

Lessons 161–170

The Victory of Jesus

Unit **17**

Adult

Student Guide



Answers
BIBLE CURRICULUM

Answers Bible Curriculum

Unit 17 • Adult Student

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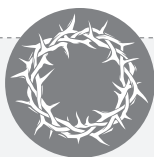
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Introduction to Answers Bible Curriculum

In the third year of his ministry, Jesus began teaching more plainly about his purpose as the Messiah. Many failed to understand his teachings, but many repented and followed him, knowing him to be the Christ.

There are only two responses to Jesus—submission or rejection. Those responses became very clear in the last week of Jesus' earthly life. He was welcomed to Jerusalem with shouting and celebration, heralded as the promised King.

Then, in a matter of a few days, he was rejected by his own people, as the crowds in Jerusalem shouted, "Crucify him!" He was shuffled through six trials and no real charge against him was found. Though he was innocent, he was sentenced to a gruesome death on the cross, by which he satisfied the wrath of God and offered salvation to sinners.

We encourage you to read the Prepare to Learn section before class each week. This will provide important background information so that you will get more from each lesson.



The Triumphal Entry

Lesson Focus

As Jesus approached Jerusalem for the final time, his disciples flocked to meet him. They celebrated his arrival, recognizing him as their King, the Son of David. Jesus fulfilled prophecy by riding a colt as the people honored him, spreading cloaks and palm leaves on the ground before him.

Key Passages

Matthew 21:1–11, 21:14–16; Mark 11–16

What You Will Learn

- How Jesus was welcomed to Jerusalem
- How Jesus' triumphal entry fulfilled prophecy

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 15:57–58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday each mark important events in the life of Jesus. Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey as prophesied by the Old Testament prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9). Good Friday is the day we remember Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, bearing the punishment for sin and the wrath of God for sinners (John 1:29). Then, Easter Sunday marks the joyous celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Without these events, the Christian faith would be futile and meaningless, and mankind would be lost and hopeless. Significantly, all four Gospels record these events, but with different perspectives and details to give us the full picture of what happened.

Every detail was sovereignly orchestrated by God. When Jesus neared Jerusalem before the Passover, he sent two disciples into a village to collect a donkey and a colt. The animals were right where Jesus said they'd be, and the disciples were permitted to collect them and bring them to Jesus (Matthew 21:1-7). Jesus rode the colt into the city, where the crowds spread their cloaks and tree branches on the road ahead of him and welcomed him with cries of "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes

in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:8-11).

The people had heard about Jesus' teaching and miracles and hoped he was their Messiah and King, as their cry of "Hosanna" (save us) indicates. However, many people, including the disciples, misunderstood what their Messiah planned to do. He was not coming to Jerusalem to gather an army and overthrow the Romans. He had a much bigger purpose—to save mankind from the punishment of sin.

Jesus told his disciples of his coming suffering and death (Matthew 16:21-23, 26:1-2), but they did not understand. As predicted, the chief priests and elders, angered by his cleansing of the temple (Matthew 21:12-13) and his authoritative preaching, plotted to arrest Jesus and kill him (Matthew 26:3-5). Imagine their glee when Judas, one of Jesus' own trusted friends and disciples, came and offered to deliver Jesus to them (Matthew 26:14-16). But God was in control of the timing of Judas' betrayal, and Jesus would share a final Passover meal with his disciples before his arrest.

After the meal, Jesus and his disciples went to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, where Judas led the mob to arrest Jesus in the garden. The hasty and clandestine trials held at night by the Sanhedrin and high priest were

unsuccessful in finding fault in Jesus. But the high priest accused Jesus of blasphemy when Jesus told the truth that he was the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 26:63–68). Then the Roman procurator, Pilate, ordered that Jesus be flogged and crucified, even though he knew Jesus was innocent (Matthew 27:18–26).

Soldiers stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on him then placed a

crown of thorns on his head, mocking him as the King of the Jews before leading him away to be crucified at Golgotha (Matthew 27:27–33). Jesus' death opened the way for mankind to approach the throne of grace and obtain mercy and forgiveness (Hebrews 4:14–16). And his death was not the end, as we read of his glorious resurrection after he was placed in a tomb (Matthew 28:1–10).

Historical/Apologetics Background

Easter, along with the week leading up to it, is one of the most well-known Christian holidays, even among non-Christians. Because all four Gospels record the events, we have many more details during this time than other periods of Jesus' life. However, these four accounts can offer some challenges as we work to harmonize them. Of course, we know that the Bible is the sovereignly inspired, inerrant Word of God. Any challenges are due to our own assumptions and misunderstandings; there are no contradictions between the Gospels.

As we work through the timeline of events, one of the challenges regards the timing of Jesus' anointing in Bethany. John 12:1–7 places the event six days before the Passover, when Jesus first arrived in Bethany. This would place it on Saturday night, before the triumphal entry. But Matthew and Mark seem to record the event just two days before the Passover (Mark 14:1–9; Matthew 26:1–12). Although we can't be sure, it seems reasonable that John's timing is more accurate

and Matthew and Mark were inserting the event in a parenthetical sense to explain, in part, why Judas sought to betray Jesus (Mark 14:10–11; Matthew 26:14–16). John also makes this connection, though more explicitly, by explaining that Judas cared not for the poor but dealt dishonestly with the group's moneybag (John 12:4–6).

We should not be dogmatic regarding either placement, since Scripture is not clear about when the event took place. It is possible that neither is chronological—John could have mentioned it early because he was explaining the significance of Jesus staying in Bethany, and Matthew and Mark could have mentioned it later in connection to Judas' desire to betray Jesus. Some have even suggested these are two separate events, though the accounts are so similar in detail that there is little reason to doubt they are parallel accounts of the same event. What we do know for sure is that the anointing occurred in Bethany—where Jesus lodged each night—and

that Jesus recognized it as a preparation for his burial.

Other questions arise as well: when did the fig tree wither; why were the religious leaders waiting to eat the Passover; which day was Jesus crucified on; did the

rooster crow once or twice; when did the temple veil tear; what was the inscription on Jesus' cross? We must struggle with the text, digging deeper into God's Word, being dogmatic where the Bible is clear and showing grace where it is not.

Studying God's Word

What took place between Palm Sunday and Easter?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1–11

Matthew 21:14–16

Passion Week Activity

Using Mark's Gospel, determine the timeline of events during the final week of Jesus' ministry.

Day 1 — Triumphal entry (Mark 11:1)

Day 2 —

Day 3 —

Day 4 —

Day 5 —

Day 6 —

Day 7 — Sabbath (Saturday)

Day 8 — Sunday resurrection (Mark 16:1-2)



Jesus Rebukes the Pharisees

Lesson Focus

The religious leaders of Jesus' day—the scribes, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees—had fallen into the trap of legalism; they had made the traditions and commands of men equal to the commands of God. Jesus showed them the error in their thinking, pointed them back to the Word of God as the authority, and rebuked them for leading others astray.

