



LIBERATING
FAITH STUDIES

THE RIGHTEOUS REIGN OF GOD

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The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary
as a signal for silence
 - II. Singing
 - III. The Apostles' Creed
 - IV. Prayer, closing with the
Lord's Prayer in concert
 - V. Singing
 - VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
 - VII. Responsive reading
of the lesson text by school
 - VIII. The Decalogue
-

The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while
the classes are being arranged
 - II. Class study of the lesson
 - III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
 - IV. Closing bell — silence
-

The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application
of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

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Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Dr. Catherine S. Powers

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

The Home Daily Bible Readings will continue to appear at the end of each Sunday's lesson but they will be the readings for the following week. We made this change in response to your requests. The readings for the first week are on the following page.

For over a year we have used Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

This virtual AME Connectional Church School was birthed due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The blessings from the teachings have been immeasurable. We will continue this Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894. Visit our website- www.iamame.org- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

Like our Facebook page so you will be informed about programming and important announcements from the Publishing House and *The Christian Recorder*: www.facebook.com/amecpublishing.

Join our Facebook Group to continue conversations after Church School and share ideas, thoughts, and best practices with other AME Church School members and teachers: www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool.

Thank you for purchasing *Liberating Faith Studies*. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin
President/Publisher

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 29–June 4

Monday	Isaiah 42:1-7 (God's Servant Will Establish Justice)
Tuesday	Galatians 2:16b-21 (Live by Faith, Not Works)
Wednesday	Isaiah 49:1-13 (My Servant Shall Restore Israel)
Thursday	Isaiah 49:14-23 (God Will Not Forget You)
Friday	1 Thessalonians 3:11–4:8 (God Desires You Live in Purity)
Saturday	Colossians 3:8-17 (Clothe Yourselves with Love)
Sunday	Isaiah 52:1-12 (You Shall Be Redeemed)

Your God Reigns

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 52:1-12

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 52:7-12

Key Verse: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, ... who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Isaiah 52:7 (NRSV)

ISAIAH 52:7-12 (NRSV)

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

8 Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion.

9 Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

10 The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

11 Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord.

12 For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

ISAIAH 52:7-12 (KJV)

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

9 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

10 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

11 Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.

12 For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward.

KEY TERM

- **Isaiah** – Hebrew term: “God is salvation.”

INTRODUCTION

“The Righteous Reign of God” is the overarching theme for this quarter’s lessons. Old Testament affirmations of God’s matchless power initiate our exploration of studies that culminate with Jesus, the Messiah, teaching about God’s kingdom. There are three units of study:

Unit I, “The Prophets Proclaim God’s Power,” is a five-week study, exploring four Old Testament prophets’ depictions of God’s supreme rulership. Unit II, “Jesus Envisions the Kingdom,” comprises four sessions devoted to Jesus’ teachings as recorded in Matthew’s gospel. Unit III, “God’s Eternal Reign,”

presents four sessions of studies from New Testament epistles that explore promises and potentialities of life under God’s sovereign rule.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The commandment to “love God with

all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4) was the last commandment God conveyed through Moses to the Israelites. The Israelites were on the brink of entering the long-awaited Promised Land. God also instructed them to teach this commandment to their children and others, and to pass it on intergenerationally. Unfortunately, the Israelites repeatedly disobeyed God.

Encouragement for the Oppressed, Isaiah 52:1-6

The Israelites were on the brink of entering the long-awaited Promised Land.

Events in today’s lesson occurred as God was about to rescue the Israelites from the Babylonians. For seventy years, as prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah (29:10-11), the nation had endured oppressive suffering while being exiled to Babylon. God allowed this calamity

because Israel turned from God to seek safety and protection through ungodly alliances with other nations – first Assyria, and later Babylon. Consequently, the Israelites were treated as vassals, who were forced to pay homage to pagan

governments and their idol gods. Therefore, Isaiah was speaking to a wearied audience, who for the prolonged period had been demeaned and severely oppressed.

