

Preparing the Lesson

Date of Use _____

Joseph and His Brothers

Genesis 37



Key Point

Joseph was hated by his brothers, who threatened him with death and sold him into slavery, but he was rescued by God. God's Son, Jesus, was also hated and was killed for our sin. He is our deliverer from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Law/Gospel

Hatred ruins relationships and separates me from others and from God. **Jesus' death and resurrection restores my relationships with God and others.**

Context

Rachel died as her second son, Benjamin, was born. The twelve tribes of Israel are complete, but Jacob's favored wife is dead. Now Jacob's favor rests with Joseph, Rachel's firstborn. Jacob saw his father, Isaac, before he died and now lives in his father's land, the land of Canaan. The sons of Israel are shepherds.

Commentary

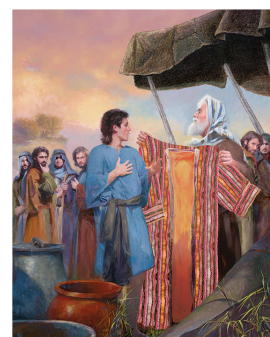
The account of Jacob begins and ends with Joseph (Genesis 37:2; 46:4). God always provides a deliverer for His people. In the lifetime of Jacob, Joseph was the deliverer. Moses records the Christlike characteristics of Joseph in Genesis, his first book. Joseph is never depicted as sinning in his vocation. He was not sinless, of course, for there would be only one Sinless One, Jesus Christ. Instead we see Joseph fulfilling his God-given vocations faithfully, trusting in God's mercy.

As a son, Joseph reports the misdeeds of his father's other sons. As a servant to Potiphar, Joseph becomes chief of all his master's possessions and remains chaste despite the advances of Potiphar's wife. In prison, he manages the jail with diligence, becoming a leader among inmates. As the right hand of Pharaoh, Joseph rules with wisdom and mercy. Finally, as a brother, Joseph forgives all that his brothers meant for evil because he saw the hand of God working for good. In each vocation—son, worker, and brother—Joseph trusted God to provide him with all that he needed to support his body and life, to defend him against all danger, and to guard and protect him from all evil (Small Catechism, First Article).

Joseph bore the cross of being his father's well-beloved son. He incurred the wrath of his other brothers. God revealed to Joseph the future, yet his brothers, his father, and his mother refused to believe him. They even rebuked him. But just as Mary pondered strange and wonderful things in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51), so Jacob kept the matter of these dreams in mind (Genesis 37:11).

Joseph's cross was magnified by his brothers' betrayal into death. They cast him into a pit, while dreaming up a story of vindication. When greed overcame their desire for blood, they sold him into slavery. Reuben's weakhearted attempts were too little and too late. He valued favor with his brothers more than the life of his father's son. Good intentions do not produce good works. What humans mean for evil, God uses for good.

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Preparing the Lesson

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Joseph's Troubles

Genesis 39

Key Point

The Lord was with Joseph and, through him, saved Joseph's family and others. God promises to be with us in every situation, and through His Son, Jesus, a descendant of Joseph's brother Judah, God saves us from our sin.

Law/Gospel

I sin when I do not want to live out my vocation or forget that God is with me in my troubles; these sins, like all sin, condemn me to eternal death. **Nevertheless, God is with me in all my troubles and offers me and all who sin His steadfast love and mercy for the sake of His Son, Jesus.**

Context

Joseph's brothers get rid of the dreamer. The brothers cover up their evil with lies and blood, and Joseph's father refuses to be comforted. The sons of the Egyptian slave woman (Genesis 21:8–21; 39:1; Galatians 4:21–25) sell the favored son of their father into slavery. Against his will, Joseph becomes the leader of an Egyptian household. The Lord is with him.

Commentary

The theme of God's presence in all of Joseph's circumstances is central (Genesis 39:2, 3, 21, 23). The Lord is always working for the good of His own. Joseph serves Potiphar well. Joseph knows how to manage details and oversee things. "The LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" (Genesis 39:5)—every unbelieving one of them. God allows Joseph to suffer while allowing his evil brothers to get off free. He allows Potiphar and his indecent wife to prosper. All this God does for the purpose of preserving His people and working good for those who love Him.

