His return?

God has anticipated these questions. In this lesson, we will consider His answers.

IGNORANT SCOFFERS— II Pet. 3:3-7

The Apostle Peter wrote about “the last days” (II Pet. 3:3). The New Testament writers were mindful that they lived in the last days—not necessarily the end of history, but the era before the final events. The Saviour had come in fulfillment of Scripture, and the next thing they anticipated was His second coming.

One sign of that final age can be seen all around us today. There are scoffers who desire only to satisfy their sinful desires. Notice that mind-set and lifestyle go together. Those who mock God’s words also live morally

degraded lives, “walking after their own lusts” (II Pet. 3:3).

Scoffers ridicule the notion that Jesus will return as the reigning King and Judge of the earth. In their eyes, the world continues as it always has since ancient times—in fact, since the beginning of the world.

Such mockers are “willingly . . . ignorant” (II Pet. 3:5). This is not the ignorance of the earnest seeker who desires to be taught. It is the willful ignorance of the unrighteous who suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18-20). They will not come to terms with the knowledge of God that resides deep in their hearts, for then they would have to submit in obedience to Him.

They deny that God created the world of nature. The Bible teaches that “the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). He spoke, “and it was done” (Ps. 33:9).

Just as surely as God sent the cataclysmic Flood of Noah’s day, so He will intervene again at Judgment Day, the day of destruction of the ungodly (II Pet. 3:6-7). Until then, the heavens and the earth are “kept in store” by His almighty decree.

EXPECTANT SAINTS—II Pet. 3:8-10

The apostle addressed his readers as his “beloved” (II Pet. 3:8). Love for our fellow saints is a mark of every true Christian. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (I John 3:14).

Next is an exhortation: “Be not ignorant” (II Pet. 3:8). A true Christian will not persist in willful ignorance as scoffers do. But there is also ignorance that results from the neglect or absence of sound teaching, and we must guard against it.

God’s perspective on the passing of time is not like ours. Moses contemplated God’s eternal existence and prayed, “A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past” (Ps. 90:4). He also reflected on the shortness of human life: “It is soon cut off, and we fly away” (vs. 10). We humans see a brief window of perhaps eighty years, while God sees all of eternity.

We should not think that God is “slack” (II Pet. 3:9), or slow, to keep the promise of Christ’s return. Rather, we should see His gracious patience. Jesus’ coming is delayed so that the day of salvation may be prolonged and more souls may “come to repentance.”

The Day of the Lord will come like “a thief in the night” (II Pet. 3:10); that is, it will surprise all who are unprepared for it. The apostle here described only the final outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth. This destruction of the earth by fire will follow Jesus’ return and His glorious reign of peace.

LIVING IN EXPECTATION— II Pet. 3:11-15a

Truth has consequences. Here, in the usual pattern of the New Testament letters, doctrinal teaching gives way to instruction for living.

Knowing about God’s plan for the future indicates “what manner of persons” (II Pet. 3:11) we ought to be. Our lives should be marked by holy con-

duct and godliness—that is, behavior and character befitting people who live in anticipation of Judgment Day. (In earlier times, “conversation” meant conduct or behavior. That is how it should be understood here.)

“Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (II Pet. 3:12) carries the idea of expectantly waiting. Consider the amazing thought that we can actually hasten the coming of that day. Through our prayers, our obedience, and our faithful proclaiming of the gospel, God is accomplishing what He has purposed to complete before the end.

God’s plan for the ages does not end in doom. He teaches us to “look for new heavens and a new earth” (II Pet. 3:13) where righteousness will prevail.

The expectation of heaven should be more than a comfort during our time on earth; it should sharpen our desire to “be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (II Pet. 3:14). Spiritual wholeness is a state of peace with God, with others, and with ourselves (cf. Rom. 5:1). Moral excellence ought to be the goal and desire of every Christian.

Again the apostle emphasizes the patience of God. When Judgment Day is delayed, the day of salvation is prolonged. This demonstrates the merciful, long-suffering character of God (II Pet. 3:15).

SIDELIGHTS

All things continue as they were. In their science classes your students may learn a principle called “uniformitarianism,” meaning that the processes of nature have always operated, without exception, in ways that can be observed and measured now. This outlook denies God’s intervention in the affairs of this world.

It is true that nature is governed by consistent laws. The study of science, with all its benefits, is possible because of these laws. But the Bible also affirms that God

governs and intervenes in His world.

God created and sustains all things by His almighty word (Heb. 1:1-3), and He can overrule laws of nature when He wills to do so. Miracles are those exceptional events in which God occasionally overrules nature's laws. Someday God will intervene drastically in judgment; the Flood in Noah's day is the historic precedent for this.

LESSON THROUGH THE TEACHER

Purpose

Teach that Christ's return is still the blessed hope of the Christian and that it should comfort us and motivate godly living.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

As you pray and study, be mindful of your students' everyday lives. Do they attend schools where history and science are taught from a viewpoint that denies God's role? Do they have peers who scoff at Christian beliefs?

