

Kingdom Life

DISCIPLESHIP PATH

A Firm Foundation for Life

FOUNDATIONS

301	THE KINGDOM OF GOD
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*“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries
of the Kingdom of God.”*

Jesus Christ, *Luke 8:10*

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Introduction and Purpose

When we first come to faith in Christ, it is easy to think of it as if we are simply adding Jesus to our lives. But as we study God's word, we learn He sees it very differently. When we come to Christ, He sees it as a complete redefining of who we are. In John 17:16, Jesus was praying to the Father for us, and He revealed a profound truth about us when He said, [“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”](#) “The world” covers pretty much everything we have ever known, everything we have ever been part of, and everything that has been a part of us. It is a mystery.

So, if we are no longer of this world, then what are we? When He was being examined before Pilate, Jesus tried to explain it by saying, [“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”](#) Now that we have come to Christ, we are of His kingdom and of His realm. We are no longer defined by this world, but we are new creatures, with new identities centered in Christ and His Kingdom. He desires that we step fully into this new reality and learn to see ourselves through the eyes of His Kingdom, rather than from the lens of the world.

As we will see in this study over the next eight weeks, we are no longer citizens of this world, but our citizenship is now in the Kingdom of Heaven. Our loyalty and allegiance must be squarely centered in God's Kingdom and His authority. We have a mission and purpose to represent and advance the Kingdom of God in the earth. We are now adopted into the family of God – as royalty. We now have access into the holiest place to pray, to worship, to serve as priests to our God. We are now soldiers with mighty weapons to do battle in the conflict of the ages. We have a future and a home in the new creation which is to come at the end of the age. In Christ, everything has changed.

One of our greatest challenges, is to lay aside our old worldly mindset, and to allow the Holy Spirit to retrain us to think, believe, and act as Kingdom citizens - with Kingdom goals, a Kingdom focus, and with Kingdom power. Our success in this Christian walk is very much dependent on our understanding and embracing our new identity as Kingdom citizens in Christ.

So, where do we begin? Jesus taught us to [“Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness.”](#) It all begins with a decision to pursue the Kingdom, to learn about the Kingdom, to chase after the Kingdom and the King above all things. Is there anything more important than this? Could there ever be a greater calling? If we will honestly seek, He has promised He will reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven to us. And not only that, but He has also promised to reveal His kingdom within us. Are you ready to make that leap with Him? Glory be to God forever and ever, amen.

Table of Contents

Week 1 – Seek First the Kingdom of God

1-1	The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand	5
1-2	The King	8
1-3	Seek First the Kingdom	11
1-4	The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven	14
1-5	Be on the Alert	17

Week 2 – The Kingdom Within

2-1	The Sacrifice	21
2-2	You Must be Born Again	24
2-3	The Spirit Within	27
2-4	Freedom from Sin	30
2-5	The Inner Witness	33

Week 3 – Citizens of the Kingdom

3-1	Transferred to the Kingdom of Light.	38
3-2	The Children of God	41
3-3	Neither Jew, nor Greek.	44
3-4	Ambassadors for Christ	48
3-5	A Colony of Heaven	51

Week 4 – The Temple of God

4-1	A More Perfect Tabernacle	55
4-2	A Temple of the Holy Spirit	59
4-3	Zeal for Your House	62
4-4	The Order of Melchizedek	65
4-5	A Royal Priesthood	69

Week 5 – A Kingdom at War

5-1	Citizen Soldiers	74
5-2	The Art of War	77
5-3	The Full Armor of God	80
5-4	The Belt of Truth	83
5-5	The Helmet of Salvation	87

Week 6 –The Advancing Kingdom

6-1	Faith as a Shield to Defend	91
6-2	Faith as a Shield to Attack	94
6-3	The Sword of the Spirit	97
6-4	The Good News Shoes	100
6-5	All Authority	102

Week 7 –The Apostasy

7-1	The Father of Lies	106
7-2	The Mystery of Lawlessness	109
7-3	Doctrines of Demons	112
7-4	A License to Sin	115
7-5	Be Alert and Pray for all the Saints	120

Week 8 –The End of the Age

8-1	And Then the End Shall Come	124
8-2	When the Son of Man Comes	127
8-3	The Resurrection of the Dead and the Judgment Seat of Christ	131
8-4	New Heavens and a New Earth	136
8-5	The New Jerusalem and the Marriage of the Lamb	139

FOUNDATIONS 301 WEEK ONE

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Week 1 – “Seek First the Kingdom of God”

Lesson 1-1 – “The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand”

Depending on who you ask, there are around 200 sovereign nations in the world, each having its own independent government. Among those countries, there are dozens of governmental and socioeconomic systems used to govern the society of citizens. Some countries are democracies, in which the governmental leaders are elected by a popular vote of the people. And at the other end of the spectrum, there are dictatorships, in which the leaders hold authoritarian power over the people through military strength.

Some countries are controlled by religious elites - this is known as a theocracy. A monarchy typically has a royal family, with a king or queen in authority. In Great Britain, they have a Constitutional Monarchy form of government. They have a constitution that defines how power is shared between a monarch and a parliament elected by the citizens. On the other hand, the United States of America is a Constitutional Republic with a governing document that defines the power sharing of officials elected by the people - to represent the people. There are literally dozens of governmental types implemented throughout the world and it can all get quite complicated to understand.

At this point, you may be asking yourself what any of this has to do with our relationship with God. Well, it has a lot to do with our relationship with God. Here is a statement from John the Baptist in the Gospel of Matthew.

[^{MT 3:1} Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."](#) NASB

A kingdom is a form of government. The mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven is a central theme in Old Testament prophecy and in New Testament teachings. John the Baptist's fundamental message was that we should prepare ourselves for the fulfillment of the prophetic promises, which speak not only of a coming Messiah, but also of the coming of a heavenly kingdom. Jesus also, from the beginning of His public ministry, proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven - and that we should prepare our hearts through repentance.

[^{MT 4:17} From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."](#) NASB

The Kingdom was a central part of Jesus' message as he taught from village to village.

[^{MT 4:23} Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.](#) NRSV

Notes and Questions _____

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus taught about the Kingdom saying things like this.

MT 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. NASB

And like this.

MT 5:10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. NASB

Jesus often used analogies to help people understand the realities of the Kingdom, like in this passage.

MT 13:24 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. NASB

And like this one...

MT 13:33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened." NASB

And like this one...

MT 13:45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it. NASB

When Jesus sent out His twelve disciples to the cities of Israel, He gave them these instructions.

MT 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' NASB

And in Matthew 24, when Jesus was revealing to his disciples some of the things that were to come, He said this...

MT 24:3 And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. ⁵ "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. ⁶ "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. ⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

Notes and Questions _____

MT 24:8 "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. ¹⁰ "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. ¹¹ "And many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. ¹² "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. ¹³ "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. ¹⁴ "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come. NASB

He said the good news of the Kingdom will be preached to the whole world until the end of the age. The Kingdom of God is not just a peripheral side-thought in Jesus' teaching, but a central theme of His message to be proclaimed all the way to the end of the age.

So, what is the Kingdom? Some people say it is the universal church. Others say it just refers to Heaven. I have heard it taught the Kingdom of God simply refers to our submission to God's authority over us. But as we will see in future lessons, the Kingdom is much, much more than all that.

The Kingdom of Heaven has a government and a rule of law. It has a diplomatic corps and an army. It has a society of subjects - citizens who possess rights and have civic responsibilities. It has an economy with profound economic principles. The Kingdom has its patriots, and occasionally its traitors. The Kingdom is presently at war. It has a religious order, a temple, and a priesthood. Our natural realm exists within the spiritual, not the other way around. Spiritual forces, both good and evil, influence the natural.

Most importantly, the Kingdom of Heaven has a King. But how can we respond properly to our King if we are unaware of His Kingdom, or if we do not understand how it works, or our place in the Kingdom? What if we do not even know how to submit to a king? There is so much we can learn about this from the scriptures. Are you ready to dig in?

Study Questions – 1a. From the Matthew 3:1 and 4:17 passages, what was the basic message preached by John the Baptist and Jesus? 1b. And what are some ways the present reality of the Kingdom of Heaven impacts us today?

Prayer – I thank You Father that You love me so much. I pray You would give me eyes to see the reality of Your Kingdom in the world and in my life today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 1 – “Seek First the Kingdom of God”

Lesson 1-2 – “The King”

“A government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” This statement was famously made by Abraham Lincoln in his speech, the Gettysburg Address of 1863. Although Lincoln is credited with the phrase, the thought predates him by centuries. Lincoln most likely borrowed the phrase from the Bible translator John Wycliffe who made the following statement in the prologue to his Bible translation of 1384 – “The Bible is for the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

Self-government, either by direct democratic voting or through elected officials, is possibly the best form of human government. But the most obvious flaw is the “self” part. We like the idea of being in charge, but there is a downside. Self-government ultimately produces a greater individual accountability before God. Since we choose our representatives, we become responsible for the policies they implement. Wycliffe probably understood it best because he recognized that a “government of the people” can only succeed to the degree that the peoples’ hearts are governed by God.

One of the first things we must realize about the Kingdom of Heaven, is that it is not a democracy. We do not get to vote on things. And if we want to be part of God's Kingdom, we must be okay with Him being in charge – not us. Jesus is not an elected representative coming to power through the will of the people. In fact, when Jesus performed the miracle in the feeding of the five-thousand, the people were ready to take up arms and crown Him as an earthly king - but Jesus was not willing.

[JN 6:14 After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. NIV](#)

The people did not understand the heavenly nature of God's Kingdom. They also did not understand that Jesus would never ascend to the throne through the will of the people, but only by the will of God. Here is how Peter and the Apostles explained Jesus' ascension to the throne as they were speaking to the whole Council of Jewish leaders.

[AC 5:30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. ³¹ "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. ³² "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." NASB](#)

Can you picture God the Father as King on the throne in Heaven with Jesus His Son seated as a prince at His right hand? Have you ever thought of Jesus as a Prince? In

Notes and Questions _____

Acts 3:15, Peter and John describe Jesus as the “Prince of life”. Even Isaiah prophetically referred to Him as the “Prince of Peace”. But Jesus has not only been exalted by the Father as a Prince, but also as a King - on multiple levels.

MT 2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." ³ And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he *began* to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, ⁶ AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL." NASB

From the prophetic writings, the Jewish people understood the coming Messiah would become the King of Israel. This would be God's fulfillment of the promise to King David that he would have a descendent on the throne of Israel perpetually. And when Jesus was being interrogated prior to His execution, Pilate asked Him a most direct question about it.

MK 15:1 And early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes, and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate. ² And Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And answering He said to him, "It is as you say." NASB

And just before Jesus ascended to the Father, His disciples questioned Him about His restoring the kingdom in Israel. And He basically said, “Not yet”.

AC 1:6 And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority. NASB

Even though they reject Him now, there will come a time when Jesus takes his rightful place as King on the throne in Jerusalem - but Israel is not the full extent of His rule. The Revelation of John reveals much more about what is to come in the end times as all the nations of the earth join forces to do battle against the Kingdom of Heaven.

REV 17:14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." NIV

At the end of the age, all the nations of the earth will wage war against Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. “All the nations” includes the United States of America. Do not be

Notes and Questions _____

deceived - other than the faithful Kingdom citizens, all the nations of the earth are in open rebellion against God. But in the end, this present rebellion in the earth will cease. All the nations and peoples of the earth will come under His authority - as King of kings. Everything in this material realm will come into alignment with His Kingdom.

REV 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh, he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords." NASB

What will the nations do with a King - One who reigns in righteousness and does not serve at the will of the people - who does not answer to us? Most of the world will not respond very well and that is the reason why the world will wage war against Him. When Jesus comes, He will be perceived as an alien invader to be resisted - no matter how kind, loving, and benevolent He is. The nations of the world will resist Him just because they are fiercely independent and unwilling to submit to be ruled by Him.

But as individuals, starting now we can learn to properly respond to Him as our King, even if we have lived our entire lives immersed in an independent, self-governing, "power to the people" culture. It starts with a determination to be fully loyal to Him as our King of kings, and to center our identity in the Kingdom of Heaven rather than the nations of the earth. First and foremost, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit calls us today to submit our hearts and come under the authority and rule of our King, and to serve Him only. Amen, and Glory to God.

Study Questions – 2a. What does Acts 5:30-32 reveal about Jesus' position in the Kingdom of Heaven? 2b. And what does the Revelation 19 passage reveal about Jesus' position on earth when He returns? 2c. How will the nations respond to His return?

Prayer - Lord Jesus, I submit to You as my King. Please help me abandon my democratic, independent mindset and to embrace the Kingdom reality of your rule in my life. Amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 1 – “Seek First the Kingdom of God”

Lesson 1-3 – “Seek First the Kingdom”

It seems every decade has its own nickname. The 1920s were known as “The Roaring Twenties”, the 1950s as the “Golden Age of Capitalism” and the “Age of Conformity”. They called the 1960s the “Swinging Sixties”. The 1980s were infamously dubbed the “Decade of Greed”.

The 1980s brought us things like big hair for women, mullets for men, parachute pants, leggings, cocaine, economic prosperity, and the fall of Soviet communism. But mostly, that decade is known for the excessive flaunting of wealth - or at least the appearance of wealth. Malcolm Forbes, the founder of Forbes Magazine, summed it by saying, “He who dies with the most toys - wins”. When my mom saw people in our small Tennessee town acting that way, she said, “If you didn’t know better, you’d think they had money”.

Jesus often talked about the dangers of trying to impress people, as well as the dangers of the unbridled pursuit of money, possessions, and power. In Matthew 6, He makes a most interesting statement about how things work differently within God’s economy.

MT 6:33 [“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”](#) NASB

This message of the coming Kingdom of God is so important, that Jesus said we should pursue God’s Kingdom and God’s righteousness above all other things in life. And notice He does not say we should seek first the King, but to seek first the Kingdom. In saying it this way, Jesus is not minimizing our devotion to God, but He is broadening our scope to understand that a true devotion to God must also include a dedicated pursuit of Kingdom life. This “seek first the kingdom” statement is profound, especially when we consider it in the context in which Jesus spoke it. Here is what he said in the preceding verses.

MT 6:19 [“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”](#) NASB

Can you see the contrast of heavenly pursuits versus earthly pursuits, and the outcome? One produces eternal treasures and the other produces fleeting treasures. If we spend

Notes and Questions _____

all our time and energy chasing after earthly treasures, it proves our heart is not set on the Kingdom of God. However, if we are pursuing heavenly things, it shows our heart is set on the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus calls us to honestly examine our own heart, to see if our heart is properly focused, or if our loyalty is divided.

MT 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. NASB

We can set our hearts on the Kingdom of Heaven, or on earthly pursuits. But we cannot serve both at the same time. He said it very clearly...

MT 6:24 "No one can serve two masters". NASB

And Jesus continues by teaching us a profound Kingdom principle. If we will direct our pursuits toward the things of the Kingdom of God and of living a lifestyle of God's righteousness, we will receive the economic benefits afforded to loyal Kingdom citizens.

MT 6:25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? ²⁶ "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? NASB

As citizens of Heaven, we partake in the benefits of God's economy, of His economic policies and principles. We become the benefactors of God's resources to meet our earthly needs. But our loyalties and priorities must be centered in His Kingdom. Jesus continues with this analogy showing how valuable we are to God.

MT 6:28 "And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. ³⁰ "But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?" NASB

God knows how to take care of His loyal subjects, those who are of His own family. He has bound Himself by a promise to care for us. It is His nature to care for us.

MT 6:31 "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' ³² "For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." NASB

Notes and Questions _____

This principle of “Seeking first the Kingdom” cuts against every natural inclination we have. But Jesus says if we will seek the Kingdom first, the material blessings will follow. This can really be a tricky thing to navigate, especially if our hearts are set on material things, then we look at the Kingdom as the way to obtain them. So, we must test our hearts. Are we seeking Him with pure motives, or are we seeking Him for the material blessings? We might as well be honest about it because God already knows what is in our hearts. But if we can learn to stop setting our hearts on the things of the world, and to make the Kingdom of Heaven our heart's desire - our sole pursuit, then God Himself will ensure our needs are met. But our hearts must be undivided in our loyalty and devotion to God and His kingdom. Jesus said it best...

[MT 6:21](#) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. NASB

Does this mean we all quit our jobs, go to the desert, fast and sit on a rock until God pours money from heaven to feed us? No. It simply means our life is focused on advancing God’s agenda, not our own. Our jobs become a Kingdom pursuit – for eternal purposes. Our investing becomes a Kingdom pursuit. Our time is devoted to promoting the Kingdom. There is nothing evil about having wealth, but it is a huge problem if our desire for “things” rules our heart.

You have probably heard it said – you never see a funeral hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer. Truly, we cannot take any of our stuff with us. When it comes to earthly possessions, death is the great equalizer. The one who dies with the most toys, is still just as dead as the flat-broke homeless person who dies in the gutter. So, God is calling us to look at things from His eternal perspective and to make some lifestyle choices. What are we going to chase after? Who are we going to serve? What will we seek first in our lives? What things have eternal value? In the end, what really matters?

[Study Questions](#) – 3a. In a practical sense, what does it mean to you to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”? 3b. And what is God’s promise to us if we will do this?

[Prayer](#) – Father, today I choose to seek Kingdom life above the pursuits of worldly gain and pleasure. Please help me to see and pursue the eternal opportunities You place before me each day. Thank You for your promise to care and provide for me. Amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 1 – “Seek First the Kingdom of God”

Lesson 1-4 – “The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven”

Have you ever noticed how dogs seem to be fascinated with little children? Even though the child pulls their tail and tries to ride them like a pony, dogs keep coming back for more. Even when the child dresses them up like a ballerina, dogs still seem to love their children. Experts say this is because little children are smaller and therefore less intimidating to the dog than adults are. I believe dogs love little children because it is easier to steal their food.

Children view the world around them from a simple and innocent perspective. They have not yet learned there are lovable opportunists standing by, watching closely to snatch that ice cream cone right out of their hands. “Like taking candy from a baby” is a concept even dogs are smart enough to understand.

As we get older and more experienced, we realize we must protect ourselves. We become less trusting and more guarded. We become increasingly skeptical of the motives and actions of others - and others do the same of us. The more we see of this world, the more cynical we can become. But even though a child's innocence makes them vulnerable, it is a quality that is precious in God's eyes. And there are certain child-like qualities God wants us to retain our entire lives - in fact, He requires it of us.

MT 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"² And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,³ and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."⁴ "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."⁵ "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me." NASB

From a human perspective, this is 100% counterintuitive. Should the greatest not be those who are the smartest, wisest, and well-educated? Should the greatest not be those who have worked the hardest or accomplished the most? Not according to Jesus. And this was not the only time Jesus made this point to His disciples.

MK 10:13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them.¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." NRSV

Notes and Questions _____

What can we learn from children? Plenty. There are child-like qualities so special to God that He requires them of us for entrance into His Kingdom. One of these qualities is the ability to humble ourselves and believe as a child believes. For better or worse, little children will believe anything you tell them. As we grow up, we learn people are not always honest (even in religious circles). We learn that we cannot believe everything we hear. Over time, our cynicism can grow and we lose the ability to be fully convinced of anything - without there being at least some level of doubt mixed in. Doubting becomes a habit, which hampers our ability to fully believe God and receive from Him.

[JAS 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.](#) NASB

Without a humble faith, we should not expect to receive anything from God - even the entrance into His Kingdom. Part of being converted and becoming like a child is learning to believe God without doubting Him. We cannot believe everything people say, but we can believe everything God says. The trick is knowing the difference.

[2TI 3:13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.](#) NASB

So, we must study the scriptures, pray for understanding, and ask the Holy Spirit to fully convince us of God's Kingdom truths and to put down our every doubt. As Jesus said...

[JN 8:31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."](#) NRSV

We will never reclaim our child-like faith without a steady diet of God's scriptures - not Christian TV, not commentaries, but God's word unfiltered and unedited. Jesus said it well when He was being tempted by Satan.

[MT 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: `Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "](#) NIV

Notes and Questions _____

And as the Apostle Paul taught.

[RO 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.](#)

And in Hebrews...

[HEB 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.](#) NASB

Faith, is being fully convinced that the things God says are true, just like a child believes. It is the first and most important step for us, for through this we gain His approval. There is no other way to be converted and enter His Kingdom.

[HEB 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him.](#) NIV

Doubt is a nasty habit that must be broken from our lives. We must reclaim the child-like faith the world has stolen from us, that we might embrace the Kingdom realities God has for us to experience. But are we really ready to go that far with Jesus?

Are we ready to believe in Jesus enough to give Him our full loyalty as our King? Are we ready to believe His message enough to pledge our full allegiance to His Kingdom and embrace it as our own - 100%? Are we ready to break with this world and seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness above all else? Are we ready to humble ourselves and believe as a child believes?

[LK 18:17 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.](#) NIV

Amen, and glory to God.

Study Questions— 4a. What are some of the child-like qualities God desires to see in us? 4b. Why do you believe these qualities are so important to Him? 4c. What are some things we can do to rediscover our child-like nature?

Prayer – Father, I pray You would help me to reclaim the child-like qualities that are precious to You. You are a good Father and I honor and respect You. Amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 1 – “Seek First the Kingdom of God”

Lesson 1-5 – “Be on the Alert!”

Y2K. Do you remember it? It refers to the year 2000. If you have forgotten, or are too young to remember, many tech gurus and doomsday prophets alike were predicting the calendar rollover from 1999 to 2000 would trigger a sequence of events that would lead to the end of the world as we know it. Since most computer databases only stored the year-date information using the last two digits (97, 98, 99, etc...), the computer systems would falsely interpret 00 as 1900 instead of 2000. This date sequencing error would create havoc in business billing and financial reporting systems, leading to widespread business shutdowns, a banking crisis, and potentially a worldwide economic meltdown. Fortunately, all that talk ended just about the time the smoke cleared from the New Year’s Eve fireworks.

Having been a Y2K Remediation Coordinator for my company, I remember it very well. And I can tell you, Y2K was a very real threat. Businesses everywhere were scrambling frantically to update their hardware, software, and database systems to insure they could recognize years using four digits. Several weeks before the date rollover, we were confident the problem was not quite as large as had been feared and that the vast majority of the serious problems with the banks had been fixed in advance. But I also remember being relieved on New Year’s Day when the electricity stayed on.

It is interesting to note that while Y2K did not destroy the economy, it did help to crash the stock market. But it was not immediate and not in the way everyone had feared. The stock market peaked in March of 2000, driven mainly by technology stocks. Much of the rapid growth in technology stocks was driven by Y2K spending, and here is an example of how that happened. In mid-1999, I was talking with the man in charge of purchasing desktop computers at our company, and I asked him how many computers he would be purchasing that year in getting ready for Y2K. He replied, “probably about 350.” Then I asked him how many he would be purchasing next year. He replied. “Next year? Probably none.” And that is how Y2K helped to drive the stock market into a bubble, then burst it. Y2K had warped the technology spending patterns.

This kind of front-loaded purchasing activity was happening throughout the entire business world, and it should have been an obvious sign that the spike in tech company earnings was going to end abruptly. Looking back on it, this was a huge red flag waving for anyone to see – but mostly, we did not see it. From the March 2000 peak to the lows of October 2002, almost 8 trillion dollars of stock market wealth was lost. That is 8,000,000,000,000 dollars. As the old saying goes, hindsight is 20/20.

