

Letter From the Editors

September 2025

Dear Teacher,

We can grow in our relationship with God as we study the scriptures together! In this quarter, our theme is “God is Faithful.” We will learn about the faithfulness of God in His relationship with humanity as a foundational part of our faith. The Lord is consistent in seeking a good relationship with people, even when His people turn away from Him. We can trust God because God always keeps His Word. Whatever God speaks will come to pass according to His will. His steadfast love endures forever. God is just. God is merciful. God is forgiving. God is powerful. God is our protector. God is our provider. God always keeps His promises. God makes covenants with people in the Bible to establish a special relationship with them. God’s covenants are promises that have been kept throughout the generations and find their fulfillment for believers in Jesus Christ. As we learn this quarter, we should ask ourselves: how have we seen God’s faithfulness in the scriptures and our own lives?

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are the foundation of God’s laws and instructions for faithfulness. These books help us understand how God relates to humanity and how we are called to relate to a holy God. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and 1 Samuel help us to understand how God responds faithfully even when people are unfaithful, and circumstances are challenging. 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Nehemiah remind us of God’s faithfulness to keep promises across generations. Finally, Job reminds us that God will always be our faithful redeemer when life feels chaotic around us. When we remind ourselves of God’s faithfulness, we can be confident putting our trust in the Lord.

This quarter highlights the message: God is always faithful! God is good all the time, and all the time, God is good. God doesn’t change even when our situations change. God keeps reaching out to us even when we walk away from Him. God’s promises will outlast our limitations. God is faithful from generation to generation. We can put our faith in the One who is always faithful. Great is God’s faithfulness! May you know God more deeply and live out His love more faithfully as we study these lessons together!

Grace & Peace,

UMI Editorial Team

Uncovering the Benefits of Direction: The Entire Bible in One Year

It is a great privilege to participate in Christian education and play a significant role in the spiritual formation of fellow Christians. *Direction*® is a resource designed to answer questions about our Christian faith. It helps to encourage us as seasoned disciples, introduce new believers to the truth of the Bible, and prepare all believers to share and defend the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

To take advantage of this commentary, start each week by reading the **Weekly Bible Study Guide**. This weekly guide provides the scripture in the KJV. In “The People, Places, and Times,” “Background,” “In Depth,” and “More Light on the Text” sections, you will find insight and understanding of the text. But these sections include more than a simple compilation of information. In each lesson, you will also see “In Focus” stories, the “Liberating Lesson,” and “Application for Activation” sections, which serve as catalysts for applying the biblical text to practical life situations.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

On the last page of the Weekly Study Guides, you’ll see a box titled **Daily Bible Readings**. The Daily Bible Readings help with engaging the scriptures throughout the week. If you complete all the Daily Bible Readings, you will have read the entire Bible in one year.

QR CODES

Next to the In Focus stories each week, you will see **QR Codes**. The codes will lead you to additional content, including videos of our In Focus stories and Teaching Tips. To use the

QR Code, open the camera app on your mobile device to scan the QR Code. Then click on the link to access the videos and teaching tips. Need additional help accessing these resources? Please call 1-800-860-8642 for assistance.



BLACK HISTORY PROFILES

There are 3 **Black History Profiles**. These profiles feature African and African American leaders who used their God-given gifts and talents to help their communities.

FAITH FEATURES

There may be a **Faith Features** essay. This section includes articles that highlight liturgical and cultural holidays or other testimonies of faith. These articles inspire the reader to reflect on the spiritual and historical foundation of the holidays.

BLACK PERSPECTIVES

There may be a **Black Perspectives** article. This section includes articles on identity rooted in our traditions.

Quarter At-A-Glance

September 2025

Week 1 Genesis: September 7, 2025

God Creates Everything

Genesis 1:1–13

How was everything created? How did God speak the world into being? What does it mean that God saw that it was good? This lesson explores the very beginning, the creation of all things, as recorded in Genesis 1:1–13. This passage reveals God's power and intentionality in bringing the universe into existence. We see in these verses the foundation of all creation and the start of God's ongoing relationship with His world.

Week 2 Exodus: September 14, 2025

God Gives Laws

Exodus 20:1–21

What does it mean to live a moral life? How should we interact with God and with each other? What are the foundational principles for a just society? God provided the Ten Commandments as a guide for His people, outlining essential principles for worship and human relationships. These commandments serve as a basis for understanding God's expectations and living a life pleasing to Him.

Week 3 Leviticus: September 21, 2025

God Values Justice

Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37

How should we treat the marginalized in our society? What does genuine love for our neighbor look like in practice? How do we conduct ourselves with integrity in business and daily life? Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37 delves into what it means to live as God's just people. God instructs His people to care for the poor and the stranger, to act honestly and fairly, and to love their neighbors as themselves. This chapter

emphasizes that true holiness is reflected in how we treat others, demonstrating God's heart for justice and compassion in all aspects of life.

Week 4 Numbers: September 28, 2025

God Plans Good

Numbers 14:1–10

How do doubt and fear impact our ability to see God's good plans? What happens when we question God's promises? This lesson shows the consequences of unbelief and the importance of trusting in God's guidance, even when circumstances seem challenging. It reminds us that God's plans are ultimately for our good, even when we don't understand them.

Week 5 Deuteronomy: October 5, 2025

God Blesses Humility

Deuteronomy 8:6–20

What are the dangers of forgetting God's provision? How does pride lead us astray? This passage warns against becoming complacent and arrogant when blessed with prosperity. It emphasizes the importance of remembering God's hand in our lives and remaining humble, lest we turn away from Him.

Week 6 Joshua: October 12, 2025

God Protects

Joshua 2:3–9, 15–16, 22–24

How does God work through unexpected people to accomplish His purposes? What does it mean to trust God's protection in uncertain circumstances? This passage illustrates God's faithfulness in protecting those who trust in Him, even in the midst of danger. It highlights the importance of courage and faith in the face of adversity.

Week 7 Judges: October 19, 2025**People Choose Sin****Judges 2:10–19**

What are the consequences of turning away from God? How does disobedience lead to oppression and suffering? This passage reveals the recurring pattern of Israel's unfaithfulness, their punishment, and God's subsequent deliverance. It serves as a reminder of the dangers of straying from God's ways and the need for constant repentance.

Week 8 Ruth: October 26, 2025**Lineage of Christ****Ruth 4:13–17**

How does God work through ordinary lives to fulfill His greater plan? What does loyalty and faithfulness look like in practice? This passage reveals God's providential hand in preserving the line of David, ultimately leading to the birth of Jesus. It shows the beauty of faithfulness and redemption within the context of everyday life.

Week 9 1 Samuel: November 2, 2025**Misplaced Faith****1 Samuel 8:1–9, 19–22**

What happens when we desire things other than God's will? How does rejecting God's leadership impact us? This passage illustrates the people's desire for a king, even though God was their King. It highlights the dangers of seeking security and identity in things other than God, and the consequences of rejecting His guidance.

Week 10 1 Kings: November 9, 2025**God is All-Powerful****1 Kings 18:20–21, 30–39**

How is God's power demonstrated? What does it mean to choose between God and false idols? This passage vividly portrays God's supremacy over false gods and His ability to answer prayer with fire. It calls for a clear decision to follow God alone and demonstrates His undeniable power.

Week 11 2 Chronicles: November 16, 2025**God is Sovereign and Answers Prayer****2 Chronicles 6:12–21**

How does prayer connect us to God's presence? What does it mean for God to hear and answer our prayers? This passage shows Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, recognizing God's dwelling place and His attentiveness to His people's cries. It affirms God's willingness to hear and respond to those who seek Him.

Week 12 Nehemiah: November 23, 2025**God Desires Accountability****Nehemiah 9:32–38, 10:28–29**

What does it mean to commit to following God's law? How do we hold ourselves accountable to our promises? This passage reveals the people's confession of sin and their covenant to obey God's commands. It highlights the importance of taking responsibility for our actions and making a conscious choice to follow God.

Week 13 Job: November 30, 2025**God Will Redeem Us****Job 19:1–7, 23–29**

How do we maintain faith in the midst of suffering? What hope do we have for future restoration? This passage shows Job's unwavering belief in his Redeemer, even in the midst of intense pain and loss. It provides hope that God will ultimately vindicate and restore those who trust in Him.

Foundational Figures

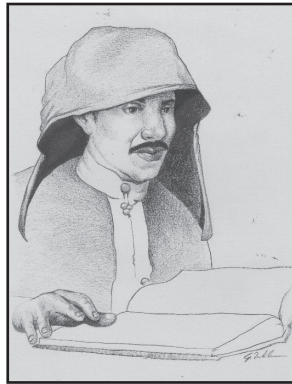
Black History Profiles

ORIGEN

185-254 AD

Theologian | Biblical Scholar

Origen is known as one of the most important theologians of the early church. He was born and lived in Alexandria, Egypt and was a strong African voice in the Greek speaking church. He is responsible for influencing Biblical scholarship, Christian theology, and apologetics even today. Origen was one of the first people to articulate a doctrine of the Trinity over 100 years before the Council of Nicaea. He wrote some of the most widely used commentaries on the Old Testament and the Gospels in his time and was a well-known preacher. Origen was known for both his piety and his brilliance. He taught and preached all across the Roman Empire



and helped lead many people to the faith. Origen was trained in Greek philosophy and also Biblical languages which helped him to understand and articulate theology from the scriptures in ways that could be understood by scholars and laypeople in his time. He drew the criticism of bishops and other theologians in his time but was remembered by some of the earliest Church historians as one of the foundational figures of early Christian systematic theology and Biblical studies.

Sources:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Origen/Theological-System>
<https://iep.utm.edu/origen-of-alexandria/>

Foundational Figures Black History Profiles

PERPETUA

182-203 AD

Martyr | Writer

Perpetua was an African Christian woman who was one of the first Christian martyrs whose death was recorded in history. Perpetua was born and raised in Carthage, which is in modern day Tunisia. The Roman emperor had outlawed Christianity, baptism, and commanded everyone to worship the Roman gods. But Perpetua and her companions refused. This was both a religious and political statement to many Africans of this time. Perpetua was a highly educated African woman, and a daughter of one of the town chiefs. She was still a relatively new believer and had an infant child when she was arrested and put into a dungeon with other Christians. People pleaded with her to deny Jesus Christ as her Savior, but she held on to her faith. Consequently, she was condemned to die in the Roman arena in Carthage as a public spectacle. It is said that she had so much spiritual power that when they



threw her to the animals in the arena, she still survived. After all her suffering, she continued to praise God. Though she was eventually executed by sword in the arena, her bravery inspired many people to believe in Jesus Christ. Perpetua was a woman filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted with vision. Her own diary account of her arrest and prison experience was evidence that she

was also a great theological thinker in a time when many women were not allowed to write theology. She shared her visions and thoughts in her diary which she gave to a companion before her scheduled execution. The companion finished the diary entry with her martyrdom, and it is today one of the most renowned written Christian testimonies from the 2nd century.