Isaiah had good news for Israel! God was about to execute another exodus, with strong parallels to Israel's exodus from Egypt. In their distress, the Israelites at one point (Isaiah 51:9) inferred that God was asleep. In response, God made it clear that it was Israel who was asleep, and not God (Isaiah 52:1). He admonished them to "wake up, be strong and beautiful again" (v. 1). He was referring to the need for repentance and spiritual cleansing. They have not only been physically imprisoned, but also spiritually imprisoned. Although they had been sold without a price, which refers to their having willingly indentured themselves, God still valued and loved them. Their rulers were even mocking

God! But this was about to end as God asserted his purpose in allowing his people to suffer. Sovereign God must reign supreme in their lives (v. 6)!

The Joys of Deliverance, Isaiah 52:7-10

The metaphoric picture of the

“He prophesied that a special messenger or deliverer would come to bring good news, establishing God eternally as supreme ruler over the entire world. Jesus Christ was the messenger of whom Isaiah spoke.”

“beautiful feet” of a special messenger vividly portrays events to come. Historically, special messengers were employed to bring news from the battlefield. Isaiah makes it clear that salvation is free, but a price would be paid by someone else. He prophesied that a special messenger or deliverer would come to bring good news, establishing God eternally as supreme ruler over the entire world. Jesus Christ was the messenger of

whom Isaiah spoke.

God Promises Redemption, Isaiah 52:11-12

Isaiah implored the Israelites to prepare for departure from Babylon. Unlike the Egyptian exile, however, the people were not to bring tangible items from Babylon to Jerusalem. Spiritual cleansing for themselves was imperative! Even things used in worshipping God while in Babylon were to be left behind. Also, they didn't need to anticipate a call to leave Babylon in haste, and neither would they be forced to run away or chased. The Lord God would lead them out of Babylon and guard them.

SANKOFA

Physical and spiritual bondage are still prevalent today. Unlike physical bondage, spiritual bondage is not always visible. Israel's physical captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians gives insights into the negative effects of physical bondage on the human spirit. Unfortunately, one of the most vivid manifestations of physical bondage today is the escalation of incarceration rates in minority communities. Incarceration is too often accepted as an ever-present reality in

minority cultures. Yet, reliable studies continuously demonstrate racial injustices and inequalities in our justice system to be significant contributors to incarceration rates. For example, black Americans comprise only 13% of the United States' general population, but they comprise 38% of the jail and prison populations in the country.

According to *U.S. News* (Oct. 13, 2021),



The Lord God would lead them out of Babylon and guard them.

average incarceration rates throughout the United States reflect findings that indicate black Americans are about five times more likely to be incarcerated than white Americans. In some states, the disparity may be even greater! Latinos are imprisoned 1.3 times more often than white Americans.

The negative effects of the astronomical numbers of incarcerations upon individuals, their families, and communities are too numerous to discuss in this lesson. Obviously, God's plans for human life (Jeremiah 29:11) are negatively impacted by these trends. Jesus commanded that we are to "love thy

neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39b). A need for prison ministries of various kinds is highly indicated.

For greater illumination on underlying evils related to incarcerations, consult literary works such as Michelle Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, published reports from governmental agencies, and advocacy groups, such as *The Innocence Project* (<https://www.innocenceproject.org/>) should be reviewed).

CASE STUDY

At the time of this writing, Russia’s incarceration of Britney Griner, an African American citizen and Women’s Basketball Association star, is gaining world-wide attention. She is accused of having attempted to leave Russia with an illegal item/substance in her bags. However, the United States State Department has determined that Ms. Griner is being wrongfully detained. Although she has already been detained more than 90 days, and scheduled hearing dates have been extended three

times, she still has not had a hearing, and no approximate release date is being reported.

International politics are obviously more determinative in outcomes for this case than Ms. Griner’s behavior or the justice she deserves. Yet, we must be concerned for her safety and protection as well as the sufferings her family and loved ones are experiencing as a result of

this ordeal. We are “duty bound” to do what we can for all prisoners. Jesus did not refer to guilt or innocence of individuals to be determining factors in the judgments he promises to exact upon disciples. He simply noted inclusiveness with his determination that, “I was in prison, and you visited me not” (Matt. 25:43b). (Griner was released on December

8, 2022 through a prisoner swap.)