Key Passages

Matthew 21:23–27, 22:1–14, 23:1–36; Mark 12:18–27

What You Will Learn

- How Jesus used Scripture to refute error
- Why Jesus so harshly rebuked false teachers

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 15:57–58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

The religious leaders in Jesus' day did not handle the scriptures of the Old Testament appropriately. And Jesus rebuked them for their failure to rightly understand and apply what had been recorded for them by God (Matthew 5:17–48). As Jesus taught and discussed the Scriptures with these teachers of his day, he would often ask the indicting question, “Have you not read?” (Matthew 12:3, 12:5, 19:4, 22:31). And then he would point them back to the right interpretation of God's Word. In fact, these leaders had such a skewed interpretation of the Scriptures that Jesus referred to them publicly as hypocrites.

By all appearances, the Pharisees believed that all of what we call the Old Testament was a reliable record of God's revelation to them. However, many of them had a zeal for obedience that was motivated by their desire to be admired by men. They had developed many oral traditions in which various rabbis (teachers) were esteemed and their teachings heeded. These added traditions created a religious system with layers of laws and regulations that went far beyond God's commands. We find record of many of these traditions in the Mishnah, a collection of Jewish laws and traditions covering many topics from the various holidays to marriage laws, civil laws, and laws concerning the temple in Jerusalem. As the Pharisees held

more and more to the traditions and approval of men, their morality and zeal for obedience became more artificial. These learned men, religious leaders, and teachers had strayed so far from the truth of God's Word that they could not see the Savior before them as he fulfilled all the prophecies they had read in the Scriptures. In fact, these men led the movement to crucify Jesus on the cross.

Matthew 23 records Jesus' last public message before he died on the cross. Here Jesus showed his righteous anger at the dishonoring of God, his laws, and his Word. Jesus' rebuke was directed toward the religious leaders—the scribes and Pharisees and their religious hypocrisy (Matthew 23:27). Jesus had some very strong words for these religious leaders, calling them blind guides, fools, children of hell, hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones! Jesus would not allow his Father's name or the work of the Spirit to be dishonored by these false teachers. They focused on the externals of religion—looking pious, saying long prayers, giving tithes—but Jesus said they had “neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).

We must take heed. The Bible is God's only Word to us. It is living, active, and powerful. It is what divides soul and spirit. It is what discerns the thoughts and intentions

of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). We are all warned not to add to God's Word lest he rebuke us and we be found liars (Proverbs 30:6). Christians are called to be transformed by the

renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). And this can only be done by diligent and faithful study of the Bible, through which we learn of his redemptive plan.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Today, we still encounter false teachers and lies against God's truth. Many Christians suggest that we should leave the Bible out of our answers to skeptics because these skeptics don't believe the Bible is authoritative. But we know by the example Scripture offers that this is not the way to defend God's honor and his Word. We can only turn to the authority of God's Word as we seek to correct those who are in error. Paul instructed Timothy to not be ashamed of the testimony of Christ but to continue in what he had learned from the sacred writings (2 Timothy 1:8, 3:14–15).

As we encounter these false teachers, we are instructed to share with patience and humility, wishing that they may repent and escape the snare of the devil (2 Timothy 2:24–26). In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter exhorted his readers to always be ready to give a reason for the hope they have in Christ, but to do so with gentleness and respect. As we engage others around us, our distinctive Christian life should cause others to see us as different. As we talk of the hope we have in Christ, unbelievers will have questions for us. Responding to these questions from Scripture and pointing people to the truths of the Bible is imperative—whether we are talking about

marriage, sexuality, education, entertainment, or any topic.

Even in the church today, we need to check ourselves to be sure we are standing on the foundation of Scripture alone. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for the traditions they had added to God's law, and later in history we see that the Reformers of the sixteenth century sought to correct errors of the Roman Catholic Church brought on by man-made traditions.

One of the common cries of those Reformers seeking to restore sound teaching was *ad fontes*, a Latin phrase that means “to the fountains.” This was a call to go back to the Bible as the source of truth, examining the traditions that had been handed down to make sure they lined up with Scripture. Those that were not consistent with Scripture were set aside as false traditions of men.

With that said, traditions are not always wrong. Biblical Christian churches can present the truth in a different manner by their use of choir robes, pews, prayer books, statements of faith/confessions, pulpits, even music styles. However, in all things, Scripture needs to be our guide. We have no biblical right to impose our patterns and practices on anyone else, unless it is a doctrine clearly taught in the Scriptures. Doing so could easily lead to the

same trap of legalism and imposing regulations on others that the Pharisees and the Roman Catholics had fallen into with their lists of extra regulations and laws.



Studying God's Word

Should tradition ever trump Scripture?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Teaches in Jerusalem

Matthew 21:23–27

Matthew 22:1–14

Jesus Corrects the Sadducees

Mark 12:18–27

Have You Not Read? Activity

Read 2 Timothy 2:14–26 and use the questions below to gain a biblical perspective on using Scripture to correct those who are in error. Note the verse or phrase from the passage that supports your answers.

1. How does the command in verse 15 relate to the passages studied in the lesson?

2. What key ideas can we take away from studying how Jesus responded to the Pharisees and Sadducees in these passages?

3. The Sadducees had raised certain portions of Scripture above others, arriving at wrong conclusions about what God had said. Where do similar ideas show up within the church today, and what errors does this lead to?

4. When you listen to those who teach Scripture, why is it important for you to know Scripture well?

5. Have you ever been taken in by a tradition of men and later come to find out that it was actually contrary to what the Bible teaches? How did you become aware of the error, and how did you correct it?

6. Why do Christians fall into the trap of legalism, making additional rules that appear to promote holiness?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Shares the Last Supper

Lesson Focus

During his last Passover meal, and just before he was betrayed in the garden, Jesus shared bread and wine with his apostles. The blessing and eating together of this meal pointed to the suffering he was about to endure on the cross. Jesus commanded them to continue to use bread and wine to remember his sacrifice.

Key Passages

Matthew 26:17–30; Luke 22:24–27; John 13:1–20

What You Will Learn

- How the disciples' pursuit of greatness compared to Jesus' humility
- The relationship between Passover and the Lord's supper

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 15:57–58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

The Jewish Passover was the most honored and sacred times of sacrifice. It was a holiday celebrated by the Jews to remember God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery out of Egypt. The first Passover recorded preceded the last of God's plagues on Egypt—when the firstborn of every household was struck down. The sacrificial instructions from God for that first Passover were specific, including which animal to sacrifice, what to do with its blood, how to cook it, what to do with the leftovers, what to wear, why to prepare in haste, and what the shed blood represented (Exodus 12).

God demanded that the Passover sacrifice be an unblemished lamb (Exodus 12:5). The blood of that lamb would be put on the doorframe of the Israelites' homes as a sign, and the destroyer would pass over those homes and spare those within (Exodus 12:13). And this was what the Passover holiday would remind the Jews of each year.