Sources:

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/perpetua.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Perpetua-Christian-martyr>

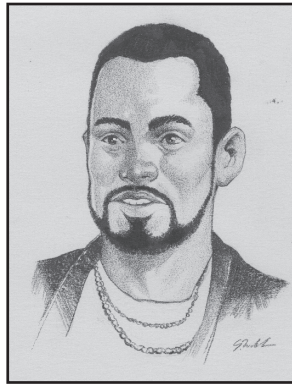
Foundational Figures Black History Profiles

TERTULLIAN

155-220 A.D.

Theologian

Tertullian was one of the greatest African scholars. Born in Carthage, he was a father of the church. Carthage was in what is known today as Tunisia and what was referred to by the ancients as Libya. He was very proud of his Carthaginian heritage. It is important to know that the Carthaginians, led by Hannibal, were Africans who fought and defeated the Romans.



Tertullian was one of the most educated people in the western world in his time. In fact, he traveled to Rome to become a lawyer. Upon his conversion to Christianity in 195 A.D., he returned to Africa to proclaim the Gospel to his own people. In Africa he taught new members and older Christians about principles of the Christian faith. Tertullian authored several books and was the first African to write theology in the Latin language. Because his first language may not have been Latin, he was able,

like present day Africans and African-Americans, to express thoughts in new terms that were unfamiliar to traditional Latin speakers. In addition to writing in Greek, he is also considered the founder of Western theology since most theological concepts in Western thought can be traced to him. The Roman church condemned this great African for heresy. In fact, they

condemned him for believing in the power of the Holy Spirit and refusing to accept the power of the bishop of Rome. Tertullian held several non-orthodox views, but he was the church father who determined the direction of the Western church. He is still noted as one of the earliest Christian apologists and made some of the most comprehensive cases of Christianity against paganism, imperial Roman religion, and Gnosticism. About thirty of his books remain with us.

Teaching Tips

September 7
Bible Study Guide 1

Words You Should Know

- A. Firmament** *raqiya'* (Heb.)—Heaven, sky.
- B. Spirit** *ruakh* (Heb.)—Wind, breath.

Teacher Preparation

- A.** Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.
- B.** Pray for your students and for lesson clarity.
- C.** Read the lesson Scripture in multiple translations.
- D.** Invite members of the class to bring nature pictures they have taken and work together to create a display that your faith community can enjoy. Provide opportunities for them to identify the images and explain how they affirm their faith in the Creator God. Suggest that they label the images with qualities and characteristics of God that the images reflect: strength, beauty, love, care, faithfulness, for example.

O—Open the Lesson

- A.** Begin the class with prayer.
- B.** Have the students read the Aim for Change.
- C.** Ask students how events in the story can weigh on their hearts and how they can view these events from a theological perspective.
- D.** Have students read the In Focus Story.

P—Present the Scriptures

- A.** Read the Focal Verses and discuss the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections.
- B.** Have the class share what Scriptures jump out for them and why, with particular emphasis on today's context.

E—Explore the Meaning

- A.** Use More Light on the Text to help stimulate in-depth discussion of the lesson text.
- B.** Discuss the Liberating Lesson and Application for Activation sections

N—Next Steps for Application

- A.** Summarize the value of knowing God as Sovereign Creator.
- B.** End class with a commitment to pray for families, natural resources, and scientists.

God Creates Everything

HOW DID THE WORLD BEGIN?

Focal Verses • GENESIS 1:1–13

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will ACKNOWLEDGE God as the creator of the universe, APPRECIATE the created world, and ADMIRE the beauty of the heavens and the earth God created.

In Focus

Breana had always wanted to be a scientist. As a child, she would take her telescope outside with her father and look at the stars through it with wonder. Her father, a physicist, was part of her inspiration for pursuing natural science as a major in college.

However, as she approached her senior year, she started having doubts about science after hearing a classmate say that he believed in science so he didn't believe in God.

Breana decided to talk to her dad about her dilemma. "How can you be a scientist and still believe in God, Dad?" she asked nervously.

Her father responded, "Breana, science helps us understand our world, not give it meaning. I started doing physics because of my faith in God. I wanted to understand how this amazing world we live in works. I don't think that wondering and investigating how creation works bothers God. But at the end of the day, science is about asking questions and getting an understanding of what we see. It does not try to understand the meaning of life or the things that matter most to me, like the love I have for you and your mom. I have faith in God for those things."

Breana was in awe. She decided that with her faith in God she could stay on her path to becoming a scientist and understanding God's creation.

What do you appreciate most about God's creation?



Keep in Mind

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1–2, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.

11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

12 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.

The People, Places, and Times

Creation. God's act of creation is the process by which the universe and humanity came into being. (Genesis 1:1–2:3). Genesis tells of the sole, sovereign Master of the universe directing the work of creation by verbal command. God makes the world in six days and rests on the seventh. Bible scholars differ on whether the “days” were 24-hour days or more extended periods. God's act of creation is unlike other ancient Near Eastern stories depicting gods fighting or the creation of man from the blood of a rebellious god.

Background

Genesis is the first book in the Bible. Genesis sets the foundation for understanding the rest of the Scriptures. Genesis 1 records God calling

creation into existence. He creates from nothing all creation. In addition, God exists apart from creation as God alone. God does not sleep and wake up. He is self-existent, all-powerful, and eternal. God establishes cycles and patterns that make up nature and assigns the functions of each aspect of creation from time to growth. Through creation, God shows that He is both orderly and creative. Each day, God creates and affirms that what He has created is good. God establishes relationships for the created order. The introduction of sin challenges the goodness and order of these relationships in the created world.

Is there a story of how something started or ended unexpectedly that has particularly interested or impacted you?

At-A-Glance

1. God is Creator (Genesis 1:1–2)
2. God creates light (vv.3–5)
3. God Creates Heaven (vv. 6–8)
4. God Creates Earth (vv. 9–13)

In Depth

1. God is Creator (Genesis 1:1–2)

God is eternal, limitless, and creates all that exists. (Isaiah 57:15). The book of Genesis begins with the account of God’s creation. The beginning here is humanity’s history, as eternity does not have a beginning or end. God is Spirit and is the source of everything. God created the world and goes through the process of bringing order to formless chaos. The earth was undifferentiated nothingness, as the Scripture says, “without form, and void” (from v. 2, KJV). God is also revealed here as Spirit. God is not a created being but the Creator of the universe by His Spirit. The Spirit of God moved over darkness before speaking light into manifestation in verse 3.

How does knowing about God’s creativity impact your understanding of creativity?

2. God Creates Light (vv. 3–5)

God speaks Creation into existence. The power of God’s Word is that whatever God commands must be. God speaks, and creation obeys. The first thing God speaks into the visible world is light. We know from science that nothing is visible to human eyes without light. God creates light and says it is good; God is pleased with His creation. Then God separates light from darkness and calls the light day and the darkness night. God creates the night and day cycle to define how time will be viewed on earth. Therefore, God gives purpose to the night and day cycle.

What roles have light and darkness played in your life?

3. God Creates Heaven (vv. 6–8)

God speaks heaven into existence as a firmament or barrier. The word for heaven here refers to the space between the ground and the upper atmosphere, typically called the sky, but it could also mean more than that. The sky separates the earth and its waters from waters in the earth’s upper atmosphere and the vast expanse of space beyond it. This continues God’s pattern of separating and establishing order, creating boundaries between things in the created world so that the world can exist in established relationships instead of chaos.

How can natural boundaries be seen as good on the earth?

4. God Creates Earth (vv. 9–13)

In earth-shaking fashion, God calls the waters on the earth together—and the land up from the waters. God gives them a purpose by naming them seas and earth and calling them good. God’s creative intentionality is on full display. Then, God creates plant life; He calls it to grow from the earth and allows each plant to reproduce using its seed. Each plant is produced according to its kind; that is to say, a peach tree produces peaches instead of oranges. There is intentional diversity in God’s creation. Not every plant is the same, but they all reproduce according to their kind. God again calls these creations and their relationships with the rest of the earth good.

How does knowing that God created diversity influence what we consider differences in life?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do you think the Scripture keeps repeating the phrase “God saw that it was good” after God created each part of the universe (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12)?

2. Why do you think God calls plants to grow from the earth instead of speaking them into existence (v. 11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God creates by speaking everything into existence. What impact does that have on how we view the power of God's Word?

2. How do you reconcile your understanding of science with your faith as a Christian? Do you believe in any aspects of evolution? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

The Bible makes it clear that God is the Creator of the universe. God not only is the source of everything created, but He gives everything purpose and function. Yet God is distinctive in making different parts of creation unique, even allowing the earth to produce plants that naturally reproduce. God is purposeful and intentional in establishing diversity and boundaries in nature. As a result of the perfect wisdom of God, the visible world has good relationships with all created things despite their differences. We can observe this and conclude that humans should also value and appreciate the purpose of all things in nature, from plants to animals, day and night, and water and land. We can also use God's example of setting boundaries, which may benefit us.

Application for Activation

Pause a moment to take in nature. Go for a walk, look at the sky, tend to a garden. Be intentional this week about engaging the natural world and thanking God for creation. Understand that God is the source of your life; everything that exists gives important meaning to what you can experience with your senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Reflect on beginnings. What good is there at the beginning of something in your life? How can you work with people in your community to begin something

new for everyone's benefit, such as a community garden? How can you show your appreciation for God's goodness in nature?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Genesis 1:1–13, KJV

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The opening statement of the Bible declares, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This statement's important embedded assumptions are foundational to the Christian understanding of the universe. The first assumption is that "the beginning" here speaks to the beginning of history, the start of time. God exists in eternity beyond time. God does not have a beginning or end; God is. The beginning here gives context to

the account of God creating the universe that follows. This beginning is the edge of human understanding that looks forward toward creation, and the other side of the beginning looks backward, before human history, into the expanse of eternity mentioned in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word...”

