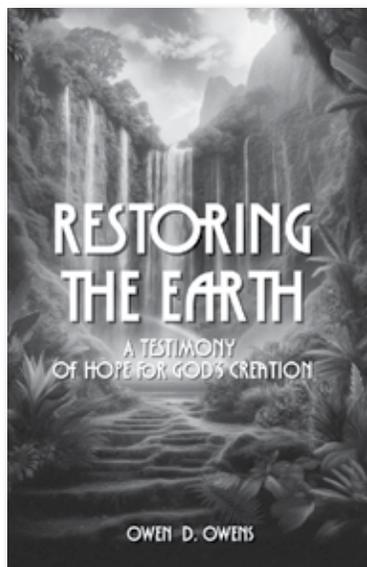
A photograph of a dirt path winding through a dense forest of green trees. The path is the central focus, leading the eye into the distance. The trees are lush and green, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

# Journeys

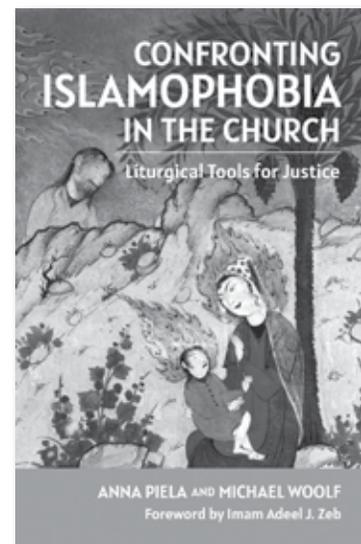
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## Children's Mental Health Resources for the Church by Dawn M. Doerr-Johnson

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Today's numerous stressors have heightened the demand for effective mental health providers for children. Yet, there are insufficient numbers of skilled service providers to meet that demand. Could your church help fill in some of the missing pieces by providing services to help meet the needs of young people? This book offers ideas for launching a program to address the mental health needs of today's children, providing case studies, clear explanations of mental health and developmental concepts, and practical tools to help your church get started. Written by a skilled family therapist, the resources in this book offer inspiration and accessible knowledge to inform the development of an effective mental health support ministry.

## Restoring the Earth A Testimony of Hope for God's Creation by Owen D. Owens

---

Owen Owens was a Christian leader committed to environmental and racial justice. In his last work, he offers reflective essays on hope for restoring the Earth and seeing God's promises while enduring life's hardships. Throughout the book, he invites readers to feel the loving light of our Creator, calling us into wholeness and healing. Owen writes passionately about the restoration of lands impacted by mountaintop removal mining and the healing of waterways, even as he faced his own end-of-life issues. *Restoring the Earth* will inspire you to pursue environmental wholeness and personal well-being that will sustain us and the planet.

## Confronting Islamophobia in the Church Liturgical Tools for Justice by Anna Piela and Michael Woolf

---

*Confronting Islamophobia in the Church* challenges Christians to stand up against Islamophobia as an expression of discipleship. Anna Piela and Michael Woolf expose the Church's role in fostering anti-Muslim prejudice and equip congregations to dismantle it. Blending sharp history, "holy envy" theology, and ready-to-use resources that weave Islamic scripture into the lectionary calendar, they make interfaith engagement both practical and transformative. This is a call to replace fear with solidarity—and to live the Gospel fully in a pluralistic world.

# Journeys

JUDSON BIBLE LESSONS • SPRING 2026 • VOL. 5.3

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Peggy Ann Griffin, Mark W. Hetrick

## About the Quarter

This is the last printed edition of the *Journeys* Bible Study Curriculum for adult learners. It has been a wonderful journey, but the time has come, as it does for all things, for change.

Beginning March 2026, *Journeys* will be entirely digital—available for download—at minimal cost, via the Judson Press website. We thank those who have been part of the long learning quest through the pages of *Journeys* and invite you all to join us in this new era of learning, discerning, and spiritual formation.

This quarter explores the powerful and challenging witness of the prophets. In Scripture, prophets were not predictors of the future but faithful messengers who spoke God's truth into injustice, spiritual decline, and communal crisis, calling people back to covenant faithfulness and hope—even when obedience was costly.

Beginning with foundational leaders such as Moses and Joshua, the lessons trace the development of prophetic leadership in Israel. Learners encounter prophets and prophetesses—including Huldah, Elijah, Micaiah, and Jeremiah—whose faithfulness often put them at odds with political power, cultural expectations, and religious complacency, revealing the courage and discernment required to speak God's truth.

As the quarter progresses, attention turns to national collapse, exile, lament, and rebuilding. Texts from Ezra, Nehemiah, and Lamentations give voice to repentance, grief, and restoration, holding honesty about loss together with confidence in God's enduring purposes.

During Lent, the focus shifts to Isaiah's vision of the Suffering Servant, inviting reflection on redemptive suffering and sacrificial love. The journey culminates in Easter, where resurrection hope proclaims new life, followed by lessons that emphasize renewal, restoration, and faithful discipleship.

Throughout the quarter, learners are challenged to consider what prophetic faithfulness looks like today, speaking truth with courage, living with integrity, and trusting God's renewing work in every generation.

## About the Writers

**Erica Wimber Avena** has served as an Interim Ministry Specialist since 2007 and brings more than thirty years

of pastoral experience, primarily with congregations in Connecticut.

Rev. Avena holds dual standing with the United Church of Christ (UCC) and American Baptist Churches USA (ABC) and has extensive experience guiding congregations through transition, renewal, and leadership change.

In addition to her congregational work, she has held significant denominational and ecumenical leadership roles, including service as Past President of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut and as a commissioner for the National Council of Churches.

**John Burns** serves as pastor of University Baptist Church in College Park, Maryland. Rev. Burns has held leadership roles within the American Baptist Churches USA, the Alliance of Baptists, and the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. A frequent contributor to *The Christian Citizen*, he is also the author of *Modeling Mary in Christian Discipleship* (Judson Press).

**Peggy Ann Griffin** is the editorial director of Global Outlook Educational Services in Chicago and a veteran civil rights activist. Griffin has authored numerous curricula for a variety of educational organizations. She holds an Ed.D. with a concentration in adult education from Northern Illinois University and a Master of Religious Education degree from Andover Newton Theological School. She is actively involved in ministry and serves on committees at North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago.

**Mark W. Hetrick** is an experienced interim pastor with a longstanding ministry focused on congregational leadership during seasons of transition. He has served multiple American Baptist congregations as an interim pastor, including Speedway Baptist Church (Indiana), and is recognized for his pastoral presence, thoughtful preaching, and ability to guide congregations through discernment and renewal processes.

Dr. Hetrick's ministry emphasizes stability, spiritual reflection, and preparation for future leadership. He brings decades of pastoral experience and is frequently invited to support churches navigating change, conflict, or transition within the American Baptist tradition.

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## JOURNEYS

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS • MARCH 1



# MOSES

*Prophet of Deliverance*

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.” (DEUTERONOMY 18:15)

Deuteronomy 18:15-22 is a pivotal passage in the Hebrew Bible, offering both a theological reflection and a prophetic promise. Moses, nearing the end of his life and leadership, spoke to the Israelites with urgency and clarity. His words were not merely a farewell but a divine assurance: God would continue to speak, guide, and lead through future prophets. This promise is deeply rooted in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, a relationship that was sustained not by human power, but by divine presence and prophetic voice.

### Lesson Objectives

- To understand Moses’ prophetic role and its significance for Israel’s spiritual leadership.
- To explore the promise of future prophets and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- To reflect on the importance of discernment in recognizing authentic spiritual leadership.
- To consider how discipleship involves listening to God, leading with integrity, and mediating with compassion.

## Deuteronomy 18:15-22 (NRSVUE)

15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. 16 This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ 17 Then the LORD replied to me, ‘They are right in what they have said. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. 19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. 20 But any prophet who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ 21 You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognize a word that the LORD has not spoken?’ 22 If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.”

### Into the Scripture

The phrase “a prophet like me” (verse 15) is rich with meaning. It acknowledges Moses’ unique role as a leader who spoke directly with God, performed miracles, delivered laws, and guided a nation through crisis. Yet it also points forward both to a lineage of prophets who would carry the mantle of divine communication, and ultimately to Jesus Christ, who Christians believe fulfills this prophecy in its fullest sense.

In the ancient Near Eastern context, prophets were not merely predictors of the future; they were truth tellers, covenant enforcers, and spiritual leaders. Moses stands at the intersection of these roles. His leadership was not inherited through monarchy or priesthood but was divinely appointed and sustained through obedience and intimacy with God.

The passage also reflects the people’s fear of direct divine encounter. At Horeb, they pleaded for a mediator, someone who could speak to God on their behalf. This fear was not dismissed but affirmed by God, who promised to raise up prophets to speak His words. This dynamic—God’s speaking through chosen individuals—became and becomes a foundational pattern throughout Israel’s history and into the Christian tradition.

Moreover, Deuteronomy 18:21-22 provides a framework for discernment. Not every voice claiming divine authority is truly prophetic. The test is simple yet profound: Does the Word come true? Is it consistent with God’s character and covenant? This call to discernment remains relevant today, urging believers to evaluate spiritual claims with wisdom, Scripture, and community accountability.

In sum, this passage is both retrospective and forward-looking. It honors Moses’ legacy while preparing the people for a future

shaped by divine guidance. It affirms that God’s voice will not be silenced with Moses’ death but will continue to echo through prophets, leaders, and ultimately through Christ, the living Word.

## Into the Lesson

---

Moses’ life and leadership offer a profound template for understanding spiritual authority, communal responsibility, and divine calling. His role was not confined to one dimension; he was a prophet, priest, judge, legislator, and mediator. This multifaceted leadership was necessary for a people in transition, from slavery to freedom, from wandering to settlement—from chaos to covenant.

The lesson begins with Moses’ preparing the Israelites for a future without him. This was not a moment of despair but of hope. He assured them that God would continue to raise up leaders who would speak truth and guide the people. This is a powerful reminder that leadership in God’s kingdom is never about one person—it is about the ongoing work of God through willing vessels.

Moses’ reference to “a prophet like me” is both personal and prophetic. It acknowledges his unique relationship with God but also points to a broader pattern of leadership. In Christian theology, this pattern culminates in Jesus Christ, who embodies the prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles in perfect unity. Jesus, like Moses, speaks God’s word, mediates between God and humanity, and leads with compassion and justice.

The lesson also draws parallels between Moses’ leadership and modern movements for justice. The comparison to Martin Luther King Jr. is especially poignant. Both leaders faced immense challenges, led people through transformative journeys, and spoke truth to power. King’s words—“God Almighty has spoken from Washington!”—echo the

prophetic tradition of declaring divine justice in the face of human oppression.

Furthermore, the lesson explores the evolution of prophecy. In Moses’ time, prophecy was direct, personal, and communal. Today, while the role of prophet may seem diminished, the need for prophetic voices remains urgent. Whether in pulpits, classrooms, boardrooms, or streets, we need leaders who speak truth, challenge injustice, and guide communities toward God’s vision of wholeness.

The lesson also invites reflection on mediation. Moses stood between God and the people, interpreting divine will and advocating for mercy. This role is mirrored in Jesus, who mediates on behalf of humanity. It is also reflected in pastors, counselors, and community leaders who help others navigate spiritual and relational complexities.

Finally, the lesson emphasizes discernment. In a world filled with competing voices, how do we recognize truth? Moses offers a sieve, a way to filter out deception and recognize authenticity. This discernment is not just intellectual; it is spiritual, relational, and communal. It requires listening deeply, observing carefully, and trusting God’s guidance.

In essence, the lesson on Moses is not just historical—it is deeply relevant. It challenges us to lead with integrity, to speak truth with courage, to mediate with compassion, and to discern with wisdom. It reminds us that God is still raising up prophets, still speaking through leaders, and still guiding His people toward the promised land of justice, peace, and love.

*“God’s voice will not be silenced with Moses’ death but will continue to echo through prophets, leaders, and ultimately through Christ, the living Word.”*

## Into Discipleship

Discipleship calls for active engagement with God’s mission in the world. It is not passive belief but transformative practice. Moses’ life teaches us that discipleship involves listening to God, leading others, and living with integrity.

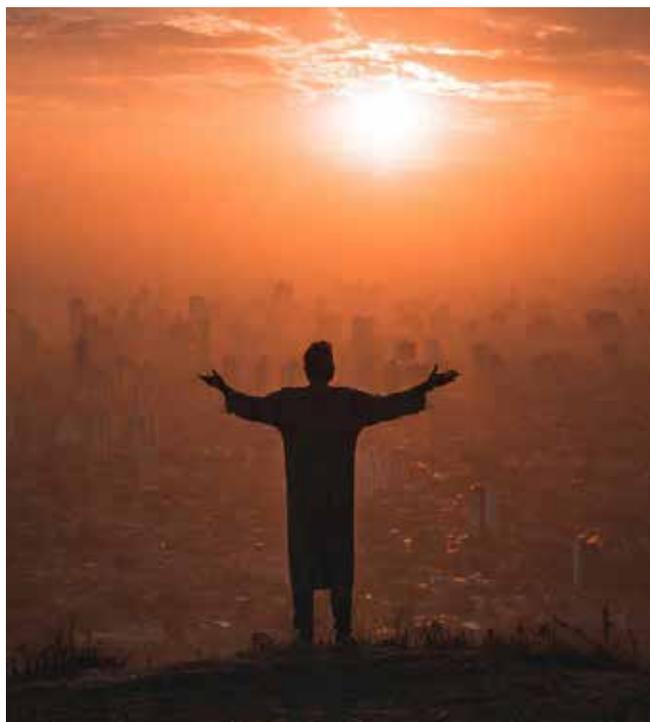
First, discipleship begins with listening. Moses heard God’s call from a burning bush and responded with humility and obedience. Today, discipleship requires us to cultivate spiritual attentiveness—through prayer, Scripture, worship, and silence. We must learn to recognize God’s voice amid the noise of daily life and respond with faith.

Second, discipleship involves leadership. Not all are called to lead nations, but all are called to influence others for good. Whether in families, churches, workplaces, or communities, discipleship means embodying God’s love, justice, and truth. It means standing up for the vulnerable, speaking out against injustice, and guiding others toward hope.

Third, discipleship requires mediation. Like Moses, we are called to stand in the gap for those who are hurting, confused, or distant from God. This might mean praying for others, offering counsel, or simply being present in times of need. It also means pointing others to Jesus, the ultimate mediator, who reconciles us to God and to one another.

Fourth, discipleship demands discernment. In a world of misinformation and spiritual confusion, we must learn to test the spirits, evaluate teachings, and seek truth. This involves studying Scripture, engaging in community, and listening to the Holy Spirit. It also means our being humble enough to admit when we’re wrong and courageous enough to stand firm when we’re right.

Fifth, discipleship is about legacy. Moses didn’t just lead for his lifetime—he prepared others to lead after him. Discipleship means



investing in others, mentoring, teaching, and empowering the next generation. It means leaving behind a community that is stronger, wiser, and more faithful than before.

Finally, discipleship is rooted in hope. Moses didn’t enter the Promised Land, but he believed in it. He trusted that God’s promises would be fulfilled, even beyond his lifetime. As disciples, we live in hope, not just for personal blessings but for the transformation of the world. We believe that God is at work, that justice will prevail, and that love will win.

In practical terms, discipleship might look like the following:

- Starting or joining a Bible study group to grow in understanding.
- Volunteering in ministries that serve the poor, marginalized, or oppressed.
- Practicing spiritual disciplines like fasting, journaling, or sabbath.
- Engaging in advocacy for justice, peace, and reconciliation.
- Mentoring youth or new believers in their faith journey.
- Reflecting regularly on your own spiritual growth and areas for transformation.

Moses' story reminds us that discipleship is a journey—a long, sometimes difficult, but deeply rewarding path. It is a call to walk with God, serve others, and live with

purpose. And like Moses, we may not see all the fruits of our labor, but we trust that God is faithful and that our work is part of a greater story.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, help us listen to your voice, follow your truth, and lead with integrity and compassion. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- Can you recall a time in your life when you experienced a victory like Moses or Martin Luther King Jr.—a moment of divine deliverance or breakthrough?
- How does the Moses narrative speak to your personal journey of faith?
- What examples of prophecy do you see in today's world? Are they spiritual, institutional, or personal?
- Have you ever served as a mediator in a conflict or situation? What was that experience like?
- How do you relate to Jesus as a mediator in your spiritual life?
- What do the laws in Deuteronomy and Exodus mean to you today? Are they still relevant?
- Have you ever needed to discern whether someone was speaking truthfully or spiritually? What helped you make that judgment?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Prophetic Roles Today

- List the various roles that Moses held (e.g., prophet, judge, mediator).
- Reflect on which of these roles you've seen in your own life or community.
- Discuss how these roles are fulfilled today—in churches, families, or society.

### Activity 2: The Sieve of Discernment

- Read Deuteronomy 18:21-22 and Matthew 7:16.
- Create a checklist of traits that help identify trustworthy leaders or prophets.
- Share examples of when discernment helped you make a wise decision.

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Scan for 24/7 Embodying  
Christ-like Leadership  
by Leslie Copeland

## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Third Sunday of Lent / Week of 3/7/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of March 1, 2026

### **Sunday, March 1 (*Second Sunday of Lent*)**

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19;  
1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

### **Monday, March 2**

Exodus 24:1-18; Psalm 62; Romans 7:7-12;  
John 4:43-54

### **Tuesday, March 3**

Exodus 32:1-20; Psalm 62;  
1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5; John 5:1-18

### **Wednesday, March 4**

Exodus 33:12-23; Psalm 62; Romans 4:1-12;  
John 5:19-29

### **Thursday, March 5**

Jeremiah 7:1-15; Psalm 84; Romans 4:13-25;  
Mark 11:15-19

### **Friday, March 6**

Jeremiah 7:21-34; Psalm 84; Hebrews 9:11-15;  
Mark 11:20-25

### **Saturday, March 7**

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 84; Hebrews 10:1-18;  
Mark 12:1-12

## JOURNEYS

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS • MARCH 8



# JOSHUA

*Prophet of Conquest*

*The LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers.”*  
(JOSHUA 6:2)

The Book of Joshua marks a pivotal transition in the biblical narrative—from wilderness wandering to territorial possession, from promise to fulfillment. After decades of uncertainty and hardship, the people of Israel stood poised to enter the land that God had long promised to their ancestors. This moment was not just about geography; it was about identity, obedience, and divine partnership. Joshua, the successor to Moses, was now the chosen leader to guide Israel into this new chapter. His leadership was not inherited by bloodline but affirmed by divine appointment and proven through faithfulness.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore Joshua’s leadership and prophetic role in the conquest of the Promised Land.
- To understand the spiritual and historical significance of Jericho in Israel’s journey.
- To reflect on the relationship between vision, faith, and action in discipleship.
- To draw connections between Joshua’s mission and contemporary movements for justice and peace.
- To consider how obedience to God’s guidance leads to transformation and victory.

## Joshua 5:13–6:5, 15-16, 20 (NRSVUE)

13 Once when Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you one of us or one of our adversaries?” 14 He replied, “Neither, but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and he said to him, “What do you command your servant, my lord?” 15 The commander of the army of the LORD said to Joshua, “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so. . . . 1 Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the Israelites; no one came out, and no one went in. 2 The LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers. 3 You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, 4 with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people shall charge straight ahead.” . . . 15 On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. 16 And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. . . . 20 So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it.