The lesson of the Passover was that God's wrath could only be satisfied by the death and shedding of innocent blood—in this case the blood of a lamb. Although this sacrifice was

repeated year after year, the blood of the lamb would not ultimately satisfy God's wrath. The Bible tells us these sacrifices were a foreshadowing of the good things to come and that it is impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). These sacrifices pointed to another—the Lord Jesus Christ—who was put to death once for all that he might bring sinners to God (1 Peter 3:18; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

This is the gospel! In this guest room with his disciples, at this last Passover dinner—the last supper—Jesus was preparing himself and his followers for his death. The annual sacrifices of the traditional Passover celebration would no longer be necessary. For the perfect Lamb of God would soon be slain and bring salvation to those whose names are written in the book of life (Revelation 3:5, 13:8).

Today, Christians gather around the table of the Lord to remember Jesus' final sacrifice. We eat the bread, and we drink the cup as we proclaim the Lord's death (1 Corinthians 11:26), waiting expectantly for his victorious return (Matthew 24:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Historical/Apologetics Background

There are four basic views among Christians regarding the Lord's supper.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches a view called transubstantiation where the substance, or the

essence, of the bread and wine are transformed into the physical body and blood of Christ, though the appearance to our senses remains like bread and wine. It is also

believed that through the eucharist, the benefits of Christ's death on the cross are being given over and over for the payment of each person's sins. In other words, Christ is being sacrificed anew each time communion is served.

Most Protestants reject transubstantiation. First of all, Scripture is very clear that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was a one-time offering for sin that never needs to be repeated (Hebrews 7:25–27, 9:28, 10:10–14). Second, transubstantiation suggests that Jesus' body and blood are present on the altar each time someone celebrates the Lord's supper. But Jesus is not on earth. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1) and will not return until his glorious second coming (Hebrews 9:28; Titus 2:13).

The other positions mentioned below are considered orthodox views. Martin Luther taught the idea of consubstantiation, which teaches that the fundamental "substance" of the body and blood of Christ are present alongside the substance of the bread and wine, which remain present. Communion becomes fully bread and wine and fully Christ, just as Christ himself is fully human and fully God at the same time. Thus, the body and blood of Christ are truly received in the Lord's supper, making it a means of grace for the Christian's sanctification. But the bread and wine don't literally become the body and blood of Jesus, nor is the sacrifice repeated.

Most evangelicals hold to the Symbolic or Memorial view promoted by

Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli. This view denies the bodily presence of Jesus in the Lord's supper. Instead, the ordinance is seen primarily as a commemoration of his sacrifice. The Lord's supper is seen not as a direct experience with the body and blood of Christ but as a memorial service.

French theologian John Calvin articulated the Real Presence view, which is somewhat of an intermediate view between consubstantiation and the Memorial view. Calvin rejected the idea that there is a transformation of substance of the elements, but he also rejected the view that the Lord's supper is merely a remembrance of a past event using symbols and figurative language. Calvin insisted on the real, though spiritual, presence of the Lord in the elements. He understood the Lord's supper to be an actual means of grace through which the Lord imparts his sanctifying grace to the believer who faithfully partakes of it.

The Lord's supper looks backward to what Jesus accomplished on the cross, where his body was broken and his blood was shed to provide eternal redemption. But it also looks forward in anticipation of the future messianic banquet with the risen Christ. This expectation is expressed in the Gospels by Christ's words: "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). Likewise, Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The Lord's supper is also to be a time of reflection, confession of a time of self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28). We are not to take communion lightly, but it should be a time of reflection, confession of sin, repentance, and celebration as we remember Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.



Studying God's Word

Should we be observing the Passover today?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

John 13:1–20

Luke 22:24–27

Jesus Eats the Passover

Matthew 26:17–30

Our Passover Lamb Activity

Throughout the New Testament, there are many connections made between the Passover and Jesus. For the following topics, identify the ideas from Scripture that relate Jesus to the Passover. Where you can, note any specific passages that express each idea. (Don't be afraid to use the concordance or topical index in the back of your Bible or cross-references in Exodus 12.)

Begin by reading through Exodus 12:1–20. As you read, be on the lookout for ideas that are parallel to the character of Jesus and the work he accomplished on our behalf.

- Character of the lamb (12:5)

 - Application of the blood (12:7)

 - Effect of the blood (12:13)

 - Memorial feast (12:14–17)
1. Can you think of any other parallels that would be helpful in understanding the connections between the old covenant and the new covenant?

 2. Write a summary statement that connects the Passover to Jesus.

Application

1. How does the connection between the Passover and the Lord's supper help you to better appreciate what Jesus has done on your behalf?

2. How could you use the parallels between the Passover and the Lord's supper to encourage a brother or sister in Christ?

3. Skeptics have accused Christians of being cannibals or acting like zombies who eat the flesh of a dead god during communion. How would you respond to someone who made such claims about you?

4. What errors do you see in the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation? How would you use Scripture to help a Roman Catholic see the errors?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Prays for His Followers

Lesson Focus

As Jesus and his disciples retired to the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus offered an intercessory prayer for them. He asked God to guard the disciples once Jesus left them in the world. He also prayed for all future believers. He prayed that all his followers would be unified and that through them the world would know Jesus was from the Father.

Key Passages

John 12:27–28, 17:1–26; Matthew 26:36–46

What You Will Learn

- How Jesus prayed for his followers
- How Jesus responded to what would happen on the cross

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 15:57–58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

As Jesus and his disciples finished their Passover meal, they retired to the Mount of Olives. Judas had already left the group to carry out his plan to betray Jesus (John 13:30). As they transitioned from the Passover, Jesus taught a few final lessons. He gave them a new commandment to love one another (John 13:34–35). He promised to prepare a place for his disciples where he was going and to return to gather them home (John 14:1–4). He taught that he was the only way to the Father (John 14:6) and that the Father could be seen through Jesus (John 14:9–11). He told the disciples that he would send his Holy Spirit to dwell with them (John 14:16–17). He explained that he was leaving (John 14:28–31), that he was the vine they ought to abide in (John 15:1–11), that the world would hate them because it hated Jesus (John 15:18–25), that joy was coming (John 16:16–24), and that Jesus had overcome the world (John 16:33).

When his teaching was done, Jesus lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed on behalf of his disciples. This intercessory prayer, sometimes called the high priestly prayer, is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. He began by acknowledging that the hour had come for the mission to be accomplished (John 17:1). Jesus had set aside his divine glory to walk on the earth, but the Father would restore that glory to him when the work was

accomplished (John 17:1–5). And in the glory of Christ, the Father would be glorified. Jesus had accomplished the work he had been given, to manifest the name of God to the people (John 17:6), to give them God’s Word (John 17:8), and to guard them that none would be lost, except the son of destruction (John 17:12). The disciples had learned all that Jesus had taught, recognizing that the Father had sent him, and Jesus was ready to leave the world (John 17:11).

