



**LIBERATING
FAITH STUDIES**

**A KING FOREVER
AND EVER**

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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

Editorial Staff

Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Rev. Lionel Merritt

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!

Dont Forget to join us on 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.

The blessings from the teachings of the virtual AME Connectional Church School have been immeasurable. We convene the 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.

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And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin
President/Publisher

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 25–December 1

Monday	Luke 3:23-38 (We Belong to Christ's Family)
Tuesday	Psalms 128 (A Household Built by God)
Wednesday	Ruth 1:1, 3, 6-18 (Determined Loyalty)
Thursday	Ruth 2:1-3, 17-23 (An Act of Kindness)
Friday	Matthew 12:46-50 (Bound Together by More Than DNA)
Saturday	Ruth 3:1-13 (Daring Faith)
Sunday	Ruth 4:9-17 (God Has Not Abandoned You)

The Ancestry of King David

Lesson Scripture: Ruth 1–4; Luke 3:23–38

Focus Scripture: Ruth 4:9–17; Luke 3:23, 31b–32

Key Verse: The women...gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. Ruth 4:17

RUTH 4:9-17; LUKE 3:23, 31B-32 (NRSV UE)

Ruth 4:9-17

9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon.

10 I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses."

11 Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem;

12 and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son.

14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin, and may his name be renowned in Israel!

15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him."

16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom and became his nurse.

17 The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Nao-

RUTH 4:9-17; LUKE 3:23, 31B-32 (KJV)

Ruth 4:9-17

9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:

12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman.

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son.

14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

mi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Luke 3:23

23 Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Heli,...

Luke 3:31b-32

31b ...son of Nathan, son of David,
32 son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz, son of Sala, son of Nahshon,...

Luke 3:23

23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,...

Luke 3:31b-32

31b ... which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David,

32 Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson,...

KEY TERMS

- **Tapestry** – Handcrafted work of art especially in clothes or furnishings.
- **Prism** – The experiences and ideas that frame how we see issues.
- **Monarchical** – Relating to monarch or king and kingdom.
- **Ancestral**–Relating to ancestors or family tree.
- **Repugnant** – Offensive.

We all like to know the family tree to which we are a branch. People from “good” or famous families wear their ancestral links as badges of honor.

a tapestry that included a vast variety of people. Certain persons in Jesus’ lineage would not fit into our narrow prisms of religious piety. Yet God used them. There

is a teaching there.

On Lesson 1

We all like to know the family tree to which we are a branch. People from “good” or famous families wear their ancestral links as badges of honor. Even today, it makes a difference when you are “somebody’s son/daughter” or related to a known or popular family

name. But Jesus’ genealogy teaches us a feature of family trees that we may sometimes try to hide. All family trees contain individuals whose life events tarnish certain branches of the tree. In other words, we are not always proud of all the branches in our family tree. This lesson and others show Jesus’ tree was no different.

INTRODUCTION

Series and Unit Overview

In this series of 13 lessons, we see how God used the earthly kingdoms of human rulers to point to an everlasting king, Jesus the Christ. The opening lessons give Jesus the legitimacy he needed for acceptance by the people he first came to. As you read the set scripture texts, notice how God’s invisible hands crafted

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

As you approach this lesson, please do not see dry historical events. Rather, see God using the nation's customs to highlight qualities God approves. Note how God instituted laws to protect Israelites from losing their family's inheritance (Numbers 27:1-11). Further, see Boaz's actions as a display of compassion (Ruth 4:10) and redemption, which was to be the hallmark of the savior.

After what looked like a disastrous life for Naomi, Boaz restored future hopes for her family by showing his respect for God's laws which protected family inheritances. This reflected the character traits of the true redeemer: selflessness and respect for God's laws.

To appreciate the depth of Boaz's actions, we must look at the economic exploitation

that could have occurred in Naomi's situation. In the Canaanite culture, the death of all males in a household provided a golden opportunity for wealthy men to increase their own property and legacy by acquiring that distressed family's land.