Joseph knows and accepts his vocation. Potiphar's wife does not know her vocation. It is not Joseph's role to share intimacies with this woman. That is Potiphar's vocation. So Joseph says no to her ambush and invitations with a muscular "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). It is sin against God, against Potiphar, against her, and against Joseph's own body and calling. And so it is "wicked." That's the right word—God's word. Joseph rightly sees everything that this sin will touch, and he answers well. He still gets no reward for it.

In fact, Joseph receives another cross. His newest humiliation is to go down even further, into prison. The godly one suffers. The Lord is with him? Yes. God is doing something with Joseph in another vocation—this one in prison, with shackled feet and an iron collar around his neck (Psalm 105:17–22). All this looks forward to another vocation.

"The LORD was with Joseph," Genesis keeps repeating. He was with the slave Joseph, the seduced Joseph, and the shackled Joseph. Through it all, the Lord showed him steadfast love. Love—so the Lord could save His people at that time and bless the nations of the world through Jacob's other offspring. Love—so the Lord could show you Jesus, steadfast love incarnate. God did all that, with Joseph, for you.

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Joseph Feeds Egypt

Genesis 40–41

Key Point

God used Joseph to save His people, all Egypt, and other nations from famine. He sent His Son, Jesus, to save all humanity from sin, death, and the devil.

Law/Gospel

My sin causes suffering for me and for my neighbor, and I cannot take care of it. **In His love, God takes care of my needs, both physical and spiritual, forgiving all my sins for the sake of Jesus, who suffered, died, and rose again for me.**

Context

Joseph was thrown into an Egyptian prison after the false accusation of Potiphar's wife. Yet he gained favor in the sight of the prison keeper. God, through the authority of the prison keeper, placed all prisoners under Joseph's authority. The Lord was with Joseph, and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.

Commentary

Joseph is an example of patience under the cross. Joseph's exaltation to second in charge of Egypt does not come about without suffering and pain. Only after years of God's forming, planning, and pruning of the rough branches is Joseph finally formed. Just like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob before him, Joseph trusted the Lord's promises despite every appearance, and he waited for the Lord's time rather than force his own (Psalm 37:5).

God was with Joseph and granted him such outstanding faith. Finally, God comes and liberates him in a wonderful manner, even though Joseph's feet were hurt with fetters and he was laid in irons. Yet, unbelieving Pharaoh raises Joseph out of prison (Psalm 105:18, 20).

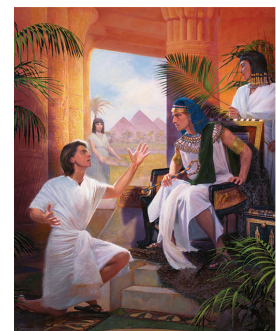
God uses the dreamer to interpret the dreams of others. He who dreamed about sheaves of wheat, the sun, the moon, and the stars now discerns the dreams of the butler, the baker, and even of Pharaoh himself. God spoke in visions and dreams and sent Joseph to discern the will and Word of the Lord. God was saving His people Israel through Joseph's hand (Psalm 105:16–17).

God's plan for the salvation of His people required Egypt. No one is as discerning and wise as he to whom God gives the Holy Spirit.

So Pharaoh elevates Joseph to the command of a foreign land. God blesses Pharaoh and his unbelieving nation in order to bless believing Joseph and, through him, all of the children of Israel. The Word and promises of God are sure. The time is coming for Him to call His Son out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15).



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Joseph Forgives

Genesis 42–45; 50:15–21



Key Point

Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and forgave them. Our Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself to us and forgives us in His Holy Word and Sacraments.

Law/Gospel

The sin I refuse to confess troubles my conscience and separates me from others and from God. **In His mercy, God invites me to confess my sins and promises to forgive them for Jesus' sake.**

Context

Pharaoh made Joseph second only to himself as head over all of Egypt because Joseph was able to discern the dreams God gave him. The seven years of plenty were now over, and the seven years of prophesied famine had begun. The famine was so severe that Jacob's family, who lived in the land of Canaan, felt the effects of the famine and needed grain from Egypt to survive. Jacob sent his ten sons to Egypt for grain; only Benjamin, his beloved, did not go. The ten made the journey to Egypt, fully aware of their sin of selling their brother into slavery.