Jesus knew he was leaving them in a world that hated them (John 17:14), so he prayed that the Father would guard the disciples, protecting them from the evil one (John 17:15). Jesus prayed for their sanctification, pointing to God’s Word as truth. And it was for their sanctification that Jesus consecrated himself as the Christ (John 17:19).

But Jesus didn’t only pray for his disciples and followers who were present during his time on earth. He also prayed for future believers, those who would believe through the word of the disciples (John 17:20). Jesus prayed for you and me! His main prayer for his followers was for unity (John 17:21–23). The unity of the church demonstrates to the world the truth of the gospel message.

After praying for his followers, Jesus went into the garden of Gethsemane to pray for himself. He knew the suffering he faced, and his soul

was sorrowful (Matthew 26:38). We can scarcely imagine the depth of anguish Jesus must have felt as he cried out to the Father to let this cup pass from him if there was any other

way (Matthew 26:39). And yet, even as he dreaded to drink the wrath of God, he was pleased to obey his Father and to set himself apart for this task that no other could accomplish.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane was full of grief and anguish, presenting an entirely different image than we are used to reading about Jesus. This account has caused confusion and misconception, as well as given rise to false teaching.

Some look at this account and say Jesus isn't God. They point to Jesus' apparent desire not to go through with the crucifixion. By saying "not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39), Jesus was distinguishing himself from God. If Jesus' will was contrary to the Father's, they surely couldn't be one. Others have emphasized the humanity of Jesus, though not necessarily denying he was God. Mormons have gone so far as to teach that Jesus, as merely a man, had to prove himself as willing to submit to the Father's will in order to become worthy of providing atonement. Their view emphasizes the free agency of Jesus to submit to or reject God's plan. In keeping himself free from sin and submitting to God's will, he earned the right and power to become the sacrifice for sin. In this way, they teach that Jesus began the process of atonement in the garden.

But these views misinterpret and misrepresent the text. Jesus said, "If it be possible" (Matthew 26:39), but he was not doubting God's ability or

expressing a lack of knowledge in his plan. He was simply expressing his desire that God's wrath be satisfied in a different way. The fact that he understood God's plan and recognized that there was no other way is evident in his willing submission to God's will despite his turmoil. Additionally, Jesus' desire to avoid drinking God's wrath does not mean that he didn't want to be part of the plan of redemption. It just demonstrates the depth of his love in laying down his life for sinners (Romans 5:8). In fact, there was a way Jesus could avoid drinking God's wrath, but it would require that none of us ever be redeemed and reconciled to God. But Jesus' mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). And so, he submitted willingly to the will of the Father to fulfill the plan the Trinity had agreed to before they even created the world.

We can look to Jesus' time in the garden and be encouraged, understanding that anything we encounter pales in comparison to what he suffered. The suffering he faced was overwhelming, but he emerged victorious. And now we can find victory in him, as well. As the perfect God-man, Jesus came into this world to save sinners like you and me.



Studying God's Word

What is Jesus' prayer for you?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

John 17:1–5

John 12:27–28

John 17:6–26

Perfectly One Activity

For each reference, record what the Bible teaches about unity. Then answer the questions below.

- Romans 12:5

- Galatians 3:28

- Ephesians 1:7–10

- Colossians 3:12–15
- 1 Corinthians 12:4–7
- Philippians 1:27

1. What does unity among believers look like?
2. What characteristics should we practice as individuals serving the body?
3. What is the goal or purpose that unifies us?

Jesus Prays in the Garden

Matthew 26:36–46

Application

1. As you consider how Jesus approached his arrest, knowing fully what was about to happen, how does this impact the way you think about living your life in service to him?

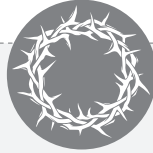
2. Have you ever wondered why Jesus leaves us in the world, especially in places where it is so difficult to be a Christian? How might Jesus' prayer in John 17 help you to answer someone who is struggling with that discouragement?

3. How does thinking about Jesus' prayer in the garden impact how you understand the sacrifice he made?

4. How does your typical approach to prayer compare with Jesus'?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Is Arrested

Lesson Focus

After Jesus had spent some time in prayer, Judas arrived with a band of soldiers to betray Jesus. The soldiers arrested Jesus and took him before Caiaphas, the high priest. Peter had followed Jesus to the courtyard of the high priest, but when asked if he knew Jesus, Peter denied his Lord. When he realized what he had done, he wept over his sin.

Key Passages

Matthew 26:14–16; John 13:21–30, 18:1–11; Mark 14:26–31, 14:53–54, 14:66–72

What You Will Learn

- The betrayal of Jesus was part of God's plan
- How Peter denied Jesus

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 15:57–58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

Jesus remained in prayer with the Father until the time had come to face his arrest. He awoke his disciples and went to meet his betrayer. Judas had gathered a band of soldiers and officers and led them to the garden where Jesus frequently visited with the disciples. There, in the middle of the night, with torches and weapons, they bound and arrested Jesus. Jesus caused no scene, rebuked his disciples for their resistance (Matthew 26:52–54), and went willingly so that “the Scriptures be fulfilled” (Mark 14:49).

The Bible records that on the night of his arrest, Jesus was led away to the high priest and an assembly of the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes (Mark 14:53). His dear friend and apostle, Peter, was following behind at a safe distance. Peter had followed into the high priest’s courtyard and was warming himself near the fire the servants had prepared (Mark 14:54). This was where Peter would soon deny the promised Messiah.

Just hours before, Peter had witnessed Judas the betrayer leading a great crowd of men with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus (Mark 14:43). Peter had courageously drawn his sword to fight back—and cut off the ear of one of the men (Mark 14:47). (It is interesting to note that the doctor, Luke, is the only Gospel writer to record that Jesus miraculously healed this man’s ear [Luke 22:51].)

Now, here at the fire, in the night, Peter was recognized by one of the servant girls. She accused him of being with Jesus. But he quickly denied it. This denial was accompanied by the first of two rooster crows. Again, the servant girl saw him and charged Peter that he had been with Jesus. Once more, Peter quickly denied this charge. Later, those standing nearby recognized him as a Galilean and thought he must be a disciple of Jesus. And a third time, Peter denied his Lord with cursing and swearing that he did not know the one who had been arrested. Just then Peter heard the rooster crow the second time and was reminded of Jesus’ warning that Peter would very soon deny him three times (Mark 14:66–71). And in the midst of this final denial, the Lord turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61).

What a look that must have been! The Master looked on his servant—the one who had declared just hours before that even if all the others left Jesus, he never would (Mark 14:29). Many believe this look was not a look of anger but of tenderness, sorrow, and pity. This loving look from Jesus brought Peter to conviction, humility, and repentance, and he immediately went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).