Before class, draw two clusters of stick figures on the board. Label one cluster "SCOFFERS" and the other "SAINTS."

Presenting the Lesson

Your students have observed mockery of biblical faith from teachers, peers, or entertainment media. Discuss what they have seen and the proper Christian response to it.

Use your drawing. From time to time, erase one figure among the "SCOFFERS" and redraw it among the "SAINTS." Emphasize what God is doing as we await Jesus' return. His will and purpose are to bring sinners to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

LESSON FOR TODAY

We must live amid those who deny and ridicule what we believe, but we must not become shaken or angered by their scoffing. Rather, let us pray for their salvation. Also prepare to speak humbly and persuasively to those who are earnestly seeking the truth (I Pet. 3:15).

Do not doubt or become impatient at the long wait for the Lord's return. Rejoice that the day of salvation is prolonged. Develop the disciplined holiness that befits one who is looking forward to and preparing for His coming.

LESSON IN OUTLINE

- I. IGNORANT SCOFFERS—II Pet. 3:3-7
- II. EXPECTANT SAINTS—II Pet. 3:8-10
- III. LIVING IN EXPECTATION—II Pet. 3:11-15a

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How should we respond to a scoffer who only wants to mock God's words (Prov. 26:4; Matt. 7:6)? How would our response differ for a sincere seeker who wants to learn?
2. The expectation of the Day of the Lord should be life changing (II Pet. 3:11, 14). Discuss the character and behavior that should follow.
3. How is the ignorance of scoffers different from the ignorance of a genuine Christian who needs to be taught (vss. 5, 8)?

Daily Bible Readings for Home Study and Worship

(Readings are for the week previous to the lesson topics.)

1. 3 March. A Glorious Reign Ahead

M.—The Lord Deals with the Mighty. Dan. 5:13-21.
T.—The Lord Judges the Powerful. Dan. 5:22-31.
W.—The Plot to Undermine Daniel. Dan. 6:1-10.
T.—The Plot Fails. Dan. 6:11-23.
F.—Daniel's God Is Exalted. Dan. 6:24-28.
S.—Daniel's Vision. Dan. 7:1-8.
S.—The Exaltation of the Coming One. Dan. 7:9-14.

2. 10 March. Daniel's Prayer of Confession

M.—Daniel's Resolve. Dan. 1:8-15.
T.—Daniel's Recognition. Dan. 1:16-21.
W.—The King's Challenge. Dan. 2:1-11.
T.—Daniel's Intervention. Dan. 2:12-16.
F.—Daniel's Success. Dan. 2:36-49.
S.—Daniel's Prayer of Supplication. Dan. 9:15-19.
S.—Daniel's Prayer of Confession. Dan. 9:4-14.

3. 17 March. Daniel's Vision Explained

M.—A Guide into the Future. Exod. 23:20-25.
T.—A Messenger of Rebuke. Judg. 2:1-5.
W.—A Messenger with Good News. Luke 1:8-20.
T.—A Messenger from God. Luke 1:26-38.
F.—A Helper in Understanding. Dan. 8:13-18.
S.—A Helper in Response to Prayer. Dan. 9:20-27.
S.—A Helper in Facing the Future. Dan. 8:19-26.

4. 24 March. The Privilege of Serving

M.—Keeping the Passover. Deut. 16:1-8.
T.—The Meaning of the Passover. Exod. 12:21-27.
W.—Preparations for the Last Supper. Luke 22:7-13.
T.—Partaking of the Lord's Table. I Cor. 10:14-22.
F.—Showing Contempt for the Church. I Cor. 11:17-22.
S.—Examine Yourselves. I Cor. 11:23-32.
S.—The Last Supper. Luke 22:14-30.

5. 31 March. Hope Restored (Easter)

M.—The Trial Before Pilate. Luke 23:13-25.
T.—The Crucifixion of Jesus. Luke 23:32-38.
W.—The Death of Jesus. Luke 23:44-49.
T.—The Burial of Jesus. Luke 23:50-56.
F.—The Messiah's Suffering. Isa. 53:3-9.
S.—The Empty Tomb. Luke 24:1-12.
S.—The Lord Has Risen Indeed! Luke 24:13-21, 28-35.

6. 7 April. Promises Kept

M.—Appearances of the Risen Lord. I Cor. 15:1-8.
T.—The Appearance to Mary Magdalene. John 20:11-18.
W.—The Appearance to Thomas. John 20:24-29.
T.—The Appearance to Seven Disciples. John 21:1-8.
F.—Breakfast with the Disciples. John 21:9-14.
S.—Simon Peter Called to Follow. John 21:15-19.
S.—You Are Witnesses of These Things. Luke 24:36-53.

7. 14 April. New Power to Proclaim the Truth

M.—I Will Not Leave You Orphaned. John 14:18-24.
T.—Abide in Me. John 15:1-7.
W.—The Coming of the Advocate. John 16:1-11.