Commentary

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. This provides him with an opportunity to bring his family down to Egypt. God used Joseph to save Egypt; now God is saving the family of promise by means of this heathen country. The promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the main focus of this narrative. God promises to give the land of Canaan to Israel. God promises to give Jacob descendants beyond measure. And most important, God promises that the Savior will be born within this family.

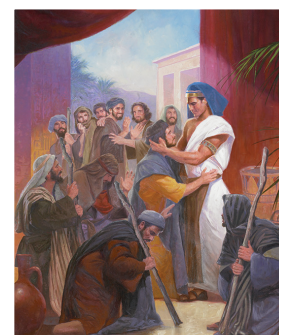
The ten brothers are sent to Egypt for grain. Jacob's decision to keep Benjamin at home to prevent him from "some calamity" is altogether human and foolish, as though Benjamin could not die at home, as though his welfare and life were in Jacob's power. If such a patriarch as Jacob, a man provided with great promises, displays such weakness, what courage can we have in dangers and trials?

These things are written to instruct and comfort us (Romans 15:4), in order that we may learn to trust God and work patiently in our God-given vocation. God gives us dangers, trials, and terrors so that we will learn to despair of our own strength and to rely on Him and His promises.

This was also the purpose of Joseph's meeting with his brothers. Joseph acted the way he did toward his brothers not because he wanted them to suffer for their sins, but because he wanted to stir up repentance in them. The terrors and troubles that this caused his brothers were not for Joseph's pleasure or revenge, but for the salvation of their souls. Recognition of sin must precede forgiveness.

Joseph reveals himself to his brothers at the great feast and forgives them, reminding us of how Jesus reveals Himself and forgives us in the divine feast of the Eucharist. Later, after their father dies, he assures them again of his forgiveness, telling them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive" (Genesis 50:20). In all, God's will is done. The brothers repent; Joseph forgives; Israel is saved from famine.

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The Birth of Moses

Exodus 1:1–2:10

Key Point

Through Moses, the Lord saved His people from slavery in Egypt. Through Christ, God saves all people from the bondage of sin and death.

Law/Gospel

In this world, I am enslaved by the demands of Satan.
God's Son, Jesus, was born to set me free from the slavery of sin, death, and the devil.

Context

God declared to Abraham that his descendants would “be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13).

Since Joseph had saved Egypt from famine, four hundred years of bondage to Egypt proved to be God's true prophetic Word for His people. The birth of Moses is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that afterward, Israel would “come out with great possessions” (Genesis 15:14).

Commentary

“I'm beat!” We all utter this expression from time to time. It is a simple way to say we are tired, busy, and overwhelmed by the forces of this fallen world and our own sinful flesh. Without relief, we easily become consumed by worry. Our despair at bitter tasks can lead us to unbelief.

Israel was “beat.” By the time of Moses' birth, the fruition of God's dire prediction of four hundred years of servitude is evident. God's promise to Abraham of relief must have seemed small and remote compared with the sore backs and calloused hands that bricks, mortar, and forced labor produced. Pharaoh's decree to have all of the sons of Israel killed at birth must have left Israel debilitated in their despair.

Into this world of pessimism, God delivers a son from the house of Levi. Through divine guidance, the midwives defy the death command, and the baby floats downriver to become a son of the household of Pharaoh himself. In this child, the Lord has now provided for His people hope of salvation from their servitude.

Likewise, God declares, “Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Matthew 2:15). In spite of a similar death sentence from Herod, a Hebrew maidservant delivered the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Under the watchful eyes of this new Miriam, Jesus would sail into the hands of the house of Pharaoh, the devil himself, where He would suffer the bitterest toil for us. On His back, He would carry the rigors of our servitude to sin all the way to Golgotha. Our Savior would rescue more than the Hebrews. He would free all nations from the bitter toil of our sins and leave the world “beat.”

