

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

SPRING 2025
COSTLY SACRIFICES



▶ International Sunday School Lessons

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

A quarterly publication of **STANDARD PUBLISHING**

SPRING 2025 COSTLY SACRIFICES



CONTRIBUTORS

Lesson Development Chad Summa (1–2), Mark S. Krause (3, 10),
Doug Redford (4–5), Doug Hoffer (6, 9),
Jon Weatherly (7–8), Mark Hamilton (11–13)

Verbal Illustrations Jason Hitchcock (1–2), Mark S. Krause (3),
Ronald L. Nickelson (3–8, 12–13), Omar Palafox (4),
Lu Ann Nickelson (6), Chad Summa (7–9),
Andrew Wood (10–13)

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

What Do You Think? Andrew Wood (1–13)

EDITORIAL TEAM

Jason Hitchcock, Jane Ann Kenney,
and Taylor Z. Stamps

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

KJV Bible Teacher is published quarterly by Standard Publishing, www.standardpub.com. Copyright © 2024 by Standard Publishing, part of the David C Cook family, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Lessons are based on the *Uniform Series International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching* Copyright © 2020 Committee on the Uniform Series. Used by permission. Scripture taken from the *King James Version*.

Costly

Sacrifices

Special Features

	Page
Quarterly Quiz	226
Quarter at a Glance.	Editorial Staff 227
Get the Setting	Jason Hitchcock 228
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings)	229
“The World of Moses” (Map Feature).	231
A Passion for Teaching (Teacher Tips)	Brent L. Amato 232
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only)	481
Activity Pages (free download)	www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages
In the World (weekly online feature).	www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world

Lessons

Unit 1: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

March 2	A Kingdom of Priests, A Holy Nation	<i>Exodus 19:1-14</i>	233
March 9	A Space for God.	<i>Exodus 25:1-9; 26:1, 31-37</i>	241
March 16	The Ordination of Priests	<i>Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37</i>	249
March 23	Offering a Sweet Aroma to God	<i>Leviticus 1:3-17</i>	257
March 30	The Day of Atonement	<i>Leviticus 16:11-19</i>	265

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

April 6	Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice	<i>Hebrews 9:23-10:4, 11-14, 19-25</i>	273
April 13	Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice	<i>1 John 2:1-6; 4:9-17</i>	281
April 20	Christ Dies and Rises to New Life	<i>Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54; 28:1-10</i>	289
April 27	The Lamb Is Worthy	<i>Revelation 5:1-10</i>	297

Unit 3: Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

May 4	David's Sacrifice.	<i>1 Chronicles 21:14-30</i>	305
May 11	Solomon Dedicates the Temple	<i>2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11</i>	313
May 18	Worship Is Restored.	<i>Ezra 3:1-6, 10-13</i>	321
May 25	A Covenant Renewal	<i>Nehemiah 10:28-39</i>	329

Quarterly Quiz

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

Lesson 1

1. Departing Rephidim, the people camped in what desert? (Shechem, Sinai, Shiloh) *Exodus 19:2*
2. The Lord said that He would come to Moses in a thick cloud. T/F. *Exodus 19:9*

Lesson 2

1. The Lord said, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may _____ among them." *Exodus 25:8*
2. The curtain was to be hung on pillars made of what wood? (cedar, cypress, shittim) *Exodus 26:32*

Lesson 3

1. The ordination process began with offering two young, unblemished bullocks and one unblemished ram. T/F. *Exodus 29:1*
2. How many days did the ordination of Aaron and his sons last? (six, seven, eight) *Exodus 29:35*

Lesson 4

1. A burnt sacrifice from the herd was to be a male "without blemish." T/F. *Leviticus 1:3*
2. What did the priests sprinkle "round about upon the altar"? (blood, water, oil) *Leviticus 1:11*

Lesson 5

1. Aaron slaughtered a bullock for his own _____ offering. *Leviticus 16:11*
2. The cloud from what burning item would conceal the mercy seat? (wool, branches, incense) *Leviticus 16:13*

Lesson 6

1. The Law of Moses is "a _____ of good things to come." *Hebrews 10:1*
2. Believers must consider how to "provoke . . . love" and "good _____" in others. *Hebrews 10:24*

Lesson 7

1. Who is our advocate with God the Father? (Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, ourselves) *1 John 2:1*

2. Believers can know that we "dwell" in God and He in us because of His _____. *1 John 4:13*

Lesson 8

1. Matthew says that the guards at the tomb ran in fear after seeing the angel. T/F. *Matthew 28:4*
2. After Jesus' resurrection, the brethren would see Him in _____. *Matthew 28:10*

Lesson 9

1. One of the elders in John's vision speaks of "the Root of _____." *Revelation 5:5*
2. What stands "in the midst of the throne [and] . . . the elders"? (Lion, Eagle, Lamb) *Revelation 5:6*

Lesson 10

1. The angel of the Lord held what item in his hand? (sword, scale, scroll). *1 Chronicles 21:16*
2. David paid Ornan six hundred shekels of _____ for the place. *1 Chronicles 21:25*

Lesson 11

1. After Solomon's prayer, what came down from Heaven? (rain, fire, angel) *2 Chronicles 7:1*
2. How many sheep were sacrificed at the dedication of the temple? (120; 1,200; 120,000) *2 Chronicles 7:5*

Lesson 12

1. What month did the people gather "themselves together" in Jerusalem? (sixth, seventh, eighth) *Ezra 3:1*
2. All the people took trumpets and cymbals to praise the Lord. T/F. *Ezra 3:10*

Lesson 13

1. The priests, the Levites, and the people would cast lots to determine who would bring the offering of wood to the house of God. T/F. *Nehemiah 10:34*
2. The people proclaimed, "We will not _____ the house of our God." *Nehemiah 10:39*

Quarter at a Glance

by Editorial Staff

The themes of worship, sacrifices, and offerings run through the Scriptures. Grasping the sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant is essential to our understanding of the New Testament's presentation of Christ's sacrifice. This quarter will explore sacrifice and worship in the Old Testament and what the New Testament has to say about sacrifice and worship under the new covenant.

Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

The first unit of lessons covers parts of Exodus and Leviticus that describe the system of sacrifices and offerings that created a holy people and a place for the presence of the Lord. On Mount Sinai, the Lord decreed to Moses that the Old Testament covenant people are "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:6; see lesson 1). The Lord gave the people specific instructions for constructing a sanctuary known as the tabernacle, which contained "the holy place and the most holy" (26:33; see lesson 2). In the tabernacle (and, later, the temple), burnt offerings were presented to the Lord, following the expectations that He gave to the people (Leviticus 1:3-17; see lesson 4).

Not only did the Lord consecrate specific places, but He also consecrated specific people for a particular service. For example, from among the people, priests were chosen and ordained to officiate at the altar (Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37; see lesson 3).

Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

The second unit turns to New Testament texts that explore the significance of Jesus' perfect sacrifice. The writer of the book of Hebrews contrasts the annual sacrifices of the Law of Moses—a law that is "a shadow of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1)—with Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice (10:11-14; etc.; see lesson 6). The seventh lesson of the quarter comes from the epistles of John, where the author describes the love of God by His sending of His Son "to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Christ's resurrection on the third day confirms His sacrifice on the cross. Lesson 8 examines the details surrounding Christ's death and resurrection as told by the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54; 28:1-10). Christ is the glorious Lamb who was slain and whose blood has "redeemed us to God" (Revelation 5:9; see lesson 9). Even in the throne room of Heaven, the glorious Lamb is declared "worthy"!

Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

The final unit of the quarter looks at the unique relationship between the sanctuary and offerings or sacrifices. King David's choices led him to bear responsibility for his sin. An angel of the Lord spoke through the prophet Gad and told David to "set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite" (1 Chronicles 21:18; see lesson 10). David refused to accept a gift from Ornan for a sacrifice to the Lord because David would not "offer burnt offerings without cost" (21:24).

Even in the throne room of Heaven, the glorious Lamb is declared "worthy"!

Lesson 11 will consider the dedication of Solomon's temple and the lavish sacrifices that took place as part of that ceremony (2 Chronicles 7:1-7). However, after the people were exiled to Babylon, that temple was left in shambles. The foundation of a new temple would need to be laid by the people who had returned from exile. When the foundation of that temple was laid, the people celebrated the goodness of God, proclaiming that "his mercy endureth for ever" (Ezra 3:11; see lesson 12).

The quarter concludes with recounting the people's covenant renewal and their pledge to observe the commands of the Law of Moses and reject the abuse and neglect of the house of God (Nehemiah 10:28-39; see lesson 13).

Get the Setting

by Jason Hitchcock

Ask almost any Christian what Jesus has done, and you will likely hear about His “sacrifice.” This noun comes from the Latin word meaning “an offering to a deity,” but it is also used in a general sense to mean “something given in exchange for something else.” But don’t make the mistake of reading that metaphorical meaning back into Scripture. Rather, *sacrifice* was a vivid reality and a concrete image to all of Scripture’s original audiences.

Sacrifice in the Ancient World

Many ancient Near Eastern people practiced sacrifices because they believed their gods depended on these offerings for food. The texts and inscriptions of ancient Sumerian, Egyptian, Akkadian, and Hittite people all describe gods with human-sounding needs for food, clothing, and shelter. *Why did ancient people offer sacrifices?* Well, otherwise, their gods would get hungry. *Why did the people build temples and sanctuaries?* They knew their gods wanted fine houses in which to live. Most natural forces of the world—like the weather—were attributed to the actions of gods who could be pacified and appeased or hostile and malevolent, depending on whether or not their needs were met.

In this context, idols of wood or stone would mediate the presence of the deity in physical form. Idols could be washed, clothed, housed, and kept safe. Deities would receive food in the form of sacrifices and savor the fragrant odors of these offerings.

Sacrifice in the Life of Israel

Perhaps it is surprising that the God of Israel chose to request sacrifices at all. Nowhere in Scripture do the writers indicate that the God of Israel needs food or relies on humans to satisfy a need. Instead, the Sinai Covenant (Exodus 19–24) treats sacrifices as either (1) expressions of praise to a God who had rescued His people and chosen them for His own, or (2) a method of cleansing to allow a sinful people to remain in relationship to a

holy God. Atoning sacrifices were not about God’s needs but the needs of His people.

With this context in mind, we can imagine that the Hebrew people approached the smoking and thundering Mount Sinai prepared to agree to whatever their God required. But the covenant stipulations they heard—summarized by the ten “commandments” or “words” (Exodus 20:1-17)—were instructions *not* to make an idol or try to persuade God into doing what they wanted. Instead, God provided them with a series of commonsense directives for life as a community.

The creation of a priesthood, tabernacle space, and the Day of Atonement allowed the Israelites—still sinful people—to meet with God. God’s sacred space would have a home with them, first in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

Sacrifice Today

The exile of Judah and destruction of Solomon’s temple halted the sacrificial system. Returning Jews were eager to restart the daily offerings and restore proper sacrifices, but this never fixed the underlying sin problem common to all people.

Nowhere in the pagan religions of the ancient world had a deity ever offered himself or herself as a sacrifice on behalf of humans. That line of thinking upends expectations regarding sacrifices, for weren’t sacrifices supposed to give the gods what *they* wanted?

Jesus’ sacrifice shows that God’s most pressing desire was not to be appeased or set free of His labor. What God wanted most was a restoration of His creation through the defeat of the powers of sin and death. Jesus became the most enduring image of God’s love by offering himself as a sacrifice on behalf of others. Thus was the plan of God to present Christ as the “propitiation through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25). Because of His sacrifice, Jesus alone is worthy to sit as judge and receive praise and honor (Revelation 5:12).

Mon, May 12 Joy Comes with the Morning Psalm 30
 Tue, May 13 Songs of Gratitude Colossians 3:12-17
 Wed, May 14 Blessed Be the Merciful, Consoling God
 2 Corinthians 1:2-14
 Thu, May 15 Enter God's Presence with Thanksgiving Psalm 95
 Fri, May 16 Worship in the Spirit of God Philippians 3:1-14
 Sat, May 17 The Exiles Return Ezra 1
 Sun, May 18 Building a New Foundation Ezra 3:1-6, 10-13
 Mon, May 19 A New Covenant Jeremiah 31:27-34
 Tue, May 20 Saved by Grace Ephesians 2:1-10
 Wed, May 21 The Last Supper Luke 22:7-20
 Thu, May 22 Hear the Word of the Lord Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-12
 Fri, May 23 Remember God's Salvation Nehemiah 9:2-3, 6-17, 32
 Sat, May 24 A Better Covenant Hebrews 8
 Sun, May 25 Revitalized Worship Nehemiah 10:28-39

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 226

Lesson 1—1. Sinai. 2. True. **Lesson 2**—1. dwell. 2. shittim.
Lesson 3—1. False. 2. seven. **Lesson 4**—1. True. 2. blood.
Lesson 5—1. sin. 2. incense. **Lesson 6**—1. shadow. 2. works.
Lesson 7—1. Jesus Christ. 2. Spirit. **Lesson 8**—1. False. 2. Galilee. **Lesson 9**—1. David. 2. lamb. **Lesson 10**—1. sword. 2. gold. **Lesson 11**—1. fire. 2. 120,000. **Lesson 12**—1. seventh. 2. False. **Lesson 13**—1. True. 2. forsake.

This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Feb. 24	We Are Priests	Revelation 1:3-8
Tue, Feb. 25	Give Thanks to God's Holy Name	Psalms 106:36-48
Wed, Feb. 26	Be Holy	Leviticus 19:1-10
Thu, Feb. 27	Love Your Neighbor as Yourself	Leviticus 19:11-18
Fri, Feb. 28	Priests of God and Christ	Revelation 20:1-6
Sat, Mar. 1	Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly	Micah 6:1-8
Sun, Mar. 2	The Sacred Assembly	Exodus 19:1-14
Mon, Mar. 3	Idolatry Confronted	Ezekiel 14:1-11
Tue, Mar. 4	Desire for God's Presence	Psalms 26
Wed, Mar. 5	God's Glory Fills the Temple	Ezekiel 43:1-12
Thu, Mar. 6	Who May Draw Near?	Ezekiel 44:15-27
Fri, Mar. 7	The Temple of Christ's Body	John 2:12-22
Sat, Mar. 8	Worship God in Spirit and Truth	John 4:13-26
Sun, Mar. 9	Prepare a Sacred Space	Exodus 25:1-9; 26:1, 31-37
Mon, Mar. 10	A Compassionate High Priest	Hebrews 5
Tue, Mar. 11	A Chosen High Priest	Leviticus 8:1-13
Wed, Mar. 12	A Cleansed High Priest	Leviticus 8:14-23
Thu, Mar. 13	A Chaste High Priest	Psalms 133
Fri, Mar. 14	A Commendable High Priest	Hebrews 7:1-14
Sat, Mar. 15	A Continuous High Priest	Hebrews 7:15-28
Sun, Mar. 16	A Consecrated High Priest	Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37

Mon, Mar. 17 **Building a Spiritual House** 1 Peter 2:1-5
 Tue, Mar. 18 **Prayer Like Incense** Psalm 141
 Wed, Mar. 19 **The Fragrance of Knowing Christ** 2 Corinthians 2:12-17
 Thu, Mar. 20 **God's Delight** Zephaniah 3:14-20
 Fri, Mar. 21 **A Holy and Acceptable Sacrifice** Romans 12:1-8
 Sat, Mar. 22 **Worship Through Loving Genuinely** Romans 12:9-21
 Sun, Mar. 23 **An Acceptable Offering** Leviticus 1:3-17
 Mon, Mar. 24 **Delighting to Do God's Will** Psalm 40:1-8
 Tue, Mar. 25 **Safe in God's Love and Faithfulness** Psalm 40:9-17
 Wed, Mar. 26 **A Preferred Sanctuary** Hebrews 9:1-14
 Thu, Mar. 27 **Christ's Perfect Sacrifice** Hebrews 9:15-22
 Fri, Mar. 28 **Vertical and Horizontal Reconciliation** 2 Corinthians 5:12-21
 Sat, Mar. 29 **Approach God in Awe** Leviticus 16:1-10
 Sun, Mar. 30 **Cleanse the Sanctuary** Leviticus 16:11-19
 Mon, Mar. 31 **Enter God's Courts with an Offering** Psalm 96
 Tue, Apr. 1 **Christ's Suffering and Exaltation** 1 Peter 3:18-22
 Wed, Apr. 2 **Suffering Servant** Isaiah 52:13-53:3
 Thu, Apr. 3 **Light out of Anguish** Isaiah 53:4-12
 Fri, Apr. 4 **A Ransom for Many** Mark 10:41-45
 Sat, Apr. 5 **Christ in Heaven on Our Behalf** Hebrews 9:23-10:4
 Sun, Apr. 6 **Confidence in God's Presence** Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25
 Mon, Apr. 7 **Our Sins Have Hidden God's Face** Isaiah 59:1-8
 Tue, Apr. 8 **Healed by Christ's Wounds** 1 Peter 2:19-25
 Wed, Apr. 9 **The Promise of Eternal Life** John 3:1-15
 Thu, Apr. 10 **God So Loved the World** John 3:16-21
 Fri, Apr. 11 **Atonement Through His Blood** Romans 3:19-31
 Sat, Apr. 12 **Reconciled to God by Christ** Romans 5:1-15
 Sun, Apr. 13 **Atonement Through God's Son** 1 John 2:1-6; 4:9-17

Mon, Apr. 14 **From Despair to Praise** Psalm 71:12-24
 Tue, Apr. 15 **Made Perfect Through Suffering** Hebrews 2:1-13
 Wed, Apr. 16 **The Provider** Genesis 22:1-14
 Thu, Apr. 17 **Servanthood, Suspicion, and a Sign** Matthew 26:17-30
 Fri, Apr. 18 **Darkness, Despair, and Death** Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54
 Sat, Apr. 19 **Ransomed!** Psalm 49:1-15
 Sun, Apr. 20 **He Has Risen!** Matthew 28:1-10
 Mon, Apr. 21 **Here Is the Lamb of God!** John 1:29-36
 Tue, Apr. 22 **The Lord Has Become My Salvation** Psalm 118:1-14
 Wed, Apr. 23 **Live and Not Die** Psalm 118:15-29
 Thu, Apr. 24 **Worthy Ransom** 1 Peter 1:13-25
 Fri, Apr. 25 **Celebrate God** Psalm 99
 Sat, Apr. 26 **Live in the Light** Revelation 21:9-16, 21-27
 Sun, Apr. 27 **The Slaughtered, Conquering Lamb** Revelation 5:1-10
 Mon, Apr. 28 **Answer Me, O Lord** Psalm 86:1-7, 10-17
 Tue, Apr. 29 **Be Alert** 1 Peter 5
 Wed, Apr. 30 **The Lord Will Not Reject Forever** Lamentations 3:21-36
 Thu, May 1 **God Patiently Waits for Repentance** 2 Peter 3:1-10
 Fri, May 2 **Live the Godly Life** 2 Peter 3:11-18
 Sat, May 3 **A Presumptive King** 1 Chronicles 21:1-13
 Sun, May 4 **A Costly Sacrifice** 1 Chronicles 21:14-30
 Mon, May 5 **A Joyful Celebration** Ezra 6:14-22
 Tue, May 6 **God Heard Me in My Distress** Psalm 18:1-12
 Wed, May 7 **God in Mesopotamia** Acts 7:2-16
 Thu, May 8 **God in the Wilderness** Acts 7:30-41
 Fri, May 9 **God Needs No Temple** Acts 7:42-50
 Sat, May 10 **Hear Our Prayers, O God** 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14-27
 Sun, May 11 **God's Glory Fills the Temple** 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11

Map Feature



A Passion for Teaching

Teacher Tips by Brent L. Amato

In any teacher training, should we not consider inspiration before implementation, motivation before methodology, and passion before presentation? Think about teachers who have captivated you. I suspect one characteristic of those teachers was their sincere enthusiasm that flowed from passion for their role.

There are three major sources of passion for Christian teaching. These three are available to all who aspire to be excellent teachers.

Who Is Teaching: You in Christ!

Realize in the truest and best sense that it is not *just you* who is teaching, but rather *you in Christ*. This “you” is filled with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 2:20). Always keep in mind your spiritual resources for teaching. This means moving beyond human-based credentials to spiritual, God-based power (1 Corinthians 2:1, 3-5; Colossians 3:16). This enables you to identify your insecurities and anxieties about teaching so you can give them over to the Lord (1 Peter 5:7). When you do, you can move beyond Moses’ self-doubting responses to God’s call (Exodus 3:11; 4:10, 13) to confident acceptance of that call.

Realize that your role is more than a teacher—you are nothing less than a steward of the gospel (compare 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; 1 Timothy 1:11-12)! Be faithful and teach, looking forward to the day you will hear the commendation of our Lord: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

Realize also that we cannot fully comprehend the impact of a Spirit-filled, spiritually gifted teacher (John 14:12). *Passionately teach!*

What You Are Teaching: God’s Word!

Realize that you are teaching the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13)! When you hold your Bible, think of yourself as being like Moses, holding the tablets at Mount Sinai. The Bible is the inspired

Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16a). The Word of God identifies and meets your students’ deepest needs (Hebrews 4:12).

Realize that the Bible is profitable for all whom you teach (2 Timothy 3:16b-17); it will not fail to accomplish God’s purpose for them (Isaiah 55:11). *Passionately teach!*

Whom You Are Teaching: Your Students!

Realize that you are influencing your students individually and corporately in your church. Realize also that your students may change from week to week in how they respond and react to the sown Word. Like Peter, one student may walk into class as a coward in the courtyard one week (Matthew 26:69-75) and as a bold preacher in a public forum the following (Acts 2:14-36). Like Thomas, another student may come as a person of great courage one week (John 11:16), as a doubter the next (20:24-25), and as a devout worshipper the third (20:26-28).

In his book on managerial leadership, Kenneth H. Blanchard writes, “Everyone is a potential winner. Some people are disguised as losers; don’t let their appearance fool you.” God knows which students will yield that hundredfold crop (Matthew 13:8, 23), so let Him worry about that. Your goal as a teacher should be that every lesson will promote spiritual maturity for the building of the body of Christ as you sow the Word (Ephesians 4:11-16). *Passionately teach!*

Teaching as a Passion

Realize how awesome it is for a Christian to be privileged to teach the Bible to others! Make it your goal to be like Apollos, who not only was “fervent in the spirit, . . . and taught diligently the things of the Lord” (Acts 18:25) but also was open to being taught “the way of God more perfectly” (18:26). The old cliché “leaders are readers” includes the idea that teachers never stop learning. This, too, is part of your passion to teach.

A Kingdom of Priests, A Holy Nation

Devotional Reading: Leviticus 19:1-10

Background Scripture: Exodus 19

Exodus 19:1-14

1 In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.

2 For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.

3 And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him.

8 And all the people answered together, and said, all that the LORD hath spoken we will do.

And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.

9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

10 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes,

11 And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

12 And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death:

13 There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.

14 And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.

Key Text

Therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. —Exodus 19:5b-6a

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 1: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize God’s expectations as expressed through Moses.
2. Explain the concept of “covenant” in its original context.
3. Declare God’s praises as one of His treasured people.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Mediating Peace
- B. Lesson Context

I. Coming to Sinai (Exodus 19:1-2)

- A. The Wilderness (v. 1)
- B. The Mountain (v. 2)

II. God’s Chosen People (Exodus 19:3-6)

- A. Rescued (vv. 3-4)
Carried Along for the Journey
- B. Treasured (v. 5)
- C. Holy (v. 6)
Building a Foundation

III. God Shall Come (Exodus 19:7-14)

- A. The People Agree (vv. 7-8)
- B. Divine Presence Anticipated (v. 9)
- C. Moses Gives Instructions (vv. 10-14)

Conclusion

- A. Holy God, Holy People
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Mediating Peace

When I look at the news and see turmoil in the Middle East, I remember the wars I witnessed as a child. The nation of Israel had defeated its neighbors in the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973). Hostilities still persisted between the two sides. But something remarkable happened in 1978: two staunch enemies, Israel and Egypt, signed a peace treaty known as the Camp David Accords. Those talks didn’t resolve every issue or change the fact that the nations had fought bitterly. But Egypt formally recognized Israel’s right to exist, and in exchange, Israel returned all captured territory in the Sinai Peninsula.

Like all peace treaties between nations, it took both sides—represented by Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel—to find common ground and shared goals. The peace talks also required a patient mediator—the United States and President Jimmy Carter—to bring them together.

The key role of a mediator is related to today’s lesson in three ways. First, Moses played the role of communicator and mediator at Mount Sinai. Second, God communicated a plan through His mediator to form Israel to be a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Third, those functions took on new meaning at the coming of the ultimate mediator, Christ, who brings lasting peace to all who turn to Him with faith (Romans 5:1).

B. Lesson Context

Four hundred thirty years from the time of Joseph, God delivered Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 12:40; 18:10). Through miraculous plagues, which showed Egypt’s deities to be powerless (7:8–11:10; 12:29-42), God brought the people out into the wilderness, where He continued to protect and provide for them (Exodus 13–18). In spite of dangers and trials, the people arrived at their destination: Sinai, the mountain where God had first revealed himself to Moses (Exodus 3). Exodus 19 begins the climactic meeting of God with His redeemed people.

I. Coming to Sinai

(Exodus 19:1-2)

A. The Wilderness (v. 1)

1. In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.

The first two verses of Exodus 19 bookend the narrative that began at Exodus 7:16: Moses had been sent to bring the Hebrew people out of Egypt “that they might serve [God] in the wilderness.” The verse before us gives an indication of how long they had been traveling: this is *the third month* since leaving *Egypt* (compare Exodus 12:2; 13:4). The Hebrew word translated “month” can also mean “new moon” (examples: 1 Samuel 20:5, 18, 24). A new moon is how ancient people would mark this passage of time. The *wilderness of Sinai* was adjacent to the wilderness of Sin, where the people had been traveling (Exodus 16:1; 17:1). They had been without natural access to water or food, and they remained dependent upon God’s provision of each.

What Do You Think?

What insights can you share about experiencing God’s provision during a relocation?

Digging Deeper

How might those insights differ between voluntary and involuntary relocations?

B. The Mountain (v. 2)

2. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.

Rephidim is where Moses struck a rock to produce water for the children of Israel, who doubted God’s provision (Exodus 17:1-7). It is also where the Israelites fought the Amalekites, a group who came out to wage war on God’s people in their vulnerable state. In response, God provided supernatural protection by allowing Moses to raise his hands to assure victory (17:8-16).

Now at their interim destination, the people

camped before Mount *Sinai*, also called Mount Horeb (Exodus 3:1). It is where Moses saw the burning bush and removed his sandals before holy ground (3:5). But the geographical location of Sinai is much-debated by archaeologists and researchers. One possible location, Jabal Musa, is at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. Some object that the Hebrews could not have reached this location so soon after leaving Egypt, and they propose other sites. Since Scripture does not give a precise location, the issue remains contentious.

The Hebrews would spend just under a year camped before this mountain (compare Exodus 19:1 with Numbers 10:11-12).

II. God’s Chosen People

(Exodus 19:3-6)

A. Rescued (vv. 3-4)

3. And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel.

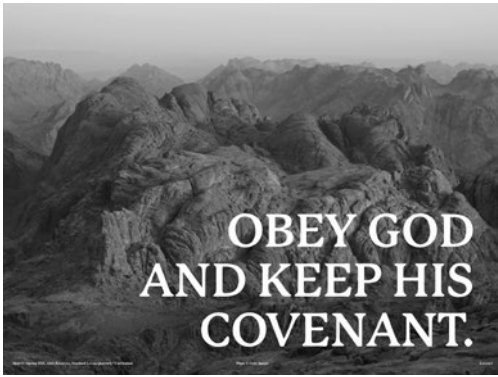
In the ancient Near Eastern world, high elevations were considered holy sites. These were places closer to Heaven and the gods who were thought to live there. The “high places” in the land of Israel were even used to worship God before the construction of a temple (1 Kings 3:2). Some five centuries later, Solomon’s temple was constructed at a high elevation and as the proper place of worship.

4. Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.

This is the first message carried by Moses—a direct speech of God. The exchange is analogous to “declarations” in a traditional wedding ceremony, which are spoken before a bride and

How to Say It

Amalekites	<i>Am-uh-leh-kites</i> or <i>Uh-mal-ih-kites.</i>
Rephidim	<i>Ref-ih-dim.</i>
Sinai	<i>Sigh-nye</i> or <i>Sigh-nay-eye.</i>
theophany	<i>the-ah-fuh-nee.</i>



Visual for Lesson 1. *Have this visual on display as you discuss the lesson commentary associated with Exodus 19:5.*

groom take their vows. God is declaring what He has done by choosing the descendants of Jacob and rescuing them from slavery. The words supply a rationale for making an agreement with the Lord: He is the God who delivers.

God had sent plagues on the Egyptians and shown their magicians and deities to be toothless (see Exodus 7:8–11:10; 12:29–42; compare Psalm 106). The reference to *eagles' wings* might stand for species of great birds that “fluttereth over [their] young, spreadeth abroad [their] wings, taketh them, beareth them on [their] wings” (Deuteronomy 32:11). This is an image of great care (compare Isaiah 40:31). God had fulfilled His plan by bringing the formerly enslaved people to this mountain to serve Him (Exodus 3:12). And the Hebrew people didn't just barely escape from *Egypt*; they were led out by the glorious power of God—“flown away” so to speak, as if carried by a majestic bird.

The image might seem ironic to a people tired of walking. But their deliverance from Egypt was unprecedented and a clear indication of the benevolent power of their rescuer-God.

Carried Along for the Journey

Mine is a family of cyclists—at least in theory. My wife and I enjoyed a good ride for many years before our kids came along. There are few memories of parenthood I treasure more than the ecstatic smile that came across my daughter's face when she rode a bike without assistance for the first time.

But when our second child was born, we had to make a new plan. So, instead, we turned to the next best family activity: walking. I found that I could get my heart pumping by strapping a growing child to a carrier on my back while I circuited the neighborhood. And he didn't seem to mind one bit. In fact, that became the routine for his nap. Somehow, nothing would put him to sleep like the steady trotting of his father or mother and the security he felt on a new adventure.

God invites the Israelites to picture a similar image in Exodus 19:4, “I bare you on eagles' wings.” I can relate to the tender confidence in that statement, the way God reminded the Israelites of all the dangers passed and trials overcome. Has God done something similar in your life, perhaps carrying you to the place you need to be? Or, perhaps, are you on a journey with your Heavenly Father right now? —J. H.

B. Treasured (v. 5)

5. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.

The speech continues with a conditional statement, a way of explaining the logic of *covenant*. God is the initiator of a covenant, just as He made a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15; 17). Covenant is part of His plan to bring blessing to the world. Typically, covenants were agreements between two parties (usually humans or nations). The promise is that, *if* the people hold up the requirements of the covenant, *then [they] shall be a peculiar treasure . . . above all people*. Israel's obedience would set them apart from all the world.

God's claim of ownership of *all the earth* justifies His particular election of Jacob's children. If God lacked rights to the whole, He would not have the ability to choose. But the creator God breathed into humans the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). He is the redeeming God whose covenant people shall be a blessing to all the earth, in continuation of His promise to Abraham (12:3).

C. Holy (v. 6)

6. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom

of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

The *holy* status that the Israelites received was not intended just for their personal benefit but ultimately for the benefit of the world as *a kingdom of priests*. This rationale is also discussed in the first century when Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). Likewise, the apostle Paul acknowledges the privileged position of Jewish people: “Unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2). Moses had been modeling a mediating role for God’s people as he accurately reported *the words* spoken by God all along.

The description “a royal priesthood, an holy nation” is valid for God’s people of the new covenant (1 Peter 2:9). Unlike the Sinai covenant, which would be repeatedly broken, the redemptive work of Jesus offers Christ’s followers a “new covenant” (see Jeremiah 31:31-32).

What Do You Think?

How would you explain to someone what being part of the new covenant priesthood means?

Digging Deeper

How would your explanation to a person agnostic to faith differ from your explanation to a new Christian?

Building a Foundation

I have done quite a few DIY projects as the owner of an old house, and I’ve learned a thing or two about proper preparation. When I first tiled a bathroom floor, I thought I knew what I was doing. I selected the right materials: tile, grout, and underlayment. The last thing I wanted was for my project to end in failure.

I had neglected to consider what lay beneath the surface. After demolishing an existing floor, I was left staring at severe water damage to the subfloor. Suddenly, I had to learn something else. I had my work cut out to replace the damage. Otherwise, I would have been covering up a more significant problem and asking for things to fall apart later.

Sometimes, we try to prepare for something new, but we might imagine a narrow set of concerns. Often, we need to spend the most work building solid foundations to ensure everything else isn’t in vain. I imagine that’s what God was doing for the Israelites in Exodus 19. Instead of leading them directly to their promised land—giving them instant consolation—God took His time. The Lord did everything possible to lay a solid foundation in their covenant relationship, for God wanted them to remember their mission and their redemptive history. Can you think of any way that God has been preparing you? Has there been an area of your life that requires starting from scratch? —J. H.

III. God Shall Come

(Exodus 19:7-14)

A. The People Agree (vv. 7-8)

7. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him.

Moses was a faithful servant because he relayed all that God had told him. *Before their faces* may seem like an odd way to give *words*. But the expression is perhaps used in the general sense to mean “in front of them.” The text does not say whether Moses used a form of writing at this point. But in Exodus 20:1-17, Moses will relay ten “words,” also called the Ten Commandments. The verse before us anticipates what Moses shall do by bringing down commands of God, commands that corporate Israel were expected to obey.

Moses gave them to a chosen group of *elders*, which was much more practical than trying to communicate with thousands of people all at once. The representatives were expected to relay the information to everyone else.

What Do You Think?

What is one thing you can improve on to ensure that your actions match the Word that God has called you to proclaim?

Digging Deeper

What are some indicators that a situation calls for silence rather than speaking?

8. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.

Words of this verse—the collective agreement of *all the people*—are repeated in Exodus 24:3, 7. But here in Exodus 19, how can they agree to stipulations they have yet to hear? This is a common question, one even raised by ancient Jewish rabbinical interpreters. One possibility is that the people agreed to and accepted God’s offer of covenant even before they were told its requirements. Exodus 19–20 gives a clearer description of the covenant. Under that reading, the people’s response did not conclude or seal the agreement. Instead, it shows Israel’s eagerness to follow whatever God would have them do. The fact that Moses *returned the words of the people unto the Lord* means that he ascended the mountain to speak with God again.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to prevent corporate confessions from becoming mere rituals?