T.—Raised Up and Freed from Death. Acts 2:22-28.
F.—The Promise of the Spirit. Acts 2:14-21.
S.—The Promise Received. Acts 2:29-36.
S.—The Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:1-13.

8. 21 April. Living with Hope

M.—The Hopeless Human Situation. Isa. 59:9-15.
T.—The Source of Hope. Isa. 59:15-21.
W.—Waiting in Hope. Ps. 38:9-15.
T.—Hoping Against Hope. Rom. 4:16-25.
F.—Seizing the Hope Set Before Us. Heb. 6:13-20.
S.—The God of Hope. Rom. 15:7-13.
S.—Encourage One Another with Hope. I Thess. 4:13—5:11.

9. 28 April. Standing Firm in Hope

M.—An Appointed Time. Ps. 75:1-10.
T.—The Day Is Coming. Mal. 4:1-6.
W.—No Good Thing Withheld. Ps. 84:1-12.
T.—My Help Comes from the Lord. Ps. 121:1-8.
F.—The Hope of Eternal Life. Titus 3:1-7.
S.—Kept Sound and Blameless. I Thess. 5:23-28.
S.—Eternal Comfort and Good Hope. II Thess. 2:1-3, 9-17.

10. 5 May. A Living Hope

M.—A Desperate Cry for Hope. Job 6:8-13.
T.—Days Without Hope. Job 7:1-6.
W.—Will Mortals Live Again? Job 14:7-17.
T.—My Times Are in Your Hands. Ps. 31:9-16.
F.—The Lord Preserves the Faithful. Ps. 31:19-24.
S.—Hope in God's Faithfulness. Lam. 3:19-24.
S.—New Birth into a Living Hope. I Pet. 1:3-12.

11. 12 May. Equipped for Godliness

M.—Full of Goodness and Knowledge. Rom. 15:14-21.
T.—The Beginning of Knowledge. Prov. 1:2-7.
W.—An Example in Self-control. Titus 1:5-9.
T.—Enduring to the End. Matt. 24:9-14.
F.—A Life of Godliness and Dignity. I Tim. 2:1-7.
S.—Love for One Another. I Pet. 3:8-12.
S.—Standing on God's Precious Promises. II Pet. 1:3-14.

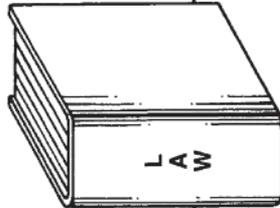
12. 19 May. Serving One Another

M.—Trust God to Provide. Luke 12:22-28.
T.—The Unfailing Treasure. Luke 12:29-34.
W.—Be Alert and Ready. Luke 12:35-40.
T.—The Thoughtful and Prudent Manager. Luke 12:41-48.
F.—The Perfect Gift from Above. Jas. 1:12-18.
S.—Faithful in Little and Much. Luke 16:10-13.
S.—Good Stewards of God's Grace. I Pet. 4:1-11.

13. 26 May. The Hope of His Coming

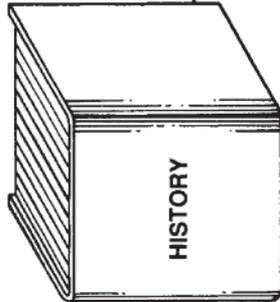
M.—Distressing Times Will Come. II Tim. 3:1-9.
T.—Warnings for False Prophets. Jer. 23:23-32.
W.—Warnings for Rich Oppressors. Jas. 5:1-6.
T.—Return to the Lord. Hos. 14:1-7.
F.—Teaching the Ways of God. Mic. 4:1-5.
S.—I Will Come Again. John 14:1-7.
S.—The Promise of the Lord's Coming. II Pet. 3:3-15.

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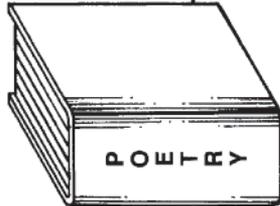
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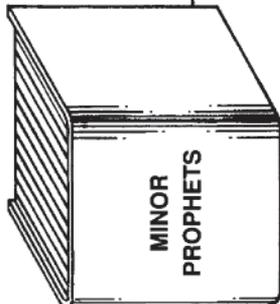
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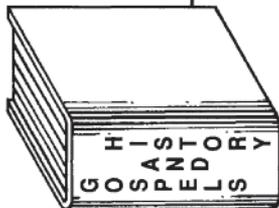
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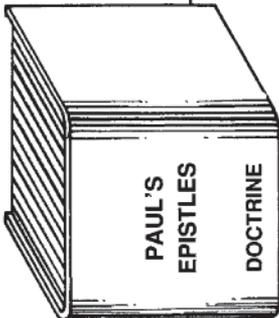
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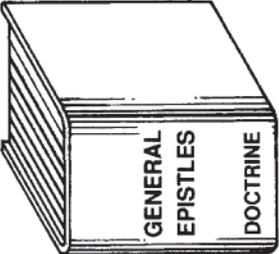
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Mark
Luke
John
Acts



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