In His Word, Christ breathes healing back into our sin-enslaved souls. In His Word, He proclaims to us, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). May we continue to hear the voice of our new and better Moses, the sweet Word of our gentle and lowly Servant, who gives rest for our weary souls.



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Moses and the Burning Bush

Exodus 2:11–4:31



Key Point

As God had Moses remove the sandals from his feet, God, in Christ, removes our sins from us, making us fit to approach God and stand in His presence.

Law/Gospel

Because of sin, I cannot approach the Lord. **Christ removes my sin so that I am declared blameless before God.**

Context

Moses kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew servant. Moses flees to Midian. In so doing, Moses chooses “rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:25–26). In the form of a burning bush, God reveals to Moses that He will deliver Israel into a thorn-free land “flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8).

Commentary

We all want to be accepted and loved exactly “as we are.” God says, “Cursed is the ground because of you; . . . thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you” (Genesis 3:17–18). On account of our sin, God removes us from His holy presence in His first Eden and clothes our shameful bodies. Our sin, our being “as we are,” places us in a more fitting land, where the very ground produces thorns and thistles.

In our accursed land, Moses shepherds his flock. Of all humanity, God might at least accept His chosen Moses just “as he is.” Yet God says, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). God alone is holy. God abhors anything less in His presence. Moses cannot come “as he is.” He must leave behind the reminder of our first clothing and resulting expulsion from Eden, even his sandals.

Nevertheless, who can approach the Lord without downcast eyes? We cannot “as we are.” We cannot without God’s only Son. Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ has taken the very form of our curse, the thorns and thistles of our cursed ground.

Even more so, the same God who shows Himself to Moses in the burning bush appears again on a new and deadlier tree. Again, He adorns His head in a crown of thorns. On this tree, He removes the effects of the curse from us forever. The thorns and nails of that tree cannot extinguish the burning yet unconsumed light of the world! Indeed, He perseveres even unto death and rises again so that we might know that by His becoming our curse, we are now eternally blessed.

During the Divine Service, we see God loving us because of the thorn-encrusted head of His Son. He beckons us to approach Him and confess our sins, and the great I AM forgives our sins in Absolution on account of Christ’s thorn-pierced brow. The Lord removes these sins from us even as He removed Moses’ sandals from his feet. In Absolution, God accepts us not “as we are,” but for who Jesus is and what He did on Calvary for us. May the Lord continue to direct us to Confession and Absolution so that we may receive the curse-removing love of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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Moses and the Plagues

Exodus 5–10



Key Point

Through a series of horrific plagues, God punished the Egyptians for their sinful treatment of God's people and freed His people from bondage. Through His horrific suffering and death on the cross, Jesus takes the punishment for our sin and frees us from sin's bondage.

Law/Gospel

On my own, I see no need for God in my life or in the world. **Christ suffered and died on the cross to free me from the bondage of sin, enabling me to see that He is the one I need most in this world.**

Context

Moses returns to Egypt to speak God's words to Pharaoh: "Let My people go" (Exodus 5:1). God inflicts ten plagues upon Egypt, but Pharaoh hardens his heart and refuses to let the Hebrews go.

Commentary

We know our birth dates. We know our favorite sports teams and musicians. We know every desire that can be described as "ours." Yet do we know the Lord God, whose speaking brings about amazing miracles?

Pharaoh does not know the Lord. At the coming of Moses, many gods are vying for legitimacy in Pharaoh's land. After four hundred years of Israel's oppression, the Lord introduces Himself. In the hand of Moses, God's staff-turned-snake devours the staffs of false gods. God's staff turns the waters of Egypt into blood. Frogs, gnats, flies, disease, boils, hail and fire from heaven, locusts, and three days of darkness leave Egypt in shambles. Even with God Himself speaking to Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart continually hardens to the reality of the Lord's existence.

Without a miracle, our "Pharaoh-flesh" hardens to the reality of the Lord's existence. Astonishingly, God does not content Himself with our desires. God multiplies His signs so His "name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exodus 9:16).