Notes and Questions _____

Oftentimes in life, we do not recognize the obvious when it is happening – but later when we look back on it, it seems so obvious we wonder how we could have missed it. This same thing happened to Jesus' disciples on a regular basis. Here is one example.

[JN 12:12 On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³ took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel." ¹⁴ And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, ¹⁵ "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT." ¹⁶ These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.](#) NASB

When Jesus entered through the gate into Jerusalem riding a donkey's colt with this kind of fanfare from the populous, it was an obvious fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy in Zechariah 9. But the disciples did not recognize it at the time. They did not tie it all together until after Jesus was resurrected and they looked back on that event.

What is the lesson for us? Sometimes scripture can be fulfilled right before our eyes, and we might not realize it until much later. Why does this matter? Well, as we study the prophecies concerning the second coming of Jesus, it is easy to look at the scriptures and conclude that Jesus cannot return now because certain things have yet to be fulfilled. It is possible those prophecies may have already been sufficiently fulfilled or are in the process right now – but we lack the understanding of how all the pieces fit together. In the future, we might look back and wonder how we could have missed something so obvious. But in the moment things are happening, it is not always so obvious. Maybe this is the reason Jesus told us to live our lives as if today were the day.

[MT 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. ³⁷ "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸ "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so, shall the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴² "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ "For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.](#) NASB

Notes and Questions _____

Jesus is telling us He is coming at a time no one is expecting. He will surprise the whole planet - even the faithful. One of the ways we can keep alert is to consistently pray for the Kingdom of God to come in its fullness, just as Jesus taught us to do.

[MT 6:9 "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. NRSV](#)

When Jesus returns, and the Kingdom comes in its fullness, the will of God will be done perfectly on earth, just as it is now in Heaven. Making this request regularly in our prayers can help to remind us of His coming. Here is another parable he spoke emphasizing the importance of staying prepared for His return.

[MT 25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² "And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. ³ "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. ⁵ "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. ⁶ "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'](#)

[MT 25:7 "Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ "And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ "But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰ "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. ¹¹ "And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' ¹² "But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. NASB](#)

The oil represents the Holy Spirit. Part of our being ready, is to be diligent to stay full of the Holy Spirit and the love of God - day by day, as we are also taught in Hebrews.

[HEB 10:24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. NRSV](#)

Not only should we prepare ourselves, but we should also encourage one another to be waiting expectantly for Jesus to return. He can come at any time to bring this present age to an end and to establish His Kingdom in its fullness. Amen, and glory to Him!

[Study Question – 5.](#) What is the main message, instruction, and warning for us in Jesus' parables of Matthew 24:36-44 and Matthew 25:1-13?

[Prayer](#) – Father, I thank you for the promised return of Jesus, when He comes to establish your Kingdom in its fullness in the earth. Come Lord Jesus, amen.

FOUNDATIONS 301 WEEK TWO	THE KINGDOM WITHIN
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Week 2 – “The Kingdom Within”

Lesson 2-1 “The Sacrifice”

It is considered one of the strangest legal cases in history - the case of United States vs. George Wilson. On November 6, 1829, James Porter and George Wilson violently assaulted and robbed a United States mail carrier in Pennsylvania as he was transporting mail from Philadelphia to Reading. Then on December 6, 1829, the pair robbed and assaulted another carrier who was taking mail from Philadelphia to Kimberton.

Porter and Wilson were subsequently tried and convicted in the Reading case for “obstructing the mail” and for “putting the life of a carrier in jeopardy”. The sentence for the second charge was death. Upon this court verdict and sentence, the prosecutor in the Kimberton case chose to no longer pursue charges. Porter was executed as scheduled, but Wilson had well-connected friends who had petitioned President Andrew Jackson for a pardon. The pardon was granted with the stipulation that Wilson would only be pardoned for the crimes for which he was sentenced to death - he would have to serve his time for the other crimes. And this is where it starts to get strange. It is not clear why, but Wilson rejected the pardon. At this point, no one knew exactly what to do with Wilson, so it went back to the courts.

The Wilson situation had exposed a couple of constitutional questions. First - can a person refuse a presidential pardon? Second - if someone does refuse a pardon, is the government then obligated to carry out the sentence? The United States Supreme Court rendered a decision saying, *"A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered, and if it be rejected, we have discovered no power in a court system to force it on him."* On the surface, this decision seems it should have sent Wilson straight to the gallows, but historical documents reveal the capital sentence was never carried out. Wilson served a 10-year sentence for the other non-capital crime and was then released.

When God forgives our sins, it is not technically a pardon because Jesus paid the penalty of our sins by dying in our place. Our sentence of death was carried out through his execution on the cross. And it is only through this substitution our sins can be eternally forgiven. But just like George Wilson rejected the forgiveness of his crime that was offered through the presidential pardon, we can reject the forgiveness of sins that comes through Jesus Christ. Here is how Jesus explained it to Nicodemus in John 3.

[^{JN 3:14} Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,](#) ¹⁵ [that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.](#) ¹⁶ ["For God so loved the](#)

Notes and Questions _____

world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. NIV

Believing in Christ is the key. But believing in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins is more than just believing Jesus exists. It is more than believing Jesus died and was resurrected. Saving faith is a complete dependence upon His atoning sacrifice as being the only way for our sins to be forgiven. His sacrifice is God's only prescribed remedy for our sin debt. If there was any other way for our sins to be forgiven, pardoned, or cleansed, Christ would not have had to die. This forgiveness is given freely as a gift, but it is also a gift that can be rejected – just as Jesus explained to Nicodemus.

^{JN 3:19} This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. NIV

In this passage, Jesus explains why people often reject the free gift of forgiveness – we love our sin and do not want to give it up. It seems to be a simple thing to repent and put our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But for many people, repentance is the deal-breaker. They are unwilling to give up their bitterness, malice and unforgiveness. They are unwilling to give up their profanity, pornography, and dirty jokes. But if we want to be forgiven, we must be willing to turn from our sin and to believe in Jesus as our atoning sacrifice and our only hope for salvation. Here is the way the Apostle Peter explained it.

^{AC 3:18} "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. NASB

Notice in verse 19 that forgiveness is conditional and dependent upon repentance – not just faith. But it very common today to hear salvation taught in a way that includes faith in Jesus - but makes no mention of turning from our sin. This leads people to believe that turning away from sin is optional. I want to be very clear about this - the idea that we can be saved apart from repentance is a false teaching. Jesus and the Apostles taught there is no forgiveness of sins if we are not willing to abandon our life of sin. The Apostle Paul spoke this truth in many of his letters.

Notes and Questions _____

EPH 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. NIV

Whenever someone teaches a concept of salvation that leads people to believe they can receive eternal life and continue in their sinful lifestyle, it is nothing but empty and deceptive words. Do not be deceived by that kind of nonsense. Paul also spoke of this in 1st Corinthians, and once again, he warns us that we should not be deceived.

1CO 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. NIV

The blood of Jesus is always available to wash and cleanse us of our sins, but not if we are unwilling to turn from our sinful ways. In the scriptures, the forgiveness of our sins is securely bound to our repentance. If we reject repentance, we are also rejecting the atoning blood of Jesus which was provided to cleanse us of our sins.

HEB 10:26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins remains, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. NIV

Choices have consequences – for good or bad. Let us be wise and turn from our sins, putting our whole confidence in the blood of Jesus to cleanse us and in the Holy Spirit to transform our minds, our hearts, and our actions. This is the true saving faith.

Study Questions – 1a. From the John 3:14-18 passage, why did Jesus come into the world? 1b. And from Acts 3:18-19, what is required of us to have our sins wiped away?

Prayer – Father, I thank You for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. I turn from my sinful past. By faith, I embrace His sacrifice as the only way my sins can be forgiven. I thank You that You love me that much. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 2 – “The Kingdom Within”

Lesson 2-2 – “You Must be Born Again”

One of the greatest skills a student can develop is the ability to ask questions. Learning to ask relevant questions is a critical tool in research, problem-solving, relationships, education, diplomacy, etc... There really is an art to asking good questions.

They say on average, a four-year-old asks around four-hundred questions a day. By the time we reach middle-age, we are asking less than ten. Obviously, one reason is that little children do not know very much about the world around them, and adults already have answers to many of those questions. But are there other reasons why we stop asking questions? Perhaps we stop asking questions because we have grown arrogant in thinking we already know it all? Or maybe we do not ask questions because we are embarrassed to admit we do not know it all? Either way, it hinders our learning. With things of the Spirit, I suspect that sometimes we do not ask simply because the truth is so far beyond our comprehension. We do not know enough to realize we should even ask a question. So, in those situations, we need assistance from a teacher - Jesus.

When Jesus was ministering in Israel, the Pharisees were a religious/political party who considered themselves to be the keepers and protectors of the Jewish law and religious traditions. They observed Jesus going about doing good and performing amazing miracles, so they knew God was with Jesus in a special way. But they were not sure what to do with Jesus, because He was not part of their Pharisee circle. And as Jesus' popularity increased, He was perceived as a growing threat. So, under the cover of darkness, one of the Pharisees visited Jesus to try to find out what He was all about.

^{JN 3:1} Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; ² this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." NASB

Then, Jesus sidesteps the complimentary words and responds by answering a question Nicodemus did not ask - because Nicodemus did not know enough to even know he should ask it.

^{JN 3:3} Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." NASB

“How can I enter the Kingdom of Heaven?” That is the question Nicodemus should have asked. It is the question every person should ask, but very few know to ask it. However, once Jesus speaks of the necessity of being born again, Nicodemus is full of questions.

Notes and Questions _____

JN 3:4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. NASB

Jesus is making it clear that there is much more to entering the Kingdom of Heaven than just joining the group of Christians - like we might join a book club at the local library. It is more than praying a prayer, filling out a membership form, and going to Church on Sunday morning. To be a part of God's Kingdom, we must be spiritually reborn. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God spoke in advance about this born-again reality. God said:

EZE 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. NASB

This prophecy contains a revelation from God that points out our greatest problem in life and the reason we must be born again - we have a hard, self-centered heart. God is not suggesting we should change our own hearts, but that we submit to Him to cut out our heart of stone and replace it with a soft heart. This is not heart surgery, but a heart transplant through which God changes us by putting His own Spirit within us. This is not something that we must do or even can do for ourselves, but something God promises to do within us if we are willing to submit to Him.

This can be a difficult thing to accept about ourselves because it offends our pride. We are offended at the notion we are not good enough - that we can never be good enough through our own efforts. We are offended when someone suggests our heart is so wicked that it is beyond repair and must be replaced - even if God is the one making that suggestion. During His earthly ministry, Jesus taught this same principle - that our heart is our biggest problem. And yes, some people were very offended.

MT 15:10 And after He called the multitude to Him, He said to them, "Hear, and understand. ¹¹ "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." NASB

The Jews were obsessed with their dietary practices, thinking they were clean or unclean before God based on what they ate or whether they performed the proper ceremonial washings. So, when Jesus made this statement, the religious leaders were very offended by it. Even Jesus' Jewish disciples were confused. So later, Peter asked Jesus to explain what He meant by that saying.

Notes and Questions _____

MT 15:15 And Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." ¹⁶ And He said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? ¹⁷ "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? ¹⁸ "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. ¹⁹ "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false witness, slanderings. ²⁰ "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." NASB

To some degree, we were all infected with this heart disease that defiles us before God. And as the Apostle Paul teaches us, these actions that emanate from our hearts will ultimately prevent us from inheriting the Kingdom of God.

GAL 5:19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. NIV

When we look at this list, it is easy to categorize these into the “bad” and the “not so bad” sins to try to justify ourselves. But all of these come out of a self-centered heart. How many times has jealousy led to murder? Just because we do not follow through with killing a person does not mean we do not wish them dead. Are we really willing to be honest about what goes on in our hearts? Are we envious or jealous of others? Do we gossip about others? Do we harbor bitterness, malice, and unforgiveness in our hearts? Are we plotting revenge against someone? Are we self-centered? Occasionally? Do we have things secretly hidden in our hearts where we think no one sees? God sees.

The good news of the Kingdom is that God promises to take away our heart of stone and replace it with a soft, loving heart. So, here is one of those eternal questions everyone should ask - but few know to ask it. Am I willing to climb up on God's operating table and submit myself to His scalpel that I might be born again with a new heart from Him? Am I ready cross that line with Him?

Study Questions – 2a. In the John 3:3-6 passage, what does Jesus say must happen to us to enter the Kingdom? 2b. And what promise does God make to us in Ezekiel 36:26-27? 2c. What do these passages reveal about our condition and our greatest need?

Prayer - Father, I submit myself to Your saving grace. I recognize my need for a new heart from You, and my inability to do anything to save myself. Thank You for your ongoing work in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 2 – “The Kingdom Within”

Lesson 2-3 – “The Spirit Within”

There is always a lot of discussion in Christian circles about the “signs of the times”. We look around us and see events unfolding before us that line up with Biblical prophecy. We conclude that these point to the soon coming of God’s Kingdom. And many of those happenings certainly are valid signs. Jesus encourages us to look forward to the day the Kingdom will be revealed in its fullness in the earth, but He also teaches us to embrace the Kingdom as it has already been revealed.

LK 17:20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." NIV

In many ways, it is more important that we look for the Kingdom to be revealed within us, than to look for the Kingdom to be revealed in the skies. But what does it mean that the Kingdom is within us? The prophetic promise from Ezekiel gives some details that will help us understand how it is possible for the Kingdom to dwell within us.

EZE 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."²⁷ "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." NASB

Look at what God promises to do in verse 27. If we have been born of God’s Spirit, and His Spirit is living within us, then the Kingdom of Heaven has already been extended into us because the King of Heaven dwells in us through His Holy Spirit. Wherever the King is, so also is the Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit within us is the key that opens the door to every other Kingdom reality in our lives. Spirit-led believers are the ones God uses to accomplish His Kingdom work in the earth. So, it is essential we understand why God has given us His Spirit, as well as what we can do to embrace and experience the Holy Spirit, day by day. The Apostle Paul taught extensively on the work of the Holy Spirit within us. One of the best examples of his teaching is found in Galatians, chapter 5.

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. NASB

Notes and Questions _____

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is God's nature expressed within us, giving us supernatural empowerment to live a life of righteousness - well beyond our own natural abilities. This is what God was saying in Ezekiel where He promised He would empower us to keep His law, which is something we cannot do in our own strength. This Holy Spirit experience is a stark contrast to what we experience apart from God when we are being controlled by fallen human nature. This hard heart of ours is self-centered and must be constantly restrained to keep us from doing wrong to others. As we have seen before, Paul also spoke of this fallen nature in the preceding verses of Galatians 5.

[GAL 5:19](#) Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. NASB

The good news is that Jesus came to deliver us from the bondage and control of this fallen human nature through the Holy Spirit. Through the impartation of His Spirit, we are freed from practicing the things which would otherwise prevent us from entering and inheriting the kingdom of Heaven. But without the Holy Spirit fruit, the best we can possibly do is try to contain these impulses by the strength of our own will. And no matter how hard we try to restrain the flesh, eventually it oozes out of us in one form or another. So, God gives us the Holy Spirit fruit so we can experience and express His loving nature. And in 1st Corinthians 13, Paul gives more detail on how the Spiritual Fruit does this work in us.

[1CO 13:4](#) Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. NRSV

Patience, kindness, and humility are all fruits of the Spirit, but love is the core of all of them. If we love people, we will be patient with them. If we love people, we will treat them with kindness. If we love people, we will not be rude to them. Paul confirms this in his letter to the Church at Rome.

[RO 13:8](#) Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. NRSV

Notes and Questions _____

When we love someone, we will not intentionally harm them. We are not going to be jealous of their success, but we will rejoice with them. We will not be secretly hoping for them to fail. We will not be gossiping about them or ruining their reputation. When we act in God's love, we literally do not sin against people. By walking in love, we fulfill the law. And if we are yielded to the Holy Spirit within, love will be our way of life. Jesus also spoke about how the love of God fulfills the law of God within us.

MT 22:35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'" ³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" ⁴⁰ "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." NASB

Love God and love people. It is not all that complicated, is it? We do not have to learn and attempt to keep all 613 Old Testament commandments - just two. All the other commandments can be fulfilled by keeping these two. Love God and love people.

This is how God's Spirit within us produces His righteousness in us and breaks the power and bondage of sin in our lives. The righteousness of God will manifest love within our hearts, changing how we feel toward God and other people. This is not an invisible, imaginary righteousness that only God can see, but His Spirit within us produces a love-based righteousness that changes us sufficiently for the whole world to see it.

Amen and glory to God.

Study Questions – 3a. From the 1st Corinthians 13:4-7 passage, what are the attributes of love? 3b. And from the Romans 13:8-10 passage, in what ways does a loving heart affect the way we treat people?

Prayer – Father, I thank You that You love me so much that Jesus would die for me. I commit myself to embrace Your love as the controlling force in my life. I bless and honor You in the name of Jesus, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 2 – “The Kingdom Within”

Lesson 2-4 “Freedom from Sin”

The American Civil War was arguably the greatest tragedy in United States history. And it was not just the devastation of the war itself, but the events leading up to the war and the aftermath. The years following the Civil War were difficult for the entire nation, but especially for the South. Most of the war was fought in the South, and the “scorched earth” tactics had devastated virtually every major city. While the Northern states were more industrialized, the South was primarily dependent on agriculture – with slave labor being a large component of their economic engine.

When the war finally ended, everything in the South was in shambles, the slaves were free, and the painful task of reconstruction was just starting. The former slaves’ transition to freedom was a struggle. Some left the South seeking opportunities elsewhere. But most were generational slaves, with their parents and grandparents also being slaves. They had never known any other life than that of a slave, with no experience in living a life of freedom. Not knowing how to live any other way, many returned to the same cotton fields making wages so low they were not much better off financially than when they were slaves. But at least they were free - technically.

In the Old Testament, there is a story of how the Children of Israel had become slaves in the land of Egypt. Through Moses, God delivered them, and they began to travel to their own Promised Land. But just as they were about to enter the freedom of their own land, they lost their faith due to a bad report from those sent to spy out the land.

[NU 14:2](#) And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³ "And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" ⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt." NASB

It had only been a few short weeks since they were miraculously delivered from their oppressive slavery in Egypt, and now they were ready to go right back to it. Slavery was all they had ever known, and in some ways, it was familiar and comfortable to them. They had been removed from their slavery, but their slave mentality was very present with them. Because they refused to go forward into their inheritance, they spent the next 40 years wandering in the desert until all the unfaithful had died off. It had taken only a few days to get them out of Egypt, but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of them. So, what does any of this have to do with us today? Well, I am so glad you asked.

Notes and Questions _____

RO 6:17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. NIV

Did you know you have been set free from sin and that you no longer have to continue in it? It is true. Before we come to Christ, we are all slaves to sin - no doubt about it. Even though we knew we were doing things that were against God's will, we just kept on doing the same sinful things over and over. We were trapped in a continuing cycle of sin because we were slaves to sin. It was all we ever knew. But when we come to Christ, that bondage is broken, and we are freed from sin's power to control us. At least that is what the Apostle Paul said about it. But wait, Peter also said it?

1PE 2:24 And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds, you were healed. NASB

Jesus died that we might die to sin and live to righteousness – that was His purpose in dying on the cross. It was not just about forgiving our sins, but also to free us from our slavery to sin. Paul goes into much more detail about this.

RO 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

RO 6:5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. NIV

If we are no longer slaves to sin, then why do we keep sinning? If we have been freed from sin, why do we continue to act as though we were still slaves to sin? Hmm... Maybe it is because we have never been taught that we are no longer slaves of sin? Maybe we have been in church all our lives and never heard this taught even once? Well, now you have heard. In Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin - and we must shed that "slave to sin" mentality and start embracing our new freedom in Christ.

RO 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. NIV

Notes and Questions _____

If sin is not our master, then why should we go on believing we cannot help but sin? Will we accept and believe we are free in Christ, or must we spend 40 years wandering in our own spiritual desert until all that remains of Egypt is finally purged from us? Only when we throw off our “slavery to sin” mentality, and embrace our “freedom in Christ” mentality, can we truly begin to experience the reality of who we are in Christ.

2CO 5:16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. NIV

In Christ, we are new creatures, created with God’s spiritual DNA. In other words – we are no longer merely human, but humans infused with the divine – a new species. This change in our spiritual substance gives us spiritual empowerment we did not have back when we were mere earthlings. Since we are no longer slaves to sin, and we have the power to overcome, we can now lay that old sinful lifestyle aside - but not if we are unbelieving or unwilling. And make no mistake about it - there is a great reward for embracing our freedom in Christ, but also a high cost to remaining a slave to sin.

RO 8:12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, but not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. NASB

And...

RO 6:22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. NIV

There are two paths set before us. Our success in the Kingdom of God depends on how well we learn to put aside the old self and put on the new self - how well we die to sin and come alive to righteousness. So, we have a choice. Will we continue to identify as slaves to sin, or as new creatures who have been set free from our slavery to sin?

Study Questions – 4a. What do you see as the main point Paul is making in the Romans 6:17-18 passage? 4b. And what is the point made in the Romans 8:12-13 and 6:22-23 passage?

Prayer – Father, I thank You that the power of sin is broken in my life, and I am no longer a slave to it. I thank You for the freedom I have in Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 2 – “The Kingdom Within”

Lesson 2-5 “The Inner Witness”

Pontius Pilate was a central figure in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. He served as the governor of Judea for ten years, roughly 26-36 AD. That he lasted that long probably attests to his effectiveness in handling a fiercely independent Jewish population. He was politically savvy, ambitious, manipulative, and sometimes ruthless – even by Roman standards. He was ultimately recalled to Rome and retired because of his brutality. You might say he and Jesus were polar-opposites.

As the governor of Judea, Pilate had the authority to appoint the Jewish high priest. And during his whole tenure, there was only one high priest - Caiaphas. The fact that he was not replaced as high priest shows that Pilate found Caiaphas to be a reliable ally among the religious elites. It also helps to explain Pilate's willingness to send Jesus to the cross, even though he believed Him to be innocent. He did it to appease his political allies in the Jewish Sanhedrin. Pilate was a pragmatic man, certainly not an idealist.

Pontius Pilate showed he had a flair for the dramatic, when he put on the show of literally washing and drying his hands before an angry mob to show he wanted nothing to do with this Jesus. The details of his meeting with Jesus also reveals something else about Pilate. Here is part of their conversation as recorded in the Gospel of John.

[^{JN 18:37} Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."](#)

[³⁸ Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" NASB](#)

Pilate's somewhat rhetorical response to Jesus reveals he was probably a cynical and disillusioned man. Across the vastness of the Roman Empire of that day, there were many cultures and many religions, with all of them claiming to be the truth. It does not take a rocket scientist to conclude that a bunch of contradictory religious belief systems cannot all be true.

The Romans themselves were a polytheistic religious culture, having many gods. He had probably heard so many conflicting stories and theories about the gods, he concluded it was humanly impossible to really know what was true and what was myth. And if one happens to be true, all the others must be false. Simple logic. So, if you consider Pilate's question in that context, it is probably an honest response, maybe even profound. “What is truth?”

