

Online Activities 2Q 2017 College and Career

Lesson 1

THE PSALMS

A collection of 150 songs or prayers, the Psalms have long been used in both Jewish and Christian worship services. These poems reflect the experience of the writer in both praise and petition. God's deliverance is sought in the midst of terrible times, while His deliverance is celebrated after those times have passed. Because of the wide range of emotions and experiences that are expressed in the Psalms, this book is a great resource for believers today in both congregational and solitary times of prayer and petition or praise and worship.

Lesson 2

BAPTISM

For centuries, baptism has been an important rite in Christian practice. However it is practiced, baptism is the physical symbol of the inclusion of a believer in God's Kingdom. To call it a symbol is not to say that it is unimportant, however. As Jesus said, a person must be born "of water and Spirit" (John 3:5, NRSV). Following His death on the cross, it became clear that the water symbolizes the grave. In the waters of baptism, a believer's old life is declared dead and the new life in Christ begins. On the other side of baptism, the believer has begun the resurrected life that Jesus intends. Though we still face physical deaths, the death that matters is the death we choose to our sinful desires in favor of the everlasting life that Jesus offers to those who trust Him.

Lesson 3

SIMON PETER

Simon, whom Jesus called Peter, was the brother of Andrew and was a fisherman whom Jesus called to be His follower. Throughout the Gospels, Peter demonstrated moments of great clarity, like when he declared that Jesus was the Messiah. At other times, Peter got ahead of himself, chastising Jesus for talking about His death, or swearing his loyalty to Jesus and then abandoning Him. Following His resurrection, Jesus made sure to draw Peter back into the fold and assure the man of his role in God's Kingdom. Peter went on to be a great apostle and minister to both Jews and Gentiles. Traditionally, he is believed to have been martyred, crucified upside down.

Lesson 4

PAUL'S HARDSHIPS

After being called to be an apostle of the Lord, Paul devoted his life to missionary work, especially in Gentile communities. Some of his difficulties were the result of Jews who did not like his working with Gentiles. This led to Jews stoning him and plotting against his life. He also experienced shipwrecks and suffered in prison on several occasions. Despite all the many hardships he suffered (see 2 Cor. 11:23–31), Paul remained confident in the Lord and proclaimed the Gospel wherever his journeys took him, even in prison.

Lesson 5

SHEPHERDS IN THE BIBLE

The leaders in Israel and later Judah were often compared to shepherds. This association comes as no surprise when one remembers that the greatest king in Israel, David, was a shepherd before he became king. Thus, like shepherds, the leaders in Israel were meant to lead the nation in the ways they should go, following the Lord faithfully and teaching the people how to do likewise. However, the leaders—the supposed shepherds of God’s people—were often negligent in their responsibilities and even willfully disobedient. The prophets would rebuke the leaders for being poor shepherds of God’s people and prophesy about a Shepherd to come who would be faithful and keep the people safe from all danger.

Lesson 6

FOREIGNERS IN JONAH

The Ninevites and the sailors going to Tarshish are the two groups of foreigners found in the book of Jonah. The sailors were not in danger of God’s wrath until Jonah put them in danger with his disobedience. They valued his life and apologized to God in advance if they accidentally threw an innocent man into the sea. However, when they saw how Yahweh calmed the sea after throwing Jonah overboard, they praised the Lord and made sacrifices to Him. They were saved on the same day that the Lord saved Jonah even if they did not have a full understanding of what it would mean to worship the Lord of all creation exclusively. The Ninevites, on the other hand, were in danger and were due to face judgment from the Lord. When they heard this from Jonah, they sincerely repented and showed their repentance through fasting. Thus in the book of Jonah, the two groups of foreigners act more faithfully to the Lord than Jonah did. The sailors offered worship and sacrifices to the Lord as soon as they were able; the Ninevites immediately repented and sought the Lord’s will.