### Into the Scripture

Joshua 5:13-15 introduces a mysterious and sacred encounter. As Joshua prepared for battle, he met a figure described as “the commander of the army of the LORD.” This divine messenger did not declare allegiance to Israel or its enemies but, instead, represented the sovereignty of God. The encounter mirrors Moses’ experience at the burning bush, where holy ground demands reverence and obedience. Joshua was instructed to remove his sandals, a symbolic

act that acknowledged the presence of God and the sacredness of the mission ahead. This moment affirmed Joshua’s spiritual authority and reminds us that leadership in God’s kingdom begins with humility and worship.

Jericho, the first city to be conquered in Canaan, is more than a military target, it is a spiritual threshold. Its massive walls represented both physical and symbolic barriers. The city’s fortifications were designed to intimidate and protect, yet they also isolated and resisted transformation. Jericho is a metaphor for the obstacles that

prevent communities from entering into God's promises: fear, pride, injustice, and resistance to change.

In Joshua 6:1-5, God outlines a strategy that defies human logic. The Israelites were not instructed to storm the walls or engage in combat. Instead, they were told to march in silence for six days, led by priests carrying the ark of the covenant. On the seventh day, they were to shout as the priests blew trumpets made of rams' horns. This ritualistic procession was an act of worship, not warfare. It required faith, patience, and precise obedience. The plan emphasizes that victory will come not by might, but by the power of God. Joshua received this vision, believed in its divine origin, and acted with clarity and conviction.

Verses 15-16 and 20 describe the dramatic climax. On the seventh day, after the final march and the unified shout, the walls of Jericho collapsed. The city was taken, and Israel began its occupation of the Promised Land. Scholars have noted that Jericho may have had a double wall system, making its fall even more astonishing. Some speculate that natural phenomena like earthquakes may have played a role, but the biblical narrative attributes the victory to divine intervention. Whether through supernatural means or through nature aligned with God's timing, the message is clear: the triumph belongs to God.

This passage invites us to reflect on how God works through vision, obedience, and community. Joshua's leadership was not rooted in charisma or military expertise; it was grounded in spiritual discernment and submission to God's will. He listened, believed, and mobilized the people with purpose. His story challenges us to trust God's guidance, especially when the path forward seems improbable or unconventional.

Moreover, the communal nature of the conquest is significant. The entire nation



*Jericho was more than a military target.*

participated in the march. The priests, soldiers, and people moved together in unity, following God's instructions. Their collective obedience led to breakthrough. This reminds us that spiritual victories often require communal faithfulness. Transformation is not achieved in isolation—it is birthed in shared vision and mutual trust.

Jericho's fall is not just a historical event; it declares that God is faithful to promises, that obedience leads to blessing, and that no barrier is too great for divine power. Joshua's story encourages us to approach our own "Jerichos" with faith, to listen for God's strategy, and to move forward in unity and trust.

## Into the Lesson

Joshua's leadership offers a compelling model for spiritual and communal transformation. He begins with a vision, a divine assurance that Jericho had already been handed over. This vision was not based on evidence but on faith. Joshua saw what others could not: the possibility of victory through obedience.

The lesson unfolds in three phases: seeing, believing, and acting. Joshua first envisioned the outcome, then believed in God's promise, and finally mobilized the

people to act. This progression mirrors the journey of discipleship. Transformation begins with spiritual insight, grows through faith, and is fulfilled through action.

Jericho's walls symbolize the barriers we face in our own lives . . . including fear, injustice, doubt, and division. The strategy that God gave Joshua was unconventional, emphasizing worship, unity, and trust. The people marched together, led by priests and trumpets, not swords and shields. Their victory was communal, spiritual, and celebratory.

Joshua's story also highlights the importance of obedience. The conquest of Jericho was not achieved through force but through faithfulness. The people followed God's instructions precisely, and their obedience led to breakthrough. This theme resonates throughout Scripture: God honors those who trust and obey.

In today's context, Joshua's mission parallels movements for justice, peace, and reconciliation. Just as Joshua led his people into a new land, modern leaders guide communities toward healing and transformation.

Joshua's leadership reminds us that spiritual vision must be paired with ethical action. His success was not personal—it was communal. He empowered others, shared the vision, and led with humility. His story invites us to consider how we can lead with faith, serve with integrity, and act with courage.

*Victory will come not by might,  
but by the power of God.*

## Into Discipleship

---

Joshua's journey into Jericho is not only a story of military conquest but also an illustration of what it means to live as a disciple of God. His leadership, rooted in

divine vision and unwavering obedience, offers a blueprint for spiritual formation and faithful living. Discipleship, as modeled by Joshua, is not passive; it is active, intentional, and transformative. It calls us to align our lives with God's purposes, even when the path forward is uncertain or daunting.

### 1. Discipleship Begins with Vision

Joshua's first step toward victory was not physical, it was spiritual. He received a divine vision that defied logic and conventional strategy. God told him, "See, I have handed Jericho over to you" (6:2), even though the city's walls still stood tall. This moment teaches us that discipleship begins with spiritual sight, an ability to perceive what God is doing and what God desires, even before it becomes visible. Disciples are called to be visionaries, to imagine a world transformed by grace, justice, and peace. We must learn to see beyond obstacles and envision the possibilities that faith unlocks.

### 2. Discipleship Requires Faith

Joshua believed in God's promise without physical proof. His faith was not based on evidence but on trust in God's character. Hebrews 11:1 defines *faith* as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Discipleship demands this kind of trust, a willingness to follow God even when the outcome is unclear. Faith is not blind optimism; it is a deep conviction that God is faithful, that God's word is true, and that God's promises will be fulfilled. Joshua's faith empowered him to lead with confidence, even when the strategy seemed unconventional.

### 3. Discipleship Demands Action

Joshua did not stop at just seeing and believing—he acted. He communicated the vision to the people, organized the march, and followed God's instructions precisely.

Discipleship is not merely a matter of belief; it is a call to action. It requires us to live out our convictions in tangible ways to serve, to speak, to sacrifice, and to lead. Faith without works is dead (see James 2:17), and Joshua's story reminds us that obedience is the bridge between vision and victory. Discipleship means our putting our faith into motion, trusting that God will meet us in our steps of obedience.

#### 4. Discipleship Is Communal

Joshua's victory was not his alone. The entire community participated in the march around Jericho. Priests, soldiers, and ordinary people moved together in unity, following God's plan. This communal obedience led to breakthrough. Discipleship is not a solo journey; it is lived in relationship with others. It involves collaboration, mutual encouragement, and shared purpose. The church is a community of disciples, called to walk together in faith and mission. Joshua's leadership reminds us that transformation happens when we move as one, united in vision and obedience.

#### 5. Discipleship Confronts Barriers

Jericho's walls represented fear, resistance, and separation. Discipleship calls us to confront the barriers in our lives and communities, whether they are personal struggles, systemic injustices, or spiritual strongholds. Joshua's story teaches us that no wall is too high for God to bring down. With faith, creativity, and perseverance, disciples can challenge the status quo, dismantle oppression, and build bridges of reconciliation. We are called to be agents of change, trusting that God empowers us to overcome what seems impossible.

#### 6. Discipleship Pursues Peace

Though Joshua's mission involved conquest, its deeper purpose was to establish a community rooted in covenant and justice. Today, discipleship includes working for peace, healing, and restoration. It means advocating for the vulnerable, standing against violence, and building systems that reflect God's love and righteousness. Discipleship is not just about personal growth—it is about transforming the world through the power of God's love.

In practical terms, discipleship might look like this:

1. Visualizing change in your community and praying for God's guidance to pursue it.
2. Acting on faith by stepping into roles of service, leadership, or advocacy.
3. Leading with integrity in your workplace, church, or neighborhood.
4. Collaborating with others to address social barriers and injustices.
5. Supporting peace initiatives locally and globally through prayer, giving, or participation.
6. Mentoring others in spiritual growth, ethical decision making, and leadership development.
7. Reflecting regularly on how your choices impact those around you, especially the vulnerable.

Joshua's story reminds us that discipleship is a journey of vision, faith, and action. It is a call to trust God, to lead with courage, and to work together for transformation. As we follow in Joshua's footsteps, we are invited to see with spiritual eyes, believe with unwavering faith, and act with bold obedience, knowing that God goes before us and that victory belongs to the Lord.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, help us to see with faith, obey with courage, and trust your power to tear down every wall that stands in the way of your promises. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- What barriers—personal or societal—do you see in your life or community?
- How does Joshua’s vision challenge your understanding of faith?
- What does it mean to act on faith in today’s world?
- How can we lead others in spiritual and ethical transformation?
- What role does obedience play in discipleship?
- How can we apply Joshua’s three-step process—seeing, believing, acting—in our own lives?
- What modern movements reflect the spirit of Joshua’s mission?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Visualizing Barriers

1. Distribute a poster board to each participant.
2. Ask the participants to write one or two words, indicating barriers they wish to remove in society.
3. Assemble the boards into a symbolic “wall.”
4. Reflect on the significance of these barriers and pray for their removal.

### Activity 2: Vision Statement

1. Read Joshua 6:15-16, 20 aloud.
2. Invite participants to write a personal vision statement inspired by the passage.
3. Share examples like this: “To build a community where justice and compassion prevail.”
4. Ask volunteers to share their statements with the group.

### Activity 3: “Moses and Joshua” Comparison

1. Create a Venn diagram comparing Moses and Joshua.
2. List unique traits and shared qualities.
3. Discuss how each leader’s journey informs our understanding of discipleship.

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Scan for The Sunday After by  
Clarence E. Wright

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## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Fourth Sunday of Lent / Week of 3/14/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of March 8, 2026

### **Sunday, March 8 (*Third Sunday of Lent*)**

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22;  
Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

### **Monday, March 9**

Deuteronomy 6:10-25; Psalm 78:1-25;  
2 Corinthians 8:1-15; John 6:27-40

### **Tuesday, March 10**

Deuteronomy 7:6-26; Psalm 78:26-39;  
2 Corinthians 8:16-24; John 6:41-51

### **Wednesday, March 11**

Deuteronomy 8:1-20; Psalm 78:40-72;  
2 Corinthians 9:1-15; John 6:52-59

### **Thursday, March 12**

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:9-16;  
Hebrews 5:1-10; John 7:1-13

### **Friday, March 13**

Ezekiel 36:24-28; Psalm 130;  
Hebrews 5:11–6:12; John 7:14-31

### **Saturday, March 14**

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 43; Hebrews 6:13-20;  
John 7:32-52



# HULDAH

## *Prophet of Wisdom*

*“Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD.” (2 KINGS 22:19)*

The passage in 2 Kings 22:14-20 introduces us to Huldah, a prophetess consulted by King Josiah’s court during a critical moment in Judah’s history. The discovery of the Book of the Law in the temple prompted Josiah to seek divine guidance, and Huldah was chosen to interpret its meaning and implications.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore Huldah’s prophetic role and the significance of her wisdom in guiding King Josiah’s reforms.
- To reflect on the themes of repentance, divine justice, and mercy in times of spiritual crisis.
- To consider how discipleship involves humility, truth telling, and action rooted in compassion.
- To affirm the value of diverse voices in spiritual leadership and prophetic ministry.

## 2 Kings 22:14-20 (NRSVUE)

14 So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophet Huldah the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, where they consulted her. 15 She declared to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me: 16 ‘Thus says the LORD: I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. 17 Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.’ 18 But as to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him: ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, 19 because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. 20 Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place.’” They took the message back to the king.

### Into the Scripture

This moment was significant not only for its theological weight but also for its historical and social context. Huldah’s prophecy came during a time of national crisis and spiritual decline. The kingdom of Judah had strayed from its covenant with God, engaging in idolatrous practices and neglecting the Law. Josiah’s reforms were a response to this decline, and Huldah’s words affirmed both the gravity of the situation and the sincerity of Josiah’s repentance.

Huldah’s authority as a prophet is unquestioned in the text. She spoke with clarity and conviction, using the prophetic formula “Thus says the Lord.” Her message was direct: judgment was coming because

of the people’s disobedience—but Josiah would be spared because of his humility and contrition.

This passage also highlights the role of women in biblical prophecy. Huldah is one of the few named female prophets in Scripture, and her inclusion here underscores the legitimacy and power of her voice. Her wisdom and spiritual insight were recognized by the king and his advisors, demonstrating that prophetic authority was not limited by gender.

The passage reinforces the themes of repentance, divine justice, and mercy. It echoes the covenantal warnings found in Deuteronomy and affirms that God responds to genuine humility. Huldah’s prophecy bridged the gap between divine judgment and human response, offering both warning and hope.

## Into the Lesson

**H**uldah's story is a compelling example of prophetic wisdom and spiritual leadership. Her role in guiding King Josiah during a time of reform reveals the importance of discernment, courage, and truth telling in leadership.

Josiah, though young, demonstrated remarkable spiritual maturity. He surrounded himself with trustworthy advisors and sought divine wisdom rather than relying solely on political strategy. His decision to consult Huldah reflects his openness to spiritual insight and his respect for prophetic authority.

Huldah's response was not sugarcoated. She delivered a sobering message about the consequences of Judah's idolatry and disobedience. Yet, she also acknowledged Josiah's humility and assured him of God's mercy. This balance of truth and compassion is a hallmark of wise leadership and prophetic ministry.

The lesson also invites us to consider the dynamics of gender and authority in Scripture. Huldah's prominence challenges assumptions about who can speak for God. Her voice was not just heard . . . it was heeded. In a patriarchal society, her role as a prophetess is an example of the inclusivity of God's calling.

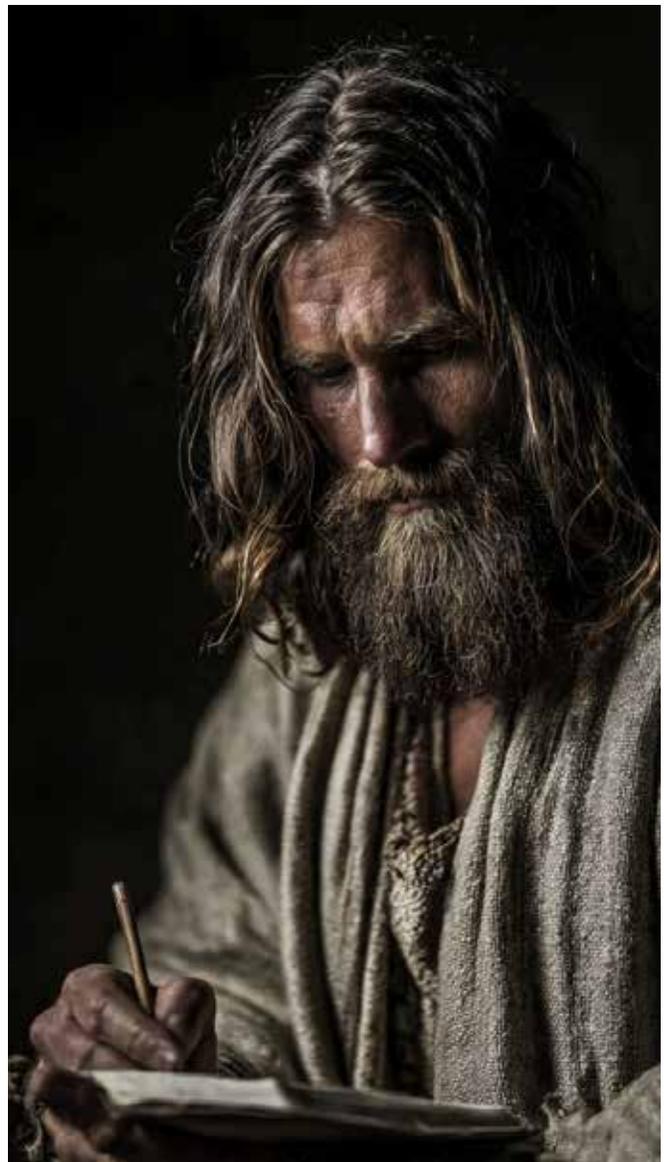
Josiah's reaction to the Book of the Law—tearing his clothes in grief—is a powerful image of repentance. It shows that true leadership involves vulnerability and accountability. Josiah did not deflect blame or ignore the warning; he responded with humility and action.

Huldah's prophecy also aligns with the broader biblical tradition of prophetic critique. She condemned idolatry, warned of judgment, and called for faithfulness. Her message fits within the framework

described by theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether: defending the oppressed, critiquing unjust systems, envisioning a new age, and challenging false religion.

Wisdom is found in truth telling, humility, and spiritual discernment. It reminds us that God speaks through unexpected voices and that faithful leadership requires both courage and compassion.

*Wisdom is found in truth telling,  
humility, and spiritual discernment.*



Discipleship begins with seeking wisdom.

## Into Discipleship

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Discipleship involves seeking wisdom, responding to truth, and living with integrity. Josiah's actions and Huldah's prophecy offer a blueprint for faithful living in times of moral and spiritual crisis.

First, discipleship begins with seeking wisdom. Josiah did not act impulsively; he sought counsel from someone known for spiritual insight. In our own lives, discipleship means being open to guidance from Scripture, prayer, and wise mentors. It means recognizing that we don't have all the answers and being willing to learn.

Second, discipleship requires humility. Josiah's response to the Book of the Law was not defensive but penitent. He acknowledged the failures of his people and took responsibility. Discipleship calls us to examine our lives honestly, confess our shortcomings, and turn toward God with sincerity.

Third, discipleship involves action. Josiah didn't stop at repentance—he initiated

reforms, removed idols, and led his people back to covenant faithfulness. Discipleship is not just about personal piety; it's about transforming our communities and confronting injustice.

Fourth, discipleship embraces truth and compassion. Huldah spoke hard truths, but she also offered hope. As disciples, we are called to speak truth in love . . . to challenge sin while extending grace. This balance is essential in ministry, relationships, and social engagement.

Fifth, discipleship honors diverse voices. Huldah's role reminds us that God uses people of all backgrounds to speak truth. Discipleship means listening to those who may be overlooked or marginalized and recognizing the gifts they bring to the body of Christ.

Finally, discipleship is rooted in hope. Even in the face of judgment, Huldah's message included a promise of peace for Josiah. Discipleship trusts that God's justice is tempered by mercy and that our faithfulness can make a difference.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, grant us the humility to hear your truth, the courage to act on it, and the wisdom to lead with compassion in times of challenge. Amen.*

### Discussion Questions

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- Why do you think Josiah chose to consult Huldah rather than a male prophet?
- What does Huldah's role teach us about women in ministry today?
- How do you respond when confronted with hard truths about your faith or community?
- What are some modern forms of idolatry, and how can we resist them?
- How can humility and repentance shape our leadership and discipleship?

- Have you ever sought wisdom from someone outside traditional leadership roles? What was the result?
- What does it mean to speak truth with compassion in today's world?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Wisdom Seekers

1. Create a list of people in your life who have offered spiritual wisdom.
2. Reflect on what made their guidance meaningful.
3. Share with the group how you seek wisdom in times of decision making.

### Activity 2: Prophetic Voices

1. Read 2 Kings 22:14-20 and identify the key themes in Huldah's message.
2. Compare these themes to modern prophetic voices—activists, pastors, writers.
3. Discuss how prophetic truth and compassion can be practiced in your community.

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Scan for God in the Ghetto by  
William Augustus Jones Jr.