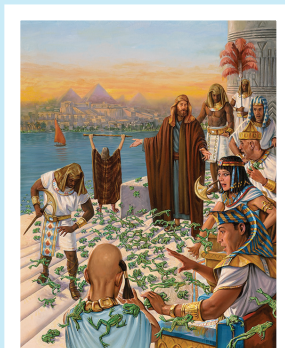
"All the earth" is Pharaoh. "All the earth" is us too! God acts to redeem all people. Egypt receives the bloody rivers, famines, and darkened days of God's "wake-up call" so that the Lord might pull all the earth out of unbelief and into knowledge of Him as uniquely God.

In the ten plagues of Egypt, God spoke to His people of old. "But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:2). However, God's language is the same. He speaks deliverance for His people through miraculous signs.

As the casting of Aaron's staff causes the plagues of Egypt, so Christ's cross punishes our Disease-bearer for the pestilences of our hardened hearts. As the rivers of Egypt ran red with supernatural blood, so the outpouring of Christ's blood shatters our inward gazing and lifts our eyes to behold the plague of hardness being purged from our hearts. For three hours, Christ suffered utter darkness on Calvary. Thus, the Lord introduces Himself to the world as her Savior. In Christ's cross, we know God as He is. His indefatigable love is for us all.

Through the retelling of Christ's plague-ridden crucifixion, the Lord shatters the walls of our hardened hearts. He produces faith that God not only justly punished our self-idolatry on Calvary, but also loves us so much that He invites us to know Him as He is—pure mercy. This knowledge of God's love in His Son fashions us as His new Israel and brings us from servitude into His heavenly kingdom.

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The Passover

Exodus 11–12

Key Point

Christ is our Passover Lamb, whose blood was shed for our forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Law/Gospel

As a sinner, I fear death. **In Christ, I look forward to eternal life; I no longer have to fear death.**

Context

Pharaoh's continued unbelief unleashes the tenth and final plague on Egypt. God Himself swoops onto the land at midnight and kills the firstborn sons of all Egypt. However, He saves those who, in faith, take hyssop and smear their doorposts in the blood of a male lamb without blemish. The Passover finally causes Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go.

Commentary

God works in mysterious ways. Rationally, we cannot fathom how the sacrificing of a year-old male lamb without blemish can turn back almighty God in His righteous anger. We cannot understand how the blood of a lamb smeared on the doorposts of a house deters death from entering Hebrew households. How can eating this slain lamb bring forth the grace of God in the place of certain death?

Only in faith. Pointing to Jesus, John the Baptizer says to us, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). When our Paschal Lamb drinks from the wine-drenched hyssop branch on the wooden doorposts of His cross, God marks the world as redeemed. God forever ensures that He will now pass over all who look in faith for deliverance from eternal death to His firstborn Son, slain. By Christ's coating of the cross in His holy blood, He destroys the power of death over us and delivers us into everlasting life.

It is no coincidence that Christ institutes His Holy Supper on the day "on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed" (Luke 22:7).

On this day, Christ takes bread and wine and speaks faith-fathomable reality: "Take, eat; this is My body. . . . Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood" (Matthew 26:26–28). When we partake of the Supper, we eat the very flesh of the new Passover Lamb. Christ puts His holy blood on the doorposts of our mouths at the altar. Thus, He passes over every reality-denying bit of us and gives us tangible proof of His mercy, for we "taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Psalm 34:8).

In His Supper, Christ causes us to put aside reason and look upon Him in faith. He gives us this faith so that we see Him in true reality, as the Lamb without blemish whose death rescues us from the sin-directed wrath of God. "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). May the God of all mercy continue to call us in faith to His altar, so that we may receive the blessings of His sacrificial death in our eating of the flesh of our Paschal Lamb, Jesus Christ.



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Crossing the Red Sea

Exodus 13:17–15:21



Key Point

As God saved the Hebrews through the water of the Red Sea, He saves us through the washing of water in Holy Baptism, conquering Satan, our greatest enemy.