Notes and Questions _____

So, when it comes to the Gospel accounts, how can we know if the stories we have heard about Jesus are true? How can we know His miracles were real? How can we know He rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father? As for those who were there at the time, the Apostles could speak with certainty out of their first-hand knowledge. This is Peter's testimony.

[2PE 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.](#)
[17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"--](#) ¹⁸ [and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.](#) ¹⁹ [And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.](#) NASB

Peter saw the miracles and the Messianic prophecies fulfilled before his eyes, so his confidence was based in part on his own personal experience. But that was 2000 years ago - you and I were not there. How do we really know people did not fabricate some of this stuff? If we were not eyewitnesses, how can we know for certain what really happened? Do we just have to take their word for it? Do we have a faith entirely dependent on the testimonies of others, of people we know very little about?

We can hold up the Bible and proclaim it is the inspired word of God, but how do we really know it is not just the words of man? I can tell you with all confidence that the scriptures are 100% reliable, but also that God does not want our faith to be entirely based on the testimonies of other people – including the Apostles, the Prophets, even Jesus Himself. Before you kick me to the curb, look at what the Apostle John says.

[JN 15:26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,"](#) ²⁷ [and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.](#) NASB

God's intention is that we would have the Old Testament Prophets, the Apostles, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit all testify to us as witnesses concerning the truth of who Jesus is. We can read the testimonies of the Apostles and Prophets, and even Jesus, but only the Holy Spirit can confirm the truth within our hearts without a shadow of a doubt. This is God's design in revealing and confirming truth to us in the Kingdom of God.

[JN 16:12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear."](#) ¹³ [But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own;](#)

Notes and Questions _____

he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. NIV

Without the Holy Spirit's confirming witness within us, our faith will always be shakable. The witness within is critical in giving us discernment in understanding truth from error.

^{2PE 1:20} But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. NASB

Apart from the Holy Spirit, we cannot even understand the scriptures, because they are spiritually inspired and therefore must be spiritually interpreted. In our own human intellect, we can be easily deceived by man and the powers of darkness. Without the witness of the Holy Spirit within us, we can only depend on our own human reasoning to sort out the truth from the falsehoods. And none of us is smart enough to for that.

In matters regarding the interpretation of scripture, we do not have the right to our own opinions. The reason we have so much conflicting doctrinal confusion among Christian denominations, is the scriptures have been intellectually interpreted rather than spiritually discerned.

The Holy Spirit is not schizophrenic, and He will not tell you one thing and me the opposite. So, whenever there is disagreement on what truth is, you can always know for certain that deception has crept in, and one or the other has not interpreted by the witness of the Holy Spirit. The scriptures may be applied in many ways, but sound doctrine as it was originally communicated through the inspired authors can only be understood through Holy Spirit discernment.

If denominational leaders could only manage to humble themselves, admit they might be wrong, and honestly submit their doctrine to God, the Holy Spirit would certainly bring us to unity in all aspects of the faith. But pride, power, and position are difficult strongholds to break. We can always hope and pray for true unity – as Jesus also did.

Not only does the Holy Spirit witness to us concerning the truth of who Jesus is, and the truth of the scriptures, but the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us about ourselves. This is from the Apostle Paul.

^{RO 8:12} So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led

Notes and Questions _____

by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. NASB

As we walk by the Spirit, the Spirit reminds us in our hearts of our place in God's family. The Holy Spirit works to remove our doubts so we might have a purer faith. But if we continue to walk in the stubbornness of our fallen sinful nature, the Spirit will only press us to repent – that we might live and not die. Let there be no question about it, eternal life belongs to those who walk by the Spirit. Do not be deceived. And as the Apostle John reminds us, abiding in love is the key to experiencing the fullness of the Spirit.

^{1JN 4:11} Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

^{1JN 4:15} Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. NASB

This is how we know we are abiding in Him – if His love is controlling our hearts. Abiding in love is the key to everything. If that is not happening, our most important priority is to get our heart back into the love of God. It should be our first order of daily business.

Study Questions – 5a. What does Jesus teach us in John 15:26-27 and 16:12-15 about one role of the Holy Spirit in our lives? 5b. And from 1st John 4:11-18, how can we know we are being controlled by the Holy Spirit and abiding in God?

Prayer – Father, I choose to walk in love because I know You are the source of love. I ask You to perfect me in Your love day by day. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

FOUNDATIONS 301 WEEK THREE	CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM
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Week 3 – “Citizens of the Kingdom”

Lesson 3-1 “Transferred to the Kingdom of Light”

Citizens fall into two basic categories - natural-born citizens and naturalized citizens. The status of natural-born citizens is based on birthright, while naturalized citizens are granted their status through legal process or marriage. In some cases, becoming a naturalized citizen in another country results in the cancellation of your citizenship rights in your birth-country. However, some countries do allow dual-citizenship, meaning you retain the full rights and responsibilities as a citizen in both countries.

There are some advantages to having dual-citizenship, such as freedom to travel, work, and do business in both countries. There may be voting rights in both, as well as access to education and social programs in both countries. But dual-citizenship can also be legally complex, partly because you are bound by the laws of both nations. Those laws may not always fully agree. And, you could be taxed by both countries.

Dual-citizenship can also be a hindrance to gaining a security clearance required for certain government jobs, because there is always the question of divided loyalty. For this reason of divided loyalty, many nations do not allow dual-citizenship. Instead, they require that you pledge full allegiance to their country, thereby renouncing and forfeiting your rights of citizenship in any other country. So, what does any of this have to do with our relationship with God? Well, when we come to Christ, we become naturalized citizens of the Kingdom of God.

EPH 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household. NASB

And in his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul explains in more detail how this works.

COL 1:13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him. NASB

Even though this world was created by Him and for Him, the vast majority of the citizens of this world are rebelling against Him - as enemies. But as blood-bought, born-again, Spirit-filled Christians, we are now citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. When we come to Christ, God transfers us out of the dark world system, with its nations, dominions, and rulers, and He grants to us citizenship in His own Kingdom of light. We are no

Notes and Questions _____

longer foreigners, but Kingdom citizens. Is that not awesome! Here is something else in Philippians that helps us to understand what this world system is all about.

PHP 3:17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. NRSV

We too, were once citizens of this world, entangled in the ways and pursuits of this world. But now, our citizenship has been transferred to the Kingdom of Heaven. But are we thinking and functioning as Kingdom citizens? Or are we continuing to think and operate as if we were still citizens of this world system? Hmmm.... Here is an excerpt from the prayer Jesus prayed for us just prior to His death and resurrection.

JN 17:14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. NIV

We are in this world, but we are not of it. The sooner we embrace that truth, the better. We are not to think like this world, we are not to use this world's methods, we are not to chase this world's pursuits. We are now citizens of the Kingdom of God - set apart for Him and the advancement of His Kingdom. This is what Peter said about us.

1PE 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. NRSV

So, where do we find our identity, as citizens of Kingdom of Heaven - or as Americans, Mexicans, Germans, or Chinese? Do these labels mean anything in God's Kingdom? What does the Kingdom of Heaven have in common with the nations of the earth? Do the nations function as servants of God, or do they serve the desires of fallen man? Are the nations of the world (including United States) part of the Kingdom of God or are they part of the world system? Are the nations not in open rebellion against God, rejecting His will and His ways? Do they bow their knee to God, or to Satan? There is a good reason why Jesus called Satan "the ruler of this world".

Notes and Questions _____

So, where will our heart's loyalties lie? Is it possible for us to pledge our heart's full allegiance to God's Kingdom, and to also pledge allegiance to a world system which is making war against God? Is it possible for us to be of the world, and not of the world at the same time? As Kingdom citizens, do we really think we can straddle the fence and have dual-citizenship with the world? Jesus clearly said - we cannot serve two masters. Will we continue to bind our hearts to earthly governments, political systems, and powers that are fully aligned with God's enemies? Or will we renounce our worldly citizenship that we might fully identify as Kingdom citizens? The words of Joshua to the Children of Israel still speaks loudly to anyone who is willing to listen - "[choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.](#)" Even though we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are still physically in this world, and we must deal with these world authorities. The Apostle Peter gives us instructions as to how we are to live our lives during our short stay in this world.

[1PE 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.](#)

[1PE 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. ¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. NIV](#)

In this world, we are strangers and aliens, not citizens. But while we are here as visitors, we are to conduct ourselves honorably. We are not to be antagonistic toward human authorities, but to be respectful. And during our stay here, we must keep our hearts free of worldly entanglements that would compromise our full loyalty, devotion, and allegiance to our own King and His Kingdom. Amen?

[Study Questions](#) – 1a. What do the Ephesians 2:19, Colossians 1:13-16, and Philippians 3:17-20 passages teach us about our citizenship status? 1b. What do Jesus' words in John 17:14-19 teach us about ourselves and our relationship to the world systems?

[Prayer](#) – I thank You Father that You have transferred me out of the darkness of these world systems. I am no longer a citizen of this world, but I now find my identity as a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. I bless You Jesus' name, amen.

Week 3 – “Citizens of the Kingdom”

Lesson 3-2 “The Children of God”

When the technology was first developed, DNA tests were expensive and limited to use in medical tests and crime labs. But now genetic testing is mainstream. For just a few dollars anyone can get a DNA test to learn about their ethnic background and the regions of the earth their ancestors came from. And as more people are tested, the genetic map grows with more detail.

Companies like AncestryDNA and 23andMe, tout the ability to help you explore your roots and connect with previously unknown relatives. Sometimes you can find entire branches you did not know existed in your family tree. There are many heart-warming stories of twins being reunited years after being separated at birth. It makes for great TV commercials.

But for other people, their curiosity opens a serious can of worms, as they learn things they do not necessarily want to know - things they were probably better off not knowing. Some people have found they are not at all who they thought they were. People have answered the front door and were shocked to see a previously unknown younger version of themselves staring back saying, “Hi Dad!” Oftentimes, those kinds of revelations end badly, or at least cause relational stress and anxiety among those involved. It changes things. So, to quote Forrest Gump, you might say a DNA test is like a box of chocolates - you never know what you are going to get.

Here is something from the Apostle John that will hopefully begin to tie all this together with our relationship with God. John starts out speaking of Jesus, and finishes speaking of we who believe.

[JN 1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.](#) NIV

When we come into God’s Kingdom, not only do we become Kingdom Citizens, but also Kingdom Children – we become royalty. If you study royal families in the natural realm, you will find there is much more to being royal than just the bloodline. There is a lot of preparation, training, and education involved in being royal.

So, just imagine you took a DNA test and found you were of a royal family. And then suddenly you were thrust into the responsibilities of being royalty, without the benefits

Notes and Questions _____

of the training, education, and preparation necessary to effectively function as part of the royal family. The fact of your royal bloodline alone, would not be of much help to you. You would hardly even know how to think of yourself as being royal.

The same is true when we join God's family. We have no clue about what it means to be a Kingdom Citizen or a Child of God. The entirety of our experience has been of being on the outside of the Kingdom, nothing of being inside. We may truly be royal in our spiritual DNA, but then continue to think and operate as if we were spiritual street urchins. So, if we want to be effective in our royal position, we must learn to think like Kingdom Citizens and Children of God. In the Gospel of Luke, there is a passage in which Jesus teaches us what being a child of God is all about. Brace yourself.

LK 6:27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ "Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. ³⁰ "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. ³¹ "And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.

LK 6:32 "And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ "And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same amount.

LK 6:35 "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. ³⁶ "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ "And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. ³⁸ "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." NASB

Interested in living the royal life of a Child of God? Well, there it is. In God's Kingdom, being royal has nothing to do with being uppity or high-minded, but of being humble. We should probably read through that passage on a regular basis, just as a reminder that it is all about serving others - not being served. Is this life Jesus describes the kind we are really interested in embracing? Or maybe not so much? We might prefer to give people the thumping we think they deserve? If so, it shows we do not know that much about being royal in the Kingdom.

Notes and Questions _____

Fortunately, Jesus is telling us these things so we can learn how to act the way heavenly royalty should act. It serves to prepare us to rule and reign with Christ - as joint heirs of the Kingdom of God. It teaches us how to act like God's children, and not like the spiritual rabble we once were. If we will humble ourselves and take these words to heart, we can learn to live up to the title we hold as a child of the God of the universe.

Jesus also reminds us that this is all between us and God. It is not a competition with each other to see which one of us can win the “humble guy of the month” award.

MT 6:1 "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

MT 6:2 "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. NRSV

It is not necessary that we call a press conference with three camera angles to make sure God is aware of that little blessing we did for someone. We do not have to plaster it all over Facebook. God sees in secret, and He will take care of rewarding us by overflowing our hearts with a sense of blessing. And here is His promise to His children.

1JN 3:1 See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. NRSV

Study Questions – 2a. From Luke 6:27-38, list the things Jesus said the royal children of God should do? 2b. Why are these things sometimes so difficult for us?

Prayer – Father, I thank You that You have brought me into your royal family. I pray that You would help me to grow into that position with all grace, honor, and dignity. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Notes and Questions

Week 3 – “Citizens of the Kingdom”

Lesson 3-3 “Neither Jew, nor Greek”

Outrage. That is the best word to describe the public response to the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers on May 5, 2020. Widespread protests erupted in cities throughout the United States, some peaceful, some turning violent. Protests in Seattle captured the most headlines with daily demonstrations, sometimes involving thousands of protestors demanding racial justice and an end to police abuse toward minorities of color.

In Seattle, businesses were vandalized and looted, police cars were burned. Eventually, demonstrators converged upon and occupied a police precinct house, which had been abandoned by the police for fear of it being overrun. Protestors and counter-protesters clashed in the streets indicating a growing racial divide, with neighbors feeling the pressure to choose a side. Residents were literally afraid to come out of their homes. As of the writing of this lesson, the daily Seattle protests were continuing over ten months after they started, although in a less chaotic manner.

“Social justice”, “Institutional Racism”, and “Economic Inequality”, have become broad, encompassing media buzzwords used to represent real and perceived inequities within societies throughout the world. Education systems, criminal justice systems, corporate boardrooms, and governmental leaders have all come under intense scrutiny and pressure as organizations such as “Black Lives Matter” and “Antifa” have demanded broad-based societal changes. The death of George Floyd exposed an ethnic divide that was much deeper and wider than most people had realized existed.

Ethnic divisions are nothing new, but they are very complex. It is not as simple as skin color. We only need to look back to recent history at the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, in which Serbians (Caucasian people) were murdering of thousands of Albanians (also Caucasians) to ethnically cleanse the region of Kosovo. If a Serbian and an Albanian stood next to each other, you probably could not pick which was which. A similar thing happened in Rwanda in 1994 when the ethnic Hutus (Africans) murdered 800,000 ethnic Tutsis (also Africans) in only 100 days. In both cases, the conflicts were not about skin color, but about generations-old culture clashes, blood-feuds, and power struggles.

A close examination of almost any conflict will reveal a power struggle of some kind, whether it be within a nation, a community, or a household. It all boils down to one group trying to hold on to power, and another group attempting to take the power from them – both feeling fully justified in their motives and actions. Jesus said these kinds of struggles will multiply and escalate all the way to the end of the age when He returns.

Notes and Questions _____

MT 24:6 "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. ⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. ⁸ "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. ¹⁰ "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. ¹¹ "And many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. ¹² "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. ¹³ "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. ¹⁴ "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come. NASB

There is so much in this passage, and eventually we will cover much of it in this series of lessons. But right now, we want to focus on verse 7.

MT 24:7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom..." NASB

Unfortunately, the translations do not fully reflect what Jesus is communicating to us. So, it will help to go back to the original Greek words. The English word "nation" is translated from the Greek word "ethnos" (from which we derive the words "ethnic" and "ethnicity"). And the English words "rise against" come from the Greek word "epi", which means "on the top". Essentially, Jesus is telling us that ethnic groups will strive to dominate other ethnic groups, and governments will strive to dominate other governments. These kinds of conflicts have always been, but they are now intensifying and threatening the stability of the whole world – just as Jesus said they would.

For many decades, governmental leaders have attempted to solve these societal conflicts and ethnic inequities through public education, anti-discrimination laws, and economic social programs. But no matter how many laws are passed, or how many trillions of dollars are poured in, it never seems to be enough. People are as angry, divided, and fearful as ever. There does not seem to be an answer. On the other hand, the scriptures do speak of a society in which there are no racial divides or inequities.

GAL 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. NASB

Notes and Questions _____

In the Kingdom of God, there is no Jew or Greek, there is no European or African, or Asian, or Hispanic or any other ethnic division. These distinctions do not exist in the body of Christ. And if these divisions do exist in a religious organization, it shows the group is not really submitted to Christ - or functioning as the Kingdom of God. A church that is truly submitted to Christ will always, always, always, reflect the ethnic diversity of its surrounding community. A church that is truly submitted to Christ will never, never, ever harbor racial bias. If it does, something is terribly wrong. Let there be no question about it, racial bias, as well as racial offense, both proceed out of the fallen nature of man - not out of Christ. As Christians, we are called put that old fallen nature to death.

COL 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. NIV

This “new self” is God’s answer to ethnic divisions and strife. But the world clearly does not have an answer. Politicians and governmental leaders cannot solve the problems of mankind because they do not have the ability to change the fallen nature of man, out of which the hatred and bias proceed. They can only create laws and threaten penalties to attempt to restrain the sinful heart of man - through fear of punishment. They cannot change the heart of the offender, nor the heart of the offended. But God can change the hearts of both. Here is the promise of God in Jeremiah 31.

JER 31:33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. NASB

And here is the promise of God in Ezekiel.

EZE 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. NASB

Notes and Questions _____

Apart from the Holy Spirit of God within us, any effort of man to solve these ethnic divisions will prove to be futile. This new heart and new self are the only lasting solution to these age-old problems. Peace between people can only be realized through the new birth into Christ. Therefore, our only hope is found in the Kingdom of God, the family of God, the image of God, in which we are being renewed daily to experience and reflect His loving heart and nature.

So rather than becoming entangled in futile, divisive, worldly arguments and strife, let us embrace God's answer. His solution is a Kingdom of new creatures, having new hearts and new spirits in Christ Jesus. Amen, and glory to God!

Study Questions – 3a. From the Matthew 24:6-14 passage, what does Jesus tell us will continue to happen in the earth until He returns to make all things right? 3b. And what does Colossians 3:5-11 teach us about God's solution to racial and ethnic divisions?

Prayer – Father, I choose to forgive unconditionally. I thank You that those who are in Your Kingdom and Your family are one. I see the racial divisiveness in this world today and I refuse to participate in any of it. My identity is in Christ, not this world. May You be blessed and honored in everything I do. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 3 – “Citizens of the Kingdom”

Lesson 3-4 “Ambassadors for Christ”

What is my purpose? Why am I here? What is God's will for my life? What ministry does the Lord have for me to fulfill? How do I discover my spiritual gifts? What is my role in the Body of Christ? These are questions I often hear from Christians - young and old. They are fair and honest questions we all must ask as we grow in Christ. The gifts, callings, and ministries of God are often like a complex mystery slowly unfolding before our eyes. Sometimes, we go through a period of preparation before the purpose of that preparation is revealed. Patience, trust, and diligence are our best course of action.

Each of us has our own unique path with God. And while God distributes a variety of gifts, callings, and ministries to the members of the Body of Christ, there are also some roles which are common for us all to fulfill. For example, we are all called to be witnesses for Christ and His Kingdom. The scriptures are clear about this, so we do not even have to question if this is our calling - we are all called to share Christ with others. The Apostle Paul described this calling in terms of being a diplomatic representative.

^{2CO 5:20} So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. NRSV

An emissary is one who travels to a foreign country as a messenger. But an ambassador is an official representative who resides in the foreign country. As citizens of God's Kingdom, we reside on the earth, but Heaven is our home. We serve as ambassadors of Christ to the people of the world. As such, we are not here to spread our own views and opinions, but to present the official positions of the King we serve and represent. We are tasked with the responsibility of delivering messages from our own government. As Paul mentions in this 2nd Corinthians passage, one of the official messages we are tasked to deliver from God to the people of the world is the message of reconciliation.

^{2CO 5:16} From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. NRSV

Notes and Questions _____

As Kingdom citizens, each of us has been called to the ministry of reconciliation. This is the main purpose of our diplomatic mission - to deliver the message that God wants the people of the world to be renewed to a proper relationship with Him, and that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way through which they can be reconciled to God. Through delivering this message, we advance God's kingdom in the earth.

It is not difficult to convince most people they are estranged from God, because they know it instinctively. But getting people to turn to God is much more complicated. Sometimes, the most difficult people to convince are those who are intellectually religious, but not truly Spirit-led. The message here from Paul was initially written to the congregation at Corinth - church people. There were people in the Corinth church who were not fully reconciled to God - as there are in churches today. So, this message of reconciliation broadly applies to all the people of the world. Paul also taught on the message of reconciliation in his letter to the congregation of Christians at Rome.

RO 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

RO 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

RO 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. NIV

This message of reconciliation includes both the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, and the Holy Spirit to sanctify our hearts and empower us to live a holy life. We receive the reconciliation through renouncing our old life and putting our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

Anyone who is not with Christ is against Him. Whether they realize it or not, anyone who is not a Spirit-led follower of Christ, is an enemy of Christ. But even so, Christ died

Notes and Questions _____

that those who hate and disrespect him might be saved. He died that His enemies might be reconciled to God. This is a clear demonstration of God's love for all the people of the world - of God's love for you and me, because at one time, we were all enemies of Christ.

COL 1:19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

COL 1:21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. NASB

On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostles found themselves serving as ambassadors before a group of people who had suddenly realized they were at a point of decision in their lives. Peter stood to speak and tell them what they must do.

AC 2:36 Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." ³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." NRSV

These words are eternal and ring true - the promise of God is for you and for your children. As ambassadors of Christ, this is the blessed and wonderful message we are privileged to share with those who do not yet know Christ. It is an invitation to be reconciled to God, join His family, become a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven and a joint heir of the eternal inheritance in Christ. Glory to God!

Study Questions – 4a. From the 2nd Corinthians 5:16-21 passage, what position do we hold as representatives of God's Kingdom? 4b. And what is the message of God to the world? 4c. From Acts 2:36-39, how should people respond to God's message?

Prayer – Father, I thank You for the great price You paid to reconcile me to Yourself. I fully receive and embrace it. Please help me as I share this message with others. Amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 3 – “Citizens of the Kingdom”

Lesson 3-5 “A Colony of Heaven”

Alexander III of Macedon is considered to have been one of the greatest military leaders of all time. At the age of 20, Alexander assumed the throne after the death of his father, King Phillip II. While attending his daughter's wedding, Phillip was assassinated by the captain of his own bodyguards. At the news of Phillip's death, many of the tribes in Greece revolted to gain their independence, but Alexander quickly squelched each uprising by military force. Alexander proceeded to consolidate his power by eliminating every person perceived to be a threat to his throne - many of them within his family.

After conquering all of Greece, he set his sights on Asia Minor, which was part of the Persian Empire. After 10 years of fighting, Alexander defeated the Persians gaining control of lands around the Mediterranean coast from Greece all the way to Egypt, including Asia Minor, Babylon, Assyria, and Persia, as far east as the borders of India. Even though his forces were often outnumbered, Alexander never lost a battle his entire military career - hence the title, “Alexander the Great”. He died at the ripe old age of 32, some say of poisoning, but probably of malaria. The king of the world was most likely brought down by a lowly mosquito.