**Devotional Scriptures**  
(Based on Year B Fifth Sunday of Lent / Week of 3/21/2021)  
Revised Common Lectionary  
Week of March 15, 2026

**Sunday, March 15** (*Fourth Sunday of Lent*)

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm  
119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

**Monday, March 16**

Daniel 13:1-17, 30-62; Psalm 23; John 8:12-20

**Tuesday, March 17**

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 102:1-2, 15-22;  
John 8:21-30

**Wednesday, March 18**

Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28; Daniel 3:52-56;  
John 8:31-42

**Thursday, March 19**

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10; Psalm 40:5-10;  
Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

**Friday, March 20**

Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 18:1-7; John 10:31-42

**Saturday, March 21**

Ezekiel 37:21-28; Jeremiah 31:10-13;  
John 11:45-57

## JOURNEYS

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS • MARCH 22



# ELIJAH

## *Prophet of Courage*

*Elijah said, “As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today.”*  
(1 KINGS 18:15)

**F**irst Kings 18:5-18 captures a pivotal moment in the ministry of Elijah, one of Israel’s most revered prophets. The backdrop is a severe drought that had lasted more than three years, a divine judgment upon Israel for its idolatry under King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The drought was not merely a meteorological event; it was a theological statement. It reflected the broken covenant between God and His people, who had turned to Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility and rain.

### Lesson Objectives

- To examine Elijah’s prophetic courage in confronting injustice and calling Israel to repentance.
- To explore Obadiah’s faithful witness within a compromised system and the diverse expressions of discipleship.
- To reflect on how strategic engagement and discernment are essential to prophetic leadership.
- To consider how discipleship involves speaking truth, building trust, and leaving a legacy of faithfulness.

## 1 Kings 18:5-18 (NRSV)

5 Then Ahab said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the wadis; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive and not lose some of the animals.” 6 So they divided the land between them to pass through it; Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself. 7 As Obadiah was on the way, Elijah met him; Obadiah recognized him, fell on his face, and said, “Is it you, my lord Elijah?” 8 He answered him, “It is I. Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here.” 9 And he said, “How have I sinned, that you would hand your servant over to Ahab, to kill me? 10 As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom to which my lord has not sent to seek you; and when they would say, ‘He is not here,’ he would require an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. 11 But now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here.’ 12 As soon as I have gone from you, the spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where; so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have revered the LORD from my youth. 13 Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred of the LORD’s prophets fifty to a cave, and provided them with bread and water? 14 Yet now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here’; he will surely kill me.” 15 Elijah said, “As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today.” 16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah. 17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” 18 He answered, “I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father’s house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.”

### Into the Scripture

**E**lijah, having been in hiding, received a divine command to present himself to Ahab. This moment was charged with tension. Ahab had been searching for Elijah relentlessly, blaming him for the drought. Yet, Elijah knew that the true cause of Israel’s suffering was its abandonment of God’s commandments.

The passage also introduces Obadiah, a high-ranking official in Ahab’s court who secretly remained faithful to God. His

encounter with Elijah was filled with fear and reverence. Obadiah’s dilemma—serving a corrupt regime while trying to protect God’s prophets—highlights the complexity of living faithfully in compromised systems.

Elijah’s declaration in verse 15—“As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today”—is an affirmation of his prophetic identity. It signaled his readiness to confront injustice and speak truth, regardless of the consequences. This moment set the stage for the dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel that followed later in the chapter.

This passage explores themes of divine justice, prophetic obedience, spiritual compromise, and the power of truth. It invites readers to consider what it means to stand before God and speak on His behalf in a world that often resists truth.

## Into the Lesson

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**E**lijah's story is a master class in prophetic courage. His decision to confront Ahab after years in hiding was not driven by ego or ambition—it was rooted in obedience to God. Elijah's courage was not reckless; it was strategic, prayerful, and purposeful. He understood the risks, but he also understood the urgency of calling Israel back to covenant faithfulness.

Obadiah's role in this narrative is equally significant. Though he served in Ahab's palace, he remained loyal to God, even risking his life to hide and feed a hundred prophets. His fear upon encountering Elijah was not cowardice; it was the realistic concern of someone navigating a dangerous political landscape. Obadiah's mediation between Elijah and Ahab shows that courage can take many forms, including quiet resistance and faithful service behind the scenes.

The lesson also examines the spiritual climate of Israel. Ahab and Jezebel's promotion of Baal worship had led to moral decay and divine judgment. Elijah's confrontation with Ahab was not just a political act; it was a spiritual reckoning. He challenged the king's authority by exposing the consequences of idolatry and calling the nation to repentance.

Elijah's strategic approach—meeting Ahab through Obadiah rather than confronting Jezebel directly—demonstrates wisdom in navigating hostile environments. He understood the dynamics of power and chose his battles carefully. This kind of leadership is deeply relevant today,

reminding us that courage must be paired with discernment.

The lesson also draws a parallel to Obadiah Holmes, an early American Baptist minister who endured persecution for his beliefs. Like Elijah, Holmes stood firm in his convictions, even when it meant suffering. His story reminds us that prophetic courage is not confined to biblical times but continues in every generation.

Ultimately, this lesson challenges us to consider what it means to be courageous in our own contexts. Whether we are called to speak truth publicly or serve faithfully in hidden places, Elijah and Obadiah show us that courage is rooted in faith, obedience, and a deep commitment to God's justice.

*Discipleship means standing for truth, even when it is unpopular or dangerous.*

## Into Discipleship

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**D**iscipleship is a call to live boldly and faithfully in the face of adversity. It is not a passive journey; it is an active, intentional commitment to follow God, speak truth, and serve others, even when the cost is high.

### 1. Courageous Obedience

Elijah's willingness to confront Ahab after years of hiding teaches us that discipleship often requires stepping into uncomfortable and risky situations. True discipleship means obeying God's call, even when it leads us into conflict or danger.

### 2. Faithfulness in Compromised Spaces

Obadiah's quiet resistance within Ahab's court shows that discipleship can flourish even in environments that oppose our

values. His protection of the prophets and reverence for God reflect a deep inner commitment. Discipleship is not limited to public ministry; it includes faithful service in hidden places.

### 3. Strategic Engagement

Elijah's approach to Ahab—through Obadiah—demonstrates the importance of timing, relationships, and discernment. Discipleship involves knowing when and how to act, guided by the Spirit. It is not impulsive; it is thoughtful and prayerful.

### 4. Speaking Truth to Power

Elijah's confrontation with Ahab is a model for prophetic discipleship. He does not flinch or compromise. Discipleship means standing for truth, even when it is unpopular or dangerous. It means challenging systems of injustice and calling people back to God.

### 5. Building Trust and Community

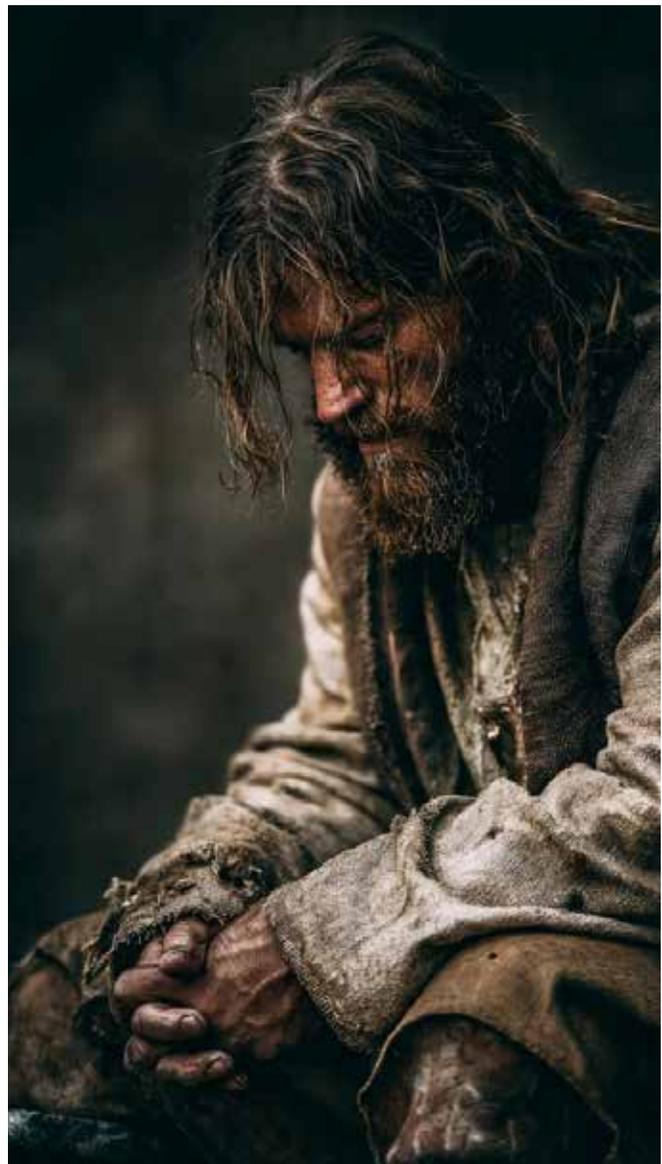
The dialogue between Elijah and Obadiah shows the importance of showing trust in discipleship. Their mutual respect and spiritual understanding enabled them to work together effectively. Discipleship involves building relationships that are rooted in honesty, integrity, and shared faith.

### 6. Legacy and Impact

The story of Obadiah Holmes reminds us that discipleship leaves a legacy. His suffering led to greater religious freedom and inspired future generations. Our faithfulness today can shape the future. Discipleship is not just about personal growth—it is about transforming communities and influencing history.

### 7. Navigating Cultural Challenges

Ahab and Jezebel's influence shows how culture can distort faith. Discipleship



Discipleship is a call to live boldly and faithfully in the face of adversity.

requires discernment to resist false ideologies and remain anchored in biblical truth. It means being in the world but not of it, engaging culture without compromising our convictions.

In practical terms, discipleship may look like this:

- Speaking out against injustice in your community.
- Supporting others who are persecuted for their faith.
- Practicing spiritual disciplines that strengthen courage and clarity.

- Building trust through honest communication and integrity.
- Mentoring others in faith and resilience.
- Living with integrity in workplaces, schools, and families.

Elijah and Obadiah remind us that discipleship is a journey of courage, faithfulness, and strategic action. It is a call to stand before God and live in obedience, no matter the cost.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, give us the courage to stand for truth, the wisdom to act with discernment, and the faith to remain steadfast in your presence. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- Elijah confronted Ahab with boldness. What situations today require similar courage from believers?
- How can we remain faithful like Obadiah when working within systems that oppose our values?
- What lessons can we learn from Elijah’s strategic approach to leadership?
- How do we discern when to speak and when to wait in difficult situations?
- What does Obadiah Holmes’ story teach us about religious freedom and conviction?
- How do we build trust in our families, churches, and workplaces?
- What role does humility play in prophetic ministry and discipleship?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Courage Mapping

1. Reflect on a time when you had to stand up for your beliefs.
2. Create a “courage map” that outlines the situation, your response, and the outcome.
3. Share with the group how your faith influenced your actions.

### Activity 2: Prophetic Voices Today

1. Identify modern individuals who speak truth to power (e.g., activists, pastors, writers).
2. Discuss how their message aligns with Elijah’s prophetic courage.
3. Explore ways that your community can support prophetic voices and stand for justice.

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Scan for Moving the Masses by  
Reginald W. Williams Jr.

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## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Liturgy of the Palms/Liturgy of the Passion / Week of 3/28/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of March 22, 2026

### Sunday, March 22 (*Fifth Sunday of Lent*)

*Liturgy of the Palms*: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29;

Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16

*Liturgy of the Passion*: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:1-39, (40-47)

### Monday, March 23

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15;

John 12:1-11

### Tuesday, March 24

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14;

1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

### Wednesday, March 25

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3;

John 13:21-32

*Annunciation of the Lord*: Isaiah 7:10-14;

Psalm 45 or Psalm 40:5-10; Hebrews 10:4-10;

Luke 1:26-38

### Thursday, March 26

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

### Friday, March 27

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22;

Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;

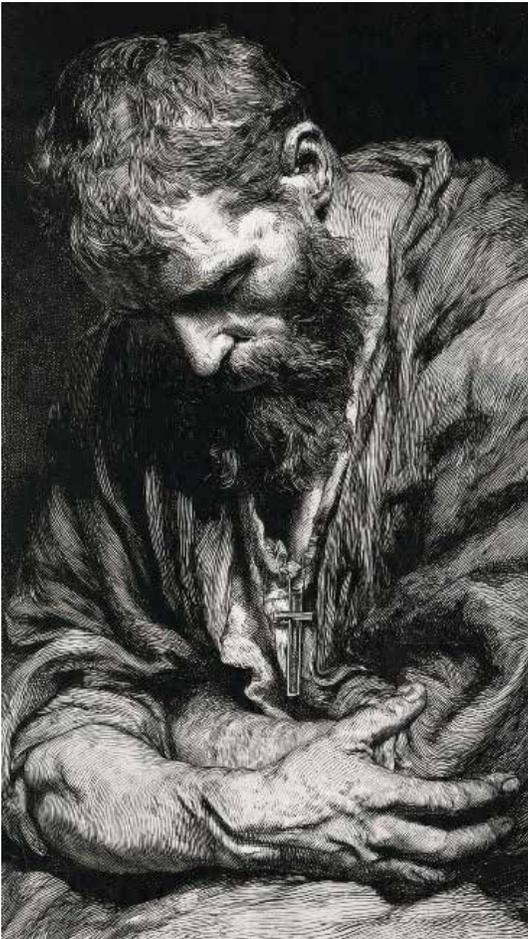
John 18:1-19:42

### Saturday, March 28

Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24;

Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8;

Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42



# SUFFERING SERVANT

## *Brings Salvation*

*But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.*

(ISAIAH 53:5)

This passage is one of four servant songs in the Book of Isaiah (see Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13–53:12). This particular song begins with this declaration: “See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up” (Isaiah 52:13).

## Lesson Objectives

- To explore the concept of vicarious suffering through the lens of Isaiah 53 and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- To reflect on how the suffering of the innocent can lead to healing, transformation, and redemption for others.
- To examine the biblical imagery of the scapegoat and suffering servant as models of sacrificial love.
- To consider how discipleship involves embracing beneficial suffering and responding to injustice with compassion and action.

## Isaiah 53:4-11 (NRSVUE)

4 Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases, yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. 9 They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with affliction. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. 11 Out of his anguish he shall see; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

### Into the Scripture

What follows this very positive promise is both unexpected and confusing. The writer describes this “exalted servant” as being “despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity” (Isaiah 53:3). The reader immediately wonders how one “despised and rejected by others” could also be a servant who is “exalted and lifted up.” The answer leads us to an understanding of vicarious suffering.

“Vicarious suffering” refers to the transforming effects brought about on a guilty person or group through the distress of a different person or group who is innocent of wrongdoing. Vicarious suffering differs from purifying pain. The latter describes the cleansing of sin that can occur when

people suffer. Psalm 66:10 talks of this kind of suffering: “For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.”

When the painful consequences of sin cause the people bearing those consequences to repent, their suffering cleanses them of destructive behaviors and creates a new purity of devotion to God. The servant in this passage, however, is not suffering to cleanse himself; he is suffering to transform and heal others. When the sinful see the agony that the servant is enduring—agony that should have been theirs to experience—that sight pierces their hearts and changes them. That is the profound effect of vicarious suffering.

The identity of the suffering servant in this passage is unknown. Some have named individuals in Jewish history as the servant; others believe that the servant is the nation of Israel itself. Whoever fulfills this role is

one who suffers the pain that should have been given to the guilty to heal or save them. The prophet says that the servant was “wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.” Somehow, the affliction of the innocent servant led to the salvation of the transgressors, whoever they might be. The prophet says, “upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.”

Isaiah notes in verse 4 that before the revelation he was currently receiving from God, the people of Israel believed that all suffering was God’s punishment on the one in pain. Isaiah writes, “We accounted him stricken and struck down by God and afflicted.” But then God made clear to the prophet that this servant’s suffering was not due to his own sin but due to the sins of others. He was yielding himself to the pain to transform those who were guilty.

Christians see Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy. Peter makes this plain in 1 Peter 2:24—“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” Although believers debate exactly how Jesus’ death healed our wounds and freed us from our sins, there is full agreement that Christ’s pain on the cross redeemed us from our sins. Good Friday confronts us with the transforming pain that Jesus suffered. When we look upon the suffering of the innocent Son of God, we are moved to repentance and devotion to the one who loved us all the way to the cross.

Respond to the following questions:

(1) Has the suffering of others ever caused a change in you? (2) How has the pain of Christ on the cross affected your life?

## Scapegoat

An ancient Hebrew practice sheds light on the meaning of this passage. In Leviticus 16:21-22, we read the following: “Then

Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.”

The goat that carried all the sins of Israel into the wilderness was called a scapegoat. In our society, the use of a scapegoat is usually condemned. When an innocent person is blamed for the failures or misdeeds of others, observers feel justifiable outrage. However, in the Old Testament, the use of a scapegoat was held in a more positive light. The ritual of symbolically placing the sins of the people on the head of a goat and banishing that goat into the wilderness cleansed the community of all its transgressions and gave it a fresh start for a renewed relationship with God.

Because Isaiah wrote, “The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (verse 6b), the servant in this passage can be seen as a scapegoat figure. Somehow, due to the mysterious workings of God, the sins of the community were transferred to the one in anguish and that virtuous sufferer carried all their sins away, leaving the community whole and forgiven.

In addition to referencing the work of a scapegoat, Isaiah also alludes to the nature and usefulness of sheep in these verses. First, he states that the guilty are like foolish sheep who have wandered off into danger and confusion. Their refusal to allow God to shepherd them has led to their own destruction. Then the writer compares the servant to a sheep who is being slaughtered or sheared. Isaiah says that the innocent one accepts his assignment to suffer for the good of others without complaint, just as a sheep accepts shearing and even

slaughtering without objection. Both the image of the scapegoat and the submissive sheep underscore the willingness of the suffering one to undergo trauma without protest so that the community could be healed and delivered from sin.

According to John 1:29, when John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching, he exclaimed, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” John seems to be saying that Jesus acted as the ancient scapegoat to take on the sins of the people and carry them away.

Acts 8:32-35 records that a man from Ethiopia read this exact passage from Isaiah and asked Philip the evangelist if he knew about whom the passage was talking. Philip told him that the descriptions of the scapegoat and sheep who willingly took on the sins of the community and suffered for their salvation were about Jesus. Then Philip declared that Jesus’ great act of sacrificial love and obedience was good news for us all.

The horror of the cross was used by God to announce good news to all sinners. That truth astonishes and humbles all believers. Although Christians might not fully comprehend how Jesus’ death liberated them from their sins, they can rejoice that all their sins were placed on the crucified one who took them away at the direction of God and set Christians free from all guilt.

## Injustice

As Christians rejoice at what God has done for them through the suffering of Christ, they should not overlook the immense injustice in what happened to Jesus. Like the servant described in this passage, Jesus was convicted and crucified through a “perversion of justice” (see Luke 23:13-25). He was crucified “with the wicked” (see Luke 23:32-43) and buried in a rich man’s tomb (see Luke 23:50-53). Although God was able to use this miscarriage of justice to save the

world, Jesus’ suffering was horribly cruel. The church of Jesus Christ must represent her crucified Lord by fighting injustice in all its forms and by caring for all those who suffer unfairly around the world today.

## Into the Lesson

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### Beneficial Suffering

If humans decided to avoid suffering at all costs, our species would cease to exist. Although medicine can provide some relief from the pain of childbirth, it by no means takes away all the agony. Yet, women often willingly enter into this excruciating process because of the joy of receiving a son or daughter into their arms. Jesus described this truth in John 16:21: “When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.”

If humans decided to avoid suffering at all costs, every surgical room in the world would close. Whether the operation involves removing a gall bladder or performing a lung transplant, all surgery involves pain. Yet, every day, people pay small fortunes to undergo the ache and soreness of surgery because they believe that the quality of their lives will be improved.