Digging Deeper

What examples from Scripture point to this happening?

B. Divine Presence Anticipated (v. 9)

9. And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

Once Moses had returned to speak with God, he was informed about a pending divine appearance. The technical name for this is *theophany*, which means an appearance or visible manifestation of God. Earlier in Exodus, God had used a cloud to reveal His presence and to give a sign of His protection (Exodus 13:21). In the New Testament, the Father speaks from a cloud at Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:5-6; Mark 9:7-8; Luke 9:34-35). Later, Jesus ascends from a mountaintop and is taken up in a cloud, which shows God’s heavenly presence (Acts 1:9). Here,

the function of God’s appearance in *a thick cloud* shows Moses’ authority as God’s messenger. Now and into the future (*for ever*), God wants the people to *believe* Moses. This idea is repeated in John 5:46, where Jesus says that those who disbelieve His testimony are also disbelieving Moses, who “wrote” about Jesus.

C. Moses Gives Instructions (vv. 10-14)

10-11. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

This verse begins direct speech from God that Moses was to convey to the Israelites. They must be correctly prepared to receive God’s presence. The command to *let them wash their clothes* forms an *inclusio* with Exodus 19:14 (see below). Two days will be the length of this preparation, and the command to *sanctify* is of the same root as “holy” in 19:6. The verb means “to transform someone into the state of holiness” or “to dedicate.” Moses will direct the people to avoid ceremonially unclean things, while at the same time they will wash and prepare themselves in body and spirit. Washing of clothing is associated with holiness in dozens of places in the Old Testament.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways you can better reflect your consecrated status to the world?

Digging Deeper

What guardrails are available to keep that reflecting from becoming legalistic or “holier than thou”?

12. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death.

Moses was already on the mountain when he heard this, so the prohibition didn’t apply to him.

A constructed perimeter would reinforce that Moses—no one else—was to be the one to whom all the people must listen.

God’s holiness was not something to haphazardly approach. Merely touching the area’s *border* would bring death. This penalty is less as a punishment than a means to protect the community from a defiler’s misdeed.

13. There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.

Here, the warning is heightened: even a single *hand*—perhaps laid upon the mountain in curiosity—or the mindless trampling of an animal would be enough to warrant death through stoning or arrows. Both forms of execution would allow others to remain at a distance from the one who had violated God’s space. The people were not to permit anything defiling to remain in their midst as they prepared to meet God.

A *trumpet* sound was to be the signal to approach. This would have been a ram’s horn rather than a brass instrument. God does not specify who was to be the one to blow it, to see that it *soundeth long*. At the signal a few verses later, the blower of this horn is once more unidentified (Exodus 19:19). One possibility is that God’s angel is responsible, since the signal comes from the mountain where humans have not been allowed to tread, except for Moses.

14. And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.

The text does not say how *Moses sanctified the people*. But washing of *clothes* is a form of ceremonial cleansing and is specified dozens of times in Leviticus and Numbers. Usually, it is prescribed when an individual or priest is being cleansed from something unclean (example: Leviticus 15:5-12). Two days would probably not be required to complete the washing. But a time of spiritual preparation is also appropriate when entering God’s presence. By implication, the Israelites were being treated as the “nation of priests” that God had named them in Exodus 19:6, since proper cloth-

ing and preparation would come to be required of priests (example: Exodus 40:12-16).

Conclusion

A. Holy God, Holy People

In its context, Exodus 19 shows the responsibilities that fall upon people whom God chooses and redeems. They are required to prepare themselves for God’s presence. In the new covenant context, it is not church buildings that house God’s presence; rather, it is the bodies of Christians themselves, those who become a “temple of the Holy Ghost” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Followers of Jesus also serve as mediators who introduce others to the ultimate mediator, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15).

By making Israel His “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), God was laying the groundwork to bless the world through the children of Jacob. Israel would break the Sinai covenant and fall victim to sin, but God had a plan to make a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-32; compare Matthew 26:28). For Christians, the promise that “all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3) has come true, in and through Jesus. He is the seed of Abraham, the inheritor of God’s promise (Galatians 3:16). Christ alone, because He is God’s Son, is fit to be *king* of God’s kingdom; the permanent *high priest* to a group of priests, He is the perfect *mediator* between God and humans.

B. Prayer

Lord, we sometimes feel inadequate as representatives of Your holiness. May we be found to be Your faithful servants and a royal priesthood despite our shortcomings. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The holy God is the redeeming God.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 236) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Spring Quarter. Order No. 9780784740132 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Have this brainstorming question posted for all to see as class members arrive:

What methods does God use to get our attention?

Expect a wide variety of responses, including *sickness, tragedy, and godly counsel from others.*

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today, we will look at an incident from ancient Israel’s history that featured an attention-getting method of an exceptional nature.”

Into the Word

Arrange for a class member to give a brief presentation on the historical context of today’s text. The presentation should summarize Exodus 1–18 in no more than eight minutes. *Alternative.* Show the six-and-a-half minute video on Exodus 1–18 from the Bible Project, found online. Caution: the video streaming site that hosts the video may interrupt it with commercials unless you have their “premium” subscription.

Next, have the text read dramatically by two participants, one being the voice of the narrator, the other being the voice of God. Have them read their respective parts of the text. The class as a whole should respond with the words of Exodus 19:8b when the narration reaches that point. (*Option.* To make this go more smoothly, print and distribute the text in advance with the three speaking parts highlighted in different colors.)

Then, form participants into study pairs or triads. Distribute handouts (you create) on which are printed the following three tasks:

- 1–Summarize God’s expectations as expressed through Moses.
- 2–Explain the concept of “covenant” in its original context.
- 3–List questions about the text that come to mind.

After several minutes, reconvene for a whole-class discussion.

Alternative. Depending on the nature of your class, you may find better instructional value in posing only the first question for the pairs or triads to consider, followed by a whole-class discussion of only the responses to it. Then, repeat the cycle for the second and third tasks individually.

After discussing the three tasks, display three posters, widely separated. Have the following topics on the posters, one each:

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS
THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL
ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

Invite class members to indicate by show of hands which of the three topics interests them most. Form study groups based on those preferences, with at least two participants per group. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following questions:

- 1–What does today’s Scripture say about this topic?
- 2–What does this account suggest for our behavior today?

Use the responses to the second question as a transition to the Into Life segment.

Into Life

God’s Faithfulness. Extend this discussion by asking how we have even more proof of God’s faithfulness than the Israelites had. Invite responses in whole-class discussion.

The Priesthood of All. Ask participants to name ways that Christians can be mediators of God’s grace today. *Option.* Distribute copies of the “A Holy Priesthood and a Priesthood Wholly” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Assign the five texts to five pairs or triads to complete as indicated.

Acceptable Worship. Brainstorm valid ways to declare God’s praises today.

As learners depart, distribute copies of the “Who, Where, Etc.” puzzle from the activity page.

A Space for God

Devotional Reading: John 4:13-26
Background Scripture: Exodus 25-27

Exodus 25:1-9

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.

3 And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass,

4 And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair,

5 And rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood,

6 Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense,

7 Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate.

8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

Exodus 26:1, 31-37

1 Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.

Key Text

Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. —Exodus 25:8

31 And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made:

32 And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver.

33 And thou shalt hang up the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony: and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy.

34 And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place.

35 And thou shalt set the table without the vail, and the candlestick over against the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south: and thou shalt put the table on the north side.

36 And thou shalt make an hanging for the door of the tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework.

37 And thou shalt make for the hanging five pillars of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, and their hooks shall be of gold: and thou shalt cast five sockets of brass for them.

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 1: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Categorize the types of offerings that God specified.
2. Compare God's instructions to Moses with New Testament directives.
3. Write a prayer of gratitude for God's willingness to dwell with him or her today.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Many Spaces for God
- B. Lesson Context

I. Gift from the Heart (Exodus 25:1-9)

- A. Items for Construction (vv. 1-5)
- B. Items for Service (vv. 6-9)

Tools for a Task

II. Tabernacle Directions (Exodus 26:1, 31-37)

- A. The Curtains (v. 1)
- B. The Veil (vv. 31-35)
Memory Box
- C. The Doorway (vv. 36-37)

Conclusion

- A. Carrying the Presence
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Many Spaces for God

I love to visit old church buildings, especially those with oaken pews and stained-glass windows. When I was in Jordan, I visited the ruins of Petra, a sixth-century church built in the canyon walls.

But the church that stands out most in my memory was in a small village in the jungle of the Dominican Republic. I had been invited to preach at this little church while a friend translated. When we arrived, it was unlike any church building I'd seen before; I've had bigger sheds! The walls were wooden planks with daylight peeking through, the roof was made of tin, and there were no chairs—only wooden boards on tree stumps.

For as small a group as gathered there, it was a joyous assembly of God's people. I don't often experience worship like that in the United States. That day reminded me that praising the one true God can happen in any place. Today's lesson examines the construction of God's tabernacle, the specially designed place that God asked His people to create. God wanted to be in their midst.

B. Lesson Context

The narrative of Scripture as a whole can be summarized according to the ways that God mediates His presence to His creation. After banishing humans from the Garden of Eden, where God himself walked (Genesis 3:8), He set in motion a plan to restore the relationship that had been broken by sin.

God's rescue of Israel from the Egyptians was a major step in that plan. Two months later, God initiated a covenant agreement with the Israelites (Exodus 19). The Sinai covenant was given for God's people to be able to live with the divine presence in their midst.

Their breaking of the covenant didn't take long (Exodus 32:7-8). Even so, God continued in faithfulness as He brought the Israelites to the land of inheritance, the land promised to them as children of Abraham (Genesis 13:14-17).

In the context of today's lesson, Moses—living

more than 500 years after Abraham—had gone up Mount Sinai and entered the cloud of God’s presence (Exodus 24:15-18). During that 40-day encounter, God gave him instructions for a tabernacle, for the items to fill it, and for the ministry of the priests. These instructions span Exodus 25–31 (see lesson 3). God desired to grant access to His holy presence, but that required a systematic approach to prevent anything profane (not just sin, but also things ritually unclean) from entering the tabernacle.

I. Gift from the Heart

(Exodus 25:1-9)

A. Items for Construction (vv. 1-5)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying.

Since the Israelites arrived at Sinai in Exodus 19:1, *Moses* had been functioning as a mediator: taking messages from God down the mountain and returning responses from the people. The instructions came directly from God, and Moses did not alter the words. He received these words while on the mountain, hidden from the people’s sight for 40 days (Exodus 24:18).

2. Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.

The word *willingly* indicates that the *offering* God prescribed was to be voluntary. Worship through giving must be motivated internally rather than externally. This is analogous to the “cheerful” giver praised by the apostle Paul when he collected an offering (2 Corinthians 9:7).

God did not specify that the offering be taken up for the construction of a tabernacle—although that is what it would be used to build—but God said *bring me an offering*. As gifts, these offerings are directed first and foremost to God.

But why should the Israelites, as former slaves of Egypt, possess valuable items worthy of an offering? Before they left Egypt, they received valuable articles from their Egyptian captors (Exodus 3:21; 11:2-3; 12:35-36). God’s intervention made this possible (12:36). Thus, in a key sense, the offering given to God was surrendering those items that

God had helped the people receive in the first place, for this very purpose.

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure you cheerfully give to God (see 2 Corinthians 9:7)?

Digging Deeper

What obstacles prevent you from giving to God in this manner? How do you deal with these obstacles?

3. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass.

This verse describes the first of several kinds of things acceptable for the offering—and perhaps these metals come first because they were most valuable. Additional metals of iron, tin, or lead are not mentioned (Numbers 31:22).

The most valuable of the three was (and still is) *gold*; some form of that word occurs over 100 times in the book of Exodus alone. Gold was used in ways other than as a medium of exchange (money). Most tabernacle furnishings would be either overlaid with gold or made from pure gold (Exodus 25:11-18; 23-31, 38-39). More than four centuries later, King Solomon would add to or replace articles, also using gold (1 Kings 7:48-50); he minimized the use of *silver* (10:21).

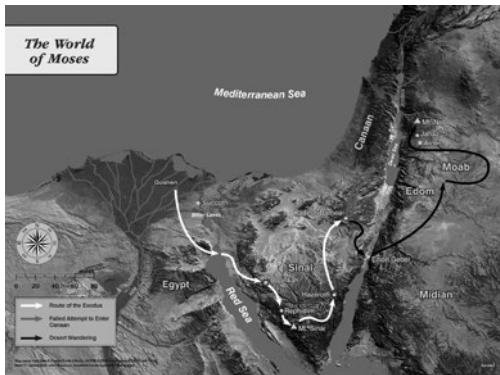
Many other items would be made of *brass* (Exodus 26:11, 37; 27:1-8; 30:17-21). Brass is an alloy of copper and zinc. That alloy was not created until about 500 BC, many centuries after the events of the text. The intent of the text is to point to bronze, an alloy of copper and tin. *Silver* would be used mainly for the “sockets” for supporting wooden beams of the tabernacle structure itself (26:19, 21, 25, 32).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can your class pool your resources and talents to give an offering to God?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to make this offering a reality?



Visual for Lesson 2. Display this visual as you review the people and places associated with lessons 1–3.

4. And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair.

In antiquity, fabric dyes were not readily available and would need to be carefully sourced. A garment's value was tied to the rarity of its dye, with *blue*, *purple*, and *scarlet* being among the rarest (compare Luke 16:19; Acts 16:14; Revelation 17:4; 18:12). These shades of violet or blueish-dyed wool would be created from crushed mollusks and certain plants. They would be used in the construction of artistic curtains (Exodus 26:31). With *fine linen and goats' hair* (which could be spun into yarn), rare fabrics would enclose the tabernacle to create its walls and layers (26:7).

5. And rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood.

Leather *dyed red* would probably be colored from a tanning process. The reference to *badgers' skins* comes from a rare Hebrew word that resembles the Arabic word for “porpoise.” Sea creatures inhabit the Red Sea and could have been hunted by the Egyptians for their fine hides. *Shittim wood* is useful for the construction of furniture and structural beams. It is also called “acacia wood.” Its wood is extremely dense and is a desirable building material.

B. Items for Service (vv. 6-9)

6. Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense.

The two types of *oil* are for different purposes in

the function of the planned sanctuary. Oil *for the light* was to be burned in the lampstand (Exodus 25:31-36). Since the tabernacle was to be without windows, light would come only from lamps. A depiction of the Jewish menorah is found upon the Arch of Titus in Rome, which shows a lampstand carried out of the destroyed second temple. It is possible—though impossible to be certain—that the original lampstand for the tabernacle followed this familiar design.

On the other hand, *anointing oil* would be used for just that purpose—not only on people but also on tabernacle furnishings (Exodus 30:22-33). It was perfumed according to the formula of 30:23-24 to contain “myrrh,” “sweet cinnamon,” “sweet calamus,” “cassia,” and “oil olive.” *Sweet incense* was to be made according to a formula in Exodus 30:34, and it has “stacte,” “onycha,” “galbanum,” and “frankincense.” When burned, the result would be a visible cloud of fragrant smoke. The formulations of the anointing oil and the incense were proprietary to God (30:33, 37). In the imagery of Revelation 8:3-4, the burning of incense symbolizes the prayers of God's people as they rise to Heaven.

7. Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate.

Onyx are the only *stones* mentioned by name for *the ephod* and *breastplate*, two items of the high priest's attire (see lesson 3). The names of the other precious stones are listed in Exodus 28:17-20. The onyx stones were to be two in number, each engraved with the names of 6 of the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:9-11). Four rows of three precious stones each would be set in the breastplate of the ephod, “with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, . . . like the engravings of a signet” (28:21). The high priest would wear the names of all 12 tribes when he came before God's presence and entered the holy place (see 28:12, 29-30).

8. And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

This short verse indicates the reason for these details: God wants to *dwell* with His people. So, He directed the people to construct a place suitable to that purpose: *a sanctuary*. This refers to the tabernacle (or to the holiest part thereof) and, much later, the temple. The layers of curtains as walls and

partitions would, on the one hand, clearly separate the sacred space of God from anything profane among the people. On the other hand, the sanctuary would announce God's presence, for it would be the most prominent feature of Israel's camp.

9. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

The pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all the instruments were prescribed by God alone. Some Bible interpreters think the phrase *that I shew thee* means that a Heavenly tabernacle or temple was shown to Moses so that the earthly tabernacle would be built in its likeness. In support of this, Stephen in Acts 7:44 calls the tabernacle to have been made "according to the fashion that [Moses] had seen." Likewise, the writer of Hebrews 8:5 says that Moses made the tabernacle "according to the pattern shewed to" him.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the claim that buildings such as temples or sanctuaries are necessary for the presence of God?

Digging Deeper

How do John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Ephesians 2:21-22; and 1 Peter 2:5 inform your response?

Tools for a Task

When my grandfather died, he left behind a remarkable collection of tools. Although he wasn't wealthy, he had acquired so many flashlights, screwdrivers, gloves, pocketknives, and watches that I always wondered why he showed an interest in these items. Why would anyone need 20 screwdrivers?

It was the watches that captured my attention as a child. I remembered that he was always wearing one, always prepared to share the time when someone asked. Actually, that explains almost everything in his collection: he wanted to be prepared. Whether he needed to fix, open, or shed light on something, he was ready.

You might say that is what God was doing when giving all these instructions for the tabernacle. The priests would need light, so God planned for them to have oil for lamps. The ark of the covenant would need a separate space, so God gave them plans for curtains and veils. The priests would need instruments for service, so God intended for them to use precious metals like gold—metals that don't tend to corrode. In a sense, all these instructions show a spirit of practicality and a concern for the details. You might look at your own life and the resources God has given you. What tasks have you been prepared to complete? What service does God ask you to render when you examine your tools and resources?—J. H.

II. Tabernacle Directions

(Exodus 26:1, 31-37)

A. The Curtains (v. 1)

1. Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.

After describing the construction of the tabernacle's contents in Exodus 25:10-40, Exodus 26:1 begins with specifications of the tabernacle's construction itself. *Linen* is made from the fibers of the flax plant. The size of these *ten curtains* is noted in 26:2, not in today's lesson text). Regarding the rare colors of *blue, and purple, and scarlet*, see commentary on Exodus 25:4, above.

The inclusion of *cherubims* is a new detail (compare Exodus 25:18). This might mean that the curtains were going to feature images of these beings woven in. Cherubim are angelic attendants of God. They are mentioned dozens of times in the Old Testament but never in the New Testament. The ark of the covenant was constructed to feature two cherubim of gold on its cover (25:18-20).

B. The Veil (vv. 31-35)

31. And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made.

The *veil* (spelled *veil* in the New Testament) mentioned here is different from the "curtains" described in Exodus 26:1. While constructed of the

same material and decorated the same way, the veil has a unique function: it separated the holy place from the most holy place within the tabernacle. The same word is later used for the dividing veil in Solomon's temple (compare 2 Chronicles 3:14).

32. And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver.

The reason the veil needed to be supported by *four pillars . . . overlaid with gold* was so it could hang and serve as the necessary partition. These golden rods would nest into silver sockets (from the gold and silver that were given in the offering). The poles would be spaced to support the stretched veil, which appears to be designed as one piece, unlike the curtains. Thus, the veil had no gaps as it sectioned off the area of the presence of God. This is the same kind of veil found in the temple in Jesus' day, and it would be torn from top to bottom at His death (Matthew 27:51).

33. And thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testimony: and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy.

Here is the explanation for the veil's use: it separated areas within the tabernacle. This division was to shield the area known as *the most holy* (which housed the very glory of God) from the area called *the holy place*. It was to be hung on *taches* (connecting buckles or rings) that were attached to four pillars. Only a single item is designated for the *most holy* place: the *ark of the testimony*, which is another name for "ark of the covenant" (Numbers 10:33; 14:44). At first, the box would contain only the tablets of the covenant (Exodus 25:16, 23). Eventually, other items would be added as signs of God's provision (Hebrews 9:4).

God is never described as being in the box. Instead, the ark is sometimes called God's "footstool," perhaps meaning that God was (invisibly) pictured as enthroned in Heaven while resting His feet at this point on earth (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalms 99:5; 132:7; Isaiah 66:1). The ark would be a focal point of Israelite faith until its disappearance at the time of the Babylonian exile.

34. And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place.

The box itself was to be two and a half cubits by one and a half cubits, or the equivalent of about 45 by 27 inches (Exodus 25:10). Its shittim or acacia wood was covered in gold, but the *mercy seat* was a solid gold cover placed on the top (25:17). It is called a mercy seat because there, at that location between two golden cherubim, God promised to meet with Moses (25:22). God said, "I will appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat" (Leviticus 16:2). And on the Day of Atonement—one day each year when the high priest would enter the most holy place—the high priest was to sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat and make atonement "for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel" (16:17).

35. And thou shalt set the table without the veil, and the candlestick over against the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south: and thou shalt put the table on the north side.

The tabernacle faced east (Numbers 3:38). *The table* with incense and bread was to be placed on the side of the veil that did not face inward toward the most holy place. Likewise, *the candlestick* is designated for the south side. Nothing is said about the significance of the locations. Among other things, the table would hold 12 loaves of bread to symbolize the 12 tribes (Leviticus 24:5-9). This bread was to be eaten by priests since it would be replaced regularly as an offering to God.

Memory Box

On the top of my bookshelf lives a small box. My children could tell you some of its contents by heart: a wood carving from my trip to South America; silver coins I collected; two hospital bracelets that say "Father," the ones given to me when my children were born—my proof that I

How to Say It

acacia	uh-kay-shuh.
cherubim	chair-uh-bim.
ephod	ee-fod.
shittim	shih-teem.
tabernacle	tah-burr-nah-kul.

wasn't stealing a baby when my wife and I loaded each of them in an infant seat.

The ark of the covenant was a bit like a memory box. Every item added had a history. Of course, the Israelites did not handle the ark the way I handle my wooden box. Even so, I try to be sure that I've shown gratitude for all God has done.

If you were to fill such a box, what would it contain? How have you stewarded the memories of God's redemption in your life? —J. H.

C. The Doorway (vv. 36-37)

36-37. And thou shalt make an hanging for the door of the tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework. And thou shalt make for the hanging five pillars of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, and their hooks shall be of gold: and thou shalt cast five sockets of brass for them.

The tabernacle doorway was to have the same coloring as the veil and curtains but would lack the interwoven cherubim decoration. The doorway was supported by five pillars instead of four, like the four holding up the internal veil. The metal used for the sockets was brass, a lesser material than the silver sockets within the tabernacle. The lesser value in the metal corresponds to the distance this doorway stands from the most holy place. The closer to God's presence, the more valuable the materials so as to reflect the value of sacred space.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can art and architecture be a way for you to honor and worship God?

Digging Deeper

How will your congregation use art in its worship of God?

Conclusion

A. Carrying the Presence

If we miss the wider context, these instructions for an offering and construction of a tabernacle seem oddly specific. Today, there is greater cultural consciousness around the giving of the Ten Com-

mandments than the building of a mobile sanctuary, but the irony is that the tabernacle was at the heart of the covenant as the most important blessing that Israel received: instructions to house the presence of God. As the people whom God had chosen to reflect His holiness, the ancient Israelites needed to live in such a way as to reflect their holy status. Otherwise, they would not be allowed to keep God's presence with them (Ezekiel 10).

The planning of materials, arrangement, and careful division of duties were necessary for this task. Without instructions, the people of Israel—who were by no means free of sin—could not have endured a holy God in their midst. But with the careful management of access, no one would haphazardly wander into the sacred space and look upon God enthroned above the mercy seat, for this would mean certain death (see a warning even to Aaron in Leviticus 16:2).

Thus, God is the ultimate planner. Not only did He plan the construction of a tabernacle, but He ensured that His people would have the necessary materials before they left the land of Egypt. Both in the Sinai covenant and in the new covenant, God can make a way for His presence to be with His people.

What Do You Think?

How has your understanding of worship changed because of this lesson?

Digging Deeper

What will you do in light of that change of thinking?

B. Prayer

Lord, may we recognize that You are holy, that Your very presence is sacred. On our own, we would never manage to dwell with You. Thank You for making a way for Your presence to be with Your people, both in the tabernacle for ancient Israel and also in the person of Christ, who sent the Spirit to reside in our midst even now. We are grateful for Your faithfulness to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God wants to dwell with His people.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Form learners into pairs or triads. Have partners brainstorm things that can be (or have been) brought into their homes to enable them to sense God's presence better.

Alternative. Project or display a series of photographs such as these: the inside of a church building, a mountain, the ocean, and a starry night sky. As you display each picture, ask class members to raise their hands for each one that helps them better sense God's presence.

After either exercise above, lead into Bible study by saying, "Perhaps no place brings us more comfort than a place where we can feel close to God. In today's Bible study, we will consider the place God designed for His people in antiquity to draw nearer to Him."

Into the Word

Ask one participant to read Exodus 25:1-9. Then, ask someone else to read Exodus 26:1, 31-37. Summarize the Lesson Context in a mini-lecture. *Alternative:* Play the video "Exodus 19-40" from the Bible Project website. Note: the video in its entirety is about six and a half minutes long. If you desire a shorter video, play the same video but from time marker 1:50 to 3:04. (*Option:* have the passage for today read after the video rather than before it.)

Divide the class into three groups, designating one group as the **Elements Group**, another group as the **Directions Group**, and the last group as the **Then and Now Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) with content as set forth below:

Elements Group. Make lists of what the people gave in the categories of *Organic Materials* and *Inorganic Materials*. Then answer this question: How "expected" were these offerings?

Directions Group. List examples of directives from the lesson text that fall under these descriptions: *God Is Separate from His People* and *God Wants to Be Close to His People*. Then answer these

questions: 1—What does the description of the tabernacle say about God? 2—What does it say about the Israelites?

Then and Now Group. Read Hebrews 9. List contrasts between Old Testament tabernacle worship and New Testament worship through Christ. (Teacher note: if the 28 verses of Hebrew 9 are "too much," then focus on Hebrews 9:11-28 instead.)

Reconvene for whole-class discussion of discoveries and insights.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Worship Then and Worship Now" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Assign it for discussion either to the class as a whole, to small groups, or to individuals, depending on the nature of your class. If assigned to individuals, announce a one-minute time limit.

Into Life

Distribute index cards and ask class members to write their responses to each of these prompts as you write them on the board:

The place where I best sense God's closeness is . . .

The place where I best sense God's holiness is . . .

The practice that brings me closest to God is . . .

(Do not write all three prompts on the board at once. Instead, write the first one, then discuss it. Repeat the sequence for the remaining prompts.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "A House for God" exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually as indicated, taking no more than one minute to do so. Since this exercise tilts toward identifying personal shortcomings, assure participants that the exercise is theirs to keep; no one will collect their responses.

As a final activity, ask participants to take one minute to write a brief prayer of gratitude to God for His willingness to dwell with us today. Bring the class to a close by forming a prayer circle to allow participants to voice the prayers they've just written. But don't put anyone on the spot to do so.

The Ordination of Priests

Devotional Reading: Psalm 133

Background Scripture: Exodus 29:1-37; Leviticus 8:1-36

Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37

1 And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest's office: take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish,

2 And unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil: of wheaten flour shalt thou make them.

3 And thou shalt put them into one basket, and bring them in the basket, with the bullock and the two rams.

4 And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water.

5 And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod:

6 And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre.

7 Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him.

8 And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them.

9 And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

35 And thus shalt thou do unto Aaron, and to his sons, according to all things which I have commanded thee: seven days shalt thou consecrate them.

36 And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering for atonement: and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it, to sanctify it.

37 Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.

Key Text

The priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

—Exodus 29:9b

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 1: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Define “ordination” in the sense of “consecration.”
2. Compare and contrast ordination/consecration in the Old Testament with its value and practice in the New Testament.
3. Make a plan to serve as a member of the Christian’s holy and royal priesthood per 1 Peter 2:5, 9.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Ordination
- B. Lesson Context

I. Preparing the Offerings (Exodus 29:1-3)

- A. Animals and Bread (vv. 1-2)
- B. Collection and Presentation (v. 3)
God, the Painter?

II. Preparing the Ordinands (Exodus 29:4-9)

- A. Persons, Place, and Purification (v. 4)
- B. Aaron, Attire, and Anointing (vv. 5-7)
- C. Descendants, Dress, and Duration (vv. 8-9)
Hand-Me-Down Clothes

III. Requiring a Week (Exodus 29:35-37)

- A. For the Priests (v. 35)
- B. For the Altar (vv. 36-37)

Conclusion

- A. The Old in the New
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Ordination

For those of an older generation, the designation “ordained minister” brings certain images to mind. Such images might include that of a devout person who has spent several years in seminary, preparing to be ordained after graduating with a degree in Bible, theology, or even counseling.

This paradigm began to break down in the United States in the late 1960s. That was the decade the Universal Life Church started issuing certificates of ordination to anyone who desired one. These easily obtained certificates began to be recognized by local governments for performing weddings, etc. Thus, a privilege of the church became, in many instances, just a business opportunity—a chance to earn a living officiating at various functions.

But that wasn’t the first time such a thing had happened. It also happened in ancient Israel’s ordained priesthood. What began in all holiness at God’s initiative eventually became an unholy travesty of sinful rulers (example: 1 Kings 12:31). The shocking picture of this decline is best appreciated by a consideration of priestly ordination at its ideal beginning—the subject of today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Context

In Israel’s earliest days, Aaron and his sons became the first priests under the nation’s leadership by Moses, who was Aaron’s brother (Exodus 7:1; 28:1). They were anointed, consecrated, and sanctified to do so (28:41). The act of anointing consisted of pouring oil on the priest’s head, done as a ritual to show a person had been selected. Consecration was the act of appointment through the authority of the congregation of the people. Sanctification was the “setting apart” of the person for the tasks of the priesthood, with the tacit agreement that the person would strive to live a holy, blameless life, observing the laws of Israel as given by God through Moses.

We can note at the outset that the possible meanings (semantic range) of English words shift over time, as do words in all languages. The words *ordination* and *ordain* do not appear in the text

of the *King James Version* for today's lesson text, although the concept is present. The *KJV* uses the verb *ordain* in a situation of gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 9:22) and the appointment of unqualified priests (2 Chronicles 11:15).

Within the new nation of Israel, God planned for men of the tribe of Levi to be designated with tasks associated with the tabernacle and (later) the temple (Numbers 3:5-9; 8:5-26; 1 Chronicles 23:28-32). From this tribe were to come the priests (Deuteronomy 18:1-5; Joshua 18:7; contrast 1 Kings 12:31). Priests were mediators between God and the people. In this role, priests offered sacrifices for atonement on their behalf (Leviticus 4:13-35; 9:7); priests were to teach and model God's distinctions between clean and unclean (10:10-11).

Setting the stage for today's lesson is Exodus 28:41, which summarizes the detail that follows in Exodus 29 regarding the ordination of priests. Leviticus 8 offers a detailed account of Moses carrying out the actions God specifies in today's lesson text.

I. Preparing the Offerings

(Exodus 29:1-3)

A. Animals and Bread (vv. 1-2)

1a. And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest's office.

The word *thou* refers to Moses, as traced back to Exodus 25:1. Thus, the instructions that follow are for him to carry out as God's designated representative to the people.

The word translated *hallow* is also translated "sanctify" in Exodus 28:41 (see Lesson Context) and 29:36-37 (see commentary below). It is the verb form of the noun regularly translated "holy." The idea of holiness is pervasive in the Law of Moses and the history of Israel. It has the sense of emulating God in being "set apart" as pure and undefiled. It is the opposite of that which is unclean or profane (Leviticus 10:10). Specific rules for priests in this regard were stricter than those for the rank-and-file Israelites (Exodus 21:1-22:16). Even so, the requirement for personal holiness isn't just for priests under the old covenant

—it's for everyone (1 Peter 1:15-16, quoting Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2).

Note the sequence here: being made holy is a prerequisite to ministering *in the priest's office*, not the other way around!

1b. Take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish.

The process of ordination for the priests was costly! For all three animals to be *without blemish* meant they were not sick or deformed in any way. This was not to be used as an opportunity to get rid of inferior livestock. These animals were to be sacrificed according to detailed instructions (Exodus 29:10-28, not in today's text). As they were sacrificed, they were given separate and distinct designations (29:14, 18, 26; Leviticus 8:14, 18, 27).

2. And unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil: of wheaten flour shalt thou make them.

Three distinct manner of bread were specified for the ordination. But despite their differences, they all have one thing in common: they are *unleavened* (made without yeast). Up to this point in Bible history, there have been two incidents associated with unleavened bread. The lesser-known incident involved the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:3); the better-known incident was the Passover and its subsequent remembrances (Exodus 12). Both situations involved a need for haste—yeasted bread would have taken too long to rise.

Specifications for offerings involving bread, flour, etc., are found in Leviticus 2. How these were to be used in the ordination ceremony is specified in Exodus 29:23-25 (not in today's lesson

How to Say It

Abihu	Uh-bye-hew.
Eleazar	El-ih-a-zar or E-lih-a-zar.
ephod	ee-fod.
Gomorrah	Guh-more-uh.
Ithamar	Ith-uh-mar.
Nadab	Nay-dab.
Sodom	Sod-um.

text) and Leviticus 6:19-23. How they were actually used is recorded in Leviticus 8:26-29.

The specification that these breads were to be made with *wheaten flour* is itself revealing. Both barley and wheat were characteristic grain crops in the promised land (Deuteronomy 8:8). But barley was the food of the poor; Revelation 6:6 suggests that barley was one-third the cost of wheat. Thus, we see a certain parallel with the requirement to bring an unblemished animal—the bread to be offered had to be made with the best flour.

What Do You Think?

How might the concept of “unleavened” apply to modern-day believers?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 16:6 and 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 direct your response?

B. Collection and Presentation (v. 3)

3. And thou shalt put them into one basket, and bring them in the basket, with the bullock and the two rams.

The exacting nature of the instructions reveals how important and serious this ceremony should be in the eyes of the Israelites. This is not some impromptu ritual. We can easily imagine the animals were cleaned and groomed, and the bread was made by the finest cooks. The *basket* itself would be of the best craftsmanship, fit for this solemn occasion.

We may view the results in terms of a visual aid. This occasion was not to be a “by invitation only plus one” event. All Israelites were to witness the ordinations (Leviticus 8:1-4). Even so, we are left to wonder how this was accomplished in a practical sense since the Israelites at the time numbered about 600,000 men, not counting women and children (Exodus 12:37; Numbers 1:46)!

God, the Painter?