The word for God here in Genesis is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which is plural, which some Christian scholars argue is a revelation of God as one God existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The word “created” here is the Hebrew *bara*’ (bah-**RAH**), which communicates God being the source of creation. This statement reveals God’s position as Creator and an attribute of God as creative. The Bible contends that God is responsible for the existence of the heavens and the earth. It did not happen by accident or without intention. God created the universe on purpose. The opening statement of Genesis gives context for the following story: this is a story about God in relationship with heaven and earth.

The Bible assumes God exists; it is not a matter of debate or uncertainty. It is a given. We understand, as believers, that without God, nothing exists. Without the faith that God exists, the rest of the Scriptures cannot be understood, and our relationship with God is incomprehensible. It is impossible to please God, let alone communicate or have a right relationship with God, without this foundational assumption of God’s existence (Hebrews 11:6). But not everyone believes in God. For example, atheists argue that there is no God or gods. In an increasingly secular, pluralistic society, Christians must know it is a faith decision to believe in God. God exists, and everything else flows from God’s existence. Whether humans believe in God or not, they are still subject to God because He created everything and transcends humanity (Job 38).

In Genesis 1:2, we are told creation was “without form, and void,” which conveys the truth that earth is in an early stage of chaos. The text presents the creation as undifferentiated and disordered. The creation is not yet capable of producing life. The text reports the gradual unfolding and development of creation. The Spirit “moved.” This is the first reference to the Spirit of God in the Bible. The term for Spirit, *ruach* (**ROO**-lakh), also translated as “wind or breath,” can be thought of as something like moving air. In this instance, the Spirit of God is present and ready to bring order to the formless creation and to prepare the earth for habitation.

The implications of this verse in our modern context are remarkable. Many people debate whether there is a gap in time between verse 1 and verse 2 because it moves from creation to chaos that is reorganized. Some then contend that this is a re-creation in verse 2. The text shows that God created *ex nihilo* or from nothing. Some Christian apologists argue that this verse leaves room for evolution, that God’s creation would manifest as the evolutionary process: from nothing taking form into something as God speaks. Scientists are consistently astounded by the extreme circumstances that had to be fulfilled for our universe to exist as we know it—trillions of variables that had to act together in specific ways to function the way it does. The Scriptures, however, advance the account of God and Creation. The account reveals another function of God: to bring order to chaos.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. 5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Just the word “light,” translating the common Hebrew word *or* (**ORE**), implies God because He is Light (1 John 1:5). Today, we know

human, plant, and animal life are all impossible without light. He spoke every aspect of known visible light into being, and it was so. What God commands happens (Psalm 33:9). This sets a precedent for the power of the Word of God that is carried out through the rest of Scripture. All that exists came into existence by God's spoken word (Hebrews 11:3).

It is also important to note that in Genesis 1, God creates by differentiating. God establishes order and right relationships by creating boundaries, an action of God that plays a major role in much of the Bible. Boundaries and order are good; they create the right relationships between things in creation. God separates light from darkness, day from night, and brings order to the chaos.

"Darkness" is from the Hebrew word *khoshek* (kho-SHEK). Some contend that darkness always represents evil; at Creation, God takes the darkness that covered the formless void and calls it "night" (Heb. *layil*, LAH-yil). Today, we know sleep is a vital part of life; humans need sleep, and the rest of creation requires regular rest cycles. The absence of balanced light and darkness cycles is a major cause of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and light therapy is often used to treat it and other forms of seasonal depression. The light and darkness form day and night. God continues to differentiate His creation and assign specific functions. The combined cycle creates the very first complete "day" or *yom* (YOME), a word that contains a concept of time.

The debate over using the word "day" in Genesis 1 is hot. Depending upon the context, it may mean what we conventionally understand to be 24 hours, or it may refer to an *epoch* or a period of time. God's perspective on time differs from a human perspective; a day to God could be thousands of years to humanity (2 Peter 3:8). This text certainly refers to God's decision to act within a certain time frame. God dwells

in eternity but acts in history for the sake of creation. With that in mind, we must consider the text as indicating that God created within a particular time frame, which could have been seven days, *epochs*, or work periods. The seventh "day" was designated as rest (Exodus 31:15). Whichever it was, we must remember that the text aims to tell us that the one true God created everything, not to determine when He performed this act.

The order of the day/night cycle here can be easily overlooked. The view of night as the beginning of a day continues throughout the Bible. The night-to-day cycle of counting days is reflected in the development of Israel's calendar and other nearby cultures organized on a lunar calendar. One implication of this cycle is daily hope; the darkness will always give way to the light within the same day (cf. Psalm 30:5). Creation moves from darkness to light.

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. 7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

At this stage of creation, the waters separate, apparently distinguishing between liquid and vapor forms, and the atmosphere as we know it is called into existence. "Firmament" (Heb. *raqiya'*, rah-KEE-ah) is used only seventeen times in the Old Testament. Although the word can refer to where birds fly (Genesis 1:20), it usually refers to more than air. It is used as "heavenly" in Psalm 150:1 (KJV): "Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power."

Reinforcing these uses of *raqiya'*, God called the atmosphere "heaven" (Heb. *shamayim*,

shaw-**MAH**-yim), a word used 420 times in the Old Testament. Although “heaven” is most often used like “firmament” to refer to God’s abode or a divine place beyond earth (Genesis 22:15; Psalm 8:1; Psalm 11:4), *shamayim* is also a place where birds fly (Genesis 7:3; Job 35:11) and clouds can be seen (Job 38:37).

9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. 10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. 11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. 12 And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. 13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.

One might think “gathering together” implies an orderly, even gentle act. However, the thought of the world’s oceans being gathered while simultaneously being separated from dry land doesn’t necessarily evoke the image of a gentle act. Instead, it brings to mind a violent, explosive, even volcanic act of giant mountainous upheavals combined with equally deep gouging from the various waterways and bodies.

Interestingly, all the earth’s vegetation wasn’t created instantly but grew out of the soil. For all the water and dry land in the world to be sorted out in a day, the evolutionary timescale for wear and tear on rocks from the water must have been radically increased. This could only

have been done by God’s power. “Brought forth” is from the Hebrew word *yatsa* (yah-**TSAH**), which has several meanings, including “growing vegetation” (Psalm 104:14). It is not surprising that God could grow trees overnight or order land and soil into existence from a formless void. Verse 12 points out that growth is a purposeful part of God’s creation. Although God could have spoken or created each type of plant life, God allows each to grow from the earth through reproduction. The herbs yield seeds, and the trees yield fruit after their kind. Each part of creation is created to reproduce itself; God sets a cycle of reproduction in motion and calls it good. Seeds are how God chooses to let creation multiply. Growth and multiplication are part of God’s creation before and after the introduction of sin and death.

Incredibly, God declares the natural world He has created as good and the relationships and cycles in the natural world as good. Scripture highlights the order of nature as valuable even before humankind is introduced to creation: The universe and the earth have value to God on their own as good creations. The complex systems we know today that make up the natural world are extremely delicate yet function consistently in orderly cycles as God created them to do. The natural sciences— such as biology, astronomy, chemistry, and physics— are all designed to help humanity understand the wonderful world that God has created.

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Say It Correctly

Firmament. **FUHR**-muh-ment.
Genesis. **JEH**-nuh-ses.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 1

Genesis 1–3
Psalm 1

DAY 2

Genesis 4–7
Psalm 2:1–6

DAY 3

Genesis 8–11
Psalm 2:7–12

DAY 4

Genesis 12–15
Psalm 3:1–6

DAY 5

Genesis 16–18
Psalm 3:7–8

DAY 6

Genesis 19–21
Psalm 4:1–5

DAY 7

Genesis 22–24
Psalm 4:6–8

Notes

Teaching Tips

September 14
Bible Study Guide 2

Words You Should Know

A. Covenant (Exodus 19:5) *beriyth* (Heb.)—An agreement; a covenant with God based on God's character, strength, and grace

B. Graven image (Exodus 20:4) *pecel* (Heb.)—An idol or likeness cut from stone, wood, or metal and then worshiped as a god

Teacher Preparation

A. Early in the week, read the In Depth and More Light on the Text sections.

B. Also read all the surrounding text.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Pray based on the Aim for Change and Keep in Mind verse.

B. After opening with prayer, ask class members to identify laws that dominate our lives, such as laws regarding stop signs, criminal acts, etc. Then ask why we obey these laws.

C. Have a volunteer tell the In Focus story, and then engage in a discussion of how it relates to today's text.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have the class read aloud the Focal Verses.

B. Use a review of The People, Places, and Times; Background; At-A-Glance; In Depth; Search the Scriptures questions; and More Light on the Text to help present the lesson.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use the Discuss the Meaning questions and Liberating Lesson to help students know how to apply the truth to their lives.

B. Allow students to share their answers.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Have class members read the Application for Activation section.

B. In the Follow the Spirit section, challenge students to create a description of a lifestyle "that pleases God at all times."

C. Close with prayer, asking for God's strength and encouragement as class members seek to please God.

God Gives Laws

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE AS GOD'S PEOPLE?

Focal Verses • EXODUS 20:1–21

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **AFFIRM** that the Ten Commandments are God's instructions to believers; **BE ENCOURAGED** to follow God's commands; and **DEVELOP** ways of living that reflect godly obedience.

In Focus

"Grandma Lottie, how did you and Granddad manage to stay married for 50 years? It seems like I see so many divorces or people just not getting married, and you two have done it for a lifetime. I want that for me and my husband," Monique asked.

"Well, baby, the most important thing was that we would always pray together and put God first. The other key thing was having clear boundaries after some tough years at the beginning. Your grandfather had to learn what I needed, and I had to learn what he needed. I needed him to listen to me and not yell at me. He needed me to be honest and not tell him what to do. Those are just some examples, but I guess it comes down to respecting each other and communicating," Grandma Lottie responded.

"I think that's really good advice. But I don't know if I know what I need well enough to ask for it yet," Monique admitted.

"What you need first is to rest and seek God. Did you know that is one of the Ten Commandments?"

"I hear you, Grandma. You know I'm always working and planning. But I'll give it a rest because you said it!"

How can learning about God's laws from elders we respect make a difference in how we view God's laws?