LIFE APPLICATION

We live in a world in which chaos is more prevalent than peace. Violence and social, economic, and political oppressions are becoming increasingly common place. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we can be assured that he is aware



We are “duty bound”
to do what we can for
all prisoners.

of every situation in our lives. He is also never surprised or outmaneuvered for our God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. Our peace is not contingent upon the absence of troubles, but on the presence of God, our beliefs in him, and trust in his Word (spoken and living). When we rely on “remedies” other than God’s plans for coping with stresses, idolatry is likely to result. Just as the Israelites could have chosen to seek God, and only him, to bring peace and security in their lives, we have the same choice: seek God’s resolutions or human solutions.

QUESTIONS

1. What impact do you expect this lesson will have on your daily life experiences?
2. How could this lesson be used to help others overcome anger, fear, anxiety, depression, and other negative reactions to adversity/oppressive conditions?
3. What actions do you suggest should be taken to stay focused on God in the midst of chaotic experiences?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: “Trust and Obey” (AME Hymnal #377)

Closing Prayer: Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank you for your presence, your love, and protection in our lives. Please forgive us for the times we have strayed from you by following our own decisions or those of other people. We pledge our loyalty today and recommit to living according to your will, dedicated to serving and pleasing you, to the best of our abilities, in all that we think and do. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 5-June 11

Monday	Ezekiel 47:1-13 (The River of Life)
Tuesday	John 16:20-33 (Receiving Everlasting Joy)
Wednesday	James 3:13-18 (The Right Kind of Spirit)
Thursday	Psalms 4 (Peace in the Midst of Distress)
Friday	Psalms 46 (God Is Our Refuge)
Saturday	Ephesians 2:11-22 (Christ Is Our Peace)
Sunday	Isaiah 65:17-25 (A New Heaven and Earth)

GOD'S KINGDOM OF PEACE

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 65:17-25

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 65:17-25

Key Verse: The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent – its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. Isaiah 65:25 (NRSV)

ISAIAH 65:17-25 (NRSV)

17 For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

20 No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

23 They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well.

24 Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

ISAIAH 65:17-25 (KJV)

17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

21 And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.

KEY TERM

- **Re-Creation** – In the context of the lesson, to create again. God is undoing and re-doing things to create a new world and new way of being. In regular use, the term is used to refer to play and making merry with the assumption that such acts also create again and renews in small but important ways.

INTRODUCTION

“The Righteous Reign of God” is thematically portrayed in today’s scriptures, which are also from the Isaiah’s prophecies. As reflected in our **Key Verse**, the imagery in this prophecy strengthens the impact and relevance of Isaiah’s verbal messages.

Concreteness is added through depictions of the “new life” that God promises will exist eternally for the faithful, who are chosen to become inhabitants of the “new heavens and new earth.” God will be the sovereign ruler (Is. 65:17-25)! Reading the entire 65th chapter of Isaiah

is recommended for contextualization that creates deeper understandings of the prophetic messages.

Isaiah is known as the *Messianic Prophet* because he, more than other Old Testament prophets, spoke about the Messiah. In last week’s scriptures, Isaiah introduced Jesus Christ as a “special messenger” with beautiful feet (Is. 52:7).


Isaiah is known as the Messianic Prophet because he, more than other Old Testament prophets, spoke about the Messiah.

In other scriptures, he introduced Jesus as “the suffering servant,” (Is. 52:13), who would intercede to pay for humankind’s sin and “open the door to salvation for all.” Today’s lesson focuses on the benefits of Jesus’ life and sacrifices on our behalf.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Israel and Judah were separate nations at this time. Isaiah prophesied primarily to Judah. The nation of Judah rejected Isaiah’s warnings about the dangers of making alliances with other nations when they should have been turning to God. Consequently, Judah, like Israel, fell under the powers

of another nation. As a vassal nation that had been deported to Babylon, the Judahites had gone astray as Israel demonstrated earlier. The Judahites were guilty of worshipping their captors' gods. In response to Isaiah's "calling them out" for disobeying God, they responded with insincere repentance (Is. 65:1-7). Consequently, God called the nation to judgment and promised severe retribution. The nation's population would be decimated in Babylon! However, a remnant would be saved and allowed to experience "new beginnings." This was evidence of God's continual commitment to his covenant with Abraham (Is. 65:8-9). In summary, the faithful remnant would be blessed, but harsh punishments awaited the disobedient! However, as with their ancestors, the remnant was warned against future disobedience. Faithfulness to God is an essential prerequisite for maintaining citizenship in God's kingdom (Is. 65:11).