In the next few days, Jesus would be falsely accused, crucified, and then resurrected from the grave. We

can only imagine Peter's anguish as the events of the crucifixion played out and he remembered his last

testimony about his Savior: "I do not know this man of whom you speak" (Mark 14:71).

Historical/Apologetics Background

When Jesus predicted his coming crucifixion and that his disciples would fall away, Peter proudly proclaimed that he would never fall away (Mark 14:27–29). And when Jesus told Peter that Satan had requested to sift him like wheat, Peter boldly retorted, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). Then, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, it was Peter, trying to prove his courage and devotion, who drew a sword and whacked off the ear of the servant of the high priest.

Just a few hours later, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. How could this happen? This was Peter, the great leader of the apostles—the one who showed such confidence and boldness! And this was not just a momentary slipup, but Peter's denials occurred over a period of two hours. While the first one may be excusable since he was caught off guard, the next two were most definitely deliberate.

Judas also denied Jesus by betraying him. Judas, too, felt remorse. But he went out and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3–5). Peter, instead, wept bitterly, but his faith did not fail. He showed up at the tomb on Sunday. He was in the upper room with the other disciples. Though he had failed, he persevered in faith. What made the difference? Judas was not a true believer in Jesus. Jesus called him a devil, unclean,

and the son of destruction (John 6:70–71, 13:10–11, 17:12). Though Judas felt sorrow for his actions, it was not godly sorrow that leads to repentance, but worldly sorrow that leads to death (2 Corinthians 7:10). Peter, on the other hand, was a true believer. His sorrow did lead to repentance and restoration.

In Luke 22, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him. But he had also prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. And Peter's faith did not fail. He stood up on the day of Pentecost and preached a powerful sermon—and 3,000 were converted. Peter continued to preach—and tens of thousands were converted in Jerusalem.

From Peter, we learn that we must be very cautious in our self-confidence. We are human; we are not exempt from falling into sin or denying our Lord. The Bible warns us about misplaced self-confidence (1 Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:1). The second thing we can learn from Peter's experience is that God is faithful. As Jesus prayed for Peter's faith not to fail, so he intercedes for us (Hebrews 7:25). As Peter was forgiven by Christ, so we, too, can be forgiven as we confess our sins (1 John 1:9). God has promised to continue the work he has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). Praise God that those whom he predestined, called, and justified, he will also glorify (Romans 8:30)!



Studying God's Word

How many times do you deny Jesus as Lord in a given week?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Judas Betrays Jesus

Matthew 26:14–16

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John 13:21–30

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John 18:1–11

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Peter Denies Jesus

Mark 14:26–31

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Mark 14:53–54

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Trials of Jesus Activity

If you were to read only one of the Gospel accounts of the trials of Jesus, you would not get the full picture. Taken as a whole, the four Gospel accounts present six trials that Jesus faced between his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane and his crucifixion.

For each of the passages below, note who was the authority and describe the treatment Jesus received.

1. John 18:1–3 —

2. John 18:12–13, 18:19–23 —

3. Matthew 26:57–68 —

4. Luke 22:66–71 —

5. Luke 23:1–7 —

6. Luke 23:8–12 —

7. Luke 23:13–25 —

Application

1. What warning do we need to take from Peter's statements of confidence in not stumbling and denying Jesus (consider 1 Corinthians 10:12)?
2. How do the responses of Judas and Peter impact your understanding of remorse and repentance? How might you help someone recognize the difference between the two reactions?
3. As you think about all that Jesus endured from his arrest and through the trials, how does it help you to appreciate what Christ has done for you?
4. How do the details recorded in the Bible regarding Jesus' trials confirm the authenticity and authority of the Bible?
5. Did the discovery of a historical reference to Pilate prove that Jesus was actually tried by Pilate?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Is Crucified

Lesson Focus

Jesus was unjustly tried, beaten, and mocked. A crown of thorns was placed upon his head, and he was told to carry his cross to Golgotha. Nailed to the cross, Jesus suffered the Father's wrath and paid the penalty for sin. Knowing that he had completed the task the Father had sent him to do, Jesus said, "It is finished," and died.

Key Passages

Matthew 26:57–68; John 18:28–19:37; Isaiah 53

What You Will Learn

- What trials Jesus faced
- What was accomplished on the cross

Memory Verse

1 John 5:4–5 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

The sinless Son of Man had come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He would be led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). He would not open his mouth but willingly accept and finish the plan the Father had in place since the beginning of time. After the illegal and unjust arrest and conviction of Jesus, he was sentenced to death—crucifixion on the cross (John 19:16).

At the time, this was one of the most disgraceful and humiliating forms of death. Pilate had Jesus scourged, and he was mockingly crowned with a painful crown of thorns that was pressed into his head (John 19:1–2). In a very frail state, he was led out to carry the cross he would be nailed to and killed upon. He was headed to Golgotha where the crucifixion would occur (John 19:17). Because of his weakened state, the soldiers compelled Simon, a Cyrenian, to assist Jesus with the cross (Mark 15:21). Jesus was offered wine with myrrh in order to lessen the pain he was about to endure, but he refused it (Mark 15:23). He was nailed through his hands and his feet to the cross. He was crucified between two criminals (Mark 15:27). The title Pilate assigned to him, “King of the Jews,” was placed on the cross (John 19:19). As he hung in agony, soldiers cast lots for his clothes (John 19:23–24), and people shouted insults at him (Mark 15:29–30).

After this, knowing that all things were now accomplished, Jesus said, “I thirst!” As Jesus suffered, many heard him cry out to his Father, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” as he pointed his hearers to consider how he was fulfilling Psalm 22 (Mark 15:34). And finally, as he gave up his spirit, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

Jesus was physically distressed, no doubt. But when he felt that his Father had forsaken him, this was a distress that went beyond the physical. It may have been at this point, after suffering so immeasurably, knowing that he would soon die, that he also felt the weight and extent of God’s wrath on him for sins he did not, nor could he ever, commit!

In this act of bearing God’s wrath upon himself, Jesus finished the work the Father had sent him to do; the work of redemption was now complete. The debt for sin was paid in full. This is the wonder of the gospel! While we were sinners, Jesus died for us, the ungodly (Romans 5:6–9). In God’s gracious and merciful plan, he made his only Son, Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us. Jesus took the sin, the wrath, and the punishment. In exchange, believers receive the precious righteousness of God that is the very nature of Jesus Christ and the promise of eternal life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Historical/Apologetics Background

Who was responsible for the death of Jesus?

Certainly, the Jewish leaders had a hand in Jesus' crucifixion. It was the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people who plotted to kill Jesus (Matthew 26:3–4). The Jewish leaders demanded that Jesus be killed rather than the criminal Barabbas (Matthew 27:20). The people of Israel also participated in the death of Jesus as they shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him!" during his trial (John 19:6). And it was the Romans, under the authority of the governor, Pontius Pilate, who actually authorized and performed the crucifixion (Matthew 27:27–37).