To appreciate the references to Perez (Ruth 4:12, 18), Judah, and Tamar, we must understand the levirate custom

(Genesis 38:8; Deuteronomy 25:5-10). This Hebrew custom demanded that a man marry his brother's widow and get children on his brother's behalf if the deceased brother had left no children (preferably sons). But here again, look through the text to see the qualities of the ultimate redeemer (the God of second chances and renewals). Both Ruth and Tamar were women abandoned by their husbands' families. Yet through the

After what looked like a disastrous life for Naomi, Boaz restored future hopes for her family by showing his respect for God's laws which protected family inheritances.

invisible hands of God, in the levirate marriage customs, these women got lasting legacies in Israel and Christ's genealogy. What is the lesson? Human disasters in our past are often the blocks God uses to build the bright lights for our lasting legacies.

In our modern society with multiple support systems, it is easy to underestimate the size of the miracle God

engineered in Naomi's life. Take a sober look at Naomi's situation through the eyes of her day. She was a widow without sons and past the age of bearing children. She had no special status in the community, no one to advocate on her behalf, no public pantries or soup kitchens, and no pension or other source of income. Naturally, she faced an uncertain and bleak future. Her life depended on the

generosity of others. Then God stepped in and all that dramatically changed (Ruth 4:13-17).

Casual readers, in error, see the grafting of the Gentiles into God's grace as starting with the ministry of Apostle Paul. What a mistake, for the divine outreach to Gentiles is evident in the story of Ruth. As a Moabitess, typical Israelites would have rejected Ruth. For a variety of reasons, the nation of Israel would have seen her as an outcast. First, her Moabite origins would have made her repulsive (Genesis 19:30-38). Then her religious practices – which included human sacrifice to a false God (Numbers 21:29) – and Moab's frequent hostility against Israel (Numbers 21–22; Judges 3:12-31) would have drawn hostile reactions in Israel. Yet look how the great redeemer grafted her into his grace.

Finally, consider how scripture framed the genealogy of Jesus to make him both human and royal. Jesus' family tree (Luke 3:23-38) establishes that Jesus was a descendant of King David (Luke 1:27, 32, 69). This is through his relationship with Joseph. But also notice the link to Adam that makes him a full member of

humanity. Our redeemer is therefore fully human, capable of understanding all our trials and tribulations. Still, he is also royally divine with all the power and authority to intercede and help us.

SANKOFA

This lesson highlights how God often fulfills promises using the customs of a nation. For God's ultimate earthly king (Jesus) to be acceptable to Israel, he had to emerge from an acceptable dynasty.

**Our redeemer
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The Jewish society was extremely patriarchal where inheritance and other family rights flowed according to family trees. For people born in the modern era, this concept of power and authority arising purely from royal family privileges is often difficult to understand or accept. We associate people's rise to power with public elections and executive

appointments. So, to understand the concept and practice of hereditary power and privileges, we must look to countries where people still observe the practices of dynastic governance. One such people is the Zulus of South Africa.

The current King Misuzulu kaZwelithini has a genealogy that stretches back to the sixteenth century. He became king on the day of the funeral of his mother,

Queen Regent Mantfombi Dlamini, who died on 29 April 2021. The queen regent herself became the interim leader of the Zulu kingdom on 21 March 2021 after King Goodwill Zwelithini (her husband), the monarch of the Zulu nation of South Africa, died on 12 March 2021.

The important thing to note is that in a dynasty, respect, power, authority, and wealth flow to heirs under their dynastic lineage. In the same way, Jesus became acceptable to Israel as king (Messiah) because of his place in the lineage of King David.

CASE STUDY

For people in western democracies, God's use of a monarchical system of government, rather than a democratic system, may seem suspect. We may want to note that the founding fathers of America ran away from the monarchical system because of the abuses they saw as inherent in such a system. So why would God favor such a system over one where the people had a free say in choosing their leaders? The answer may have both historical and social overtones.

The important thing to note is that in a dynasty, respect, power, authority, and wealth flow to heirs under their dynastic lineage. In the same way, Jesus became acceptable to Israel as king (Messiah) because of his place in the lineage of King David.

First, in the ancient Near East, the prevailing system of government was monarchies. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and their surrounding nations, all had kings as leaders. Recall how this reality influenced Israel to ask God for an earthly king like their neighbors. This started the reign of King Saul. Also, note at that time, nationals saw the earthly king as a representative of God. It was easy to believe that God would tell the king how to lead the nation. This was implicit in King Solomon's request to God for the wisdom to lead Israel. Even in the heathen nations, this thought persisted. Democracy, where nationals play a significant role in choosing their leaders, is relatively new.