Have you ever heard the word “painter” used as a description of God? I never have. Various descriptions of God abound in Scripture, but “painter” is not one of them. Even so, I think it fits.

Consider the preliminary tasks of a painter.

Every experienced painter knows that the ultimate success or failure of a job depends on *surface preparation*. Before the brush is dipped into the paint, the area to be painted needs to be cleaned in various ways for the new paint to adhere properly. God was taking care to do likewise in the text at hand. By means of meticulous instructions, He was preparing hearts to recognize the seriousness of the task at hand. His Word won’t adhere to unprepared hearts, whether under the old covenant or the new.

The end result of God’s work of preparing hearts is connected to our own receptivity to that preparatory work. How do you see this playing out in the contrast between the shallow and good soils of Matthew 13:5-8? —R. L. N.

II. Preparing the Ordinands

(Exodus 29:4-9)

A. Persons, Place, and Purification (v. 4)

4. And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water.

Exodus 40:12 is worded almost identically to the verse before us. The positioning of that verse reinforces the chronological element here: the ordination took place after *the tabernacle* had been set up.

The tabernacle proper was a portable tentlike structure (Exodus 26:1-37; 36:8-38). It was situated inside a courtyard, to the courtyard’s west side (27:9-19; 38:9-20). Once the tabernacle was operational, its most holy place was to be entered by the high priest only, and only on the Day of Atonement (see lesson 5 on Leviticus 16). But with the tabernacle’s completion, there was no priesthood in general or high priest in particular to use it! Thus, the need for ordaining *Aaron and his sons*.

The door of the tabernacle faced east: where Moses was to bring the ordinands. There, the men were to be washed with water, a ceremonial cleansing to begin the ordination ceremony. Washing with water in a ceremonial sense is also noted in Exodus 30:17-22; Leviticus 14:8-9; 15:4-27; etc. Moses followed God’s instructions exactly (Leviticus 8:6).

The sons of Aaron were four in number; their names were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar

(Numbers 26:60). The first two lost their lives when they offered “strange fire before the Lord” (Leviticus 10:1-2). That happened after the ordination ceremony, so all four were present to become priests (Exodus 28:1; Numbers 3:2-4).

What Do You Think?

What can you teach others regarding valid and invalid connections between baptism and Aaron’s washing with water?

Digging Deeper

How are 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:4-7; and Hebrews 10:19-22 relevant?

B. Aaron, Attire, and Anointing (vv. 5-7)

5. And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod.

Priestly *garments* are first mentioned comprehensively in Exodus 28:1-5, with 28:31-43 adding detail. A fleeting reference occurs in 25:7.

There were several parts to this unique uniform. The first is here called a *coat*, but it has a longer designation of “broidered coat” in Exodus 28:4. This close-fitting shirt-like garment was made of fine linen (28:39; 39:27). It is not to be confused with the linen undergarment of 28:42; 39:28.

The robe of the ephod is an outer garment. Particulars regarding its features and functions are found in Exodus 28:31-35; 39:22. Creation of the ephod itself is addressed in 28:6-14; 39:2-7. It may have been something like an apron.

What is called *the breastplate* here is further designated “the breastplate of judgment” three times in Exodus 28:15-30; this item’s construction of gold, precious stones, and fine linen is covered extensively there and in 39:8-21. Not mentioned in the lesson text for today are “the Urim and the Thummim” that fit into the breastplate (28:30). We don’t know exactly what these were, but their function seemed to be a means of consulting God regarding important decisions (example: Numbers 27:18-21).

Similar to that of the ephod was the material of the *curious girdle* (Exodus 28:8; 39:5). This

item was to interconnect with the breastplate and ephod in a manner that would prevent unintended movement of the breastplate (28:28).

6. And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre.

As clothing items for the torso were to be interconnected, so too were items for the high priest’s *head*. The *mitre* was the headdress, and *the holy crown* was something attached to it.

We don’t really know what the mitre looked like beyond the brief descriptions in Exodus 28:4, 37; 39:30. It may be something like what is called a “turban” today; it is unlikely to have been like the tall and pointed headpieces we see in modern religious ceremonies. On the other hand, Exodus 28:36-38 is most helpful in providing information about the holy crown in terms of (1) its nature of solid gold, (2) its engraved message of holiness, (3) its function of the high priest’s bearing of guilt, and (4) its attachment to the front of the headdress.

Again, the phrase *thou shalt* indicates commands to Moses. He obeyed all these instructions to the letter during the actual ordination ceremony (Leviticus 8:7-9).

7. Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him.

The text now shifts focus from the high priest’s vestments to his anointing. *The anointing oil* was a mixture of olive oil and four fine spices (Exodus 30:22-25). This use of this formulation was highly restricted, what one might call “divinely proprietary” (30:26-33).

What Do You Think?

In what cases would you initiate an anointing with oil?

Digging Deeper

How do Mark 6:13 and James 5:14-15 inform your response?

C. Descendants, Dress, and Duration (vv. 8-9)

8-9a. And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them. And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them.

Regarding the names and number of Aaron’s



Visual for Lessons 3 & 4. Display this visual as you ask the discussion questions associated with the lesson conclusion.

sons, see commentary on Exodus 29:4, above. They were the nephews of Moses, who was still receiving the *thou shalt* instructions regarding their ordination to be priests. After they had been ceremonially washed (Exodus 29:4), they would be ready to receive the garments prepared for them.

Comparing the sons' *coats*, *girdles*, and *bonnets* with the clothing of their father is insightful. The results of such a comparison classifies the garments in terms of (1) those common to both father and sons, (2) those unique to the father, and (3) those unique to the sons.

In Exodus 29:5-6, considered above, we saw that Aaron was to be given seven articles of attire to constitute his vestments. An eighth item was a "girdle," noted in 28:4, 39. (We are not counting a ninth item of underwear in 28:42; 39:28.) Of these eight items, only two—coats and girdles—were common to both father and sons (28:4, 39-40; 29:5, 8; 39:27; 40:14; note: the "curious girdle" of 29:5 is different from the "girdles" of 29:9). Clothing attributed to the sons only is the headgear known as "bonnets" (28:40; 39:28).

It's easy to focus so much on these details that we lose sight of the bigger picture. That bigger picture is found in God's stated intent for these vestments to evoke a sense of "glory" and "beauty" regarding the priesthood (Exodus 28:2, 40).

9b. And the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

The words in the original language translated *perpetual statute* occur about two dozen times in the Old Testament. In addition to describing the enduring nature of the priestly *office* (compare Exodus 40:15), it also describes priestly tasks (examples: 27:21; Leviticus 24:3).

Hand-Me-Down Clothes

Whenever family discussions turn to the subject of hand-me-down clothes, it's usually not with a positive tone! But there is at least one positive case, and it's a big one: the clothing of ancient Israel's high priest was to be passed along from generation to generation (Exodus 29:29-30). This set of clothing was considered so valuable that the first-century Jewish historian Josephus noted that it came under the control of King Herod and then his son Archelaus (the same ones of Matthew 2:1, 22), followed by Roman authorities.

While the priestly clothing of Aaron and his sons was intended to be impressive, it was not the most important aspect of their consecration. The most important thing was that the priestly office was an enduring gift (Numbers 18:7).

The same can be said of our new covenant priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). Do you treat it that way?

—M. S. K.

III. Requiring a Week

(Exodus 29:35-37)

A. For the Priests (v. 35)

35. And thus shalt thou do unto Aaron, and to his sons, according to all things which I have commanded thee: seven days shalt thou consecrate them.

This verse summarizes the intricacies of the ordination process for *Aaron* and *his sons* as set forth in Exodus 29:10-34 and Leviticus 8. Some students propose that its requirement to last *seven days* was an intended parallel to the seven days of creation, ending on the Sabbath.

The seven days could also have served as a necessary period of familiarization with God's required actions. In Leviticus 8:35, Moses stressed the seven-day requirement and the deadly consequences of not honoring it. Two of Aaron's four

sons died for a different violation shortly after their seven days were completed (Leviticus 9:1; 10:1-3).

What Do You Think?

What kinds of “waiting periods” do you need to adopt personally?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture convicts you most in this regard?

B. For the Altar (vv. 36-37)

36. And thou shalt offer every day a bull-ock for a sin offering for atonement: and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it, to sanctify it.

The tabernacle was equipped with two altars: one of about 56 square feet in area for animal sacrifices (Exodus 27:1-9) and another, smaller altar of less than 3 square feet in area for burning incense (30:1-10). *The altar* in view here is the sacrificial altar. This altar was the place where the priests did most of their work (Hebrews 10:11).

A sin offering was a means of *atonement*; Leviticus 4 explains this in detail. The need to *cleanse the altar . . . to sanctify it* is addressed in Leviticus 16 (lesson 5).

37. Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.

The fact that *whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy* is quite remarkable given that it is the opposite of the normal laws of defilement. When “clean” and “unclean” come into contact with one another, the regular pattern is that the clean becomes unclean (Leviticus 5:2-3; Haggai 2:11-13; etc.). Jesus took as given that the altar sanctifies the sacrificial gift on it (Matthew 23:19).

Conclusion

A. The Old in the New

The importance of today’s lesson is seen in the fact that ordination to the priesthood was

instructed in Exodus 29, carried out in detail in Leviticus 8, and viewed as an accomplished fact in Exodus 40. Such repetition should catch our attention!

Even so, we may wonder about modern relevance. Today’s text describes persons and events from over 3,000 years ago. Aaron and Moses are long dead. Neither the tabernacle nor the Jerusalem temple stands today. A natural, perhaps instinctive way of seeing relevance is to see parallels between the ordination of priests in the Old Testament and the modern practice of ordaining ministers of the gospel. There is value in doing so, but that’s not the primary point of relevance.

That primary relevance is at least twofold. The first is that the functions of the tabernacle, priests, and blood sacrifices form the framework for understanding Jesus’ sacrifice as an atonement (propitiation) for our sins (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; etc.). The second concerns the fact and obligations of our own priesthood (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5; etc.). We neglect facts of the old covenant as foundations for the new covenant at our peril (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who says that Scripture texts like today’s are meaningless to modern-day believers?

Digging Deeper

In what ways has your mindset regarding the Old Testament changed because of this lesson?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we honor Your plan to provide the priesthoods of both old and new covenants. Convict us on how we can do better at honoring our priesthood of all believers as it reflects Your holiness. We pray this is the name of our great high priest, the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins, Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Honor your part in the priesthood of all believers.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Show a video of someone taking an oath of office or allegiance. If playing such a video isn't possible, read through one such oath instead.

Write these "inquiry words" on the board:

Who? What? Where? When? Why?

Cycle through these words in whole-class discussion as they help your participants understand the meaning and significance of the oath.

Lead to Bible study by saying, "Today, we will look at the ancient ordination or consecration of Old Testament priests and how that is a foundation for important New Testament concepts."

Into the Word

Have two participants take turns reading the text for the lesson, Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37. Form small groups of two to six participants each, depending on the nature of your class. Designate half the groups to be **Big Picture** and the other half of the groups to be **Intricate Details**.

Distribute to each group one of two handouts (you create) that are titled according to the group's designation.

Big Picture Groups

- 1—How does Exodus 29 relate to Leviticus 8?
- 2—What is the overall significance of the garments?
- 3—Why a seven-day process rather than one hour?
- 4—Why so many intricate details?

Intricate Details Groups

- 1—What were the various ways the loaves were to be distinguished from one another?
- 2—What priestly garments did Aaron wear that his sons did not?
- 3—What priestly garments did the sons wear that Aaron did not?
- 4—What priestly garments did Aaron and his sons have in common?

Option. Announce a three-minute time limit for each question. Say "time to move on" after each three-minute limit is reached. After the total

of 16 minutes is reached, reconvene for a whole-class discussion of discoveries. Make sure that you, the teacher, can answer the questions yourself.

Option. Test your participants' recall of facts by distributing the "About One-Third of the Alphabet" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Announce that this is a one-minute work-alone speed drill. Bibles closed! Have participants score their own results.

Write the following seven references on the board as headers to seven columns, one each: *Mark 3:14; Luke 10:1; Acts 6:2-6; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Timothy 5:22.* Then, in relation to Exodus 29:1-9, do a whole-class compare (how they are similar) and contrast (how they differ) with the seven texts individually. Jot observations under the appropriate text.

Into Life

Immediately following the consideration of the seven texts above, read aloud 1 Peter 2:5, 9. Ask, "Which is the best New Testament parallel to Exodus 29: the appointment of specific individuals in those seven texts, or the appointment of all Christians in 1 Peter 2:5, 9?" Expect that the ensuing discussion will raise the question "If every Christian is ordained or consecrated to a priesthood, then does ordination or consecration (being set apart) mean anything special?" Raise that question yourself if no one else does.

Make sure that the discussion at some point compares the "go between" or "intermediary" functions of old covenant priests with our own priesthood privilege of interceding for one another (1 Timothy 2:1).

Option. Distribute copies of the "Exactly All of My Life" exercise from the activity page. Have class members work on it in pairs. If time is short, use the exercise as homework; encourage its completion in that regard by stating that you will call for results at the beginning of next week's class.

Offering a Sweet Aroma to God

Devotional Reading: Romans 12:1-8
Background Scripture: Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13

Leviticus 1:3-17

3 If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.

4 And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

5 And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

6 And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces.

7 And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire:

8 And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar:

9 But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

10 And if his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice; he shall bring it a male without blemish.

11 And he shall kill it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle his blood round about upon the altar.

12 And he shall cut it into his pieces, with his head and his fat: and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar:

13 But he shall wash the inwards and the legs with water: and the priest shall bring it all, and burn it upon the altar: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

14 And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons.

15 And the priest shall bring it unto the altar, and wring off his head, and burn it on the altar; and the blood thereof shall be wrung out at the side of the altar:

16 And he shall pluck away his crop with his feathers, and cast it beside the altar on the east part, by the place of the ashes:

17 And he shall cleave it with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

Key Text

His inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And if his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice; he shall bring it a male without blemish. —Leviticus 1:9-10

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 1: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify God’s key expectations for burnt offerings.
2. Compare and contrast the expectation of an unblemished sacrifice with that of 1 Peter 1:19.
3. Recruit an accountability partner for mutual support in giving God the best of the learner’s service.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Book of Worship?
- B. Lesson Context

I. An Offering from the Herd (Leviticus 1:3-9)

- A. Preparing the Animal (vv. 3-6)
Opportunity Cost

- B. Presenting the Sacrifice (vv. 7-9)

II. An Offering from the Flock (Leviticus 1:10-13)

- A. Preparing the Animal (vv. 10-12)
The Perfect Tax Return

- B. Presenting the Sacrifice (v. 13)

III. An Offering of Birds (Leviticus 1:14-17)

- A. Preparing the Sacrifice (vv. 14-16)
- B. Presenting the Sacrifice (v. 17)

Conclusion

- A. Burnt Offerings in the Old Testament
- B. The Smell of Worship
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Book of Worship?

If you were to ask a group of people today with a fair degree of Bible knowledge to name a book of the Bible dealing with worship, the majority response would likely be Psalms. Some might name Revelation because of the scenes of worship and praise described within the book.

Few, if any, would suggest Leviticus. Leviticus contains no hymns of praise to the Lord. The text focuses on ritual observances, sacrificial rites, and the preservation of boundaries between the sacred and profane and the pure and impure. Yet under the covenant of Sinai, these rituals were integral parts of the proper worship of God (Exodus 3:15; compare 7:16). Leviticus instructs God’s people under the old covenant how they are to approach, honor, and offer sacrifices to Him so that their covenant relationship remains firm. Today’s lesson text comes from the opening chapter of Leviticus, which covers the appropriate procedures for carrying out the burnt offerings.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Leviticus is one of the five books, collectively known as the Pentateuch, traditionally ascribed to Moses. The contents of the Pentateuch as a whole are best viewed as deriving originally from Moses and carrying his authority (see Leviticus 26:46).

This quarter’s previous lessons, taken from the book of Exodus, emphasized that God would dwell with His people and receive their worship in the tabernacle. Leviticus contains the most thorough instructions on the proper forms and procedures for the worship of God: the “where” and “how” for worship. The book’s divine authority and purposes are emphasized from the start (Leviticus 1:1-2). These are the Lord’s regulations and instructions for His people and how they must conduct themselves in relation to Him.

Leviticus takes its name from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. The title reflects the fact that the book relates to the tasks of the Levites, who assisted the priests in carrying out duties associated with wor-

ship at the tabernacle. (We recall that all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.)

A key word in Leviticus is the word *holy*. Of its 600-plus occurrences in the Bible, more are found in Leviticus than in any other book of the Bible. *Holiness* refers to a state of being set apart, including both ritual and ethical purity. The words “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2) are directed not only to all the people of ancient Israel but to all of God’s people through time (1 Peter 1:15-16, quoting that verse).

With so much emphasis in Leviticus on *holiness*, perhaps we might think that teachings on *love* would take a back seat and be stressed elsewhere. But one of the most often quoted Old Testament passages in the New Testament is Leviticus 19:18, “Love thy neighbour as thyself.” Jesus even cited this as one of the two greatest commandments (Matthew 22:39; compare 5:43; 19:19; Mark 12:31-33; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).

What Do You Think?

Which most motivates you to worship: the “where” or the “how”?

Digging Deeper

Which of these passages help you most: John 4:23-24; Acts 2:46-47; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 9:1; 10:25; 12:28?

I. An Offering from the Herd

(Leviticus 1:3-9)

A. Preparing the Animal (vv. 3-6)

3a. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish.

In the verse just before this one, the Lord permitted that animal sacrifices could come from either a person’s herd (of cattle) or flock (of sheep and goats). The verse before us narrows the focus specifically to that of a *burnt offering* that comes from *the herd*.

The directive to sacrifice only animals *without blemish* is repeated in Deuteronomy 15:21. This command reflects a key distinction between profane and sacred things. It also emphasizes that God deserves the best of one’s herds rather than

the worst. Leviticus 22:17-33 gives an extended warning against unacceptable sacrifices. Centuries later, the prophet Malachi would charge God’s people with violating this prohibition (Malachi 1:8, 13-14). The added specification that the blemish-free sacrifice be *male* foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus (Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to ensure that you offer “the best” to Christ?

Digging Deeper

How do passages such as Genesis 4:2-5; 2 Corinthians 8:12; 9:7 help you answer that question?

3b. He shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.

The Hebrew word translated *of his own voluntary will* occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament, seven of those in the book of Leviticus. It may refer to something that is acceptable or pleasing from the point of view of the giver or from the point of view of the receiver. In the context of Leviticus’s focus on proper sacrifices, the word refers to what is acceptable to God, what conforms to His requirements, and what pleases Him (Leviticus 19:5; 22:19-21, 29; 23:11).

The burnt offering could not be presented just anywhere the giver desired. The worshipper had to bring it to the place specifically designated for such a sacred purpose: the tabernacle. The Lord was to be worshipped on His terms and at the sole place designated for that purpose. He instituted strict penalties for performing sacrifices in any other location (Leviticus 17:1-4, 8-9). Deuteronomy 12:11-14 reiterates the necessity of a centralized worship site, anticipating the future temple in Jerusalem. This requirement forced the Israelites to worship the Lord alone in a consistent way and prevented them from continuing their practices of sacrificing to “devils” (Leviticus 17:5-7).

Opportunity Cost

The average cost of a beef cow in 2023 in the United States was in the neighborhood of \$3,000.

That was also about how much an average US homeowner spent on home maintenance that year. Neither cost was trivial for most people. And for an ancient Israelite, giving up a head of cattle for a burnt offering was significant.

Bearing the burdens of all these costs serves as a gauge of commitment to something or someone. And incurring an expense of \$3,000 means that that money isn't available to use elsewhere. That's known as "an opportunity cost," and it's an ideal gauge for measuring the level of your devotion to the kingdom of God.

Look at the level of your financial giving, and ask yourself, *What am I giving up the opportunity of buying when I put this amount of money in the offering plate or devote X amount of time to ministry activities?* The resulting "opportunity cost" will be quite revealing!

—R. L. N.

4. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

As the reader works through the procedure specified for the various types of sacrifices, several similarities are seen. The first is the instruction to put a *hand upon the head* of the offering (compare Exodus 29:10, 15, 19; Leviticus 3:8, 13; 4:4, 29, 33; 8:14, 18, 22). This is the first of a multistep procedure. The placement of the hand symbolizes the person's submission of the animal as a sacrifice on the person's behalf. Commentary on Leviticus 1:9, below, summarizes the entirety of the steps.

5. And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

As the procedure continues to the following steps, we may wonder who did the hands-on work to *kill the bullock*. The context implies that it was the one who had brought the animal to be sacrificed; after that, *the priests, Aaron's sons* (ordained in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8), took over to perform the rest of the tasks regarding *blood*. But Leviticus 14:19-20 mentions a priest who was to slaughter the animal. In any case, a priest had to be present to officiate.

The use of *blood*, as described, functions as a mechanism of purification. It reinforced the principle of atonement since, as the Lord later declared, "The life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11).

6. And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces.

The next step was the removal (*shall flay*) of the animal's hide. This might be either prior to or simultaneous with cutting the carcass *into his pieces*. Both would speed up the burning process. Leviticus 7:8 directed that the priest officiating at the burnt offering should receive the animal's hide.

B. Presenting the Sacrifice (vv. 7-9)

7. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire.

Only priests were allowed to carry out the act of sacrificing the animal prepared for the burnt offering. The phrase *put fire upon the altar* does not mean "to start the fire," because the fire for this *altar* was to burn continuously (Leviticus 6:9-13; Numbers 28:1-8). The idea, instead, is to stoke the fire.

8. And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar.

Exodus 29:13 and Leviticus 8:20; 9:13 specify *the parts* in greater detail.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you discharge your new-covenant priestly role (Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:5)?

Digging Deeper

How do you expect your answers to differ from those of other Christians? Why?

9. But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

This verse concludes the description of the ritual that began in Leviticus 1:4, above. The resulting smoke that creates a *sweet savour unto the*

Lord attributes a human characteristic—a sense of smell—to God. This is anthropomorphic language. Even though God is a Spirit (John 4:24), the Scriptures speak of Him as having physical characteristics (examples: Psalm 34:15-16; John 12:38). Here, the sense of smell depicts how the Lord was pleased with the burnt offering as presented in the manner set forth in the text (compare Amos 5:21).

To summarize, the ritual involved these steps:

1. Place hand on the animal's head
2. Slay the animal
3. Splash animal blood against the sides of the altar
4. Remove the hide from the carcass
5. Dismember the carcass
6. Stoke the altar fire
7. Arrange wood on the altar
8. Arrange body pieces and fat on the altar fire
9. Wash internal organs and legs
10. Burn all except hide to create smoke pleasing to the Lord

II. An Offering from the Flock (Leviticus 1:10-13)

A. Preparing the Animal (vv. 10-12)

10. And if his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice; he shall bring it a male without blemish.

For this kind of offering, *goats* or *sheep* that were *male without blemish* were interchangeable with bullocks, just discussed. We see male goats and sheep themselves as interchangeable for Passover in Exodus 12:5. Either goats or sheep were acceptable for peace offerings, with either male or female allowed (Leviticus 3). Either bullocks, male or female goats, or female lambs are allowed for sin or trespass offerings, depending on the nature of the sin (4:14, 24; 5:6).

The Perfect Tax Return

One of the editors of the book you are now holding moved from Ohio to Colorado in 2016. As April 15 of the following year approached, he spent several days preparing his five income tax returns (one federal, two state, and two city returns). The result was 17 total pages of income tax returns!



Visual for Lessons 3 & 4. As you discuss the commentary on verse 17, point to this visual and ask, "How will your life be a pleasing sacrifice to God?"

Knowing that the government requires that tax returns be devoid of omissions, he was scrupulous about accuracy (compare Romans 13:6-7). To his dismay, however, the 17 pages should have been 18—he had neglected to file one particular form with his Colorado return, thinking that that page was just a worksheet. And so he had to pay a five-dollar fine.

Reading the book of Leviticus may cause us to think that the Old Testament system of sacrifices was as complicated as modern tax codes, not to mention the Old Testament's consideration of the relative value of animal sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8). But as we sift through the requirements of the old covenant, the one element we dare not lose sight of is the requirement for an unblemished sacrificial animal. That requirement describes Jesus, upon whose perfection our salvation depends (1 Peter 1:18-19). That standard must also be ours (Matthew 5:48; 2 Peter 3:14). Is this your priority? —O. P.

11. And he shall kill it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle his blood round about upon the altar.

Here a specific instruction was given as to where the animal was to be slain: *on the side of the altar northward*. Why this was required is not entirely clear, although it may have something to do with the fact that the tabernacle and the

gateway into its courtyard faced east (Numbers 2:3; 3:38; 10:14). This rationale may also combine in some way with a need to distinguish this offering from the one taken from the herd; other than that, the procedure at this point is the same.

12. And he shall cut it into his pieces, with his head and his fat: and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar.

Again, the procedure is the same as that designated for the bovines (Leviticus 1:5-8, above).

B. Presenting the Sacrifice (v. 13)

13. But he shall wash the inwards and the legs with water: and the priest shall bring it all, and burn it upon the altar: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

Yet again, the procedure is the same as with the bullock (Leviticus 1:9, above).

III. An Offering of Birds

(Leviticus 1:14-17)

A. Preparing the Sacrifice (vv. 14-16)

14. And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons.

This option for a *burnt* offering was provided for people who could not afford to bring the aforementioned offerings from a herd or flock (Leviticus 5:7-10). Such an option was also provided for women after childbirth who could not afford to offer a lamb for the burnt offering of purification (12:8). One may recall the sacrifice that Joseph and Mary offered following the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:24).

15. And the priest shall bring it unto the altar, and wring off his head, and burn it on the altar; and the blood thereof shall be wrung out at the side of the altar.

The procedure for offering a bird as a burnt

offering differed from that prescribed for offerings from the herd or the flock (compare Leviticus 5:7-10). Whereas the blood of the animals that were sacrificed was sprinkled around the altar of burnt offering, the bird's blood was to be *wrung out at the side of the altar*. Though the bird's blood would not be nearly as abundant as that of the other animals, the need to separate its blood from its body must be completed. Israelites were forbidden to eat blood (7:10-14; compare Genesis 9:4).

16. And he shall pluck away his crop with his feathers, and cast it beside the altar on the east part, by the place of the ashes.

The meaning of a bird's *crop* is uncertain. It may refer to the pouch near the gullet or throat (the craw) where the bird stores food temporarily before digestion. Another option is that it may refer to the lower intestines. Its removal may be compared to removing the intestines from the animals of the herd or the flock.

The place of ashes that was *beside the altar* seems to have been a temporary location for ashes; the ultimate destination for that refuse was outside the camp (Leviticus 4:12; 6:10; 8:17; Numbers 4:13).

B. Presenting the Sacrifice (v. 17)

17. And he shall cleave it with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

Further instructions regarding the sacrifices of birds conclude this portion of our text. The anatomy of a bird is quite different from that of sheep/goats and bovines, thus the sacrificial procedure was quite different. *The priest* was solely responsible for preparing and presenting the bird as a burnt offering. Though not as monetarily valuable as something offered from the flock or the herd, this offering still produced a *sweet savour unto the Lord*. Whether the worshipper was well-to-do or impoverished made no difference to the Lord, who treats everyone alike (Acts 10:34; compare Deuteronomy 10:17).

As followers of Jesus, our duty is to offer to God, not burnt sacrifices of animals or birds, but our lives

How to Say It

anthropomorphic	an-thruh-puh- <i>more</i> -fik.
Pentateuch	Pen-ta-teuk.
Septuagint	Sep- <i>too</i> -ih-jent.

as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). Our sacrifices do include the monetary (Hebrews 13:16; 2 Corinthians 8:3-4; Philippians 4:18) but are primarily spiritual (1 Peter 2:5), consisting of “the fruit of our lips” offering our thanks to God (Hebrews 13:15) and the good deeds we do as salt and light in our spheres of influence (Matthew 5:13-14).

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to help others understand the foreshadowing nature of Levitical sacrifices?

Digging Deeper

Which elements of foreshadowing can you list right now?

Conclusion

A. Burnt Offerings in the Old Testament

The burnt offering is the first of several kinds of sacrifices in the book of Leviticus. The burnt offering is mentioned first, perhaps because it was the most committal: the one presenting the sacrifice received nothing tangible back. At first glance, Deuteronomy 12:27 would seem to contradict that statement. But this exception applied to Israelites who lived too far from the tabernacle to make the trip there (Deuteronomy 12:21).

Burnt offerings are mentioned about 270 times in the Old Testament. Their association with atonement makes study of them important in light of New Testament passages such as Mark 12:33 and Hebrews 10:1-14.

B. The Smell of Worship

One day, in a class I was teaching, we discussed the sacrifices the Israelites were required to bring as part of their worship of the Lord. Someone asked, “How did those people stand the smell of all of those animals being burned up day after day?”

Yes, to our modern way of thinking, the sacrificial system prescribed in the Old Testament and covered in today’s text may seem odd, wasteful (killing all those animals), and even offensive. And, as mentioned earlier, the book of Leviticus does not make for the most captivating reading in the world!

Whatever ugliness we may see or disgust we

may feel about the sacrificial system, with all its bloodshed and the continual smell coming from the sacrifices being offered, God saw things differently. The sacrificial offerings constituted, as our lesson title states, “a sweet aroma.” This is why it is so important to allow Him to dictate what kind of worship is acceptable to Him.

Through the sacrificial system, God demonstrated the necessity of total commitment to Him, His desire to be present with His people, and the seriousness of sin. And He wanted people to understand that, as Paul puts it in Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin is death.” But God, in His grace, has always provided a substitute so that we do not have to pay those wages. In the Old Testament system, the substitutes were the animals or birds. Those substitutes foreshadowed the ultimate Substitute who God in time would provide: Jesus, whose sacrifice at the cross was also a “sweetsmelling savour” (Ephesians 5:2), the once-for-all sacrifice that fulfilled what (and who) the Old Testament sacrifices pointed toward. Indeed, as Paul puts it, our lives are to serve as “a sweet savour of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14), spreading “the savour of his knowledge . . . in every place” (2:15).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the claim that the book of Leviticus has no value for modern-day Christians?

Digging Deeper

How has this lesson changed your answer?

C. Prayer

Our Father, help us to see the meaning of the word *offering* as more than money. May we demonstrate the commitment and obedience to bring our best before the Lord. Thank You for the sacrifice of Jesus, who gave himself unreservedly to be the sacrifice needed to remove our sins and provide full atonement that we might be reconciled with You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Always worship God on His terms, not ours.

The Day of Atonement

Devotional Reading: Psalm 40:9-17
Background Scripture: Leviticus 16

Leviticus 16:11-19

11 And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself:

12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail:

13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel.

18 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

19 And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Key Text

He shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. —Leviticus 16:16

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 1: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Explain the significance of the Day of Atonement.
2. Compare and contrast the Day of Atonement with Jesus' sacrifice.
3. Participate in a debate on the value (or lack thereof) of specifying an annual day for congregational confession of sin or write a prayer confessing sin.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Necessary Barriers
- B. Lesson Context

I. Atonement for Some (Leviticus 16:11-14)

- A. Bull as Sin Offering (v. 11)
- B. Incense for a Cloud (vv. 12-13)
- C. Blood for Sprinkling (v. 14)

II. Atonement for Many (Leviticus 16:15-17)

- A. Goat as Sin Offering (v. 15a)
- B. Blood for Sprinkling (v. 15b)
Typology? Typography?
- C. Result for Places (v. 16)
Hijacked Words
- D. Restriction of Entry (v. 17)

III. Atonement for the Altar (Leviticus 16:18-19)

- A. Blood Applied (v. 18)
- B. Blood Sprinkled (v. 19)

Conclusion

- A. What a Day!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Necessary Barriers

One good principle of life is *Don't tear down a fence until you find out why it was erected in the first place*. Undoubtedly, there was a reason for putting up any given fence in the first place, but the question is whether that reason still exists.

This principle applies all the more regarding divine matters. Within the Old Testament, the world is divided in part between pure and impure things. While God has always desired to dwell with His people, His presence cannot reside in an impure location, so barriers must be erected. Today's lesson text describes how God addressed the problem of sacred space and impurity in the Old Testament era. Next week's lesson will address His permanent solution.

B. Lesson Context

The Lesson Context from last week's lesson, drawn from Leviticus 1, also applies to this lesson, so that information does not need to be repeated here. The lesson at hand will, in turn, be the context for next week's lesson from Hebrews.

In this, our second lesson in Leviticus, we jump from chapter 1 to chapter 16. How these two chapters fit within the whole book is seen in this broad-brush outline:

- I. Sacrificial Worship (1:1–7:38)
- II. Ritual Ceremonies (8:1–10:20)
- III. Purity vs. Impurity (11:1–15:33)
- IV. Day of Atonement (16:1-34)
- V. Holy Sacrifices (17:1-16)
- VI. Community Holiness (18:1–20:27)
- VII. Particularly Holy (21:1–27:34)

God established several feasts and holy days for the new nation of Israel. These are listed in Leviticus 23; Numbers 28–29; Deuteronomy 16; etc. In the book of Leviticus, the Day of Atonement takes center stage among them (compare Numbers 29:7-11). Indeed, the writer of Leviticus devotes more than 4 percent of the entire book to that single day on the calendar of the ancient Israelites—the tenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 16:29; 23:27). On the modern calendar, this equates to a day in late September or early October. If you've

heard this day referred to as *Yom Kippur*, then you are learning to speak Hebrew!

The sacred space designated “most holy” is the context for the actions taken on that day of every year. Perhaps you have heard that place described as “the holy of holies.” That is a very literal, word-for-word translation of the Hebrew as it is found in Exodus 26:33; 1 Kings 6:16; 7:50; 8:6; and elsewhere. The translation “the holy of holies” does not appear in the *King James Version*, but the location is the same in the translation “the holy place within the veil” (Leviticus 16:2) or simply “the most holy” (Exodus 26:33). The most holy place was the heart of the tabernacle, the sacred structure that God commanded Moses to build as a site for God’s presence among the people (Exodus 26).

Our printed text picks up with the Lord’s instruction on how Aaron, brother of Moses and the first high priest (Leviticus 16:2-5), was to discharge his duties when that sacred day came around each year.

I. Atonement for Some

(Leviticus 16:11-14)

A. Bull as Sin Offering (v. 11)

11. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself.