 Faithfulness to God is an essential prerequisite for maintaining citizenship in God's kingdom (Is. 65:11).

Promises of New Life, Isaiah 65:17-24

The Babylonian Exile lasted seventy years! Imagine the impact of this message on the beleaguered, faithful believers, who had prayed and waited for deliverance! In his own time, God responded. The timing may have been later than desired, but the impact of this prophecy phenomenally exceeded human perceptions or expectations regarding how and when God should respond. Most of Isaiah's imagery and metaphors are relatable. Notably, however, since Isaiah also used prose and poetry, some limitations to our understandings are inevitable.

New Life Extends to All Creation, Isaiah 65:25

God always completes his work as he did with the original creation of the world (Gen.1-2)! His considerations of nature as well as new humankind are reflected in Isaiah's prophecies concerning "the new heavens and earth." A return to God's original plans for humankind and nature is inferred. With the remnant, God was

giving the nation of Israel a chance to begin again. Later, through Jesus Christ (John 3:16), “new life” opportunities, were extended to all faithful disciples.

SANKOFA

Reviewing Israel’s sins, retrospectively, may seem nonsensical to us and create some sense of spiritual superiority. Israel’s knowledge of God’s covenant with Abraham and his history of protecting and delivering the nation innumerable times does not comport with the nation’s repetitive disobedience. Many of are likely to think that they will never be guilty of this sinful behavior! How can we be sure?

A metric for choosing righteous leadership can be found in 1 John 4:1-3 (ESV): “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit

that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” Contrary to this and related scriptures, the ease with which members of the People’s Temple of California were led to submit their personal agencies and livelihoods to become subservient to their pastor, Jim Jones, is

illustrative. Their story is a 21st Century prototype of people seeking safety and deliverance through human agency versus God. Trust and obedience that belongs only to God was bestowed upon their pastor. Unfortunately, their misguided loyalties led to their committing suicide en masse.

Israel’s knowledge of God’s covenant with Abraham and his history of protecting and delivering the nation innumerable times does not comport with the nation’s repetitive disobedience.

On November 18, 1978, Jim Jones, founder of the People’s Temple, orchestrated the murders and suicides of more than 918 people who had followed him to Guyana. The victims included 913 members of the Peoples’ Temple. Most of the victims were black people from impoverished backgrounds. A total of 304 victims were

less than 17 years old. It is commonly believed that “Pastor” Jones’ original passions for the underrepresented in society, his promotion of himself as a gifted healer, and his charismatic personality actually facilitated his ability to deceive many people beyond his congregation. Consequently, his tyrannical behavior and abuse of power within the confines of Jonestown, an agricultural mission that Jones led his congregation to create in Guyana, went unchecked for many years. When the possibility of his being investigated seemed imminent, Jones convinced his congregation to commit suicide by drinking a lethal concoction that had previously been developed for that purpose. Jones, himself, was found dead with a gunshot wound to his head. For more information go to: <http://jonestown.sdsu.edu>.

CASE STUDY

Peace is an elusive concept! Although individuals typically ascribe various

meanings and conceptualizations, the pursuit of peace is endemic to human life. As presented in this lesson, and particularly in our **Key Verse**, peace from God exceeds human imagination! Isaiah’s futuristic prophecy includes visions of a world that reflects the *completeness* of God’s plans and purposes for humankind. This is the kingdom over which God will reign supreme!

As presented in this lesson, and particularly in our **Key Verse**, peace from God exceeds human imagination!