Keep in Mind

"And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments"
(Exodus 20:6, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Exodus 20:1** And God spake all these words, saying,

2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and

rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

13 Thou shalt not kill.

14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

15 Thou shalt not steal.

16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

18 And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

The People, Places, and Times

Mount Sinai. This mountain was a very important landmark for the Israelites. Mount Sinai is both the site of Moses receiving his call from God (Exodus 3:1) and the Children of Israel receiving God's Law and covenant (Exodus 19–20). After the Israelites were rescued from Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness; there they camped at the

foot of Mount Sinai while Moses climbed the mountain to enter God's presence. God revealed Himself to Moses and gave to him His law and covenant affirming Israel as His holy nation: they would be one nation under one God, who would be their leader (Exodus 19:3–6).

Moses. Moses' parents were Amram and Jochebed, who were of the tribe of Levi. In order to save him from death at Pharaoh's

order, Moses' mother made a basket, placed him in it, and set it in the Nile River (Exodus 2:1–10). Years later, God called Moses to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 3–4), and his older brother Aaron was made his spokesperson. After Pharaoh's refusal to listen to Moses, God sent ten plagues upon Egypt. Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt and across the parted Red Sea, but the Egyptians who chased them drowned (12:37–15:20). God provided the Hebrews' daily needs as they traveled through the wilderness. Moses and the people arrived at Mount Sinai, where God gave the Ten Commandments to them, as well as instructions on building a tabernacle as a center of worship.

Background

The Ten Commandments are God's first commandments given for the Children of Israel to obey in their covenant relationship with God after they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt. These commandments serve as the foundation for most of the other commandments in the Laws of God. They were inscribed on stone tablets and placed in the Ark of God's Covenant to show how they were the foundation of God's instructions for relating to God and to other people as God's covenant people.

At-A-Glance

1. Remember God (Exodus 20:1–2)
2. How to Love God (vv. 3–11)
3. How to Love People (vv.12–21)

In Depth

1. Remember God (Exodus 20:1–2)

God had delivered the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and now they were in the wilderness of Sinai to meet God at the

mountain where he had met Moses in a burning bush. In chapter 19, we read that the Lord had told Moses to be ready because He would come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of the people. Moses and the people prepared by consecrating and setting themselves apart and washing their clothes. They only came to the foot of the mountain, because God set boundaries that the people could not cross making the mountain holy for God's presence. Here we see God speaking to the people after Moses went down from the mountain to the people. God ties the promise of deliverance of His people from Egypt with His name. The Lord is now proclaiming His holy name again, now that the deliverance is reality for the Children of Israel. God reminds the Israelites of past blessings, of His deliverance of them from slavery in Egypt. We must continue to remember what God has done in our lives and associate His marvelous works with His name.

Why does God command us to remember what He has done in the past?

2. How to Love God (vv. 3–11)

God's first commandment is that the Lord is God, and to have no other gods before Him. Having no other gods before Him is best translated as "You shall not prefer other gods to me." The meaning is that God is the only God the Israelites should worship and obey. Ultimately, the Lord is the Most High God, and He who expects faithfulness to the covenant made with His people. If something takes us away from honoring and obeying the God of heaven who created us, that is considered a false "god" or idol in our lives. Therefore, we must be careful not to elevate anything else above our God.

The second commandment is not to make any images of our God or other gods to worship. God is not a creature and cannot be worshipped through created statues the way other gods

can. We should worship God the Creator and never the things created, including our family, education, work, and material possessions. The third commandment is to not take God's name in vain, which means not to take it lightly or treat it casually. God is holy, and we should only say God said something, did something, supports something, or doesn't support something with the most respect, seriousness, and fear we can. We certainly shouldn't use curses or swears and involve God as people do in popular culture.

The fourth commandment in verse 8 is for God's people to have time set aside to worship God, totally dedicate themselves to Him, and rest. The word "Sabbath" is derived from the Hebrew verb *shabbat*, which means "to rest or cease from work." The command was to set aside each seventh day as belonging to the Lord. The Sabbath, in essence, was another sign of honoring the covenant which God had with His people.

How can we prioritize God first in our daily lives?

3. How to Love People (vv. 12–21)

The fifth commandment is a fascinating hinge commandment to honor your father and mother. It is accompanied with a promise for long and abundant life in the land God promised to the Children of Israel. The meaning is that as children care for their elders and obey the commands they pass down from the Lord, God will allow them to prosper in the Promised Land. The sixth commandment is you shall not kill, meaning murder, which directs you not to take another person's life. The seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery, is particularly directed at married people. They are to honor their exclusive marriage covenant as part of their exclusive covenant with God. You cannot take someone else's spouse. The eighth commandment, you shall not steal, is you cannot take someone else's possessions.

The ninth commandment, not to bear false witness, is a legal commandment not to lie so that another person is punished for something they did not do. You cannot take another person's innocence. The tenth commandment, not to covet, means we should not lust after anything that belongs to someone else. If you avoid wanting what is someone else's, then you won't take it and will keep the other commandments. The overall principle of these last five commandments is that you cannot take what is not yours. God will give you what you need; you should respect God's and your neighbor's boundaries.

The Children of Israel hear these commandments, see God's displays of power, and are afraid. Moses reminds them that we should also remember that fear of God should not drive us away from God but help us stay near to God and not break His commandments.

How does understanding boundaries help us keep God's commandments?

Search the Scriptures

1. What type of love does God show to those who love Him (v. 6)?
2. What is the last of the Ten Commandments that supports the others about neighbors (v. 17)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Was there a need for God to remind the people about Egypt? How might the people, as well as Moses, have responded if God did not bring this to their remembrance (Exodus 20:2)?
2. How do the Ten Commandments apply to our lives today? Do they apply to just believers or all people? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

Clearly, God has the power to bring us out of the things that have us bound. We need to realize that God is omnipotent (all-powerful), and He can do anything but fail. So when the challenges of life knock at our door, we need to

remember the God that we serve. When we are faced with obstacles and mountains that seem too high to climb, we also need to remember the God that we serve. We need to consider His track record and know that He still has a lot more that He can do in our lives. However, if we want God's blessings to continue to shower down upon us, we need to make sure that we are obedient to His Word. We should not constantly challenge Him as the Israelites, His chosen people, did.

Application for Activation

This week, ask God to help you to follow His commands, His statutes, and His Word. Pray that God will aid you in successfully living in a way that reflects the commands that He has given. Remember that how we relate to others is connected to how we relate to God. Which of the commandments is most challenging for us to keep? Ask God for help to honor Him and His commandments.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Exodus 20:1–21, KJV

1 And God spake all these words, saying,

This week's passage recounts one of the most climactic moments of the Old Testament: God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses for him to pass along to the Children of Israel. Another word for "Ten Commandments" is "Decalogue," which comes from the Greek *deka logos* (**DEK**-ah **LOG**-os), or "ten words," as they are called later in the Old Testament (see Exodus 34:28, where the words translated "Ten Commandments" literally mean "ten words").

"God spake all these words." We must not ignore the importance of God speaking. The alert Bible reader will connect this passage to Genesis chapter 1, where God first speaks into history. We see there that God's speech is not like ours; it does not simply describe what is already there. On the contrary, when God speaks, things come to be, things that were not there before! In the same way, when God speaks here, we might well describe it as an "act of re-creation" (Enns, 411) in which God is forming not only the worlds themselves but also His people after His image and character. So the words that come after demonstrate not just the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" to be observed by God's people, but also the very nature of God Himself, out of whose perfect holiness and justice these heaven sent commands come forth.

2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

How do we know that the Ten Commandments are more than arbitrary do's and don'ts? This verse demonstrates the twofold foundation on which the Decalogue is built: God and His grace. First we see the majestic self-revelation of God, as Yahweh ("the LORD"), who revealed Himself by this name to Moses and showed His kindness to the Israelite

forefathers, all the way back to Abraham. The declaration “I am the LORD thy God” shows the innate authority God possesses. It is enough to declare His identity as the reason that Israel is bound to His commands. (Think of a parent saying to a child, “I am your father,” or “I am your mother”—this usually speaks for itself!) But God also demonstrates His kindness to His people in that He does not stop at the simple declaration, “I am your God.” Though His character and authority are reason enough for Israel to obey, He brings forth another reason: *I have redeemed you; I have brought you out of slavery.*

The phrase “have brought” in Hebrew is *yatsa’* (yaw-**TSAW**), which means “to cause to go or come out.” As though Israel needed reminding, God points back to the recent events of the Exodus. There’s no doubt that the people would have thought back to the plagues on the Egyptians, to the Passover miracle, and to their stunning deliverance through the Red Sea. Even before the last of these events takes place, God prepares the people to remember the greatness of His power and of His kindness toward them: “And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage:” (Exodus 13:14). Here we see the pattern God establishes for His people: first, He acts to save them in His mercy; second, they remember the greatness of what He has done; and third, they respond by honoring Him with their obedience.

3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

This first command, though just eight short words in the King James Version, conveys powerfully the heart of biblical religion from beginning to end. In an age that already managed to develop an innumerable number of “gods” to worship (not unlike the age in which

Christ lived, or our own age), Yahweh ensures that the Israelites will make no mistake about the call to monotheistic, wholehearted devotion to their Lord.

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

The phrase “graven image” translates the Hebrew word *pecel* (**PEH**-sel), meaning “carved image” or “idol.” The second commandment is closely tied to the first. Though most cultures today no longer make actual physical idols that receive worshipful adoration, this kind of literal idol-making was common in the day of Moses. (Again, the golden calf incident will show us just how common it was!) So Yahweh addresses specifically what it looks like not to have any other gods before (besides) Him. Knowing the waywardness of the Israelites’ hearts and the frequency of idol-making among their neighbors, Israel’s God reveals that to make an image (“graven” means “engraved” or “made out of physical things”) is to violate the heart of the first commandment. To worship images is, by definition, to have other gods beyond the Lord. Whether the object of the image is “in heaven above” (either the sky or heaven itself) or somewhere on or under the earth, such worship turns upside down the proper and beautiful relationship between Creator and creature. The Bible calls this worship idolatry. But the prohibition found in verse 4 does not apply only to worshiping images of things that are not God; it also clearly includes the worship or veneration of images *of* God. The telling phrase here is “in heaven above.” Though this phrase can sometimes refer simply to the sky, usually in that case it uses the plural “heavens.”