This verse begins to list the sacrificial procedures needed to cleanse the most holy place, starting with the cleansing of the high priest, *Aaron* himself. He had to address his uncleanness before taking the next step of atoning for the people’s sins. After doing so, Aaron proceeded to offer the required sacrifices that were part of the day’s procedures.

The verb translated *make an atonement* is a critical one in the book of Leviticus. In fact, over half of its appearances in the Bible occur in Leviticus. The popular-level description of atonement is that of “at-one-ment” with God. That is certainly what atonement results in, but the verb translated “make an atonement” by itself doesn’t reveal to our modern ears how that “at-one-ment” with God is to be achieved.

*Prepare to be in
God’s holy presence.*



Visual for Lesson 5. *Display this visual and lead into the lesson by asking learners to notice how the ancient Hebrews prepared to be in God’s presence.*

The challenge involves some technical issues with the nature of the Hebrew language. In the word’s various configurations and contexts, it can mean “ransom,” “payment of money,” “bribe,” or “pacify” (Exodus 30:12; Job 31:39; 1 Samuel 12:3; Proverbs 16:14, respectively). These meanings are not mutually exclusive; they can shade into one another depending on context.

The old Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, helps us here. The words it uses are picked up in the New Testament to explain the sacrifice of Christ in terms of the word *propitiation* (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). That meaning also fits with what the Day of Atonement provided: a means of escaping the penalty for one’s sin by the offering of a substitutionary sacrifice. Sin offerings are explained in Leviticus 4:1–5:13.

B. Incense for a Cloud (vv. 12-13)

12. And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil.

Aaron (or any high priest who would take part in these proceedings on the Day of Atonement) had to prepare himself carefully and appropriately before entering *within the veil*, meaning the curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place within the tabernacle (compare Exodus 26:33; Hebrews 6:19; 9:2-5). The source of the

needed *burning coals of fire* was likely the altar of burnt offering, which was located near the front of the courtyard of the tabernacle (Exodus 27:1-8). Aaron's loss of two sons when they misused censers of fire (Leviticus 10:1-2) made clear the necessity of following these instructions with great care and seriousness.

The ingredients for the *sweet incense* are found in Exodus 30:34-38. Such incense had two purposes. First, it was another kind of sacrificial item showing honor to God. Second, the aroma permeated the area around the tabernacle and highlighted the uniqueness and separateness of the place. It thus served as a perceptible reminder that God was holy and that the precincts of His abode should be respected.

13. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not.

The *cloud* of smoke created by the burning of *incense* is for Aaron's protection (compare Exodus 28:43), since no one can see God's face and live (33:20). The *mercy seat* refers to the elaborate cover of the ark of the covenant, which was topped with two golden angelic figures (cherubim) facing one another with outstretched wings (25:10-22). The ark represented God's presence among the people. The word translated as *testimony* refers to the stone tablets into which Moses chiseled God's law (34:1-4, 29), tablets that were kept inside the ark of the covenant (16:34; 25:21; 40:20).

The presence of the Lord in this most holy place is what made it "most holy." That was why the high priest could not enter it carelessly or casually. God must be approached on His terms, not ours.

What Do You Think?

Considering Revelation 8:3-4, how will you adjust your prayer life to be more of a fragrant incense before God?

Digging Deeper

Which is more important in that regard: quantity or quality? Why?

C. Blood for Sprinkling (v. 14)

14. And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

This action is similar to what was to be done for other sin offerings (Leviticus 4:6-7, 17-18). In those cases, the blood was to be applied to the altar of incense, which was located immediately in front of the veil (curtain) that shielded the most holy place. Here, however, the blood was first to be sprinkled on the east side of the ark of the covenant. Since the tabernacle was situated facing east (Numbers 2:3), the *eastward* side is the front side.

The high priest was also to sprinkle some of the blood *seven times* on the ground directly in front of the mercy seat. This represented the entirety of the most holy place being brought into contact with the blood of the sin offering. The number seven often represents completeness or perfection (examples: Revelation 5:6; 15:1, 8). See Hebrews 9:7-8 for further explanation.

II. Atonement for Many

(Leviticus 16:15-17)

A. Goat as Sin Offering (v. 15a)

15a. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people.

Having provided atonement for himself and his family, the high priest was then to prepare to enter the most holy place a second time on behalf of *the people*, his fellow Israelites. That preparation involved killing one of the two goats of *the sin offering*, mentioned in Leviticus 16:5. The first goat was slaughtered as an atoning sacrifice, cleansing the sacred precincts from the impurity of Israel's sins. The other goat became the scapegoat, which was released into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:8-10, 20-22). The priest would first lay hands on the goat's head and confess the people's sins over it, thus transferring them symbolically to the animal (16:21). A person would then be charged with taking the goat into the wilderness and releasing it so that it wouldn't return (16:22, 26-28). The scapegoat and its destination

thus represented the complete removal of the sins and impurities of the people.

B. Blood for Sprinkling (v. 15b)

15b. And bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat.

The high priest was to follow the same procedure that he did in providing atonement for himself and his household. Sin offerings on behalf of the people are described in detail in Leviticus 4:13-21.

What Do You Think?

What do the meticulous instructions regarding the ministry work for and on the Day of Atonement have to say about providing ministry today, if anything?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do you see the spiritual, mental, and physical preparations for ministry tasks to be interrelated?

Typology? Typography?

Here's an advanced Bible comprehension quiz:

1. What's the difference between *typology* and *typography*?
2. Which of those two terms is more important for today's study? Why?

Answers: 1. *Typology* is the study of how one thing serves as a pattern for another thing; *typography* deals with the style and arrangement of typeset matter. 2. Although you may admire the pleasing layout of the book you are now reading due to excellent typography, it's typology that really counts in Bible study.

You may have heard typology referred to by the more familiar description of *type* and *antitype*. These two words express how Old Testament things (the "types") foreshadow New Testament things (the "antitypes"). Multiple New Testament texts highlight these typological relationships: Adam was a "figure" of Christ (Romans 5:14), and God's provision of water and bread and deliverance of His people through the Red Sea foreshad-

owed communion and baptism under the new covenant (1 Corinthians 10:6-12).

A treasure trove of types and antitypes is found in comparing the book of Leviticus with the book of Hebrews. Start by re-studying last week's and this week's lessons from Leviticus in light of next week's lesson from Hebrews. But do so only if you're interested in moving from the "milk" of the Word of God to the "meat" (Hebrews 5:12-13). Are you? —R. L. N.

C. Result for Places (v. 16)

16a. And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins.

We may wonder why *the holy place* would need atonement. After all, inanimate objects have no consciousness or ability to sin! As pointed out in the comment on verse 11, atonement addressed not only individual sins but also the contamination of places and things closely associated with the holy God. Therefore, *atonement* was not only for people but also for consecrated things and areas.

Three words underline the seriousness of the spiritual state of *the children of Israel*: *uncleanness*, *transgressions*, and *sins*. The Hebrew word rendered *transgressions* is the most serious word in Hebrew for disobedience toward God; it implies deliberate and willful rebellion. It occurs twice in Leviticus 16 (see 16:21) and nowhere else in the book.

Chapters 11 through 15 of Leviticus address various sources of uncleanness and impurity in greater detail. Certain prescribed sacrifices and purifications provide atonement for these. God foresaw that the Israelites would pollute the places of worship to the degree that they, too, needed to be cleansed.

What Do You Think?

What are some spiritual guardrails you can erect to ensure you are not in rebellion against God?

Digging Deeper

How do you decide which guardrails are your responsibility and which belong to the Holy Spirit?

Hijacked Words

Think of some Bible words or phrases adopted by culture to use in other contexts. One that comes to my mind is “he saw the handwriting on the wall” (adopted from Daniel 5) to describe an inevitable negative outcome. Another example is the word *holy*, which occurs often in irreverent expressions.

The word *sanctified* is one in particular that catches my attention. I heard it as part of the lyrics to the song “All Down the Line” performed by the Rolling Stones and others. It’s a song about a lonely person waiting for a train. As he waits and thinks, he decides that what he needs is a girlfriend who has a “sanctified” mind.

Christians know that the word *sanctified* means “to be holy” or “consecrated,” signifying distance from spiritual uncleanness. The song, however, seems to use the word *sanctified* merely as a three-syllable filler to coordinate the meter of two lines of lyrics. This makes me wonder if Christians do something similar personally. Is your sanctification just a casual, filler concept, or is it something you pursue deliberately and daily? Before answering, read John 17:17-19; 1 Corinthians 6:10-11; and 1 Thessalonians 5:23. —R. L. N.

16b. And so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

When Moses set apart the nation of Israel as God’s covenant people, he did so by sprinkling blood on an altar, on the book of the covenant, and on the people (Exodus 24:6-8; Hebrews 9:19-20). And when *the tabernacle* was completed, it too (and everything within it) was sprinkled with blood (9:21). The tabernacle remained *among* the people, even in their state of *uncleanness*, but atonement by means of blood needed to be provided for the tabernacle each year (compare Exodus 30:10).

D. Restriction of Entry (v. 17)

17. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel.

This verse might be summed up with just three words: Keep your distance! To do so would prevent the high priest’s being distracted from his duties. The absolutely vital nature of the high priest’s actions for *atonement* is seen in the all-encompassing applications to *himself, his household, and for all the congregation of Israel*. Such a restriction echoes what the Israelites were told when God’s presence came to them at Mount Sinai. No one, not even an animal, was allowed to cross the sacred boundaries except for Moses and Aaron; whoever did so would die (Exodus 19:10-13, 24). On the Day of Atonement, no one could reenter the tabernacle until atonement had been made for priest, places, and people.

What Do You Think?

What modern ministry tasks would you be better at working alone, if any?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 6:6 and Luke 5:16 inform your answer?

III. Atonement for the Altar

(Leviticus 16:18-19)

A. Blood Applied (v. 18)

18. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

After the purification of the most holy place, the cleansing regimen progresses outward. The tabernacle featured two altars: the altar of burnt offering (Exodus 27:1-3) and the altar of incense (30:1-10). We wonder which of the two altars is being referred to here. The statement that the high priest is to *put [blood] upon the horns of the altar round about* doesn’t help us decide, since both altars were to be treated that way (Leviticus 4:7, 25).

Favoring the subject to be the altar of burnt offering is the fact that it was used for so many offerings to address the sins of the people that the need for its own atonement was much greater than that of the altar of incense (Exodus 29:36-37; compare Ezekiel 43:20). Favoring the altar

of incense, however, is the phrase *the altar that is before the Lord*. The altar of incense was located very close to the curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place, whereas the altar of burnt offering was located at the entrance to the tabernacle (Exodus 40:5-6, 26-29). Given its proximity to God’s abode, however, the position of the altar of burnt offering could also merit its description as *before the Lord*. Moreover, the fact that the priest is told to *go out* suggests that he is leaving the tabernacle, in which case the altar of burnt offering would be in view.

B. Blood Sprinkled (v. 19)

19. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Blood is not the only substance to be sprinkled *seven times* under the Law of Moses. Oil and water were also used ceremonially in this manner (examples: Leviticus 8:10-11; 14:5). Such sprinklings could be done for the physical healing of someone’s body. But blood sprinklings were for cleansing the sacred space of the tabernacles and its objects. The term *hallow* means “to make holy.”

What Do You Think?

In what ways can the corporate aspects of the Day of Atonement be applied to the church, if any?

Digging Deeper

How do Nehemiah 9 and Acts 19:18-20 influence your response?

Conclusion

A. What a Day!

The phrase *What a Day!* can convey very different messages. It can be used to characterize joy or distress, depending on the demeanor and tone of voice of the speaker.

The Day of Atonement was one of the most important days of the Israelite calendar. Some students see a fivefold purpose for the Day of Atonement. First, it highlights God’s hatred of sin. Second, it underlines the requirement for blood to

be shed for the forgiveness of sin. Third, it reveals how “contagious” sin is—even inanimate objects needed atonement. Fourth, it uses “types” to foreshadow the death of Christ. Fifth, its yearly repetition was a self-demonstration of the need for a permanent remedy for sin.

On the cross, Jesus achieved in one day what Aaron and the high priests of the old covenant who followed him could never accomplish. The effectiveness and finality of Jesus’ sacrifice was demonstrated visually by the tearing of the temple veil that set apart the most holy place (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). The writer of Hebrews refers to Jesus’ flesh as the “veil” that was “torn” to give every Christian access to the presence of God. Jesus is now our high priest, the only one necessary under the new covenant (Hebrews 10:19-21). But we shouldn’t get ahead of ourselves—that’s next week’s lesson.

B. Prayer

Our Father, You created us to be at one with You, in Your presence. But sin has shattered that oneness, bringing division and chaos. Thank You for Your grace and mercy in providing ways for that oneness to be restored—first, through a Day of Atonement designed for the ancient Israelites and now, through a superior Day of Atonement designed for the entire world and accomplished through Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice. We praise You in His name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Praise God for His provisions of atonement!

How to Say It

Corinthians	Ko- <i>rin</i> -thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Deuteronomy	Due-ter- <i>ahn</i> -uh-me.
Leviticus	Leh- <i>vit</i> -ih-kus.
Septuagint	Sep- <i>too</i> -ih-jent.
Thessalonians	<i>Thess</i> -uh- <i>lo</i> -nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
typography	tie- <i>paw</i> -gruh-fee.
typology	tie- <i>paw</i> -luh-gee.
Yom Kippur (<i>Hebrew</i>)	<i>Yohm</i> Kih- <i>purr</i> .

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to share information regarding how their families celebrate annual traditions (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) in ways other families may not. Ask for elaborations on the particulars of *why* and *how* regarding those traditions.

Transition to Bible study by saying, “It is good for us to celebrate the people, things, and events that are important to us. The celebrations of the Old Testament were something of a double-edged sword in this regard: they could simultaneously be times of celebration and solemn reflection. Today’s lesson has us consider one such day.”

Into the Word

Option. Before beginning the lesson proper, distribute copies of the “An Orderly Arrangement” as a pre-test exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Announce that learners have one minute to arrange the feasts as indicated. Go over results as a class; learners score their own results.

Ask two volunteers to take turns reading the verses of Leviticus 16:11-19. Then, divide learners into five study pairs or triads, each to focus on one element of the text you assign. Give each pair or triad a reference card on which you have printed the following:

Vail Group: Exodus 26:31-35; Leviticus 16:12-15

Incense Group: Exodus 30:34-38; Leviticus 16:12-13

Mercy Seat Group: Exodus 25:17-22; Leviticus 16:13-15

Blood Group: Leviticus 16:14-19; Hebrews 9:22

Sin Offering Group: Leviticus 4:1-12; 16:11-15

Have printed on the reference cards the following single-word questions: *Element?* *Physical description?* and *Purpose?* for learners to address as research questions for their assigned texts.

While learners work in pairs or triads, write those same three single-word research questions on the board as headers of three columns, one each. Then, write the five group names as the titles to five

horizontal rows that intersect the three columns. Fill in the intersections during whole-class discussion after groups finish their research.

Some expected observations for *Physical description* are as follows: **Vail**—fine linen in blue, purple, and scarlet; hung as a barrier between the holy place (which had the altar of incense) and the most holy place (which had the ark of the covenant); **Incense**—a sacred formula of onycha (gum resin benzoin), stacte (styrax), and galbanum (another aromatic gum resin); **Mercy seat**—the cover for the ark of the covenant, 3’ 9” in length by 2’ 3” in width, made of pure gold, recreations of cherubim included; **Blood**—from sacrificial animals, sometimes smeared, other times sprinkled; **Sin offering**—a type of offering distinct from several others listed in Leviticus 1–7. Unlike burnt offerings, which were wholly consumed by fire, the animal sacrificed in a sin offering could be eaten.

Some observations for *Purpose* may be as follows: **Vail**—served as a distinct boundary that warned of the deadly danger for unauthorized passing beyond it, signifying God’s holiness; **Incense**—provided a shield or blocking cloud between God and the high priest; God’s proprietary formula was not to be copied and used for anything else; **Mercy seat**—where God would speak with the high priest; **Blood**—necessary for atonement; **Sin offering**—likewise, necessary for atonement.

Into Life

Form your learners into two teams who are to debate this resolution: *Our congregation should have an annual day for confessing sin together.* Research various debate formats in advance, choosing the most appropriate for your class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Prayer of Confession” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to be completed as indicated.

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Mark 10:41-45

Background Scripture: Hebrews 9:23–10:25

Hebrews 9:23-28

23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-14, 19-25

1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Key Text

Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. —Hebrews 9:24

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify how a person enters the holiest place.
2. Explain why Christ had to die only once.
3. Recruit an accountability partner for mutual encouragement in love and good works.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Grandma's House
- B. Lesson Context

I. Absolute Necessity (Hebrews 9:23-28)

- A. Better Sacrifice (v. 23)
- B. Better Tabernacle (v. 24)
- C. Better Priest (vv. 25-28)

Once or Twice? Ready or Not?

II. Weak Sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1-4)

- A. Repetition (vv. 1-2)
- B. Reminder (vv. 3-4)

III. Perfect Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:11-14)

- A. Christ's Service (vv. 11-12)
- B. Christ's Rest (vv. 13-14)

IV. Implications (Hebrews 10:19-25)

- A. Reasons (vv. 19-21)
- B. Exhortation (vv. 22-25)

Faithful in Assembling

Conclusion

- A. One Sacrifice
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Grandma's House

My grandmother kept a very tidy house. The floors were always spotless, and the carpets were free of stains. She exemplified the philosophy, "A place for everything, and everything in its place."

I also knew her as a wonderful playmate. She would chase my sister and me around outside. She would play with us in the pool or the mud, teaching us to experience the world with our hands.

But we couldn't enter her house while we were dirty. She had a shower outside by her pool, where we would wash off before going inside. We had to put on clean clothes and shoes. We knew Grandma loved us, but she needed to preserve her home. Her front door separated the earthy outside world from her pristine abode. Her threshold was a barrier that uncleanness could not cross. Sound familiar?

B. Lesson Context

The book of Hebrews clarifies the relationship between the old and new covenants. Its original intended audience seems to have been Christians of Jewish heritage who were in danger of slipping back into Judaism. To address this issue, the unnamed author demonstrates how the regulations of the Law of Moses pointed to Christ and His work.

After identifying Christ as the high priest of the new covenant (Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 8:1-13), the author summarized the regulations for worship under the old covenant (9:1-7) and how those practices were not permanent (9:8-10). They have been superseded by the one-time sacrifice of Christ, the ultimate high priest (9:11-22). These details set the stage for the outstanding summary presented in chapters 9 and 10, the focus of today's text.

I. Absolute Necessity

(Hebrews 9:23-28)

A. Better Sacrifice (v. 23)

23. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The word *therefore* indicates that the writer is moving from establishing facts of Christ's blood atonement—the "What's so?"—to exploring the implications of those facts—the "So what?" The phrase *patterns of things in the heavens* refers to things of earth with counterparts in Heaven. The need to use animal blood to purify various elements of the old covenant worship structures seems clear in Leviticus 16:15-19. But the second half of the verse at hand tells us that the *necessary* also applies to *the heavenly things themselves*. But if nothing sinful has come into contact with those heavenly things, why the need for purification?

Some students see a "lesser to the greater" logical argument as the solution. Such an argument says that if something is true for a thing of lesser importance, it must also be true for a thing of greater importance. The next verse provides insight into the author's assertion regarding the need to purify the heavenly things.

What Do You Think?

What "necessary" actions do you need to take now that Christ has completed His own "necessary" actions?

Digging Deeper

Would *justification* and *sanctification* be two good categories for your responses? Why, or why not?

B. Better Tabernacle (v. 24)

24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

The word *for* implies that what follows explains or expands on the previous statement. Mortal high priests enter into a sanctuary made by human hands (contrast Acts 7:48). Christ, on the other hand, entered *into heaven itself* at His ascension. There, He performed His priestly duties in the heavenly tabernacle, not in the replica on earth (see Hebrews 9:12). The author emphasizes a distinctive feature of Christ's heavenly ministry. The present tense *now* points to Christ's ongoing role in interceding for believers (see Romans 8:34;

Hebrews 7:25). Contrary to mortal priests who repeatedly offer sacrifices, Christ's single sacrifice has eternally settled the sin debt (see 7:27; 10:10). In this role, Jesus stands directly before God, without any veil separating Him from the Father, conducting His priestly duties on our behalf.

C. Better Priest (vv. 25-28)

25. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others.

This verse compares how Jesus' service differs from mortal high priests. The Law of Moses prescribes an annual Day of Atonement for addressing the people's sins (Leviticus 16:29-30; 23:26-32). Two goats were chosen, one for sacrifice to atone for sins and one for release into the wilderness as a scapegoat to carry off sins (16:7-10, 20-22). On the Day of Atonement and only on that day, *the high priest* would enter the Holy of Holies to set these procedures in motion (16:2, 34). This backdrop sets the stage for a great contrast, next.

26. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Hebrews 7:27 makes much the same point that we see here. Both passages emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' self-sacrifice. Rather than suffering *often*, His sacrifice was one-time only. That's one reason it is superior to the sacrifices of mortal high priests. If His sacrifice were only as effective as that of animals, He would have had to die repeatedly *since the foundation of the world*. The apostle Paul makes the same point: Christ's sacrificial death marks the transition from one era of history to another (1 Corinthians 10:11).

27-28. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

The death sentence that all humans labor under was pronounced in Genesis 3:19. The writer's phrase *once to die* refers to physical death. There are some notable exceptions in that a handful of people in

the Bible died twice physically: those whom Christ raised from the dead during His earthly ministry died again later. Contrary to humans, who were *appointed* to die once, Jesus voluntarily sacrificed His life to settle the debt of sin. His death was a conscious act of self-sacrifice (see John 10:15-17).

The phrase *after this* sets the possibility of another death as a result of *the judgment* to come. No one will be exempt from this evaluation: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). The result will be an eternal separation of forgiven sinners from unforgiven sinners (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; etc.). Some students propose that the two verses before us mean a person is judged immediately after death; others disagree. The author does not specify when the judgment occurs. The emphasis is on the fact that our “once” death sentence stands in parallel with Christ’s *once offered* sacrifice *to bear the sins of many* (Isaiah 53:12). His return then will not be for paying for sins again, but for bringing in the promised salvation (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13).

What Do You Think?

What actions would you take if you knew this was your last day on earth?

Digging Deeper

How would or should those actions differ from your daily routine, if at all?

Once or Twice? Ready or Not?

An evangelist from yesteryear had a ready response when someone would ask him when his birthday was. He would respond with the simple question, “Which one?” After the then-confused person asked, “You’ve been born more than once?” the evangelist would reply, “Yes. If you’re born once, you die twice; if you’re born twice, you die once.” This then served as a lead-in to discussing the need to be born again (John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23) as the only way to escape the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

We live under Christ’s directive of the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20. This directive brings the challenge to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a

reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Time is short—death can come at any time to anyone. I know that I need to adopt a greater sense of urgency in that regard. Do you? —R. L. N.

II. Weak Sacrifices

(Hebrews 10:1-4)

A. Repetition (vv. 1-2)

1. For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

The author of Hebrews continues to compare and contrast the realities of the old covenant with those of the new covenant. Having shown the superiority of Christ’s priesthood, the author explains the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice to animal sacrifices.

The phrase *the law* refers to the Law of Moses in this context, not law in general. Nothing was wrong with the Law of Moses regarding what it was intended to achieve (Romans 3:20; 7:7; etc.). Its holy value is in the facts that (1) God was its ultimate author and (2) *as a shadow of good things to come*, the law points to certain future greater realities (compare Hebrews 8:5; 9:11). Those who accepted the first fact while missing the second fact were in danger of putting an unrealistic burden on others (Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 3:1-6; etc.).

The New Testament authors recognize the law’s limited and distinct role in God’s plan. The law was a temporary guardian meant to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:23-25). The law’s limited role means that it cannot *make the comers thereunto perfect* since no one has kept the law perfectly (Romans 3:9-20)—no one, that is, except for Christ.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain the concept of *foreshadowing* to someone in as few words as possible?

Digging Deeper

How would your explanations to unbelievers and new Christians differ? Why?

2. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

The word *for* introduces a logical conclusion to the current argument regarding the limitations of the Law of Moses. Were the Law of Moses to have been God's "final word" to humanity, God would not have settled the sin issue *once* and for all. The animal sacrifices would need to continue forever. And since such sacrifices would need to be repeated indefinitely, they do not have the power to perfect God's people. Paul makes a similar argument about the law in Galatians 3:21, where he denies that righteousness comes through the law because God did not give a law capable of imparting eternal life.

B. Reminder (vv. 3-4)

3. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

Instead of freeing the people from their guilt, the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses had the opposite effect: they reminded the people of their *sins every year*. The sacrifices highlighted sinfulness rather than fixing the problem of sinful hearts (again, Romans 3:20).

What Do You Think?

In what ways could your congregation regularly and appropriately remind its members of the reality of sin?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to remind yourself of individual sins? of corporate sins?

4. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

This verse highlights the main limitation of animal sacrifices. Given that God commanded the animal sacrifices, it may seem strange that the author of Hebrews denies that they *take away sins*. After all, do not Leviticus 16:10 and Numbers 29:11 say that the two goats make "atone-ment"? But notice again their temporary nature. It's "wash, rinse, repeat" indefinitely.



Visual for Lesson 6. Display this visual as you ask learners for examples of situations when Jesus' redemption changed something for the better.

III. Perfect Sacrifice

(Hebrews 10:11-14)

A. Christ's Service (vv. 11-12)

11. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

The author continues to draw together the threads of the argument. He does so here by first describing the duties of *every priest*. Under the old covenant, a priest's work was never done. He would perform the same rituals and sacrifices repetitively. The blood offerings he would make were categorized in various ways: the sin offering (Leviticus 4:1-35; 6:24-30); the trespass offering (5:14-6:7); the burnt offering (1:3-17); and the peace offering (3:1-17). The bloodless offerings were the grain offering (2:1-16) and the drink offering (23:13). None of these rituals or sacrifices could ultimately remove the people's sins. The contrast comes next.

12. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

By contrast, Christ's priestly service required only a single offering; himself. He offered this sacrifice one time for the sins of humanity. At that point, His duties were completed, and He took His rightful seat at God's *right hand*. The writer of Hebrews draws on Psalm 110:1 to affirm Jesus in this position. By the time we get to this point in the book of Hebrews, the writer has already pointed

to this psalm three times (Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1). The use here implies that the Son's sacrifice is completely satisfactory, never needing to be repeated. He will remain seated until His second appearing (9:28; a notable exception is Acts 7:55-56).

B. Christ's Rest (vv. 13-14)

13. From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

This verse continues the quotation of Psalm 110:1. The idea seems to be one of rest now that Christ's work on the cross is completed. He offers no more sacrifices. Instead, He occupies a seat of honor while His Father works to make every knee bow to Christ and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:9-1).

14. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

This verse concludes the argument that the author has been making. The numerous animal sacrifices of the old covenant have given way to Christ's *one offering*. This is the offering by which people may be *perfected*, not by the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses. The people being perfected by Christ are also referred to as *them that are sanctified*. To be sanctified is to be made holy or set apart, and there are two aspects to this.

IV. Implications

(Hebrews 10:19-25)

A. Reasons (vv. 19-21)

19. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Our last section sketches the implications of Jesus' priestly work. According to Leviticus 16, only the high priest could enter the most holy place, the dwelling place of God's presence in the tabernacle and temple. This access was only allowed once a year. Because Jesus' sacrifice completely satisfied the penalty for sin that we owed,

we can each have access to God that was unthinkable before (compare Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 4:16; 9:8, 12, 25). Regarding the *boldness* (confidence) that we now have *to enter into the holiest*, see also 10:35; and 1 John 5:14.

20. By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

The *new and living way* distinguishes the new covenant from the old one. This way is "new" because it was inaccessible before Christ offered himself as a sacrifice. This way is also "living," which means it gives life to those who follow it.

By His self-sacrifice, Jesus has *consecrated* a path for us *through the veil of his flesh*. When His body was torn to death by nails on the cross, the curtain in the temple was torn at the same time (Matthew 27:51). The link becomes more evident if the veil is understood not as a barrier but as the threshold that separated the Holy of Holies from the outer world. Similarly, Christ's body broken on our behalf is the door that leads into God's presence (John 14:6).

21. And having an high priest over the house of God.

The author provides a statement of fact that gives the reason for the imperative of the next verse. Before we go there, however, we take a minute to examine the designation *the house of God*. That was a title for the Jerusalem temple, especially after the return from Babylonian exile (examples: Ezra 3:8; Nehemiah 11:11). But the author of Hebrews uses the designation to refer to people who constitute the church (Hebrews 3:6).

B. Exhortation (vv. 22-25)

22. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

This is the resulting imperative; this is what we are to do *with a true heart in full assurance of faith*—an imperative echoed in various ways elsewhere (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 6:11; 1 John 5:13). The imagery of *hearts sprinkled* and *bodies washed* may have its basis in Ezekiel 36:25. See also the image of sprinkled blood in Hebrews 12:24 and cleansing in 9:14. The

How to Say It

Judaism	<i>Joo-duh-izz-um</i> or <i>Joo-day-izz-um</i> .
Nehemiah	<i>Nee-huh-my-uh</i> .

inner cleansing of the heart is matched also by the outer cleansing *with pure water*, which most likely refers to baptism.

The Greek word translated *conscience* occurs 30 times in the New Testament. The word occurs in a positive sense (example: Acts 23:1), in a “weak” sense (example: 1 Corinthians 8:7), and in a decidedly negative sense (example: Romans 2:15). Our conscience was given to us by God to be a moral guide, but humans are adept at modifying their conscience toward *evil* (1 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15).

23. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)

The verb *hold fast* denotes consistency in adhering to the professed faith. The ability of God’s people to be faithful is based on God’s faithfulness to uphold His promises. His faithfulness is beyond question (1 Corinthians 1:9; Hebrews 3:6).

24-25. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

These two verses are logically connected. Think about it: wouldn’t it be almost impossible to encourage *one another . . . unto love and to good works* unless we are in the habit of *assembling of ourselves together*? That’s the context of supporting each other (Acts 2:42-47).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to ensure you are still gathering with other believers during life’s busy season?

Digging Deeper

How will you ensure that those gatherings are opportunities for encouragement and accountability?

Faithful in Assembling

Pete was an older man who only had one leg. He used crutches and a wheelchair but was at church every Sunday. Harriett was a friend’s grandmother who taught the junior girls’ class. At

times, she let us take turns teaching the class. I hope she lived long enough to hear that many of us followed her example by teaching children at our churches. Bill taught the high school Sunday school class every week. He made us laugh, and we loved him.

You may be thinking, *But things were different back then. After all, don’t we now have the option of attending church virtually through the live streaming of our services?* Pete, Harriett, and Bill were just some of the people I knew growing up in our church. They were faithful in meeting with other Christians every week. Their love and encouragement spurred me and others on to lives of service for God. Who is someone whose service in the church encouraged you? How will you be an encouragement in your congregation? —L. J. N.

Conclusion

A. One Sacrifice

Most people in the ancient Greco-Roman world believed that their gods were remote and cared little for them. Some Jewish people of the time between the Testaments also viewed God as distant, so they developed (imagined) elaborate systems of angels to bridge the gap between God and humanity. It is easy for us to believe that God is distant. His silence can lead us to think He doesn’t care about us.

But such a belief is proven false when we consider the actions of Jesus, our great high priest. He put on flesh and came to earth to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins—those aren’t the actions of a “distant” God!

The next time you feel distant from God, perhaps the best question to ask yourself is: *Which of us moved?*

B. Prayer

Father, thank You for giving us a faithful high priest, Your Son, Jesus. Give us the courage to approach You with the boldness Jesus purchased for us. We pray in His name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus opened the Holy of Holies to us.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Bring a few objects that are miniature versions of other things (examples: globe, baby doll, flower, model airplane). Pose this question for each item in turn, inserting the appropriate words in the brackets: “Is this [globe] really [the earth]?” When you receive the expected answer of *no*, ask, “How do you know?” Encourage whole-class discussion.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Types, Shadows, and Reality” exercise from the activity pages, which you can download. Encourage participants to work together to determine answers to the true/false quiz. State that you will not collect the completed quizzes. After participants finish, poll the class members on how they answered each question. Write on the board the results of your polling as participants voice their choices. Note the lack of unanimity as you announce that there are no answers that can be stated to be correct beyond a reasonable doubt, given the limited information available from a shadow.

After either activity, say, “It is important to distinguish ‘the real thing’ from ‘representations of the real thing.’ As we do, we learn that the representations aren’t necessarily counterfeit but are predictive or foreshadowing. In today’s lesson, stay alert for the symbols and shadows to consider the greater truths they represent.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Hebrews 9:23-28. (*Option:* Extend the reading to 10:1 to capture the word *shadow*.) Divide participants into five small groups or study pairs. Assign one of the following five passages to each: Genesis 22:1-14; Exodus 12:1-13; Numbers 21:4-9; Joshua 2:8-21; Jonah 1:11-17. With the assignments, include a hand-out (you create) featuring these two questions: 1—What is the symbol in your passage? 2—How was that symbol predictive of Jesus?

Have groups voice their discoveries in the ensu-

ing whole-class discussion. *Be prepared to answer both questions yourself for each set of texts.*

Ask a volunteer to read Hebrews 10:11-14. Assign the following verses to the five small groups to discuss: Judges 10:10; 1 Samuel 12:10; 1 Kings 8:47; Psalm 106:6; and Jeremiah 14:20. Encourage groups to review the context surrounding their assigned verse to discover who is confessing, where, and at what period in history. After group discussions, ask someone in each group to read their verse aloud, one right after another. Ask, “What is the common theme/phrase in all these verses?” (*Expected response:* Admission of sin.) Then, ask, “Before Jesus came and died on the cross, what did the people have to do when they sinned?” (*Expected response:* A blood sacrifice was necessary.)

Ask a volunteer to read Hebrews 10:19-25. Draw a chart with three columns on the board with these headers:

Effect | Cause | Reaction

Have the class identify two phrases to put under *Effect* and two phrases to put under *Cause*. (*Expected responses:* Effect—boldness to enter the most holy place; Cause—the blood of Jesus.) Assign one verse to each small group: v. 22a, v. 22b, v. 23, v. 24, and v. 25. Ask groups to consider these *reactions* in relation to the *effect* and *cause* truths that come before. (*Example:* Why are we able to draw near to God? Because Christ has torn the curtain and given us access.) Then, have a volunteer come to the board to write the action response phrase from their verse.