We are all acquainted with the beneficial effects of some suffering. We put ourselves through temporary affliction to receive something of great value. What makes the death of Jesus different from the suffering most of us experience is that he underwent physical torment on our behalf, not his own. Such a selfless act deserves our deeper reflection.

Respond to the following questions: (1) When have you been willing to suffer to achieve a desirable outcome? (2) Have you ever suffered to help someone else?

*“By his bruises we are healed.”*

## Into Discipleship

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### Easter

Isaiah’s vision of the suffering servant included the servant’s vindication at the hands of God. The prophet assures the reader that this servant “shall see his offspring,” “prolong his days,” and see that the will of the Lord will prosper. Finally, the prophet reports that out of the servant’s anguish “he shall see light.” Today, we celebrate that vindication. Today, our anguish has also turned to light as God has raised Jesus from the dead. The Lord’s redemptive

work of suffering has been completed through the miracle of the Resurrection. Christians can praise God that not only has God freed them from their sins, God has also freed them from the fear of death through the work of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus told the two men on the road to Emmaus on the first Easter, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). Yes, it was . . . and, yes, Christ did. Jesus Christ is risen today; He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Respond to the following questions:  
(1) How does the resurrection of Christ complete Jesus’ quest to save us from our sins? (2) How can you express your gratitude to Christ for all he did on your behalf?

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, strengthen us to speak truth with courage, remain faithful in challenging places, and trust your guidance in every step we take. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

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- When have you been willing to suffer to achieve a desirable outcome?
- Have you ever suffered to help someone else?
- Has the suffering of others ever caused a change in you?
- How has the pain of Christ on the cross affected your life?
- How does the resurrection of Christ complete Jesus’ quest to save us from our sins?
- How can you express your gratitude to Christ for all he did on your behalf?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Reflective Journaling

Write about a time when you witnessed someone suffer for the benefit of others. Reflect on how that experience impacted your understanding of sacrifice and compassion.

### Activity 2: Community Engagement

Identify a local organization that supports individuals who suffer unjustly. Volunteer your time or resources to support their mission as a way of living out the servant's example.

## Sources and Resources

Brueggemann, Walter. *Isaiah: Volume 2, Chapters 40–66 (Westminster Bible Companion)*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

**Scriptures:** Isaiah 53; Leviticus 16; John 1:29; Acts 8:32-35; Luke 24:26; 1 Peter 2:24 (Peter's reflection on Christ's suffering); Psalm 66:10 (Purifying suffering); John 16:21 (Jesus' teaching on childbirth and joy)

*The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes—Volume VI*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.



Scan for Living a Job Faith by  
Paige Lanier Chargois

## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Easter / Week of 4/4/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of March 29, 2026

### Sunday, March 29

Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

### Monday, March 30

Acts 2:14, 22-32; Psalm 16;  
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8; Matthew 28:1-10

### Tuesday, March 31

Acts 2:36-41; Psalm 33:1-11; 1 Peter 1:13-25;  
Luke 24:1-12

### Wednesday, April 1

Acts 3:1-10; Psalm 105:1-11, 42-45;  
1 Peter 2:1-10; Luke 24:13-35

### Thursday, April 2

Acts 3:11-26; Psalm 4; 1 Peter 2:11-25;  
Luke 24:36b-48

### Friday, April 3

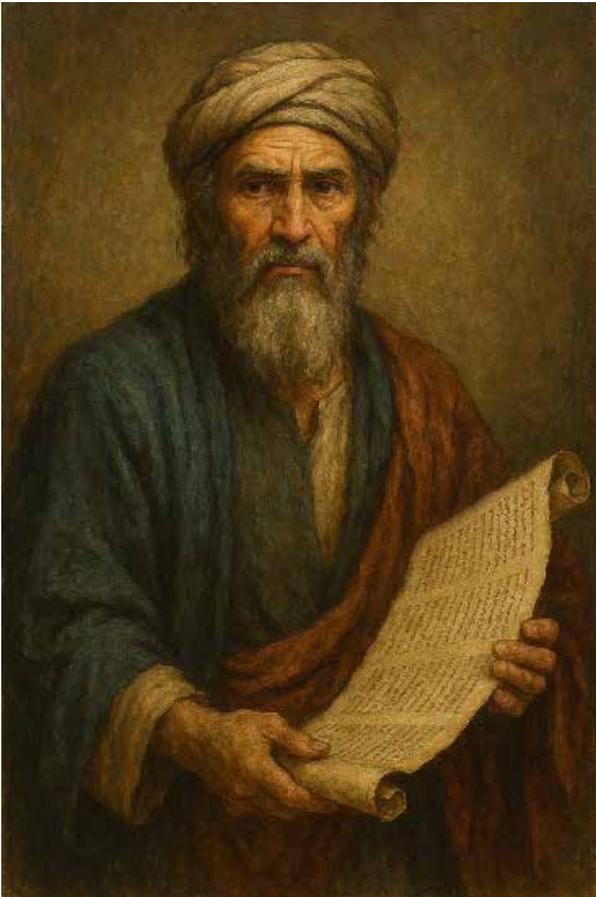
Acts 4:1-12; Psalm 118:19-29; 1 Peter 3:1-12;  
John 21:1-14

### Saturday, April 4

Acts 4:13-21; Psalm 148; 1 Peter 3:13-22;  
Mark 16:9-20

## JOURNEYS

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS • APRIL 5



# EZRA

*Faith-and-Action Preacher*

*[Ezra said,] “O My God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.”*  
(EZRA 9:6)

**E**zra 10:1-12 captures a moment of communal reckoning in post-exilic Judah. The people, recently returned from Babylonian captivity, were not simply rebuilding a city—they were reconstructing a shattered identity. The physical temple may have been restored, but the spiritual foundation of the community remained fragile.

Ezra, a priest and scribe deeply committed to

the law of God, arrived in Jerusalem to find a society fractured economically, religiously, and morally. The people were struggling to reestablish their covenantal relationship with God amid the ruins of exile and the complexities of a repopulated land.

### Lesson Objectives

- To examine Ezra’s response to communal sin through lament, confession, and leadership.
- To explore the ethical complexities of Shecaniah’s proposal and Ezra’s actions.
- To reflect on how discipleship involves emotional honesty, communal accountability, and justice for the vulnerable.

## Ezra 10:1-12 (NRSV)

1 While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel; the people also wept bitterly. 2 Shecaniah son of Jehiel, of the descendants of Elam, addressed Ezra, saying, “We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. 3 So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Take action, for it is your duty, and we are with you; be strong, and do it.” 5 Then Ezra stood up and made the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear that they would do as had been said. So they swore. 6 Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God, and went to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, where he spent the night. He did not eat bread or drink water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. 7 They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, 8 and that if any did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all their property should be forfeited, and they themselves banned from the congregation of the exiles. 9 Then all the people of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. All the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. 11 Now make confession to the LORD the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.” 12 Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, “It is so; we must do as you have said.”

### Into the Scripture

**E**zra’s response to this spiritual crisis was deeply emotional and spiritually charged. He did not begin with condemnation or legislation; he began with lament. His grief was visceral and public: he wept, confessed, and threw himself down before the house of God. This act of mourning was not performative; it was a sincere expression

of sorrow for the collective sins of the people. Ezra’s lament became a catalyst for communal repentance. A great assembly of men, women, and children gathered around him, drawn not by coercion but by conviction. Together, they wept bitterly, acknowledging the brokenness of their covenant with God.

This moment is significant not only for its emotional intensity but also for its spiritual depth. It reflects a communal recognition

that sin is not merely personal—it is societal. The people understood that their actions had consequences beyond individual lives; they affected the entire community’s relationship with God. Ezra’s leadership in this moment models a prophetic posture: one that calls people to truth, repentance, and restoration.

The passage introduces Shecaniah, a member of the community who proposed a radical solution to the crisis: the dissolution of marriages between Jewish men and non-Jewish women. His suggestion was rooted in a desire to restore covenant fidelity, with his having believed that intermarriage with foreign women had led the people astray. Shecaniah’s words reflect the concern that these relationships had introduced idolatrous practices and diluted the spiritual identity of Israel. His call to action was bold, as he urgently persuaded Ezra to lead the people in making a covenant to separate from these wives and their children.

This proposal, however, raises complex questions. While the concern for spiritual purity is understandable within the context of Israel’s covenantal history, the method of restoration—sending away families—challenges our understanding of justice, mercy, and the character of God. The narrative invites us to wrestle with the tension between law and grace, between maintaining religious identity and honoring human dignity.

Ezra’s leadership was marked by deep conviction and a desire to restore holiness among the people. He did not dismiss Shecaniah’s proposal; instead, he embraced it and mobilized the religious leaders to enforce it. A proclamation was issued, calling all the returned exiles to gather in Jerusalem. Those who refused to come faced excommunication and the loss of property. The urgency of the moment was palpable—the people assembled in the rain, trembling not only from the weather but also from the weight of the decision they faced.



Ezra’s response was deeply emotional and spiritually charged.

The passage culminates in a collective confession and agreement to follow Ezra’s directive. The people acknowledged their guilt and committed to separating from their foreign wives. Yet, this resolution leaves us with lingering questions: Were these marriages truly the root of the spiritual crisis, or were they a symptom of deeper issues? Were the women and children treated justly, or were they scapegoated in a desperate attempt to regain divine favor?

Ezra 10:1-12 does not offer easy answers. Instead, it invites us into the complexity of communal repentance and spiritual leadership. It challenges us to consider how we respond to sin, both our own and that of our communities. It asks whether our pursuit of holiness can coexist with compassion, and whether our efforts to restore righteousness reflect the heart of God.

## Into the Lesson

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Ezra's story unfolded at a time of national upheaval, not unlike our own. Written during the COVID-19 pandemic, this lesson reflects on how crises expose both the strengths and weaknesses of communities. Just as Judah grappled with its identity after exile, we too have faced questions of blame, responsibility, and healing.

Ezra's grief is a model of spiritual leadership. He did not hide from the sins of his people; he confronted them with honesty and humility. His lament was not performative, it was transformative. It drew others into a shared experience of repentance and opened the door to communal renewal.

Shecaniah's proposal to dissolve interfaith marriages reflects a desire to restore covenant faithfulness. However, it also reveals the dangers of exhibiting zeal without compassion. The biblical prohibition against intermarriage was not a focus on ethnicity but on spiritual fidelity. The concern was that foreign spouses might lead the Israelites to worship other gods, violating the first commandments.

Yet, the solution—sending away wives and children—raises profound ethical concerns. These families had been together for years. The children were innocent. The women were not the transgressors. The punishment fell on the vulnerable, not the guilty. This echoes patterns we still see today, where the powerless bear the consequences of the powerful's sins.

Ezra's actions, though well-intentioned, remind us that righteousness must be tempered with mercy. The apostle Paul later wrote that believers should not divorce unbelieving spouses if they are willing to live in peace (see 1 Corinthians 7:12-13). This New Testament perspective invites us to consider reconciliation over rejection.

The lesson also explores the role of spiritual leaders in times of crisis. Ezra fasted, prayed, and called the people to gather. He used his authority to demand accountability, but also risked alienating those he sought to restore. Leadership in faith communities requires both courage and compassion, truth telling and grace giving.

In our own time, we must ask these questions: How do we respond to communal sin? Do we seek scapegoats or solutions? Do we punish the vulnerable or protect them? Ezra's story challenges us to lead with integrity, to grieve with sincerity, and to act with justice.

*Ezra's grief is a model of spiritual leadership.*

## Into Discipleship

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Ezra's lament teaches us that discipleship involves emotional honesty and spiritual vulnerability.

First, discipleship calls us to grieve sin. Ezra's public mourning invites us to take sin seriously. In a culture that often minimizes wrongdoing, his example reminds us that true transformation begins with sorrow.

Second, discipleship involves communal accountability. Ezra did not act alone; he gathered the people, listened to leaders like Shecaniah, and engaged the community in decision making. Discipleship is not a solo endeavor; it is lived in relationship.

Third, discipleship requires discernment. Not every solution to sin is righteous. Ezra's decision to send away families may have restored ritual purity, but it also caused harm. Discipleship means weighing actions against the character of God, who is both holy and compassionate.

Fourth, discipleship demands justice for the vulnerable. The women and children

in Ezra's story were victims of a system that prioritized purity over people. Today, discipleship calls us to advocate for those who are marginalized, to ensure that our pursuit of holiness does not come at the expense of mercy.

Fifth, discipleship is about hope and restoration. Shecaniah said, "Even now there is hope for Israel" (verse 2). This hope is not naïve; it is rooted in God's covenant faithfulness. Discipleship means believing that change is possible, that grace is available, and that God is still at work.

Sixth, discipleship includes spiritual leadership. Ezra's fasting, prayer, and proclamation show us that leaders must model the faith that they teach. Whether pastors, teachers, or lay leaders, discipleship means guiding others with humility and conviction.

In practical terms, discipleship might look like

- leading or joining a group that studies Scripture and reflects on communal issues.
- practicing lament through prayer, journaling, or worship.
- advocating for justice in policies that affect families, immigrants, or the poor.
- mentoring others in ethical decision making and spiritual growth.
- engaging in interfaith dialogue with compassion and clarity.
- reflecting on how our actions impact the vulnerable in our communities.

Ezra's story is a call to discipleship that is honest, courageous, and compassionate. It reminds us that repentance is not just about turning from sin; it is about turning toward God and one another in love.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, teach us to grieve sin with honesty, seek justice for the vulnerable, and act with courage and compassion as we pursue your holiness. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- Have you ever witnessed a community or nation grieve over its collective sins? What did that look like?
- How do you respond when leaders call for repentance in times of crisis?
- What ethical concerns arise from Shecaniah's proposal? How would you have responded?
- Can you think of modern examples where the vulnerable are punished for the sins of the powerful?
- How do you balance truth telling with compassion in your own leadership or relationships?
- What does Ezra's story teach us about communal accountability and spiritual restoration?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Lament and Leadership

- Reflect on a time when you or your community experienced grief over wrongdoing.
- Write a short prayer or journal entry expressing lament and hope.
- Share with your group how spiritual leaders helped guide that process.

### Activity 2: Justice and Discernment

- Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 and compare it with Ezra 10:1-12.
- Create a list of principles for ethical decision making in faith communities.
- Discuss how these principles apply to current issues in your church or society.

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## Sources and Resources

Blair, Edward P. *The Illustrated Bible Handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. "Strength to Love," in *A Testament of Hope*. New York City: Harper & Row, 1986.

**Scriptures:** 1 Corinthians 7:12-13; Ezra 9–10; Malachi 2:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; Exodus 20:3-5

*The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 2*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953.



Scan for Church on Purpose  
edited by Adam L. Bond  
and Laura Mariko Cheifetz

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## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Second Sunday of Easter / Week of 4/11/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of April 5, 2026 (Easter)

### Sunday, April 5 (Easter)

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1–2:2;  
John 20:19-31

### Monday, April 6

Psalm 105:1-22; Judges 6:11-24; Acts 1:15-26

### Tuesday, April 7

Psalm 105:23-45; Judges 7:1-8, 19–8:3;  
Acts 2:1-21

### Wednesday, April 8

Psalm 106:1-18; Judges 9:1-21; Acts 2:22-36

### Thursday, April 9

Psalm 106:19-48; Judges 10:1-18; Acts 2:37-47

### Friday, April 10

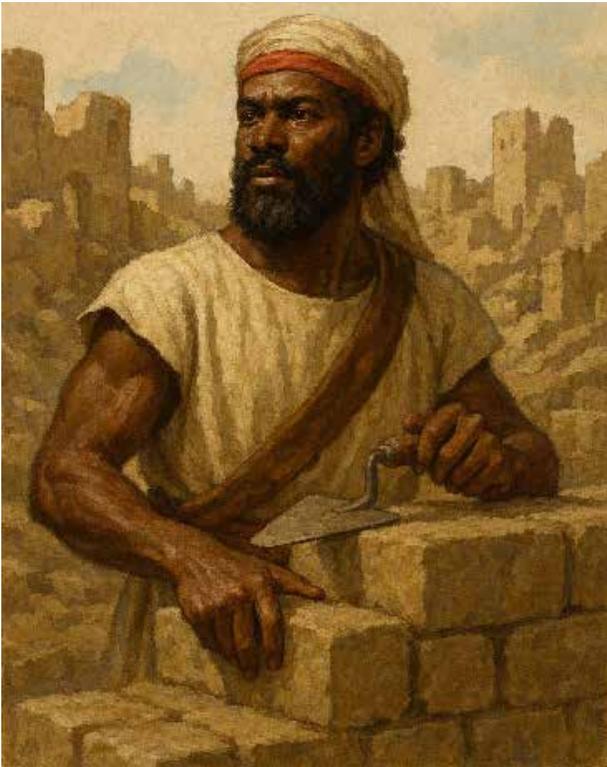
Psalm 107:1-16; Judges 11:1-11; Acts 3:1-11

### Saturday, April 11

Psalm 107:17-43; Judges 13:1-24; Acts 3:12-26

## JOURNEYS

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS • APRIL 12



# NEHEMIAH

## *Rebuilder and Renewer*

[Nehemiah said,] “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace.”  
(NEHEMIAH 2:17)

The Book of Nehemiah is part of a larger narrative arc that includes Ezra and chronicles the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylonian captivity. Together, these books reflect a period of restoration of land, of worship, and of identity. Nehemiah, though born in exile, carried within him a deep reverence for the traditions and sacred spaces of his ancestors. His role as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia placed him in a unique position: he was both a servant of empire and a steward of memory.

### Lesson Objectives

- To understand Nehemiah’s emotional and spiritual response to the devastation of Jerusalem.
- To explore the relationship between divine calling and strategic leadership.
- To reflect on the importance of spiritual clarity, preparation, and communal commitment in rebuilding what is broken.

### Nehemiah 2:11-20 (NRSVUE)

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. 12 Then I got up during the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put into my heart to

do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon's Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue. 15 So I went up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate and so returned. 16 The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work. 17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace." 18 I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they mocked and ridiculed us, saying, "What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building, but you have no share or claim or memorial in Jerusalem."

## Into the Scripture

Nehemiah 2 marks a turning point in the story. After receiving permission from the king, Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem, a city that once stood as the spiritual and political heart of Israel but now lay in ruins. The broken walls and burned gates were not merely architectural failures—they were symbols of vulnerability, shame, and disconnection from God's covenant.

The passage reveals Nehemiah's methodical approach. He did not rush into action. Instead, he spent three days in quiet observation, then conducted a nighttime inspection of the city's perimeter. This moment of solitude and secrecy is significant. Nehemiah was discerning not only the physical damage but also the spiritual weight of the task ahead. His silence was strategic, allowing him to

gather information without interference or premature opposition.

Throughout the chapter, we see a blend of spiritual conviction and practical leadership. Nehemiah prayed, planned, and prepared. He understood that rebuilding Jerusalem was not just about stones and gates, but about restoring dignity, reclaiming identity, and renewing covenantal relationship with God. His leadership was rooted in faith, but it was expressed through action.

Nehemiah's journey echoes the broader biblical theme of restoration. Just as God called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, Nehemiah was called to lead them out of disgrace. His story reminds us that divine calling often requires human courage, strategic thinking, and communal effort. Nehemiah's actions were not isolated; they were part of God's unfolding plan to renew the people and reestablish worship in the land.