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy

God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

God repeats the command against worshipping idols or other gods and now answers the “why” question that may have been lingering in the minds of the hearers. “I...am a jealous God” may not be the answer that a generation bent on pleasing itself might want to hear, but it is the answer nevertheless. As noted above, God’s jealousy is perfect and appropriate, like a spouse’s intense desire that their spouse’s body be theirs and theirs alone. Yahweh, by His covenant and powerful acts of salvation, has claimed Israel for Himself. For them to take any other master is not just ungrateful, but deeply offensive and detestable. “For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24). When the mountain quaked with smoke and fire as God delivered the Decalogue, the Israelites could hardly have had any doubt about that!

The word “visiting” in the Hebrew is *paqad* (paw-KAD), which means “appoint, assign,” or “punish.” The noun “iniquity” is *avon* (Heb. ‘avown, aw-VONE), which means “sin, depravity, fault.” The latter part of Exodus 20:5 might trouble us. Is it fair, after all, to punish children or grandchildren for the sins of their parents or grandparents? Many interpreters of this verse have pointed out that God may have been speaking about the consequences of sin; certainly a grievous sin committed by one generation can reverberate harmfully into the next generation and the one beyond it. This may explain the verse in part, but we do not do the idea justice if we do not remember that God gives this pronouncement as part of His covenant. God’s covenants are always made with corporate bodies (like Israel, or the church), not simply individuals. And so it is important for us to acknowledge that the sins of God’s people affect each other, even other generations, not just in a natural sense but also in a covenantal sense.

6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

However severe God’s justice might seem, such justice is completely miniscule when compared to His mercy (see James 2:13). If justice lasts a few generations, then mercy lasts for thousands and thousands! Exodus 20:6, like verse 5, deals with the covenant. The word translated “mercy” is, in the Hebrew *cheched* (KHEH-sed), the word typically used in the Old Testament to describe God’s particular love to His covenant people. Likewise, the phrase “those who love me and obey my commands” (NLT) is covenant language; it speaks to those who are called to keep up their end of the deal in response to God’s overwhelming mercy and grace. So, the reference does not mean that God’s mercy only comes to people when they are loving God and keeping His commandments. Rather, His mercy comes at all times to those found in His covenant. Their love and commandment-keeping flow out of this mercy.

7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

This commandment is probably the one about which the Church has had the most confusion. Part of the confusion comes from the importance God places on His name—something not as familiar to modern society as it was to the ancients. As *The NIV Application Commentary* asks: “What’s in a name? Plenty. The name of God, the tetragrammaton (Hebrew name for God) YHWH, is God’s name. It is the name whose significance was patiently explained to Moses in chapters 3–4. It is the name whose very mention connected the Exodus community to the patriarchs. It is God’s salvation name (3:15; 6:6; 15:3), and as such

must be treated with the highest respect” (Enns, 417). With this in mind and considering the focus of the first two commandments, we can see that God is primarily concerned about how the Israelites used the holy name of Yahweh. The phrase “in vain” in Hebrew is *shav*’ (shawv), which means “falsely, lying,” or “worthlessness.” God’s name, then, should never be used in spells or incantations, for example, as other kingdoms would use their gods’ names. If the name was used in a vow, then that vow should be very carefully kept.

But the third commandment, like all the others, says more than it appears to at first, as Jesus makes clear in His treatment of the commandments about murder and adultery in Matthew 5:21–22, 27–32. It concerns not just the mouth but also the heart. As such, this commandment forbids both speaking and believing things about God that are untrue or unworthy of Him.

8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The fourth commandment brings to a close what is often called the “first table” of the Ten Commandments—the ones that deal particularly with the people’s relationship to God rather than to each other. As such, the fourth commandment goes with the other three; the honor and worship of God are the paramount concern for those who would keep the Sabbath holy. The first way to honor God concerning the Sabbath is to “remember.” The word “remember” in Hebrew (*zakar*, zaw-KAR) means “be mindful, recall,” or “call to mind.” Throughout the Bible, remembering is never just something done with the mind, but rather an act of worship and something that prompts the people to thankful obedience. Israel is a remembering people, and remembrance of their deliverance in the Exodus continues to shape the lives of Jews even to this day. God’s people are called to “remember” the Sabbath.

In Hebrew, *shabbath* (shab-BAWTH) means “ceasing from work.” The Sabbath, then, should be observed in the way verses 9–10 demonstrate for a particular reason: “to keep it holy.” The phrase “to keep it holy” in Hebrew is *qadash* (kaw-DASH), which means “keep sacred” or “honor as sacred.” As verse 11 will demonstrate, the Sabbath is a holy day because God has made it so. God’s people have the awesome duty of preserving the day’s holiness!

9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

We see God’s mercy in the explanation of the Sabbath command: though the chief issue is God’s honor and glory, the people’s Sabbath rest is certainly also for their blessing (for a New Testament picture of this blessing, see Hebrews 4:1–11). The Bible always assumes that God’s people will work hard. The word “labour” in Hebrew (*abad*, aw-BAD) means “to work, serve.” Whether gathering manna (food) or doing more modern tasks, the pattern of six days’ work is an ancient one. It is the gracious gift of rest, finding peace with God, that stands as the central point of God’s command. The six days of work will culminate with feasting, celebration, and worship, even as God’s rest followed His work of creating the world (v. 11).

10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

God’s Sabbath command, when spelled out in detail, shows itself to be a covenantal command. The hallowing of the seventh day is not simply a matter of respecting oneself, but of revering the solemn commitment of one’s entire household. The Lord calls on the covenantal heads of the families to see to it that He is honored by their conduct on this day of

days. Even animals are included in this matter! Certainly, it is true that animals need a day of rest just as much as human beings, and in this sense, God is gracious also to His creation.

11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

The third commandment contains not only the “what” of the command but the “why”: “for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (20:7). The second commandment, likewise, contains its own reasons for why God forbids graven images: “for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God” (20:5). We might even say that the first commandment has its own reason for being, as explained in the verse before it: “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (20:2). Likewise, the Lord graciously grounds the Sabbath command for His people on the foundation of His own character and work. “The LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (20:11). The word “hallowed” is a synonym for the Hebrew *qadash* (kaw-DASH), and here it means “consecrated, dedicated, or set apart.” Surely anything that Almighty God has consecrated, dedicated, or set apart should also be consecrated, dedicated, and set apart by those who are called by His name!

12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

This commandment is the only commandment of the ten tied to a direct result. If the children of Israel honor their parents, then God will cause them to have longevity and prosperity in the Promised Land when they settle there. This becomes foundational for Deuteronomy’s longer explanation of how

to pass on the covenant from generation to generation. This commandment was common in ancient Near Eastern cultures. The Children of Israel were to obey the Lord, learn and meditate on His Law, and teach their children to do the same. When we receive the instruction and wisdom of our godly parents, it causes us to have the longevity, prosperity, and promises God intended for us. Parents are also the heads of households and God is establishing again the idea of submission to righteous authority that leads to God’s blessing. This commandment assumes that the parents are faithfully following God and does not condone or allow the abuse of children or mandate that children obey ungodly parents. We see those points made clearer throughout the Old Testament, and also the blessings gained from honoring godly parents as well.

13 Thou shalt not kill. 14 Thou shalt not commit adultery. 15 Thou shalt not steal. 16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.

The last five commandments are focused on not taking anything from our neighbors that does not belong to us. We are to respect our neighbors’ boundaries as we expect the boundaries of God. When someone crosses a boundary, it is called a transgression or trespass. We are not to take lives, spouses, property, or innocence that belongs to our neighbors.

Adultery or engaging in sex with another person’s spouse was considered a sin against your spouse and the other person’s spouse. Men and women could be convicted of adultery. Not bearing false witness was particularly meant to regulate so someone was not put to death or punished on the word of one witness.

Deuteronomy clarifies a law: “Out of the mouths of two or three witnesses it shall be established” (Deut 19:15), meaning you need two witnesses to convict someone of wrongdoing. But if we do not even think lustfully about wanting things that belong to our neighbors, then we won’t have to worry about taking things that belong to our neighbors.

18 And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. 19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. 20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. 21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

The Lord shows His power at this point in the same way He had when the children of Israel first came to Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. They see lightning and hear thunder and the sound of a loud trumpet as well as smoke and are told to stand back because they see God’s awesome power. They were told not to come any closer because the mountain was holy because of God’s presence. If they came closer, they would die under the power of God’s glory. God uses the same display of power here as bookends to emphasize the importance of the Ten Commandments as God’s spoken Law for His people. This display also serves two other purposes. First, the Lord says explicitly in Exodus 19:9 that this display of power that only Moses is anointed to withstand will reinforce his leadership before the Children of Israel. Second, this display of power is to instill the fear of God in the people so they will obey God.

If they do not obey God, they will surely die, whether by the leaders stoning them for disobedience or them being consumed with the fire or power of God’s glory for drawing too close to His presence in their sin and unholiness. Ultimately, sin against God will lead to God’s punishment and wrath, which the children of Israel had already seen destroy their enemies in Egypt. As Moses encourages them that God was all-powerful and deserves their single-minded obedience, he proceeds back into God’s presence to receive more instructions about how to worship God and create a holy place for God to dwell among His people.

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Say It Correctly

Decalogue. **DEK**-uh-log.
Hallowed. ha-lod, **HA**-lo-wed.
Sabbath. **SAB**-uhth.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 8

Genesis 25–6

Psalms 5:1–7

DAY 9

Genesis 27–29

Psalms 5:8–12

DAY 10

Genesis 30–31

Psalms 6:1–5

DAY 11

Genesis 32–34

Psalms 6:6–10

DAY 12

Genesis 35–37

Psalms 7:1–5

DAY 13

Genesis 38–40

Psalms 7:6–13

DAY 14

Genesis 41–42

Psalms 7:14–17

Notes

Teaching Tips

September 21
Bible Study Guide 3

Words You Should Know

A. Stranger (Leviticus 19:10) *ger* (Heb.)—A sojourner; a newcomer, or a foreigner

B. Unrighteousness (Lev. 19:15) *`evel* (Heb.)—Injustice, iniquity, and wickedness

G. Have a volunteer summarize the In Focus story. Discuss.

H. Ask, “Knowing how painful injustice feels, how careful should we be to avoid inflicting others with injustice?” Discuss.