Into Life

Discuss the concept of “accountability partners” and how it differs from a “mentor/protégé” relationship. Challenge those participants who are willing to choose an accountability partner for mutual encouragement in light of Hebrews 10:24-25.

Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 59:1-8
Background Scripture: 1 John 2:1-6; 4:7-21

1 John 2:1-6

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

1 John 4:9-17

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God,

but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

Key Text

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. —1 John 4:10

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify his or her advocate with the Father.
2. Explain the motivation and significance of Jesus' sacrifice.
3. List three ways to practice 1 John 2:6 in the week ahead.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Surprising Symbol
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Source of New Life (1 John 2:1-2)

- A. Our Advocate (v. 1)
- B. Our Propitiation (v. 2)

II. The Proof of New Life (1 John 2:3-6)

- A. The Test of Obedience (vv. 3-4)
 - B. The Model of Love (vv. 5-6)
- When You're Snowed In*

III. Love in Action (1 John 4:9-12)

- A. God's Initiative (vv. 9-10)
- A Modern Propitiation*

- B. Our Responsibility (vv. 11-12)

IV. Certainty of Knowledge (1 John 4:13-17)

- A. Divine Intervention (vv. 13-14)
- B. Human Confession (vv. 15-17)

Conclusion

- A. Transformed Reality
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Surprising Symbol

Today, the cross of Christ is recognized the world over. We see it on church buildings, use it for headstones, depict it in paintings, and wear it as jewelry. The latter is particularly surprising for becoming so common, given that the cross was the instrument of torture and death for notorious criminals in the Roman world. In that era, crosses along roadsides symbolized the ultimate consequence for challenging the Roman Empire's power.

How could such a terrible object become the universal symbol of a faith that preaches love and offers new life? The answer to that question lies in the purpose of Jesus' death on the cross: today's lesson.

B. Lesson Context

Our text comes from two parallel sections of the New Testament epistle designated 1 John. It is one of three letters by John among the General Epistles. This is a section of the New Testament consisting of the eight letters: Hebrews; James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Jude.

The epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John are not explicitly ascribed to the apostle John by name, yet the early church ascribed these epistles to him, just as they did with the Gospel of John.

The three letters have close connections to the language and themes of the Gospel of John, so it is reasonable to conclude that all came from the same author. In doing so, we carefully distinguish the apostle John from John the Baptist or John Mark (Acts 1:5; 12:12; etc.).

The letter 1 John and the Gospel of John explicitly state that the author was an eyewitness of Jesus' life and ministry (John 1:14; 1 John 1:1-3). These two works of Scripture have similar purpose statements (compare John 20:31; 1 John 5:13). Both purpose statements find their basis in what the readers can "know" as a certainty. This is a distinctive emphasis of the author. He wrote about 14 percent of the New Testament, but his writings feature over one-third of the New Testament's 250 uses of the Greek word that is underneath the idea of "to know" (more on this in the commentary below).

The letter 1 John addresses growing controversies in the first-century church about the nature of Christ and the Christian life. It seems some believers were influenced by a common concept of that day that said all material things are by nature evil, but that which is spirit is by nature good. On this basis, some began to deny that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. After all, if material things are evil, then it would be impossible for the good God to exist as a human in a body. The letter of 1 John refutes this. Some students see the growing heresies of Gnosticism and Docetism as playing a part in this problem.

I. The Source of New Life

(1 John 2:1-2)

A. Our Advocate (v. 1)

1. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The author addresses readers as *children* often (1 John 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). The term suggests a close and affectionate connection between the writer and the original audience. This term might also hint that the readers are either younger or less mature in their spiritual journey than the writer.

The Greek word translated *advocate* here is the same one translated “Comforter” in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, where it describes the Holy Spirit. Christ’s forgiven people still sin; they recognize as much if they are honest with themselves. When believers sin, they do not require justification once more; instead, as children of God, they receive forgiveness through the intercession of Jesus Christ with the Father. Is forgiveness a one-and-done affair? Is the once-forgiven sinner returned to the life of death on the first failure after forgiveness?

The answer is no, as the author sketches Christ’s ongoing role as an “advocate,” one who speaks on behalf of another. Another way of saying this is that Christ intercedes for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). With God the Father depicted as the righteous judge, Christ speaks on our behalf, identifying us as those whose punishment has

already been taken by Christ himself. Christ is *righteous*, meaning He is not guilty of any sin and is entirely in accord with God’s right way.

B. Our Propitiation (v. 2)

2. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

The keyword *propitiation* now appears in the text. The underlying ancient Greek word is rare in the New Testament. The noun forms appear exclusively here, in Romans 3:25, and 1 John 4:10 (see below) and refer to something that turns away wrath. A verb form is in Hebrews 2:17.

Central to the gospel message is that Christ’s death was the once-for-all-time sacrificial offering that shifted our fully deserved punishment for sin onto Him, who is the sinless one (2 Corinthians 5:21). This doctrine is often referred to as “substitutionary atonement.” Christ’s substitutionary atonement is sufficient for all our sins—past, present, and future. This reality is fundamental; this is grace. It is available for *the whole world*, but it is effectual and operative only for those who receive it through faith in the blood (Romans 3:25-26).

II. The Proof of New Life

(1 John 2:3-6)

A. The Test of Obedience (vv. 3-4)

3. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

The author uses the verb translated *know* about two dozen times in the five short chapters of 1 John. These mostly affirm the Christian’s confident faith in Christ and assurance of salvation. Here, the question is what assures us that Jesus’ is indeed our advocate and propitiation when we sin. The answer is that keeping Jesus’ commandments

How to Say It

Docetism	Doe-set-iz-um.
Ecclesiastes	Ik-leez-ee-as-teez.
epistles	ee-pis-uls.
Gnosticism	Nahss-tih-sizz-um.
propitiation	pro-pih-she-ay-shun.

is our proof (John 14:15; 15:10). If Jesus is Savior, then He must also be Lord.

But how can one who keeps Jesus' *commandments* also need ongoing forgiveness of sins? The writer uses the stark contrast between ongoing sin and ongoing obedience to capture the nature of the Christian life. As a people habituated to sin, we continue to sin even after receiving the gift of Christ's atoning death. But as people with faith in Christ, we continually submit our lives to His authority. So sin, ongoing in the lives of believers, is continually being overcome. Sin is no longer in control, no longer at home.

What Do You Think?

What steps can believers take to overcome sin and submit to Christ's authority?

Digging Deeper

How has your life changed since you submitted to Christ's authority?

4. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

This verse restates and reinforces 1 John 1:6: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Some believers among John's original readers may have separated faith in Christ from obedience to Christ. Perhaps thinking their "good" spirits were completely separate from their "evil" bodies, they lived as if their actions had no bearing on their relationship to Christ (see Lesson Context). Nevertheless, the contents of a person's heart will eventually become apparent through their actions (compare Matthew 12:34). Therefore, the writer completely rejects the idea that someone's actions would not align with their declared faith.

B. The Model of Love (vv. 5-6)

5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

By contrast, our following Jesus' teaching expresses the effect of everything He has done. Jesus' death for sinners was the fullest expression

of God's love for humanity, and Jesus' teaching instructs us how to express God's love to others (John 3:15; 1 John 3:16). This makes God's love for humanity our love for humanity. The ancient Greek word translated *perfected* can take various shades of meaning, depending on context. Here and elsewhere, the sense is that of a finished task because its goal has been achieved. The writer uses the word this way five times in his Gospel (John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4, 23; 19:28) and four times in his first epistle (here and 1 John 4:12, 17, below; and in a negative sense 4:18).

6. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

To confess Christ means to obey Christ. *To walk, even as he walked*, is to follow His example (John 13:15).

The author fronts this conclusion by introducing a Greek word translated as "abide"; he uses this word 23 times in this letter. In doing so, he speaks of a close, ongoing connection. This image originated from Jesus as He compared His followers to branches connected to Him as the vine (John 15:1-11). The author's linkage to Jesus' teachings clarifies that a believer cannot keep Jesus' commandments or follow in Jesus' footsteps through his or her own strength. Doing so is only feasible by remaining in Christ and letting God's Spirit produce fruit in and through the believer. This teaching applies to everyday life. Those who abide in Jesus will inevitably live their life in ways reflecting His love and teaching. In the text between 1 John 2:6 and 4:9 (not in today's lesson), the author continues to trace the theme of love as it applies to various situations.

What Do You Think?

How can you be better attentive to the work of God's Spirit to produce fruit in you?

Digging Deeper

How will such fruit empower you to abide in Christ?

When You're Snowed In

I have a vivid childhood memory of when my
Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice

family was snowed in by more than a foot of that white stuff. I tried to help my dad dig out. But I quickly encountered a problem: with every step I took, I sank deeply into the snow. I could hardly move. The solution was for me to follow my father's path as he did the major work of clearing snow.

The challenge to walk as Jesus walked may seem overwhelming. How can we possibly walk in the same way that the sinless, holy Son of God walked? That's the first step: we admit our weaknesses. The second step is to realize that Christ knows our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15; compare Romans 8:26). While achieving perfection through our own endeavors is impossible, this does not imply that the benchmark of perfection is reduced (Matthew 5:48). We will still sin. However, forgiveness is still available (1 John 1:9). What is the most important improvement you must make in your walk? —C. S.

III. Love in Action

(1 John 4:9-12)

A. God's Initiative (vv. 9-10)

9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

How can we fail but to see John 3:16 restated here? The supreme expression of God's love is demonstrated through the incarnation: the divine Son of God putting on human flesh to announce and deliver salvation personally. The description of Christ as the *only begotten Son* emphasizes His uniqueness and value to the Father. The eight other translations of the underlying Greek word—not always referring to Jesus—are found in Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and Hebrews 11:17.

God sent His Son to give life to humanity and thereby allow them to enter the presence of the holy God. Jesus not only accepted and affirmed that mission, but He also narrowed the focus of His uniqueness and exclusivity of mission when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Truly, we live only *through him*.



Visual for Lesson 7. *Point to the visual and ask volunteers to brainstorm ways to celebrate God's love in the upcoming week.*

10a. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

An astute observation from years ago is that what is unique about the relationship between the true God and people is that pagan religions tell stories about humanity's search for god(s). In contrast, Christianity tells the story of God's search for us (Luke 19:10). Christ became incarnate in a world that had rebelled against God (Romans 3:10-12, quoting Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20). His becoming human is an act of love, and His death on the cross brings that love to its fullest measure. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The message of the gospel calls us to love God and our neighbor (Matthew 22:34-40). All such love begins with God's love, expressed and made available through the death and resurrection of the incarnate Christ.

10b. And sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

John aims to convey to his audience that love is an action, not an empty term. He illustrates this by detailing how God demonstrated His love for the world: by becoming *the propitiation for our sins*. The declaration in this half-verse echoes what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:8. see discussion of this word in commentary on 1 John 2:2, above.

A Modern Propitiation

I wouldn't have believed it had I not heard and

seen it personally. The exact date was May 31, 1989, and I was watching a TV news report on the resignation of Representative Jim Wright as Speaker of the House of Representatives. He was resigning under a cloud of alleged ethics violations.

Near the end of his lengthy speech, he made a statement that amazed me: “Let me give you back this job you gave to me as a propitiation for all of this season of bad will that has grown up among us.” I remember wondering at the time whether the average viewer in the TV audience knew what *propitiation* meant! The man was sacrificing his position in the hope that it would bring the ethics turmoil to a halt.

But notice a key difference: the man was giving up a job to deflect wrath *away from* himself; Jesus gave up His life to deflect God’s wrath away from us and *onto* himself! How should your life change now in realizing this fact? —R. L. N.

B. Our Responsibility (vv. 11-12)

11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

This implication of the gospel is unmistakable. After receiving God’s love, we must recognize our responsibility to love the same people God loves. We do not need to ask who our neighbor is when hearing the command to love our neighbor (Luke 10:29). God loves all because Christ’s death makes atonement available for all (1 John 2:2, above). God loves first and loves those who do not love Him. And so must we who have received His love. Even our enemies are objects of God’s love and so must be of ours (Matthew 5:43-47).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can love one another just as God has loved us?

Digging Deeper

How do you deal with negative attitudes that prevent you from loving those you might consider unlovable?

12a. No man hath seen God at any time.

Many texts reflect the fact that God cannot be *seen* (examples: Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16). But in Christ, God became a visible,

physical human, so to see Christ was truly to see God (John 14:8-9); the next half-verse expands on this.

12b. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

The imperative to *love one another* is so important that John uses that phrase five times in this letter (here and 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12). This command is a repeated part of Jesus’ message (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17) and stressed by others as well (Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22). As we love others, then our actions make God visible to the world.

Regarding the word *perfected*, see commentary on 1 John 2:5, above.

What Do You Think?

Describe someone you know who excels at loving people. How will you follow his or her example?

Digging Deeper

Who will you ask to be an accountability partner to encourage you as you practice loving others?

IV. Certainty of Knowledge

(1 John 4:13-17)

A. Divine Intervention (vv. 13-14)

13. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

The presence of the Holy *Spirit* expresses a new reality. The Spirit’s presence in us gives us the certainty that we are in Christ and He is in us. Christ’s promise of the Spirit’s presence is a fact for all who are Christians and can be a fact for all who are not yet Christians (John 14:16-17; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 1:13; 1 John 3:24; etc.). The Holy Spirit’s presence is God’s presence. Life in the Spirit is the life of God’s love, demonstrating and assuring that we belong to Him through Christ’s atoning death.

14. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

The beginning of this epistle is a stirring declaration that the incarnate Christ, seen by eye-

witnesses, is the basis for the gospel message (1 John 1:1-3). In shorter form, the author now repeats that declaration. By using the word *we*, the author declared he had seen Jesus personally and, therefore, his testimony is that of an eyewitness. The mission of *the Son to be the Saviour of the world* reinforces the same thought of John 3:17.

B. Human Confession (vv. 15-17)

15. **Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.**

This verse is a summary statement of the plan of salvation. A doctrinal error often seen is to take such summary statements as being the entirety of that plan. For someone to *confess that Jesus is the Son of God* is good as far as it goes. But remember that demons confess the same thing and are still lost (Mark 5:7; James 2:19). Spiritual maturity (Hebrews 5:12) is required for understanding the entirety of that plan, which results in knowing how *God dwelleth in a believer, and he in God* (compare Acts 2:38; Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 11:6; etc.).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who claims that they can confess that Jesus is the Son of God but still willfully and intentionally commit sin?

Digging Deeper

What is the relationship between right belief and right actions? How does James 2:14-26 inform your response?

16. **And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.**

The author turns to the imperative of *love*. Christ's life, death, and resurrection fully demonstrate God's love. We can say without reservation that *God is love* (also 1 John 4:8). For us to confess Christ truly means that we love one another. Such love is found among all who genuinely experience the abiding unity with God brought by Christ. Without such love, our confession is empty. With it, our confession is complete.

17. **Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.**

This is the third time the writer has spoken of perfection with regard to *love* (see commentary on 1 John 2:5; 4:12, above); he will continue to do so in the verse that follows this one. And again, Jesus is our model. These concepts are so foundational that they bear repeating!

What's new here is how it all ties in with *the day of judgment*. The complete love of the Father revealed within us empowers us to face God's judgment confidently. This boldness stems not from our righteous deeds but from our trust in God's mercy to save us (Titus 3:5). The nature of our loving works *in this world* will demonstrate the presence or absence of saving faith (James 2:14-26). Jesus had much to say about this coming judgment (Matthew 11:20-24; 12:36; 25:31-46; etc.).

Conclusion

A. Transformed Reality

Symbols are intended to be meaningful, but people must acknowledge that meaning for the symbols to have their desired effect. I may know a red light means "stop," but I will stop at the red light only if I honor its intended meaning.

So it is with the cross. This central symbol of Christianity reminds us of Christ's death, the saving work He accomplished on it, His resurrection, and the love that motivated every part of His ministry. Our failure to love others will indicate that we don't honor the symbol of the cross—we betray the cross instead. What can you do to honor the intent of that symbol today?

B. Prayer

Lord God, Your love surpasses our imagination. We are filled with thanksgiving because Christ died and rose for us. Lead us to love one another as You have loved us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Christ's death for us moves us to a life of love for others.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to share questions children ask that are hard for adults to answer simply. (*examples*: Why is the sky blue? How do you know the sun will rise tomorrow?) Write these questions on the board, then challenge learners to come up with some appropriate answers.

Alternative. Distribute the slips of paper from the “What Am I?” activity on the activity page, which you can download. Tell learners to keep their creature a secret but think of a few activities that describe what their creature does as hints to their identities. Learners will take turns sharing their hints, allowing the rest of the group an opportunity to guess their creature.

When all creature identities have been revealed, take a poll to see which was the hardest to guess. Lead into Bible study by saying, “Some things are hard to explain or describe. The way we attempt to do so may indicate some things about what we believe. Today’s lesson requires special attention to how the apostle John explains certain ideas and describes certain relationships.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read 1 John 2:1-6. Distribute to small groups handouts (you create) that have these four phrases printed in the four corners, one phrase per corner:

Things both God and I know

Things that God knows that I don't know

Things that I know that God doesn't know

Things that neither I nor God knows

Have learners share their reflections in small-group discussions. Expect responses to the last two of the four to be “nothing.”

Ask a volunteer to read 1 John 4:9-12. Provide large paper or poster board along with appropriate markers to the groups. Instruct groups to create a visual rendering of the way these verses

explain (1) the primary way the love of God has been demonstrated, (2) what that signifies for us, (3) how we are to respond, and (4) how it is “perfected” or comes to completion. Have them explain their images in whole-class discussion.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Since A, Then B” exercise from the activity page to groups to complete as indicated. When they are finished, allow time for groups to compare their responses. (*Option*: this exercise can be moved to follow other segments of this Into the Word segment; it can also be a transition or introduction to the Into Life section.)

Ask a volunteer to read 1 John 4:13-17. Distribute a triangle-shaped sheet of paper to each group. Ask groups to brainstorm three things God has done: one thing each by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Have groups write down one response in each corner of the triangle. These actions must be unique to the role of each (*example*: since the Bible describes both the Son and the Holy Spirit as “advocate,” that one can’t be used).

Challenge groups to make their case either in terms of physical evidence (something that can be seen, touched, or both) or consistent testimony from several people.

After a few minutes, reconvene for a whole-class discussion as groups present their case. Be prepared to show how the proposals connect to 1 John 4:13-17.

Into Life

Have learners partner up. Refer back to 1 John 2:6 and ask partners to work together to make a list of three or more habits that Jesus practiced personally (example: He took time away from the crowds to be alone to pray, Matthew 14:23). Challenge partners to think of practical ways they can adopt these same habits personally in the week ahead. Request that learners be ready to reflect on their experience in this regard when the class next meets.

Christ Dies and Rises to New Life

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 2:1-13

Background Scripture: Matthew 27:24-28:10

Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54

39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, this man calleth for Elias.

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

49 The rest said, let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, truly this was the Son of God.

Matthew 28:1-10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, all hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

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

Key Text

As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. —Matthew 28:9

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Matthew's account of the crucifixion and resurrection.
2. Identify and explain allusions to and quotes of the Old Testament in this account.
3. Sing with classmates a hymn or praise song that celebrates the resurrection.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Still the Most Amazing Story
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Death of the King

(Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54)

- A. Forsaken by People (vv. 39-40)
- B. Feeling Forsaken by God (vv. 45-50)
- C. Surrounded by Signs (vv. 51-54)

Phone Books, Curtains, and Hearts

II. The Resurrection of the King

(Matthew 28:1-10)

- A. The Grave Opened (vv. 1-4)
- B. The News Announced (vv. 5-7)
- C. The Lord Recognized (vv. 8-10)

34,000 Emotions?

Conclusion

- A. Retaining Amazement
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Still the Most Amazing Story

No story hits us like the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. It has the full range of human tragedy: betrayal, injustice, and courage. It is filled with mystery and irony. It evokes deep sympathy for its characters. It contrasts the power of vested interests with the power of Almighty God. It confronts our greatest enemy, death. Its ending is astonishing. But as we experience it, we realize how necessary the story's conclusion is.

For some of us, we've known the Easter story for as long as we can remember. Others who became Christians more recently can still recall their vivid reaction when they first heard it. During the Easter season, we get a chance to listen to that story again as if it's our first time. It is a story that is ever new—the story of how God made new life available to a lost and sinful humanity.

B. Lesson Context

Following Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah), Jesus began to warn His disciples of His coming death and resurrection (Matthew 16:13-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). His disciples, however, failed to comprehend (John 20:9). In a series of trials featuring biased testimonies, Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion (Matthew 26:57-68; 27:11-26).

Crucifixion was a brutal form of execution. Roman authorities reserved it to make an example of the most notorious criminals, striking fear in the population. Those condemned to it were tied or nailed to a wood frame in a prominent public place. Left to the elements and loss of blood, the crucified person would die slowly of blood loss, respiratory failure, and exposure while being subjected to public ridicule. As today's lesson opens, that is the state in which we find Jesus.

I. The Death of the King

(Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54)

A. Forsaken by People (vv. 39-40)

39. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads.

The parallel account of Matthew 27:39-40 reads almost the same (Mark 15:29-30); the parallel in Luke 23:35 is more abbreviated. This verse is also similar to Psalm 22:7 (compare Psalm 109:25).

40a. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself.

This mockery is based on Jesus' prediction in John 2:19-20. Jesus was indeed on record as promising to raise *the temple . . . in three days* were it to be destroyed. But "he spake of the temple of his body" (John 2:21). Jesus is not recorded as saying that He would destroy the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the accusation *thou that destroyest the temple* came from the lips of false witnesses (Matthew 26:60-62; Mark 14:58). To speak against a temple in the ancient world was to invite a death penalty (Jeremiah 26:1-11).

What Do You Think?

What should you do when you come across a misinterpretation of Jesus' teaching?

Digging Deeper

What are some contexts in which you would answer that question differently?

40b. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

The taunt *if thou be the Son of God, come down* mirrors Satan's words during Jesus' temptation at the start of His ministry (Matthew 4:3). This challenge can be seen as the final effort by the tempter to thwart God's plan.

Interestingly, the designation *the Son of God* was used by others to describe Jesus, but never from the lips of Jesus himself. Jesus was called Son of God by both demons and worshippers (Matthew 8:29; 14:33); a voice from Heaven was heard to say, "This is my beloved Son" (3:17). Jesus' preferred self-designation was "Son of man" (8:20; 9:6; etc.).

Jesus could indeed have *come down from the cross*, but He chose not to (compare Matthew 26:53). In choosing to stay there and die, He offered His life as the sacrifice of atonement (or propitiation; see last week's lesson) as He diverted the punishment for human sin onto himself, the sinless one (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

B. Feeling Forsaken by God (vv. 45-50)

45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

Matthew 27:41-44 (not in today's lesson) documents further ridicule aimed at Jesus. When we come to Matthew 27:45, the story shifts to a broader scene. Parallels to Matthew 27:45-50 are Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; and John 19:28-30.

The *darkness* that came *over all the land* was likely not an eclipse of the sun, as we understand that to mean when the moon moves between the sun and the earth. This is for two reasons. First, a normal eclipse of the sun lasts no more than 15 minutes; this darkness lasted three hours. Second, a normal eclipse of the sun requires a new moon. However, Jesus was crucified during Passover at full moon (see Leviticus 23:5-6; Psalm 81:3).

This darkness, then, is of supernatural origin. The literal, physical darkness that occurred suggests a deeper application: in the Bible, the presence of darkness reveals God's displeasure (example: Exodus 10:21-23). Since there is no natural explanation for the darkness, it can be considered a supernatural event orchestrated by God as a direct reaction to those who mocked the Messiah.

46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

We come to one of the seven cries by Jesus from the cross, also recorded in Mark 15:34. The cry is in Aramaic, which is a later form of the Hebrew language. The words come from the beginning of Psalm 22, previously noted. Having been surrounded by taunts and darkness for hours, Jesus

How to Say It

Aramaic	Air-uh- <i>may</i> -ik.
Arimathaea	Air-uh-muh- <i>thee</i> -uh (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Eli (Aramaic)	Ee- <i>lo</i> -eye.
lama (Aramaic)	lay-muh or lah-mah.
Magdala	Mag-duh-luh.
Magdalene	Mag-duh-leen or Mag-duh- <i>lee</i> -nee.
sabachthani (Aramaic)	Suh- <i>back</i> -thuh-nee.

was enduring a separation from the Father in order to bear the punishment for humanity's sins (Matthew 1:21; 20:28; 26:28).

What Do You Think?

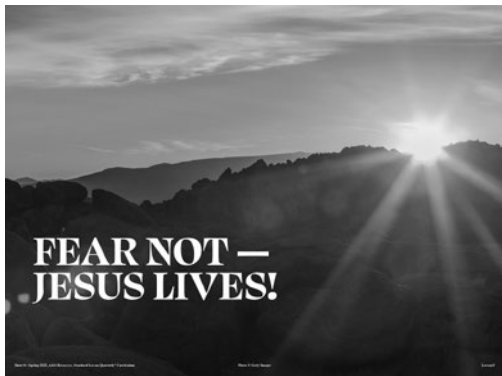
Without giving direct advice, how would you counsel someone who feels forsaken by God?

Digging Deeper

What spiritual disciplines help you sustain faith in God during times when it feels like He is distant?

47. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, this man calleth for Elias.

One of God's names in the ancient Hebrew language is *Elohim*. When this word occurs in a "construct" sense (that is, combined with another word), one or more letters on the end of *Elohim* may be dropped off in the process of attaching another word; two examples of this are Exodus 15:2 and Numbers 22:18. Psalm 22:1, which Jesus was quoting, is of course the most important example. Here is the root of the misunderstanding on the part of *some of them that stood there*. They heard the Aramaic word *Eli* not as a cry to "my God" but as a calling on the name of the long-ago prophet *Elias* (that is, Elijah). There had been two previous misunderstandings regarding Elijah (Matthew 16:14; 17:10-13), and this is a third one.



Visual for Lesson 8. *Point to this visual and ask, "How will you live a 'fearless life' in light of the resurrection of Jesus?"*

48. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

We don't know the motive behind the action that we read here (compare Psalm 69:21). If the *one* performing the action was hostile toward Jesus, then this act of giving *him to drink* was a continued mockery in some way. If the one performing the action was sympathetic, it may be intended as an act of kindness. What is called *vinegar* is a cheap kind of wine vinegar of the day (compare Mark 15:36-37; Luke 23:36; John 19:29).

49. The rest said, let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

The phrase *let be* indicates some impatience on the part of the mocking bystanders. They don't want the action of satisfying Jesus' thirst to interfere with anything else Jesus had to say or to otherwise distract from the appearance of *Elias* (Elijah).

50. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

The words *Jesus* cried out *with a loud voice* are recorded in Luke 23:46: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." John 19:30 further records Jesus as having said, "It is finished" as He died. This verse highlights two key aspects: first, Jesus maintained enough physical strength until His death to shout. Second, He remained in control of His life to the very end.

C. Surrounded by Signs (vv. 51-54)

51a. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

Though Jesus appeared to have been abandoned by God, Matthew offers signs establishing the opposite. *The veil of the temple* separated the temple's holy place from the most holy place. Only the high priest could pass behind that curtain to enter the most holy place—and that just once a year—to offer the sacrificial blood on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 26:31-34; 30:10; Leviticus 16:1-34; 23:27-28; Hebrews 9:3). As the three hours of darkness were supernatural in origin, so was this tearing of the temple curtain *from the top to the bottom* (also Luke 23:45).

The significance of this event is explained in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 9:11-12, 24; 10:19-20).

Phone Books, Curtains, and Hearts

A strongman feat of yesteryear was to tear a thick phone book in half. There was a technique to doing so, but strength was still necessary. If you saw a thick phone book torn in half, you would automatically presume someone “with muscle” made it happen.

Jewish tradition holds that the curtains (veils) that marked off the most holy place were from 3½ to 4 inches thick! Consequently, the veils were so heavy that it took 300 priests to hang them. To have seen one of these curtains ripped top to bottom would cause gasps and cause people to imagine the strength necessary to have done so. Only someone with superhuman strength could tear such a veil—God Almighty!

Our friends and family who have not embraced the gospel might need time to accept the gospel due to their reluctance or uncertainty. We can and must tell the story, but ultimately, it’s the Word of God, which is “sharper than any twoedged sword,” that will cut through the resistance (Hebrews 4:12). How did that happen for you? —R. L. N.

51b. And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.

The earthquake similarly points to divine action. God was clearly at work. In the Old Testament, earthquakes frequently signified God’s presence and sometimes divine judgment (examples: Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 114:7-8; Joel 3:16). Therefore, the first-century crowd witnessing the crucifixion would likely have understood this association.

52-53. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

Matthew alone tells us of this additional sign. As his description continues, we understand this sign occurred not immediately as Jesus died but a few days later, *after his resurrection*. The designation *the holy city* refers to Jerusalem (Matthew 4:5).

54. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, truly this was the Son of God.

A *centurion* was a Roman soldier who commanded a unit known as a “century” in a legion of the Roman army; each “century” consisted of about 80 men. The centurion noted here was likely the one in charge of the crucifixion detail. Processing all he had experienced, the centurion sided against the mockers. His declaration, *Truly this was the Son of God*, stems from his fear-driven response to the supernatural occurrences around him. Jesus’ disciples had a similar response when Jesus walked on water and calmed the storm (Matthew 14:28-33).

What Do You Think?

What evidence for Christ do you find best to use when sharing the gospel?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond to a fellow Christian who believes a “testimony” approach to evangelism is better than an approach based on historical evidence?

II. The Resurrection of the King (Matthew 28:1-10)

A. The Grave Opened (vv. 1-4)

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

A long-held view is that the passage of days in the ancient Jewish calendar are marked from sunset to sunset (Leviticus 23:32). Therefore, most students recognize that *the sabbath* would have ended at sunset on the day before the action we see here. The women don’t set out for their task until *the first day of the week* (Sunday) is in view. Sabbath was a day of rest (Luke 23:56).

Their designation as *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary* reveals their key roles in Matthew’s passion narrative. They were present at Jesus’ crucifixion and saw where He was buried (Matthew 27:55, 61). Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus from the early days of His ministry. Jesus had delivered her from demon possession (Luke 8:2). We remind ourselves that “Magdalene” is not a surname in the modern sense. Rather, it designates this particular Mary as being from Magdala.

The “other” Mary was the mother of James and Joses (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:47) and possibly the wife of Cleophas (John 19:25). Though the other Gospels name additional women (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10), Matthew may have focused on these two because of their prominence among those of Jewish background who first read his Gospel.

By the evil initiative of the Jewish leaders and the compassion of Joseph of Arimathaea, Jesus’ body was not left as long on the cross (Matthew 27:57-58; John 19:31). Joseph had provided the tomb, and the two women named Mary were eyewitnesses to the interment (Matthew 27:59-61). Because the Sabbath would begin a short time after Jesus’ death, His body could not be properly prepared for burial without violating the commandment not to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11).

What Do You Think?

How would you react to a claim that early morning is the best time for connecting with God?

Digging Deeper

What biblical examples of connecting with God at other times of the day can you cite?

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

Again, an earthquake signaled divine action, given the result we see here. The angel *rolled back the stone from the door* not to let Jesus out but to let Jesus’ followers in. They needed to see the tomb empty. The resurrected Lord could enter or exit a locked room without opening the door (example: John 20:19-20, 26-27). He did not need the stone to be moved for His own benefit.

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

There is no mistaking this angel for a human! His face and clothing are bright with light, suitable for supernatural encounters (Matthew 17:2; Luke 9:29; Acts 1:10).

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

The Roman governor Pilate had agreed to set a guard at the tomb to prevent Jesus’ followers from removing His body and declaring He had been raised from the dead (Matthew 27:62-66). These are *the keepers* noted here. The fact that they became *as dead men* is similar to John’s reaction to seeing the ascended Jesus in Revelation 1:17.

B. The News Announced (vv. 5-7)

5-6a. And the angel answered and said unto the women, fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.

As *the angel* told Joseph at the beginning of Jesus’ story to *fear not* (Matthew 1:20), this angel tells *the women* the same. The wondrous scene they witnessed fulfilled Jesus’ promise to be raised from the dead (16:21-28; 17:22-23; 20:19; etc.). Jesus’ mysterious promise to die and rise again is now more apparent. It happened not as anyone expected but precisely *as he said*.

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

The emphasis on the empty tomb counters any notion that Jesus’ followers were only experiencing a “spiritual” resurrection of Christ. Jesus’ physical resurrection involved the coming to life again of His physical body. *The place where the Lord lay* was vacant!

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

The *disciples*, who had abandoned Jesus in the garden (Matthew 26:47-56), were to be the first whom the women were to *tell* of His resurrection. He had warned them they would fail, yet promised to meet them afterward in Galilee (26:31-32). The angel was saying nothing new but was reaffirming Jesus’ previous declarations. Key among these is the declaration *ye shall see him*. Jesus’ resurrection was not an invisible event in the minds and hearts of the disciples. It was a physical event in space and time: the resurrected Jesus seen by many (1 Corinthians 15:6).

C. The Lord Recognized (vv. 8-10)

8. And they departed quickly from the sep-

ulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

The women were filled with fear from such a close encounter with God and joy at what God had done. They obeyed the angel's words implicitly, running—an uncommon act for grown people in their time—to tell the other followers of Jesus.

34,000 Emotions?

Quick: How many emotions can you name in less than a minute? Most of us can list several, such as *happiness, anger, fear, sadness, joy, disgust,* and *surprise*. That was the list proposed by psychologist Paul Eckman in the 1970s. To this list of “basic six emotions” has been added many more over the subsequent decades. One researcher now proposes that there are 34,000 emotions or combinations of emotions!

Reaction to a situation can be unpredictable when two or more emotions are experienced together, at the same time. Experiencing joy and fear simultaneously, the reaction of the women at the tomb was to obey immediately as they were instructed to “go quickly, and tell” (Matthew 28:7). Sometimes, powerful emotions can keep us from doing what we should. But the women were not paralyzed into inaction—quite the opposite! How often does fear keep you from talking to someone about Jesus? —C. S.

9. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, all hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

The angel commanded the women to *tell his disciples* that Jesus was alive, and they were on their way to do so without having yet seen Him alive for themselves! But it wasn't long before they received personal confirmation as Jesus himself *met them*, with the women reacting as we read here. Though silent, their reaction to seeing Jesus showed recognition and reverence, affirming that even in His resurrected body, Jesus deserved the same worship as before His death (compare Matthew 2:11; John 9:37-38; 20:28). They offered to Jesus the honor due only to God. Soon, they would be joined by many more (Matthew 28:17).