This passage invites us to reflect on our own moments of crisis and calling. How do we respond when we see brokenness in our communities, our churches, or our own lives? Nehemiah shows us that faithful leadership begins with prayerful discernment, honest assessment, and bold proclamation. His story demonstrates what can happen when one person listens to God, mobilizes others, and refuses to be deterred by opposition.

## Into the Lesson

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### Heartbroken

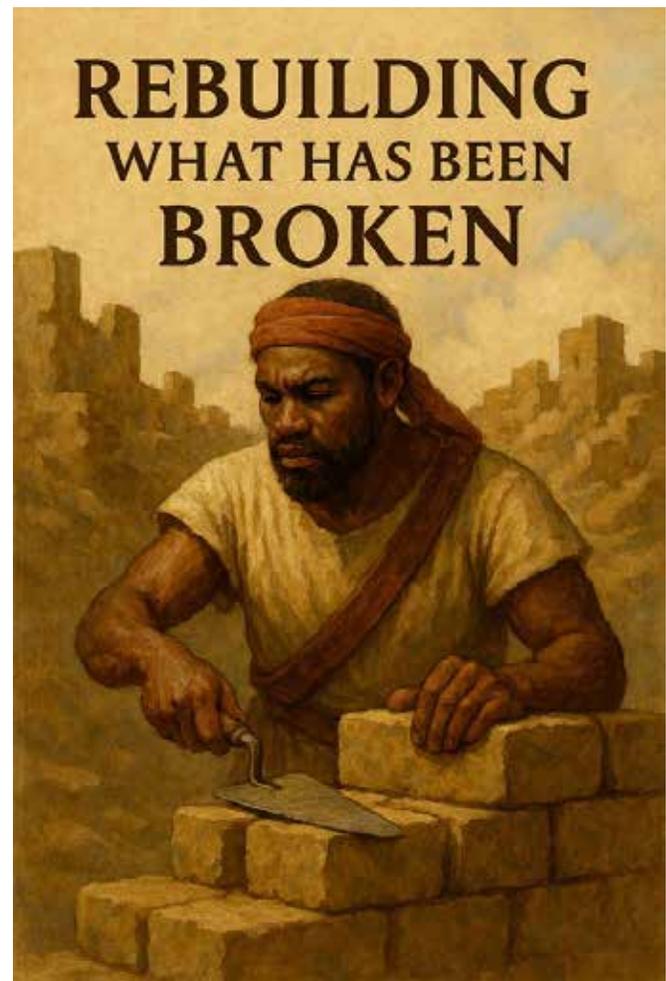
Nehemiah's sorrow was deeply rooted in reverence for his ancestors and their burial grounds. In many cultures, burial sites are sacred, representing continuity, memory, and identity. Nehemiah's lament—"Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste . . . ?" (Nehemiah 2:3b)—was a cry of spiritual anguish. His grief mirrored the devastation of a people disconnected from their sacred story.

This heartbreak becomes the catalyst for action. Nehemiah did not remain in mourning; he moved toward mission. His emotional response was not weakness but the beginning of prophetic leadership.

### Right Place, Right Time

Nehemiah's position as cupbearer placed him in proximity to power. Though a servant, he had earned the trust of the king. His request to return to Jerusalem and rebuild was met with favor, and he was sent with letters of protection and resources. Nehemiah interpreted this moment as divine timing: God had placed him in the right place at the right time.

Leadership often begins with recognizing divine opportunity. Nehemiah's discernment



and readiness to act remind us that faith is not passive—it is responsive.

### Reconnaissance

Before announcing his plans, Nehemiah conducted a nighttime inspection of Jerusalem's walls. He traveled discreetly, accompanied only by a few trusted men. His silence was strategic. He did not yet share his findings with the priests, nobles, or officials. This moment of quiet observation reflects wisdom and foresight.

Jesus commended such preparation in Luke 14:28: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost . . . ?" Nehemiah models this principle. He counted the cost before engaging the community. His leadership was not impulsive . . . it was intentional.

## Plan A

After gathering information, Nehemiah presented his plan. He named the problem clearly: “Jerusalem lies in ruins”; he then called the people to action: “Come, let us rebuild” (verse 17). His appeal was not just practical, it was spiritual. He assured them that “the hand of my God had been gracious upon me” (verse 18a), and that the king supported the mission.

The people responded with enthusiasm: “Let us start building!” (verse 18b). Their commitment was not just emotional—it is communal. They committed themselves to the common good.

But opposition arose. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem—regional leaders with vested interests—mocked and threatened the project. Their resistance was political and spiritual. They feared the empowerment of Jerusalem and sought to maintain control.

Nehemiah’s response was firm: “The God of heaven is the one who will give us success” (verse 20a). He dismissed their claims and asserted the divine right of the people to rebuild.

*Faith is not just what we feel—  
it’s what we do.*

## Into Discipleship

**N**ehemiah’s story is a blueprint for faithful leadership and spiritual resilience. His journey offers a compelling model for how disciples of Christ can respond to brokenness with prayerful discernment, strategic action, and communal engagement. In a world where many things lie in ruins—relationships, institutions, even our sense of purpose—Nehemiah’s example calls us to rebuild with courage and conviction.

## Grief Can Be Holy

Nehemiah’s sorrow was not a sign of weakness; it was a sacred response to injustice and loss. His heartbreak over the destruction of Jerusalem became the fuel for transformation. In our own lives, grief can be a spiritual signal, alerting us to what matters most. When we mourn the brokenness around us—whether in our communities, churches, or families—we are invited to partner with God in the work of restoration.

## Preparation Is Spiritual

Before Nehemiah lifted a stone, he spent time in prayer, silence, and observation. His nighttime inspection of the city was not avoidance—it was discernment. In discipleship, preparation is not a delay of obedience; it is part of obedience. We are called to listen deeply, assess wisely, and move intentionally. Whether we are launching a ministry, confronting injustice, or healing a relationship, spiritual preparation grounds us in God’s wisdom.

## Opposition Is Inevitable

Nehemiah’s mission was met with mockery and resistance. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem tried to undermine the work before it began. This reminds us that when we pursue God’s mission, we will face opposition sometimes from external forces . . . sometimes from within. But clarity about God’s call gives us courage to persist. Discipleship is not always comfortable, but it is always purposeful. When we know who sent us, we can endure what confronts us. Community matters!

Nehemiah did not rebuild alone. He mobilized the people, cast a shared vision, and invited collective commitment. Discipleship is not a solo endeavor; it is a shared journey. The rebuilding of Jerusalem

was a communal act of faith, and so is the work of the church today. Whether we are restoring a neighborhood, renewing a congregation, or healing a family, we need each other. God’s vision is too big for one person to carry alone.

### Faith in Action

Nehemiah’s leadership was marked by a seamless integration of faith and action. He prayed and planned. He trusted God and organized people. His story challenges us to move beyond passive belief into

active discipleship. Faith is not just what we feel—it’s what we do as well. When we see brokenness, we are called to respond not with despair, but with hope and holy resolve.

In our own lives, we may be called to rebuild what has been broken: relationships, communities, churches, or even our own spiritual foundations. Like Nehemiah, we must begin with prayer, move with purpose, and trust that God’s hand is upon us. The work may be hard, the opposition real, but the promise is sure: the God of heaven will give us success (see Nehemiah 2:20).

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, give us the courage to rebuild what is broken and the faith to trust your hand in every step. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- Nehemiah’s grief was tied to the desecration of sacred spaces. What places or memories are sacred to you, and how do they shape your faith?
- Have you ever felt that God placed you in the right place at the right time? How did you respond?
- Why is it important to assess a situation before acting? How can churches benefit from strategic planning?
- What does Nehemiah’s leadership teach us about balancing faith and action?
- How do you respond to opposition when pursuing a God-given mission?
- What does it mean to commit to the “common good” in your faith community?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Mapping Sacred Spaces

Invite participants to draw or list places that are spiritually significant to them: family homes, churches, cemeteries, or cities. Reflect on how these places connect to their faith journey. Share stories in small groups.

### Activity 2: Leadership in Action

Divide the class into small groups, with each group assigned a leadership challenge (e.g., rebuilding a ministry, responding to community needs). The groups are to outline a plan using Nehemiah's model: assess, pray, plan, act, and respond to opposition. Present plans to the larger group.

## Sources and Resources

Bottum, Joseph. "City of Bones, City of Graces," in *Plough Quarterly*, Winter 2020.

**Scriptures:** Luke 14:28 (Jesus on counting the cost); Nehemiah 1–2 (Full narrative of Nehemiah's call and preparation)



Scan for Better than Success: 8 Principles of Faithful Leadership by C. Jeff Woods

## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Third Sunday of Easter / Week of 4/18/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of April 12, 2026

### Sunday, April 12 (*Second Sunday of Easter*)

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7;  
Luke 24:36b-48

### Monday, April 13

Psalm 111; Judges 14:1–15:20; Acts 4:1-12

### Tuesday, April 14

Psalm 112; Judges 16:1-31; Acts 4:13-31

### Wednesday, April 15

Psalm 113; Judges 17:1–18:31; Acts 4:32–5:11

### Thursday, April 16

Psalm 114; Judges 19:1–20:48; Acts 5:12-26

### Friday, April 17

Psalm 115; Judges 21:1-25; Acts 5:27-42

### Saturday, April 18

Psalm 116; Ruth 1:1-22; Acts 6:1-15



# A PLEA FOR RESTORATION

## *Hope Amid Ruins*

*Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old.*

(LAMENTATIONS 5:21)

The Book of Lamentations, whose authorship is traditionally attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, is a poetic and painful response to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. In Hebrew, the book is titled “How?”—a question that captures the bewilderment of a people who had witnessed the collapse of their nation, temple, and way of life. The title itself is a lament, a cry of confusion and sorrow directed toward God.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore the emotional and theological depth of communal lament in Lamentations 5.
- To reflect on how grief, confession, and hope shape our relationship with God during times of crisis.
- To consider how restoration begins with spiritual reconciliation and honest prayer.

## Lamentations 5 (NRSVUE)

1 Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace! 2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to aliens. 3 We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows. 4 We must pay for the water we drink; the wood we get must be bought. 5 With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven; we are weary; we are given no rest. 6 We have made a pact with Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread. 7 Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities. 8 Slaves rule over us; there is no one to deliver us from their hand. 9 We get our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness. 10 Our skin is black as an oven from the scorching heat of famine. 11 Women are raped in Zion, young women in the towns of Judah. 12 Princes are hung up by their hands; no respect is shown to the elders. 13 Young men are compelled to grind, and boys stagger under loads of wood. 14 The old men have left the city gate, the young men their music. 15 The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning. 16 The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned! 17 Because of this our hearts are sick; because of these things our eyes have grown dim: 18 because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate; jackals prowl over it. 19 But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations. 20 Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? 21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old— 22 unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

### Into the Scripture

Lamentations 5 is the final chapter of the book and serves as a communal prayer. It is not just a historical record of suffering but a reflection on loss, injustice, and divine silence. The chapter opens with a plea: “Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace!” (verse 1). This was not a demand for answers but a cry for recognition. The people felt unseen, forgotten, and abandoned.

The chapter continues with vivid descriptions of suffering: displacement, poverty, exploitation, and violence. The people of Judah were no longer in control of

their land or their lives. Widows and orphans abounded. Basic resources like water and wood must be purchased from their oppressors. The social order had collapsed, and joy had turned to mourning.

Yet, amid the grief, there was a turning point. In verse 21a, the people cried out, “Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored.” This is the heart of the chapter and the heart of biblical lament. Restoration is not just about rebuilding walls or reclaiming land. It is about reconciliation with God. The people recognized that their healing must begin with spiritual renewal.

Lamentations 5 ended not with resolution but with tension: “Unless you have utterly rejected us . . .” (verse 22). The prayer left

space for uncertainty, acknowledging that restoration is not guaranteed. This honesty is part of the power of lament. It allows space for grief, confession, and hope to coexist.

## Into the Lesson

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### Cries and Questions

In times of crisis, we often ask the six journalistic questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? Some are easier to answer than others. But the last two—why and how—often leave us speechless. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many asked these same questions. Why did this happen? How could God allow such suffering?

Lamentations 5 is filled with these questions. The people of Judah were not just grieving . . . they were confused. They wondered if God saw them, if God remembered them—if God still cared. Their lament was raw and honest. It did not hide behind theological platitudes. It spoke directly to God, asking for attention, mercy, and restoration.

### See Us

The opening verse was a plea for visibility: “Look, and see our disgrace!” (verse 1b). In seasons of suffering, many believers feel invisible. They wonder if God has turned away. The writer of Lamentations expresses this feeling without shame. He called on God to remember the people and their covenant. This was not arrogance; it was faith—faith that God’s promises still matter, even in the rubble.

### Oh, the Horror

The middle section of the chapter paints a grim picture. Homes had been taken by strangers. Widows and orphans filled the streets. Basic necessities were no longer

free. The people were weary, driven, and desperate. They had sought help from Egypt and Assyria, nations that could not save them. Their trust in human solutions had failed.

Jeremiah had warned against such alliances (see Jeremiah 2:18-19). Now, the people saw the futility of their choices. Lamentations 4:17b confesses, “We were watching eagerly for a nation that could not save.” This is a powerful reminder that restoration cannot come from political or economic power alone. It must come from God.

### Who’s at Fault?

The writer wrestled with blame. “Our ancestors sinned . . . and we bear their iniquities” (verse 7). This is a common human response—to blame the past. But the prophet eventually acknowledged, “Woe to us, for we have sinned!” (verse 16). Restoration begins with confession. The people must own their part in the brokenness.

The chapter continues with descriptions of violence, famine, and despair. Women were assaulted. Elders were dishonored. Children were burdened. Joy had vanished. The temple lay in ruins, and wild animals roamed Mount Zion. This was not just physical devastation but spiritual desolation.

*Lament is not weakness—  
it is worship.*

## Into Discipleship

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Lamentations 5 teaches us that discipleship includes lament. Faith is not always triumphant; it is sometimes tearful. In seasons of loss, we are invited to speak honestly with God. Lament is not weakness . . . it is worship. It is the act of our bringing our whole selves before God, including our grief, anger, and confusion.

## Honest Prayer

The people of Judah did not pretend as though everything was fine. They named their pain. They confessed their sins. They asked hard questions. This kind of prayer is courageous. It opens the door for healing. When we pray honestly, we invite God into our real lives, not just our ideal ones.

## Spiritual Restoration

The key verse—“Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored”—reminds us that healing begins with God. We may seek solutions in politics, medicine, or economics, but true restoration is spiritual. It is about

returning to God, renewing covenant, and rebuilding trust.

## Hope in Tension

The chapter ends with uncertainty. “Unless you have utterly rejected us . . .” This is not a lack of faith but recognition of mystery. Sometimes, we do not know what God will do. But we still pray. We still hope. We still ask for restoration.

Discipleship means walking with God through the ruins. It means trusting that even when joy has ceased and dancing has turned to mourning, God is still present. Restoration may not be immediate, but it is possible. And it begins with a plea: “See us, O Lord. Restore us.”

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, draw us back to you and renew our hearts, so that we may walk in your hope and healing. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- What parts of your life or community feel like they are in ruins?
- Have you ever prayed a lament? What did you say to God?
- Why is it important for us to name our pain honestly in prayer?
- What does it mean to be restored to God before being restored in other ways?
- How do you hold on to hope when restoration feels uncertain?
- What promises of God help you endure seasons of grief or loss?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Writing a Personal Lament

Invite participants to write their own lament, following the structure of Lamentations 5. Encourage honesty, naming grief, confusion, and hope. Share in small groups, if comfortable.

## Activity 2: Restoration Mapping

Create a visual map of areas in life or community that need restoration—spiritual, relational, emotional, physical. Discuss what restoration might look like and what steps could begin the process.

## Activity 3: Scripture Reflection Circle

Read Romans 8:35-39 aloud. Reflect on what it means that “nothing can separate us from the love of God.” How does this promise speak to the themes of Lamentations?

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## Sources and Resources

**Scriptures:** Lamentations 5; Jeremiah 2:18-19; 4:17; Romans 8:35-39;  
2 Chronicles 35:25 (Jeremiah’s lament for Josiah)



Scan for *The Risk of Being Woke*  
by Curtiss Paul DeYoung

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## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Fourth Sunday of Easter / Week of 4/25/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of April 19, 2026

### Sunday, April 19 (*Third Sunday of Easter*)

Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24;  
John 10:11-18

### Monday, April 20

Psalm 118:1-18; 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Acts 7:1-8

### Tuesday, April 21

Psalm 118:19-29; 1 Samuel 1:21-2:11;  
Acts 7:9-16

### Wednesday, April 22

Psalm 121; 1 Samuel 2:12-26; Acts 7:17-34

### Thursday, April 23

Psalm 124; 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a; Acts 7:35-8:4

### Friday, April 24

Psalm 125; 1 Samuel 4:1b-18; Acts 8:5-25

### Saturday, April 25

Psalm 126; 1 Samuel 5:1-6:21; Acts 8:26-40



# SPEAKING TRUTH BOLDLY

## *Prophetic Courage in Action*

*Micaiah said, “As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak.”*  
(1 KINGS 22:14)

The story of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 is an example of prophetic integrity in the face of political pressure. King Ahab of Israel, known for his corruption and idolatry, sought to reclaim the city of Ramoth-Gilead from the king of Aram. Before going to battle, Ahab consulted four hundred court prophets, all of whom assured him of victory. Their message was unanimous and suspiciously convenient.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore the prophetic courage of Micaiah in speaking truth to power.
- To reflect on the risks and responsibilities of delivering God’s message in the face of opposition.
- To consider how Christians today are called to confront injustice with integrity and boldness.

### 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28 (NRSV)

15 When he had come to the king, the king said to him, “Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?” He answered him, “Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.” 16 But the king said to him, “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?” 17 Then Micaiah said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the LORD said, “These have no master; let each

one go home in peace.” 18 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favorable about me, but only disaster?” 19 Then Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him. 20 And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ Then one said one thing, and another said another, 21 until a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ 22 ‘How?’ the LORD asked him. He replied, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then the LORD said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it.’ 23 So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you.” . . . 26 The king of Israel then ordered, “Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king’s son, 27 and say, ‘Thus says the king: Put this fellow in prison, and feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I come in peace.’” 28 Micaiah said, “If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me.” And he said, “Hear, you peoples, all of you!”

## Into the Scripture

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Jehoshaphat, king of Judah and Ahab’s ally, sensed the lack of authenticity and asked for a prophet of the Lord. Ahab reluctantly mentioned Micaiah, whom he disliked because “he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster” (verse 8b). Micaiah was summoned and initially echoed the court prophets, but with evident sarcasm. When pressed, he revealed the true vision that God gave him: Israel scattered like sheep without a shepherd, a metaphor for Ahab’s impending death.

Micaiah then shared a startling heavenly scene: God asked the heavenly host who would entice Ahab to go into battle and fall. A spirit volunteered to be a “lying spirit” in the mouths of the prophets. This vision raised questions, but its purpose was clear: God’s judgment on Ahab was certain, and the false prophets were part of that judgment.

Despite the warning, Ahab chose to imprison Micaiah and proceeded with the battle. He disguised himself, hoping to avoid death, but was struck by a random arrow and died. The prophecy was fulfilled, and Micaiah’s truth telling was vindicated.

This passage challenges us to consider the cost of truth. Micaiah spoke what God commanded, knowing it would lead to punishment. His courage stood in contrast to the court prophets who prioritized comfort over conviction. The story invites us to ask this: What does it mean to speak truth boldly in our own time?