In January 2004, the Honorable Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, gave the following definition of peace in this world: “Peace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish regardless of race,

colour, creed, religion, gender, caste, or any other social markers of difference.” Many scriptures emphasize the critical importance of peace among humankind. However, this kind of peace is always contingent upon loving, trusting, and obeying God.

LIFE APPLICATION

To say that we live in a chaotic, divisive world that privileges some people at the expense of others is an understatement! Homelessness, hunger, and violence, including mass shootings, and voter suppression, intertwined with social, political, and economic inequalities, are only a few of the daily threats to peace and security. Unfortunately, we have no special immunity. However, we have almighty God on our side.

As adults, we are all aware and may have been personally affected by many social ills that are created as people wrongfully search for utopia. The damages often affect entire families and communities. Addictions of all kinds, including alcoholism, legal and illegal drug use, gambling, and many others are often fostered by individual responses to the stresses of life.

Jesus declared that we “are in this world, but not of the world.” While we, like unbelievers, may suffer, our sovereign

God expects us to respond differently. Careful review and analysis of Isaiah’s prophecies as well as the fates of Judah, Israel, and the residents of Jonestown reveal and support the seriousness of the first and great commandment. We must be faithful to serve and honor Yahweh only (Exodus 20:3) and abide by his commandment to “love the Lord your

God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:38).

QUESTIONS

1. What relationships do you see between this lesson and the spiraling rates of addiction in contemporary society?
2. What examples of voluntary subservience to another human or belief system can you identify?
3. How can this lesson be used to empathize with and encourage others “to overcome”?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: “When Peace Like a River” (AME Hymnal #448)



Jesus declared that we “are in this world, but not of the world.”

Closing Prayer: Father God, thank you for protecting us through the storms of this life. Please forgive us for the times when we have failed to trust and obey you. When tests and trials besiege us, please increase our sensitivities to the need to faithfully seek your guidance, to wait for your response, and to move forward with unequivocal confidence in your promises to love and deliver us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**June 12-June 18**

Monday	Isaiah 50:4-9 (The Confidence of God's Servant)
Tuesday	Isaiah 52:13–53:12 (God's Servant Will Make Many Righteous)
Wednesday	Mark 10:17-27 (Forsaking All for the Kingdom)
Thursday	Mark 10:35-45 (The Greatest Must Be a Servant)
Friday	Psalms 113 (Who Is Like the Lord?)
Saturday	Mark 14:1-9 (A Humble Act of Love)
Sunday	Ezekiel 37:15-28 (God's Servant David Shall Be King)

GOD'S SERVANT-KING

Lesson Scripture: Ezekiel 37:15-28

Focus Scripture: Ezekiel 37:21-28

Key Verse: My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Ezekiel 37:27 (NRSV)

EZEKIEL 37:21-28 (NRSV)

21 ...then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land.

22 I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms.

23 They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

24 My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes.

25 They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever.

26 I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore.

27 My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

28 Then the nations shall know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forevermore.

EZEKIEL 37:21-28 (KJV)

21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:

22 And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

23 Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

24 And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.

27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

28 And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

KEY TERMS

- **Ezekiel** – An Old Testament prophet, whose name in Hebrew means “God will strengthen.”
- **Jewish Diaspora** – As used in this context, refers to Jewish people living outside of Israel.
- **Millennial Kingdom** – The one-thousand-year period during which Jesus Christ will reign on earth (Isaiah 2:4, 42:1; Revelation 20).

INTRODUCTION

This lesson expands the prophetic visions of God’s efforts to claim the attention of his people, to bring them to repentance, and to restore his supremacy over them. Like any loving, compassionate parent who is concerned with seeing their children suffer, even when it results from their own deviant, disobedient behavior, God heard and responded to Israel’s cries. He repeatedly sent warnings and calls for repentance through his prophets.

Like any loving, compassionate parent who is concerned with seeing their children suffer, even when it results from their own deviant, disobedient behavior, God heard and responded to Israel’s cries.

Ezekiel, one of the major Old Testament prophets, is the messenger in this lesson.

At this time, God’s people were a disoriented, oppressed population, and Ezekiel was living among them. God had allowed them to be forcibly exiled from their homeland to Babylon because of their disobedience and disloyalty. They continuously failed to honor the conditions set forth in God’s covenant with Abraham.