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

Jesus repeats the angel's encouragement and instructions regarding *Galilee*. A key aspect of Jesus' message is His enduring love for His disciples. Despite their fearful abandonment of Him during His crucifixion and their absence at the tomb, Jesus continued to refer to them as His *brethren*. Again, this is nothing new; it's a reaffirmation of what He said before His death (Matthew 26:32; etc.). John 21 records the results of that gathering.

What Do You Think?

How do you determine when it's time for action rather than worship and vice versa?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond to the claim that the Christian life is either *action* or *worship*?

Conclusion

A. Retaining Amazement

The grind of daily life can distract us from the most profound truths—we humans tend to allow “the urgent” to take priority over “the important.” That's why Christians must continually remind themselves of the importance of what God has done. By repetition, we remember. In remembering, we restore the eyesight of faith to its proper and primary focus.

Against every expectation but in accord with every divine promise, Jesus died and rose from the dead. Let's hold the glorious amazement of those events in our hearts daily and forever.

B. Prayer

God of wonder, power, and love, we thank You that Jesus died and rose for us. Grant that His desires for our new life may also be our desire. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Focus on the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to talk about their favorite stories from a book or movie. Prompt them to share what makes the story special and the most memorable scene. Ask, “How often do you return to that story? Does it affect you differently whenever you watch/read it again?”

Optional. Bring five plastic Easter eggs and put one sensory item in each: a piece of candy (taste), a perfume sample card (smell), a whistle (hearing), a cotton ball (touch), and a magazine clipping (sight). Hide the five eggs around the room and challenge learners to find them.

When all five have been found, have the finders open their eggs to reveal what is inside. With each reveal, ask the group to state (1) which of the five human senses the revealed item triggers and (2) a personal memory in that regard. (*Examples:* the whistle represents the sense of hearing; a sound that triggers a memory may be a foghorn used to wake up teens at summer camp every morning.)

Say, “Because it is Easter Sunday, let us spend some time studying the greatest story that was ever written. Pay attention to the details that could make it new, fresh, and alive for you today.”

Into the Word

Read Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54. Then form study pairs or triads and give each a handout (you create) that features these four verse-grouping references printed as column headers, one each:

Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54

Mark 15:29-30, 33-39

Luke 23:35, 44-48

John 19:28-30

Have printed on the handouts the following instructions: “List in the columns the details that the passage in the column head mentions but the other three passage-groupings do not.” Discuss results as a class.

Option. Distribute to study pairs copies of the “Five Senses at the Crucifixion” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to complete as indicated. When pairs are finished, allow time for whole-class interaction on responses. Ask, “How did this exercise improve your understanding of the crucifixion?”

Have volunteers act out the scene at the tomb: the two women, an angel, and Jesus. (As an option, add two guards.) Use tables, chairs, or boxes to create a “tomb” as a prop. Ask someone to serve as the narrator and reread the passage. As the narrator reads, the volunteers will act out the scene. Everyone else will be the audience.

Afterward, ask the audience to share their thoughts about what they saw, and the actors about what they experienced. Encourage everyone to elaborate on their responses by giving reasons for what their emotional reaction might have been.

Alternative. Read Matthew 28:1-10. Then form study pairs or triads and give each a handout (you create) that features these four references printed as column headers, one each:

Matthew 28:1-10 | Mark 16:1-11

Luke 24:1-12 | John 20:1-13

Have printed on the handouts the following instructions: “List in the columns the details that the passage in the column head mentions but the passages in the other three Gospels do not.” Discuss results as a class.

Into Life

Sing with classmates a hymn or praise song that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. You can choose one or provide songbooks so participants can choose them. (*Option.* Challenge participants to find some hymns or praise songs this week that help them celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Compile titles and make a list. Ask them to bring their songbooks to share with the group next week.)

The Lamb Is Worthy

Devotional Reading: Psalm 118:15-29
Background Scripture: Revelation 5

Revelation 5:1-10

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

5 And one of the elders saith unto me, weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst

of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

9 And they sung a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Key Text

They sung a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. —Revelation 5:9

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the Lion, the Root, and the Lamb.
2. Explain the significance of each of those three designations.
3. Participate with classmates in writing lyrics for a new song of praise.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. What Is Worth?
- B. Lesson Context

I. Who Is Worthy? (Revelation 5:1-4)

- A. Sealed Scroll (v. 1)
- B. Checking Candidates (vv. 2-4)
Feeling Helpless

II. Christ Is Worthy (Revelation 5:5-10)

- A. Lion and Root (v. 5)
Regarding Credentials

- B. Slain Lamb (v. 6)
- C. Praise to the Lamb (vv. 7-10)

Conclusion

- A. Jesus Is Worthy
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. What Is Worth?

People have very different ideas about what makes someone worthy of honor. In modern cultures, a person's worthiness for various honors often seems to be based on the person's wealth, success, or popularity in the public eye.

My friend Joe does not fit this model of a worthy person. Joe works as a mid-level manager of a small company that makes medical equipment. By some standards, Joe is not rich. In the eyes of the world, his life is simple and unremarkable. But Joe has a wife and four children whom he loves dearly. He goes to work every day and works hard in a thankless profession to provide for his family. His wife and children never go without, even though Joe often does. He models self-sacrificial love daily. Were you offered a choice between being a famous but self-serving person or being unknown but self-sacrificial, whom do you think God would consider more worthy of honor?

B. Lesson Context

Revelation 4 and 5 narrate the apostle John's vision of the divine throne room. This vision immediately follows the appearance of the "one like unto the Son of man" (Revelation 1:13; compare Daniel 7:13), who dictates letters to seven churches in the province of Asia Minor. These letters offered both encouragement and caution to churches that ranged from being faithful to unfaithful.

Two good questions to ask in many life situations are "What's so?" and "So what?" In answer to the first question, Revelation 1–3 establishes the facts regarding the status of seven churches; in answer to the second question, the visions of Revelation 4 and following describe rewards and consequences. This allows us to see God's authority and power, the reality that He remains in charge even when earthly events would suggest otherwise (compare Psalm 47:8).

John's visions begin in Revelation 4:1 with a glimpse of God in His throne room (compare Isaiah 6:1). This is the location of the true and ultimate

ruler of the universe. While “in the spirit” (Revelation 4:2), John witnesses startling and glorious things: precious stones, elders with crowns, fiery lamps, creatures who worship God day and night, etc. After this broad look around the throne room, John’s vision zooms in to focus on a specific object.

I. Who Is Worthy?

(Revelation 5:1-4)

A. Sealed Scroll (v. 1)

1. And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

When we see the word *book*, we naturally think of a modern book with edge-binding, numbered pages, etc. But the word being translated is also translated as “scroll” in Revelation 6:14, and that interpretation is also applicable in this context. A scroll is typically made from flattened papyrus or animal skins and is opened and closed by being unrolled and rolled (again, 6:14).

The description of the document as having been *written within and on the backside* witnesses to its unusual nature. Most scrolls were written on only one side, but lengthy documents could take up both sides. The fact that this scroll has writing on it front and back signals its contents’ breadth, depth, or both (compare Ezekiel 2:9-10).

Naturally, we are curious about the scroll’s contents, and various proposals have been offered. However, the focus of Revelation 5 is not on the scroll’s contents but on the fact that it is *sealed with seven seals*. Scrolls were the common medium in the ancient world for important documents. These were often sealed to prevent someone from reading or tampering with their contents. A seal in this context would normally consist of hot wax poured over threads that tied the scroll in its rolled-up state. Legal documents would have several seals, indicating several witnesses. These witnesses often used a signet ring to press into the wax for self-identification. This made it impossible to open the scroll without detection of tampering. Many students believe that the number *seven* stands for “perfection” or “completeness,” based on how it is used elsewhere in the Bible (compare Revelation 15:1, 8).

B. Checking Candidates (vv. 2-4)

2. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

The dramatic action in the rest of this scene is set up by this proclamation of a *strong angel*, who is unnamed (compare Revelation 10:1). The use of the word *worthy* makes his question not so much an open invitation as it is a rhetorical challenge. The term *worthy* in this context encompasses not just moral excellence but also signifies someone who possesses the authority and power to break the seals.

What Do You Think?

What has to happen for you to live a “worthy” life?

Digging Deeper

How do Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; etc. inform your answer?

3. And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

The search for someone worthy seems at first to fail. The mention of *heaven, earth, and under the earth* was a typical method of depicting the domains of heavenly beings, earthly beings, and the world of the deceased (compare Exodus 20:4, 11; Psalm 146:6). But to focus on the scientific nature of each of the three locations is to miss the bigger picture. That bigger picture is “anywhere you can think of.” This description, therefore, highlights the entirety of the cosmos, as it does in Philippians 2:10. Every part of creation has been explored, and no one qualified has been found—yet.

4. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

People are described as weeping in many places in the Bible. But the phrase *wept much* is an intense form found elsewhere in the New Testament only at Matthew 2:18; Mark 5:38; and Philippians 3:18. The sense can be one of the duration of the weeping or depth of distress or both (compare Genesis 46:29; Judges 20:23; Ezra 3:12; 10:1).

One theory that might explain John's reaction concerns what he was told at the beginning of the throne-room scene. There, he was told that future events would be revealed to him (Revelation 4:1). But now, in the verse before us, John's expectations become frustrated. If John connects the scroll's contents with knowledge of future events and no one can open the scroll, then the promise will not be fulfilled. Even he, John, was not *worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon*. John's weeping is consistent with what he knows and doesn't know. But that is about to change.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways that Jesus would want you to react to the sorrows of life?

Digging Deeper

Are specific cases such as Jeremiah 22:10 and Ezekiel 24:15-18 relevant to this question? Why, or why not?

Feeling Helpless

At one time, I despised plumbing work. I loathed it, dreaded it, and would rather do any other sort of home repair than plumbing. But, since plumbing work by a professional wasn't in my budget as a new homeowner, I had little choice but to attempt to fix things myself. And something was always leaking in our old house built in the 1920s. The fact that the plumbing was complicated by mixtures of PVC, iron, and copper pipes drove me toward despair.

We fell helpless when we try to bring a challenging situation under control but we lack the skill, means, or qualifications to do so and nobody else is available to call on. That was the apostle John's situation.

But remember: Revelation 5:4 is not the end of the story! We are often sad and in pain because of a situation we can't control or remedy. When that happens, remember that the One who came to solve our greatest problem is available to strengthen us. How often must you hit rock bottom before you call on His strength? —C. S.

II. Christ Is Worthy

(Revelation 5:5-10)

A. Lion and Root (v. 5)

5. And one of the elders saith unto me, weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

John is comforted by *one of the 24 elders* present around God's throne (Revelation 4:4, 10). Someone is indeed worthy, the elder claims, and he refers to this person with two important designations.

The first designation, *the Lion of the tribe of Juda*, comes from Genesis 49:9-10, where Jacob refers to his son Judah as a "lion's welp" and compares him to a lion that no one dares rouse. This metaphor is immediately followed by the promise that Judah will always have the right of rulership.

The other designation, *the Root of David*, confirms that the Messiah is in view. This description comes from Isaiah 11:1, 10, another text viewed as a prophecy about the coming Messiah. The specific title in Isaiah 11:10 is "a root of Jesse" (Jesse having been the father of David). Isaiah prophesied how the Messiah will bring justice and peace to the earth and unity to the nations. The designation "the root and the offspring of David" is explicitly claimed by Jesus near the book's end (Revelation 22:16).

The one who is both Lion and Root has the right to open the scroll because He has "prevailed." The narrative doesn't tell us at this point what that victory is, but the coupling of this word with the imagery of the regal lion implies a conquering king. The reader expects someone as mighty as a lion to enter the scene.

Regarding Credentials

Credentials can be a funny thing. To be approved for a specific task, you may need credentials that say you're qualified. But how do you get qualified without being given a chance to do similar work?

This kind of circular trap doesn't apply to opening the sealed scroll. It wasn't a question of credentials or prior experience at breaking wax seals

that was the issue. Rather, the issue was one of credentials in terms of *authorization*. Only Christ had the proper credentials, the authorization, to open the sealed scroll. His credentials included His birthright as the Lion from the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. But it was His action of laying down His life that completed His credentials as the only one qualified to open the scroll.

What about your credentials as a spiritually mature Christian? Have you moved from the “milk” needed by a spiritual infant to the “meat” of God’s Word that is the spiritual diet of the mature (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12-14)? Do you desire spiritual maturity as much as Christ desires it for you? —C. S.

B. Slain Lamb (v. 6)

6a. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.

The reader first encounters *the four beasts* and *the elders* in Revelation 4:4-6. The word *beasts* implies that these beings are neither humans nor angels. In the book of Revelation, the number “four” is symbolic of the entirety of the earth and its inhabitants (compare 7:1). Combining that observation with the creatures’ multitudes of eyes (4:8) indicates that they are watching the entire earth; nothing is hidden from them. This symbolizes the all-knowing nature of the Lord, His omniscience (compare Hebrews 4:13).

If the original readers expected any particular animal to appear in addition to the four beasts, it would likely be a lion, per the previous verse. To the readers’ likely surprise, however, the spotlight focuses on *a Lamb*. This is a startling plot twist, especially given the Lamb’s outward appearance. It bears the marks of having *been slain*, yet it lives, given that it is standing. A metaphor is used here to represent Christ, who was killed but resurrected. The image of the slain Lamb recalls the Old Testament’s concept of blood sacrifice, yet the Lamb in John’s vision didn’t remain dead; it is depicted as alive, bearing visible, serious wounds (compare Isaiah 53:7; John 20:24-29; Revelation 13:8). The New Testa-

ment uses the capitalized word *Lamb* or *Lamb’s* some 30 times, and all but two of those are in the book of Revelation.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain to an unbeliever the meaning and significance of the images of Jesus as the Lion, a Lamb, and the Root?

Digging Deeper

Which of those three images do you find the most difficult to grasp? Why?

6b. Having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

The description of the Lamb combines the number *seven* (symbolizing perfection or completeness; see commentary on Revelation 5:1, above) with *horns* (symbolizing power per Psalm 132:17; Ezekiel 29:21; Daniel 7:7-24; 8:3-22) and *eyes* (symbolizing divine knowledge per 2 Chronicles 16:9; Zechariah 4:10). The exact meaning of the *seven Spirits of God* is difficult to determine (compare and contrast Revelation 1:4; 4:5). Some students take this phrase to be the same as the sevenfold Spirit depicted in Isaiah 11:2-3; this viewpoint allows a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

Another viewpoint understands the seven Spirits to refer to God’s seven angels of Revelation 8:2, 6; 15:1; etc. Some ancient Jewish texts mention seven archangels that stand before God’s throne. The nonbiblical Tobit 12:15, for example, speaks of “Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.”

In any case, translators have to make a choice here: to translate as upper-case *Spirits* indicates a belief on the translators’ part that this word refers to

How to Say It

Judah	Joo-duh.
Laodicea	Lay-odd-uh-see-uh.
Messiah	Meh-sigh-uh.
omniscience	ahm-nish-untz.



Visual for Lesson 9. Display this visual as you discuss the lesson commentary associated with Revelation 5:9.

deity; that is the choice the translators of the *King James Version* made.

In either case, the fact that these Spirits or spirits serve the Lamb's purpose shows His power and authority.

C. Praise to the Lamb (vv. 7-10)

7. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

The Lamb demonstrates His worthiness by receiving the scroll *out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne*. All present, including John, undoubtedly watch in amazement as the Lamb does this audacious thing! However, this is not an act of thievery or usurpation, for God has been waiting for the Lamb. The scroll and its contents belong to the Lamb.

8a. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb.

With the transfer of the scroll, worship in Heaven resumes. But now *the four beasts and four and twenty elders* bow *before the Lamb*. This is not to recognize a transfer of power that diminishes the authority of the one on the throne. Rather, it recognizes the Lamb's authority and His unity with the one on the throne.

The number of elders, 24, is double the number 12, which may represent the people of God from both the Old and New Testaments. Israel, the covenant people of the Old Testament era,

was comprised of 12 tribes (Exodus 24:4; compare Revelation 21:12). Christians, the covenant people of the New Testament era, are linked with the 12 apostles (Luke 6:13; compare Revelation 21:14), who are the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Jesus himself combines the idea of 12 tribes with 12 apostles in His description of the future (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30).

8b. Having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

Following the transfer of the scroll, new details unfold before John's eyes. The elders now have *harps*, which they presumably use for worship music, given that harps were common as instruments of worship (Psalms 33:2; 71:22; 147:7; etc.). Harps are also mentioned in Revelation 14:2; 15:2.

The fact that the elders also hold *golden vials full of odours* offers the reader a rarity in the book of Revelation: the two words *which are*. These two words indicate that an explanation of the symbolism comes next. In several passages, the "which are/is" language explains symbolism with more symbolism (example: Revelation 5:6). But that isn't the case here, given the unambiguous identification of *the prayers of the saints*. The context implies that the Lamb receives those prayers; He doesn't ignore them.

9a. And they sung a new song.

Worship of the Lamb includes singing. What the elders sing is not an old favorite but *a new song*. This imperative is stressed throughout the Psalter (Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Revelation 14:3 is an additional implementation (compare Isaiah 42:10). However, in that instance, it's the 144,000 redeemed who are singing while the four beasts and the elders (apparently) listen.

What Do You Think?

How often should the church introduce new songs in worship services? Why?

Digging Deeper

What would nudge you toward being more open to learning a new song?

9b. Saying, Thou art worthy to take the book,

and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.

The reality that the Lamb had been slain would have been perceived as a source of embarrassment by many. But the heavenly court praises the Lamb not in spite of His death but because of it. Christ's obedient death is humanity's victory over sin-guilt (Romans 3:25-26). The Lamb's unique obedience to the Father made Him worthy to take the book and *open the seals thereof*.

The heavenly court then explains the implications of that death further. Primary is the truth that it *redeemed us*. The verb translated "redeem" occurs about 30 times in the New Testament; it always refers to a purchase that involves an exchange (examples: Matthew 13:44, 46; John 13:29). Such purchases can refer to paying a price to free someone (examples: 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23), and that's the sense here.

9c. Out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

The song now recognizes the diverse nature of those who have been redeemed. The diversity is fourfold in that they come from every family group (*kindred*), every language group (*tongue*), every demographic (*people*), and every ethnic group (*nation*). This heavenly mix is drawn from the entire world.

10a. And hast made us unto our God kings and priests.

This half-verse yields three minor problems regarding the original author's words per the various Greek manuscripts. The first challenge concerns the word *us*. In some manuscripts, it's the Greek word translated "them" instead. This may have been a scribe's intent to match the word "them" to the diverse group in Revelation 5:9c, just studied.

The second minor challenge is that the phrase *unto our God* does not appear in the oldest manuscripts. The third challenge is that the oldest manuscripts have the Greek word for *kingdom* instead of *kings*. Revelation 1:6 also has "kings" instead of "kingdom" in a manuscript variant, so that's evidence for the word *kings*. However, Exodus 19:6 speaks of "a kingdom of priests," which seems to be the antecedent or pattern for the issue. In any

case, we will be treated like royalty when God's kingdom is manifested in its fullest; note the golden crowns the elders wear in Revelation 4:4!

Returning to Revelation 1:6, that passage can help us with the "unto our God" challenge since, without question, it has "unto God" as equivalent. Offering certain parallels and directions to the half-verse before us are Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; and Revelation 20:6.

What Do You Think?

What ways will you live as a priest of God in the week ahead?

Digging Deeper

In addition to 1 Peter 2:5, what passages encourage you to do so?

10b. And we shall reign on the earth.

To serve as a royal priesthood comes with a promise: God's people will one day *reign on the earth*. Christ made this promise explicitly in the letter to the church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:21), and it appears elsewhere in the New Testament as well (2 Timothy 2:12). This is an astonishing and humbling responsibility (compare Luke 19:17).

Conclusion

A. Jesus Is Worthy

The answer to the question *What makes a person worthy of honor?* depends greatly on who is bestowing the honor. In God's economy, earthly success does not draw His praise. Ultimately, Jesus alone is worthy of all glory and honor. He alone is worthy to unbind the scroll. While Jesus will always reign supreme, we will be honored by being called to reign with Him. But our worthiness will be tested! Expect it.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, orient our hearts to the things that You value, not the things the world values. Teach us to live self-sacrificially as Jesus did. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

B. Thought to Remember

Jesus alone is worthy of all honor and praise.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

As learners arrive, have the following written on the board:

Life is like . . .

- *riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.*
- *a game of chess. Always think before you make a move.*
- *a cactus. It's beautiful but thorny.*

Poll learners to see which of the three “Life is like . . .” completions most closely matches their experiences. Discuss.

Alternative. Distribute slips of paper from the “It’s Kind of Like . . .” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to take no more than one minute to turn their statement into a “___ is like” analogy.

After either of the above, say, “Some things are nearly impossible to describe by using a pithy analogy or metaphor. We call such things ‘inexpressible’ or ‘indescribable.’ Today’s lesson allows us to consider how the apostle John wrestled with an experience almost beyond his understanding.”

Into the Word

Ensure that participants comprehend that Revelation 4 is the necessary context or preamble to today’s text from Revelation 5. To do so, distribute handouts (you create) with the references *Revelation 4* and *Revelation 5:1-10* as headers of two columns, one each. Have printed down the left side the words *throne, seven, elders, beasts, and worthy* as labels to five rows, one each. Have printed these instructions on the handout: “As we come to each word in Revelation 5:1-10, write the verse where the word occurs in that text and in Revelation 4. Make your entries where the appropriate column and row intersect.”

In the lower half of the handout, have printed *New to Me, Comforting to Me, and Disturbing to*

Me as headers to three columns, one each. Have learners make entries under the appropriate header as you progress through Revelation 5:1-10.

Form learners into study triads. Have triads discuss among themselves Revelation 5:1-4 and make entries to the top and bottom halves of their handout. When triads seem finished, reconvene for a whole-class discussion of insights.

Repeat this procedure for Revelation 5:5-7, but have triads also consider imagery in the text as drawn from Genesis 49:8-10 (lion); Isaiah 11:1, 10 (root); Isaiah 53:7-8 and John 1:29, 36 (lamb). When triads seem finished, reconvene for a whole-class discussion of insights. *Option:* Depending on the nature of your class, you might choose to focus the attention of the triads on (1) what the prophecies say, (2) how we know they are about Jesus, and (3) how Jesus did or will fulfill them all.

Repeat the basic procedure of Revelation 5:1-4, above, for Revelation 5:8-10. *Option:* Have triads dig deeper by considering (1) the significance of the number 12 as informed by Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; and Revelation 21:12-14; as well as (2) the disposition of the “prayers of all saints” as informed by Revelation 8:3-4.

Into Life

Say, “In the spirit of the ‘new song’ of Revelation 5:9, let’s write one!” Form groups for writing a couple of lines of lyrics for a new song of praise.

Alternative 1. Distribute instead copies of “The Worthy Lamb” exercise from the activity page to be completed as indicated.

Alternative 2. Have your class sing a new song by taking the lyrics of an existing song and singing it to the tune of another song. (Ensure that the two existing songs have the same meter, as noted in the index to many hymnals.) For example, the words to “All the Way My Savior Leads Me” can be sung to the tune of “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken” and vice versa.

David's Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: 2 Peter 3:11-18

Background Scripture: 1 Chronicles 21:1-22:1

1 Chronicles 21:14-30

14 So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

17 And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

18 Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

19 And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD.

20 And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat.

21 And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground.

22 Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.

23 And Ornan said unto David, take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

24 And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.

25 So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.

26 And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.

27 And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

28 At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.

29 For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon.

30 But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

Key Text

King David said to Ornan, nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. —1 Chronicles 21:24

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 3: Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Specify what David accepted responsibility for.
2. Explain why David insisted on paying for what was offered to him as a gift.
3. Write an intercessory prayer on behalf of his or her community.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Plagues and Punishment
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Destroying Angel (1 Chronicles 21:14-17)

- A. Terrible Judgment (v. 14)
Disaster Brings Change
- B. Divine Peril (vv. 15-16a)
- C. Passionate Plea (vv. 16b-17)

II. The Fiery Altar (1 Chronicles 21:18-27)

- A. Prophetic Directive (vv. 18-19)
- B. Humble Cooperation (vv. 20-25)
The Pseudo-Sacrifice
- C. Sheathed Sword (vv. 26-27)

III. The Sword of the Lord (1 Chronicles 21:28-30)

- A. Ancient Tabernacle (vv. 28-29)
- B. Fearful Caution (v. 30)

Conclusion

- A. Community Suffering
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Plagues and Punishment

In the fourteenth century, the Black Death (bubonic plague) came to Europe and caused sudden, widespread fatalities. A common estimate is that one-third of the people of Europe died within five years. Since the science of the time could not explain the plague, many people believed the disease to be God's punishment for the corrupt lifestyles of Christians and the church's tolerance of sin. This belief often led to persecution of perceived heretics.

More recently, widespread outbreaks of viral disease—the 1918 Great Influenza pandemic, the 1980s AIDS epidemic, and the COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s—have been perceived by some as punishments by God for societal sins. Those who saw these health crises that way proclaimed justification from Scripture.

Well-known are the 10 plagues inflicted on the people of Egypt (Exodus 7:14–11:10). But most, if not all, of these don't fit our usual understanding of the word *plague* as referring to a disease resulting from a bacterial or viral infection. In today's lesson, a plague sent as God's punishment takes place during the reign of Israel's greatest ruler, King David.

B. Lesson Context

Despite being portrayed as “a man after [God's] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), King David committed grievous sins. Most remembered are the sins of adultery and murder in his seduction of Bathsheba and the death of her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11). The “God's own heart” part of David seems to have gained traction after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan about the violation of the sixth and seventh commandments (Exodus 20:13-14). The result was the tender prayer of Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

More consequential for a greater number of people, however, was the sin of David concerning a census he took of Israel to know the potential size of his army (2 Samuel 24:2; 1 Chronicles 21:2). The results of the survey must have aston-

ished David: there were over one million men who “drew the sword” (2 Samuel 24:9). This census angered the Lord, for David’s pride drove it as he rejected his reliance upon God for Israel’s security.

The prophet Gad delivered God’s judgment to David, and it came with a twist: David could choose from among three punishments, of varying impacts on Israel, for his sins. The choices were three years of famine, three months of attacks by the nation’s enemies, or three days of a pestilent plague (1 Chronicles 21:12). These three had been ways the Lord showed His wrath to Israel (see Jeremiah 14:12). David chose the third option, with horrific results for his people.

I. The Destroying Angel

(1 Chronicles 21:14-17)

A. Terrible Judgment (v. 14)

14. So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

The *pestilence* the Lord delivered *upon Israel* was labeled earlier as the “sword of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 21:12). Although not described, the implication is that of a fast-moving malady that kills quickly. The parallel passage, 2 Samuel 24:15, notes the plague’s reach “from Dan even to Beersheba”—a straight-line distance of about 150 miles, encompassing the whole of Israel. In the small geographic footprint of David’s realm, every village and every citizen would have felt loss because of these deaths. The sorrowful outcry from survivors would have been deafening and impossible for the king to ignore.

Disaster Brings Change

The Bible explains how God used floods, plagues, locusts, and invading armies to express His displeasure with sinful people. But He wasn’t expressing His anger merely to “blow off steam”; instead, He was instigating change—from sinful behavior to godly behavior.

When disasters have happened since the first century AD, some people will attribute it to God’s wrath (see the Introduction to this lesson). But invariably, this is just speculation. We don’t know if a given disaster today is actually a divine pun-

ishment or simply an event that God allows to occur. But we do know that change follows disasters. Just think of the societal changes since the COVID-19 pandemic.

When we face personal disaster, we might worry that God is punishing us. It’s more valuable, however, to focus on what change will follow. Remember the example of Job, who lost everything through no fault of his own while remaining faithful. God is more than able to bless us in the aftermath with even more than we lost (Job 42:12). —A. W.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who thinks that disasters are God’s judgment for sin?

Digging Deeper

How might your response differ regarding a sick person who thinks God is punishing him or her?

B. Divine Peril (vv. 15-16a)

15a. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand.

This half-verse reveals the time has come for Jerusalem to experience God’s anger as *an angel of death* appears on the scene. It’s unfitting to take the word *destroy* in the sense of “demolishing buildings” since the parallel in 2 Samuel 24:16 establishes that the focus is on the people themselves.

Before completing this devastation, however, the Lord *repented him of the evil*. This phrasing doesn’t mean that God had been doing something wrong or sinful—that would be impossible. Instead, to “repent” means God changed the course of what was anticipated to happen next. The word *evil* in this context doesn’t refer to a moral evil but to the due punishment.

15b. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

A threshing floor was a flat, hard piece of ground, ideally one of stone. Every harvest, the dried bundles of grain would be threshed here.



Visual for Lesson 10. *Display this visual as you ask the discussion questions associated with verses 24-25.*

This process involved laying the grain out and having it beaten or trampled by oxen to separate the ripened seeds from the stalks. The process also involved winnowing (compare Ruth 3:2; note figurative use in Luke 3:17). When the process was complete, grains could be ground into flour for making bread. A threshing floor was thus an essential piece of food production that could last from harvest to harvest. Threshing floors are mentioned dozens of times in the Bible, sometimes figuratively (examples: Deuteronomy 25:4; Isaiah 28:27; 1 Corinthians 9:9).

The fact that a *Jebusite* owned this *threshing-floor* is revealing. Jebusites are mentioned over 40 times in the Old Testament. They were not Israelites (1 Kings 9:20; 2 Chronicles 8:7); rather, they were one of the tribes inhabiting the promised land that the Israelites were commanded to drive out. They had lived in Jerusalem and, apparently, David let some of them stay after he conquered the city (2 Samuel 5:6-8). Ornan's presence after David's takeover indicates he had favor with the Israelite conquerors in some way and was perhaps known to David. (Note: 2 Samuel 24:16 uses "Araunah" as a variation of Ornan's name.)

16a. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem.

Comparing 1 Chronicles 21:16-17, a segment of our lesson-text, with its parallel section in 2 Sam-

uel 24:17 yields some interesting results. The most obvious difference is one of length: this part of the story is about twice as long in our lesson-text than the version in that parallel verse. That parallel of the half-verse before us now merely says, "David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people."

What Do You Think?

What should you do if you hear someone describe angels in a way that doesn't match the Bible's descriptions?

Digging Deeper

How can the Bible's image of angels as warriors be comforting to you as a believer rather than a cause for fear?

C. Passionate Plea (vv. 16b-17)

16b. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

This scene is absent altogether in the parallel verse of 2 Samuel 24:17. *Sackcloth* is the garment of mourning (examples: 2 Samuel 3:31; Amos 8:10). It is made from rough, loose-fitting cloth—modern burlap may be similar. Sackcloth was the exact opposite of the finery of kings' robes or of the luxurious garments of a nation's leaders (example: Jonah 3:6).

In the verse before us, the wearing of sackcloth is combined with falling prostrate—itsself a sign of humility before God or other people (example: Ruth 2:10). The combined aspects of wearing sackcloth and falling facedown are rare in Scripture; this indicates the extreme nature of the situation at hand. The reaction of *David and the elders of Israel* to the angel is submission, not defiance. They surrendered to the judgment of the Lord.

17. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

The parallel in 2 Samuel 24:17 says much the same as the verse at hand but is more succinct.

Both stress David's confession that he and he alone was responsible for the unholy census he had taken. His advisor Joab had warned him against doing that and had even left one tribe uncounted. But David quickly rejected Joab's counsel (2 Samuel 24:3-4; 1 Chronicles 21:3-6).

Even so, David seemed quite willing to admit his sin and repent. When God confronted Adam with his sin in the garden, he attempted to shift the blame to his wife, Eve (Genesis 3:12). When Samuel rebuked Saul for disobedience, that king made excuses (1 Samuel 15:13-21). David did neither. As he did when confronted with his sin regarding Bathsheba, David took sole responsibility (2 Samuel 12:13).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to take responsibility for something wrong you've done?

Digging Deeper

How should your prayers be the same or different from what David prayed?

II. The Fiery Altar

(1 Chronicles 21:18-27)

A. Prophetic Directive (vv. 18-19)

18. Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

The severity of David's sin demanded more than words of repentance and submissive body postures. So *the Lord* made His expectations clear to *David* through the prophet *Gad*. This man is elsewhere referred to as a "prophet" (1 Samuel 22:5), as a "seer" (1 Chronicles 21:9), and as both: "the prophet Gad, David's seer" (2 Samuel 24:11). For David to *go up* means that a bit of an uphill hike was to be part of his overall task. See commentary on 1 Chronicles 21:15b, above, regarding the designation of *the Jebusite*.

19. And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD.

David realized that *Gad* was not offering his own expert opinion but was speaking in *the name of the Lord*. The phrase *went up at the saying* indi-

cates complete obedience. The Lord had chosen a specific site. As noted in 2 Chronicles 3:1, that place was "mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David . . . in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite." This threshing floor was to become the site of Solomon's temple (1 Chronicles 22:1). Moriah was the place where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2).

B. Humble Cooperation (vv. 20-25)

20-21. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground.

This seems to have been a workday for *Ornan . . . and his four sons*. As they were *threshing wheat*, they perhaps did not notice at first the presence of *the angel*. We can scarcely imagine the shock of turning around and simultaneously seeing both an angel and the king! The parallel passage 2 Samuel 24:20 adds that David was accompanied by servants, adding to the shock.

22. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.

David wasted no time in making known the reason for his visit. He could have "pulled rank" and confiscated Ornan's property, but David offered *the full price*. He intended to carry out the Lord's instructions through Gad but with justice and integrity. And if there was any time in David's life when he had to act with unquestionable integrity, this was it, considering the lives that were at stake.

23. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

We now see the extent of Ornan's threshing operation. We also gain insight into the person

of Ornan himself. Although he is a non-Israelite (see commentary on 1 Chronicles 21:15b, above), he was familiar with Israel's sacrificial system. He knew how *oxen* and *wheat* could be used in differing types of *offerings* (Leviticus 1 and 2; we note that the *King James Version* uses the word *meat* at times to stand for any food, even grain; see Leviticus 2:1, 4). Burnt offerings require wood for fire, and Ornan offered his *threshing instruments* for that purpose.

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to evaluate your generosity?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 convict you in this regard?

24-25. And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.