## Into the Lesson

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### Payday Someday

The story of Ahab and Jezebel is one of delayed but inevitable judgment. Their crimes, especially the murder of Naboth, seemed to go unpunished for a time. But

God's justice, as proclaimed by Elijah and later confirmed by Micaiah, was not forgotten. The phrase "Payday Someday," popularized by preacher R. G. Lee, captures this truth: sin may appear to escape consequence, but God's justice will prevail.

This theme resonates today. Injustice may persist, but Scripture assures us that God sees, remembers, and acts. Micaiah's role in this narrative was crucial. He was the voice of truth in a sea of deception. His words were not popular, but they were faithful.

### What I Want to Hear

Ahab's court prophets told him what he wanted to hear. Their loyalty was to the throne, not to God. Jehoshaphat's insistence on hearing from a true prophet reveals a deeper wisdom: discernment requires listening beyond flattery.

Micaiah's sarcastic initial response—"Go up and triumph" (verse 15b)—is a mirror to the king's expectations. But when pressed, he delivered God's message: defeat and death. The metaphor of scattered sheep is a common prophetic image for failed leadership. Ezekiel and other prophets used it to critique rulers who neglected their people.

Micaiah's courage is evident. He risked imprisonment and possibly death to speak truth. His example challenges us to consider our own prophetic witness. Are we willing to speak truth, even when it is unpopular or dangerous?

### A Lying Spirit

Micaiah's vision of the heavenly court is provocative. It suggests that God permits deception as part of judgment. This raises questions, especially in light of James 1:13, which states that God does not tempt anyone to sin.

The passage is not a literal blueprint for divine behavior but a symbolic portrayal of



God's sovereignty. Ahab's downfall was not caused by God's deception but by his own refusal to listen. The lying spirit represents the consequences of rejecting truth.

Ahab's character was consistent throughout the narrative. He ignored Elijah, manipulated others, and disregarded Micaiah. His downfall was not arbitrary but the result of persistent rebellion. The vision underscores that judgment is not random; it is rooted in moral failure.

### We'll See

Micaiah's final words are a challenge: "If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me" (verse 28a). He invited the people to witness the outcome. His prophecy was not vague—it was testable. When Ahab died in battle, Micaiah's truth was confirmed.

Rather than repent, Ahab imprisoned Micaiah and proceeded with his plan. His decision to disguise himself revealed his fear and lack of integrity. He hoped to escape judgment, but God's word proved true.

This moment is a reminder that silencing truth does not change reality. Micaiah's imprisonment did not negate his message. Truth, even when suppressed, will rise.

*Speaking truth is not always safe,  
but it is always sacred.*

# Into Discipleship

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**M**icaiah's story reminds us that speaking truth is not always safe, but it is always sacred. In a world where power often demands affirmation, the voice of God may sound like dissent.

## Speaking Truth to Power

Disciples are called to speak truth in love, even when it challenges authority. Whether confronting injustice, racism, corruption, or spiritual compromise, our witness must be rooted in God's Word. Like Micaiah, we must say, "Whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak."

## Risk and Integrity

Micaiah risked imprisonment to remain faithful. His integrity was not for sale. Discipleship requires similar courage. We

may face rejection, criticism, or loss, but our calling is to truth, not comfort.

## Justice and Repentance

The story of Ahab and Jezebel is a warning: ignoring God's Word leads to destruction. But it is also an invitation. Repentance is always possible. God's justice is not vindictive but restorative. When we turn from sin and seek mercy, restoration begins.

## Modern Prophetic Witness

Today, prophetic voices are needed in every sphere—church, government, education, and community. Silence in the face of injustice is complicity. Disciples must speak, act, and live in ways that reflect God's justice and love.

Micaiah's story ends with vindication. His truth was proven. But more importantly, his faithfulness endured. He did not speak to be right; he spoke to be faithful. That is the heart of discipleship.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, give us the courage to speak your truth with love and integrity, even when it costs us. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

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- Have you ever had to speak truth to someone in authority? What was the outcome?
- Why do you think Micaiah chose to speak truth, knowing the consequences?
- How do we discern between flattering voices and prophetic truth today?
- What does it mean to be a prophetic witness in your community?
- How can the church support those who speak truth in difficult contexts?
- What injustices do you see around you, and how might God be calling you to respond?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Prophetic Courage Reflection

Invite participants to write about a time when they spoke truth in a difficult situation. What did they risk? What did they learn? Share in small groups.

### Activity 2: Role-play: Speaking Truth to Power

Create scenarios where participants must speak truth to a fictional authority figure (e.g., a boss, pastor, or politician). Practice using Scripture and compassion to guide the conversation.

### Activity 3: Justice Mapping

Identify areas of injustice in your community. Create a map or list of issues. Discuss how the church or individuals might respond prophetically and faithfully.

## Sources and Resources

**Scriptures:** 1 Kings 22; Ezekiel 34:2-3 (Shepherd imagery); James 1:13 (God and temptation); 1 Kings 21:25 (Ahab's character); Romans 8:35-39 (Assurance of God's love)

**Sermon:** "Payday Someday" by R. G. Lee:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_BZepT-czgU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BZepT-czgU)



Scan for The Risk of Being Woke  
by Curtiss Paul DeYoung

## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Fifth Sunday of Easter / Week of 5/2/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of April 26, 2026

### Sunday, April 26 (*Fourth Sunday of Easter*)

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21;  
John 15:1-8

### Monday, April 27

Psalm 130; 1 Samuel 7:3-17; Acts 9:1-22

### Tuesday, April 28

Psalm 132; 1 Samuel 8:1-22; Acts 9:23-31

### Wednesday, April 29

Psalm 145:1-7; 1 Samuel 9:1-14; Acts 9:32-43

### Thursday, April 30

Psalm 145:8-21; 1 Samuel 9:15-10:1;  
Acts 10:1-23

### Friday, May 1

Psalm 146; 1 Samuel 10:17-27; Acts 10:23-33

### Saturday, May 2

Psalm 147:1-11; 1 Samuel 11:1-15;  
Acts 10:34-48

## JOURNEYS

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS • MAY 3



# SHAPED BY TRUTH

*Authentic Worship and Renewal*

*Those who err in spirit will come to understanding, and those who grumble will accept instruction. (ISAIAH 29:24)*

Isaiah 29 contains a prophetic call to spiritual renewal in the midst of political instability and national crisis. The people of Judah, facing the looming threat of Assyrian invasion, continued to gather for worship, recite liturgies, and perform religious rituals. Yet, Isaiah saw through the surface. He discerned that their worship had become hollow, an echo of tradition rather than a living encounter with God. The prophet's message was clear: God is not impressed by empty words or rote performance. Worship without sincerity is not only ineffective, but also offensive.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore Isaiah's prophetic critique of empty worship and spiritual arrogance.
- To reflect on how humility and repentance open the door to restoration and justice.
- To consider how Christians today can speak truth boldly and live faithfully in a culture that often trivializes the sacred.

### Isaiah 29:13-24 (NRSVUE)

13 The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me and their worship of me is a human

commandment learned by rote, 14 so I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden. 15 Woe to those who hide a plan too deep for the LORD, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, “Who sees us? Who knows us?” 16 You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall the thing made say of its maker, “He did not make me,” or the thing formed say of the one who formed it, “He has no understanding”? 17 Shall not Lebanon in a very little while become a fruitful field and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest? 18 On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and freed from gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. 19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. 20 For the tyrant shall be no more, and the scoffer shall cease to be; all those alert to do evil shall be cut off— 21 those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit, who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate and undermine justice for the one in the right. 22 Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: “No longer shall Jacob be ashamed; no longer shall his face grow pale. 23 For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. 24 And those who err in spirit will come to understanding, and those who grumble will accept instruction.”

## Into the Scripture

This chapter unfolds in four distinct movements, each revealing a layer of Judah’s spiritual condition and God’s response:

### 1. A Rebuke of Hollow Worship (Verses 13-14)

God spoke through Isaiah to condemn the people’s superficial religiosity: “These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (verse 13). Their worship had become a learned behavior, a human commandment repeated by memory but disconnected from the heart. Isaiah’s critique is not about the form of worship but its substance. The

people said the right words, but they did not live them. Their rituals were no longer expressions of devotion—they were attempts to manipulate God.

Jesus later quoted this passage in Matthew 15:7-9 to confront the Pharisees, showing that this issue transcends time. Whether in ancient Judah or first-century Jerusalem, the danger of lip service remains. Isaiah’s rebuke invites us to examine our own worship practices. Are we truly present before God, or are we merely performing?

### 2. A Warning Against Arrogance (Verses 15-16)

Isaiah shifted from worship to leadership. The rulers of Judah believed that they could outmaneuver God. They formed secret alliances—particularly with Egypt—hoping

to protect themselves from Assyria without repenting or seeking divine guidance. They acted as if God could not see their plans, saying, “Who sees us? Who knows us?” (verse 15).

Isaiah responded with a metaphor: “Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?” (verse 16a). The image is striking. Human beings, formed by God, were attempting to instruct their Creator. This reversal of roles was not just foolish—it was dangerous. The leaders’ arrogance blinded them to the truth. Their wisdom would fail, and their discernment would be hidden. Isaiah warned that trusting in human strategy while ignoring divine instruction leads to ruin.

This warning remains relevant. When believers dismiss Scripture as impractical or outdated, they echo the arrogance of Judah’s leaders. Isaiah reminds us that God’s wisdom is not subject to human approval. The potter shapes the clay, not the other way around.

### 3. A Vision of Restoration (Verses 17-21)

After the rebuke and warning, Isaiah offered a vision of hope. God’s judgment is not the end but the beginning of renewal. The prophet describes a transformed world: Lebanon would become a fruitful field, the deaf would hear, the blind would see, and justice would be restored. The meek would rejoice, and the needy lifted up.

This vision is both physical and spiritual. It speaks of agricultural abundance and miraculous healing, but also of social justice. Tyrants would be removed, scoffers silenced, and those who manipulated the legal system would be cut off. Isaiah’s restoration was not just about comfort . . . it was about accountability. God’s reign brings healing and justice, lifting the humble and confronting the corrupt.

For the church, this vision is a call to action. We are invited to participate in God’s restorative work, advocating for the poor,

defending the oppressed, and celebrating the joy of those who depend on God.

### 4. A Promise of Transformation (Verses 22-24)

The chapter concludes with a promise: “No longer shall Jacob be ashamed” (verse 22b). The people who once resisted instruction would come to understanding. Those who grumbled would accept guidance. Isaiah envisioned a community transformed not just externally, but internally. Hearts would change. Worship would be sincere. Awe would return.

This transformation is rooted in God’s faithfulness. Just as God kept the promise to Abraham, God would redeem the descendants of Jacob. The people would see their children thrive and would sanctify God’s name. Isaiah’s final words are not just hopeful—they are redemptive. They affirm that failure can lead to renewal, and that God’s mercy is greater than human rebellion.

Isaiah’s message in chapter 29 is both confrontational and compassionate. He speaks truth boldly, exposing hypocrisy and arrogance, but he also points toward redemption and restoration. His words challenge us to examine our worship, our assumptions, and our willingness to be shaped by God. In a world that often values performance over authenticity, Isaiah calls us back to the heart of faith, a life surrendered to the Potter, shaped by grace, and committed to justice.

## Into the Lesson

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### Nothing Sacred

In today’s culture, sacred symbols are often commercialized or mocked. A satirical nativity scene featuring cats dressed as biblical characters may seem harmless,

but it raises questions about reverence. Isaiah faced a similar concern: the people of Jerusalem had reduced worship to ritual, using sacred practices to manipulate God rather than honor God.

The prophet's urgency is clear. He called the people back to genuine adoration and obedience. Worship is not a performance; it is a posture of the heart. When sacred traditions become tools for self-interest, they lose their power to transform.

## Lip Service

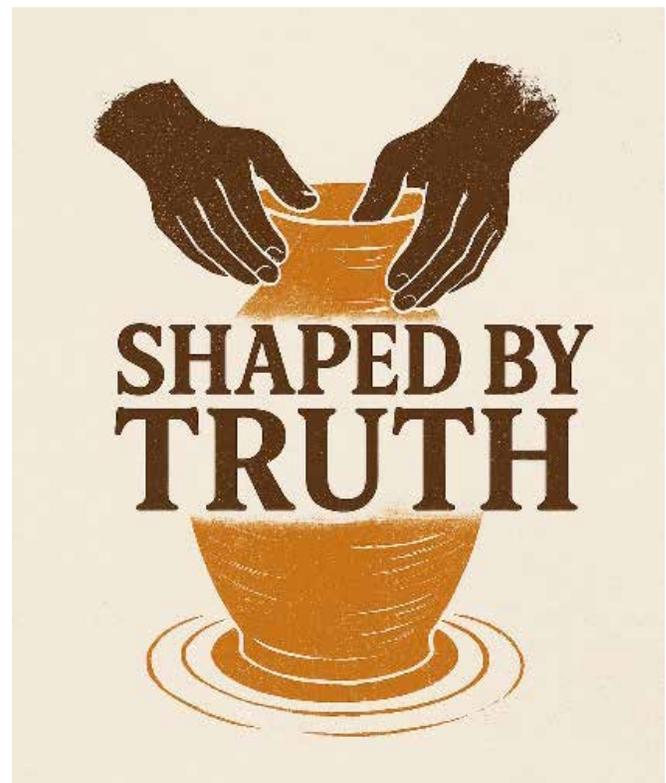
Isaiah 29:13 is a piercing indictment: "These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me." The prophet exposes the gap between words and devotion. Worship had become mechanical, a series of memorized phrases disconnected from lived faith.

Jesus echoes this critique in Matthew 15:7-9, condemning religious leaders who prioritize human traditions over divine commandments. Isaiah's concern is timeless. Even today, believers can recite prayers and sing hymns without engaging their hearts. The challenge is to align our words with our spirits to worship in truth.

## All Mixed Up

Isaiah warns that God will "do amazing things" (verse 14) that will shock the people. Their wisdom will fail, and their plans will unravel. The leaders of Judah had placed their hope in an alliance with Egypt, believing it would protect them from Assyria. But Isaiah insisted that only repentance and obedience could save them.

The metaphor of clay and potter is central. Human beings, formed by God, cannot presume to instruct the Creator. Yet, arrogance persists. Even today, some dismiss Jesus' teachings as impractical. Turning the other cheek, loving enemies, and pursuing



peace are often seen as naïve. But Isaiah reminds us that rejecting divine wisdom is not strength but folly.

## A New Day

Despite the judgment, Isaiah offers a vision of hope. The land will flourish, the deaf will hear, the blind will see, and the meek will rejoice. God's restoration is both physical and spiritual. Justice will be restored, and those who pervert the legal system will be removed.

This is a holistic vision of redemption. God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. The reign of God brings healing and accountability. Christians are called to advocate for both, celebrating blessings and confronting injustice.

## No Longer Ashamed

The chapter ends with a promise: the people would no longer be ashamed. They would see their children thrive and would stand in awe of God. Those who once resisted instruction

would embrace it. Isaiah affirmed that failure can lead to transformation. When human plans collapse, God's purpose can prevail.

This is a message of grace. Personal, communal, and national failure can become the soil for renewal. When we humble ourselves, God lifts us up. When we stop trying to mold God to our image and allow God to shape us, we find peace.

*The clay does not instruct the potter.  
Discipleship requires surrender.*

## Into Discipleship

Isaiah's prophetic voice calls us to discipleship marked by humility, sincerity, and bold truth telling. In a world that often trivializes the sacred and elevates self-interest, we are invited to live differently.

### Authentic Worship

Discipleship begins with worship that engages the heart. It is not enough to say

the right words; we must live them. True worship transforms us, aligning our desires with God's will.

### Prophetic Courage

Isaiah spoke truth boldly, even when it challenged the powerful. Disciples are called to do the same. Whether confronting injustice, hypocrisy, or spiritual complacency, we must speak with clarity and compassion.

### Humility Before God

The clay does not instruct the potter. Discipleship requires surrender. We must trust that God's wisdom exceeds our own and be willing to follow even when the path is difficult.

### Hope in Restoration

Isaiah's vision reminds us that failure is not the end. When we repent and return to God, restoration is possible. Discipleship is a journey of transformation from arrogance to awe, from lip service to love.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*God of truth and mercy, shape our hearts with your wisdom, that we may worship you sincerely, walk humbly, and live boldly for justice. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

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- Have you ever found yourself going through the motions in worship? What helped you reconnect?
- What does it mean to give God more than lip service?
- How do you respond when Scripture challenges your assumptions?
- What are some ways that our culture trivializes the sacred? How should Christians respond?
- How can the church advocate for both healing and justice in the world?
- Have you experienced personal or communal failure that led to spiritual growth?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Worship Reflection Journal

Invite participants to reflect on their worship practices. What rituals feel meaningful? What feels routine? Encourage journaling about ways to deepen your/their engagement with God.

### Activity 2: Clay-and-Potter Visualization

Provide clay or modeling material. Ask participants to shape something while reflecting on Isaiah's metaphor. Discuss what it means to be shaped by God rather than trying to shape God.

### Activity 3: Justice and Restoration Mapping

Create a visual map of areas in society where justice is needed and where restoration is possible. Discuss how the church can be involved in both.

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## Sources and Resources

**Satirical Nativity ad:** *Parade Magazine*, June 14, 2020

**Scriptures:** Isaiah 29; Matthew 15:3-9 (Jesus on lip service);  
Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount)



Scan for *Hiding God's Word  
in Our Hearts* by  
Marvin A. McMickle

## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Sixth Sunday of Easter / Week of 5/9/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary”

Week of May 3, 2026

### **Sunday, May 3 (*Fifth Sunday of Easter*)**

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6;  
John 15:9-17

### **Monday, May 4**

Psalm 148; 1 Samuel 12:1-25; Acts 11:1-18

### **Tuesday, May 5**

Psalm 149; 1 Samuel 13:5-18; Acts 11:19-30

### **Wednesday, May 6**

Psalm 150; 1 Samuel 15:1-3, 7-25; Acts 12:1-17

### **Thursday, May 7**

Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47 or Psalm 93;  
Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

### **Friday, May 8**

Psalm 113; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Acts 13:1-12

### **Saturday, May 9**

Psalm 122; 1 Samuel 16:14–17:11;  
Acts 13:13-25

## JOURNEYS

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS • MAY 10



# THE CONSEQUENCES OF GIVING CHALLENGING ADVICE

### *Integrity in Leadership*

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I tell you, you will put me to death, will you not? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me.” (JEREMIAH 38:15)

Jeremiah 38:14-23 presents one of the most poignant and emotionally charged episodes in the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. The scene unfolded in the shadow of impending catastrophe: Babylon’s armies were encamped around Jerusalem, and the city’s destruction was no longer a distant threat—it was imminent.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore the tension between truth telling and self-preservation in spiritual leadership.
- To examine Jeremiah’s prophetic integrity in the face of political pressure and personal danger.
- To reflect on the cost of giving godly counsel and the risks of ignoring divine guidance.
- To consider how discipleship calls us to speak truth even when it is unwelcome.