Consequently, judgment is a major theme in Ezekiel’s prophecies. However, many of his prophecies were also futuristic, with deliverance and hope as major themes. The prophecies in today’s scriptures exemplify the nature of Ezekiel’s futuristic prophecies. Having endured prolonged persecutions in Babylon, the Israelites

were consumed with questions, such as (a) “Is God still with us?” or (b) “Has God abandoned us?” and even (c) “When, Lord, when?”

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The background for this lesson can

be extended to include Ezekiel's visions regarding *The Valley of Dry Bones* (37:1-14) and *The Two Sticks* (37:15-20). The former speaks to the cleansing and reclamation of the faithful to godly living. The latter speaks to reformation of the two nations (Israel and Judah) into a single nation again, as God intended.

Israel as "One Nation Under God," Ezekiel 37:21-23

Ezekiel not only conveyed God promises to end the diaspora of his people, but also to give hope to the remanent that would return to their homeland. One king, whom Ezekiel later identified as David (v. 24), would reign over them. Spiritual cleansing and purification would be evidenced by righteous

living and rejection of sinfulness. Aware of humankind's foibles and Israel's long history of failures to consistently obey him, God offered a new, everlasting covenant (the Davidic Covenant) under which he promises continuous opportunities for cleansing and protection

from backsliding. Israel would genuinely identify as his people, and Yahweh as their God.

An Everlasting Covenant of Peace, Ezekiel 37:24-28

Ezekiel's prophecy extends beyond the appointment of King David to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Jesus, in Old

Testament history, is often referred to as *David* because he is David's descendant. King David was a mortal man, whose reign was temporal. Conversely, Jesus Christ is an immortal and perfect king, who reigns eternally (Rev. 17:14; 19:16; 21). Immediate and future blessings are intertwined in the conditions of this new covenant. The new covenant promises



Jesus, in Old Testament history, is often referred to as David because he is David's descendant

more than physical and geographical restoration. Glimpses into the *Millennial Kingdom* are conveyed along with promises of new lifestyles and habits to be exemplified by new attitudes and expressions of love among people and deeply abiding reverence for God. Praise

God, these prophecies also apply to us! Because of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial lamb whom Ezekiel introduces as God's servant king, we can claim adoption into God's inclusive family and inheritance to his salvation plans (Hebrews 1:1-2).

SANKOFA

On July 13, 2022, Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune was honored (posthumously)

to become the first African American to represent a state in the United States Capitol's National Statuary Hall. Dr. Bethune's statue replaced that of a Confederate general in the Capitol. Her statue had previously been on display in Florida (her home state) since October 2021. Although Dr. Bethune is honored by many other monuments, including in the widely acclaimed Bethune Cookman University, her statue in the United States' Capitol is a crowning achievement.

To say that Dr. Bethune rose from humble beginnings would be a huge

understatement! Born in 1875, she was the 15th of 17 children of parents who were both former slaves. Jim Crow laws and violence against black people were pervasive throughout her life. Yet, with the encouragement of her deeply religious parents, she attended school and became an inveterate learner. Today, Dr. Bethune is renowned for being

a passionate educator, presidential advisor, and many other highly visible roles in public service. Her legacies as a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother are equally impressive.

In 1955, Dr. Bethune expressed the following visions in her last will and testament: "I leave you hope. The Negro's growth will be great in the years to come. Yesterday our ancestors endured the

degradation of slavery, yet they retained their dignity. Today, we direct our strength toward winning a more abundant and secure life. Tomorrow, a new Negro, unhindered by race taboos and shackles, will benefit from more than 330 years of

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ceaseless struggle. Theirs will be a better world. This I believe with all my heart.”

CASE STUDY

In June 2022, African Methodism was afforded the honor of hearing from one of our own present-day visionaries. Mrs. Opal Lee, who is also known as the *Grandmother of Juneteenth*, was a keynote speaker during the Connectional

Christian Education and Youth Congress (CEC). Mrs. Lee is an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) deaconess and member of Baker Chapel AME Church in Fort Worth, Texas. She is also a retired educator, whose lifetime of social activism, including quests for freedom and equality for all Americans, resulted in

Juneteenth becoming a national holiday. Her speech focused on the importance of *voice* in activating change.