David resisted any urge to use his position to pay anything less than *the full price* to Ornan and his family. The sin at issue was David's, and his repentance was to cost him. Ancient weights found in archaeological digs reveal that a shekel's weight is about 11.34 grams, which converts to 0.365 troy ounces in today's measurements. So the *six hundred shekels of gold by weight* paid by David would have been about 219 troy ounces of gold. Assuming gold today sells for about \$2,000 per troy ounce, David's offer would be the equivalent to more than \$400,000 today!

However, when we look at the parallel account in 2 Samuel 24:24, we see a difference: a sale price of only "fifty shekels of silver." At today's price of \$24 per troy ounce of silver, that equates to less than \$500. But a close look at the text reveals there is no contradiction. In the verse before us now, the price in gold is *for the place*, while the parallel text says the price in silver was "for the threshing floor and the oxen." So our text here indicates a more significant purchase of the land where the threshing floor was located. Since this later became the site of

Solomon's temple (1 Chronicles 22:1), a conservative estimate is that at least 10 acres are purchased.

The Pseudo-Sacrifice

The people who know best the meaning of the word *sacrifice* are parents. The people who are second best at knowing that word's meaning are chess players. A sacrifice in both areas involves giving up something of short-term value in anticipation of a long-term benefit. Parents sacrifice their own short-term desires for the long-term needs of their children; chess players sacrifice a piece in exchange for a checkmate later. The common thread is that something of value is given up, which will result in hardship if no positive results are forthcoming.

A sacrifice that costs little or nothing is a contradiction in terms. Do you offer God pseudo-sacrifices? Do you share with Him less of your money than you spend on coffee every week? Think deeply about that: unless your financial giving causes you to do without something you would like to have, it's not sacrificial giving. The same goes for how you spend your time.

An acceptable sacrifice to God does not necessarily have to involve money, but it should be costly in some way. The sacrifices God appreciates the most are not even material. As the psalmist says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:17). And that psalmist was none other than David himself. —A. W.

What Do You Think?

How will you, like David, give to God even though it costs you something?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to develop the attitude that giving to God might require a cost?

C. Sheathed Sword (vv. 26-27)

26. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.

We are not given the details of the *altar* David built. Given the urgency of the situation, we may speculate that it was hastily constructed from nearby materials. It may have been “an altar of earth” like the one in Exodus 20:24; that was the first instance of combining *burnt offerings* and *peace offerings*, explained in Leviticus 1 and 3, respectively.

The Lord’s fiery response must have been spectacular and awe-inspiring. Sometimes *fire* from *heaven* is judgmental (example: 2 Kings 1:10-14); at other times, it indicates divine approval in some sense (example: 2 Chronicles 7:1). In this instance, it seems to have reflected both.

27. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

There could be no better outcome than this.

III. The Sword of the Lord

(1 Chronicles 21:28-30)

A. Ancient Tabernacle (vv. 28-29)

28-29. At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon.

Although this story is about David’s sin, its consequences, and its resolution, it has other important information too. This story represents a transitional phase between tabernacle and temple as the proper house of the Lord, and between Jerusalem and *Gibeon* (five miles to the north) regarding location. The tabernacle made by *Moses* four hundred years earlier was still at the *high place* in Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1:13), not yet transferred to Jerusalem. Also in Gibeon was *the altar of burnt offering*, the concept of which also dated to Moses.

B. Fearful Caution (v. 30)

30. But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

David doesn’t seem to believe he’s been for-

given fully! So the man who slew a bear, a lion, and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) shrinks back in fear of *the sword of the angel of the Lord*. Seeing the angel’s power has made David cautious (compare 1 Chronicles 13:12).

Conclusion

A. Community Suffering

Large numbers of people suffer deeply from the mistakes of a single individual. Think about the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian student in 1914, which kicked off World War I and the deaths of millions. In the Bible, consider the gross sins of King Manasseh, which resulted in God’s sending Israel into the Babylonian exile (Jeremiah 15:4; see 2 Kings 21:16). At the birth of Jesus, the insecurity and ruthlessness of King Herod led to the massacre of innocent babies and children in Bethlehem and nearby areas (Matthew 2:16).

David understood that his prideful sin had resulted in the deaths of 70,000 men. The nearly 10 months it took before the census-takers returned (2 Samuel 24:8) can be seen as God’s waiting period before He acted. He is patient—but His patience has limits (2 Peter 3:9).

B. Prayer

Lord God, we, like David, are imperfect servants because of our sins. May we never be so prideful or isolated from others that we do not see how our actions can affect those around us. Help us to choose responsibility and repentance for our sins so that others may not bear our consequences. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our sin affects others.

How to Say It

Araunah	A-raw-nuh.
Bathsheba	Bath-she-buh.
Jebusites	Jeb-yuh-sites.
Ornan	Or-nawn.
Uriah	Yu-rye-uh.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask participants if they have any good “clueless boss” stories that they wouldn’t get in trouble for sharing. Caution that no names be used.

Alternative. Bring in some “clueless boss” cartoons (the Dilbert comic strip is famous for these). Pass them around for lighthearted chuckles.

After either introduction, say, “We usually use the word *clueless* to describe someone who has no idea what is happening. Today’s lesson will reveal a decision by a boss that went beyond clueless, all the way to being deadly sinful. It will be a fair warning to us today.”

Into the Word

Have two participants read aloud the 17 verses of today’s lesson, alternating with each verse. Afterward, announce a closed-Bible pop quiz on how much they remember about those verses. State that you won’t collect the quizzes and that everyone will grade his or her own. Then, distribute handouts (you prepare) with the following multiple-choice questions. *Time limit: one minute!*

- 1—How many died as a result of David’s sin?
a. 70,000 b. 170,000 c. none
 - 2—What stood between Heaven and earth?
a. prophet b. stairway c. angel
 - 3—What did David build?
a. temple b. altar c. tower
 - 4—What did David buy?
a. tabernacle b. food c. threshing floor
 - 5—David refused to offer a sacrifice that cost him what?
a. nothing b. anything c. everything
 - 6—Who did David say shared the blame for his sin?
a. the prophet Gad b. the people c. no one
- [Answers: 1-a; 2-c; 3-b; 4-c; 5-a; 6-c.]

Encourage open discussion of the quiz results. When someone asks a question about an uncertainty, use that as a transition point for an “all question” time. Form study pairs or small groups to create two lists of questions: one list of their

own questions and another list of questions that an unbeliever might ask regarding the passage.

Call for questions and responses to the ensuing whole-class discussion. Expect that this question in particular will be asked: “Why would God kill 70,000 innocent people because of the sin of someone else?” or similar. (Pose the question yourself if no one else does.)

Introduce an approach that examines the validity of assumptions behind the question. Write the word *Assumptions* at the top center of the board. Then, ask learners to identify some of those behind that question of the 70,000 deaths. Be sure to identify the assumption that the 70,000 were not deserving of death. Use this approach for every question as appropriate.

Into Life

Ask for modern examples of people suffering the consequences of wrongdoing committed by others. Jot the examples on the board. After a few are offered, pick one and say, “We’re going to write an intercessory prayer for this one, but not the kind we usually hear.” Then, distribute handouts (you create) with a typical intercessory prayer printed at the top—a prayer that asks God to do something about some situation or injustice. Have these instructions at the bottom above a blank space: “Rewrite this prayer (or an entirely new one) so that you’re asking God to show you how you can be His hands and feet to solve the problem.”

Option. At an appropriate point in the lesson, distribute copies of the “Stopping the Butterfly Effect” exercise on the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it in study pairs as indicated.

Option. As learners depart, distribute copies of the “To Be a Living Sacrifice” exercise from the activity page as a take-home. Encourage its completion by announcing that you will discuss the results at the beginning of next week’s class.

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Devotional Reading: 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14-27

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-20

2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11

1 Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house.

2 And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.

3 And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

5 And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

6 And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood.

7 Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brasen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat.

11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected.

Key Text

When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. —2 Chronicles 7:3

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 3: Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize what happened when Solomon finished praying.
2. Explain the idea of “dedicating” or “consecrating” something.
3. State how one can respond to God’s presence and love with worship and sacrifice.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Finishing a Father’s Legacy
- B. Historical Context
- C. Literary Context

I. Glory of God (2 Chronicles 7:1-3)

- A. Fire Comes Down (vv. 1-2)
A Third Kind of Fire
- B. People Bow Down (v. 3)
Powerful Love

II. Worship by People (2 Chronicles 7:4-6)

- A. Sacrifices (vv. 4-5)
- B. Music (v. 6)

III. Actions by Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:7, 11)

- A. Consecration (v. 7)
- B. Completion (v. 11)

Conclusion

- A. Seeking God’s Goodness
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Finishing a Father’s Legacy

From 1927 until his death in 1941, Gutzon Borglum, along with numerous assistants, carved the sculptures of four American presidents into the side of Mount Rushmore, located in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Borglum chose the 60-foot sculptures to represent 150 years of American history. Borglum worked on the project until his death, mere months before its completion. His son completed the project.

Today’s lesson, regarding the construction of the temple, is both similar to and different from the Borglums’ project. They are similar in that neither man who envisioned the projects in the first place lived to see their respective completions. They are different in that while the father oversaw almost all the work in the Borglums’ project, the opposite was true regarding the temple construction. King David wanted to build a magnificent temple for the Lord, but the honor went to his son Solomon instead. While David laid the groundwork, it was to be Solomon’s legacy to oversee and complete the project.

B. Historical Context

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles emphasize the importance of the reigns of David (1010–970 BC) and Solomon (970–930 BC) as their lives related to the temple’s coming into existence. The chronicler explains how those kings instituted most of the ongoing practices of the temple, especially those of sacrifice, prayer, and singing. All three of those elements are present in the parallel books of 1 and 2 Kings, but much more so in the Chronicles.

In 1 Chronicles 22:8, King David explained to his son Solomon that God had forbidden David from building the temple due to the amount of blood he had shed. After David’s extensive preparations (22:5), the honor was to fall to Solomon instead. He spent seven years completing the temple his father dreamed of building (1 Kings 6:38). The year of its completion was, therefore, 963 BC. The book of 2 Chronicles links father and son in several passages not included in 1 Kings (examples: 2 Chronicles 2:3, 7; 3:1; 6:42; 7:10; 8:14).

The dedication ceremony for the temple included a lengthy and eloquent prayer by the king (2 Chronicles 6). In that prayer, Solomon asked the Lord to remember His covenant with His people and His promise to David. He prayed for forgiveness of future sin. He pled for the temple to be a beacon of God's great name and mighty hand. He closed his prayer by inviting everyone else to celebrate the same divine mercy that he had recognized. Solomon thereby challenged himself and his hearers to a life of worship and sacrifice.

C. Literary Context

The first nine chapters of 2 Chronicles are commonly recognized as a literary sub-unit of the book as a whole. One reasonable outline of these nine chapters is:

- A. Solomon's Kingship (1:1-17)
- B. Temple's Construction (2:1-5:1)
- C. Temple's Dedication (5:2-7:22)
- D. Solomon's Other Activities (8:1-9:31)

Another way to show the inner dynamics of 2 Chronicles 1-9 is with this arrangement:

- A-Solomon's wisdom and wealth (1:1-17)
- B-He prepares temple construction (2:1-18)
 - C-He builds the temple (3:1-5:1)
 - C'-He dedicates the temple (5:2-7:22)
 - B'-He completes the temple, etc. (8:1-16)
- A'-Solomon's wisdom and wealth (8:17-9:28)

Notice the repetition of themes in a parallel "inverse pyramid" arrangement.

The powerful conclusion to Solomon's prayer, which immediately precedes today's lesson text, is reflected in a psalm:

Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength; let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant.

—2 Chronicles 6:41-42

Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.

For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed. —Psalm 132:8-10

The parallel account to today's text is 1 Kings 8:62-66. Compared to that earlier account, today's passage is the longer version; it includes additional details.

I. Glory of God

(2 Chronicles 7:1-3)

A. Fire Comes Down (vv. 1-2)

1a. Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices.

See Literary Context, above, regarding the content of Solomon's *praying*. As we read about *the fire that came down from heaven* to consume *the burnt offering and the sacrifices*, we're naturally inclined to compare and contrast this event with other such episodes in the Bible. Fire of divine origin was often for the purpose of judgment. Examples of this kind of fire stated in a personal way as being from the Lord or similar are Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 11:1; 16:35; and Psalm 21:9. Examples of judgmental fire more generally said to be from Heaven are 2 Kings 1:10-14; Luke 9:54; 17:29; and Revelation 20:9. But the fire in the lesson text at hand is in the minority of cases that are not judgmental, but showing divine favor instead (compare Leviticus 9:24; Judges 6:21).



Visual for Lesson 11. Display this visual as you ask the following question: "How have you experienced the Lord's love and goodness?"

Burnt offerings were a specific type of sacrifice whereby the entire offering was consumed by fire on the altar (Leviticus 1). By making such an offering, the people acknowledged their sin and the need for its removal. In the context at hand, it should have convicted the original audience of the need to enter the temple with holy attitudes and intent if they were to live in a healthy relationship with God and each other (contrast Jeremiah 7:30; Luke 19:46). The dramatic descent of the fire signaled that God was watching.

What Do You Think?

Without fire from Heaven, how can your congregation know whether someone's sensing of God's presence is genuine?

Digging Deeper

What can happen if proper discernment is lacking in that regard?

A Third Kind of Fire

Have you ever seen a “fire tornado”? These can form when a large forest fire heats the air so much that weather patterns begin to self-generate. The result may be a towering vortex of spinning flames connecting earth and sky, inspiring awe and terror.

I imagine that the descent of fire from Heaven at the dedication of Solomon's temple looked something like this kind of tornado. And yet, there is no record of fear on the part of those present! The fire was one of approval, not judgment.

But between the two fires of approval and judgment stands a third type of fire: the fire of testing. We all have to undergo certain trials of fire that test our faith (1 Peter 4:12). These can serve to cleanse us from unholiness (compare Proverbs 25:4; Malachi 3:2-3). We serve the Lord with the realization that the quality of our work will be tested by fire on the last day (1 Corinthians 3:12-13). Wouldn't it be better to embrace the testing now so we have time to repent before that final audit? —A. W.

1b. And the glory of the LORD filled the house.

The dramatic intensity of the fire from Heaven, just considered, was enhanced (if that were possible!) when *the glory of the Lord filled the house*. The concepts of fire and *glory* are combined in several places in the Bible (examples: Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 5:24; Isaiah 4:5; Zechariah 2:5; 1 Peter 1:7).

The manifestation of God's glory occurred also at the dedication of the tabernacle, which was the forerunner to the temple (Exodus 40:34-35). On that occasion, the glory happened in conjunction with a cloud rather than fire. This same combination had also occurred in the account of Solomon's bringing the ark of the covenant to the temple (2 Chronicles 5:13b–6:1; 1 Kings 8:10-12; compare Exodus 16:10). The combination of glory and cloud will occur yet again when God's glory departs the temple some 366 years after its dedication (Ezekiel 10:4, 10). Thus, God's glory is regularly connected with vital turning points in ancient Israel's focus on expressions of worship. The purpose of the glory is consecration or sanctification (Exodus 29:43).

2. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.

At first glance, 1 Kings 8:11 seems parallel to the verse before us because the idea conveyed is identical. But 1 Kings 8:11 is actually parallel to 2 Chronicles 5:11, 13b-14 in the flow of events. All are similar in outcome to what we see here: *the priests could not enter the house of the Lord*, with echoes of Exodus 40:35, as noted above.

B. People Bow Down (v. 3)

3. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

The text shifts its focus to those gathered, *the children of Israel*. Their experience of seeing the *fire* that *came down* and *the glory of the Lord* prompted them to renew their life of worship. (“Renew” is the right word because they had prayed and sacri-

ficed before, but henceforth they would do so in a more profound way.)

The people sang an often-repeated phrase found also in Psalm 136. The song also preceded Solomon's prayer (2 Chronicles 5:13). It was part of the singing when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:34). It was sung again centuries later as the altar was being rebuilt following return from exile (Ezra 3:11). The event of the consecration of the temple was a reminder of God's goodness and *mercy* in the past and for the future.

What Do You Think?

What changes might you experience by being more mindful of God's goodness, mercy, and love?

Digging Deeper

How can we gain that greater mindfulness?

Powerful Love

Most kids of Lavonte's age didn't watch their dads play pro football on TV. But Lavonte did—his dad was a 6'7", 360-pound offensive tackle. He was intimidating and didn't have to do much to keep Lavonte in line. Just the deep rumble of Dad's voice calling Lavonte from the back porch was enough to make the youngster freeze in his tracks and rapidly reconsider his intentions!

Would it be fair to say Lavonte feared his dad? Well . . . *yes* and *no*. He knew his father was a firm and strong man. Yet Lavonte also knew with absolute certainty that his dad would never hurt him. Because the same voice that growled out his name like a lion had talked as softly as a cat's purr to him every night at bedtime. And he knew he had a standing invitation to curl up next to his dad on the couch to watch replays of his dad's last game.

God inflicts powerful acts of judgment. His enemies don't stand a chance against His wrath. Yet when His people witness the consuming fire falling from Heaven, their response is not one of terror but one of love, awe, and admiration: "He is good; for his mercy endureth for ever!" (2 Chronicles 7:3).
—A. W.

II. Worship by People

(2 Chronicles 7:4-6)

A. Sacrifices (vv. 4-5)

4. Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

The *sacrifices* that followed differ from those incinerated by fire from Heaven (burnt offerings) in that some of the sacrifices in view here could be eaten. After God put His stamp of approval on the temple by consuming the initial sacrifices, the people joined in.

There are usually clear delineations of the duties of the three offices of *prophet*, *priest*, and *king* in ancient Israel. In the laws of sacrifice in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the king had no role—indeed, there was no provision for ancient Israel even to have a king in those three books (compare 1 Samuel 8). The story of King Uzziah's leprosy after his attempted sacrifice (2 Chronicles 26:16-23) reveals that a king was not to usurp the role of a priest. But there were some exceptions, and that seems to have been the case here as *the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord*. The sheer number of sacrificial animals may have overwhelmed the number of priests available. If so, a practical adjustment was made (compare 30:2-3).

We might easily misunderstand the purposes of sacrifice and dismiss the practice as barbaric or see it merely as a way of appeasing God's anger. Sacrifice was a form of worship. The people had to take something that was valuable to them and either give it over to God entirely or to both God and other people.

What Do You Think?

In what circumstances should our actions as living sacrifices be visible to all? In what circumstances visible only to God?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 5:13-16 and 6:1-4 influence your answers?

5. And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred

and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

The number of animals would have fed many thousands of people, making this event a celebration for a large percentage of Solomon's subjects. The dedication ceremony was designed to shape the life of the entire kingdom, including those not able to be present in Jerusalem. Solomon rightly understood that celebrating such an important event as the dedication of the temple in grand style should bring the people together in more ways than one.

It is interesting to compare the numbers of animals sacrificed in this verse to the Passover sacrifices later offered under Kings Hezekiah (reigned 716–687 BC) and Josiah (reigned 641–609 BC) centuries later, according to 2 Chronicles 30:24; 35:7-9:

<u>King</u>	<u>Oxen/Cattle</u>	<u>Sheep and Goats</u>
Solomon . . .	22,000	120,000
Hezekiah . . .	2,000	17,000
Josiah	11,100	37,600

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles measure kings by how they treat the temple in Jerusalem and facilitate worship there. By that measure, Solomon was a model king, at least at this point in his life.

B. Music (v. 6)

6a. And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry.

This verse stands on the shoulders of 1 Chronicles 15:3-22. That passage describes in great detail how *David the king* organized *the Levites* as temple musicians in conjunction with his second (and successful) attempt at bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. The musical instruments mentioned there are “psalteries and harps and cymbals” (1 Chronicles 15:16). These instruments were also present at the first (and failed) attempt to relocate the ark, with two additional instruments mentioned in that context: timbrels and trumpets (13:8). The Old Testament mentions at least 14 distinct musical instruments a total of over 200 times.

Singing isn't mentioned in this verse. But since the first attempt to relocate the ark involved sing-

ing (1 Chronicles 13:8), as did the second attempt (15:22), it's more than reasonable to presume that singing also occurred here.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you better incorporate music as part of your private worship?

Digging Deeper

How will your decisions in that regard differ in your “good” times from that of your “bad” times? Why?

6b. And the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood.

Priests are associated with *trumpets* about a dozen times in the Old Testament. There were two kinds of trumpets used for different purposes. First were the trumpets of silver; these were for calling the people to assemble, for setting out, to announce times of rejoicing at festivals, and for signaling in battle (Numbers 10:1-10). These are the trumpets in view here.

The second kind was trumpets made from rams' horns. These are mentioned in dozens of places, but in connection with priests only in Joshua 6.

III. Actions by Solomon

(2 Chronicles 7:7, 11)

A. Consecration (v. 7)

7. Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brasen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat.

The horizontal surface of the altar Solomon had built measured 20 cubits by 20 cubits, or about 900 square feet (2 Chronicles 4:1). Although it was quite large, it was not large enough for the work of that day of dedication. Thus, Solomon needed a plan to deal with this. So, with priestly help, he *hallowed* (meaning “consecrated” or “sanctified”) *the middle of the court[yard]* to be suitable as an overflow altar. This practice was not provided for in the Law

of Moses, but 2 Chronicles sees it as an appropriate emergency measure. The aim of the event was more important than the silence of the law in this regard.

Three types of offerings are noted. *Burnt offerings* were characterized by being totally consumed by the fire; regulations are in Leviticus 1 and 6:8-13. Regarding *meat offerings*, we note that the *King James Version* uses the word *meat* at times to stand for any food, even grain; see Leviticus 2:1, 4) Regulations for this kind of offering are in Leviticus 2 and 6:14-23. *Peace offerings* were offerings of thanksgiving or are connected with the taking of vows; regulations are in Leviticus 3 and 7:11-21. The Law of Moses forbade the eating of the *fat* of animals that were candidates for sacrifice (Leviticus 7:22-27; compare Exodus 29:13).

What Do You Think?

What steps do you need to take for greater consecration since 1 Corinthians 6:19 establishes that your body is now the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Digging Deeper

What superficial efforts have you seen others make in this regard?

B. Completion (v. 11)

11. Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected.

The passages 2 Chronicles 5:3; 7:8-10 indicate that the temple dedication occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three annual pilgrimage feasts (Deuteronomy 16:13-17; 31:10). Solomon had committed himself fully to the completion of the temple, focusing all his resources to that effort. But more than it being about a building, it was also about a people. He recruited many artisans and craftsmen to help as they used their skills for God's glory.

Solomon, like any other king, also built a palace (*the king's house*). His palace had a footprint more than four times that of the temple (11,250 square feet and 2,700 square feet, respectively; see

1 Kings 6:2 and 7:2). Compared to the seven years it took to build the temple, the 13 years to build his palace is understandable!

The palace had to be larger than the temple because it needed to house the king, his numerous wives, many officials, etc. A palace was not just a grandiose house but a small city within the city.

Conclusion

A. Seeking God's Goodness

The temple became the center of ancient Israel's religious life. It was the place where they could meet God. Sacrifices and prayers would occur at that temple for generations. While Solomon could not have foreseen the details of the long history of worship that followed his actions, his trust in God was proven by his prayer, worship, and actions. These reflected confidence in God's holiness, power, and enduring love.

Solomon prayed to God to remember His promises to his father and to previous generations. The king's prayer was integral to his worship. His focus on completing the temple *before* he started his own house showed his heart (contrast Haggai 1:2-4).

Unfortunately, this interconnection of faithful prayer, worship, and actions would not last. It didn't last for the people (2 Chronicles 36:15-21), and it didn't last for Solomon himself (1 Kings 11:4-11). Will it last for you?

B. Prayer

O God our Father, may we always praise You for Your merciful love and goodness. Renew in us a life of worship. Strengthen our dedication to Your holiness and help us to love others as You see them. May we be living sacrifices for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Respond to God with worship.

How to Say It

Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Josiah	Jo-sigh-uh.
Uzziah	Uh-zye-uh.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Have the phrase *Spontaneous Songs* written on the board as learners arrive. Ask your learners to name songs (religious or secular) that people might sing spontaneously right after a startling experience, either good or bad. The song could be sung in a context that the songwriter did not envision. Jot responses on the board.

Alternative. If you think the above will be too difficult, research such songs yourself and write their titles on the board before class begins; *do not* write the title *Spontaneous Songs* on the board. That theme is what the learners are to guess based on the song titles you list. Just two examples of songs that might be sung spontaneously are “We Are the Champions” by Queen (in reacting to a positive event) and “I Won’t Back Down” by Tom Petty (in reacting to a challenging event). Have at least four songs on the board. Ask what the songs have in common.

Make a transition by saying, “Today, we’re going to consider an event that resulted in spontaneous singing. Let’s see how the ancient Israelites connected singing to a major positive event in their nation’s history.”

Into the Word

Before the Scripture for the lesson is read, distribute handouts (you prepare) titled “Since, Cents, Sense, or Scents?” Below the title, draw a pie chart divided into five segments or “slices.” Label the five segments *Touch*, *Taste*, *Sight*, *Sound*, and *Smell*, one label for each segment.

Tell the class that you will read the lesson text of 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11 aloud twice. As you do, participants are to jot verse numbers in the five segments of their pie charts according to which of the five senses would have been most activated by the verse you are reading at the moment. (Responses can vary, but expect the following as likely, per the verse numbering: 1–sight, 2–

sight, 3–sight, 4–touch, 5–smell, 6–sound, 7–smell, 11–sight.)

As you read the text, be sure to read the verse numbers as well. After you finish, do so again so participants can review their decisions. In the ensuing whole-class discussion, compare and contrast the responses. Draw a grid on the board that has eight horizontal rows and five vertical columns. Put the numbering of the eight verses of the lesson at the beginnings of the eight rows, one each; put the five senses as headers of the five columns, one each. Fill in the intersections as appropriate as participants respond with their choices.

Into Life

Form learners into small groups to compare and contrast the events of the text with the worship experiences they have had. To prompt discussion, distribute these questions on a handout (you create):

- 1–What elements of the worship in today’s text give us valid ideas for our own worship?
- 2–What are some ways to respond best to God’s presence and love with worship and sacrifice?
- 3–What are some specific things we can do on Saturday night to prepare ourselves better for worship on Sunday morning?

Option. Distribute copies of the “Whose To-Do List?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to one-on-one study pairs for completion as indicated. This activity recognizes the fact that in the dedication of the temple, there was a part for the people to play and a part for God to play.

Option. Distribute to study pairs or triads copies of the “God’s Greatest Hits” exercise from the activity page, to be completed as indicated. If time is short, this can be a take-home exercise. To help ensure completion, state that you will begin class next week by discussing results.

Worship Is Restored

Devotional Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

Background Scripture: Ezra 3:1-13

Ezra 3:1-6, 10-13

1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the

LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Key Text

All the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. —Ezra 3:11b

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 3: Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Outline the history of Judah’s exile to Babylon and return to Jerusalem.
2. Summarize the behaviors of those who had returned from exile in light of their fear, joy, and sorrow.
3. Write a prayer that identifies an area where fear must be overcome so that godly service is not hindered.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Weeping and Rejoicing Today
- B. Lesson Context

I. Rebuilding the Altar (Ezra 3:1-6)

- A. People Gather (v. 1)
- B. Leaders Lead (v. 2)
- C. Sacrifices Offered (vv. 3-5)
The Mammoth Hunt
- D. Status Summarized (v. 6)

II. Laying a Foundation (Ezra 3:10-13)

- A. Musical Praise (vv. 10-11)
- B. Mixed Reactions (vv. 12-13)
How to Waste 50 Years—or Not

Conclusion

- A. Work as a Response to Grace
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Weeping and Rejoicing Today

For over 25 years, my friend Sandra has served as a missionary in several countries, including Croatia, Ukraine, and Iran. Sandra reports asking an Iranian friend how she came to faith in Christ. The friend told Sandra, “When I was walking across Turkey trying to get away, I had a vision of Jesus Christ. He told me, ‘I will be with you.’” Sandra then taught her friend more about what being a Christian meant in light of God’s mercy and love.

We are wise to be skeptical of claimed visions, lest Revelation 22:19 be violated (compare Hebrews 1:1). But a claimed vision that aligns with the teaching of the Bible deserves further investigation. Such an occurrence may be the first step in being called to a saving relationship with God through Christ.

The experiences of Sandra and her friend remind us that Christians live in a world characterized by both pain and pleasure, grief and joy (compare John 16:21). And so it is with the Judeans of the mid-sixth century BC, today’s lesson from the book of Ezra.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Ezra tells how Jews from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin returned to their homeland from exile in Babylon. That happened shortly after the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Persians in 538 BC (Ezra 1:1–2:1), when the Persian king, Cyrus, issued a decree that allowed the return (Ezra 1:1-4; compare 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Isaiah 44:28; 45:1, 13).

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle the return in three distinct phases. Ezra 2:64-65 reveals about 50,000 people in the first wave, making the arduous trip of over 800 miles. A later wave of returnees, coming under the leadership of Ezra, took exactly four months (Ezra 7:8-9).

The primary purpose of the journey was to “[re]build the house of the Lord” in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5). When that city was destroyed in 586 BC, there remained no nation of Judah,

no capital city of Jerusalem, no temple, no royal palace, and no walls (2 Kings 25:8-17; compare 2 Chronicles 36:15-21). Normally, it would be impossible for a nation to come into existence again after an absence of more than half a century. But God was in this situation, and the impossible became not just possible but a reality. As Jeremiah stated, nothing is too difficult for God (Jeremiah 32:17).

The temple's rebuilding would require much effort, money, time, labor, and good leadership. An easier and quicker task would be to start rebuilding the temple's altar of burnt offerings (see description in Exodus 38:1-7 and use in Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13; also see lesson 4). And that's where we begin our lesson.

I. Rebuilding the Altar

(Ezra 3:1-6)

A. People Gather (v. 1)

1. And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

The story's setting in *the seventh month* places it in late September or early October. By this time, the Jews had two calendars: a civic calendar and a religious calendar. The reference here is to the seventh month of the religious calendar, the first month on the civic calendar. By name, the month was called "Ethanim" (possibly meaning "gifts" or "flowing water") before the exile (1 Kings 8:2) and "Tishri" (meaning "beginning") after the exile.

By the time of the event described in the verse before us, those who had returned from exile had already dispersed to live in their ancestral villages (Ezra 2:70). Apparently, few wanted to live in Jerusalem itself, leading to a situation where one in every ten individuals was eventually selected by lot to inhabit the city (Nehemiah 11:1-2).

This seventh month of the Jewish religious year included four observances that would have drawn the people to Jerusalem. These were the blowing of trumpets on the first day (Leviticus 23:23-25), the Day of Atonement on the tenth day (23:26-32; see also lesson 5), the feast of tabernacles on days

15 through 21 (23:33-36a, 39-43), and an assembly of the eighth day on day 22 (23:36b). But the reason *the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem* may not be any of these, as we shall see.

What Do You Think?

What do you think is the value of having large numbers of Christians from a wide area attend a worship event?

Digging Deeper

How can we maintain unity among dispersed believers when gathering regularly in person is impossible?

B. Leaders Lead (v. 2)

2a. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel.

The important leaders *Jeshua the son of Jozadak* and *Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel* are mentioned together in a dozen Old Testament verses (here and Ezra 2:2; 3:8; 4:3; 5:2; Nehemiah 7:7; 12:1; Haggai 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 4). These occurrences reveal that Jeshua was the high priest and Zerubbabel was the governor. In these passages, we see Judah's religious leader and political leader working together to ensure the successful rebuilding of community and religious life. That rebuilding included *the altar of God of Israel* in its traditional place in the temple courtyard, even though the temple remained in ruins.

We may call their activity here "leadership by example." The reconstruction of the altar was necessary, and it appears that the direct engagement of these two leaders played a key role in making it happen. When we read of the temple that "Solomon built in Jerusalem" (1 Chronicles 6:10), it suggests he funded and authorized the temple's construction rather than doing the physical work himself. However, considering the activities mentioned in the verse before us, the term *builded* appears to have a more personal connotation.

Even so, it wasn't just Jeshua and Zerubbabel doing the work. The *brethren* of each pitched in.



Visual for Lesson 12. Display this visual and allow learners one minute for silent reflection on the ways that the Lord has restored them for worship.

The priests who had returned from exile were 4,289 in number, so there was no shortage of available labor (Ezra 2:36-39). However, so many trying to work together to build the altar would result in people getting in each other's way. A more manageable number of priests helping the two leaders would be the 19 leaders of priests named in Nehemiah 12:1-7. The number of individuals associated with Zerubbabel who assisted in the task remains unknown.

2b. To offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

The function of the altar *to offer burnt offerings thereon* clarifies that this was the altar of burnt offerings, not the golden altar of incense, given how each had been used in both tabernacle and temple. These two altars are distinguished *in the law of Moses* in Exodus 27:1-8; 30:1-10; 37:25-28; 38:1-7; 40:5-6. The Law of Moses gave specifications for the construction and function of the altar (Leviticus 1; see lesson 4; see also Numbers 28:1-6).

C. Sacrifices Offered (vv. 3-5)

3. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries; and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

The fact that *the altar* was constructed *upon his bases* reveals reconstruction on the footprint of the one destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Baby-

lon in 586 BC. The rebuilt altar thus became the fixed point around which the rest of the rebuilding work could proceed.

The duration of time required to rebuild the altar is uncertain. Workers might have labored rather quickly because *fear was upon them because of the people of those countries*. We read the actions of those enemies later (Ezra 4:1-5; Nehemiah 4; etc.). At this point, the nature of their threat is not evident. It may have been a threat of a physical nature, designed to intimidate and demoralize the people (compare Nehemiah 6:1-15). Or the threat may have been perceived as spiritual—contact with unholy people making the altar, etc., impure. The text is not specific on this point.

With the altar rebuilt, the priests reestablished the twice-daily sacrifices on behalf of all the people as commanded in Exodus 29:38-46 and Numbers 28:1-8. It also permitted burnt offerings designed to inaugurate worship (see lesson 4).

The Mammoth Hunt

The young hunter was terrified, wanting to flee. But the pressure of his father's hand on his shoulder told him to wait, wait, wait until the command came: *Now!* The two leaped from their hiding place and hurled their spears with banshee screams into the startled herd. The startled mammoths tried to stop, turn around, and step to the side all at once. But to their right, the level terrain just . . . ended. All five tumbled down a 90-foot precipice to their deaths on the rocky shoreline of the river below. The courage of the two hunters meant food for an entire village in the coming winter.