But as we search God's Word, we also will come to understand that the death of Jesus Christ was ordained and accomplished by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God himself (Acts 2:23, 4:28). The prophet Isaiah, nearly 700 years before the crucifixion, wrote that it pleased the Lord to crush the Messiah and put him to grief. God's plan had always been that his Son's soul would be an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10).

Yes, it ultimately was God himself who determined, before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8), to send his Son to live a perfect life, to die, and to be raised again from the dead so that sinners could be forgiven. In fact, this would be the **ONLY** possible way sinners could be reconciled to the holy, perfect, righteous God.

And yet, here lies the paradox—the tension between man's responsibility and God's sovereignty. For in spite of God's predetermination of Christ's death, each man will be held responsible for the role he played in completing God's plan. It was still an act of "lawless men" as Peter said (Acts 2:23). And Jesus himself said he must go as had been determined, but woe to the one who betrayed him (Luke 22:22).

The death of God the Son—Jesus Christ—on the cross is undoubtedly the most horrific sin ever committed. And yet in it, we see the absolute sovereignty of God. In spite of the evil perpetrated, God's infinitely good and eternal plan was perfectly fulfilled. The cross shows us more clearly than anything else that God's perfect purposes will be accomplished in spite of, and even through, the evil intentions of sinners (Romans 8:28).

We cannot leave the topic of the crucifixion—and who was responsible for it—without a careful examination of our own hearts. We who have come to faith in Christ are also guilty of his blood, shed on the cross for us. He died to pay the penalty for our sins (Romans 5:8, 6:23). Therefore, we should live in a way that shows gratitude for what Jesus has done. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds we have been healed (1 Peter 2:24–25).



Studying God's Word

What was accomplished on the cross?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Before Caiaphas

Matthew 26:57–68

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Jesus Before Pilate

John 18:28–19:16

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Jesus Is Crucified

John 19:17–37

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Cost of the Cross Activity

Read Isaiah 53:1–12 and answer the questions below.

1. How is Jesus described?

2. How was Jesus treated?

3. How did Jesus respond to this treatment?

4. What idea is repeated multiple times in verses 4 through 6?

5. Who was responsible for crushing Jesus and putting him to grief?

6. In verses 10–12, what was made an offering for guilt?

7. What word is used in verse 12 to describe what Jesus did for sinners? How does this describe what Jesus did on the cross?

8. What idea do you see repeated throughout this passage?

9. In a sentence, summarize the message of Isaiah 53.

Application

1. How could you incorporate the love demonstrated by Jesus on the cross to encourage believers and call unbelievers to trust in Christ?

2. How can we explain that it pleased the Father to crush his Son (Isaiah 53:10; Acts 2:22–24) in a way that is consistent with God’s character?

3. While God was ultimately in control over the death of Jesus, in what way are you and I responsible for the death of Jesus?

4. Since Jesus died on the cross, and his work is finished, what does this mean about our own efforts to cover our sins?



Prayer Requests



The Resurrection of Jesus

Lesson Focus

The women went to Jesus' tomb early on Sunday morning. They found the stone to the tomb rolled away, the tomb empty, and an angel of the Lord there. The angel told them Jesus was risen from the dead. On their way to tell the disciples, they saw Jesus and worshipped him. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is important because it provides an inheritance for believers—a living hope—eternal life with God.

Key Passages

Matthew 28:1–10; 1 Peter 1:3–9

What You Will Learn

- What happened at Jesus' tomb after his death
- Why Jesus' resurrection was necessary to secure our redemption

Memory Verse

1 John 5:4–5 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

Jesus lived his life and died according to God's plan ordained before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). On the cross, Jesus finished the work the Father had sent him to do. He bore God's wrath on himself and took the punishment for the sins of everyone who would ever turn in repentance and faith to him (1 John 2:1–2).

But there was still more to come—the glorious event that brought assurance to the stunning truth that sinners could have eternal life with God (John 5:24; Romans 5:18)—the resurrection of Jesus from the grave (Matthew 28). Joseph of Arimathea had taken the body of Jesus and laid it in a new tomb with a large stone rolled against the door (Matthew 27:59–60). The tomb was sealed, and a guard was placed at the entrance (Matthew 27:66). There was a great earthquake and an angel of the Lord appeared from heaven and rolled the stone away from the door. As the women came to the tomb at dawn, they saw the angel sitting upon the stone (Matthew 28:1–2). He announced that the Savior had risen just as he said he would. The women were instructed to go and tell the disciples this amazing news (Matthew 28:5–7).

As though this were not enough good news for one morning, the women then encountered Jesus Christ himself! He told them not to

be afraid and to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee (Matthew 28:9–10).

The Apostle Paul understood the importance of the resurrection. You see, Paul explained that if Christ is not risen, then our faith and our preaching is empty. And there would be NO resurrection to eternal life for believers. If Christ is not risen, our faith is futile; we are not forgiven, but still in our sins. If Christ is not alive, we are to be pitied because without the resurrection, our hope in Christ does not exceed the boundaries of our life here on earth (1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

But believers are not to be pitied. Jesus did rise from the dead. And with that resurrection comes an amazing promise and assurance. The Bible tells us that the risen Jesus Christ has destroyed the last enemy—death (1 Corinthians 15:26)! Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him will live even though they die (John 11:25). This is our hope. It is a living hope promised through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ through his resurrection from the dead. This precious hope guarantees an inheritance in heaven that will not fade away (1 Peter 1:3–5).

The resurrection is a critical part of the gospel. Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, and he was buried and rose again according

to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Everyone who has turned away from their sins in repentance

and faith and turned to the risen Jesus Christ for forgiveness will have the hope of eternal life (John 14:19).

Historical/Apologetics Background

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most significant event in history. The Apostle Paul always included the resurrection as a vital part of the gospel he had preached (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). It is a doctrine that brings hope and joy. Let's look at some of the reasons for that.

First, the resurrection of Jesus provides indisputable evidence that he is who he claimed to be—the Son of God, God in the flesh (Romans 1:4).

Second, the resurrection also proved Jesus' teachings to be true. He claimed many times that he would be raised on the third day (John 2:19–21; Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34).

Third, the resurrection validated Jesus' sacrificial death. Jesus died for sinners, and his resurrection and victory over death shows that God accepted the sacrifice as payment in full. Paul clearly understood the significance of Christ's bodily resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gave six devastating consequences that would occur if Christ was not raised bodily from the grave: 1) preaching Christ would be pointless (v. 14); 2) our faith in Christ would be empty (v. 14); 3) all those who have testified to the resurrection would be liars (v. 15); 4) no one would be redeemed from sin (v. 17); 5) all who had died would have perished because they would have died in their sins (v. 18); and 6) Christians would be the most pitiable people on the earth (v. 19).