Alexander's intent was not simply to conquer and rule, but to export Greek culture to the whole world. In these conquered areas, the Greeks quickly established cities with Greek names, Greek architecture, Greek religion, Greek language, Greek thought, and Greek colonists. When they settled these areas, the Greeks did not assimilate into the local cultures - they brought their Greek identity with them. Even though they were living far from their home, they were still Greek, and they were loyal subjects of Greece.

Many years ago, I heard a song that has stayed with me ever since. The song was written by Will McFarlane and called “A Colony of Heaven”. It expresses this idea that our purpose as a community of believers is to be an extension of the Kingdom of God into the world. Is that not what we are - a colony of Heaven established in a world that is very different from us? The writer of Hebrews makes the point that it has always been that way for people of faith. He uses Abraham as an example.

HEB 11:8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. NIV

Notes and Questions _____

If you feel a bit out of place in this world, that is a good thing. It puts you in very distinguished company. Abraham did not fit into this world, and neither did Jesus for that matter. Since we are not of this world, it is perfectly natural we do not feel quite at home here. However, if we do feel at home in this world, and we are seeking approval from the people of the world, then we have good reason to be concerned for ourselves.

JAS 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. NASB

We should make no mistake about it - this world is a hostile enemy of God. These world powers have no respect for God or for Christians. They only seek to manipulate and exploit us for their own selfish ends. Ultimately, the world only wants to squeeze us into its mold. But if we continue to follow Christ, we will never, ever, ever fit into the culture of this world system - we will always be outsiders. And we must decide that we are okay with that.

HEB 11:13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. NIV

As a colony of the Kingdom of Heaven, it is normal to have a longing in our hearts for our homeland – even if we have never seen it. But for now, we are Kingdom citizens dwelling in a foreign land. So, what is our purpose here? What are we to do and be during our stay on this earth? Here is something from Jesus that helps to explain.

MT 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. NRSV

Like a city on a hill, God has placed us in a position of visibility, so the world might see a people who reflect the love, the goodness, and the righteousness of God. Here is something else Jesus said in the preceding verse.

MT 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. NRSV

Notes and Questions _____

When we sprinkle a little salt on a steak, we expect the salt to improve the flavor of the meat. And when God sprinkles us into the world, He expects the world to be a little better because of our being here. What would be the point of adding salt to our food if it did nothing to change the taste? If we were no different from the world, what good would we be? Jesus said we would be good for nothing.

Can we be salt and light in this world if we are so homogenized with the world, that we have taken on the mindset and ways of the world, that no one could see any difference in us? Or will we be like the Greeks and maintain a culture and lifestyle that reflects the ethics and values of our eternal homeland? Will we be so different in the way we speak, live, act and love, that the world will look at us and say, “You're not from around here, are you?”

The Christian community is here in the earth to shine as a light to the nations. We are here to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God. We are established as a colony of Heaven in this earth until He returns. Come Lord Jesus!

Study Questions – 5a. What do you see as the main point the writer is making in the Hebrews 11:13-16 passage? 5b. And according to Jesus in Matthew 5:14-16, what is our purpose here on this earth?

Prayer – Father, I thank You that You have put me on this earth for a purpose and You have made me part of something much bigger than me. Lord, there is so much I still need to learn about this, but I am willing to step out as a light to shine according to Your design. I love You. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

FOUNDATIONS 301	WEEK FOUR
THE TEMPLE OF GOD	

Week 4 – “The Temple of God”

Lesson 4-1 “A More Perfect Tabernacle”

Where is the best place to worship? This is a key question people have attempted to answer throughout the history of mankind. Every religion has its holy sites – places they believe you can go to get closer to God. And typically, these places are considered holy because something significant is believed to have happened there.

For Islam, the holiest city is Mecca in western Saudi Arabia – where Islam’s founder Mohammad was born. Their holiest site is the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, otherwise known as The Great Mosque, which was built on a site where Muslims believe Abraham and Ishmael built a house. Muslims are taught if they are able, they must participate in a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime, preferably during the holy time of Ramadan. Each Muslim is also taught they must bow toward Mecca and pray five times daily.

In Hinduism, the holiest city is Varanasi in northern India. Hindus believe this city was founded by the Hindu god Shiva and is greatly favored by him. Hindus are taught they should pilgrim to Varanasi to visit the temples there at least once during their lifetime. Visiting all the Hindu shrines could be quite a task though, because there are over 3,000 Hindu temples and shrines in Varanasi alone.

For Buddhists, Bodh Gaya in eastern India is the foremost religious site. This is the location of the Mahabodhi Temple which houses the Bodhi Tree under which Buddhists believe Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became the first Buddha.

In the 10th century BC, King David chose the site for the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem – the place where it is believed Abraham came to offer his son Isaac. The temple was ultimately built by David’s son, Solomon. This temple was long ago destroyed, and the site is now occupied by an Islamic structure known as the Dome of the Rock. Within this building lies the Foundation Stone which Jews consider to be the exact place Abraham offered Isaac. It is called the Foundation Stone because Jews also believe this is the place from which the creation of the earth began – making it the connecting point between heaven and the earth. Even though this is the holiest site in Judaism, Jews are restricted from worshiping there due to Islamic control of the site. So daily, thousands of people come to pray at the Western Wall, which is the closest proximity to the Foundation Stone a Jew can come to worship.

Christians have their holy sites, as well. When the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he sent his mother, Helena to Israel to locate the tomb of

Notes and Questions _____

Jesus. Soon afterwards, a building known as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was erected on this site. Constantine also commissioned the building of Church of the Nativity in the place where they believed Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

People of all religions trek to their respective holy sites because they believe they are more likely to have a special spiritual experience because the location is more favored by their deities than other places are. People go to church buildings to pray alone because they believe God is more likely to meet them there than other places. During His earthly travels, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman who questioned Him about the proper location to worship God.

[JN 4:19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."](#) ²¹ Jesus declared, "Believe me woman, [a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.](#) ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ [Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.](#) ²⁴ [God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."](#) NIV

Jesus is proclaiming to her (and to the whole world through the scriptures) that very soon something was about to happen that would change the way people worship God. Jesus also reveals that this change would open the door for us to worship God in the way He really wants to be worshiped, and that the times of making pilgrimages to holy sites seeking a deeper revelation of God would be over.

For us to really understand this new way of worship, it is necessary we understand some things about the old way. In the book of Exodus, God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle for worship, along with all its furnishing. It was to be portable so it could travel with the people as they made their journey from their slavery in Egypt to their freedom in the homeland God had promised to them. Beginning with Exodus 25, there are several chapters of detailed instructions of how God wanted this tabernacle to be constructed, along with its furnishings and the priestly garments. Finally, in Exodus 40, the tabernacle was erected and here is what happened.

[EX 40:33 He set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So, Moses finished the work. ³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the](#)

Notes and Questions _____

tabernacle.³⁶ Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey;³⁷ but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up.³⁸ For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey. NRSV

Whenever the cloud of the Lord moved, the people would pack their things, including the tabernacle, with all its furnishings, and move along with Him. Essentially, God lived in a mobile home. Even after the people entered the Land of Promise, the tabernacle was moved from place to place in Israel until Solomon finally built the temple in Jerusalem around 500 years later. And Solomon's temple was patterned after the tabernacle built by Moses.

But here is an important point - God was well-pleased to dwell among the people, but He did not manifest His presence with them until the tabernacle had been completed according to the exact specifications He had given to Moses. And the writer of Hebrews gives us insight into why God required the tabernacle to be constructed in this way.

HEB 8:5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." NIV

And also...

HEB 8:1 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. NIV

The tabernacle built by Moses and the temple built by Solomon were both physical replicas built to mirror the spiritual tabernacle that had already been built by God in the heavenly realm. And it was in this heavenly tabernacle that the blood of Jesus was presented as the atonement for our sins.

HEB 9:11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! NIV

Notes and Questions _____

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, the application of His blood to our lives, and the presentation of His blood in the heavenly temple have opened the door for us worship God in a way which was previously not possible.

HEB 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. NIV

Before Christ shed His blood, we were denied access to this heavenly temple built by God. But now, we are invited to enter the Most Holy Place to draw near to God in worship and communion with Him. With this knowledge, we can circle all the way back and gain a deeper understanding of the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman when He said this:

JN 4:21 Jesus declared, "Believe me woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." NIV

The time has passed for regarding certain physical locations as being holier than others. The time for making pilgrimages to holy sites to find a deeper revelation of God is over. Our pilgrimage is not to a physical location, but to a heavenly one in which there is a more perfect tabernacle made without hands. Since it is not subject to physical laws, we can enter the Most Holy Place at any time to worship and commune with our God and Savior. Glory to God!

Study Questions – 1a. In John 4:19-24, what does Jesus teach us about where and how we should worship God? 1b. And what do Hebrews 8:1-2 and 8:5 reveal about the reason God instructed Moses to build the wilderness tabernacle the way He did?

Prayer – Father, I thank You that I can worship You anywhere and anytime. I ask You to draw me into worship and teach me how to worship You deeper from my heart.

Notes and Questions

Week 4 – “The Temple of God”

Lesson 4-2 “A Temple of the Holy Spirit”

The temple of God is a great mystery. As we saw in the previous lesson, the true temple is in the heavenly realm and it was not built by man, but by God. The tabernacle built by Moses and the temple built by Solomon were both patterned after this heavenly temple. It was in this heavenly temple that the blood of Jesus was offered as an eternal atoning sacrifice for the sins of all the people of the world. And through His blood, we are invited to enter the Holy of Holies to worship and commune with God. If this were not enough to completely blow your mind, just wait!

In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul speaks of how the Jews and Gentiles have become one body in Christ. And at the end of that paragraph, Paul reveals a truth about God’s temple that makes it even more mysterious.

[^{EPH 2:19} Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.](#) NIV

So, while we are invited to enter this temple to worship, we are also part of the temple, both individually and corporately. Peter also mentions this reality in his writings.

[^{1PE 2:4} As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."](#) NIV

The chief cornerstone is the stone that is perfectly shaped and without defect. It is the stone that is laid first, and then all the other stones are hewn to align with it. Jesus is the cornerstone of the heavenly temple, and we individually are being shaped to fit in perfect alignment with Him. We can enter the temple to worship, but we are also part of the temple. But there is yet another mysterious thing about the temple of God.

[^{1CO 6:19} Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.](#) NASB

Wherever you go, the Spirit goes with you. Wherever you go, the temple goes with you. You are a part of the temple, and the temple is a part of you. You may be wondering

Notes and Questions _____

what any of this has to do with anything. Well, it is very much about our identity in Christ, of who we are. It is very much about understanding our role and our connectedness to Christ in the Spirit. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit. A temple is a holy, sanctified place of worship – that is what is within us and that is what we are.

The spiritual temple within you is the same temple after which the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon were patterned. The same is true of the implements of worship within the temple, such as the Golden Lampstand, the Ten Commandments, and Ark of the Covenant. Here is what the writer of Hebrews says about it.

HEB 9:1 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. ² For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. ³ And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, ⁴ having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. ⁵ And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. NASB

Later in Hebrews 9, he refers to these things as being “copies” of things in the heavenly temple.

HEB 9:23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵ nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. NASB

If the Ark of the Covenant built by Moses was a mere copy, then the original exists in the heavenly temple today. This is the same temple in which we are invited to worship, the same temple of which we are a part, and the same temple which is within us. This temple has a golden lamp stand with seven lamps symbolizing the perfect word of God.

PS 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. NRSV

The temple within us has a golden altar of incense symbolizing our prayers to God.

REV 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. ⁴ And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. NASB

Notes and Questions _____

The temple within us has a golden jar filled with manna which represents Jesus as our bread of life.

JN 6:48 I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. NRSV

The temple within us has tablets upon which God's law is written. This represents God's holiness within us.

JER 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. NIV

The temple within us has an ark of the covenant, which is the throne of God - the mercy seat, in the throne room of grace.

REV 16:17 The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" NRSV

You might be wondering how all this can be. Well, in the spirit realm the limitations of the physical realm do not exist. If you can understand how the Holy Spirit can be in all true Christians at the same time, then you can understand how the temple of God can be within all true Christians all over the world at the same time. And yes, it is a mystery.

We have a calling. We are called to be living stones built into a house of worship to our Father. Our bodies are a temple, in which the Holy Spirit of God is pleased to manifest His presence. And we are called to enter and worship in the heavenly tabernacle made without hands. Amen, and glory to God.

HEB 4:16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. NASB

Study Questions – 2a. What does Ephesians 2:19-22 teach us about the temple of God? 2b. And what do we learn about the temple of God from 1st Corinthians 6:19-20?

Prayer – Father, Your temple is truly a mystery. I am so honored You would choose to dwell in me. I stand in awe of You and I worship You. I bless You, in Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 4 – “The Temple of God”

Lesson 4-3 “Zeal for Your House”

Most every pastor will tell you there have been times when they stand in the pulpit and their message goes a totally different direction than they were planning. They just might as well throw away their notes because the Holy Spirit steps in to give a message necessary for the moment.

When I first began to outline these teachings on the temple of God, this lesson was not included. But as I began to study the different New Testament scriptures that speak of the temple and tabernacle, the Lord revealed a pattern of thought among the writers that was so obvious, it had to be included. On a couple of occasions, Jesus did something very radical that infuriated the religious authorities. Here is John’s account of Jesus early in His ministry.

JN 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." NRSV

And Matthew gives an account of Jesus doing this again later in His ministry.

MT 21:12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ "It is written," he said to them, " `My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a `den of robbers.' " ¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. NIV

The Gospel of Mark reveals this as being one of the main reasons the religious leaders wanted to get rid of Jesus.

MK 11:18 And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. NRSV

The sale of animals for sacrifice was a big money-making racket for the temple. They might not even allow you to bring your own animal for sacrifice. Instead, you would be

Notes and Questions _____

required to purchase an animal from the temple market at an inflated price. And you would have to purchase it with special temple coins, which was the reason for the money changers. This was another way to defraud the people through a dishonest currency exchange rate. Jesus saw all this as a desecration of the temple, which was supposed to be a sacred place. If the religious leaders had not been corrupted and had been willing to keep the temple a sacred place, then there would have been no need for Jesus to do what He did.

So, why does any of this matter for us today? It matters because we are the temple of God – you and me. And Jesus is no less zealous for a clean spiritual temple today than He was for a clean physical temple back in that day. And just to clarify, we are not talking about freshly vacuumed church buildings, but a clean spiritual temple within the hearts of Christians like you and me.

MT 21:13 "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.' " ¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. NIV

Jesus desires our hearts to be a place of prayer and worship and healing and wholeness, just the same as the physical temple was to be.

As I was studying this topic in the scriptures, I noticed a pattern. There are several places in the epistles that talk about us being a temple of the Holy Spirit – and nearly every one of them in the context of holy living. Here is one from Paul.

^{1CO 6:18} Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body. NIV

And here is one from Peter...

^{1PE 2:1} Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ² like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. ⁴ And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. NASB

When we allow selfish fleshly influences to take over in our lives, the temple within us is desecrated. Things like unforgiveness, envy, malice, hypocrisy, slander, gossip, sexual

Notes and Questions _____

sins, hatred, bitterness, and other things like these pollute the sacredness of our hearts. We are called to be zealous of the temple within us, and to cleanse ourselves of these things just like Jesus was zealous to cleanse the temple in Jerusalem.

You can be certain that Jesus' cleansings of the temple in Jerusalem were temporary. Things would have quickly returned to business as usual because the religious leaders wanted it that way. But in A.D. 70, the Jerusalem temple was totally destroyed, with not one stone left upon another - and it has never been rebuilt. For the Jews, everything associated with the temple worship has ceased to exist. This event in the natural should speak volumes to those of us who have the responsibility of temple service in the spiritual. At least Paul seemed to think so.

[^{1CO 3:16} Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.](#) NIV

We are the temple, we are sacred, and we have a responsibility. Jesus desires that we would have zeal for the temple within. Will we rid ourselves of the self-seeking, the darkness, and the compromise in our hearts, or must Jesus come through like a mad man with a whip to get our attention? Do not be deceived - the cleansing of the physical temple was a natural example of what Jesus will do in the spiritual realm if we are not good stewards of the precious, sacred treasure He has planted within us.

Study Questions— 3a. In the account given in Matthew 21:12-15, what did Jesus do, and why? 3b. In 1st Peter 2:1-5 and 1st Corinthians 6:18-20, what are we instructed to do, and why?

Prayer – Father, I am sorry for the times I have defiled the temple within me. I choose to zealously cleanse this temple within me, just as Jesus cleansed the physical temple in Jerusalem. You are holy, and You should dwell in a clean house. Thank You for Your great love for me. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 4 – “The Temple of God”

Lesson 4-4 “The Order of Melchizedek”

The care and ministry of the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon was the exclusive responsibility of a group known as the Levites. They were a tribe named after Levi, who was the third son of Jacob and Leah, and the great-great-grandfather of Moses and Aaron. The Levites are known as the priestly tribe, although only a smaller group of Levites known as the Kohanim were the priests. “Kohan” is the Hebrew word for “priest”, and if you know someone with the last name Kohan, Kohen, or Cohen, they are most likely descendants of those who were of the Levitical priesthood. Outside of the Levites, no one could be legally sanctioned to serve as a priest or perform the priestly duties and rites.

On the other hand, the kingship of Israel was promised perpetually to the descendants of David, who was of the tribe of Judah. Judah was the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, and the slightly younger brother of Levi. This promise of God to David made it impossible for anyone outside the tribe of Judah to be a properly sanctioned King of Israel. The Biblical lineage of Jesus reveals He is of the tribe of Judah and a descendent of David, but not of the tribe of Levi. However, the writer of Hebrews makes this statement about Jesus.

[^{HEB 4:14} Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.](#) NRSV

In the heavenly temple - the temple made without hands; Jesus is the great high priest. But, if Jesus is not of the tribe of Levi, how is it possible for Him to be a priest at all, let alone a high priest? Even the writer of Hebrew acknowledges Jesus as not being of the priestly group according to the Law of Moses.

[^{HEB 7:13} He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.](#) NIV

And...

[^{HEB 8:4} Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.](#) NRSV

If Jesus is not descended from the priestly order, upon what basis can He be a priest? Oddly enough, the answer is found in Psalm 110, which is a Messianic prophecy revealing some things the Father God speaks to the Son.

Notes and Questions _____

PS 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." ² The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. ³ Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth.

PS 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." ⁵ The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. NIV

So, Jesus is an eternal high priest - but not of the order of Levi. He is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Who? Melchizedek? This is not exactly someone you would call a significant bible character. From the entire history recorded in the Old Testament, he is only mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20 and in the Psalm 110:4 passage we just read. Everything the Old Testament says about this man is contained in only four verses of scripture. How does an obscure person like Melchizedek manage to establish the priestly order adopted by the Savior of the world, and eternally implemented in the heavenly temple built by the God of the universe? It seems that something of that magnitude should get more than just four verses.

We will dig deeper into the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14. Here is the context. At this time Abraham was still known as Abram. Lot, who was Abram's nephew, was living in Sodom. Several kings who were in alliance with a king named Chedorlaomer raided Sodom, stealing the riches of the city. They also took several hostages, including Lot. Abram responded by attacking those kings, defeating them, freeing the hostages, and recapturing the treasure of Sodom. This is what happened next.

GE 14:17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him one tenth of everything. NRSV

And that is all the Old Testament has to say about Melchizedek. On the surface, there does not seem to be very much here, but there is. The writer of Hebrews gives some fascinating commentary revealing more about who this Melchizedek was.

HEB 7:1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, ² and Abraham gave

Notes and Questions _____

him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." ³ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. ⁴ Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! NIV

This description has led many to conclude Melchizedek was type of Christ. Others believe he was a literal manifestation of Christ. I would not fight with anyone about it, but after studying these passages, I now believe the latter to be true for several reasons. First, the description in Hebrews does not describe any natural human that ever lived.

Secondly, if God built the heavenly temple before any of the earthly temple structures existed, the heavenly priesthood would have already been established. Furthermore, if the earthly tabernacle and temple were fashioned after the heavenly pattern, it would seem backwards to pattern the heavenly priesthood after an earthly one. And it seems impossible for an imperfect human to establish an earthly priesthood that would by any measure be adequate to be implemented in God's heavenly temple for all eternity.

This Genesis 14 passage is the first place in the scriptures that a "Kohan" (a priest) is mentioned. The Melchizedek priesthood predates the Levitical priesthood by hundreds of years – at least. So, why then did it cease to exist? Why is there is no evidence of any other priests of this order throughout history? But maybe it did exist and function in the heavenly temple - just not on earth because there were no earthly priests worthy of it.

To me, these are all compelling reasons to believe Melchizedek was a manifestation of Christ. But the thing that finally convinced me and settled it in my heart, was when I saw what Melchizedek brought out to Abram – the bread and wine. These are the communion elements that represent the body and blood of Jesus. But either way you look at it, this meeting with Melchizedek was a critical juncture in Abram's life. It was a test of sorts, because Melchizedek was not the only person there with Abraham that day. The king of Sodom was also there, and he made Abram a very tempting offer.

^{GE 14:21} Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, ²³ that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" NRSV

Sodom was a wealthy city, and this would have made Abram a very wealthy man. But the king of Sodom was as wicked as they come. He was so wicked that later in Genesis, God rained fire from heaven to destroy him and his whole city, excluding Lot and his family. Abram chose to reject the king of Sodom's offer of riches and he disassociated himself from him. Instead, Abram chose to share communion with Melchizedek, the

Notes and Questions _____

King of Righteousness and Peace. He received the blessing of Melchizedek and gave the tithe to him. Abram passed the test. And immediately after this encounter with Melchizedek, Abram's relationship with God entered a whole new dimension.

[GE 15:1](#) After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." ² But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

[GE 15:4](#) Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. NIV

Abram's meeting with Melchizedek led him directly into his covenant relationship with the Most-High God. From that point on, the Abrahamic covenant has become the foundation upon which all Biblical history has been built. It is still unfolding before our eyes today. So, maybe this Melchizedek is not such an insignificant character after all.

He was both priest and king, making his priestly order a royal priesthood. And being of this order, Jesus Christ can be both priest and king. And if Jesus is the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, then you and I are priests of the order of Melchizedek, as well. Since we are of this priestly order, we should at least learn how to pronounce his name. "Mel" + "KIZ" + "uh" + "dek". See, that was not so hard.

[Study Questions](#) – 4a. From Hebrews 7:13-14 and 8:4, why is it impossible for Jesus to serve as a priest under the law of Moses? 4b. What does Psalm 110:1-5 reveal about the priesthood of Jesus? 4c. And what happened immediately after Abram's encounter with Melchizedek?

[Prayer](#) – Father, I thank You that in Jesus, I have both a king and a high priest who reigns eternally in the heavens. I thank You that He ever lives to intercede for me before the throne of grace and mercy. I bless and honor You, in Jesus' name, amen.

[Notes and Questions](#) _____

Week 4 – “The Temple of God”

Lesson 4-5 “A Royal Priesthood”

As we have seen from the scriptures in our previous lessons on the Temple of God, it is a heavenly temple located in the spiritual realm. It is the temple built by God, after which the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon were patterned in the physical realm. In the same way the Holy Spirit dwells in Christ followers, the heavenly temple is also within each Christ follower. And beyond that, each of us is a living stone in the heavenly temple, just like the stones that were used to construct the physical temple. Through the blood of Christ, we are invited to enter the holiest place to worship.