On June 17, 2021, ninety-four-year-old Mrs. Lee stood alongside President Joseph Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris as President Biden signed a bill,

designating Juneteenth as a national holiday. President Biden is reported to have knelt before Mrs. Lee before signing the bill and giving Mrs. Lee the first pen that he used. In addition to using her voice to gain support, Mrs. Lee, for many years, had walked 2 ½ miles mornings and evenings to symbolize the 2 ½ years that expired before enslaved people in Texas knew about the signing

Mrs. Lee sees Juneteenth as a “unifier” versus a black or African American event because people of all races and cultures actively engaged to ensure its elevation to national holiday status

of the Emancipation Proclamation. Mrs. Lee sees Juneteenth as a “unifier” versus a black or African American event because people of all races and cultures actively engaged to ensure its elevation to national holiday status. Notably, Mrs. Lee has also become a published author. For more information regarding Mrs. Lee’s

phenomenal rise from birth into a segregated society that discriminated and violently opposed the extension of basic human rights to people of color, the following websites should be reviewed: https://www.1x.com/social_justice/who-is-opal-lee-meet-the-grandmother-of

juneteenth/54339; <https://people.com/human-interest/what-to-know-about-opal-lee-the-grandmother-of-juneteenth/>.

LIFE APPLICATION

Just prior to his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus claimed us and prayed for all of his disciples (John 17). He petitioned God, our Father, to protect us, save us, and grant eternal life because of our relationship with him. It is up to us to claim

our inheritance as his disciples. Some may be inclined to believe that since they are not prophets, Ezekiel's story is irrelevant to them. However, it is important to remember that prophecy is just one of the spiritual gifts granted by God to enable us to fulfill his plans for our lives.

1 Corinthians 12:4-

6 (NRSV) says "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." Therefore, it is incumbent upon each of us to identify, appreciate, and use our spiritual gifts to glorify God.

How do we identify our gifts? God is our perfect source for all wisdom (James 1:5). Mathew 7:7 implores us to persist in asking, seeking, and knocking with faith when answers are not immediately forthcoming. Along with the scriptures, prayers, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and other tools available to enhance our relationships with God, *Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tests* can be found online. Of course, these tests should never be

used as substitutes for godly wisdom, but as indicators of what we should present to God for confirmation.

There is much work for all disciples. Therefore, it is imperative that we engage ourselves, not for the sake of being busy, but for the sake of being fruitful as we

seek to fulfil God's plans for our lives. Despite life's circumstances, as Ezekiel demonstrated, we must continue to use our gifts to the best of our abilities, and to work at maintaining our own faith as we encourage others.

QUESTIONS

1. How will the study of Ezekiel's

... it is incumbent upon each of us to identify, appreciate, and use our spiritual gifts to glorify God

- prophecies impact your discipleship?
2. How can this lesson be used to encourage others?
 3. What advice would you give to people who insist they are not gifted?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (AME Hymnal #52)

Closing Prayer: Father God, thank you for blessing us with your peace, your

protection, your provision, and especially your forgiveness. Lord, your Word tells us we are a light unto the world, a city set upon a hill that cannot be hidden. We thank you for the opportunity to serve you and the privilege of calling you “Our Father.” Please cleanse us of all unrighteousness and bless us to continue learning and seeking to become worthy disciples... for you are worthy to be praised! In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 19-June 25

Monday	Jeremiah 31:1-9 (Love with an Everlasting Love)
Tuesday	Jeremiah 31:27-34 (A New Covenant)
Wednesday	2 Corinthians 5:1-11 (We Walk by Faith)
Thursday	2 Corinthians 5:12-21 (Renewed in Christ)
Friday	Psalms 86:1-7, 9-16 (God Abounds in Steadfast Love)
Saturday	1 Corinthians 13 (Love Is the Greatest)
Sunday	Zephaniah 3:14-20 (The Lord Is in Your Midst)