Fourth, Jesus' resurrection proves that physical death is not the end of human existence. God, who gives life to all things (1 Timothy 6:13), has the power to resurrect the human body. Christ's triumph over the grave is God's pledge to us that we, too, shall be raised (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

Fifth, the resurrection tells the world that the kingdom of God is ruled by a living sovereign who has accomplished redemption, not through the works of men, but through the gift of grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Unlike all other religions, Christianity alone is led by one who has defeated death and who promises that his followers will do the same. The founders of all other religions are in the grave; they are dead and gone. Christ alone is alive! About 60 years after his death, the risen Savior said to the Apostle John: "I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:17–18).

Because Jesus is alive, we can be confident that he will come again to receive his children to himself (John 14:3). The dead in Christ will be raised up, and those who remain and are alive at his coming will be changed and receive new, glorified bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52). This is all because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!



Studying God's Word

What did the resurrection accomplish?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

The Empty Tomb

Matthew 28:1–10

A Risen Savior Activity

When we think about sharing the gospel, we almost always think of Christ's work on the cross. However, as we examine the New Testament, there is another element that is included. Read the following passages and write a short summary of the role of the resurrection in each passage. Then, answer the questions that follow.

- Acts 2:22–36

- Acts 3:11–16

- Acts 4:8–12

- Romans 4:23–25

- 1 Corinthians 15:1–5, 15:12–19

- 2 Corinthians 5:14–16

1. What is the connection in these passages between proclaiming the death of Jesus and his resurrection when presenting the gospel?

2. Do you always mention both the cross and the resurrection when you share the gospel?

3. Considering Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, if you don't remember to mention the resurrection in a presentation of the gospel, have you failed to offer the hope of Christ for salvation?

Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3-9

Application

1. How has your understanding of the necessity of the resurrection changed over time (or through this lesson)?



Jesus Appears to His Disciples

Lesson Focus

After rising from the dead, Jesus appeared to many of his disciples in various ways. He offered instruction, reassurance, proof, and encouragement. He also demonstrated forgiveness and grace in the restoration of Peter, who had denied Jesus on the night of his arrest. Jesus proved to his followers that he had defeated death. Jesus is alive.

Key Passages

John 20:11–18, 20:26–31, 21:1–19; Luke 24:13–43

What You Will Learn

- The post-resurrection encounters of Jesus
- How Jesus showed grace in restoring Peter

Memory Verse

1 John 5:4–5 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

Jesus rose from the grave on Sunday morning and appeared at least five different times to nearly 20 different people on that first day. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, telling her that he must ascend to the Father (John 20:17). He appeared to the other women who had been at the tomb: Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and the other women with them (Luke 24:10; Mark 16:1). He told them to bring the news to the disciples and to tell them he would come to them in Galilee. Then Jesus appeared to Cleopas and another disciple as they were walking to Emmaus. The two men were discussing the events of the last few days. Jesus then expounded the Old Testament scriptures to them, explaining how they concerned the Messiah (Luke 24:13–27). Once the disciples recognized him as Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the others. When they arrived, they found out that Jesus had appeared to Peter as well (Luke 24:33–34).

As they were sharing their encounters and talking about these things, Jesus appeared in their midst—in a locked room. Jesus reassured them that he was not a spirit, but flesh and bones. He invited them to touch him and see the marks of the crucifixion on his body. He even ate a piece of fish to demonstrate the reality of his bodily resurrection and then he opened their minds to understand the

full gospel message (Luke 24:36–45). Thomas was not with the others, so Jesus appeared to them again eight days later, inviting Thomas to believe, which he did (John 20:24–29). Jesus also appeared to disciples in Galilee (John 21) and to hundreds of followers (1 Corinthians 15:1–8).

Perhaps the most encouraging appearance of the resurrected Jesus is his encounter with Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Here, Jesus asked Peter to confirm his love for his Savior. Jesus did not ask once, but three times, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” (John 21:15–17). Many believe that by repeating his question three times, Jesus was reminding Peter of the three times he had denied even knowing Jesus. This time, Peter answered earnestly, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you” (John 21:16). Jesus’ response to Peter was one of forgiveness and restoration. Peter had denied Christ three times. Jesus then gave Peter the opportunity to proclaim his love for Christ three times. After that, Jesus commissioned Peter to feed his lambs. This charge and the responsibility that went with it left no doubt that Peter had been forgiven and restored as an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

These witnesses who saw Jesus were commanded to proclaim the good news of who Jesus is (the Messiah and Son of God) and the forgiveness of sin offered through

Jesus' death and resurrection (Luke 24:45–53; John 20:30–31). The book of Acts records how they obeyed Christ's command and boldly proclaimed the gospel despite persecution. The gospel changed the disciples from

frightened men to bold witnesses willing to give their lives to share the message of Christ. May God give us the same boldness to share the message of hope and salvation found only through Jesus Christ.

Historical/Apologetics Background

The central focus of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. It was this pivotal moment in history, when Jesus conquered death and the grave, that gives humanity hope for all eternity if only they will repent and trust in Christ for salvation. The resurrection is central to Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:12–19), and it happened in real time and history. Paul speaks with all surety and confidence when he says, “Christ has been raised from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20). He grounds this in both the revelation of the Scriptures (verses 3–4), the testimony of those who had seen him (verses 5–8), and the historicity of Adam and the entrance of death into creation (verses 21–22). Because of Christ's triumphant resurrection from the dead, we can have full confidence in the coming resurrection of the dead when we, in resurrected bodies, will dwell with Christ for eternity (1 Corinthians 15:35–49).

Christians can have the utmost confidence in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus since God's Word accurately tells us about these historical events. These central truths of the Christian faith were also witnessed by hundreds of people. Jesus was publicly executed on a cross (Matthew 27:32–50), buried in Joseph's tomb

(Mark 15:42–47), and seen alive again by more than 500 people at the same time (1 Corinthians 15:6).

The resurrection showed clearly that Jesus Christ had the power to destroy death—the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). This realization made the enemies of God shudder at the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. But what could they do now that Jesus was alive again? The only thing they could do was seek to discredit the resurrection. And that they quickly did. The Bible tells us that the chief priests and elders paid a large sum of money to the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb to fund the lie that Jesus' disciples had stolen the body of Jesus while the guards slept (Matthew 28:11–15). From that first week after his death even to this day, those who refuse to submit to the lordship of Christ have invented many arguments to try and explain away the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

While the Bible speaks of Jesus showing himself by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3), we must acknowledge that we do not have tangible access to those proofs today. But what we have is the record of all these things and more in the inspired, inerrant Word of God. We can trust all of God's Word, including the accounts of Jesus' resurrection and later appearances.



Studying God's Word

How many people saw the resurrected Jesus?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Appears to Many

John 20:11–18

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Luke 24:13–35

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Luke 24:36–43

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John 20:26–31

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Jesus Restores Peter

John 21:1–19

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God's Restoring Grace Activity

As we examine our own lives in the light of the Apostle Peter's actions, we can find great hope in knowing that the same grace Peter experienced in his life is available to us. In the two columns below, identify three parallels between Peter's denial of Jesus and Peter's restoration by Jesus. After you have drawn these parallels, use the questions that follow to examine your own heart.