So, the heavenly temple is part of us, and we are part of the temple. It is part of who we are in Christ. Yet, there is another aspect of the temple that even further defines who we are in Christ. The apostle John speaks of this in his salutation to the seven churches in the Revelation.

[REV 1:4 John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.](#) NIV

So, in addition to having access to the heavenly temple, being part of that temple, and having that temple within us, we are also priests serving God in His temple. Jesus is the eternal High Priest of the temple, and we are called as priests to minister and serve in the heavenly temple under His authority. So, we are not just worshipers, but also priests in His temple. Peter also spoke of this in one of his letters.

[1PE 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.](#) NIV

Jesus is the High Priest in God's temple according to the priestly order of Melchizedek, which is a royal priesthood. And if Jesus is of the order of Melchizedek, then we also are of that same royal priesthood. This is part of our identity as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a child of God, and a joint heir with Christ. But what do we know about being priests in God's temple? Probably not very much, but we can dig into this and learn. For starters, we can learn some things from the Levitical priesthood, which was patterned after the heavenly priesthood. The services they rendered in the earthly the tabernacle are types and shadows of the service we will perform in the heavenly temple.

Notes and Questions _____

The book of Leviticus details the many rituals the priests were to perform. And it was a bloody business. But each of these actions is rich with spiritual significance for us as priests in the heavenly temple. There is so much more than we can possibly cover in this lesson, but here is one an example of the sacrifices the Levites were to offer on behalf of the people.

LEV 1:10 But if his offering is from the flock, of the sheep or of the goats, for a burnt offering, he shall offer it a male without defect. ¹¹ And he shall slay it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. ¹² He shall then cut it into its pieces with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. ¹³ The entrails, however, and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. NASB

One of the primary jobs of the priests was to properly offer the sacrifices for sin. Different situations required different sacrifices. Sometimes the sacrifice could be eaten afterwards, sometimes it had to be burned entirely. But every type of sacrifice had a detailed list of instructions that had to be followed to the letter. Fortunately, Jesus has completely fulfilled the atonement through the shedding and offering of His blood.

HEB 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. NASB

Since Christ has presented His own blood as the eternal redemption for sins, ministering the atonement is not part of our priestly responsibilities. But as Peter points out, we do have sacrifices to offer up.

1PE 2:4 And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. NASB

Spiritual sacrifices? What are the spiritual sacrifices we are to offer up? Well, here is an example. In the tabernacle of Moses, there was a golden altar for incense placed right in front of the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat.

EX 30:6 You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet with you. ⁷ Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer

Notes and Questions _____

it, ⁸ and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations. ⁹ You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. ¹⁰ Once a year Aaron shall perform the rite of atonement on its horns. Throughout your generations he shall perform the atonement for it once a year with the blood of the atoning sin offering. It is most holy to the LORD. NRSV

In the heavenly temple, this altar before the mercy seat is where the blood of Jesus was presented as the eternal atonement for our sins. Of all the holy places, this is the most holy of all. And the ministry of offering the incense at this altar is still supposed to be performed by us daily. Here is a glimpse of how that temple service works in the spirit.

REV 5:8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. NASB

Our prayers are the incense to be offered on the altar. And look at what happens later.

REV 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. ⁴ And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. ⁵ And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. NASB

There are some things that seem quite insignificant in the natural realm, but in the spiritual realm they are amazingly impactful. Think about this. When we pray, our prayers are placed on the same altar where the blood of Jesus was offered. They go up before God as a fragrant incense, then the earth is powerfully impacted because of them. Prayers we pray, often in weakness, return from heaven with great power and authority. Prayer is part of our temple service. And all the while, Jesus is praying for us.

HEB 7:23 Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. NIV

This is Jesus fulfilling His role as High Priest. And part of our priestly role is to intercede for others, placing these prayers on the altar of incense.

1TI 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may

Notes and Questions _____

lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. NASB

Giving physical resources to perpetuate the work of the ministry is also a spiritual sacrifice of our priestly service.

PHP 4:18 But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. NASB

Offering praise to God is also part of our priestly service.

HEB 13:14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. ¹⁵ Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. ¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. NASB

Living a godly life is part of our priestly service.

RO 12:1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. NASB

When we do these things in reverence and honor, we enter the heavenly temple as priests according to the order of Melchizedek, to present these spiritual sacrifices to God in His throne room of grace. What an honor!

Study Questions – 5a. In 1st Peter 2:9, what does Peter say about our identity in Christ? 5b. According to Revelation 8:3-5, what happens to our prayers? 5c. What are some of the spiritual sacrifices we perform as part our priestly duties in the temple?

Prayer – Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, Maker of all things, Giver and Sustainer of life, merciful Savior, loving Father, I worship and honor You. You are holy and perfect in all Your ways. You never make mistakes. And with You, all things are possible. There is none above You or like You. In the name of Jesus, I bless You, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

FOUNDATIONS 301 WEEK FIVE	A KINGDOM AT WAR
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Week 5 – “A Kingdom at War”

Lesson 5-1 – “Citizen Soldiers”

Prior to the American Revolution, one of the people’s grievances against the British government was that the king of England had sent a standing army to the colonies. It was apparent the soldiers were not there so much for the defense of the citizens, but as a show of force to control them and to prevent protests. But instead of deterring a revolt, this military presence added fuel to the unrest and then it finally lit the match that caused it to explode. During one protest, five civilians were killed when British troops fired their weapons into a crowd of townspeople - an event now known as the Boston Massacre. This led to more protests and then to a full-scale rebellion and war.

Long before the American Revolution, the individual colonies and communities had organized militias of citizen soldiers for the purpose of defense. Any able-bodied man was expected to participate in the defense of their communities. Some were nicknamed “minutemen” because they were always at the ready, to be mobilized in a minute’s notice to protect against an impending attack. They were not a paid professional army, but ordinary shop-keepers and farmers equipped with weapons better suited for squirrel hunting than the battlefield. Now, these citizen soldiers were being pitted against an army of highly-trained, well-equipped British regulars, along with German mercenaries hired by King George to put down this rebellion. Although it seemed highly improbable, this rag-tag group of citizen soldiers eventually won the day.

The New Testament scriptures often speak of our Christian experience using military terms. One of these passages is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

EPH 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. NIV

Although we live in a physical world, we fight in a spiritual war using spiritual weapons. This war is waged against the Kingdom of Heaven, of which we are citizens. The forces of evil are attempting to destroy our families, our individual lives, and our Christian fellowship. But our battle is not against people, but against the dark forces that control them. Whether we recognize it or not, this spiritual warfare is going on all around us.

EPH 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of

Notes and Questions _____

righteousness in place,¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. NIV

When should we be suited in God's armor - at all times? When should we take up the shield of faith and sword of the Spirit - at all times? Is this only for the pastors and church staff? No! As colony of God's Kingdom in this earth, each of us is called to prepare ourselves as a citizen soldier to take up arms and join in the fight at any moment. We are God's minutemen soldiers in a spiritual war.

2CO 10:3 Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. NRSV

Our battle is not between Democrats and Republicans, or white people fighting black people, or Americans versus the Chinese, or men struggling with women. Much of what we see in the public arena is nothing more than a puppet show - with Satan pulling all the strings on all sides. The real battle is in the spiritual realm, where the hearts and minds of people are either in controlled bondage to Satan - or set free in Christ. Human methods are totally useless for winning these kinds of spiritual battles. In his letter to Timothy, Paul warned him about becoming entangled in worldly methods.

2TI 2:1 You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. NRSV

Our effectiveness in warfare is dependent on our proper alignment with Jesus as our Commander in Chief. We do not possess any spiritual authority that is not delegated to us by Him. During His earthly ministry, this principle was demonstrated in the life of a Roman soldier who came to Jesus with a request.

MT 8:5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." And he said

Notes and Questions _____

to him, "I will come and cure him." ⁸ The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith." NRSV

How would you like to be the one with a faith that causes Jesus to be astonished? This Roman soldier's faith was rooted in his understanding of how authority works, and of Jesus' authority over all things. The authority of Jesus delegated to us is paramount to success in our spiritual battles.

We are in a war, and that war will continue to the end of the age. We need to be aware of our civic responsibility as citizen soldiers in God's Kingdom. And just in case you are questioning whether or not our peaceful, loving Savior is really a military man, here is the picture we are given of Him in the Revelation of John.

REV 19:11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. NIV

There is most certainly a war going on, so let us make sure we show up for it.

Study Questions – 1a. What does Ephesians 6:10-12 teach us about what is currently going on in the spirit realm? 1b. And according to Ephesians 6:13-18, how should we prepare ourselves for this reality?

Prayer – Lord, I know there is more going on around me than I can see with my eyes. Please make me spiritually sensitive to what is happening in the spirit realm. I make my decision right now, that I will suit up and join You in the fight. You are my Lord, and I will follow You, in Jesus' name and for Your glory, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 5 – “A Kingdom at War”

Lesson 5-2 – “The Art of War”

“The Art of War” is a military classic written by the Chinese general and military strategist, Sun Tzu (pronounced – “soon DZOO”). Believed to have been published around the 5th century B.C., it remains one of the most profound tactical military handbooks of all time. But the influence of the “The Art of War” has reached far beyond the battlefield. It has been studied by politicians, businessmen, and lawyers who have used these basic principles to develop effective business and negotiating strategies.

As a glimpse into the mind of an ancient military genius, I found “The Art of War” to be a fascinating read, even though its proverbial style makes it a bit tedious to read at times. But I also found it particularly useful in gaining insight into military organization and tactics that are not only effective in the natural realm, but can also easily be applied for success in warfare of the spiritual realm. Warfare is warfare, whether in the natural or the spiritual - many of the underlying tactics are the same. And the more we understand about military strategy and how to implement those in the spirit realm, the more effective we will be as warriors in the spirit against the enemy of our souls.

So, as we study spiritual warfare over the next three weeks, we will tap into “The Art of War” on a regular basis, not as scripture, but to help highlight the strategies of warfare that are already contained in the scriptures. This is not only for developing strategies we can use to fight our enemy, but also to recognize and thwart the strategies he uses against us. Here is something Sun Tzu taught concerning the importance of being a student of strategic warfare - to learn what strategies lead to success or to failure.

Sun Tzu said: The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected.

Translation for us? Unless we learn how to fight as effective spiritual warriors, Satan can run roughshod over our lives, over our children, over our families, and over our church communities. We must know our enemy and his methods. Here is what the Apostle Peter said about Satan's intentions toward us.

[¹PE 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around,](#)

Notes and Questions _____

looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. NRSV

We have an enemy who hates us - who wants to destroy us. If we are spiritually unaware, or if we are spiritually unprepared, Satan can come through like an F5 tornado and leave an unbelievable path of destruction behind. Many times, this happens, and people do not even see it coming. And after the fact, they may not even recognize that Satan was the one behind it all. Jesus describes Satan as a wolf and a thief.

JN 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly." ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." ¹² "He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them." NASB

Satan is like a ruthless, blood-thirsty animal. He has no ethics, nor morality, no sense of right and wrong, no conscience. He is the one who stirs up violence in the earth. He is a million times worse than Hitler ever imagined to be, worse than every criminal on earth combined. And as Paul states, he is deceitful and crafty.

2CO 11:2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. ³ But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." NASB

Satan attempts to deceive us just like he deceived Eve. He wants to lead us away from our faithful and pure relationship with Christ. And he will - if we are not spiritually discerning - if we are not on the alert. It is essential we learn the art of spiritual warfare so we can effectively battle this crafty enemy. If you want a glimpse of what Satan wants to do to us, study the Book of Job.

From the very beginning, Satan has attempted to infiltrated our churches, with the goal of gaining influence. He does this by using people who outwardly appear to be servants of Christ, but who are actually servants of Satan himself.

2CO 11:13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds." NASB

Without keen spiritual insight from the Lord, we cannot even be certain about what we are hearing from the pulpits or in Sunday school classes. Satan is so crafty, he can even

Notes and Questions _____

twist the scriptures to make people believe they are teaching the truth when they are actually teaching deception. Have you ever wondered why there are so many denominations and so much division? There is a war against the Kingdom of God, and for the most part, the Church is unaware and unprepared. But it does not have to be that way. And one of the first things we need to realize about Satan is that he is a defeated enemy.

HEB 2:14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵ and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. NASB

So..., if Satan is a defeated enemy, why is he so successful in this world? Good question. James, the Lord's brother, gives us insight into this.

JAS 4:6 But he gives all the more grace; therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. NRSV

Most of Satan's victories happen because he encounters little or no resistance. If we will throw up a strong front of resistance, he will flee because he is a defeated enemy. We fight from a position of victory, but we will not experience victory if we do not resist. Many battles are lost because we concede before the battle even begins. This should break our hearts and lead us to repentance. Personally, I am not satisfied with being trampled by a defeated enemy, I hope you are not satisfied either. As the Apostle Paul teaches us, it is time for us to suit up for battle and learn the art of war. Amen?

EPH 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. NASB

Study Questions— 2a. From 1st Peter 5:6-9 and John 10:10-12, what do we learn about Satan's intentions toward us? 2b. And from the James 4:6-10 passage, what are we taught to do, and why?

Prayer – Father, I pray You will help me to understand how to resist Satan when he comes to tempt or attack. I love You and fully align myself with You and Your purposes.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 5 – “A Kingdom at War”

Lesson 5-3 – “The Full Armor of God”

Sun Tzu was quite comprehensive in the writing of his military handbook. He covered things like geography, including mountains, narrow passes, flatlands, marshes, rivers, and wooded areas. He explained how certain terrains could be used for gaining an advantage in battle, and which also terrains should be avoided, if possible. He also taught how the army could best position itself for battle based on that terrain. Here is one example of his strategy of using rivers.

After crossing a river, you should get far away from it. When an invading force crosses a river in its onward march, do not advance to meet it in mid-stream. It will be best to let half the army get across, and then deliver your attack.

Seems logical. If you can catch your enemy crossing a river, you can use it to your advantage to divide his army. But be wary when you are crossing a river lest your enemy does the same to you. Rivers can be perilous for an army, but they can also offer opportunities if you know how to turn it to your advantage.

Sun Tzu was strong on training and operational readiness, but he also knew the state of his army was only part of the victory equation. He encouraged his generals to learn as much as possible about their adversary and as much as they could about the conditions of the field of battle. He summed it up in this way.

Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt; if you know Heaven (the sky and weather) and know Earth (the geography), you can make your victory complete.

So, over the next few weeks, we will focus on scriptural principles that speak into three areas of military strategy. First, we will look into how we can know ourselves and prepare ourselves to be battle-ready. Then, we will study our enemy and analyze his tactics in order to gain an advantage against him in battle. And finally, we will consider the field of battle and what conditions favor us for victory - when to defend and when to attack. We will start by learning about our strength for battle.

[^{EPH 6:10} Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.](#) NIV

Notes and Questions _____

There is so much in this passage. It tells us we are at war, where our strength is found, who we are fighting, and who we are not supposed to be fighting. Our warfare is not against people - those for whom Christ has died. So, we need to get that through our heads from the very start. Our battle is against Satan and his forces of evil in the spirit realm. As for people, we love them and desire they be reconciled to their Maker.

Another thing we must not forget, is our own strength is inadequate to defeat these dark powers. Satan is a vastly superior warrior to us. But he is not superior to Jesus, who has already defeated him. If we are going to successfully hold our ground and put the enemy to flight, we must learn to stand and advance in God's power – not our own. Paul continues with his teaching on the armor of God.

[EPH 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. NIV](#)

When are we supposed to put on the armor of God? We put it on before the battle comes to us. Our armor does not benefit us if we wait until we are already half dead before we try to put it on. It is difficult to suit up in armor when our enemy is already thrashing us about the head and shoulders. We do not know when the enemy will attack, so we eat with our armor on, and we sleep with our armor on, we wear it to work and when we go on vacation. Our armor is of no benefit to us if we are not wearing it. Here are more details about the armor of God.

[EPH 6:14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. NIV](#)

Here, we see six pieces of spiritual armor. Some are for defense, and some for attack. Of these, the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit typically get the most attention. The other weapons usually only getting a mention. But as vital as a sword and shield are, they alone do not make a full covering of armor. So, we will study each weapon to understand how they work to protect us, and how we can stay dressed in them.

We will start with the breastplate of righteousness. When I was first learning about the armor of God, I was taught we put on the armor by speaking with our mouth - sort of a name it and claim it method. I would say, “Lord, I put on the belt of truth, the boots of peace, and the breastplate of righteousness”, thinking that was how the armor was put on. But nothing changed, I did not have victory - it did not work. Then I thought, maybe

Notes and Questions _____

I am not speaking this with enough authority of faith. So, I became bolder and louder with my confession. Why? I guess to let God and the devil know I was serious. But still, nothing changed. Then God, in His great mercy, spoke with revelation and I realized the truth. We do not put on the breastplate of righteousness by speaking it, but by living it.

When we do what is right and are committed to a lifestyle of righteousness, it protects our inner parts from Satan's attacks just like a breastplate protects a soldier when an enemy tries to run him through with a sword. Satan's attacks will just glance off and not harm us. Righteous living protects us like a breastplate. I can testify to you, that this principle has changed my life. There is another important aspect to the breastplate.

^{1TH 5:7} For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.
⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. NIV

In this passage, Paul calls it a breastplate of love. So, are there two breastplates? No, only one. If you remember from our earlier lessons, love is the fulfillment of the law.

^{RO 13:8} Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For this, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law. NASB

When we are filled with God's love and are expressing that love to others – that is God's righteousness working in and through us. It is a mighty weapon of defense, protecting our hearts when the enemy comes to attack. But if we harbor jealousy, bitterness, anger, selfishness, unforgiveness, hatred, or things like these in our hearts, we become vulnerable to attack and Satan can skewer us. So, let us be careful to guard our hearts, keeping ourselves in God's love, so we offer no opportunity to the enemy. Glory to God.

Study Questions – 3a. What does Ephesians 6:10-12 teach us about who our enemy is, and who is not our enemy? 3b. According to Ephesians 6:13, when should we put on our armor, and when should we take it off? 3c. How does the breastplate protect us?

Prayer – Father, I commit today to do the right thing in every circumstance. I pray You will help me as I suit up in Your full armor to do warfare for the advancement of Your Kingdom. I give You praise, honor, and glory, in Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 5 – “A Kingdom at War”

Lesson 5-4 – “The Belt of Truth”

In his book, “The Art of War”, Sun Tzu often emphasized the importance of being prepared for battle, whether it be preparation to attack an enemy, or preparation in anticipation of being attacked. Here is what Sun Tzu taught his generals about the importance of having an expectancy that there could be an attack from an enemy at any time.

The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable.

What is true in the natural is also true in the spiritual. When you see the enemy coming, it is usually too late to prepare. So, we should always be dressed in readiness. The Apostle Peter encourages us to stay alert, disciplined, and prepared for the probability of an attack from the devil.

IPE 5:8 Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. **NRSV**

When our spiritual battles go badly for us, it is usually because we are unprepared for Satan’s assault. We are not expecting the attack and he catches us with our defenses down - we are simply unaware and unprepared. But as we develop a disciplined warrior mindset, we learn to be well-positioned to respond to these attacks. As a military leader, Sun Tzu's first priority was to secure his army in a defensible position – and only then would he look for opportunities to attack the enemy.

Sun Tzu said: The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy. To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

So, in our spiritual warfare, we must recognize our need for both defensive and offensive measures. When Satan launches a surprise attack, it is our defensive weapons that protect until we can launch a counter-attack. In the last lesson, we looked at how

Notes and Questions _____

walking in love and righteousness works as a breastplate to protect the heart of our inner man against the devil's assault on us. This is one of the ways we prepare ourselves defensively against an attack – to keep ourselves in God's love.

Here is a hypothetical example. We learn that a friend has been spreading untrue rumors about us and undermining our relationships with other people. This will undoubtedly sting us, but if our heart is already filled with God's love, we will be able to respond with love and forgiveness. We can then mount a counter-attack by going to the person and telling them we love them, we are praying for them, and that we value our relationship with them. Without even confronting the gossip issue, we have counter-attacked with a goal of bringing repentance, preserving the relationship, and putting Satan to flight. But if we are not dressed in the full armor of God, we can be so injured and angered that we respond in a way that furthers Satan's divisive agenda, rather than thwarting it.

[EPH 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place. NIV](#)

The belt of truth is another piece of the full armor of God. In Paul's day, the belt was a standard part of Roman soldier's armor, and it served several purposes. A belt provided something to which a sword, a money pouch, or any other small item, could be attached. Their clothing did not have pockets, so the belt provided a hands-free way of carrying things.

However, the main purpose for the belt was to secure their tunic (not trousers) tightly around the waist. This was important because you could not risk having your clothes flying around and entangling you during battle. So, the belt served to hold your clothing and body armor together securely so you could fight unhindered.

Paul said that when we walk in truth it works to protect us the way the belt protected a Roman soldier in battle. In a spiritual sense, truth ties into every other piece of armor. Our faith must be based in truth, our righteousness must be based in truth, our salvation must be based in truth, our sword (which is the word of God) must be based in truth, etc.... Truth holds all our armor together. There are several of aspects of truth that are applicable to our warfare, and one of them is found in Ephesians.

[EPH 4:25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. NRSV](#)

Notes and Questions _____

This is a relatively easy one. If we are not a truthful person, it gives Satan an opening to attack us. If we are not honest, if we flatter people just to gain an advantage, if we tend to exaggerate and bend the truth to suit our own purposes, Satan will use it to destroy all our relationships. People will see us as someone who cannot be trusted because our words are unreliable. And if we are prone to being less than truthful, it shows that Satan already has a foothold in our hearts. Here is something Jesus said about lying, as He was speaking to some of the religious leaders of His day.

JN 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! NIV

Satan is a liar and the father of lies. When we are being tempted to be less than truthful, he is the one behind it. The way we break that stronghold, is to determine in our heart that we will be a person of integrity, committed to telling the truth – even if it hurts or makes us look bad. So, we will own up to our mistakes instead of attempting to cover up with falsehood. This does not mean we have to be brutally honest when we see someone having a bad hair day or if their baby is not really that pretty. I hope you understand that we always lead with love and kindness in those kinds of situations. Here is another passage from Paul that reveals a different aspect of truth.

2TH 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. ¹⁴ And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

In this instance, Paul is not speaking of truth in a general sense, but he is specifically referring to the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. The message of Jesus being the savior of the world is truth. We can confidently rest our faith on that message, knowing it is completely true and reliable. Jesus is that reliable truth personified.

JN 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. NASB

Satan has been hard at work in his attempts to muddy the waters in the church so that people believe lies instead of the truth. False teachings are common in churches today and we must be diligent to pray and ask God to reveal His perfect truth from the scriptures to us and to protect us from any deception. In 2nd Timothy, Paul emphasized the importance of doing this so our teaching will be true and unadulterated.

Notes and Questions _____

^{2TI 2:15} Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. NASB

To do this, we must have a heart that yearns for truth. We must crave it and pursue it like a precious treasure. If we do not have a heart that embraces truth, our spiritual armor can fly apart and leave us wide open for Satan's deception. Paul speaks of this in 2nd Thessalonians, where he is teaching about the eventual coming of the lawless one, also known as the antichrist, who will come to deceive.