Law/Gospel

The waves of this sinful world surge around me and drain me of life. **The waters of Holy Baptism wash me clean of sin and grant me life eternal.**

Context

Pharaoh lets the Hebrews go, but he soon regrets having done so. Pharaoh unleashes his unholy host upon the hapless Hebrews and quickly overtakes them. God fights for His people as a pillar of cloud and fire. In the hand of Moses, God's staff parts the Red Sea, thereby giving dry ground so the children of Israel might cross. Afterward, God topples the watery walls of the sea and destroys the very army bent on the destruction of His people.

Commentary

Hopeless! Perhaps we feel hopeless at times. We see no way out of our situations. Our sins, this world, even the devil and his minions envelop our entire view and obscure all hope.

The Israelites feel hopeless. All the wanting in the world cannot give them the power to defeat the mighty armies seeking to subjugate them again. Likewise, wave after wave of watery death stands before them. Fearing the circumstances, they respond naturally by grumbling: "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" (Exodus 14:11). Whereas our eyes see only death by sword or water, God speaks salvation: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Exodus 14:13). Thus, the water parts, providing a pathway to paradise for God's people.

This salvation for the children of Israel in the crossing of the Red Sea foreshadows the watery deliverance of the new Israel.

Thus, "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:2). Likewise, in the Red Sea of Christ's crucifixion, Christ's blood purges the demonic death grip that the devil has on God's creation. On Calvary, Christ takes the worst that this world can dish out and bears the marks of our sinful complaints on His beaten and bloodied body.

Thus, Christ restores hope for us. God gives this hope to us in His same watery way. In our Baptism, we "stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD." God tinges crimson our Red Sea baptismal fonts by the blood of His Son. In our consecrated baptismal waters, God washes away our sinful griping and the pursuing Egyptian demons.

From font to funeral, God continually fills us with His hope because He drenched us by His "washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). We are never hopeless because God promises to fight for us. "Let us draw near . . . with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:22–23).

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God Provides Manna, Water, and Quail

Exodus 16–17

Date of Use _____



Key Point

In Christ, God feeds us with the manna of His Word and the water of His forgiveness, satisfying our eternal hunger and quenching our spiritual thirst.

Law/Gospel

My attempts to satisfy myself with all good things cannot fill the void that sin creates in my life. **Christ—by His suffering, death, and resurrection—fills me to overflowing with His life-giving grace and mercy.**

Context

Escaping the clutches of drowned Pharaoh, the Israelites find themselves wandering in the desert without food and water. Humankind, in sinful unbelief, soon begins to grumble about the lack of amenities. Yet, God provides for His people. God “commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven, and He rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven” (Psalm 78:23–24). Moreover, God Himself stands before Moses on the rock. As Moses strikes, water gushes forth to quench Israel’s thirst.

Commentary

Any number of life’s maladies can overwhelm us and leave us hanging out to dry in our deserts of doubt. A job loss or a serious illness can leave us fretting over the basic things of this world, even food and drink.

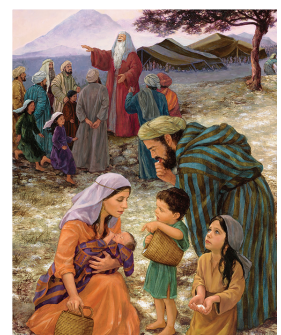
The Israelites worry too, because they hunger. Sand seemingly scattered everywhere disheartens this group of depressed desert drifters. A Promised Land flowing with milk and honey seems worlds away to ravenous stomachs and dry, chapped lips. This anxious distrust in the Father festers into sinful unbelief.

“Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?” (Matthew 7:9). If we, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven give good gifts! God always acts against our unbelief. He loves us enough to provide for us. Thus, God rains bread from heaven for His people and creates water from a rock simply by the striking of a staff.

Likewise, our Father gives us the true bread from heaven, Jesus Christ. God provides us His Son so that we “shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). In His Word, we partake of the same spiritual rock from which the Israelites drank, for “the Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Regardless of the extent of our desert surroundings, we have no worries because God fills us with Christ through His Word! On account of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice, His Word speaks absolution. In His Word, forgiveness rains down as manna. Forgiveness pours forth as soothing waters from our Rock’s stricken side. This water, infused with grace, quenches our thirsting throats and reinvigorates worry-worn souls. Satiated by the Word, let us with carefree hearts “make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!” (Psalm 95:1).