Peter's Denial

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Peter's Restoration

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

1. How does John 10:27–30 help you understand how God's grace is available in your life even when you fail to honor him perfectly?
2. How does Jesus' prayer in John 17:9–12 make it clear that Peter's denial and restoration were part of God's plan for Peter?
3. In what ways do you deny Jesus as Lord in your day-to-day life? List some specific examples from the last few weeks or months.
4. How does this description of Peter's denial and restoration offer you encouragement as a follower of Jesus when you deny Christ by your actions? (Consider 1 John 1:8–2:2.)

Application

1. Which of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus is most striking to you? Why?
2. How do the appearances of the risen Jesus strengthen your faith?
3. What encouragement do you find in this account of Peter's denial and restoration?
4. How does the restoration of Peter by Jesus relate to Paul's words in Ephesians 2:10? How does this relate to your life?
5. How could you use the lesson material today to either encourage a believer who is struggling in his faith or point an unbeliever to the hope of the gospel?



Prayer Requests



The Ascension of Jesus

Lesson Focus

Jesus' last command to his followers was that they preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations. All believers share in that same responsibility and are called to go to all nations with the gospel of truth. This is important because the gospel is the good news, and it alone can bring eternal life. After giving these final instructions, Jesus ascended to sit at the right hand of the Father.

Key Passages

Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:1–11; Romans 10:9–17

What You Will Learn

- The purpose of Jesus' final instructions
- Why Jesus returned to heaven

Memory Verse

1 John 5:4–5 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

For 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus continued to show himself, teach, and prepare his followers for life without his physical presence. When it finally came time for him to return to his Father, he gave parting instructions.

He began by once again confirming his authority—all authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He then told his followers to “make disciples.” This is a call that includes evangelism—proclaiming the gospel to others—as well as teaching and guiding these disciples to observe all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:20). This is a commission to ALL believers through the ages. We know that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13). But how will anyone call on the Lord if they do not believe in him? And how will they believe in him if they have not heard of him (Romans 10:14)? The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). We are to be bold and not ashamed of the gospel. It is the gospel that is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Without the truth of the gospel, people will perish in their sins.

Jesus told his followers to baptize the disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). This external baptism by water is a picture of what happens when a person trusts

in Christ. They die with Christ, are buried with Christ, and are raised to newness of life (Romans 6:4). Scripture also talks about another baptism by which the Holy Spirit makes believers new creations in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is often referred to as being “born again” by the Holy Spirit (John 3:6–7).

The great commission continues beyond a new believer’s repentance and faith. A new Christian is like a newborn—unskilled in the word of righteousness (Hebrews 5:13). These new believers are to be disciplined—molded by the truth and trained to do all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:20). Those older and more mature in the faith are to instruct the younger Christians so they will continue to grow and bear fruit for the Lord (Titus 2:3; 2 Timothy 2:2). Jesus ended his great commission with a promise that gives the encouragement and strength necessary to boldly fulfill his command. He told his disciples, and he tells us, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

At the Mount of Olives before his ascension, Jesus affirmed his promise to send the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples to fulfill the great commission. Then he rose from their sight and returned to heaven. As the disciples gazed heavenward, two angels appeared to assure them Jesus would return in the same way he ascended to heaven (Acts 1:8–12).

Historical/Apologetics Background

The great commission was not a new commandment. God's heart has always been for the nations. God's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament wasn't for their sake alone; God had always intended that Israel would be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 60:3).

As early as Genesis, God's intent to use the nation of Israel as a catalyst to spread his Word to all the world is clear. The judgment for the tower of Babel scattered people across the earth, and nations were formed. This was followed by God's promise to Abram that through him and his seed "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). God would use Abraham, the father of Israel, in a way that would be a means of blessing all the nations; from his seed, Jesus Christ would come and provide redemption to the world (Genesis 18:18, 22:18). The same promise was then given to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and then to Jacob as the father of the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 28:14).

We know that Israel was God's chosen nation. And yet God was jealous for all the peoples of the earth—both Jews and Gentiles—that they would worship his name. It is hard to miss the many Gentiles in the Old Testament who were known to be followers of the one true God of Israel. We encounter people like Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Genesis 14:18); Jethro of Midian, Moses' father-in-law (Exodus 3:1); Rahab, the harlot in Jericho (Joshua 2:1); Ruth

of Moab (Ruth 1:4); the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9); and many others like them. And who can forget God sending Jonah to take the message of repentance to the cruel Assyrians of Nineveh? The people of that pagan city believed God, repented of their sins, and turned to the one true God (Jonah 3:5–10).

God did not ordain that Israel alone would receive the blessing of salvation through the Messiah. God called Israel and put her into service to spread his name to the nations of the earth. The decisive fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham—that the nations of the earth would be blessed through his offspring—was accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's plan was that through Jesus Christ, all people—including those from the most pagan nations—can become sons of Abraham and heirs of all his blessings through faith in Jesus Christ.

So when Jesus left his followers with the great commission, he was continuing the purpose of his Father that the everlasting gospel would be preached to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—that they would fear God and give him glory, and that they would forever worship him who made heaven and earth (Revelation 5:9–10). Now and always, Christians have the great privilege and the solemn responsibility to take the message of the gospel to the nations of the world.



Studying God's Word

Are you obeying the great commission?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Make Disciples

Matthew 28:18–20

Whose Commission? Activity

Answer the following questions.

1. Do you believe that you are responsible to spread the good news of the gospel as an evangelist? Why or why not?

2. In Matthew 28:18–20, the disciples were commanded to spread the gospel, make disciples, and to teach those disciples all that Jesus had taught them. If Jesus taught the disciples to spread the gospel, would the new disciples be responsible for spreading the gospel, too?

3. In Luke 24:46–48, Jesus addressed the disciples. To whom were they to preach the gospel? Is this possible for this small group of disciples who lived nearly 2,000 years ago?

4. In 2 Corinthians 5:18–21, what role do those who have been reconciled in Christ have?

5. How has your answer to the first question changed in light of these passages?

6. What hinders you most from being bold as an ambassador of Jesus Christ and his gospel?

Jesus Ascends

Acts 1:1–11

Proclaim the Gospel

Romans 10:9–17

Application

1. How would the world be different if the great commission had not been carried on by the generation that followed the original 12 disciples?

2. In what ways has your thinking about the responsibility of evangelism changed over time, and what influenced that thinking?
3. We have all had fears about sharing the gospel with others. How can we overcome these fears and seek to be obedient as witnesses of Jesus?
4. Have you ever found a new recipe or a new app that you just loved and had to tell everyone about? How does this example relate to our proclamation of the gospel?
5. What should be the supreme motivator in fulfilling the great commission?
6. How could adopting the following phrase encourage us to obey the great commission: “I am responsible to proclaim the good news, not for the response of the people hearing it”?



Prayer Requests