## Jeremiah 38:14-23 (NRSVUE)

14 King Zedekiah sent for the prophet Jeremiah and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, “I have something to ask you; do not hide anything from me.” 15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I tell you, you will put me to death, will you not? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me.” 16 So King Zedekiah swore an oath in secret to Jeremiah, “As the LORD lives, who gave us our lives, I will not put you to death or hand you over to these men who seek your life.” 17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will only surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. 18 But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be handed over to the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand.” 19 King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, for I might be handed over to them, and they would abuse me.” 20 Jeremiah said, “That will not happen. Just obey the voice of the LORD in what I say to you, and it shall go well with you, and your life shall be spared. 21 But if you are determined not to surrender, this is what the LORD has shown me: 22 a vision of all the women remaining in the house of the king of Judah being led out to the officials of the king of Babylon and saying, ‘Your trusted friends have seduced you and have overcome you. Now that your feet are stuck in the mud, they desert you.’ 23 All your wives and your children shall be led out to the Chaldeans, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand but shall be seized by the king of Babylon, and this city shall be burned with fire.”

### Into the Scripture

The people were anxious, the leaders were divided, and the king—Zedekiah—was desperate. Installed by Babylon as a puppet monarch, Zedekiah found himself trapped between competing political factions, the expectations of his people, and the terrifying reality of divine judgment. In a moment of vulnerability, he summoned Jeremiah for a secret meeting, hoping the prophet might offer a divine loophole to

escape the consequences of rebellion and poor leadership.

Jeremiah, however, was not a court prophet seeking favor or safety. His allegiance was not to earthly rulers but to the sovereign God of Israel. He had already endured imprisonment, humiliation, and threats for proclaiming God’s truth. He had been thrown into a cistern, left to die, and rescued only through the intervention of a foreign servant. Yet, despite the abuse and rejection, Jeremiah remained steadfast. When Zedekiah called him, Jeremiah did not

soften the message. He did not offer false hope or political compromise. Instead, he delivered the same divine directive he had proclaimed all along: surrender to Babylon was the only path to survival. Resistance would bring ruin not only to Zedekiah personally, but also to his family, his court, and the entire city of Jerusalem.

This passage reveals the cost of prophetic ministry. Jeremiah was a solitary figure of integrity in a world of compromise. He knew that speaking the truth may provoke anger, retaliation, or even death. He also knew that his words may fall on deaf ears. Yet, he spoke not out of bitterness or self-righteousness, but out of obedience to God and love for his people. His courage and clarity were a stark contrast to Zedekiah's indecision and fear. The king was torn between the truth he heard and the consequences he dreaded. He feared betrayal by his own officials more than he feared the judgment of God. His inability to act decisively became a tragic flaw that led to devastating consequences.

Jeremiah's message was not merely a pronouncement of doom; it was a call to repentance, humility, and surrender—not to Babylon as a political power, but to God's sovereign will. The prophet offered a vision of mercy: if Zedekiah obeyed, then his life would be spared, his family protected, and the city preserved. But if he refused, then destruction was inevitable. Jeremiah paints a vivid picture of what would happen if the king continued to resist: his wives and children would be taken captive, his trusted allies would abandon him, and he himself would be seized by the Babylonians. The city, once the spiritual heart of Judah, would be burned to the ground.

This haunting prophecy was a warning and lament. Jeremiah did not rejoice in the downfall of Jerusalem; he grieved it. His words are filled with sorrow for a people who had repeatedly rejected God's guidance.

He pleaded with Zedekiah to listen, to change course, to embrace the painful path of surrender as a means of redemption. But Zedekiah, paralyzed by fear and pride, could not bring himself to obey. His failure to act not only sealed his own fate but also ensured the suffering of countless others.

In this passage, we see the intersection of divine justice and human responsibility. God's judgment is not arbitrary but is the result of persistent disobedience and hardened hearts. Yet, even in judgment, there is an invitation to mercy. Jeremiah's prophetic voice reminds us that God always provides a way forward, even in the darkest moments. The question is whether we will have the courage to follow it.

Jeremiah 38:14-23 challenges us to consider the cost of truth telling, the weight of leadership, and the urgency of obedience. It asks us to reflect on our own responses to divine counsel: Do we listen when God speaks? Do we act when truth demands sacrifice? Do we trust God's discipline as a path to restoration? In the end, Jeremiah's story reminds us that prophetic courage, though costly, is essential for the healing of communities and the fulfillment of God's purposes.

## Into the Lesson

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Jeremiah's story speaks powerfully to the challenges of spiritual leadership in times of crisis. He is a model of integrity, refusing to compromise the truth for safety or popularity. His loyalty to God placed him at odds with political leaders and religious elites. Yet, he remained faithful, even when it cost him his freedom and reputation.

Zedekiah, by contrast, embodies the dangers of indecision and fear. He knew Jeremiah spoke the truth, but he could not bring himself to act on it. He was afraid of the princes who opposed surrender, afraid

of the people who had defected to Babylon, and ultimately afraid of losing power. His fear paralyzed him, and his inaction led to catastrophe.

This dynamic is not limited to ancient Judah. Today, leaders in churches, communities, and nations face similar pressures. The temptation to silence truth tellers, to prioritize comfort over conviction, and to avoid hard decisions is ever-present. Jeremiah's example challenges us to speak truth with courage, even when it is unpopular or dangerous.

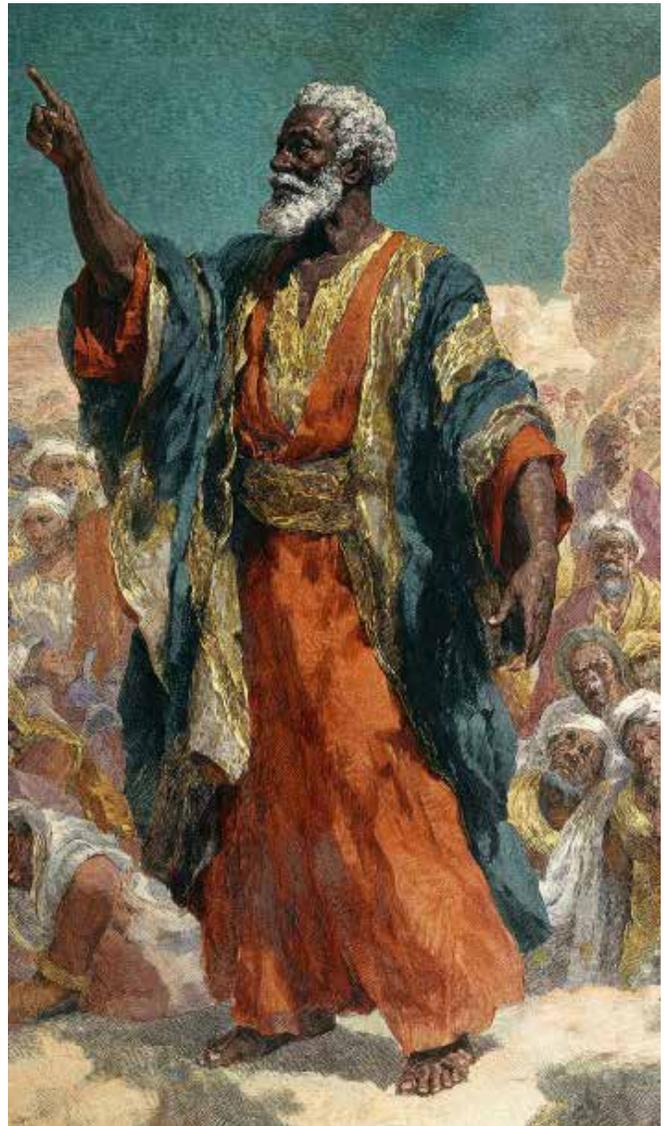
The lesson also highlights the cost of ignoring divine guidance. Zedekiah's refusal to heed Jeremiah's counsel resulted in devastating consequences. His family suffered, his city was destroyed, and he was blinded and taken captive. The tragedy could have been avoided if he had trusted God's word and acted with faith.

For believers, this story is a call to listen to prophetic voices, to seek God's will in difficult times, and to respond with obedience. It reminds us that God's discipline, though painful, is often a path to redemption. As Hebrews 12:6 reads, "The Lord disciplines those whom he loves." Discipline is not punishment but correction, meant to restore and renew.

*Discipleship is not about self-preservation but about faithfulness to God.*

## Into Discipleship

Jeremiah's encounter with King Zedekiah offers insights into the nature of discipleship—what it means to follow God faithfully in a world that often resists truth, accountability, and transformation. Discipleship is not merely about personal



piety or religious observance; it is a way of life marked by courage, conviction, and compassion. Jeremiah's example challenges us to embrace the difficult dimensions of spiritual leadership and faithful witness.

### I. Discipleship Requires Courageous Truth Telling

Jeremiah stood before Zedekiah knowing that his words could cost him his life. Yet, he spoke the truth without compromise. This kind of courage is central to discipleship. Following Christ means proclaiming God's Word even when it is unpopular, inconvenient, or dangerous. It means resisting the

temptation to soften the message to avoid conflict. In a culture that often values comfort over conviction, discipleship calls us to be prophetic voices, truth tellers who speak with love but without fear.

## 2. Discipleship Involves Risk

Jeremiah's ministry was marked by rejection, imprisonment, and threats. Giving godly counsel is not always welcomed; it can strain relationships, provoke anger, and lead to isolation. Yet, discipleship is not about self-preservation but about faithfulness to God. Jesus warned his followers that they would face persecution for his name's sake (see Matthew 10:22). To be a disciple is to accept the risks that come with standing for truth, knowing that our reward is not in human approval but in divine affirmation.

## 3. Discipleship Means Trusting God's Discipline

Jeremiah's message to Zedekiah was not just about political strategy . . . it was about spiritual surrender. He called the king to accept defeat as a form of divine discipline. This is a hard word, but a necessary one. Discipleship involves trusting that God's correction is for our good. Hebrews 12:11 reminds us that "discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." Like Jeremiah, we must learn to see discipline not as punishment, but as a pathway to restoration.

## 4. Discipleship Calls for Integrity

Throughout his ministry, Jeremiah refused to compromise. He did not bend to political pressure or popular opinion. His loyalty to God was unwavering. Discipleship demands this kind of integrity, a commitment to live according to God's standards even when

others urge us to conform. Integrity means being the same person in private as we are in public. It means choosing righteousness over convenience, and truth over expediency. In a world full of compromise, discipleship calls us to be people of character.

## 5. Discipleship Is Persistent

Jeremiah did not give up on Zedekiah, even after being rejected and abused. He continued to offer counsel, hoping for repentance. This persistence is a hallmark of discipleship. We are called to love others enough to keep speaking truth, even when it seems futile. Galatians 6:9 encourages us thusly: "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up." Discipleship means staying the course, trusting that God is at work even when we cannot see the results.

## 6. Discipleship Advocates for the Vulnerable

Jeremiah warned Zedekiah that his choices would harm his family. He was concerned not only with the king's fate but also with the well-being of the innocent. Discipleship involves protecting the vulnerable and speaking out against injustice. It means recognizing that our decisions have consequences for others, especially those who lack power or voice. Jesus consistently sided with the marginalized, the poor, the sick, and the outcast. To follow him is to do the same, advocating for justice and mercy in our communities.

In practical terms, discipleship might look like the following:

- Offering biblical counsel to friends and family, even when it's hard or unwelcome.
- Standing firm in faith when pressured to compromise values or beliefs.
- Trusting God's plan during seasons of discipline, hardship, or uncertainty.

- Advocating for justice in policies and practices that affect the vulnerable.
  - Mentoring others in spiritual growth, ethical decision making, and leadership.
  - Reflecting deeply on how our choices impact those around us, especially the powerless.
- Jeremiah's story reminds us that discipleship is not easy, but it is essential.

It is a call to live with courage, compassion, and conviction. It challenges us to be faithful witnesses in a world that often resists truth, and to trust that God is working through our obedience to bring healing, justice, and transformation. Discipleship is not just about following Jesus—it is about becoming more like him, even when the path is difficult.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, give us the courage to speak your truth with love, even when it is hard . . . and the faith to follow your will, even when it costs us. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- Have you ever been asked for advice that you knew would be rejected? How did you respond?
- What fears keep people from speaking the truth in love?
- How do you discern when to speak hard truths and when to remain silent?
- What are the risks of giving advice based on Scripture? What are the risks of withholding it?
- How does Jeremiah's story challenge your understanding of spiritual leadership?
- Can you think of modern examples where leaders ignored wise counsel and suffered consequences?
- What does this passage teach us about the role of fear in decision making?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Speaking Truth in Love

- Reflect on a time when you had to give difficult advice.
- Write a short journal entry or prayer about the experience.
- Share with your group how you balanced truth and compassion.

## Activity 2: Discipleship and Discipline

- Read Hebrews 12:6 and Galatians 6:9.
- Create a list of ways that God’s discipline has shaped your spiritual growth.
- Discuss how you can support others who are going through seasons of correction.

### Sources and Resources

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Scan for *The Polished King*  
by Joseph Evans

### Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Seventh Sunday of Easter / Week of 5/16/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of May 10, 2026

#### **Sunday, May 10 (*Sixth Sunday of Easter*)**

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13;  
John 17:6-19

#### **Monday, May 11**

Psalm 14; 1 Samuel 18:6-16; Acts 14:8-18

#### **Tuesday, May 12**

Psalm 16; 1 Samuel 19:1-18; Acts 14:19-28

#### **Wednesday, May 13**

Psalm 17; 1 Samuel 20:1-17; Acts 15:1-18

#### **Thursday, May 14**

Psalm 18:1-20; 1 Samuel 20:18-42;  
Acts 15:19-35

#### **Friday, May 15**

Psalm 18:21-50; 1 Samuel 22:1-23;  
Acts 15:36–16:5

#### **Saturday, May 16**

Psalm 27; 1 Samuel 23:1-14; Acts 16:6-15



# GOD CREATES LIFE

*Celebrating the Creator's Design*

God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.” (GENESIS 1:14)

Genesis 1:14-25 continues the majestic narrative of Creation, focusing on days 4-6. These verses describe the formation of the heavenly lights—the sun, moon, and stars—and the creation of living creatures in the waters, in the skies, and on the land. The text emphasizes divine intentionality: God speaks, creation responds, and the result is declared good. This pattern of command, execution, and affirmation reveals a God who is both powerful and purposeful.

## Lesson Objectives

- To explore what Genesis 1:14-25 teaches about God as Creator and the theological significance of creation.
- To appreciate the beauty, order, and interdependence of creation as a reflection of divine wisdom.
- To consider how the doctrine of creation shapes Christian discipleship and responsibility toward the environment.

## Genesis 1:14-25 (NRSVUE)

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15 and let

them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 16 God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. 20 And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. 24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

## Into the Scripture

This passage proclaims that creation is neither random nor chaotic but ordered and meaningful. The repeated refrain “And God said” underscores the creative potency of divine speech. Unlike human words, which often fail to accomplish their intent, God’s word is performative—it brings reality into being. This anticipates the New Testament’s affirmation in John 1:1-3 that the Word was present at Creation, linking Genesis to Christ as the Logos through whom all things were made.

The sun and moon, central to ancient cosmologies, are demythologized in Genesis. They are not divine beings but created instruments serving God’s purposes. Their role in marking seasons, days, and years establishes a rhythm for life and worship. Israel’s festivals, tied to lunar and solar cycles, remind the community that time itself is a gift from God. This ordering of

time contrasts sharply with cultures that viewed celestial bodies as capricious powers controlling human destiny. Genesis liberates humanity from fear of astral determinism by subordinating these lights to the Creator’s sovereignty.

The creatures of sea, sky, and land reflect God’s delight in diversity and abundance. Each is blessed with the capacity to reproduce, signaling that life is dynamic and expansive. This blessing of fruitfulness anticipates covenantal themes later in Scripture, where multiplication becomes a sign of divine favor. The goodness of creation challenges dualistic tendencies that devalue the material world. Here, matter matters because God made it and pronounced it good. This affirmation grounds Christian ethics in respect for the physical order, calling believers to stewardship rather than exploitation.

Historically, Genesis 1 emerged in a milieu saturated with mythologies that portrayed Creation as the outcome of cosmic



conflict. Babylonian texts like the Enuma Elish depict gods battling sea monsters to impose order. Genesis offers a radical alternative: creation unfolds peacefully through divine speech. Even the “great sea creatures,” often feared as symbols of chaos, are domesticated within God’s good design. This polemic reassured Israel that their God reigns supreme over all forces, natural or supernatural. The stars, associated with fate in pagan thought, are here mere luminaries, stripped of power to dictate human destiny.

The passage also anticipates humanity’s vocation as stewards of creation. Though humans were not yet introduced, the blessing given to animals foreshadowed an interconnected web of life. Creation is relational, sustained by divine command and human responsibility. This interdependence mirrors the communal nature of God’s people and later the body of Christ. Just as ecosystems thrive through mutuality, so discipleship flourishes through shared care for the earth.

Practically, these verses invite us to recover wonder and responsibility. In an age of ecological crisis, Genesis calls us to resist narratives of domination and embrace stewardship. The sun and moon still govern rhythms of life; their constancy reminds us of God’s faithfulness. The abundance of species testifies to divine creativity, even as biodiversity loss warns of human negligence.

To confess God as Creator is to commit to practices that honor creation—reducing waste, protecting habitats, and advocating for justice where environmental harm disproportionately affects the vulnerable.

Genesis 1:14-25 is not only an ancient text but also a living summons. It beckons us to see the world as sacrament, a visible sign of invisible grace. Every sunrise, every bird in flight, every ripple in the sea whispers the goodness of God. To ignore this is to miss a dimension of discipleship that is as old as Scripture and as urgent as today’s headlines.

## Into the Lesson

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This lesson invites us to marvel at the grandeur of creation and to recognize its spiritual depth. The ordered sequence of days reflects divine wisdom, challenging modern assumptions that faith and science are incompatible. Scientific discoveries about the cosmos and biodiversity need not diminish wonder; rather, they can deepen our appreciation of God’s artistry.

Consider the sun and moon. Ancient peoples often feared or worshiped these lights, yet Genesis presents them as servants of God’s purposes. Today, we understand their roles in photosynthesis, tides, and climate, processes essential for life. Such knowledge should inspire gratitude and humility, reminding us that creation’s complexity exceeds human mastery.

The creation of birds and sea creatures on the fifth day and land animals on the sixth day underscores the richness of life. The phrase “of every kind” celebrates biodiversity, which modern ecology affirms as vital for planetary health. When species vanish due to human negligence, the harmony envisioned in Genesis is disrupted. Thus, this text calls us to ecological responsibility as an expression of faith.

The goodness of creation challenges dualistic worldviews that demean the material order. Christianity affirms that matter matters because God made it and declared it good. This conviction shapes ethics: how we treat the earth reflects how we honor its Creator. Pollution, exploitation, and indifference contradict the divine blessing pronounced over creation.

Practically, this lesson speaks to contemporary crises. Climate change, deforestation, and species extinction are not merely scientific issues . . . they are spiritual concerns. To confess God as Creator is to commit to creation care. Worship that praises the Creator while ignoring creation's plight is incomplete. Discipleship must integrate doxology with ecology.

*To confess God as Creator is to commit to practices that honor creation.*

## Into Discipleship

Discipleship involves several dimensions: First, *wonder*. Ezra's lament in another context reminds us that spiritual vitality begins with honest emotion. Similarly,

Genesis calls us to awe. In a culture of distraction, cultivating wonder through prayer, nature walks, and study nurtures gratitude.

Second, *responsibility*. Dominion (outlined in Genesis 1) is not domination but stewardship. Discipleship means managing resources wisely, advocating for environmental justice, and resisting consumerism that depletes the earth.

Third, *community*. Creation's interdependence mirrors the body of Christ. Just as ecosystems thrive through mutuality, so the church flourishes through shared gifts. Discipleship is communal, inviting collaboration in caring for both people and planet.