Teacher Preparation

A. Pray for lesson clarity.

B. Study and meditate on the entire text.

C. Prepare a slide deck presentation or bring news clippings of incidents involving justice and compassion.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have volunteers read the Focal Verses.

B. Now use The People, Places, and Times; Background; Search the Scriptures; At-A-Glance outline; In Depth; and More Light on the Text to clarify the verses.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer, including the Aim for Change.

B. After prayer, introduce today’s subject of the lesson.

C. Read the Aim for Change and Keep in Mind verse in unison. Discuss.

D. Share your presentation.

E. Then ask, “Have you ever personally experienced injustice?”

F. Share testimonies.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Have volunteers summarize the Discuss the Meaning, Liberating Lesson, and Application for Activation sections.

B. Connect these sections to the Aim for Change and the Keep in Mind verse.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the lesson.

B. Close with prayer.

God Values Justice

DOES GOD CARE ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Focal Verses • LEVITICUS 19:9–18, 33–37

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will IDENTIFY what it means to love one's neighbor as one's self, REFLECT on ways to act with compassion, and PRAY to live a life of justice and compassion.

In Focus

“Granddad, I heard that the Golden Rule, treat other people the way you want to be treated, is important in a lot of cultures. But what does that even mean? I mean, what if you don't know how to treat yourself well? And if America is such a Christian nation, why don't our laws treat people equally? I saw in a video online that immigrants are being put in jail for just trying to work like everyone else. And black folks are being shot just for walking down the wrong street. Why don't our laws reflect the golden rule if all these cultures agree on it?”

“Well, that's a lot of questions all at once; I'm glad you're so curious, Jaden. One of the important ways I learned the Golden Rule was from the Bible.”

“The Bible has the Golden Rule in it?”

“Yes it does, but that doesn't mean that our country always does what the Bible teaches. People don't always act like Christians, and America certainly doesn't. But God calls us to care for the most vulnerable people in society--both as individuals and as a nation. We know America hasn't always kept all of its promises as Dr. Martin Luther King said. Most nations haven't. But that's why believers need to continue to advocate for more justice that reflects more of God's love for all people. When we care for the least of these, we are answering God's call.”

“I've never heard anyone talk about that stuff in the Bible,” Jaden said with surprise.

Have you talked about God's call for justice with anyone recently? Why or why not?

Keep in Mind

“But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God”
(Leviticus 19:34, KJV).



Focal Verses

KJV **Leviticus 19:9** And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.

10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour; I am the LORD.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

33 And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.

34 But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.

36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37 Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.

The People, Places, and Times

A Holy People. God's people have always had a special relationship with Him, one that is based on God's nature and character. When Israel agreed to be God's people and to obey His covenant—following His miraculous deliverance of them from the Egyptians—they bound themselves to ethical and religious responsibilities. These were delivered to them through legal codes (i.e., the Covenant and the Holiness Code), which included both positive and negative requirements. The vertical relationship of God's people was fairly simple and straightforward—they were to have no

other gods, they were not to use the Lord's name in vain, and they were to honor the Sabbath. The horizontal relationship was more complicated and came in the form of numerous specific commands, all provided as guiding examples and principles for how they governed themselves both at home and in the world.

Background

The Holiness Code of Leviticus 18:1–24:9 was given to the Israelites as a set of ethical and religious responsibilities, including positive and negative commands. John Rogerson and Philip Davies write, “The basis of the

regulations in 19:11–18 about fair dealing with one’s neighbors [sic] is not so much social solidarity as mutual religious responsibility” (145). A large part of Leviticus deals with priestly matters, while chapters 18 and 20 address sexual relations. Chapter 19, the focus of today’s lesson, deals primarily with Israel’s horizontal relationships with others, particularly addressing justice and fairness as examples of holiness.

At-A-Glance

1. Social Justice: Treating Others Right (Leviticus 19:9–16)
2. Social Justice: Starts in the Heart (vv. 17–18)
3. Social Justice: Cares for Strangers (vv. 33–34)
4. Social Justice: Being Fair in Business and Law (vv. 35–37)

In Depth

1. Social Justice: Treating Others Right (Leviticus 19:9–16)

Jesus summarized the horizontal part of a proper relationship with God as “love thy neighbour as thyself” (see Matthew 22:38–39; Luke 10:27). Inherent in every aspect of God’s holy nature and His laws regarding holiness is His heart of love. Every law in the Sinai Tradition reflects God’s love heart. Treating others right, or loving one’s neighbor, is the ultimate expression of social justice. Contained within this overriding principle are the following details:

Proper handling of the land (vv. 9–10). Inherent in treating others right is the matter of strangers (e.g., travelers), but also includes the ubiquitous poor and those who perhaps once were better off but have fallen on hard times.

The Israelites demonstrated a godly attitude toward others by generously leaving the corners of one’s fields or vines for those less fortunate. Today, one’s surplus can be shared with others in many ways.

Honesty with everyone (vv. 11–13). It might seem apparent initially, but the laws against committing perjury, stealing, and lying (which parallel the third, eighth, and ninth commandments) are sometimes harder to obey when the boundaries are unclear. The choices between right and wrong are evident when the cases are obvious. However, deception, deceit, and fraud often take subtle and more easily justified forms. The godly person avoids all such acts, however minor, that dishonor God and harm others.

Not taking advantage of others (vv. 14–16). Much like the previous laws, these specify taking advantage of the disadvantaged. Mistreating vulnerable people, such as those with disabilities or someone in a desperate situation, is injustice defined. The opposite type of person is also included—God’s holy people are not to act dishonorably toward the privileged. An easy example would be filing unjust lawsuits against rich people. In all cases, embodying social justice excludes all forms of gossip, backstabbing, and slander, as these are harmful to others and dishonoring to God.

How do these laws reflect or challenge our society today?

2. Social Justice: Starts in the Heart (vv. 17–18)

Don’t hate, and don’t seek revenge. Jesus was clear when He commanded to love even one’s enemies in Matthew 5:43–44, which would more than encompass these verses speaking primarily about “neighbors.” Jesus knew that murder started with hate and frequently originated with a grudge that morphed into vengeance. A law against this evil root would

avoid much trouble, grief, and heartache, not to mention it would spare lives. God is fully capable of exercising vengeance. Judgment belongs to God and God alone.

Love your neighbor as yourself. The second greatest commandment is reiterated in both Testaments and reinforced by Jesus and others. This is presented as one of several positive laws, but it captures the heart of the Holiness Code—all the law codes. Nothing better defines the child of God or social justice than loving one's neighbor as one's self.

How does having the right heart intentions to keep God's laws help us to keep them?

3. Social Justice: Cares for Strangers (vv. 33–34)

Strangers are sojourners (travelers). Strangers may also be immigrants or foreigners, and God's children are to treat them as they would be—again invoking the second greatest commandment. This clarifies beyond question the New Testament rhetorical question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The answer is abundantly clear—everyone! None are excluded from the law, as the various specific examples clarified. Whether they are visitors just passing through, settlers from another culture, or foreign outsiders, all are to be treated like blood relatives and loved as one's self.

Israel once was a stranger in Egypt. Considering that the great Exodus from Egypt had not happened very long before the time of these laws, the reminder should have been a very familiar example. Nothing drives a point home better than a personal example, especially a recent one. For Christians, the parallel is with their deliverance from the bondage of sin, which, more often than not, is remembered with great fondness, no matter how many years pass. Occasionally, however, some need to be reminded that they once had been delivered from oppression and bondage, and they

should not even consider mistreating others or inflicting them with any injustice.

4. Social Justice: Being Fair in Business and Law (vv. 35–37)

Just scales, righteous dealings, and fairness toward all. Some Old Testament laws occasionally translate perfectly into modern society without needing any cultural filter. The law about unjust scales is preceded by a general command of not doing any unrighteousness in “judgment” or weighing any matter. Still, specifically, when scales determine values, deception is difficult to detect. This could find countless modern applications, such as gas stations not setting their pumps accurately, taxi drivers “running up the meter,” expense accounts or invoices being “padded,” and accountants doing “creative” bookkeeping.

Obedying God's just ordinances is evidence of righteousness. Even where there is an unbridgeable cultural distance between the laws of the “Sinai Tradition” and today, God's people are still called to a standard of holiness measured against God's. Nothing demonstrates personal righteousness more than being faithful to living in a way that honors God. Nothing more explicitly defines such a life as one committed to loving others through practical expressions of social justice.

Search the Scriptures

1. Where is the Holiness Code found in Scripture?
2. Were the laws in the Holiness Code exhaustive?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Think about some of your personal experiences with injustice or unrighteousness. How did these experiences make you feel?
2. Now, contrast these memories and feelings with a memorable time when you witnessed holiness, justice, or righteousness. How did those make you feel?

Liberating Lesson

Often, the idealistic matters of holiness and justice become elusive when confronted with complex, emotional, and controversial events and circumstances—such as a nation’s concern for border security or access to healthcare and how that should be translated into laws and actions. As much as one wants to obey God’s Word and love one’s neighbor, how are those realities impacted when a neighbor breaks the law? Do we want God’s justice against others but God’s mercy for ourselves? How should the thinking of Christians be balanced to reflect God’s commands while respecting the rights of non-Christians? These are not easy questions or simple issues. God’s people must be careful to weigh (judge) the issues, allow themselves to be driven by principles of biblical justice, and not let our faith be confused by the vested interests of politics.

Application for Activation

God’s people are to be in the world but not of it. Theirs is a higher calling to the kingdom of God and holy living as defined by Scripture—which translates to a timeless command to treat others as we would be treated, to love others as we would be loved, and a determination to be just and fair in all one’s human relationships. Surely, there are enough challenges in this one paragraph to last a lifetime.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37, KJV

Introduction

In this lesson, “I am the LORD” appears eight times. With other verses in chapter 19, it appears 16 times and 162 times within the Old Testament. Within the lesson, the phrase expands in verses 10, 34, and 36 as “I am the LORD your God” (see also vv. 3, 4, 7, 24). All of the above are abbreviations of the entire first use in the chapter, “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2), which serves as the introduction to the chapter and this lesson. These words are the simple but all-sufficient reason that Israel (and the church) is to obey. This portion of Scripture is all about God’s holiness and His requirements for our holiness, and thus has been called the “Holiness Code.”

The chapter spells out Israel’s ethical and religious responsibilities. Some injunctions are negative (to be avoided) while others are positive (to be embraced). This chapter underscores and elaborates the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) given to Moses in Exodus 20:2–17 and reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:6–21.

