

Master Teacher 2017 First Quarter

Lesson 1

Creation Psalms

Psalms 8, 19, 29, 33, 65, 104, 139 are classified as Creation Psalms. They emphasize God's role as Creator. Psalm 8 praises the wonders of God's creation. Psalm 33 begins with invitations, commands, and reasons for God's praise (vv. 1–5). The earth is full of God's faithfulness toward Israel. Psalm 104 is a poetic retelling of the creation narrative in Genesis 1. It praises the Creator, rather than the creation.

Lesson 2

Enthronement Psalms

Psalms 24, 47, 93, 95–100 are Enthronement Psalms, because they portray God as King over the universe. Although they do follow a certain structure, they do call readers/listeners to praise God for His lordship over the heavens and the earth. Enthronement Psalms are different from Royal Psalms, which focuses on earthly kings like King David.

Lesson 3

Apocalyptic Scriptures

The term *apocalypse*, the Greek name of the book of Revelation, means “unveiling.” Apocalyptic writings have distinctive literary features, particularly prediction of future events and accounts of visions and journeys to heaven, often involving vivid symbolism. Later apocalyptic material often builds upon and elaborates the symbolism employed by earlier ones. This is particularly the case in the book of Revelation, where John uses Old Testament especially the Hebrew prophets for ideas and symbols. Biblical scholars often assert that apocalyptic writings are a response to distress and national tragedy, enabling suffering people to see that God is in control of their circumstances and that ultimate deliverance is assured.

Lesson 4

Leviathan

The very first mention of leviathan comes from the book of Job. There leviathan is described as being a large sea monster, who has super strength. It can only be tamed by God. Isaiah also give similar details about leviathan: “On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.” (27:1, NRSV). Here Isaiah not only uses the Hebrew word that both mean “sea monster, serpent, or dragon.” Psalm 74:14 describes leviathan as having multiple heads.

Lesson 5

Hallel Psalms

The Hallel psalms include 113–118, 136, and 146–150. These psalms are “a litany of praise psalms used in Jewish festivals or morning services. Heb. *hallēl* is derived from the verb ‘to praise,’ which occurs as a command (‘praise thou’) in various Psalms” (Gerald M. Bilkes, “Hallel” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 542). As our survey of the psalms has shown, work is intended to be a form of praise to God. These psalms depict a variety of ways in which our work can praise the Lord. In all of them we see that our work is grounded in God’s own work. When we work as God intends, we imitate, extend, and fulfill God’s work.

Lesson 6

Circumcision

Circumcision among Jews has been mainly a ritual centered on males—for males and by males. God gave to the command for every Jewish male to be circumcised to the patriarch of the Jews, Abraham. He was charged with circumcising his children and male slaves. Circumcision became an important sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham, and his descendant would become a great nation. Those who were not circumcised would be, according to Scripture, cut off from the covenant. This curse shows the importance of circumcision and how it might have even elevated men to a special status. They bear on their bodies the sign of God’s covenant.

Lesson 7

Adoption in Ancient Rome

Land owning males in ancient Rome were very powerful and controlled everyone in their households—their wives, children, and slaves. The Roman father possessed absolute control and power. Sons never came of age during their father’s lifetime. Sometimes, Roman male citizens who did not have male heirs adopted sons. This is the case with the Roman Emperor Claudius, who adopted Nero in order that Nero might succeed him on the throne. In order to adopt, a father had to pay the other father for sale of the adoptee. Then the adoptive father would go to one of the Roman magistrates to make the transfer legal. Once the magistrate legalized the adoption, it was complete. The adoptee would no longer have any ties to the former family, but would receive all of the privileges of being a part of the new family. Similarly, children of God have no ties to our old lives. We have become joint-heirs with Christ, the firstborn of God.

Lesson 8

Slavery in Ancient Rome

Slavery was practiced in ancient Egypt, Israel, and Greece, as well as Rome. Most slaves in the Roman Empire were foreigners, although Roman slavery was not based on skin color. Slaves in Rome included captures from war, sailors seized and sold by pirates, and slaves bought outside Roman territory. During hard times, Roman citizens—desperate for money—would sell their children into slavery.