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The Ten Commandments

Exodus 19–20



Key Point

The Law kills, but the Gospel revives. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

Law/Gospel

The Ten Commandments define God’s Law. **Jesus, through His incarnation and by His suffering and death for my sins, defines God’s love and mercy toward me.**

Context

In the burning bush, God answers Moses’ question, saying, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). God fulfills this promise and delivers the Israelites to the base of Mount Sinai. Here, in the midst of the smoldering smoke that shrouds the summit, God gives Moses the Ten Commandments.

Commentary

After parting the seas for us, showering us with manna from heaven, and bringing forth water from a rock to quench our thirst, the Lord prepares to give us a far superior gift. “Let them . . . be ready for the third day” (Exodus 19:10–11), because the Law is coming.

The great cloud descends first “like the smoke of a kiln” (Exodus 19:18), blocking out the light and obscuring our view. Next, we hear the deafening trumpet of God Himself purifying the air before His holy presence. At the sound, the soldiers lift their spears, ready to carry out the Lord’s orders. Should a person’s hand or foot touch the mountain, “he shall not live” (Exodus 19:13). Our eardrums nearly burst from the thunderclaps as lightning flashes threateningly all around us. Last, God’s condemning voice rains vocal death on us in the proclamation of the Ten Commandments. Fear chills the very marrow of our shaking souls as we realize that we can never keep such holy commands.

Through the haze of our singed, stinging, and tear-filled eyes, we see an unassuming figure step forward through the cowering crowd. His broken and bruised back, anointed by the bloodied whip, bears our Law-demanded cross. As He steps on that mountain in our stead, He willingly acquires our death sentence. The soldiers carry out God’s command, crucifying Christ. This “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3) pours out His soul to death and is numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12). The mountains tremble, a cloud of darkness descends, and a soldier spears the One who came not “to abolish the Law or the Prophets” but “to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).

Indeed, let us be ready for the third day. The Law kills, but the Gospel revives. When the final earthquakes of the Law reverberate and die on that third day, a tomb sits empty. At this tomb, His angel soothes our ears with His peace-packed proclamation: “Do not be afraid. . . . He is not here, for He has risen, as He said” (Matthew 28:5–6).

While “the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Tears of fear melt into joy. May we always live in Christ, through whom “everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39).

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Preparing the Lesson

Date of Use

Worship in the Tabernacle

Exodus 40



Key Point

In the tabernacle, God dwelled with His people, cleansing them and making them holy through the blood of sacrifices. In Christ, God now dwells among us, cleansing us and making us holy through Jesus' blood, shed for us on the cross.

Law/Gospel

My sin makes me unholy and separates me from God; I am unworthy to stand in His presence. **God cleanses me, makes me holy, and dwells in me through the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.**

Context

The Israelites are camped at Sinai, almost a year after their exodus from Egypt. The Ten Commandments have been received . . . and almost immediately shattered when the golden calf is constructed. But God has provided a means of atonement for the people: the altar and blood of sacrifice.

The Lord has shown Moses a heavenly tabernacle after which he is to model the earthly tabernacle. Earth reflects heaven. Indeed, heaven is present on earth as the heavenly Lord takes up residence within the tabernacle. Afterward, as recorded in Leviticus, the Lord will institute the various sacrifices by which He will maintain fellowship with His nation.

Commentary

Eden was a sanctuary of sorts, where humans lived and worked in perfect communion with God. But in the post-Eden world, where death and sin strangled creation, where were humans to turn? Where was the "Eden" where they could be made right with God? The Lord made a new garden. The tabernacle became this new Eden for all fallen Adams and Eves. Here, they could return to the Lord and be purified and made holy through the bloody sacrifices instituted by God for their sake. The place even had the look of a garden, with various flora and fauna woven into the very fabric of the tent. Everything about the sanctuary visually proclaimed, "Welcome home, sons of Adam and daughters of Eve! Welcome back to Eden!"