Greece (Athens) had a limited version of democracy from the 5th century BCE. However, internationally, the kingdom model persisted until the 13th century. The Magna

Carta of 1215 is a red-letter document in the history of democracy as we know it today. Therefore, we must put God's use of the kingdom concept in its proper context. It was not God's stamp

of approval on the abuses inherent in that system of government. Rather, it is God relating to the people in terms of the system of government with which they were familiar.

LIFE APPLICATION

When we study them, in the stories of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, we see brilliant interplays of God's purpose and human decisions. As these people pursued their own interests, they unknowingly fulfilled God's purpose. Look at this concerning your own life. Sometimes, unwittingly, people try to impose rituals and certain demands on us as preconditions for accessing God's grace. Reject those impositions. Accept that in the same way God met Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz where they were, in the normal activities of life, God will likewise meet you where you are. Just be open to his invisible hands.

Ruth's story is a fascinating screenplay for a movie. The narrative has all the elements for a box-office hit for our times. Included in the plot are issues of migration, poverty, mixed marriage, and redemptive love. Reflect on each of these and examine your attitudes toward these

matters. Ask yourself how your attitudes toward these matters reflect the attitudes you think God holds. For instance, would God despise an immigrant from another country because that person worships in rituals which to you are repugnant? Similarly, can you embrace interracial marriages and still be faithful to your own race? These Bible stories teach us that answers to complex issues are not as cut-and-dry as we would like.

It was not God's stamp of approval on the abuses inherent in that system of government. Rather, it is God relating to the people in terms of the system of government with which they were familiar.

Also, consider how the lineage of David and Jesus can help you to enhance your or your congregation's Advent and Christmas celebrations. Does it really mean something to you that Jesus is from the lineage of David? When you consider the winding and multinational lineage of Christ, do you see God's hands reaching out in love to embrace all humanity? How

does such an image frame how you will celebrate this Advent and Christmas seasons? Take your time in thinking about these issues. They have the seeds to grow new, dynamic outlooks in your life.

QUESTIONS

1. How can Jesus be of the lineage of David when Joseph was not his biological father?
2. What message does it send that people with questionable characters are in Jesus' genealogy?
3. If democracies are the best form of governance, why did God set up kingdoms?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Hail to the Lord's Anointed," *AMEC Hymnal* #107

Closing Prayer: Dear gracious God, I thank you for redeeming me from the powers of sin, and for the second, third, and fourth chances you have given me in this life. In you, my future is bright. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**December 2-December 8**

Monday	1 Samuel 16:1-13 (The Lord Looks on the Heart)
Tuesday	2 Samuel 5:1-10 (A Shepherd for God's People)
Wednesday	Luke 1:26-38 (Christ's Unending Reign)
Thursday	Psalms 2 (God Defends God's Anointed)
Friday	Isaiah 9:1-7 (Endless Peace for David's Throne)
Saturday	Romans 1:1-7 (The Son of David)
Sunday	2 Samuel 7:4-17 (An Everlasting Kingdom)

God's Promise to David

Lesson Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-17

Focus Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:4-17

Key Verse: Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. 2 Samuel 7:16

2 SAMUEL 7:4-17 (NRSV UE)

4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan,

5 "Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?

6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.

7 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'

8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel,

9 and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.

10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place and be disturbed no more, and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly,

11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel, and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

14 I will be a father to him, and he shall be

2 SAMUEL 7:4-17 (KJV)

4 And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying,

5 Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

6 Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

7 In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepecote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

9 And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings.

15 But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”

17 In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

KEY TERMS

- **Ethiopia** – A country in eastern Africa with a population of 126 million.
- **Sacred** – Highly respected and/or feared (revered); be holy (dedicated to God).
- **Gratitude** – Feelings or expressions of being thankful/grateful.
- **Dynasty** – A line of rulers from the same family.

INTRODUCTION

Material prosperity and professional success can affect people's lives

in diverse ways. For worldly people, the taste of success can open a larger appetite for more success. Sadly, in the pursuit of more success and material prosperity, such people neglect their relationship with God. For others, material prosperity and success trigger gratitude to God and draw them closer to God and his purpose in their lives. The latter case is what we saw with King David. His success in wars

and comforts in his home triggered in him a gratitude that focused him on God, and what he could do to honor God.