Slave owners had absolute control over their slaves and their families. The owners could sell or rent them out at any time. The lives of slaves were often tough. Slaves were whipped, branded, and even sexually abused. Their owners could also kill them for any reason and would face no punishment.

Those enslaved by Romans for the most part were not bound to their owners indefinitely. There were opportunities for manumission. Some slave owners freed their slaves on their death bed or after great service rendered by the slave. Others allowed their slaves to buy their freedom. Once freed, male slaves could obtain Roman citizenship.

Lesson 9

Fruit bearing

Jesus' parable of the sower teaches that we need to be good soil in order to bear fruit. This includes being teachable, being open to receive criticism, and freeing ourselves of mindsets and preconceptions that keep us from hearing. It includes being ready to endure trials and hardships. If we are to bear fruit, we also need to be nourished by our relationship with God. If we are to become like God in character, we need to feed ourselves daily on God's word. Jesus said, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4, NRSV). We need to spend time in worship and prayer. We need to think about the things that build us up in Christ (see Phil. 4:8-9). We need to set our hearts and minds "on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (see Col. 3:1-3, NRSV). These are all ways in which we can become "transformed by the renewing of [our] minds" (see Rom. 12:2, NRSV).

Lesson 10

Authorship of 1 John

The author of 1 John is anonymous; no author is identified within the work itself. The only other New Testament letter that makes no reference to the author's name is the epistle to the Hebrews. The second and third letters of John, however, designate the author as John "the Elder." Bible scholars debate whether or not this person is the same author of the first letter and/or the Apostle John. There are significant similarities in style, vocabulary, theological emphases, and even structure between these books of the New Testament.

The introduction to the letter, 1 John 1:1-4, repeatedly emphasizes the eyewitness nature of the testimony the letter contains. 1 John 1:1, in particular, places special emphasis on what the writer himself has heard and seen. It appears, rather, that the author intends by his statements in the prologue to indicate that he was one of the original eyewitnesses of the life and ministry of Jesus on earth, and that he intends to associate himself with the other original eyewitnesses. This is completely consistent with the traditional argument that the author is the Apostle John.

Lesson 11

Ephesus

In the ancient world, Ephesus was a center of travel and commerce. The city, because of its location on the Aegean Sea, was one of the greatest seaports of the ancient world.

Three major roads led from the seaport: one road went east toward Babylon via Laodicea, another to the north via Smyrna, and a third went south to the Meander Valley.

Ephesus was also known for having one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis the Greek goddess of the hunt. Only the foundation and one column remain today of this once massive temple. Paul stirred up much controversy in the city as he led its citizens away from sorcery and cultic worship at this very temple (see Acts 19:27). The ruins of this ancient city lie on the western coast of modern-day Turkey.

Lesson 12

Harvesting Grapes

For the first couple of years of growing grapes, the grape vine should not be allowed to produce fruit. The roots have to be well established and strengthened before the vine can support the additional weight of fruit. Likewise, in the Kingdom of God, new believers should concentrate on developing their roots in God—by being fortified from learning the Bible and praying. After those first years, bearing fruit and pruning become important. Not only would vines run rampant without control, but canes will only produce fruit once. Vines should be pruned annually. Vinedressers are encouraged to not be afraid to remove at least ninety percent of the previous season's growth. This will ensure a higher quality product. The more you prune, the more grapes you will have. God the Vinedresser is concerned about believers bearing fruit. Those branches that do not bear fruit, He takes away.

Lesson 13

Prophet Joel

Joel means "Jehovah is God." This name occurs frequently in the Old Testament (see 1 Sam. 8:2; 1 Chron. 4:35, 5:4, 8, 12). The prophet Joel was the son of Pethuel, who is an obscure figure in the Bible. In 1 Chronicles 24:16 a man by name of Pethahiah is mentioned. Some have connected him with the father of Joel, Pethuel, claiming upon this that Joel belonged to a priestly family; but this, as well as other claims cannot be confirmed. As to the time and place, when and where he carried his prophetic ministry, we are not left in doubt. He prophesied not like Hosea among the ten tribes, but he was a prophet of Judah. The entire book of Joel bears witness to it; this fact has not been disputed among biblical scholars.