Fourth, *hope*. The refrain "And God saw that it was good" resounds even amid ecological despair. Christian hope affirms that God's purpose for creation is restoration, not ruin. This hope energizes action, sustaining efforts for sustainability and justice.

Fifth, *integration*. Spiritual disciplines—prayer, fasting, worship—should connect with creation care. For example, fasting from excess consumption or incorporating prayers for the environment into liturgy embodies holistic discipleship.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Creator God, awaken in us a sense of wonder and responsibility, that we may honor your handiwork through faithful care of the earth and all its creatures. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

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- How does Genesis 1:14-25 challenge ancient and modern misconceptions about creation?
- In what ways do the sun and moon serve spiritual purposes beyond physical functions?
- How can scientific knowledge enhance rather than hinder faith in God as Creator?
- What practical steps can Christians take to honor the goodness of creation today?
- How does the concept of interdependence in creation inform our understanding of community and discipleship?
- Where do you see tension between dominion and stewardship in contemporary culture?

### ACTIVITIES

#### **Activity 1: Creation and Praise**

Take a walk outdoors or view images of nature. Write a short prayer or poem praising God for specific aspects of creation. Share with the group.

#### **Activity 2: Interdependence Mapping**

In small groups, create a diagram showing connections between elements of creation (e.g., sun, plants, animals, humans). Discuss how disrupting one link affects the whole.

#### **Activity 3: Ethical Action Plan**

Brainstorm practical ways that your community can care for creation—reducing waste, supporting conservation, advocating for policies. Commit to one action this week.

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## Sources and Resources

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Scan for *New Rules for Radicals*  
by Willard W. C. Ashley Sr.

## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Day of Pentecost / Week of 5/23/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of May 17, 2026

### **Sunday, May 17 (*Seventh Sunday of Easter*)**

Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

### **Monday, May 18**

Psalm 33; 1 Samuel 23:15-29; Acts 17:1-15

### **Tuesday, May 19**

Psalm 34; 1 Samuel 24:1-22; Acts 17:16-34

### **Wednesday, May 20**

Psalm 35; 1 Samuel 25:1-22; Acts 18:1-11

### **Thursday, May 21**

Psalm 36; 1 Samuel 25:23-44; Acts 18:12-28

### **Friday, May 22**

Psalm 40; 1 Samuel 26:1-25; Acts 19:1-10

### **Saturday, May 23**

Psalm 41; 1 Samuel 28:3-25; Acts 19:11-20



# GOD HEARS OUR CRY

*Faith Over Fear*

*“If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.”*

(NUMBERS 14:8)

Numbers 13:1–14:10a narrates a defining moment in Israel’s wilderness journey where faith and fear collide. God commanded Moses to send leaders from each tribe to explore Canaan, the land promised to their ancestors. This reconnaissance mission was not merely strategic; it tested whether the people would trust God’s provision or surrender to anxiety.

## Lesson Objectives

- To explore the historical and spiritual significance of Israel’s wilderness experience and its relevance for contemporary faith journeys.
- To examine the tension between divine promise and human fear, and how this tension shapes spiritual decision making.
- To encourage participants to identify personal and communal obstacles to trusting God and to develop practices that nurture courage and faith.
- To reflect on how God’s faithfulness in the past informs our confidence in God’s promises today.

## Numbers 13:1–14:10 (NRSVUE)

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send

a man, every one a leader among them.” 3 So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them leading men among the Israelites. 4 These were their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph (that is, from the tribe of Manasseh), Gaddi son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Machi. 16 These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua. 17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, “Go up there into the Negeb, and go up into the hill country, 18 and see what the land is like and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, 19 and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, 20 and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes. 21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. 22 They went up into the Negeb and came to Hebron, and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 And they came to the Wadi Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Wadi Eshcol because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there. 25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they reported to him and said, “We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large, and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country, and the Canaanites live by the sea and along the Jordan.” 30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.” 32 So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied

out, saying, “The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. 33 There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim), and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” . . . 1 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 So they said to one another, “Let us choose a captain and go back to Egypt.” 5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. 6 And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, “The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only, do not rebel against the LORD, and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.” 10 But the whole congregation threatened to stone them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.

## Into the Scripture

The scouts returned after forty days with a report that was both exhilarating and unsettling. They confirmed the land’s abundance, describing it as “flowing with milk and honey” (see 13:27; 14:8), a phrase that evokes covenantal hope and divine generosity. Yet, alongside this affirmation came a sobering reality: the inhabitants were strong, and their cities were fortified. The Land of Promise was also a land of challenge. This duality—gift and obstacle—became the crucible for Israel’s faith.

Joshua and Caleb emerged as voices of courage, urging confidence in God’s power: “If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us” (Numbers

14:8). Their words echoed the heartbeat of covenant spirituality: God’s promises were not nullified by human impossibility. But the majority’s fear spread like wildfire, infecting the congregation with despair. The people wept, grumbled, and even contemplated returning to Egypt, a tragic reversal that exposes the fragility of trust.

This passage invites us to wrestle with the tension between divine assurance and human anxiety. It asks hard questions: What happens when God’s promises collide with daunting realities? How do communities discern between prudent caution and paralyzing fear? Numbers 13–14 does not offer easy answers, but it does reveal a pattern: faith flourishes when anchored in God’s character, and fear dominates when fixated on human limitations. The narrative

challenges us to consider where we place our gaze—on giants or on God.

## Into the Lesson

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The Israelites stood on the threshold of promise, yet their hearts trembled. Why? Because fear often speaks louder than faith when giants loom large. Historically, this moment followed a series of divine interventions—deliverance from Egypt, provision in the wilderness, and covenant renewal at Sinai. Yet, proximity to past miracles does not guarantee present courage. The scouts' report was factual, but interpretation turned facts into fuel for panic. This dynamic is familiar: challenges in life—illness, financial strain, relational conflict—can eclipse our memory of God's past faithfulness.

This episode exposes the anatomy of fear. Fear distorts perspective, magnifies obstacles, and minimizes God's power. The people saw fortified cities but forgot the God who split the sea. They remembered giants but ignored grace. Joshua and Caleb's minority voices remind us that courage is not denial of reality but confidence in God's presence. Their words ("The LORD is with us; do not fear them" [14:9c]) echo through Scripture as a call to trust beyond sight. Faith is not naïve optimism; it is radical reliance on God's character.

*Faith is not naïve optimism; it is radical reliance on God's character.*

## Into Discipleship

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### Discipleship in the Wilderness

Numbers 13–14 reminds us that discipleship is not cultivated in comfort but forged in



uncertainty. Following God rarely unfolds as a straight path of ease; it is often a journey through deserts where trust is tested and faith is refined. The Israelites had witnessed astonishing miracles—plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, manna from heaven—yet these experiences did not inoculate them against fear. This sobering truth warns us that proximity to divine acts does not guarantee mature faith. Spiritual growth requires intentional practices—prayer, community, obedience—that anchor us when fear surges.

### Honest Lament and Bold Trust

Like the Israelites, we may voice complaints when life feels overwhelming. Scripture affirms that lament is not sin when it leads us toward God rather than away from God. Lament gives language to grief and confusion, but it must mature into trust. Joshua and Caleb model this progression. They acknowledge the reality of giants and fortified cities, yet they cling to God's promise. Discipleship invites us to do the same, naming reality while affirming God's reliability. Faith does not erase hardship; it reframes it through the lens of divine presence and power.

### Community as a Catalyst for Courage

Fear thrives in isolation, but faith flourishes in community. The Israelites' failure was

collective, and so is our call to resilience. How can our communities cultivate strength so that fear does not derail obedience? Mentoring relationships, corporate worship, and storytelling are vital. When we share

testimonies of God's faithfulness, we remind one another that giants are not ultimate and that God's promises endure. Discipleship is not a solo endeavor; it is a communal pilgrimage toward trust.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, when fear clouds our vision, help us to remember your promises and walk forward in faith, trusting that you are with us. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- What fears most often challenge your trust in God's promises?
- How does remembering God's past faithfulness help you face present uncertainties?
- Why do you think the majority report influenced the people more than Joshua's and Caleb's words?
- What practices can help shift our perspective from fear to faith?
- How does this passage speak to communal decision making in times of crisis?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: "Faith Versus Fear" Mapping

Create two columns labeled "Faith Responses" and "Fear Responses." List examples from Numbers 13–14 and from your own life. Discuss patterns and insights.

### Activity 2: Promise Journaling

Write down promises of God from Scripture and personal experiences of God's provision. Share in pairs or small groups.

### Activity 3: Role-play Debate

Divide into two groups: one representing the fearful majority, and the other representing Joshua and Caleb. Debate whether to enter the land. Reflect on what arguments felt persuasive and why.

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## Sources and Resources

Levine, Baruch A. *Numbers 1–20 (The Yale Anchor Bible Commentaries)*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993.

**Scriptures:** Numbers 13–14; Hebrews 11:1 (Faith defined); Deuteronomy 1:29-31 (God’s past deliverance); Joshua 1:6-9 (Courage commanded)



Scan for Crossing the Lines We  
Draw by Matthew Tennant

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## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Trinity Sunday / Week of 5/30/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of May 24, 2026

### **Sunday, May 24 (*Day of Pentecost*)**

Isaiah 6:1-8 and Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17;  
John 3:1-17

### **Monday, May 25**

Psalm 42; 1 Samuel 30:1-20; Acts 20:1-16

### **Tuesday, May 26**

Psalm 43; 1 Samuel 30:21-31; Acts 20:17-38

### **Wednesday, May 27**

Psalm 44; 2 Samuel 1:1-16; Acts 21:1-16

### **Thursday, May 28**

Psalm 45; 2 Samuel 1:17-27; Acts 21:17-36

### **Friday, May 29**

Psalm 46; 2 Samuel 2:1-11; Acts 21:37–22:21

### **Saturday, May 30**

Psalm 47; 2 Samuel 3:1-21; Acts 22:22–23:11



# GOD PROTECTS THE FAITHFUL

## *Rahab's Courage and God's Grace*

*[Rahab] said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you." (JOSHUA 2:9)*

Joshua 2 narrates a pivotal moment in Israel's conquest of Canaan where divine strategy intersects with human courage and unexpected grace. As Israel stood on the threshold of the Promised Land, Joshua sent two spies to assess the defenses of Jericho, a heavily fortified city that represented both a physical and symbolic barrier to the fulfillment of God's promise. Their covert mission led them not to a military outpost or a political ally, but to the

home of Rahab, a woman whose social status as a prostitute placed her on the margins of society, yet whose spiritual insight and strategic brilliance positioned her at the center of God's unfolding plan.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore Rahab's courageous actions and their impact on Israel's mission.
- To reflect on how God uses unexpected individuals to fulfill divine purposes.
- To consider the role of intelligence and faith in navigating challenges.

## Joshua 2:1–3:17 (NRSVUE)

1 Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and spent the night there. 2 The king of Jericho was told, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.” 3 Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out the whole land.” 4 But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. 5 And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them.” 6 She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. 7 So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. 8 Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof 9 and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land and that dread of you has fallen on us and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. 12 Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith 13 that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them and deliver our lives from death.” 14 The men said to her, “Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land.” 15 Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the outer side of the city wall and she resided within the wall itself. 16 She said to them, “Go toward the hill country, so that the pursuers may not come upon you. Hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned; then afterward you may go your way.” 17 The men said to her, “We will be released from this oath that you have made us swear to you 18 if we invade the land and you do not tie this crimson cord in the window through which you let us down and you do not gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your family. 19 If any of you go out of the doors of your house into the street, they shall be responsible for their own death, and we shall be innocent, but if a hand is laid upon any who are with you in the house, we shall bear the responsibility for their death.

20 But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be released from this oath that you made us swear to you.” 21 She said, “According to your words, so be it.” She sent them away, and they departed. Then she tied the crimson cord in the window. 22 They departed and went into the hill country and stayed there three days, until the pursuers returned. The pursuers had searched all along the way and found nothing. 23 Then the two men came down again from the hill country. They crossed over, came to Joshua son of Nun, and told him all that had happened to them. 24 They said to Joshua, “Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us.” . . . 1 Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. 2 At the end of three days, the officers went through the camp 3 and commanded the people, “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, 4 so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it.” 5 Then Joshua said to the people, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” 6 To the priests Joshua said, “Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on in front of the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went in front of the people. 7 The LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. 8 You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’” 9 Joshua then said to the Israelites, “Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God.” 10 Joshua said, “By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: 11 the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. 12 So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 13 When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, come to rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap.” 14 When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. 15 Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, 16 the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people

crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

## Into the Scripture

Rahab's home, built into the city wall, became a sanctuary for the spies. Her actions—hiding the men on her rooftop, misleading the king's soldiers with a calculated story, and negotiating a covenant for her family's protection—reveal a remarkable blend of courage, intelligence, and faith. Her confession, "I know that the LORD has given you the land" (2:9), was not merely a statement of fear or political calculation; it was a declaration of spiritual clarity. Rahab saw what many in Israel still struggled to grasp: that God's promises are trustworthy, and God's power was already at work.

This moment was rich with spiritual significance. Rahab, a Gentile and outsider, became a vessel of divine protection and a symbol of inclusive grace. Her story challenges assumptions about who God can use and affirms that faith is not confined by social status, ethnicity, or past mistakes. In Rahab, we see a woman who risked everything—her safety, her reputation, her future—because she believed in the sovereignty of a God she had only heard about. Her courage and conviction not only saved the spies but also set the stage for Israel's victory.

Rahab's legacy is profound. She is named in the genealogy of Jesus (see Matthew 1:5), honored in the hall of faith (see Hebrews 11:31), and praised for her works as evidence of living faith (see James 2:25). Her story reminds us that God often works through the unexpected—and that faith, when paired with courage and wisdom, can transform lives and shape history.

## Into the Lesson

Rahab's story challenges conventional expectations and invites us to reconsider how God works through unexpected people and circumstances. As a marginalized figure—a woman, a foreigner, and a prostitute—Rahab would have been dismissed by many in her society. Yet, in the unfolding drama of Israel's conquest, she became a central agent in God's redemptive plan. Her actions were bold and strategic: she hid the Israelite spies, misled the king's soldiers, and negotiated a covenant to protect her family. These choices, while ethically complex, served a higher purpose: preserving life and advancing the mission of God's people.

Rahab's deception raises important questions about morality and faith. Scripture does not ignore the ambiguity of her actions. Instead, it affirms her courage and faith. She is praised in the New Testament, not for her moral perfection but for her decisive alignment with God's purposes (see Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Her story reminds us that faith is not always tidy or conventional. Sometimes, it requires navigating difficult choices with wisdom, discernment, and trust in God's greater plan.

Rahab's intelligence and discernment were gifts that God used to protect God's people. Her ability to assess danger, formulate a plan, and execute it under pressure reflects a kind of spiritual leadership that transcends social norms. She demonstrates that faith is not passive; it is active, strategic, and courageous. In Rahab, we see that courage often involves risk, and

that faith may require stepping into morally gray areas for the sake of a greater good. Her story invites us to reflect on how God might be calling us to act boldly, even when the path is uncertain or the cost is high.

Moreover, Rahab's inclusion in the genealogy of Jesus (see Matthew 1:5) and her recognition in the "hall of faith" (see Hebrews 11) affirm that God's grace is radically inclusive. Her transformation from outsider to ancestor of the Messiah illustrates the redemptive power of faith. Rahab's story teaches us that God sees beyond labels and limitations, and that those who trust in God—regardless of background—can play a vital role in God's unfolding story.

*God sees beyond labels and limitations.*

## Into Discipleship

### Faith and Intelligence

Rahab's story is a compelling example of how faith and intelligence can work hand in hand to fulfill God's purposes. Her actions were not impulsive; they were calculated, thoughtful, and rooted in a deep awareness of the situation around her. She understood the political tension in Jericho, the fear surrounding the Israelites, and the urgency of the spies' mission. By sending the spies west into the hills, instructing them to hide for three days, and lowering them from her window—strategies that ensured their survival—Rahab demonstrated a wisdom that was both practical and spiritual. Her intelligence was not merely human cunning; it was a gift used in service of divine protection. In discipleship, we are called to cultivate such wisdom not only to understand God's Word but also to apply it with discernment in complex situations.



Faith is not blind; it is informed, strategic, and responsive to God's leading.

### Courage in Crisis

Rahab's courage stands out as one of the most striking elements of her story. She risked her life by defying the king's orders and aligning herself with the people of Israel. Her boldness was not born of recklessness but of conviction. She believed in the power and promise of Israel's God. In moments of crisis, faith often demands action that defies fear and challenges the status quo. Rahab's example reminds us that discipleship is not always safe or comfortable. It may require standing alone, speaking truth, or protecting others at personal cost. Her story calls us to embody a faith that is brave, resilient, and willing to act even when the outcome is uncertain.

### Community and Confirmation

When the spies returned to Joshua, their report echoed Rahab's earlier confession: "All the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us" (2:24b). This moment of confirmation was more than intelligence—it was spiritual affirmation. Rahab's insight had prepared the way for Israel's confidence in God's promise. In our own communities, we often seek signs that we are on the right path: testimonies, encouragement,

and outcomes that affirm our calling. These confirmations are not just emotional reassurances; they are spiritual markers that God is present and active. As we pursue

God's mission, we must listen for these affirmations and share them with others, strengthening the collective resolve to walk in faith.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, grant us the wisdom of Rahab, the courage to act in faith, and the trust to follow your purpose even when the path is uncertain. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

- What aspects of Rahab's story challenge or inspire you?
- How can intelligence and faith work together in discipleship?
- What signs of confirmation have you experienced in your spiritual journey?
- How do we navigate ethical dilemmas in pursuit of God's mission?
- In what ways can marginalized voices contribute to God's work in our communities?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: "Faith and Strategy" Role-play

**Objective:** Explore the intersection of faith and intelligence through Rahab's decision making.

**Instructions:** Divide into small groups. Each group reenacts the scene where Rahab decides how to protect the spies. Assign roles (Rahab, spies, neighbors, king's messengers). After the role-play, discuss the following:

1. What risks did Rahab face?
2. How did her faith influence her strategy?
3. What would you have done differently?

### Activity 2: Moral Dilemma Discussion

**Objective:** Reflect on ethical complexity in faith-based decisions.

**Instructions:** Present a few modern-day scenarios where telling the truth might endanger others (e.g., hiding refugees, whistleblowing).

1. What would you do in this situation?
2. How does Rahab's story inform your response?
3. Can deception ever be justified in service of a greater good?

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## Sources and Resources

**Scriptures:** 2 Corinthians 1:16-20; Joshua 2:3-24; 6:22-25;  
21:43-22:6; James 2:18-25



Scan for Devotions from  
HERstory by Lynn Domina

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## Devotional Scriptures

(Based on Year B Second Sunday After Pentecost / Week of 6/6/2021)

Revised Common Lectionary

Week of May 31, 2026

### **Sunday, May 31 (*Trinity Sunday*)**

*Proper 5 (10):* 1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20,  
(11:14-15) and Psalm 138; Genesis 3:9-15 and  
Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1;  
Mark 3:20-35

### **Monday, June 1**

Psalm 50; 2 Samuel 5:1-12; Acts 25:13-27

### **Tuesday, June 2**

Psalm 51:1-12; 2 Samuel 6:1-11; Acts 26:1-23

### **Wednesday, June 3**

Psalm 52; 2 Samuel 6:12-23; Acts 26:24-27:8

### **Thursday, June 4**

Psalm 53; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Acts 27:9-26

### **Friday, June 5**

Psalm 54; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Acts 27:27-44

### **Saturday, June 6**

Psalm 55; 2 Samuel 8:1-18; Acts 28:1-16

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