As believers, we should plan and make provisions for the future. However, we must also be open to God's overriding purpose in our lives.

Yet it was not a straight walk from project conception to completion. God had his own divine plans for David and his family. Accordingly, David's plans, though well intended, had to give way to God's plans. A lesson worthy of note. As believers, we should plan and make provisions for the future. However, we must also be open to God's overriding purpose in our lives.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Three powerful themes emerge from the pages as we read the background text. First, we see the power of gratitude and how God responds to it. Second, we see God's sense of humor and how the Lord uses it in a cross-play of words. Then, we notice a display of the trait that is arguably King David's most commendable attribute. He happily submerged his will

and plans under those of the Lord. Look for these as you work through the text.

King David's desire to build a physical "house" for God sprung from gratitude (7:1-2). He and his kingdom were at rest from war. David saw that period as the ideal time to show God his appreciation for the string of successes God had given Israel. This surge of gratitude led to a conversation between David and God's representative.

The interplay of words is obvious in the word "house." David intended to build a physical structure, a house of worship. God responded and told David, "As we are talking about houses, let me tell you about the 'house' (dynasty) I plan to build for you." This is a huge point. It tells us that God responds to us in a language we can understand and relate to. Hence, we should be cautious when people tell us they receive a message from God, and we must hire a programmer from the Pentagon to decode it.

Verses 7:6-9 make a point that believers can easily overlook. God noted that he had always lived among his people "in a tent and in a dwelling." This points us back to both Exodus 26 and John 1. Indeed, it reminds us of God's interactions with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. These

references show God's primary desire is to be with his people in all situations. God does not want to be set aloof in a magnificent sanctuary somewhere removed from the people. The Lord is at home among us wherever we are.

The reference to "cedar" (7:2, 7) shows David's thinking and God's response and counter. David, as king, was living in luxury (cedar) and wanted to give God a house of worship of a similar or better quality. At that time, people in that region regarded cedar as the highest quality

wood for construction. It grew tall and straight (Psalm 92:12) and was remarkably durable as it repelled insects. People saw cedar as a symbol of wealth, stability, and power. This superior regard for cedar lasted for centuries. Even today builders still see it as premium wood.

See in verses 9-16 the extent of the "house" (dynasty) God promised David. It is massive and

extensive, spanning over centuries. It centers around David and his direct descendants, but all Israel benefits. When God is doing something special, he does it big. Matthew 1:1 and 1:17 put the blessings on David's "house" in the context of generations. Read and appreciate what those verses say. We can take God at his word.

“
“
God responded and
told David, “As we are
talking about houses,
let me tell you about
the ‘house’ (dynasty) I
plan to build for you.”

Verses 14-16 highlight a truth immature Christians fail to recognize in their haste to emphasize God's goodness. God's promises are covenants in which both parties have obligations. Implicit in the divine promise is a condition that the people in the promise remain faithful to God and his commandments. When the people to whom God made the promise fail that condition, God will act in judgment, which will be unpleasant. However, the intent of that judgment is not to destroy the people. It is an aspect of God's grace designed to bring the people back into alignment with God so that the promise comes true, and God gets the glory.

SANKOFA

King David's vision of a magnificent "house" (temple) of worship for God resurfaced in the minds of other leaders later in history. One leader who had a similar vision was the great Ethiopian King Lalibela. According to historical records, King Lalibela ruled Ethiopia in the late 12th or early 13th century AD. The traditions say the king was a devout Christian who envisioned recreating Jerusalem in Ethiopia. That was in the period when Muslim invaders had temporarily halted pilgrimages to the Christian holy land. Therefore, King Lalibela's dream was to provide in Ethiopia an alternative

Jerusalem for Christian pilgrims.

From that dream, he built 11 stone churches which historical journals regarded as the "Eighth Wonder of the World." These famous stone churches included the internationally acclaimed Church of Saint George, also known as Bete Giyorgis. One website described this church as "one of Lalibela's most awe-inspiring creations." International travel advisors say no visit to Ethiopia is complete without a visit to the Church of St. George. In 1930, in the sacred space of St. George, the Ethiopians crowned Emperor Haile Selassie king of kings of Ethiopia.

King David's vision of a magnificent "house" (temple) of worship for God resurfaced in the minds of other leaders later in history. One leader who had a similar vision was the great Ethiopian King Lalibela.