9 And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the

gleanings of thy harvest. 10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

Jesus quoted from the Law to confirm that the greatest command is vertical, to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5, right after the great “*shema*” verse in 6:4), while the second greatest command is horizontal, to love one’s neighbor. Virtually all of Leviticus 19 deals with the horizontal, which includes proper handling of the land to care for the needs of the poor. In 19:10, the Hebrew word for “poor” is *‘aniy* (aw-NEE) and has been consistently interpreted among most versions. The Hebrew word for “stranger” is *ger* (gare), but this word has been interpreted as “foreigner,” “alien,” and “sojourner.” The point is not to pick the fields or vines clean and not think only of oneself or one’s profits. The point is to act generously with every harvest and crop and consciously think of others, especially those less fortunate, like the poor and those away from home—the travelers—and to care about their needs in a practical and tangible way.

11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. 12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD. 13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

This part of the Holiness Code of Leviticus is cast in the negative by prohibitions. It is all about social justice, which involves much more than economic justice, as some might think incorrectly. To steal, deceive, or lie is squarely denounced in the eighth and ninth commandments (do not steal and do not bear false witness), but in this context, it applies especially to the poor. Later verses in this

lesson directly include all who are vulnerable and indirectly include everyone. Ultimately, the prohibition is against deception and deceit against anyone for any reason. Paralleling the third commandment (do not take the name of the Lord in vain) with different words in Leviticus 19:12 refers to using God’s name in an oath that one does not intend to keep. Today’s swearing on a Bible in a courtroom but planning to commit perjury would violate this injunction. Dishonesty compromises the individual and the entire human community, contrary to and destructive of God’s holiness.

Oppression does not reflect God’s holiness, which demands a higher standard and values even the “least of these” as the same thing as serving God Himself (Matthew 25:31–40). In Leviticus 19:13, the Hebrew word for “neighbor” is *rea’* (RAY-ah) and ultimately refers to everyone.

14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD. 15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. 16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

People with disabilities are vulnerable, and even in ancient times, it was clear that God would not tolerate injustice of any kind inflicted upon them. This specific injunction is followed by the familiar and powerful rationalization, as if to say, “Do this, just because I the Lord say it.” Verse 15 is a more general reference, as if verse 14 needed another blanket for those who might find exceptions to “do no unrighteousness” of any kind in judgment (negative injunction)—whether it involves the poor or the rich—but rather “judge” your neighbor righteously (positive injunction).

“Judge” comes from the Hebrew word *shaphat* (shaw-FAT) and can mean to govern, vindicate, or punish, but it can also mean to decide a controversy or enter into one. “Judgment” in Hebrew is *mishpat* (mish-PAWT) and means a just ordinance; it is a little more specific (with the “just” element) than “statute.” The context of this entire section speaks to men acting like wolves who single out the weak, sickly, or those most likely to be easy to abuse. A child of the holy God is not to do these things—or risk God’s anger.

Slander is another specific type of evil or injustice, which in Ezekiel 22:9 is connected to murder. In modern times, the legal definition of slander is publishing something about someone else that is not true and doing it with malice. The biblical injunction refers to gossip involving false or untrue statements spread intentionally. Because it causes so much damage and because it is so far from holiness, slander or gossip is singled out for prohibition in Scripture (see also Jeremiah 6:28; 9:4; Proverbs 11:13; 20:19). Gossip or slander also violates the eighth commandment.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. 18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

In Matthew 5:43, Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:17–18 (part of the Mosaic Law), clearly understanding that hate in one’s heart leads to murder. Thus, hate has always been condemned in both testaments of Scripture, with or without the act of murder. The specific expressions of revenge and bearing a grudge in verse 18 are a sharper focus of the general injunction against hatred. Other parts of the Old Testament zoom in even further on the subject of revenge, specifying repeatedly that God alone has the right, and God

alone can exact perfect justice, regardless of the severity of the act or actions that inspired the hate and revenge (see Jeremiah 15:15; Nahum 1:2; Psalm 94:1). It is common knowledge that resentment and anger fester and invariably result in unholy expressions and deeds. In addition, it is commonly known that such attitudes often harm the bearers more than their targets.

It is juxtaposed against and antithetical to all forms of injustice, hatred, and evil, and love stands as the quintessential solution and antidote. In Leviticus 19:18, the Hebrew word for “love” is *’ahab* (AH-hab). The do’s and don’ts of loving one’s neighbor could have been listed by the thousands. But the list in Leviticus, expanded from the Ten Commandments in Exodus, should have served as a sufficient extension to make clear that love for God translates into love for neighbors, and that love does not inflict injustice, hatred, vengeance, and so on. Jesus quoted from the now famous citation of the second greatest commandment, captured by all three Synoptic Gospel writers (Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27), Paul (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14), and James (James 2:8). Again, the only rationale needed is that God is God.

19:33 And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. 34 But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

As stated, the Hebrew word for “stranger” is *ger* (gare) and can include a sojourner; in verse 33, the phrase “stranger sojourn” is interpreted from the Hebrew *guwr* (goor). Thus, the phrase easily could have been a bit of humorous alliteration (i.e., spelled phonetically, “the ger guwr”). In our modern times, these sojourners would be immigrants or visitors. It is easy to see the proper way to treat strangers in a brief

sentence: “Love them as you love yourself.” In a literal sense, the Israelites had been “stranger sojourners” in Egypt not long before. Hence, the reference in verse 34 to their former place of slavery was appropriate, and the connection was vivid. God loved the Israelites when they were sojourners in the foreign land of Egypt, and He also loved them when they rebelled against Him and practiced evil. Likewise, He loves us while we have been strangers and sinners to Him.

35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. 36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

‘Evel (EH-vel) is the Hebrew word for “unrighteousness,” and it sounds remarkably like our word “evil.” Indeed, the meaning is synonymous with injustice, iniquity, and wickedness, and it can include violent deeds of injustice. In verse 36, the Hebrew word for “just” is used, *tsedeq* (TSEH-dek), and means justice, rightness, and righteousness—the exact opposite of evil from verse 35. Few Old Testament theological concepts emerge quite as strongly as the twin themes of justice and righteousness (see Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 16:5; Amos 5:24). We are to embody or model our love and obedience to God through our love for and service to others, without exception.

Jesus further underscored the Levitical amplifications of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) by removing all listed specifics and replacing them with even more impossible-to-achieve holiness—namely that to think about acting unjustly would make one guilty of the whole law (Matthew 5:22). In contrast to unjust weights used in unrighteousness, those in Leviticus 19:36 who use “just weights” both exercise justice and are evidence of righteousness.

37 Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.

Again, the word “judgments” in Hebrew is *mishpat* and means just ordinances, an equivalent of “statutes.” Although that word in Hebrew is *choq* (khole), which refers to God’s laws in this use, it does not contain the clear, “just” element of *mishpat*. We must obey God’s commands!

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Say It Correctly

Decalogue. **DEK**-uh-log.

Ephah. **EE**-fuh, **EE**-fah.

Leviticus. Lih-**VI**-tih-kuhs.

Zechariah. Zek'uh-**RI**-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 15

Genesis 43–45

Psalms 8

DAY 16

Genesis 46–47

Psalms 9:1–6

DAY 17

Genesis 48–50

Psalms 9:7–12

DAY 18

Exodus 1–3

Psalms 9:13–20

DAY 19

Exodus 4–6

Psalms 10:1–6

DAY 20

Exodus 7–9

Psalms 10:7–11

DAY 21

Exodus 10–12

Psalms 10:12–18

Notes

Teaching Tips

September 28
Bible Study Guide 4

Words You Should Know

A. Spy (13:2) *tur* (Heb.)—To go before and search out

B. Glory (14:10) *kabod* (Heb.)—Majesty, honor, splendor; especially of God

Teacher Preparation

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Reading.

B. Pray for your students and lesson clarity.

C. Read the lesson Scripture in multiple translations.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Begin the class with prayer.

B. As a class, brainstorm a list of big decisions that adults make—with marriage, children, health, etc. Discuss specific ways God can be a part of each decision.

C. Have the students read the Aim for Change and the In Focus story.

D. Ask students how events like those in the story weigh on their hearts and how they can view these events from a faith perspective.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Read the Focal Verses and discuss the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections.

B. Have the class share what Scriptures stand out for them and why, with particular emphasis on today's context.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use In Depth or More Light on the Text to facilitate a deeper discussion of the lesson text.

B. Pose the questions in Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning.

C. Discuss the Liberating Lesson and Application for Activation sections.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the value of trusting in God's promises.

B. End class with a commitment to pray for courage to cling to the truths God has revealed to us.

God Plans Good

HOW CAN WE HAVE FAITH DESPITE OPPOSITION?

Focal Verses • NUMBERS 14:1–10

Aim for Change

EVALUATE the reasons for the Israelites' refusal to listen to Joshua and Caleb, DESIRE deeper trust in the promises of God, and CONFRONT the future in confidence of God's guidance and provision.

In Focus

Michelle was the only one professing faith in Christ within her family. She had grown up learning to be kind, but when a friend at school invited her to youth group, she heard the true Gospel for the first time. Michelle realized just being kind was not enough; she repented of her sins and accepted salvation that night.

When she was old enough to live on her own, Michelle wanted her faith to be seen in all of her life. But her family didn't understand. Often, she came up against persecution from family members because she would not join in their parties and trips to casinos to gamble. Many of the family members encouraged her to join them and have some fun. Occasionally, two of her cousins would tease her about her faith keeping her from having a good time with the family. A few even wanted to start an argument by saying things which they thought would cause Michelle to respond in negative ways. She did not argue with them. She simply quietly lived out her faith.

However, Michelle looked forward to the gatherings at church with other Christians. She found encouragement and strength from her church family to continue to work out her salvation as she walked daily with God

Our behavior is often a powerful witness to others. How is Michelle sharing her witness?



Keep in Mind

“If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which floweth with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:8, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Numbers 14:1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

The People, Places, and Times

Promised Land. The land of Canaan is a hill country east of the Mediterranean Sea and west of the Jordan River. God promised Abraham that this land would be given to his descendants (Genesis 13:14–17). The Israelites occupied the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, fighting such people as the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. The land was described as “flowing with milk and honey,” indicating that it would provide the Israelites with an abundant lifestyle.