As Eden opened on the east (Genesis 3:24), so did the tabernacle. There, Israelites reentered God's holy place via the altar, and *only* via the altar. There, the blood of bulls, goats, sheep, and doves was poured out. This blood was not simple blood, but blood ordained by God through His Word. God did not need it; sinners did. The sacrifices were for their benefit. By it, they were cleaned, renewed, and made holy.

God's dwelling within the tabernacle also foreshadowed a future, more intimate dwelling of God among people. For the Word became flesh and dwelt (literally, "tabernacled") among us (John 1:14). The Son made our flesh His own; the Creator assumed the stuff of His own creation. His body is our tabernacle, holy and pure.

Baptized into His pure and holy body, we are pure and holy also. We enter where no Old Testament high priest ever could: into the body of God Himself. He cleanses and sanctifies us. Through His once-for-all sacrifice, we are welcomed back into a new Eden: the Church.

Exodus 40 stresses that Moses made everything exactly as God instructed him. Nothing was done willy-nilly; for just as everything in creation had its right place, so in this place of new creation, everything had its right place. For here, God re-created fallen sinners, refashioned them in His image, and restored them to fellowship with Him. In doing all this, He gave an ongoing preview of what He would do in His Son, who is our Tabernacle, our Priest, our Sacrifice, and our Holiness.

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Preparing the Lesson

Date of Use _____

The Bronze Serpent

Numbers 21:4–9



Key Point

As the bronze serpent was lifted up to heal and save the Israelites from the snakes, so Christ was lifted up on the cross to heal and save us from sin, death, and the devil.

Law/Gospel

Bitten and poisoned by sin and death, I complain when life is not what I want. **God calls me to repentance and points me to Christ, who heals me by His death and resurrection.**

Context

Forty years have passed since the nation began their wanderings as punishment for their rebellion (Numbers 13–14). A new generation is about to be given their chance to enter the Promised Land.

But like father, like son—their mouths are full of murmuring, for their hearts are overflowing with mistrust of God's benevolence. The woebegone desert in which they travel prompts them to throw a national pity party. After this incident, they will prove victor over enemy nations and encamp in the land east of the Jordan to prepare for Moses' farewell sermons (Deuteronomy) and their entry under Joshua's leadership.

Commentary

In Scripture, the snake is the devil's pet. Ever since Satan hissed his lies through that serpentine mouth in Eden, these reptiles have been demonized. Hardly does the Bible have a good word to say about them; in fact, quite the opposite. Even when Moses' and Aaron's staffs are transformed into snakes (Exodus 4:3; 7:9–12), they are hardly treated as "man's best friend."

It comes as no surprise, then, that of all the animals chosen to plague the grumbling, unbelieving Israelites in the desert, snakes were the chosen weapon. These were "fiery serpents," which probably refers not to their appearance (as if they were glowing) but to the effect of their venom on the human body. Not only did it burn, however; it also killed.

This is a radical call to repentance. But as the psalmist says, "When He killed them, they sought Him" (Psalm 78:34).

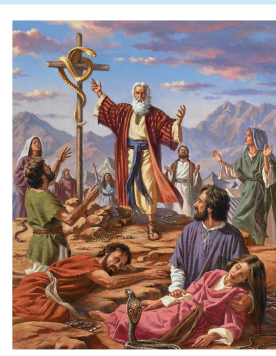
Sometimes, one has to come face-to-face with death to face up to his or her sin and seek the face of the living God. So it was for Israel. So it is oftentimes for us.

The confession of the people is good and right. They have sinned against God and His chosen leader. But what they want is not what they need. They don't need a divine St. Patrick to clear their little desert Ireland of serpents.

Christ knows what they need: a visible conduit for His healing, a medicine that is in the very image of the problem itself. They need a serpent of salvation, and that's what God gives them. The bronze serpent, uplifted on the pole, is the means chosen to grant healing and relief. Under the guise of these deadly serpents, this bronze serpent works not death but life. Through it, Christ saves.

In John 3:14, Jesus says that as Moses raised this serpent in the wilderness, so He, too, must be lifted up on the cross to draw all men to Himself. Hidden under the guise of a condemned sinner is the Holy One of God. He has become our sin, *the* sinner, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ is our true "serpent of salvation," in whom we are healed from the venom of sin and death.

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