Since prehistoric times, fear has been a normal

How to Say It

Ethaniam	<i>Eth-uh-nim.</i>
Jeshua	<i>Jesh-you-uh.</i>
Jozadak	<i>Joz-uh-dak.</i>
Judeans	<i>Joo-dee-unz.</i>
Nebuchadnezzar	<i>Neb-yuh-kud-nez-er.</i>
Shealtiel	<i>She-al-tee-el.</i>
Tishri	<i>Tish-ree.</i>
Zerubbabel	<i>Zeh-rub-uh-bul.</i>

and necessary human emotion. Whether you're a mammoth hunter or a modern mom, fear heightens the senses and prepares the body to fight or flee as necessary.

That same impulse may kick in when God asks people to do hard things. The great heroes of the faith were often fearful when God called them. Think of Abraham, Moses, Jonah, Gideon, and Jeremiah. The essence of faith is not that we don't feel fear. Instead, it's that we don't let that fear overcome our faith. —A. W.

4. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required.

The feast of tabernacles was one of the three annual pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem. Exodus 23:15-17 and 34:18-25 name these three feasts.

At first reading of those passages, it may appear that there are more than three feasts and that the feast of tabernacles is not among them. But there are indeed three considering that (1) the two feasts of unleavened bread and passover were often regarded as a singular observance, as they took place consecutively, and (2) the various feasts go by different names (example: the feast of tabernacles is the same as the feast of ingathering).

The phrase *as it is written* witnesses the concern for rooting practice firmly in the Law of Moses. Given the reality of and reason for the Babylonian exile, it's understandable that this became very important during the postexilic period. All this may lead us to conclude that the reason "the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem" (Ezra 3:1, above) was for this feast. But that little word *also* should cause us to not be too hasty in this conclusion. Meaning "besides," that word may indicate that a celebration of the feast of tabernacles wasn't the primary purpose of the gathering. Instead, the broader context of being able to resume burnt offerings could have been the main reason. (See commentary on Ezra 3:6, below.) For the nature of *the custom, as the duty of every day required*, see reference to the twice-daily sacrifices noted in 3:3, above.

5. And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

This verse indicates the comprehensive reintroduction of the functions of the altar as established in Numbers 28 and 29. The sacrificial system was fully reinstated from the earliest possible moment after the Judeans had reestablished themselves.

The contexts of these offerings are summarized in terms of (1) those that are *continual*, (2) those of *the new moons*, (3) *all the set feasts of the Lord*, and (4) those categorized as *freewill*. Having already discussed the first of these, we now briefly examine the second. The ancient Jews used a lunar-solar calendar, with the passage of months determined by the phases of the moon (Isaiah 66:23). A new moon, which is the opposite of a full moon, marked the first day of a new month; the burnt offerings prescribed for this day are outlined in Numbers 28:11-15 (contrast Colossians 2:16). The third summarization includes the full array of feasts listed in the commentary on Ezra 3 to this point. Freewill offerings, the fourth summarization, are burnt offerings connected with vows (Leviticus 22:18, 21, 23; etc.).

The carrying out of the sacrifices also required the reestablishment of animal husbandry and pasture management throughout the area around Jerusalem. This fact, in turn, implies a restoration of the basic mechanisms of ensuring that shepherds were paid, flocks protected, water sources managed, and so on. A return to something approaching normal life had begun.

What Do You Think?

How do annual celebrations like Christmas or Easter impact your faith?

Digging Deeper

How have you used these celebrations as opportunities to share the gospel message with unbelieving friends and family members?

D. Status Summarized (v. 6)

6a. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD.

This verse supports the suggestion that the primary reason for the people to have “gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem” (Ezra 3:1, above) was not the feast of tabernacles but the feast of trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25; Numbers 29:1-6). For the significance of *the seventh month*, see commentary on Ezra 3:1, above.

6b. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

The rebuilding of the altar allowed the Judeans to restart the prescribed worship of God. However, a gap remained in that *the temple of the Lord* was absent. Its destruction in 586 BC had been complete (2 Kings 25:9). Even its *foundation*, originally *laid* in 966 BC (1 Kings 6:1, 37), would need to be laid anew.

What Do You Think?

How much preparation does it take for you to do things for God?

Digging Deeper

In what situations would it be better for you to get started on those things even though you feel unprepared?

II. Laying a Foundation

(Ezra 3:10-13)

A. Musical Praise (vv. 10-11)

10. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

The laying of *the foundation of the temple of the Lord* took about a year and a half (compare Ezra 3:1 with 3:8). The identity of *the builders* and the source of at least some of the construction material is found in Ezra 3:7-9, which is not part of today’s text. The *apparel for the priests* undoubtedly included the 100 priestly garments donated in Ezra 2:69.

The *trumpets* mentioned here are not the kind made from a ram’s horn (as in Exodus 19:13, 16, 19). Instead, the word being translated for trumpets as used here is the same one that refers to those made from silver in Numbers 10:1-10. *The ordinance of David king of Israel*, for the organization of musicians, is found in 1 Chronicles 6:31-46 (compare 15:19-22). *Levites* as temple musicians are associated with various musical instruments in 2 Chronicles 29:25. By adhering to David’s ordinance, the broader aim was not to discard the positive aspects of Judah’s past but to renew them.

11. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

Here, we see another renewed connection with the past as the musicians sing of God’s *mercy* and enduring goodness. These lyrics go back to King David, centuries earlier (1 Chronicles 16:34, 41; compare Psalms 107:1; 136:1).

B. Mixed Reactions (vv. 12-13)

12. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy.

The temple had been destroyed in 586 BC, and the year was about 536 BC as the singing continued. Thus, it had been just about 50 years in between. Those who had been 20 years old when they witnessed the destruction of Solomon’s magnificent temple had become *ancient men* of age 70. The fact that they *wept* bitterly is quite understandable. They had to have been thinking of the sins of their generation that resulted in the destruction of that *first house* (Haggai 2:3).

By contrast, those who *shouted aloud for joy* were undoubtedly young enough never to have seen Solomon’s temple. The excitement of this accomplishment was to them unprecedented and thrilling.

The computation of the 50-year interval mentioned above doesn't conflict with the prophecy of 70 years of oppression in Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10. The oppression of exile occurred in the three waves of 605, 597, and 586 BC. Similarly, the return from exile occurred in three waves: 538, 458, and 444 BC. Thus, the computation of 70 years depends on selecting which starting and ending points apply (compare time identifiers in 2 Kings 24–25; 2 Chronicles 36:11-21; Ezekiel 1:1; Daniel 1:1-2).

How to Waste 50 Years—or Not

A new patient had been admitted for treatment, so the hospital chaplain dropped by his room to introduce himself and check on the patient's needs. The new patient was out for a medical procedure, but his wife was there. On seeing the chaplain enter, she said almost immediately, "My husband thinks he wasted 50 years of his life because he didn't become a Christian until age 50."

After the two had chatted for a few minutes, the husband returned. On seeing the chaplain, he immediately exclaimed, "Chaplain, I wasted 50 years of my life!" His joy at being a Christian seemed to be overshadowed by the regret of those pre-Christian years.

That happened in the late 1980s, and I was that hospital chaplain. I remember not disagreeing with him. But I assured him it was better to waste 50 years than to waste an eternity. How will you spend the years ahead? —R. L. N.

13. So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

As time progressed beyond this high emotion, it's easy to imagine excitement becoming disappointment and disillusionment. That's because the next 20 years turned out to be a tug-of-war between outsiders on whether or not the work on the temple should continue (Ezra 4:1–6:12). Opposition to construction was eventually defeated. Still, the intervening years resulted in lethargy on the part of the Judeans. The Lord

himself had to intervene to get the project back on track (Haggai 1:1–2:9). The result was that the temple remained unfinished for two decades, not being completed until 516 BC (Ezra 6:15).

What Do You Think?

What is an occasion of your life that was so emotionally powerful it brought out tears of joy?

Digging Deeper

What is a situation where you were sad or grieving but had hope because of your confidence in God?

Conclusion

A. Work as a Response to Grace

Today's Scripture text points not only to human endeavor but also to God's mercy. His mercy makes our every endeavor possible and allows results. The story also signals God's actions, to which humans respond. God had brought the Judeans home in something of a "second exodus," allowing them to rebuild their world. The key question at that point was: *Would their world also be His world?* That question rings across the centuries to confront us today: *Is your world His world?*

What Do You Think?

What is your most surprising takeaway from studying this Scripture text?

Digging Deeper

How can that insight be applied in your life this week?

B. Prayer

Father, help us to remember that there is always a bigger picture. We lose sight of that bigger picture when we shift our focus to life's obstacles. May we never be guilty of such a shift nor of being the obstacles themselves. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Praise God for His enduring mercy!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Announce a numbers puzzle as you write the following on the board:

444 / 458 / 538 / 586 / 597 / ???

Challenge learners to predict what the unknown three numerals are as they relate to the five sets of three numerals prior. Give no clues or clarifications, with one optional exception: have various dates written down on slips of paper in plain view.

Expect some class members to attempt a mathematical solution while others sit simply mystified. After everyone gives up, announce that the numbers are important biblical years BC, listed in reverse chronological order. The missing numerals are 605. Use the commentary on Ezra 3:12 to explain briefly what happened in each year.

Alternative. Place in chairs before class begins copies of the “Fight, Flight, or Freeze?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Encourage learners to begin checking boxes shortly after arrival.

After either activity, say, “Let’s see how God blessed a decision to rebuild despite adverse circumstances.”

Into the Word

Distribute 10 index cards on which you have printed the 10 verses of Ezra 3:1-6, 10-13, one verse per card, one card per learner. Do not put verse numbers on the cards! Give a learner an additional card if you have fewer than 10 participants. Have them read their verses aloud in a random order, then rearrange them to be in the correct order. Show the transformation from random order to correct order in a visual way most appropriate to the nature of your class (some possibilities include rearranging cards on a table or rearranging participants themselves as they stand holding their cards).

Follow by asking everyone to turn cards over to

their blank sides and write what they think is the main point of the passage. Announce that they are to work alone on this, with a time limit of one minute. Say that you will collect the cards to read to the class, so learners should not put their names on them—the readings will be anonymous.

Collect finished cards. Make a list on the board of the main points proposed on the cards. Do not allow discussion until all main points are listed. Indicate duplicate main points by tally marks. Invite discussion when you’ve completed the list.

Consider in advance what method of discussion would best suit the nature of your class. Here are three methods (but not the only three): (1) small-group discussion, (2) nobody gets to speak twice until everyone has spoken once, and (3) point and counterpoint. Resist the temptation to “take a vote” in order not to give the impression that the intent of a Scripture passage is determined by readers who are in the majority. Use the commentary and Lesson Context to correct misconceptions. Explore the possibility that there may be more than one main point in the passage.

Into Life

Form participants into study pairs. Distribute to each a handout (you prepare) on which are printed these questions for personal discussion:

- 1—How can you apply to your life the lessons learned from today’s text?
- 2—What obstacles seem to delay or prevent you from doing so right now?

Option. If you used the “Fight, Flight, or Freeze?” exercise earlier, draw learners’ attention to the four entries: Ouija board, idolatry, sexual immorality, and witchcraft. Discuss in light of 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; Colossians 3:5; and other relevant texts.

Close by having learners write a prayer identifying an area where fear must be overcome so that godly service is not hindered.

A Covenant Renewal

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 31:27-34
Background Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1-10:39

Nehemiah 10:28-39

28 And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;

30 And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:

31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

32 Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;

33 For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

34 And we cast the lots among the priests, the

Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law:

35 And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD:

36 Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God:

37 And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.

38 And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.

39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

Key Text

We will not forsake the house of our God. —Nehemiah 10:39b

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 3: Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the promises the people made.
2. Explain the historical background for the promises the people made and what hope was implied in those promises.
3. Recruit a partner for mutual accountability on two spiritually important actions: one to start doing and one to stop doing.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Identity in Uncertain Times
- B. Lesson Context

I. People's Commitment (Nehemiah 10:28-29)

- A. Various Identifiers (v. 28)
Still Relevant!
- B. Singular Voice (v. 29)
Pulling Whose Hair?

II. Law's Restatement (Nehemiah 10:30-39)

- A. Rejecting Intermarriage (v. 30)
- B. Keeping the Sabbath (v. 31)
- C. Supporting the Temple (vv. 32-37)
- D. Tasking for Levites (vv. 38-39)

Conclusion

- A. Practical Spiritual Life
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Identity in Uncertain Times

One of the great challenges of our time is maintaining our identity as Christians. This is important for reasons listed in Matthew 5:13-16; John 13:35; 2 Corinthians 8:21; etc. The apostle Paul stressed a personal goal to be “made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). But he knew there were lines he could not cross lest his identity as a Christian be compromised. The enduring challenge is ensuring we do not allow surrounding culture to draw those lines. The Judeans of the mid-fifth century BC faced a similar challenge.

B. Lesson Context

The year was about 444 BC, and the Judeans, led by Nehemiah, formed a tiny part of the vast Persian Empire. Nehemiah held a high post in that empire as the king's cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:11). Most of the empire's subjects worshipped numerous fictitious gods. Therefore, the Judeans had to draw firm lines between themselves and their neighbors in order to maintain their distinctive identity as the consecrated people of the one true God. A failure to do so was what had led to the Babylonian exile in the first place (13:17-18). The stakes couldn't be higher!

The book of Nehemiah as a whole recounts the story of a later generation of Judeans having returned to Jerusalem and Judah in the third of three waves to do so. As such, the Lesson Context from last week's lesson also applies here. In particular, the original purpose of Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem was to rebuild the city's walls (Nehemiah 1–4; 6:1-15). That was nearly 100 years after the first wave of exiles had returned!

Nehemiah, working with Ezra—a scribe of the law (Ezra 7:6; Nehemiah 8)—understood that while physically protecting the city was vital, maintaining the spiritual defenses of the people was even more critical. Nehemiah 8 records a time of concentrated teaching from God's law followed in chapter 9 by confession of sin.

This recommitment to God involved two general categories: commitments to *stop* doing certain

things and commitments to *start* or *continue* doing other things.

I. People's Commitment

(Nehemiah 10:28-29)

A. Various Identifiers (v. 28)

28a. And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims.

The identifiers here are sometimes distinctive, sometimes overlapping. *The Levites*, those descended from the tribe of Levi (Genesis 35:23), were solely in charge of the items and duties associated with the tabernacle and temple. However, they were not included in a census of Israelites and did not receive an inheritance of land (Numbers 1:47-53; 18:1-7, 20). All *priests* were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. The word translated *porters* is also translated “doorkeepers” in 1 Chronicles 15:24, and that is the sense here; it was one of the specific jobs of certain Levites (26:1-19). The word *singers* includes those skilled in vocal music, instrumental music, or both. These same four identifiers are repeated in Ezra 2:70; 7:7; Nehemiah 7:73; 10:39; 13:5.

The word *Nethinims* is a transliteration (not a translation); that's where a word in one language is brought over into another language simply by swapping the original-language letters of the word into the letters that sound the same in the other language. The Nethinims first make their appearance, in postexilic times, in 1 Chronicles 9:2. They were part of a group that numbered 392 who returned during the first wave from exile (Ezra 2:58). The clue to their function as temple servants is found in Ezra 8:20. That text also gives us a precise numbering of those who returned in the second wave of 458 BC: “Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty.”

In short, the entire workforce of the temple appears on this list! The priests carried out the sacrifices, the Levites cleaned up and made sure things ran properly, the gatekeepers provided security and ensured proper traffic flow (1 Chronicles 4:26-30), and the singers set the psalms to music.

28b. And all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding.

Separation *from the people of the lands unto the law of God* is a key theme in this book (Nehemiah 9:2; 13:3). Everyone old enough to understand was to toe the line on this requirement (compare 8:2).

What Do You Think?

How do you know when it's time to separate yourself from someone else?

Digging Deeper

What are some types of “separation distance”?

Still Relevant!

Ashley had been born in Indiana, raised as a Christian, and attended Bible college in Tennessee. So, how and why did she convert to Islam? Well, one day, she met a polite and handsome Egyptian university student in a coffee shop. As she got closer to him, she got further from Jesus until finally she made her choice. She converted and got married in a traditional Islamic ceremony. And Jesus? To her, Jesus is now just a good example to follow. She doesn't consider Him to be her Savior.

People change faiths for various reasons, but none is more common than romance. The Bible remains very relevant in this regard. Prohibition regarding intermarriage between believers and unbelievers finds its greatest expression in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians 6:14. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul compared the love a husband was to have for his wife with the love Christ has for His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25-27). Still, within a generation, the church at Ephesus had lost its first love (Revelation 2:4). What guardrails can you erect to ensure that no other suitor, spiritual or physical, tempts you away from Christ?

—A. W.

B. Singular Voice (v. 29)

29. They clave to their brethren, their nobles,

and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes.

People of all occupations and demographics swore *an oath* to commit themselves to following the Law of *Moses*. That law, given about 1,000 years prior to the writing of this verse, specified the *curse* for disobedience (Deuteronomy 27:15-68; compare Daniel 9:11). The people seem to have been binding themselves to suffering the punishments listed therein should they disobey. The Law of Moses seems to have been ignored and violated more times than it had been honored over the 10 centuries since its giving.

It may be tempting to put the three words *commandments*, *judgment*, and *statutes* under individual microscopes to detect different shades of meaning. But that would be to miss the forest for the trees. The idea, rather, seems to be to leave no requirement out. The three words in the original language are found together in nine other places: Deuteronomy 5:31; 6:1; 7:11; 26:17; 1 Kings 8:58; 2 Kings 17:37; 2 Chronicles 19:10; Nehemiah 1:7; 9:13.

Pulling Whose Hair?

Leaders come in all shapes, sizes, styles, and goals. That last one is often troubling since not all leaders have good intentions. Some leaders may be interested only in personal wealth or aggrandizement (example: Daniel 4:29-30). Others may lead people down a wrong path (example: Ezra 9:2). In both cases, the situation may require a right-thinking leader to confront the bad leader.

Such was the case with the two men known as Ezra and Nehemiah. They were contempo-

raries and worked together. But they had different leadership styles. When confronting the sin of intermarriage due to unholy leadership, Ezra led by exhibiting extreme expressions of grief, including pulling out his hair (Ezra 9:1-3). But Nehemiah's style was more direct as he pulled out other people's hair (Nehemiah 13:25).

Those aren't the only two ways to take the lead in confronting sin. What's yours? —R. L. N.

II. Law's Restatement

(Nehemiah 10:30-39)

A. Rejecting Intermarriage (v. 30)

30. And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons.

The danger of intermarriage is specified in Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4. The threat was that of resulting idolatry. When the Lord tested the Israelites in this regard, they failed (Judges 3:1-6). And this is where King Solomon erred and suffered accordingly (1 Kings 11:1-13). This prohibition helped to mark the boundary between God's holy people and the pagan gods' unholy peoples.

One might think that such marriages might allow for the conversion of the pagan spouse to Judaism. The book of Ruth offers an example of this happening. But that seems to have been the very rare exception.

Ezra, the teacher of the law, had arrived in Jerusalem in 458 BC (Ezra 7:8). Intermarriage and the resulting idolatry seems to have been the most significant problem he noticed. The entirety of Ezra 9 addresses the problem itself; the entirety of Ezra 10 records the confession of this sin and the names of the guilty. Nehemiah confronted the same problem about 25 years later (Nehemiah 13:6, 23-27).

B. Keeping the Sabbath (v. 31)

31a. And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day.

The longest of the Ten Commandments is the fourth, which concerns keeping *the sabbath*

How to Say It

Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Levites	Lee-vites.
Leviticus	Leh-vit-ih-kus.
Nehemiah	Nee-huh-my-uh.
Nethinims	Neth-ih-nimz.
Sabbath	Sab-uhth.
victuals	vih-tulz.

day. The Israelites had been warned about failing to honor that day as God had prescribed (Jeremiah 17:19-27). Their failure in that regard was a factor in their exile (Nehemiah 13:16-18). The pagan *people of the land* cared nothing for the Sabbath. Conducting commerce with them showed that God's covenant people cared nothing for it either.

As the text moves from the Sabbath to *the holy day*, the movement is from specific to general. Any day the Lord declares holy is such. The most frequent of these is the day of the new moon (last week's lesson on Ezra 3:5; also Numbers 10:10; Psalm 81:3; Amos 8:5).

To decline to engage in commerce on the Sabbath required some advance planning and even temporary hardship. However, it also resulted in a day of rest (Exodus 31:15). If God himself decided that it was good for Him to rest one day out of seven, who are we to think otherwise?

31b. And that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

The weekly Sabbath had a counterpart in the Sabbath of *the seventh year*. That was a time when *every debt* owed to a fellow Israelite was to be canceled (Deuteronomy 15:1-3).

The sabbatical seventh year was also the year to leave the fields unsown and unplowed. Whatever the land produced on its own that year would be sufficient for both poor and not-so-poor alike (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7). Those Hebrews who were working as indentured servants for their fellow Israelites were to be set free in their seventh year (Exodus 21:2; Deuteronomy 15:12). With the passage of seven cycles of seven years came the Year of Jubilee in the fiftieth year, with special rules applying (Leviticus 25:8-55).

The practice of periodically eliminating personal debts was known elsewhere in the ancient Near East. It was seen as a way of ensuring that grave inequalities among people did not worsen with time. Since their world had no banks, loans usually came from neighbors or the temple. These loans were designed to help the borrower survive. The forgiveness of debt was, therefore, a deeply personal act and a way of addressing social imbalance among neighbors.



Visual for Lesson 13. Display this visual as you discuss ways that the class could demonstrate its commitment to God in light of today's text.

C. Supporting the Temple (vv. 32-37)

32. Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God.

This verse begins a list of obligations the people agree to for temple upkeep and ongoing operations. The first item is the annual temple tax. A *shekel* was a silver coin weighing about three-eighths of an ounce. At a modern exchange rate of, say, twenty-five dollars per ounce of silver, *the third part* of a shekel would equate to no more than five dollars. But, the changing levels of supply and demand for silver, like other precious metals, fluctuate through time (1 Kings 10:21). Thus, a comparison with modern exchange rates, while interesting, may be misleading. A better approach is to investigate what could actually be purchased with a shekel, although this too will fluctuate (compare 2 Kings 6:24-25; 7:1). Placed on a timeline, the concept and implementation of the temple tax can be traced back to Exodus 30:11-16 and forward to Matthew 17:24-27.

What Do You Think?

How much emphasis, if any, should the church place on planned financial giving?

Digging Deeper

What advantages and disadvantages are there to "faith promise" giving? "Fifth Sunday" offerings? Automatically recurring online giving?

33. For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

This verse itemizes expenses incurred for the functioning of the temple. To modern eyes, this may all seem to be a lot of repetition. But we need to keep a chronological framework in mind. By Nehemiah's day, the second temple had been completed about 70 years prior, in 516 BC. Thus, at least one generation had passed off the scene, and those who followed needed instruction. Therefore, these reminders:

shewbread: Leviticus 24:6

continual offerings: Leviticus 1–2; Numbers 28:1–8

sabbaths: Numbers 28:9–10; Deuteronomy 5:12–15

new moons: Numbers 10:10; 28:11–15

set feasts: Leviticus 23; Numbers 28:16–29:40

sin offerings: Leviticus 4:1–5:13

What Do You Think?

Were you to propose a monthly celebration for your congregation, what would it be?

Digging Deeper

How would you monitor that celebration's impact on the congregation's health?

34. And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law.

Leviticus 6:12–13 specifies that the fire on *the altar* at the Lord's sanctuary must never go out. That requirement demanded a lot of *wood*. The payment in wood, therefore, became a shared responsibility. With no objective means for assigning this rotating task, the selection method is to *cast the lots*. This method of leaving the choice up to the Lord is seen also in the choosing of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:8), allocation of land (Joshua 18:6–10), division of duties (1 Chronicles 25:8; 26:13), and identify-

ing an individual (1 Samuel 14:38–42; Jonah 1:7; Luke 1:8–10; Acts 1:26).

What Do You Think?

In what circumstances, if any, would you propose casting lots to make a church-related decision?

Digging Deeper

What are some dangers in this practice?

35. And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD.

The foundation of the offering of *the firstfruits* is found in Exodus 13:1; 22:29; 25:19; and Numbers 17:12–13. The idea is that when a harvest starts, the very first of that harvest goes to God for temple support. Giving the first of the harvest demonstrated trust in God that the rest of the harvest would sustain life. The Israelites even had a specific harvest celebration called Day of Firstfruits; it is the same as the feast of weeks, the feast of harvest, and Pentecost (Exodus 34:22; Numbers 28:25; Deuteronomy 16:9–10, 16). In the New Testament, the concept is reversed: God gives us the firstfruits of His Spirit (Romans 8:23).

36. Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God.

The firstfruits principle applied to the firstborn male of children and livestock as well (Exodus 13:1–2, 12–13, 15; 22:29). This concept seems alien to modern readers, but it speaks to the life of gratitude that biblical law wishes to cultivate.

The reason the firstborn are to be brought *to the house of our God* is for a redemption ritual as specified in Exodus 13:1–16; 34:19–20; Numbers 18:15–17).

37a. And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God.

This half-verse offers a sweeping summary of all *firstfruits* expectations specified so far.

What Do You Think?

What can you do to implement a personal “firstfruits” giving pattern?

Digging Deeper

How much of this should you model visibly to others? Why?

37b. And the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.

Now we come to something new: *tithes*, which have not been mentioned in the book of Nehemiah until this point. But what’s new in Nehemiah is well rehearsed in the Law of Moses. *The Levites* were to be wholly devoted to the functioning of the temple. As such, they weren’t to be growing crops like everyone else (ideally, that is; contrast Nehemiah 13:10). The giving over of the tithes (one-tenth) of crops, etc., to the landless Levites allowed them to focus full time on their work in the temple (Numbers 18:24; Deuteronomy 18:1-2). Tithes also provided sustenance for the fatherless and widows (Deuteronomy 14:27-29; 26:12-15).

D. Tasking for Levites (vv. 38-39)

38. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.

When Ezra led the second wave of returnees from exile in 458 BC, he took great care to ensure proper handling of funds (Ezra 8:24-34). The same seems to be evident here.

The direction concerning *the tithe of the tithes* shows how meticulous Nehemiah was in obeying the Law of Moses. The concept is founded on the command in Numbers 18:26. Just as the people, in general, were expected to tithe to support the Levites’ service in the tabernacle and temple, so also the Levites themselves were expected to tithe from the tithes they had received.

39. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctu-

ary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

The words translated *corn*, *wine*, and *oil* occur together frequently in the Old Testament in various contexts of blessing (example: Deuteronomy 7:13) and woe (example: 28:51). Since these commodities would tend to arrive in large batches at harvest time, appropriate storage rooms (*the chambers*) were needed. The rebuilt temple indeed had such rooms (Ezra 8:29). The task of their oversight was the responsibility of four Levites in particular (1 Chronicles 9:26). These rooms were abused later in Nehemiah’s absence (Nehemiah 13:6-13).

Conclusion

A. Practical Spiritual Life

It has been said that there are two great days in a person’s life: the day we’re born, and the day we discover why. This story concerns a religious community’s discovery of why it existed. Its goal was not merely to survive, or live a rich material life. Rather, the Israelites lived in order to grow closer to God and show others how that could happen. Nehemiah’s community made practical commitments that allowed them to do that.

Pitting religious teaching and practical actions against each other is both easy and popular. In fact, they go together. We do good things because we value the right things, and doing good actions reshapes our values and ideas. Nehemiah’s community understood this as they sought to follow the law of Moses. Their actions followed God’s desires for human well-being.

B. Prayer

O God, our Creator and Sustainer, shape our commitments toward Your aims for our world. Grant us the rest that comes from trust in Your promises, the work that leads to a deeper love of our neighbors, and the confidence that You will be with us at all times. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Commitments translate into action;
action translates into character.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Divide the class in half, naming the two halves the “Thou Shalts” and the “Thou Shalt Nots.” Have the groups take turns voicing Old Testament laws according to their group designation, Bibles closed. Summarize responses on the board for all to see. Continue until there have been 20 total responses or one group cannot offer further responses.

Make a transition by pointing to your list and saying, “As we work through today’s text regarding covenant renewal, notice which of these ‘thou shalt’ and ‘thou shalt not’ were apparently violated. Also, be on the alert for ones that we’ve missed.”

Into the Word

Before the reading of Nehemiah 10:28-39, challenge learners to be alert for three sins in particular that needed to be addressed for covenant renewal. Have two volunteers take turns reading the text aloud. As the reading concludes, ask what those three sins were. (*expected responses: intermarriage, failure to keep the Sabbath, and failure to support the temple*)

Form the class into at least three sets of study pairs or triads. Give each grouping one of three handouts (you create) on which you have printed the following:

Intermarriage Study Team

- 1—Was the sin of intermarriage defined in terms of differing religious beliefs, differing cultures, both, or something else?
- 2—What dangers did intermarriage present?
- 3—In what ways is intermarriage addressed under the new covenant in Christ, considering 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14?

Sabbath-Keeping Study Team

- 1—What were the people substituting for a day of Sabbath rest?
- 2—If the people wanted to do something on the Sabbath other than rest, what’s wrong with that?

- 3—Why is Sabbath-keeping not part of the requirements under the new covenant in Christ, but the other nine of the Ten Commandments are?

(*Expected answer: the other nine are grounded in the nature of God, which never changes. By contrast, the Sabbath commandment is based on the work of God under the old covenant; His work under the new covenant shifts attention to the first day of the week per John 20:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10.*)

Temple-Upkeep Team

- 1—What areas of temple support seem to have been neglected?
- 2—What seems to have been the reason(s) for the neglect?
- 3—In what ways does this problem speak to how we are to maintain our bodies as temples, per 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 2 Corinthians 6:16?

Option 1. Leave off the third question of each handout so you can pose them—either audibly during whole-class discussion or on separate handouts—in the Into Life section.

Option 2. Make a transition by distributing copies of the “Pick One” exercise from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

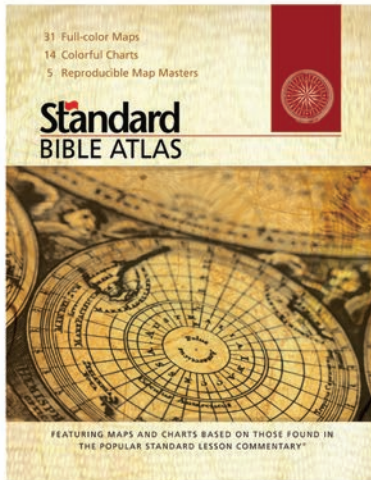
Into Life

Wrap up by drawing participants’ attention to the opening “Thou Shalt” and “Thou Shalt Nots” exercise. Have them write on an index card one “thou shalt” that they personally need to start doing. Below that, have them write one “thou shalt not” that they personally need to stop doing.

Assure learners that you will not collect the cards; encourage them to post the cards where they can be seen daily in the week ahead. Explore the possibility of recruiting a partner for mutual accountability.

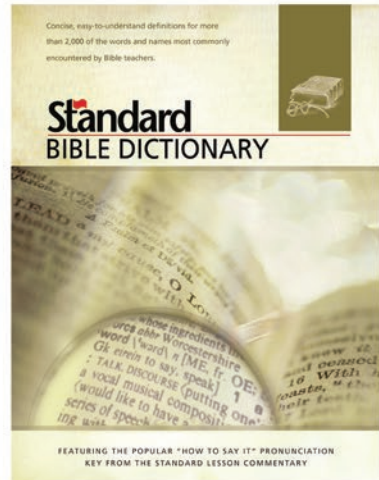
Alternative. Precede the above by distributing copies of the “Mutual Accountability” exercise from the activity page, to be completed as indicated in study pairs or triads.

Get the Most from Every Lesson!



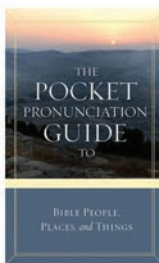
Standard Bible Atlas

Includes 31 colorful maps of the Holy Land and 15 charts with timelines, comparisons, and summaries designed to help you understand and illustrate complex Biblical information.



Standard Bible Dictionary

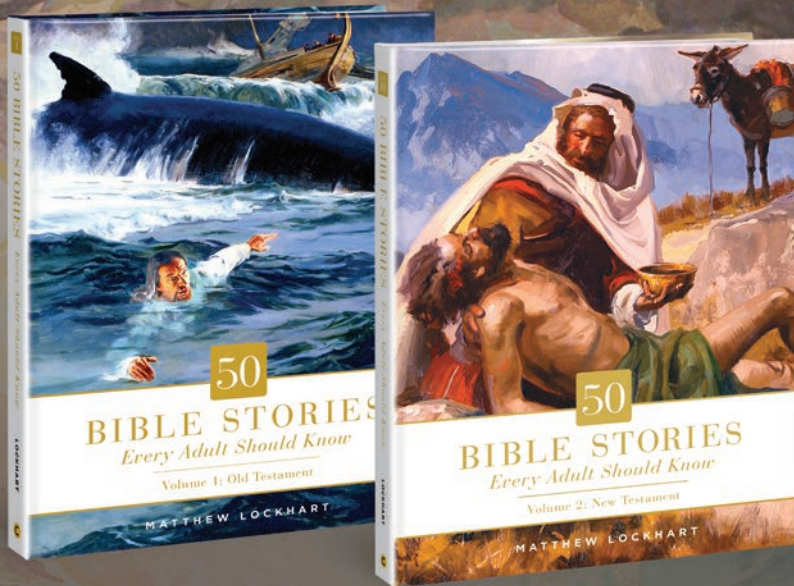
This Bible dictionary includes more than 2,000 entries with a popular how-to-say-it pronunciation guide as well as definitions to enhance teaching and personal Bible study.



The Pocket Pronunciation Guide

Every Bible teacher knows the feeling of reading a Scripture passage out loud and getting a hard-to-pronounce word. Now you can have at-your-fingertips information on how to pronounce hundreds of commonly mispronounced words in the Bible.

Standard LESSON



WAIT ... *That's* in the Bible?

Chances are there are stories in the Bible you've never heard or have forgotten. This visually rich collection—curated especially for adults—will surprise, entertain, and inform as you journey through some of the most important stories in the Old and New Testament. Discover and see the Bible in a fresh way with classic Bible art featured in this two-volume set.

Available from David C Cook
and everywhere books are sold

DAVID COOK
transforming lives together

Standard[®]
PUBLISHING
part of the David C Cook family

A Adult
KJV Bible Teacher
No. 6290

3629025