Caleb. This spy was from the tribe of Judah, which was associated with royalty, as it produced King David and Jesus. Only he and Joshua stood as a voice of courage when the twelve spies returned from the Promised Land (v. 24), saying they could take the land. God promised to allow him to enter the Promised

Land for his faithfulness. Therefore, when it came time to take the land a generation later, Caleb led his clan to conquer the portion of land allotted to him. He defeated some of the most formidable opponents of Canaan, the giant sons of Anak (Joshua 15:13–15).

Background

Numbers 13 and 14 record the Israelites’ journey in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. While in the wilderness, God commands Moses to send one man, the leader of their ancestral tribe, to spy on the Canaan land (Numbers 13). Shammua goes from the tribe of Reuben, Shaphat from Simeon, Caleb from Judah, Igal from Issachar, Joshua (Moses changed his name from Hoshea) from Ephraim, Palti from Benjamin, Gaddiel from Zebulun, Gaddi from Manasseh, Ammiel from Dan, Sethur from Asher, Nahbi

from Naphtali, and Geuel from Gad. The men were to determine the land's quality and the people's strength.

After the men return from spying on the land, they declare that Canaan is full of good things, but the people seem too strong to overcome. As they listed their objections to entering the land, only Caleb (13:30) and Joshua (14:6-9) disagreed with their report. Caleb and Joshua believed they could prevail over the enemies in the land of Canaan. However, the negative report persuaded the Israelites, and they lamented that they had not remained in Egypt. The Israelites decided to choose another leader who could help them return to Egypt and stone their current leaders. But the glory of the Lord appeared and interrupted their plans.

The Israelites are tired of wandering and can now enter the land God had given them. Why are they reluctant to claim what God has promised them?

At-A-Glance

1. The People Speak Out in Rebellion (Numbers 14:1–4)
2. Joshua and Caleb Speak (vv. 5–10)

In Depth

1. The People Speak Out in Rebellion (Numbers 14:1–4)

After the 12 spies gave their reports about Canaan, the Israelites did not want to enter the promised land. The Israelites responded with mutiny and rebellion against God. Ten spies said they should not enter, while two spies encouraged them to receive God's blessings for their nation. The people listened to the ten spies, who justified their desire to return to Egypt. Their response was a rebellion against God's instructions. The people complained and

murmured against God and Moses. They "wept all night" (Numbers 14:1).

As they imagined their desperate condition, the people fretted, which gave credit to the negative report of the ten spies instead of God's promises. Because they feared they would be dying soon, they wished they were already dead. The previous months of good living, due to God's protection, were dismissed as the Israelites wished they had died in Egypt.

The Israelites looked forward with despair, without realizing that God did not save them from Pharaoh to die at the hands of the Canaanites. The Israelites responded to God's good plans with an audacity that God led them into a snare of death and destruction.

Why do people complain through criticizing and grumbling?

2. Joshua & Caleb Speak (vv. 5–10)

Through the loud cries of the Israelites, Moses and Aaron humbly prayed to God. As the people's complaints continued to incite clamor and rebellion, Moses prayed that the people would not ruin themselves.

In response to the sins of the people and in dread of the wrath of God, which was ready to befall them, Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes (v. 6). They assured the angry Israelites of the blessings in the land they surveyed. As the majority had reported, the land would not engulf them because Israel had God on their side. But, the Israelites did not confront their fear of entering the land that awaited them. If the Israelites had confronted their fears, they would have realized that their disbelief was a sin, and they had provoked God to leave them (v.12). The Israelites needed faith to enter the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb saw the abundance of the land. It was a "good land" (v. 8) and worth entering. However, due to the Israelite's lack of trust in God, they couldn't receive the fullness of God's promises.

Joshua and Caleb were distressed by the Israelite's lack of faith and desire to return to Egypt. The Israelites were not in danger from the Canaanites, but they were in danger from their God because they rebelled against Him. Joshua and Caleb encouraged the Israelites to trust that God would bring them into the Promised Land. The Israelites responded in anger and distrust of God's leaders, who desired to give them good counsel. The complaints led to an enraged multitude who desired to stone God's servants. The Israelites were not reasonable, and their anger was out of control.

Consider your relationship with God. Do you complain when something terrible happens or blame someone else? Do you pray to God in response to challenges?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the Israelites cry (Numbers 14:1)?
2. What did the Israelites believe would happen to them in the unfamiliar land (v. 3)?
3. In their despair and rebellion, what do the Israelites conspire to do (v. 4)?
4. Why did Joshua and Caleb believe they should enter the land (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. The Israelites' experience of what happened in the past made them want to derail their future, although God already promised them victory. Most of the assembly wanted to return to Egypt, but two factors stopped them—God's presence and His chosen leadership. Describe God's presence in this Scripture. What difference does Moses' leadership make in this story?
2. The Israelites were so fearful that they longed to return to Egypt, where they labored as slaves (Numbers 14:1–2). Why were they afraid of the future even though God promised them victory?

Liberating Lesson

God has called the church to enter our lands and be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Despite that call, many churches remain silent on issues like violence against women and children, the plight of refugee and migrant families, and environmental concerns. While we often justify our silence by arguing that churches are spiritual, not political spaces, Jesus taught us that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls, and minds. The second commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves. God has promised never to forsake us. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:20) records that Jesus is with us until the end of the age. God has already promised us the victory! So, why are we so afraid to speak up and help those who are suffering?

Application for Activation

Use a poster board to display God's blessings and promises for His children or postcards to inspire you to trust God's Word. Include God's response when we complain and murmur. Refer to Philippians 2:12–18, which instructs believers to avoid murmuring and complaining. Place the board and postcards in a place you see every day to begin your day focused on God's blessings and promises.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Numbers 14:1–10, KJV

1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

Nothing breaks a parent's heart like seeing a child cry unless those tears result from selfish desires and ingratitude. The tears of the ungrateful often get an angry response. God had delivered the children of the promise to the edge of the Promised Land. Spies had been sent in and brought back a mixed report. The majority of the spies held that the land's inhabitants were too strong to be conquered, and any attempt to destroy the inhabitants would result in the Israelite's defeat. The people believed the report from the ten spies and wept (Heb. *bakah*, baw-KAW). Their loud wailing was an expression of sadness and lament. They wondered, "Why does God continue to make it so hard?" Their perspective was based on the negative report of the ten spies, not the promises of the one true God.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

All the hardships the people had endured for the previous two years piled on each other. The people embraced the report from the ten spies and turned on Moses and Aaron, God's appointed leaders. Nothing of the excitement and vitality that had greeted the departure from Egypt remained, and now they just wanted to die. Now, they feared being prey (Heb. *baz*, baz). They envisioned themselves being carted off as the spoils of a losing war. They concluded that God had handed them a raw deal by bringing them to the edge of the Promised Land, only to be destroyed by the giants in the land.

Their earlier lust for the meat, fruit, and vegetables of Egypt had helped to dull the memories of the harsh conditions of slavery. God had greeted their earlier complaints with fire and holy wrath, so the people now rebelled against God's appointed authority. If God wasn't going to make the task of occupying the Promised Land easy, they would take matters into their own hands and return to Egypt.

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

The rejection of Moses' and God's leadership was complete. The Israelites no longer wanted anything to do with God's plan to deliver them to a Promised Land where they could be free. They decided among themselves to come up with an alternative plan. They appointed leaders to guide them back across the desert and into Egypt. The people were no longer complaining. They are determined to take their circumstances into their own hands and do things their way.

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

Moses and Aaron knew that the people's actions would not please God. They fell on their faces, anticipating what God was about to do. Earlier complaining had resulted in fire

and plague from God, and now, in the face of outright rejection by the assembly, the prophets did not know how God would react. They only knew that it wouldn't be pleasant.

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: 7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

As Moses and Aaron lay prostrate on the ground, Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who came back with a message of faithful anticipation that God would give the people the land, “rent” (Heb. *qara*’, kaw-**RAH**, which means “to tear into pieces”) their clothes, stepped up, and addressed the people. Though they were the two spies who returned and gave the minority report concerning the Promised Land, Joshua’s name was not mentioned until now. This was because Joshua was second in command of Moses, and the company of people would have expected him to be in complete support of anything Moses communicated. Now, he supported Caleb and tried to help persuade the masses not to reject God and His appointed leaders. Though the journey had been burdensome, they had not lost faith in God or His plan for Israel’s future. They reminded the people that the land was indeed a marvelous place.

8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. 9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

Clothes rent, Caleb and Joshua stood before the people and tried to make their case not to

abandon God. Earlier, the people had seen a single huge branch of grapes cut from a tree in the Promised Land, which required two men to carry back to the encampment. Caleb and Joshua did not refute the report of the other spies but tried to remind the people that the God who had promised the land to them was sufficient to fulfill His word and deliver that land. They emphasized that the land would be theirs if God delighted in His people. Thus, they encouraged and warned the people not to rebel against God (Heb. *marad*, maw-**RAD**, which means “to be seditious”). They also indicated that because God was with the people, the land’s inhabitants would be defenseless. It was almost as if Joshua and Caleb reminded the people of the power of the same God who delivered them from Egypt. Yet the people to whom they spoke had already decided not to listen.

10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

As Caleb and Joshua pleaded with the people to remember God, the crowd became more and more convinced that they wanted nothing to do with what they were saying. As a response, they began to pick up stones to kill them. Stoning was a legitimate judicial punishment that an assembly had the authority to exact upon anyone they felt was guilty of a religious crime. The people did not believe that Caleb and Joshua were communicating the will of God to them. Instead, they felt they were false witnesses and worthy to be stoned, breaking the commandments of God. The congregation had allowed itself to become convinced that God was in favor of their desire to return to Egypt. The Children of Israel felt justified in their belief and actions until God’s glory (Heb. *kabowd*, kaw-**BODE**) appeared before them and spoke to Moses.

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Say It Correctly

Tabernacle. taa-**BUHR**-naa-kuhl.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 22

Exodus 13–15

Psalms 11

DAY 23

Exodus 16–18

Psalms 12:1–3

DAY 24

Exodus 19–21

Psalms 12:4–8

DAY 25

Exodus 22–24

Psalms 13

DAY 26

Exodus 25–26

Psalms 14

DAY 27

Exodus 27–29

Psalms 15

DAY 28

Exodus 30–31

Psalms 16

Notes