^{2TH 2:8} And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹ And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. NASB

It is a dangerous thing when we do not have a heart for truth, because if we continue to flirt with lying influences, God will eventually give us over to them. But if we will relentlessly and honestly pursue the truth of the word, Jesus says we will find it.

^{JN 8:31} Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." NASB

This is our challenge – to put on the belt of truth by having a heart that honestly pursues the truth of His word, and then abides in it. Amen, and glory to God forever and ever.

Study Questions – 4a. What does Ephesians 4:25 instruct us to do? 4b. And why is this important? 4c. What does John 8:44-45 teach us about Satan's nature? 4d. Why is it important for teachers to be careful to follow the instruction in 2nd Timothy 2:15?

Prayer – Father, I choose truth. I commit myself to You as a person of honesty and integrity in all my dealings. I ask that You protect me from deception and lead me into the pure truth of Your word. I bless and honor You, in Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 5 – “A Kingdom at War”

Lesson 5-5 – “The Helmet of Salvation”

Just like natural warfare, spiritual warfare can be a difficult and hazardous business. One of the biggest hindrances to winning a war is having soldiers who are unwilling to engage the enemy and fight him. After all, why go to war if you might get killed in the process? Would it not be better to just give up than to die? Sun Tzu recognized this tendency within people. He knew if he was going to build an effective fighting force capable of winning wars, this “surrender” mindset had to be overcome. One thing he implemented to counteract this mindset was what he called “The Moral Law”, and here is one thing he said about it.

The Moral Law causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger.

In essence, the moral law gives the people a righteous cause for fighting, convincing them that going to war is the right thing to do. The moral reason might be that we are fighting for survival or freedom for family and others. Maybe we are fighting for a sense of duty and honor. Maybe our enemy is evil and simply needs to be stopped. Whatever the reasoning behind it, the moral law provides a cause worth dying for, a purpose greater than life itself. In addition to this, Sun Tzu taught that soldiers would fight better if they knew they would be rewarded for their bravery and loyalty.

So that there may be advantage from defeating the enemy, they (the soldiers) must have their rewards. Therefore, in chariot fighting, when ten or more chariots have been taken, those should be rewarded who took the first. Our own flags should be substituted for those of the enemy, and the chariots mingled and used in conjunction with ours. This is called, using the conquered foe to augment one's own strength.

In natural warfare, we see these two primary motivators - a moral reason for fighting and the promise of a reward. In our spiritual warfare these same two principles apply. In Christ, we have a cause greater than ourselves and the promise of reward. In the heat of our spiritual battles, reminding ourselves of our cause and our reward can inspire us to continue pushing forward when the going gets tough. This is how another part of the full armor of God serves to protect us - the helmet of salvation.

[EPH 6:13](#) Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand

Notes and Questions _____

firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. NIV

At this point, you are probably thinking there is no connection between anything we presented in the paragraphs above and the helmet of salvation in this passage. And you would be correct. But there is another passage that does make that connection for us.

^{1TH 5:4} But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith, and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. NIV

Note the difference in how Paul speaks of the helmet in this passage, calling it “the hope of salvation”. This is a distinction that reveals an important truth about our salvation, specifically that we have not yet received every aspect of it. Paul speaks of this in another passage, explaining what motivated him to live the way he lived.

^{PHP 3:7} But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

^{PHP 3:12} Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

^{PHP 3:15} Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. NASB

Notes and Questions _____

Paul understood there are certain things associated with our salvation that we have not yet received. We have received the Holy Spirit and the Atoning Blood as a down payment on the life which is to come. But the resurrection of the dead and eternal life are reserved for those servants who remain faithful to the end, not for those who quit or turn out to be unfaithful to Him. Here is something else Paul said about it.

[1CO 9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.](#) ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. [They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.](#) ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ [No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.](#) NIV

Some people act as if they have a full guarantee of the whole package, regardless of how they live. But Paul understood there was a sanctifying process underway in his life and he must submit to it. He understood that eternal life was not in himself, but in Christ. He understood he could possibly fall away, so he set his course to faithfully endure to the end. Here is something else the Apostle John said that might help to further explain how this works.

[1JN 2:25 And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.](#) NASB

For now, we have eternal life as a promise from God to His faithful - a promise we have not yet attained. This is the reason Paul called it our “hope of salvation”. When we do battle with Satan, and he is tempting us to give up and align with him, we resist him by setting our hope on the promise of God to His faithful. In doing so, our hope acts as a helmet to protect our minds from the enemy’s onslaught. The hope of salvation is our spiritual helmet, so let us keep it securely strapped. We fight on because we have a righteous cause and a promised reward from our commander who is faithful. Amen?

Study Questions – 5a. What does 1st Thessalonians 5:8 teach us about the helmet we are called to put on as armor? 5b. And from Philippians 3:7-16, what does Paul teach us about his goals and what he wanted to attain? 5c. How does this knowledge help us to continue strong in the battle against the powers of darkness?

Prayer – Father, I thank You for the wonderful promise of the resurrection from the dead and eternal life with You. Like Paul, I press on to lay hold of that for which You have laid hold of me. Lord Jesus, I put my whole trust and confidence in You. Amen.

Notes and Questions _____

<p>FOUNDATIONS 301 WEEK SIX</p>	<p>THE ADVANCING KINGDOM</p>
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Week 6 – “The Advancing Kingdom”

Lesson 6-1 – “Faith as a Shield to Defend”

Thus far, we have discussed three pieces of the full armor of God - the belt of truth, the helmet of the hope of salvation, and the breastplate of righteousness (also known as the breastplate of love). These three are purely defensive weapons for our protection while in battle. And now we will turn our attention to another weapon - the shield of faith. While it may appear to only be for defense, the shield can also be a mighty offensive weapon. But we will begin with studying the defensive aspects of the shield of faith. Once again, here is the Ephesians passage speaking of the full armor of God.

EPH 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. **NIV**

What does it say in verse 11 about why we put on the full armor of God? It is to stand against the devil's schemes. And what does it say in verse 16 about why we take up the shield of faith? It is to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Notice they are not just regular arrows, but arrows that are on fire. So, what is the difference? Why would Satan want to shoot fire at us? Well, the use of fire in the spiritual realm serves the same purpose as in the natural. If we understand the natural, we can gain insight into Satan's strategy for using fire against us in the spiritual. In his book, “The Art of War”, Sun Tzu taught his generals the strategic reasons for using fire against an enemy.

There is a proper season for making attacks with fire, and special days for starting a conflagration (an extensive destructive fire). The proper season is when the weather is very dry; the special days are those when the moon is in the constellations of the Sieve, the Wall, the Wing or the Cross-bar; for these four are

Notes and Questions _____

all days of rising wind. In attacking with fire, one should be prepared to meet five possible developments:

- 1) When fire breaks out inside the enemy's camp, respond at once with an attack from without.*
- 2) If there is an outbreak of fire, but the enemy's soldiers remain quiet, bide your time and do not attack.*
- 3) When the force of the flames has reached its height, follow it up with an attack, if that is practicable; if not, stay where you are.*
- 4) If it is possible to make an assault with fire from without, do not wait for it to breakout within but deliver your attack at a favorable moment.*
- 5) When you start a fire, be windward of it. Do not attack from the leeward. A wind that rises in the daytime lasts long, but a night breeze soon falls.*

The reason for shooting flaming arrows into an enemy's camp is not so much for killing the enemy, but for causing a fire that leads to confusion, crisis, and panic within the camp. This diversionary tactic creates an opportunity to mount an attack while the enemy camp is in chaos. This is Satan's strategy in lobbing flaming arrows at us. The Apostle Peter teaches us we should not be surprised by this tactic.

IPE 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. NRSV

When things start to go a little crazy in life, we can bet Satan is lobbing a few flaming arrows into our camp, attempting to make us panic so he can launch an offensive against us. Our defensive weapon against these attacks is our faith. As we rise to the occasion and stand strong in our faith, it acts as a shield to protect us and extinguish those flaming arrows. Our confident faith puts out the fire and blocks Satan's attempt to advance on us.

From a historical perspective, the predominant Roman shield of Paul's day was known as a "scutum". This type of shield was constructed of wood as a structural backing, with a thick leather cover. Rather than being circular in shape for hand-to-hand sword fighting, it was rectangular, with a semicircular curve to it. It was large enough kneel behind and shield the entire body from swords, arrows, or spears. Prior to battle, they would soak the leather in water, making the shields resistant to the pitch-covered flaming arrows. Battlefield reports describe the shields with arrows sticking out, resembling smoldering porcupines. It was a very effective defensive weapon.

Notes and Questions _____

From a practical standpoint, how do we implement the shield of faith? How do we effectively put it to use to defend against Satan's attacks? One thing we need to understand is Satan's end game. Satan does not really care about many of the things he attacks in our lives, they are simply diversions. For example, he may attack us in our finances, our health, our relationships - the list could go on and on. But Satan's ultimate objective is to divide our heart from God, who is the central focus of our faith. Satan fires a few flaming missiles at us causing life to go haywire, then he starts whispering in our ear, "If God really loved you, why would He allow something like this to happen?" Satan's attack is designed to get us into a panic so we will begin to question God's character and His love for us. But if instead of panicking, we focus our faith on God's love and goodness, God's power energizes our faith to neutralize Satan's attack.

[IPE 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you,⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.](#)

[IPE 1: ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. NIV](#)

When the flaming arrows are flying and our life turns to chaos, we focus our attention on God. We focus on His goodness, His love for us, and the promise of salvation. We focus on His mercy toward us and His strength to protect us, putting our full confidence and trust in Him. As we bring our hearts into agreement with the truth of who He really is, peace and thankfulness will fill our hearts - protecting us like a shield in battle. When Satan sees his attack was futile, he will withdraw. Amen and glory to God.

[Study Questions](#) – 1a. From Ephesians 6:10-18, in what way does the shield of faith provide protection? 1b. In natural warfare, why would an enemy use flaming arrows? 1c. While under attack by fire, where should we focus our faith?

[Prayer](#) – Father, You are good and loving, perfect in all Your ways. You never make mistakes. Through faith, Your power protects me from the attack of the enemy. You are my strength and my shield. In Jesus' name I thank You, amen.

Week 6 – “The Advancing Kingdom”

Lesson 6-2 – “Faith as a Shield to Attack”

The shields were a critical component in protecting the Roman soldiers from attack. But the design of the shields also led to the development of several attack strategies employed by the Romans. These strategies included the “Triple Line”, the “Wedge”, and the “Tortoise”. In one way or another, each of these maneuvers used the soldier’s shields to create a wall for breaking through enemy lines and strongholds.

In the “Wedge” attack maneuver, the Roman legions would form in the shape of an arrowhead. Leading with their shields, they would charge the enemy line and pierce it with the tip, then as the wedge further penetrated the line, the enemy forces would be divided. The shields were used to literally ram the enemy soldiers, compressing them against one another, making it very difficult to offer an effective defense.

Another offensive maneuver using the shields was the “Tortoise”. It was a much tighter formation, in which the front row of soldiers marched side by side with their shields facing forward. The second, third and fourth rows carried their shields over their heads to form a canopy to protect the entire group from arrows and spears from above – sort of like a tortoise shell. That many men marching in such a tight formation was also slow moving like a tortoise. Even so, the “Tortoise” maneuver was very effective in providing protection while attempting to break through city gates and walls.

Just as the Roman shield was a very effective offensive weapon, so is our shield of faith in advancing against the forces of darkness. Deploying our faith in God, we can drive the enemy back and take ground they had previously occupied. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus cast out a demon and explained to his disciples how faith works.

MT 17:14 And when they came to the multitude, a man came up to Him, falling on his knees before Him, and saying, ¹⁵ "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. ¹⁶ "And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." ¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

MT 17:19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰ And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you." NASB

Notes and Questions _____

Jesus is not suggesting we should go out and attempt to move literal mountains with our faith, but that dealing with the powers of darkness can be like moving a mountain. The mountain can be any bondage Satan has inflicted on people to bind them. The mountain can be any obstacle or stumbling block Satan has put in place to hinder the completion of our assignment - anything that stands in the way of the mission God has sent us to accomplish. Jesus is teaching us we cannot push the enemy out with a small faith shield. Here is another instance recorded in Mark's gospel.

MK 9:20 And they brought the boy to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling about and foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² "And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us, and help us!"

This is such a horrific scene, with this boy being tormented this way. And you can hear the desperation in his father's voice, yet with hope. Then Jesus said this to him.

MK 9:23 And Jesus said to him, "If You can!" All things are possible to him who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, "I do believe; help my unbelief." ²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." ²⁶ And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. NASB

There are so many things we can learn from this passage. First, what did Jesus say was possible for those who believe? All things? If we believe, all things are possible. Keep in mind he is specifically teaching us this in the context of spiritual warfare and dealing with the powers of darkness. If we believe, all mountains can be moved.

Also, notice what the boy's father said in verse 24. He said he did have faith, but he knew his faith was small - he had a small faith shield. Have you ever felt that way? I sure have. But this man did the right thing in being honest, calling upon God's mercy, and asking for help with his faith. The apostles of Jesus did the same thing.

LK 17:5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" NASB

There is nothing wrong with admitting our faith is small, and it is a good thing to ask God to increase our faith to meet whatever challenge is before us. After all, God is the one making the miracle happen anyway. Our faith is not in ourselves, and our faith is not in our faith. Our faith is in God to do these things, and He wants us to succeed. Amen?

Notes and Questions _____

The shield of faith has unique qualities compared to the other pieces of armor. For example, you cannot put on the breastplate of righteousness for another person, meaning you cannot live righteously for them. The same is true of all the other weapons, except for the shield of faith. We can stand in faith for others and shield one another with our faith.

Much of the effectiveness of the Roman shield was realized through the soldier's ability to link their shields together to create a wall for defense or to drive the enemy back. The same is true for us in the spirit realm. And through the prayer of agreement, we can link our shields together, multiplying our faith.

[MT 18:19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven."](#) ²⁰ ["For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."](#) NASB

This assumes we are in alignment with God's purposes, not using it for our own glory or reputation. It is not to make us look good, but to make Jesus look good and to advance His kingdom agenda. But, when two or more of us stand together in faith without doubting, we can push through the enemy lines like the blade of a bulldozer.

[1JN 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.](#) ⁴ [For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.](#) ⁵ [And, who is the one who, overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?](#) NASB

This is the victory that is ours through Christ Jesus.

Study Questions – 2a. From the Matthew 17:14-20 passage, what did Jesus do that His disciples could not do? 2b. And why could they not do it? 2c. What are some ways our faith can be expanded?

Prayer – Father, I pray You would help me to grow in faith. I do believe, but I want to believe more. Thank You for Your great love for me, in Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 6 – “The Advancing Kingdom”

Lesson 6-3 – “The Sword of the Spirit”

The sword of the Spirit is possibly the most powerful weapon we have for attacking the works of the powers of darkness. While a sword can be used to block the attack of the enemy, the sword is primarily an offensive weapon to pierce and drive the enemy back. The Apostle Paul gives us a hint about this spiritual sword - what it is and how we put it to use as part of the full armor of God.

EPH 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. NASB

When we speak the word of God, it is an incredibly powerful weapon for spiritual warfare. In the spirit realm, God’s word does what a physical sword does in the natural. It cuts and exposes what lies hidden underneath. You might even consider it a scalpel.

HEB 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. NIV

When delivered with the power of the Holy Spirit, the word penetrates the deepest parts of our being. It cuts into us, not for the purpose of harming us, but for healing us and bringing deliverance. It uncovers whatever is hiding within us, revealing any darkness lurking in our hearts.

PS 107:17 Fools, because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. ¹⁸ Their soul abhorred all kinds of food; and they drew near to the gates of death. ¹⁹ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. ²⁰ He sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions. NASB

When we open our hearts to receive God’s word, it comes alive within us – to bring life to us. The word drives out darkness like a skillful swordsman. The Psalmist gives us a glimpse into the amazing power that is unleashed when God speaks.

PS 119:89 Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven. ⁹⁰ Thy faithfulness continues throughout all generations; Thou didst establish the earth, and it stands. NASB

The word of God is an exceedingly powerful force. God created the universe simply by speaking it into existence. God’s word is powerful because of the One who speaks it.

Notes and Questions _____

He has the authority to fulfill every syllable. The word of God is forever settled - eternal, unshakable, immovable, and unstoppable. The word of God never fails. God never speaks without purpose. His word goes forth with a mission which will fully accomplish all that He intends.

ISA 55:10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. NASB

The word accomplishes its work because God makes certain of it.

JER 1:12 Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it." NASB

He sends His angels to perform His word. Although mostly unseen, they are warring alongside us as we do battle with the enemy. We are never alone in the battle.

PS 103:19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all. ²⁰ Bless the LORD, you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word! ²¹ Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will. NASB

As we take up our full armor, including the sword of the Spirit, we join the heavenly ranks in battle to accomplish all God intends. The word of God is not weak like human words are, but it comes forth in power.

JER 23:28 "The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?" declares the LORD. ²⁹ "Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?" NASB

As Moses proclaimed to the Israelites, the word of God is not obscure or far away, but very near to us.

DT 30:11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. NIV

Notes and Questions _____

The sword of the Spirit is not a weapon we wield with our hand, but a weapon that proceeds from our heart and comes out of our mouth. It is as close as our lips. As surprising as it may sound, God trusts us with His word. He invites us to take up His word as a weapon to fight the enemy. But we must be careful not to wield it recklessly, casually, or for our own purposes. Speaking the word of the Lord is a fearful thing, to be done in reverence, knowing the power proceeds from His word, not our words. Here is a description John gives of Jesus and the Sword of the Spirit from the Revelation.

REV 1:12 And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. ¹⁴ And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷ And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. NASB

The sharp two-edged sword coming from the mouth of Jesus is the word of God. And we have that same sharp two-edged sword in our mouth. The word is powerful beyond our imagination - and fearful to speak. But will we use it? Will we study the word and learn how to handle it as a skillful swordsman? Will we pray for the anointing, so the word comes forth in the power of the Holy Spirit, not having been spoken by us, but by God through us? His anointing brings His word to life on our lips. The word becomes active in us as we believe it, and then speak it. He will watch over His word to perform it, that it will not return empty to Him without accomplishing all He intends. Amen? Glory to God.

Study Questions – 3a. According to Ephesians 6:17, what is the Sword of the Spirit? 3b. According to Hebrews 4:12-13, how does the Sword of the Spirit accomplish its work in people? 3c. What does Deuteronomy 30:11-14 reveal about how we implement the Sword of the Spirit?

Prayer – Father, I know Your word is a powerful force because You are a powerful force. Thank You for trusting me with Your word. Please help me learn to use the Sword of the Spirit skillfully to accomplish Your will in the earth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 6 – “The Advancing Kingdom”

Lesson 6-4 – “The Good News Shoes”

No soldier is ready for war without a good pair of boots. A weak army could probably defeat one twice as strong if the stronger army was fighting barefoot. We take it for granted, but the soles of our feet carry the entire weight of our bodies. Just try walking barefoot across a gravel parking lot, then imagine fighting hand-to-hand combat through rocks, limbs, and rough terrain with no shoes on your feet. Even if our sword was sharp, our helmet strapped on, our breastplate firmly fitted, and our shield raised, without good boots to protect our feet, our ability to advance and take ground from the enemy would be severely limited. This is the reason our spiritual armor includes boots.

[EPH 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore and fasten the belt of truth around your waist and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.](#) NRSV

In essence, Paul is telling us we should prepare ourselves to share the good news of Christ. In Paul’s day and before, foot travel was the predominant mode of travel. They did not have cars, trains, or airplanes. They did have horses, donkeys, and camels, but very few people owned one. They also had boats, but boats only help if you are traveling by water. So, most of their traveling was by foot. As such, the feet were often used to metaphorically symbolize the direction we are going in life. Here is an example from Jeremiah.

[JER 14:10 Thus says the LORD to this people, "Even so, they have loved to wander; they have not kept their feet in check. Therefore, the LORD does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity and call their sins to account."](#) NASB

That scripture speaks negatively of Israel’s disobedience, but the next passage speaks prophetically of you and me – and of our feet.

[ISA 52:7 How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"](#) NASB

I would bet you never imagined there was a prophecy about your feet, but there it is. Your feet are important. They are important because of the message you carry within you. This passage in Isaiah is probably what Paul was thinking of when he added it to the full armor passage in Ephesians.

Notes and Questions _____

Evangelism certainly falls in the realm of spiritual warfare. When a person is converted to Christ, they are snatched away from the enemy. Satan does not like to lose people, so he works overtime to condition people to be resistant to God's voice. The gospel is good news, but people may not see it that way in the beginning. More often than not, a person coming to Christ takes multiple encounters through which that resistance is slowly, gently, and lovingly chipped away. This approach takes determination and patience, looking for every opportunity to witness - without going so far that they become uncomfortable and slam the door on us.

Jesus and Paul both compared the growth of God's Kingdom to a garden or field where seeds are planted and watered prior to the reaping of a crop. This is particularly true in our day. So, we look for opportunities to converse with our neighbors. And somewhere in that conversation, we plant a seed by mentioning the Lord, or prayer, or church, or our faith, etc.... Without being pushy or preachy about it, we just naturally throw a comment out there and let it stand. Then the next time we see them, we throw something else out there. Eventually, they will recognize us as people who have faith and hope in God.

If they mention some difficult situation in their lives, we can offer to pray for them. If they are open to it, we can even offer to pray with them. We always lead with love and concern. It may not seem so, but each encounter is spiritual warfare - an opportunity to lovingly chip away at Satan's stronghold on their lives. Then eventually, the Lord will open a door to have a serious talk about faith in God. But we must always be prepared to carry the good news wherever we go.

[^{1PE 3:15} But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.](#) NIV

And this is what we do. Amen, and glory to God.

Study Questions – 4a. From Ephesians 6:13-15, what piece of spiritual armor are we to put on our feet? 4b. And how does the prophetic passage of Isaiah 52:7 describe the message our feet are to carry to the world?

Prayer – Father, I ask that You show me opportunities to share the good news of Christ. Please give me the wisdom to share in a way that people can receive. I offer myself as a messenger to deliver Your word of reconciliation through Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 6 – “The Advancing Kingdom”

Lesson 6-5 – “All Authority”

There are things in life that fall under the category of “What was I thinking?” You know, something that seems like a good idea until we actually do it? And in retrospect, we realize it was a really, really, bad idea? Here is one of those situations from Acts 19.

[AC 19:11](#) God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. NRSV

This was clearly a bad idea. Can you imagine their faces when the demon spoke to them? If you have ever heard a demon speak, you know it can make your blood run cold. It probably froze them in their tracks, and the possessed man was on them before they could even think about running away. They were fortunate they lived to tell of it. They seemed to think they could just speak the words Paul used, and the demons would come out, just like they came out when Paul did it. They were wrong.

Spiritual warfare is much more than learning to recite the correct words, as if we think there is something powerful in the words themselves. Battling in this realm is all about authority. And for us, it is all about delegated authority. In the Gospel of Luke, there is a story illustrating how this authority works.

[LK 7:2](#) There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

[LK 7:6](#) So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Notes and Questions _____

LK 7:9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. NIV

How would it make you feel if Jesus was amazed at your faith? This man had faith Jesus could heal his servant, because he knew Jesus had authority over the sickness. And because of His great compassion for people, Jesus often delegated this authority to his disciples.