Lesson 7

SHEOL

Sheol is neither heaven nor hell. In Israelite thought, the dead all went to the same place: Sheol. This was not a place of punishment or reward. It was simply the place of the dead. It was thought to be beneath the world, which explains in part why Jonah spoke as though he was in Sheol while he was in the depths of the sea in the fish’s belly. Sheol offered a shadowy existence for the dead that was supposedly outside of God’s presence. Jonah celebrated in his prayer that God saw him even when he should have been in Sheol, and basically was in Sheol, and yet still the Lord had power to bring Jonah back to real life. For this reason, Jesus talked about the sign of Jonah as the only sign the Pharisees would receive (see Matt. 12:39–41).

Lesson 8

NINEVEH

Though Nineveh was a settlement for many generations, it did not reach prominence in the ancient Near East until it became the capital of Assyria under King Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.). His palace was likely the location of the famed Hanging Gardens. The city was sacked in 612 B.C. by Babylonians and Medes, bringing an end to the Assyrian Empire. The modern city of Mosul sits on this site, and a Muslim shrine in the city was dedicated to the prophet Jonah until its destruction in 2014.

Lesson 9

GOD'S GLOBAL CONCERN

Chapter four of Jonah reveals that Jonah knew all along that God had a global concern. His will was not as simple as doing good to Israel and punishing all her enemies. Instead, God's will was to save all of His creation, including even Israel's most vile enemies. Because of this, Jonah wanted to disobey God and not preach to Nineveh. He didn't like that God has a concern for all of His creatures, even the ones His people consider evil. The same God who called Jonah to preach in Nineveh calls His people today to pray for our enemies, bless those who curse us, and actively work for the good of all God's creatures, even those we consider evil and our enemies.

Lesson 10

Jael

Deborah warned Barak that the glory of his victory would go to a woman, but she did not mean herself. Jael was the wife of a Kenite named Heber. Heber was at peace with King Jabin, Sisera's ruler. Jael, however, was not. Under the guise of allegiance, she invited Sisera into her tent. When he asked for water to drink, she brought him milk. After he had fallen asleep, she drove a tent peg through his temple. In this way, Jael received the glory of the battle because she dealt the fatal blow to Israel's enemy, Sisera (see Judg. 4:17–22).

Lesson 11

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Angels often act as messengers from God to His people. Many stories are told in the Bible of angels visiting with God's people to bring them news of God's intentions for them. However, sometimes the angel is specifically called an "angel of the Lord." At such times, it seems that the writer is speaking of the Lord as He took physical form to visit His people Himself. However, the person who is visited by the angel of the Lord does not recognize the Lord before them, or recognizes the Lord only later. Though angels themselves are plenty terrifying to many who have met them, seeing the Lord face-to-face is a death sentence. Thus, seeing the angel of the Lord spared the faithful even as they received a message straight from Him.

Lesson 12

VOWS TO GOD

A vow to God is a promise made to Him that goes above and beyond what He requires. One example of a vow was the Nazirite vow, taken for a time of special consecration to the Lord. Frequently in the Old Testament, a vow was taken at a moment of need and was fulfilled after God had supplied deliverance. This often entailed special sacrifices and other dedication to the Lord following deliverance. Unsurprisingly, a vow taken in a moment of need could be taken hastily so that a man or woman would live to regret that vow just as Jephthah did.

Lesson 13

BARREN WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

Though childlessness is a choice that some women make today, in the days of ancient Israel it was a source of heartache and shame for a married woman to be without children. Though pregnancy and childbirth were very dangerous and infant mortality was high, women were expected to bear children for their husbands and raise a family. Throughout the Bible, women who experienced the pain of childlessness were blessed by the Lord. Sarah became the mother of the nation of Israel. Rachel gave birth to Jacob's two favorite sons. The mother of Samson, though not named, was honored to become the mother of a man who was called to deliver Israel from their enemies. Later, Hannah would give birth to the prophet Samuel, and generations after that Elizabeth gave birth to the prophet John the Baptist. In her lifetime, a young virgin named Mary also had a Son named Jesus. The barren women of the Bible were the women to watch, for God was eager to bless them and bless the world through their children.