CASE STUDY

King David's dream was to build a permanent (as opposed to movable) sacred space to represent the presence of God. Thinking about this leads us to consider the use and power of sacred spaces. An article addressing the topic (Sacred Spaces) on encyclopedia.com gave this definition: "A sacred place is first a defined place, a space distinguished from other spaces. The rituals that a people either practice at a place or direct toward it mark its sacredness and differentiate it from other defined spaces." This is a simple yet remarkable definition. It reveals a truth that people often miss when discussing

sacred spaces (churches, temples, burial sites) and places that commemorate significant religious or national events.

There is no strange magic to the physical place itself. Sacred spaces have no secret mysterious chambers where angels sleep, and God sits to make decisions that control our lives. Underline this aspect in the definition. It is, “The rituals that a people either practice at a place or direct toward it mark its sacredness.” In other words, sacred spaces become sacred because people dedicate or consecrate them as sacred (holy) and use them accordingly. For Christians, when we use such spaces, they should represent the presence of God as the Ark did for Israel. The images and settings in the sacred space should reinforce our image of God and what he means to us.

For this reason, throughout human history sacred spaces reflected how the people saw God when the location or item became sacred. Therefore, in the Jewish temples, we had a Holy of Holies, a most sacred place where only the highest priest went. This displayed the judicious God who worshippers had to approach with strict reverence. Approaching the Holy of Holies in an unworthy matter meant certain death.

Against this background, traditionalists

have question marks over the design of ultra-modern church buildings. These religious zealots believe that the designs of modern churches are like what they see in secular clubs, concert halls, and sports arenas. For them, the religious “set apart” distinguishing “atmosphere” is missing in the designs of contemporary sanctuaries. To this lament, we quote Romans 14:5: “Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind” on the appropriateness of a sacred space.

LIFE APPLICATION

Sacred spaces have no secret mysterious chambers where angels sleep, and God sits to make decisions that control our lives.

God’s promise to King David, as with the promise to Abraham, took several years (generations) to be fulfilled. Consider this soberly within the context of our age of microwave technology and AI. We want to see God deliver instantly on the promises we claim. Do we respect that the promises of God take time (often generations) to reach fulfillment? Ignoring

this reality can lead to unnecessary frustrations in our Christian walk.

A traditional view among Christians is that all Christians are spiritual Jews; and, therefore, heirs of the promises God made to King David. Examine your views on this. Consider the extent to which the Davidic promises apply to you, and what are the benefits of these promises you now enjoy or hope to enjoy.

David had a clear view of who God was, his relationship with God, and what he could do to show his gratitude for God's blessings. How clear are your ideas on these issues? To clarify your outlook on these matters, consider keeping a *God Journal*. In this journal write sayings and paste photos that speak to how you understand your relationship with God. Such a practice will help you to clarify any grey areas about the identity and character of God and your relationship and duty towards him.

We cannot get around this fact. God frustrated David's plans to build a holy temple for Israel to worship God. Naturally, David was disappointed. However, God's replacement plans contained bigger and wider blessings for David, his descendants, Israel, and the wider world. Use this backdrop to reconsider when a disappointment in your life led to something great you could never have imagined. Pondering on these events can help to shape a healthier outlook for dealing with disappointments.

QUESTIONS

1. Nathan, King David's spiritual advisor, gave him the green light on what David had in his heart, but God vetoed the plans. Explain this.
2. What about traditional sacred spaces (e.g., church sanctuaries) makes such places special to you?
3. How can you know if God has given the green light to your plans for your church or your community?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Standing on the Promises," AMEC Hymnal #424

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, help me to see the wisdom and find the strength to submerge my plans under your will. I know on occasions this can be hard. But I know your way is always the best way and with your help I can do it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

December 9-December 15

Monday	Psalm 89:1-4, 27-37 (God's Covenant of Love)
Tuesday	Luke 1:5-17 (God Has Heard Your Prayer)
Wednesday	Luke 1:18-23 (A Message of Promise and Grace)
Thursday	Psalm 84 (God Is a Sun and Shield)
Friday	Malachi 4 (The Herald of God's Coming)
Saturday	Luke 1:57-66 (A Child of Wonder)
Sunday	Luke 1:67-80 (Praises to the God Who Saves)

The Prophet Who Prepares the Way

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:5-23, 57-80b

Focus Scripture: Luke 1:67-80

Key Verses: And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

Luke 1:76-77

LUKE 1:67-80 (NRSV UE)

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his child David,

70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors and has remembered his holy covenant,

73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us

74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

75 in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days.