MT 9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." ^{10:1} He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. NIV

We should never underestimate Jesus' authority or His compassion. This passage documents His delegation of authority to the twelve, but there was another time He did the same thing with seventy disciples.

LK 10:17 And the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." ¹⁸ And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning." ¹⁹ "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you." ²⁰ "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." NASB

It is easy to get excited about miracles, but there is greater joy to be experienced in the promise of eternal life. We could get a reputation by casting out a few demons and healing a few sick people. People might begin to treat us like we were rock stars. Something like that could make us think more highly of ourselves than we should. So, we must make certain of our motives. Here is an account of a man known as Simon the magician, a man who had gained a reputation by dazzling the people of Samaria with his magic tricks. Simon had become a believer through the ministry of Philip, and when he witnessed people receiving the Holy Spirit, Simon was quite interested in receiving the ability to lay hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit.

AC 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him,

Notes and Questions _____

"May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God." NRSV

You can get more details about this in the scriptures, but Peter was quite firm with Simon about the condition of his heart. It is an important question we all should ask ourselves. Why do we want the power? Is it because we secretly want to be seen as a big shot spiritual powerhouse? Or is it because we seek God's glory and share His compassion for people?

Whether it be in the natural or in the spiritual realm, the lust for power can be an alluring and blinding influence. Jesus is pleased to delegate His authority to us, but He also wants us to have the right motives. So, we should pray and ask for the authority to do the Kingdom work, but not before we pray to receive His compassionate heart. If we have His heart, we can be trusted with His power. And there is plenty of power available.

MT 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." NIV

It is not for our glory and honor, but all the glory belongs to Him. Amen?

Study Questions – 5a. From Matthew 9:35 - 10:1, what does Jesus give to His disciples? 5b. And how does this assist us in spiritual warfare? 5c. What does verse 36 teach us about Jesus' motivations for engaging in spiritual warfare? 5c. And according to Acts 8:18-21, why did Peter rebuke Simon?

Prayer – Father, You know what is in my heart. I ask You to reveal and cleanse my heart that I might be a trustworthy vessel to receive Your power and authority for spiritual warfare. May You be glorified, and may Your Kingdom be advanced through my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

FOUNDATIONS 301 WEEK SEVEN	THE APOSTASY
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Week 7 – “The Apostasy”

Lesson 7-1 – “The Father of Lies”

Do you remember the G.I. Joe cartoons of the 1980’s? Each episode would end with a life-lesson for the kids, like “do not play with matches”, or “look both ways before you cross the street”. And then G.I. Joe would always say in his tough military voice, “Now you know, and knowing is half of the battle.” Of the entire G.I. Joe cartoon series, that phrase is the only thing I remember. For me, that phrase was the life-lesson.

As we navigate the difficulties of the day in which we live, we must always remember who our enemy is, and who is not our enemy. People are not our enemies; Satan and the powers of darkness are our enemies. As we move forward in this study, please, please, please remember this. We do not attack people, but we do expose the strongholds of deception.

As we war against the powers of darkness, it is essential we understand the methods and strategies the enemy attempts to use against us in the Church. Knowing these strategies is half of the battle. Satan’s most effective weapon against us is deception, and he is very good at it. In his book, “The Art of War”, Sun Tzu taught his generals the basic tactics of using deception in warfare. He said:

All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive. When we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.

Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder and crush him. If he is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is superior in strength, evade him. If your opponent is of choleric temper, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant.

Deception is Satan’s way. From the very beginning, Satan’s warfare against mankind has been deception upon deception. Here is the account from Genesis.

GE 3:13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." NIV

Satan did not have to destroy Adam and Eve. He simply deceived them so they would disobey God and destroy themselves. This is Satan’s way of warfare. When Jesus encountered the Pharisees, they treated Him with a certain level of public respect, even though they were secretly plotting against Him to kill Him. Jesus confronted them and told them by doing so, they were taking on the nature of Satan in their hearts.

Notes and Questions _____

JN 8:43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. NASB

Right there, Jesus exposes Satan's nature, tactics, and intent. Satan's war against the Church and us as individuals, is a war of lies, with the intent to murder and destroy. However, if we already know his strategy and plan of attack, we have the advantage. If we know him well enough to predict the tactics he might use, we can be better prepared to win the battle. Here is something Paul said about Satan's warfare.

^{2CO 11:2} I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. NIV

Can you see Satan's intent? Through a variety of cunning deceptions, he attempts to draw our hearts away from a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus. That is his goal. But his methods are clearly described in the scriptures, therefore predictable and discernible. When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he revealed his playbook of strategies and deceptions. We are going to work our way through the Genesis account to point out the various maneuvers Satan uses.

Strategy #1 – Satan tempts us to question and contradict God's word.

^{GE 3:1} Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' " ⁴ "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. NIV

The word of God is the sword of the Spirit and one of our most effective weapons in spiritual warfare. Satan's motive is to disarm us by stealing God's truth from our hearts through questioning, contradicting, or otherwise perverting our understanding God's word. This is exactly what he did to Eve in the Garden, and what he attempts to do to us. He first questions God's word, then contradicts it. Here is another strategy he uses.

Strategy #2 – Satan tempts us to question God's character.

^{GE 3:5} "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." NIV

Notes and Questions _____

Satan tempted Eve to question whether God really had Adam and Eve's best interest at heart. This was a direct attack on God's loving nature. Satan knows that God is our strength, power, defense, and provider. So, his intent is to drive a wedge by creating distrust in our hearts toward God.

Strategy #3 – Satan attempts to foster discontentment in our hearts.

GE 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so, they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. NIV

God only gave Adam and Eve one boundary, which was – do not eat from the one tree. Within the boundaries God gave them, He was already providing everything they needed. Everything was theirs, except for that one thing. Satan deceived them by convincing them to focus on what they did not have, rather than being thankful for all they did have. His goal was to foment discontentment within their hearts so they would desire (lust after) things that were outside the boundaries God had set for them. Paul knew this was an important issue, so he spoke about learning to be content.

PHP 4:11 ...I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. NRSV

Satan will tempt us to focus our full attention on whatever we do not have, rather than everything God has already provided. So, when we are tempted with discontentment, thankfulness is a most powerful weapon to fight it. Exercising thankfulness might even be the door through which God's next round of provision is provided. Amen?

Study Questions – 1a. In the John 8:43-44 passage, what does Jesus reveal about Satan's nature, intentions, and methods? 1b. And what does the 2nd Corinthians 11:2-3 passage teach us about what Satan attempts to do in the lives of Christians?

Prayer – Father, I know You love me, and You always have my best interest at heart. I pray You would give me keen spiritual insight and the ability to see through the cunning ways the enemy attempts to damage my pure devotion to You. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 7 – “The Apostasy”

Lesson 7-2 – “The Mystery of Lawlessness”

In “The Art of War”, Sun Tzu taught his generals that their main purpose was not to fight battles, but to win battles. And you might logically say, “How can you win a battle if you do not fight?” Well, here is what he said about it.

Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence. Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.

Therefore, the skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting. He captures their cities without laying siege to them. He overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field.

So, how does one go about winning battles without fighting them? Sun Tzu taught a multitude of strategies, but there was one he called “the sovereign’s most precious faculty”, which was his group of spies. He defined the different types of spies, along with the ways these spies might procure inside information that would be helpful. He gave this instruction on what must be done before the armies ever engaged in battle.

Whether the object be to crush an army, to storm a city, or to assassinate an individual, it is always necessary to begin by finding out the names of the attendants, the aides-de-camp, and door-keepers and sentries of the general in command. Our spies must be commissioned to ascertain these.

The enemy's spies who have come to spy on us must be sought out, tempted with bribes, led away and comfortably housed. Thus, they will become converted spies and available for our service.

Satan has been waging a non-stop war of deception against the church for nearly 2000 years. He is very good at it. One of Satan’s strategies against the Church is to plant his own operatives on the inside. This is not so much for the purpose of spying, as it is for gaining positions of power and influence over what is taught. Here is something Paul said about how Satan attempts to infiltrate churches.

[^{2CO 11:13} For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.](#) ¹⁴ [And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.](#) ¹⁵ [So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.](#) Their end will match their deeds. NRSV

Notes and Questions _____

Satan has been using this tactic in his war against the Church from the very beginning. And for the most part, the Church today is oblivious to it. But our inability to discern this inward attack only serves to make Satan's battle plan against us more effective. Any honest evaluation of the Church today would conclude we are not healthy.

We live in a time in which prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes. But some of those prophecies come in the form of warnings that tend to make us uneasy when we read them. And our tendency is to deflect that discomfort by telling ourselves those scriptures are referring to someone else's group, not our own. But there are some prophecies that speak of events so broad-based, so all-encompassing, they impact every person in the Church. Paul often talked about the "mystery of Christ" having been revealed, but he also talked about another mystery – the "mystery of lawlessness".

^{2TH 2:1} Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, ² that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

^{2TH 2:3} Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. NASB

An apostate is a person who in one way or another, abandons the Christian faith as it was originally intended to be. But in this passage, Paul is not speaking of apostasy on an individual level, but on a much larger scale. He is warning of a mass apostasy that would occur before the Lord returns.

Many years ago, I heard a theory that this apostasy was speaking of people leaving the churches in droves. But in the scriptures, a very different picture is painted. They show this apostasy to be more about false teaching entering churches than it is about people exiting churches. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul explains how this apostasy would come about.

^{2TI 4:1} In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ² proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke,

Notes and Questions _____

and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. NRSV

The word apostasy implies rebellion. Paul is warning us there would come a time when Church people would rebel against the true Christian teachings and faith. They will gather around pastors and teachers who will present a pseudo-gospel making them feel secure, but not producing a life genuinely changed in Christ. This prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes. And earlier in his letter, Paul gave more details about this.

^{2TI 3:1} But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. NASB

Paul is warning us the last days will be difficult because churches will be full of people who maintain an outward appearance of godliness, but inside they are being controlled by their own selfish, fleshly desires. But there is something else more dangerous here. Instead of leading the people to repentance and into a Holy Spirit-led lifestyle of love and righteousness, the pastors will teach doctrines and preach sermons crafted to accommodate that fleshly lifestyle and make repentance optional. Paul called it, “the mystery of lawlessness”. It is a broad-road salvation, a perversion of grace, but with the name of Jesus plastered all over it.

We do not need to be fearful of this, but we must be discerning about what we receive as truth. There are many conflicting doctrines, so we cannot naively assume all we have been taught is true. We must honestly study the scriptures and pray for eyes to see and understand our salvation as it was originally delivered. We must test the teachings we hear against the scriptures to make sure they align with the word of God. Amen?

Study Questions – 2a. What strategy of Satan is revealed in 2nd Corinthians 11:13-15?
2b. According to 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-7, what must happen before Jesus returns?
2c. In 2nd Timothy 4:1-4, what did Paul warn us would eventually happen in the Church?

Prayer – Father, my desire is to know the truth, no matter where it leads. So, I ask that You lead me into the purity of Your truth in all things. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 7 – “The Apostasy”

Lesson 7-3 – “Doctrines of Demons”

Once upon a time, there were two rats. One was very young and naive; the other was very old and wise. One day the young rat asked the old rat the secret to his long life. He responded, “I always stay away from the free cheese.” Now, here is something Sun Tzu taught his generals about using bait to entrap the enemy.

Thus, one who is skillful at keeping the enemy on the move maintains deceitful appearances, according to which the enemy will act. He sacrifices something, that the enemy may snatch at it.

By holding out baits, he keeps him on the march, then with a body of picked men he lies in wait for him.

When it comes to doctrine, we avoid the “free cheese” because it is most likely a trap of the enemy. What do we mean by this? Well, Satan often uses bait to lure us into a place he can ambush us. Many times, the bait is a sweet-smelling church doctrine designed by Satan to lead us into a life of permissiveness and compromise. When Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness, Satan used a very interesting tactic.

MT 4:5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”” ⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” NIV

Do you see what Satan did there? He tried to bait Jesus by quoting scripture. This is an Old Testament statement that does speak of God's protection. But Satan’s suggestion that Jesus intentionally jump off the temple was a twisted application of the scriptures which would have tested God. If Satan would pervert scripture to tempt Jesus, do you think he might use that tactic against us today? Well, Peter warned us it would happen.

2PE 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. NIV

Then Peter goes on to explain how these destructive heresies will be so easily introduced in the churches.

Notes and Questions _____

^{2PE 3:13} But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

^{2PE 3:17} Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. NIV

Most demonic deceptions are crafted by distorting the scriptures. And since the Bible is being quoted, many people will not recognize that a distorted interpretation is being presented. Jude, the younger brother of Jesus, gives more specific details about how the underlying message of these false doctrines differ from the genuine gospel.

^{JUDE 1:3} Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ⁴ For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. NIV

Right there, Jude exposes the enemy's attack against us. Satan attempts to distort the scriptures to make the gospel appear to be a license to sin. But as Jude encourages us, we must hold to the faith as it was originally given, not to what it may have evolved into over several hundreds of years. Jude wrote this to the church almost 2000 years ago, but it could have just as well been written this morning. Considering where we are in the timetable, it may be even more relevant today than it was then. Here is one of the warnings Paul gave us about what would happen in these last days.

^{1TI 4:1} The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. NIV

It does not take too many of Satan's operatives to make a royal mess of things. If Satan can deceive a pastor, he can deceive the whole congregation. If Satan can deceive a single seminary professor, he can deceive the whole class of potential pastors. If Satan can deceive a group of people into forming a denominational structure revolving around a false belief system, he can perpetuate that falsehood for generations by indoctrinating

Notes and Questions _____

people from the time they are small children. When you grow up in a false system, it seems normal to you because it is all you have ever known.

It would be a mistake to believe these are simple “misunderstandings”. Whenever the gospel is implied as a license to sin - it is demonic in origin. And it all begins with a false idea, that in one way or another implies the good news of Jesus Christ gives us a license to sin. With the passing of time, we now have millions of people who believe the gospel is a tacit license to sin. And with that slippery slope, even the most immoral sins are gaining acceptance in churches. This is the “mystery of lawlessness” broadly at work in churches today, as Paul warned us. He warned if we opted to go down this path, God would give us over to be deceived in all kinds of ways. It all starts with the license idea.

2TH 2:8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹ And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. NASB

We must keep in mind the context in which Paul is speaking - that this is all going to happen within the Church. This is scary stuff. The Apostle John was struggling against heresy in his day, and he also spoke of this deluding spirit in one of his letters, telling us, “And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world.” So, where is the antichrist spirit now, did it just go away? Certainly not. The spirit of antichrist is still making war against the Church. It is still attempting to infiltrate, deceive, cause division, strife, and chaos in Christian circles. There is a war going on, so we must be alert and discerning. Amen?

Study Questions – 3a. In 2nd Peter 2:1-2, what are we warned would happen among us? 3b. In 2nd Peter 3:13-17, what does Peter warn us some people will do to the scriptures? 3c. According to Jude 1:3-4, what will some people do to the grace of God?

Prayer – Father, I pray You would help me see faith in Jesus the way it was originally given. Help me to cut through all the clutter and see Your truth clearly that I might cling tightly to it. In the name of Jesus I ask, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 7 – “The Apostasy”

Lesson 7-4 – “A License to Sin”

In the previous lessons, we have seen that Satan uses deception in his warfare against us individually and the Church. We have seen the prophecies warning us of a massive apostasy that would come in the last days. And, we have seen the scriptures showing that people would follow leaders who would teach ear-tickling heresies, perverting the grace of the Lord to make it appear to be a license to sin. In this lesson, we will show several scripture passages that have been targeted by the enemy for this purpose.

Typically, demonic doctrines are constructed by using several passages of scripture that are isolated from the context in which the Biblical authors originally intended. Then, those out-of-context passages are assembled to create a license-to-sin narrative that appears to be a Biblical pattern of thought. Some of these deceptions are very complex. Satan is depending upon our ignorance of the scriptures, and our willingness to believe whatever interpretation we hear without testing it. Here is an example of several scripture passages that have been assembled to create a false narrative intended to lead people to believe they cannot help but sin and will always be slaves to sin.

1JN 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. NASB

That was from the Apostle John, the next is from James, the brother of Jesus.

JAS 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. NIV

This is something Jesus said.

JN 8:7 Jesus lifted up himself, and said unto them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone." KJV

Here is one from Paul.

RO 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ¹⁹ For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. NASB

There are other passages we could add to this, but these should suffice for our example. As you can see, we have statements from four Biblical figures, including Jesus, that appear to be a reliable Biblical pattern of thought establishing the idea that we will always be living in sin, and we cannot help but sin. Today, many churches teach these passages exactly that way – as Biblical truth. I have even heard some make an argument that anyone who thinks they can live without sinning for a day or even an

Notes and Questions _____

hour is a deceived, prideful, idiot. But are those conclusions really what the original authors intended to communicate? Let's look at the 1st John passage in context.

¹JN 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

¹JN 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. NASB

When we look at 1st John 1:8 in the context of the surrounding verses, we can clearly see John is saying that we have all sinned and need a Savior. But he is not saying we must continue to live in bondage to sin – as slaves to sin. In fact, John says the very reason he wrote the letter was "that you may not sin". John's message of a love-based righteous lifestyle is one of the primary themes communicated throughout the entire letter of 1st John. Hmm... What then about the statement James made about everyone stumbling in many ways? Once again, we must look at the context before we draw our conclusions.

¹JAS 3:1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. ² For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. NASB

Once again, when we see James' statement in context, it is clear he is not making the argument that we cannot live a righteous life, but rather that a righteous life will be evidenced by what we say and how we say it. But what about that thing Jesus said about casting the first stone? Keep in mind Jesus was not speaking to a group of loving, Spirit-filled Christians. No, He was speaking to a murderous, blood-thirsty, mob of Jews intending to stone a woman to death for committing adultery. When He had silenced the crowd and they had left, here is what He said to the woman.

¹JN 8:9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ "No one, sir," she

Notes and Questions _____

said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." NIV

Once again, the context shows that Jesus is not advocating the idea that we cannot help but sin. And only a few verses later in the same chapter of John, Jesus says this about how He frees us from our slavery to sin.

JN 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." NIV

So again, the context of these passages reveals the truth - Jesus did not come to leave us as slaves to sin, but to set us free from it. On the other hand, Satan wants to keep us convinced we are still in bondage to sin so he can continue to exercise control over us. And he uses well-meaning pastors and teachers to spread his disinformation.

The same is true of Paul's comments in Romans 7. If you read Romans 6 and 8, you will find that Paul teaches a life in Christ in which the bondage to sin is broken. Sandwiched in between 6 and 8, Paul speaks of the futility of trying to live a righteous life apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Context is key. We should often be reminded of Jude's warning us about God's grace being perverted to make it look like a license to sin.

JUDE 1:3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ⁴ For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. NIV

One of the most popular "license to sin" passages is found in Romans 8.

RO 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, "For thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

Notes and Questions _____

It would probably be safe to say that anyone who has been in church for a year or more has heard this passage taught in this way – “No matter how we live, no matter what sins we commit, nothing can separate us from Christ.” But is that what Paul was really intending to communicate in this passage - that there are no eternal consequences for continuing in a sinful life? Take a look at something Paul said a just few verses earlier.

RO 8:12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. NASB

Does this passage sound like a license to sin? Not at all. So, either Paul is contradicting himself in the Romans 8:35 "Who shall separate us?" passage, or maybe we have not understood his intent. If we look closely at the Romans 8:35 passage, we will find that Paul never mentions sin, but things like persecution, hunger, and poverty. A contextual examination of this passage will reveal it is not about giving us a “license to sin”, but about our ability to live a righteous life through life's most difficult circumstances. It is the exact opposite of a license to sin.

The key to understanding is found in the phrase, "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." A word study on “love” in Romans will reveal two concepts – “the love of God for us”, and “the love of God in us”. In this Romans 8:35 passage, Paul is speaking of “the love of God in us”, which is the love we experience in our hearts through Christ's indwelling presence. Earlier in Romans, Paul talked about “God's love in us” using the same context of trials and persecution.

RO 5:3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. NASB

This is what Paul is talking about in the last part of Romans 8:39. Essentially, he is saying that even through life's most difficult situations, nothing can prevent us experiencing God's love in our hearts and expressing that love to others. And Paul understood the sanctifying effect God's love has on our hearts and our actions, which he talked about later in Romans 13.

RO 13:8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. NASB

Notes and Questions _____

When we walk in God's love toward one another, we literally don't sin against one another. By walking in God's love, we fulfill the law of Christ, as well as the moral law. This is how God's love within us sanctifies our behavior and our lifestyle through the Holy Spirit. If we take that understanding of "God's love in us" back into Romans 8:35-39, we can clearly see Paul is attempting to communicate to us that we have the ability to live in God's righteousness, even during life's most difficult trials. It is the exact opposite of a license to sin. But many church people have just accepted that "license to sin" interpretation as fact. And it is just not true. Immediately following Paul's warning of the apostasy (the apostasy we see at work today), he made this statement.

2TH 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. NIV

Let us make no mistake about it - we are saved through Holy Spirit sanctification, not apart from it. If we hear an ear-tickling teaching that sounds like a license to sin, we can be sure it is a demonic doctrine belonging to the apostasy and the antichrist spirit in the world today. It is part of Satan's warfare against us, so let us not be deceived by it. And let us not be discouraged, but to keep ourselves in the love of God. Amen?

Study Questions – 4a. When considering the verse 1st John 1:8, how does the context of the surrounding verses (1st John 1:6 - 2:2) help us to understand what John was trying to communicate to us? 4b. And how do the verses of Romans 8:12-14 help us to not misunderstand what Paul said later in Romans 8:35-39?

Prayer – Father, I desire to be a student of Your word. Please help me to always test the teachings I hear against the whole counsel of Your word. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.

Notes and Questions

Week 7 – “The Apostasy”

Lesson 7-5 – “Be Alert and Pray for all the Saints”

Jesus and the apostles knew the last days would be difficult times. They all told us to stay alert, to be ready, and to pay attention to what we see around us. They also said to not be discouraged by what we see. In an atmosphere of apostasy in the Church, it is so easy to fall into an attitude of condemning others. But that is not what we are to do. At the end of his teaching on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6, Paul concluded with one of the main ways we do battle - in prayer.

[EPH 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. NIV](#)

Paul instructed us to “be alert” in our prayers. “Be alert” is warfare lingo, meaning we should pay attention to what is going on around us and pray for people accordingly. Prayer can take on many forms. Prayer can be a request, or it can be an expression of thankfulness for something received. Prayer can be an expression of praise and worship. That may be the reason Paul said we should [“pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests”](#).

But then, Paul charges us with two specific areas we should be sure to include in our prayers. First, he said we should [“be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”](#) In other words, pray for the Church as a whole - all Christians everywhere. Then he requested prayer for himself that [“words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.”](#) This is a prayer we should be praying for Church leaders, not only our own local leaders, but leaders everywhere.

It is not a coincidence that our instruction to pray for the whole church and to pray for church leaders is given in the context of spiritual warfare. From the very beginning, Satan has made war against the Church, with a specific focus on Church leaders. So, what are we supposed to pray? At the beginning of Ephesians, Paul told them what he was praying for them.