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

77 to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,

79 to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

LUKE 1:67-80 (KJV)

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

KEY TERMS

- **Dynasty** – A line of leaders whose sole qualification for office is their blood relations in a particular family.
- **Tanzania** – A country in eastern Africa with a population of about 66 million.
- **Tanganyika** – The forerunner state to Tanzania (which merged with Zanzibar).

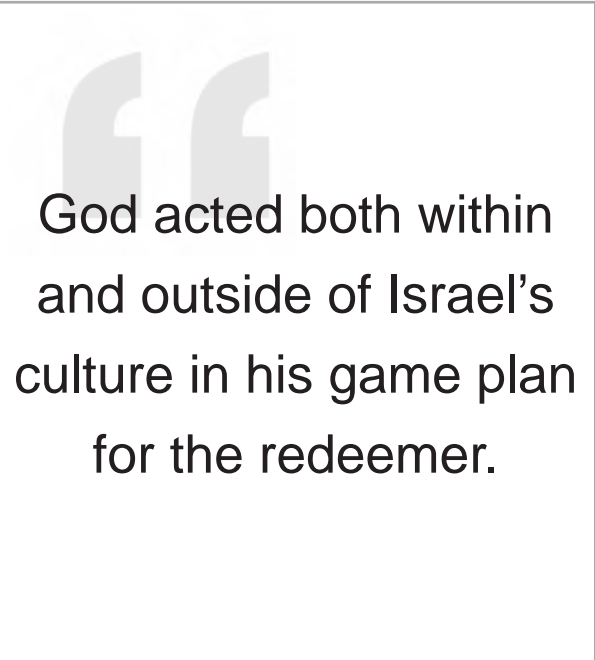
INTRODUCTION

Traditions play a significant role in our lives. They prevent us from having to reinvent the wheels we need to roll through life. We naturally use the established “truths” and customs from previous generations as guides for accepted behaviors in worship, work, and general community interactions. The traditions become powerfully authoritative when we see them endorsed by people we regard as experts.

But there can be a downside when we follow traditions slavishly with mindlessness. Traditions can have serious biases that discriminate against certain groups. In this lesson, we will see how for centuries religious leaders- indeed the whole nation of Israel- misinterpreted

God’s promise of a liberator (savior). The self-interest of the recognized leaders blinded them to the real identity and work of the promised redeemer. Israel looked for a strong conquering (military) leader who would free them from Roman domination. God sent a lowly savior to redeem the entire world from the bondage of sin.

God acted both within and outside of Israel’s culture in his game plan for the redeemer. God’s game plan stood within the culture as it included an official sponsor to introduce the redeemer and his ministry. The plan went outside the traditions because neither the sponsor nor the redeemer acted within the expected patterns of a redeemer or a sponsor. Both caused a stir in the way they operated and lived.



God acted both within and outside of Israel’s culture in his game plan for the redeemer.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In lesson 2 we saw God’s promise of a dynasty to King David. In the books of Kings and Chronicles, we followed the partial fulfillment of God’s promise among the kings of Israel and Judah. But the reigns of these earthly kings had limits in both time and scope.

At the juncture of our set text, God is ready to take the dynasty promise to

its ultimate dimension. The fulfillment of the promise is now moving from mere physical liberation and security to spiritual and eternal freedom and security. Read the lesson with this perspective in mind.

Then notice the prophecy of Zechariah in verses 68-79. Follow the connection to the divine promises in 2 Samuel 7 and even further back to the promise to Abraham. As the scriptures make clear, God fulfills his promises “in the fulness of time.” This is a tenet to remember when we claim God’s promises.

Verse 68 notes that Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit. Before Acts 2, general outpouring of the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, had a restricted meaning. It meant that the Spirit of God empowered the person to make specific declarations or take unusual actions on

God’s behalf. The special empowerment was usually for a limited period. You see this in places like Exodus 31:3; 35:31-35; Numbers 11:25-26; 1 Samuel 10:10-11; and Joshua 34:9. We must not confuse this with the gift of the indwelling, residing presence of God’s Spirit which believers receive today.