[EPH 1:15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while](#)

Notes and Questions _____

making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. NASB

Feel free to pray this prayer for me anytime - please do. It is significant to note that at the time of his writing this letter, Paul had not met these people. He had only heard of their faith, yet he was already praying for them that their hearts might be enlightened, and they would have a spirit of revelation and wisdom. This is a prayer we can pray for Christians everywhere, even those we do not know - especially for Church leaders. We live in difficult times. Here is another prayer Paul prayed for the church at Philippi.

PHP 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God. NIV

This may not sound like a prayer of spiritual warfare, but it attacks everything the enemy wants to do in people's lives. It gives us insight into how Paul prayed for the churches - even those people he had never met. Many of his prayers have these common themes in them. Here is one in Colossians.

COL 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. NRSV

These common themes in Paul's prayers serve to teach us how to pray for the Church the way Paul prayed for the Church. This includes our personal circle of Christians, our local fellowship, and all Christians everywhere - especially leaders, because they are specifically targeted by the powers of darkness. This is one of the ways we do warfare for one another against the enemy. And praying these prayers for others will serve to strengthen us, as well. Try it and see if you are not personally spiritually strengthened by praying for others in this way. When we see apostasy, we can pray the way Paul prayed for his fellow Jews who had rejected Christ.

Notes and Questions _____

RO 10:1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. NRSV

When we know we need to pray, but we do not know how, we can pray in the Spirit.

RO 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. NIV

We must pray for all Christians everywhere and especially for Church leaders that our eyes of our hearts would be opened for spiritual insight. Paul closed out his first letter to the church in Thessalonica with this exhortation and prayer, which is fitting for us today, as well.

1TH 5:16 Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit; ²⁰ do not despise prophetic utterances. ²¹ But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

1TH 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. NASB

Lord Jesus, let it be so in our lives, our families, our churches, and our leaders.

Study Questions – 5a. What did Paul encourage us to do in Ephesians 6:18? 5b. And what can we learn about praying for our Christian leaders from Paul's request in Ephesians 6:19-20? 5c. What do you believe we can learn from studying the prayers of Jesus and the Apostles?

Prayer – Father, it is clear we live in difficult times. So, I ask You to give us discernment and spiritual insight for all situations. I pray You would enlighten our hearts, so we can know the fullness of Your love. Strengthen us in Your power, in Jesus' name, amen.

Notes and Questions

FOUNDATIONS 301 WEEK EIGHT	THE END OF THE AGE
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Week 8 – “The End of the Age”

Lesson 8-1 – “And Then the End Shall Come”

End times studies are interesting, but can also be extremely complex in many ways. Personally, I believe the way we approach the foreknowledge provided by God is important. We may have our ideas about when Jesus will return, but the specific time is a secret our Father is keeping to Himself. In fact, Jesus said His coming will take everyone by surprise.

We must also remember that the events we read about in the Bible may appear to happen closely together in a timeline, when they could actually unfold hundreds of years apart. So, if we take the prophecies as a puzzle to be assembled so we can decipher when Jesus is returning, we may be missing the whole point. Many of the prophecies are not so much for the purpose of revealing when Jesus is returning, but to prepare us to be ready for His return - whenever that may be. But still, we cannot help but wonder, right? In that regard, Jesus’ disciples were no different from us.

[MT 24:3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"](#) NRSV

They understood as we should, there will come a time when the world as we have known it will come to an end. Like us, they wanted as much detail about it as they could possibly get. So, Jesus gave them a rough synopsis of some of the things that would happen leading up to the end of the age. And in the very next verse, this is what He told them.

[MT 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. ⁵ "For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will mislead many.](#) NASB

So, the time before Jesus returns will be a time of great religious deception. Since Jesus has revealed this to us, we can prepare ourselves by prayerfully studying the scriptures diligently so we do not fall for the deceptions. Diligent study will also help us to throw off any bad teachings we may have already received. Remember this, we do not interpret the scriptures to fit with our own personal experience. But we search the scriptures to learn what the genuine Christian experience should be, then we seek God to bring us into alignment with that truth. Here is the next thing Jesus said to them.

[MT 24:6 "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. ⁷ "For nation will](#)

Notes and Questions _____

rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. ⁸ "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. NASB

These types of events have been occurring for almost all of recorded human history. But in the past 110 years or so, mankind has experienced two wars that engulfed the entire planet. The world is filled with political, ethnic, and religious power struggles. Cyber warfare and nuclear threats among nations have become routine.

At the individual level, social media platforms have become the forums for bickering, personal attacks, and character assassination. All civility is being abandoned as societies slowly unravel before our eyes. But Jesus told us to not be surprised or frightened when we see these kinds of things coming to pass. At the end of Matthew, He gave us this promise, "[And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.](#)" There may come a day when we are persecuted for His sake. Many Christians in the world are already being persecuted. Even so, we still have that promise He will always be with us.

[MT 24:9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. ¹⁰ "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. ¹¹ "And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. ¹² "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. ¹³ "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. NASB](#)

Jesus is not telling us these things to scare us, but so we can decide in advance how we are going to respond if it does happen. Will we allow our love to grow cold so that we fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another? Or will we follow the instruction of Jude when he was speaking of things that would happen in the last days?

[JUDE 1:17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. ²¹ Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. NIV](#)

Since we know in advance that persecution could come our way, we can make our decision in advance that we are going to remain faithful and keep ourselves in the love of God to the very end. We can settle it in our minds and hearts right now. Amen?

Then Jesus continued by speaking of what would happen throughout the earth because of the compassionate actions of His faithful servants.

Notes and Questions _____

MT 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come." NASB

But if all this craziness is going on in the world, and people are acting out in these ways, why should we even bother with them? Maybe for the same reason Jesus came to die for them? Here is something that illustrates Jesus' heart toward people.

MT 9:35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;" ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." NRSV

When we take hold of His compassion and make it our own, then we will understand the reasons for why we go, why we preach, why we teach, why we share our faith, why we give, why we invite, why we pray, why we labor. All of this must become a central theme in our end-times paradigm - you and me being witnesses to the world. And when our mission is complete, the end will come.

Study Questions – 1a. In Matthew 24:4-5 and 24:9-13, what did Jesus warn us would happen in the last days? 1b. And why do you think He revealed these things to us in advance? 1c. What does Matthew 24:14 reveal about our purpose in Jesus' end times scenario?

Prayer – Father, You are good and loving and kind. I thank You for the revelation You have given in Your word. I pray You will help me to learn, to understand, and to embrace all You have revealed for my benefit. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 8 – “The End of the Age”

Lesson 8-2 – “When the Son of Man Comes”

As we look back at the Gospels and the life of Jesus, it is easy to see how He fulfilled the things spoken of Him by the prophets hundreds of years before He came. But for the people who lived in the time between those prophetic revelations and His first coming, it must have been a confusing puzzle to sort out. The same can be true for us as we attempt to piece together the prophecies yet to be fulfilled. Thankfully, our salvation is not dependent on our having a perfect understanding of the end time events.

So, it is not our goal in these studies to create an accurate timeline or to sort out every detail of John's Revelation. We are not trying to present a comprehensive analysis and harmony of single every scripture that speaks of Jesus' return. What we are attempting to do, is to paint a broad-brush stroke picture of future events, so we can look forward with faith to the magnificent things God has in store for us. Will there be difficult times ahead? Possibly, but none will compare with the glory God has promised.

At the present time, there is a veil between the physical and spiritual realms. But a day will come when that veil will be pierced, the two realms will converge, and everyone will see the coming of the Lord. Jesus described it this way.

MT 24:30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. NIV

And...

MT 24:27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. NIV

When Jesus returns, everyone is going to know about it. No television coverage will be needed to see Him. The Revelation of John paints an incredible picture of this as it unfolds.

REV 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine

Notes and Questions _____

press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh, he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords." NRSV

And here is something else Jesus said about His coming.

MT 25:31 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne." NASB

When Jesus returns having His army of angels with Him, He is not coming to take us all home to heaven, but to rule and reign on the earth. Yep. Here is something Paul said about His reign.

1CO 15:24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. NRSV

I will remind you, that sometimes Biblical history is fulfilled over long periods of time. Some prophecies in the Gospels may appear to happen in quick succession, when they are really happening many years apart. Here is what the Revelation says about Jesus' reign on earth.

REV 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. NASB

What! Did you see what that said? When Jesus returns, He will rule and reign on the earth for a thousand years. This is a time period known as His millennial reign. But before He establishes His thousand-year reign, He will put down the armies of the Anti-Christ (the beast), the False Prophet, and the armies of the nations.

REV 19:19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. NASB

This is the same ruler Paul was speaking about in 2nd Thessalonians concerning the great apostasy that would happen before Jesus returns.

2TH 2:3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in

Notes and Questions _____

the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed.

^{2TH 2:7} For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. NASB

For many years, it has been debated who this is, what this means, and when it will all come about. There are other questions about how much of this is happening in the physical realm and how much in the spiritual. If it is mostly happening in the spiritual, it would be more difficult to discern. But we can certainly see the impact of the deceptive anti-Christ spirit broadly at work in the world and church today. The good news is when Jesus does appear, He is going to do away with that deceptive influence.

^{REV 19:19} And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. ²⁰ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. NASB

At the Lord's coming, the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet will be done away with forever. And Satan, who is the source of the anti-Christ spirit, will be bound and prevented from deceiving during the millennial reign of Christ.

^{REV 20:1} Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while. NRSV

The scriptures do not give us very many details about what happens during the millennial reign of Christ. In that regard, it is a little like the creation story in Genesis. God could have given us a lot more details of how He created everything, but He did not. He did tell us enough that we could have faith in Him as the one who did it. We do not have to know all that much about the millennial reign, just that it is coming. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released for a final showdown.

Notes and Questions _____

REV 20:7 When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea.⁹ They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them.¹⁰ And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. NRSV

Once again, Satan incites a rebellion among mankind, but this one is his last. Finally, the deceptive influence of Satan in the earth will be finished forever. Glory to God! Come Lord Jesus!

Study Questions – 2a. What do Matthew 24:30, Matthew 24:27, and Revelation 19:11-16 reveal about the return of Jesus?

2b. What does Revelation 19:19 reveal about how the nations of the earth will respond when Jesus returns?

2c. What do Revelation 19:19-20 and Revelation 20:1-3 reveal about how Jesus will deal with the deceptive influences in the earth?

2d. What do Matthew 25:31 and Revelation 20:4 reveal about what Jesus will do after He defeats the Anti-Christ armies?

2e. From Revelation 20:7-10, what ultimately happens to Satan, and when does it that take place?

Prayer – Father, I thank You for the revelation that evil will not continue forever, but will be destroyed in the end. I look forward to the day of a righteous ruler in the earth - Jesus our Lord. In His name I pray, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 8 – “The End of the Age”

Lesson 8-3 – “The Resurrection of the Dead and the Judgment Seat of Christ”

The resurrection of the dead has been a topic of debate in the Church from the very beginning. Today, Christian people still have differing views on several aspects. These include when the resurrection will take place relative to other events, the conscious state of our soul in between death and the resurrection, as well as when and how the final judgment takes place. With most of these differences, the eventual final outcome for each individual is the same - it is just a question of timing and process. So, in this lesson, we are going to try to keep this as simple as possible, rather than attempting to sort through every single detail.

It is my opinion that some beliefs about the resurrection are essential to salvation, and some are not. The Apostle Paul's most comprehensive teaching on the resurrection is found in 1st Corinthians 15. This was written to resolve a doctrinal argument among some people in the Corinth church. Here is what he said in his intro to that teaching.

1CO 15:12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, **how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and **if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.** NASB

Within the Jewish religious community, there were two schools of thought on the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in a resurrection of the dead, and the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. This incorrect viewpoint on the afterlife in the Corinth church, was probably due to Sadducee influences among the Jewish believers. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul addressed this same issue.

RO 10:9 **because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. NRSV

Some people teach these verses as a stand-alone formula for how a person is saved, to the exclusion of anything else the scriptures have to say on the matter, such as repentance, sanctification, receiving the Holy Spirit, walking by the Spirit, etc... Even in Romans, Paul has a ton more to say about the essentials of our salvation than just the concepts in these two verses. So, to take these verses as an all-inclusive saving faith formula would be a mishandling of God's word.

But one important thing Paul does in this passage, is to show that our belief in the fact of the resurrection of the dead is an essential part of saving faith. And when Paul was

Notes and Questions _____

on trial before the governor Felix, Paul witnessed to him that every dead person would be resurrected, even the wicked.

[^{AC 24:15} I have a hope in God--a hope that they themselves also accept--that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.](#) ¹⁶ Therefore I do my best always to have a clear conscience toward God and all people. NRSV

And here is something from the writer of Hebrews.

[^{HEB 9:27} And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment,](#) ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. NRSV

Just in case you have been taught the eastern religion concept of reincarnation, please understand that is not how it works. There are no old souls who have lived many lives. We get one shot at this life - not life, after life, after life, until we finally get it right. So, every person who has died will be resurrected, but as it was revealed to the Apostle John, every person is not necessarily resurrected at the same time.

[^{REV 20:4} Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.](#) ⁵ [\(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.\) This is the first resurrection.](#) ⁶ [Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.](#) NRSV

There will be a resurrection of the faithful and righteous when Jesus appears at the beginning of His millennial reign. They will rule and reign with Him for a thousand years. The unfaithful and wicked will not be raised until the end of the thousand-year reign, for the final judgment.

Paul talked about the resurrection of the righteous in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. Some in their congregation had died, and they were concerned about what would happen to them. Paul explained - in the same way that God raised Jesus from the dead, He would also raise those who had died in Christ.

[^{1TH 4:14} For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.](#) ¹⁵ [For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.](#)

Notes and Questions _____

This word “precede”, implies “to leave behind” or “to go without”. Paul is letting them know that those who have died will not be left behind in their graves when Jesus returns. Then he continues.

1TH 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words. NASB

This passage may appear as if the resurrection wraps everything up, we all go to heaven, and that is that. But in 1st Corinthians, Paul gives a more comprehensive teaching on the resurrection and we see the millennial reign of Christ that follows.

1CO 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. NRSV

So, here we see Christ as the first to be resurrected from the dead. Then when He returns, those who have died in Christ will be resurrected. And later in the chapter, he speaks of the new spiritual body we will receive when we are resurrected.

1CO 15:35 But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹ All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. NIV

Then he said:

1CO 15:42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is

Notes and Questions _____

sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. NIV

When the dead in Christ are resurrected, we will be raised with a heavenly, glorified body, just like the body Jesus now has. It will not have the weaknesses and frailties of the bodies we now have. Glory and amen! And for those in Christ who are alive and remain when Jesus returns...

^{1CO 15:51} Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." NIV

As Paul said in the 1st Thessalonians passage, the dead in Christ will rise first. They will rise with imperishable, immortal, glorified bodies. Then the bodies of those still alive will be transformed into the same imperishable, immortal, glorified bodies. Remember, this is the first resurrection - the resurrection of the righteous. The Revelation also speaks of the second resurrection and the great white throne judgment.

^{REV 20:11} Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. NIV

At this point, Satan has already been thrown in the lake of fire. So, this is the final judgment for all time. All of mankind will appear before the judgment seat to give an account. Some will be judged righteous, and some will stand condemned, as Paul said.

^{2CO 5:10} For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. NIV

Here are the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

Notes and Questions _____

JN 5:26 "For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and will come out--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. NRSV

There is a resurrection to life, and there is a resurrection to condemnation. After that final judgment, something else very important happens.

REV 20:14 And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. NASB

Hades is the New Testament equivalent of Sheol in the Old Testament. It is the spiritual state or place people go when they die. Hades is described as having locked gates that prevent people from getting out. We are not talking about people who have been revived after fifteen minutes of not breathing on an operating table. While there are several instances in the Old and New Testaments of people being temporarily raised from the dead, except for Jesus, they all eventually died and were buried.

In this Revelation 20:14 verse, God is letting us know that there will be no more death and no need for a place for the dead to be held captive. When we think of the end of the age, we often think of Jesus defeating Satan and the powers of darkness, then casting them in the lake of fire so they can never tempt or deceive again. And it would be difficult to overstate the importance of that victory. But Satan is not the last enemy to be defeated by Jesus - death is the last enemy to be defeated.

1CO 15:26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. NRSV

Study Questions – 3a. What do Acts 24:15-16 and Hebrews 9:27-28 teach us about death, the resurrection, and the judgment? 3b. What does Revelation 20:4-6 reveal about the timing of the resurrections? 3c. From 1st Corinthians 15:51-54, what happens to the faithful who are still alive when Jesus returns? 3d. According to Revelation 20:11-15, what happens at the end of the millennial reign of Jesus?

Prayer - We thank You Lord for the blood of Jesus, we thank You for the Holy Spirit, we thank You for Your word, and we thank You for the promise of the resurrection to life.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 8 – “The End of the Age”

Lesson 8-4 – “New Heavens and a New Earth”

We were not here to see the earth and the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve fell, but it must have been something to behold. When God created Adam, He gave him authority over the earth. And when Adam and Eve fell into corruption, everything under their authority fell into corruption with them. Compared to that pristine beginning, the earth we see today is groaning and convulsing, with difficulties and struggles for humans and animals alike. In Romans, the Apostle Paul speaks of how the whole creation longs to be set free from the curse and corruption that came through Adam.

^{RO 8:18} For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. NASB

We know Jesus died to redeem mankind, but we often fail to recognize He also came to redeem the whole physical creation. The prophet Isaiah spoke the word of the Lord concerning the newness all of creation would eventually experience.

^{ISA 65:17} "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. NIV

And also...

^{ISA 66:22} "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. ²³ From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD. NIV

The creation as we have known it will cease to be. It will be renewed to the innocence it had in the beginning. The new heavens and new earth will be so amazingly better and our lives will be so radically changed, our past lives will quickly fade from our memories. The past will seem irrelevant in the light of God's new creation. But for now, we are here. Peter explains the transition between the old and the new will be quite dramatic.

^{2PE 3:3} First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of

Notes and Questions _____

creation!" ⁵ They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, ⁶ through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless. NRSV

The heavens and earth we now have will be destroyed by fire, along with everything in the world. This knowledge should help us to not hold too tightly to material things, since they will all be destroyed anyway. Peter continues...

2PE 3: ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

2PE 3: ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation... NASB

In this new creation, there will be no sin. There will be no temptation or deception, no devil or demons, no wickedness, no anxiety. All sickness and disease will be purged. Perfection and innocence will be fully restored. This new creation will be part of the inheritance for those who have faithfully followed the way of Christ, those who have chosen the path of righteousness in the present life. The innocence will even extend into the animal kingdom. And yes, there will be animals in the new creation.

ISA 11: ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. NIV

We are not all going to be sitting on clouds playing harps for all eternity. In this new creation, there is a new earth and it is going to be a busy place with people and animals just the way God intended at the beginning of creation. Through Christ, everything is being redeemed, everything is being made new, everything will be as it should be. We

Notes and Questions _____

will experience the purest love of all. It is probably impossible for us to comprehend or even imagine this until we experience it.

The vision of God given to John in the Revelation gives us fantastical imagery of the things that await us in the perfection of this new creation. But the greatest of God's promises are the ones that speak of how this new creation will impact our hearts.

REV 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. NASB

And then...

REV 21:4 And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost." ⁷ "He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son." NASB

It is difficult to imagine a life with no pain, with no mourning, with no death, with no tears, with no sickness, no stress, no sin, and no conflict. But that is what awaits us.

1CO 2:9 But just as it is written, things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." NASB

Even though it is difficult to comprehend the future promised to us, I believe it is good to occasionally take time to imagine and ponder how wonderful these things will be. Maybe that is why God has given this knowledge to us - so we can set our hearts and our hope on what He has prepared for us. Amen?

Study Questions – 4a. In what ways does Romans 8:18-22 describe the physical creation as we now know it? 4b. According to 2nd Peter 3:10-15, what happens to the heavens and the earth at the end of the age? 4c. From Isaiah 11:6-9, what will the new creation be like for the animals? 4d. According to Revelation 21:4-7, what will the new creation be like for us?

Prayer – Father, I thank You that You make all things new. I look forward with great hope to the time You fulfill all You have promised. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

Week 8 – “The End of the Age”

Lesson 8-5 – “The New Jerusalem and the Marriage of the Lamb”

The account of the creation at the beginning of Genesis reveals the kind of relationship God intended to have with mankind from the beginning.

GE 3:8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze... NRSV

In the beginning, God would take evening walks in the garden. He did it often enough that Adam and Eve knew the sound of Him coming. Before they fell, they were quite comfortable with God's presence, and He with them. If this kind of closeness was God's intention from the beginning, it stands to reason He would seek to restore it for all eternity.

REV 21:5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." NASB

In the Revelation, John's vision reveals one of these “new” things - a New Jerusalem. In reading about this new city, it is easy to get caught up in imagining the magnificence and beauty of it all. But the beauty of the city is only part of the story. The real significance is where the city comes from and who dwells in it.

REV 21:10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. NIV

This is the city that comes out of heaven whose architect and builder is God. And there is no longer any separation between the heavenly and the earthly, for God has merged them together. It is also interesting and obvious God likes the number 12. There are 12 gates, 12 angels, 12 tribes, 12 foundations, 12 apostles. And this pattern continues.

REV 21:15 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶ The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. ¹⁷ He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. ¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city of

Notes and Questions _____

pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. NIV

There are 12 precious stones, which parallel the 12 stones on the breastplate of Aaron's priestly robe. And there are 12 pearls as gates. All this precision shows God as a prefect architect and builder. He is a God of perfect order, and the new heavens and earth will reflect His perfection and precision.

The walls are 144 cubits thick, which is 12 squared. This city is 12,000 stadia in length, width, and height. One stadia is over 600 feet, so that would make this city roughly 1,400 miles long by 1400 miles wide - almost 2,000,000 square miles. To put it in perspective, this one city is over half the size of the land mass of the United States of America. It is also 1,400 miles vertical – a perfect cube. This is a really, really big city.

REV 21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. NIV

The city is magnificent, but that is not what is important. What really matters is that God the Father and Jesus the Son will manifest their presence there. There will no longer be the separation between the spiritual and physical. They will no longer be distant, but close and accessible, just as it was with Adam and Eve in the garden. Read these next verses and wonder with me if this seems like a great place to take a walk with Jesus in the cool evening breeze.

REV 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Does this sound peaceful to you? Our access to the tree of life is restored and we can drink from the river of the water of life. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil

Notes and Questions _____

does not exist. There is no tempter, no deception, no sin, no death, no sorrow. All things are restored, all things are made new. We will be eternally united with our Creator and Savior.

REV 22:3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever. NIV

So, now we prepare ourselves for a wedding that is to come - our wedding.

REV 19:6 "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. ⁷ "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." ⁸ And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." NASB

Then we will fully understand the prophecy of the glories to come.

1CO 2:9 But just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him. NASB

Glory to God forever and ever, amen.

Study Questions – 5a. According to Revelation 21:10-14, what comes out of heaven down to earth? 5b. And what does Revelation 21:15-17 reveal about how large this is? 5c. From Revelation 21:22-27, what is not needed in this city, and why? 5d. What does Revelation 19:6-9 teach us about what happens to us?

Prayer – Father, I thank You for the magnificent things you have planned for me. I am thankful You love me so much that You want to spend eternity with me. It is a wonderful promise, and I am so looking forward to it all. In the name of Jesus our Savior and Lord, forever and ever, amen.

Notes and Questions _____