The phrase “horn of salvation” (“mighty

savior”) in verse 69 needs special note. In the Old Testament (Psalm 75:4-5, 10; 2 Samuel 22:3) writers used the term to refer to strength, particularly military force. In verse 69, Zechariah is describing a strong military-type influential liberator. But this time, as we already know, freedom is moral and spiritual. It is not freedom from Roman domination. Instead, it is a rescue from the bondage of the law and sin.

Verses 1:71-74 carried the parallels a step further. In 2 Samuel 7, the rescue from the enemies and oppression would appear to be natural physical enemies. But the liberator in Luke 1 came to free the world from spiritual enemies and oppression. This is a freedom that stretches into eternity. How do we know? Jesus himself told us in places like John 3:16.

Also, note how Zechariah’s prophecy swung between Jesus and his son John the Baptist. Luke 1:76, an echo of Isaiah 40:3-5, clearly speaks of John’s role as the way-maker: the one who clears the way for Christ by calling people to repentance and introducing the Christ to the world.

As the scriptures make clear, God fulfills his promises “in the fulness of time.” This is a tenet to remember when we claim God’s promises.

The references in verses 1:76 and 1:79 are noteworthy for another reason. They point sharply to the mission of Jesus the Christ. Often, we try to pull Christ and the Holy Spirit into every whip and fancy we want to address. Normally, there is no harm in doing this. However, we must never lose sight of Jesus' primary mission. It was quite specific. He came to show us the way to life, real life, the abundant life. This is the joy, hope, and peace of living that supersedes external circumstances. It starts with a relationship with Christ on earth and extends into eternity. This is exactly what Isaiah prophesied: Isaiah 9:2 and 42:7.

SANKOFA

The prophecies about the coming of Christ (liberator/redeemer) were attractive because they offered Israel hope of liberation. Unfortunately, most people read the prophecies with eyes of physical liberation. This is understandable. Any people living under the control or domination of another nation or group of oppressors yearns daily for freedom. Such was the case in Tanzania in the 1960s. Julius Nyerere rode on his people's craving for freedom and improved living standards to become the first prime minister of Tanganyika and

later the first president of Tanzania.

Contemporaries of President Nyerere said his rise to power sprang from his ability to feed the hope for freedom that burned in his compatriots. A striking example of this is in what Tanzanians named *The Arusha Declaration*. Read the excerpt quoted below, not with your eyes but with the heart of exploited people.

"We have been oppressed a great

deal, we have been exploited a

great deal and we have been disregarded a great deal. It is our

weakness that has led to our being oppressed, exploited, and

disregarded. We now intend to bring about a resolution which

will ensure that we are never again victims of these things."

...we must never lose sight of Jesus' primary mission. It was quite specific. He came to show us the way to life, real life, the abundant life.

If you can identify with the sentiment behind those words, you can understand why Israel looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promise of a liberator/redeemer/savior. Unfortunately, the nation of Israel could not identify their freedom fighter when he appeared in the form of a poor, helpless child.

CASE STUDY

Zealots of democracy will read God's promise of a Davidic dynasty with curiosity. They question why God favored one-man rulership which put all the powers of government in the hands of one man. However, researchers who study such matters highlighted that dynasties could offer certain advantages to a society. From works such as *Dynasties and Interludes: Past and Present in Canadian Electoral Politics* (Lawrence LeDuc, Jon H. Pammett), we get useful insight into why God may have worked through a dynasty. Among the advantages of a dynasty, we noted three.

First, a dynasty has the power of name recognition. People consciously and subconsciously associate descendants with the success of their predecessors. This makes acceptance of the descendants easier. Because of the high regard in which Israel held David, his sons started their reigns with powerful name recognition and goodwill. With the Messiah coming in the tradition of King David, Israel presupposed he would be of the character of King David.

David's devotion to God was evident, despite his famous blunders. It was, therefore, reasonable to assume that his descendants would have a similar devotion to God. And indeed, Jesus did!

Second, people assume that the descendant has the resources of his father's house. This applies to both physical and mental resources. If the father (or grandfather) was wise, people assume the offspring will also be wise. Yes, we know history shows this is not always the case. Yet, it is a startling assumption people often make.

The new ruler in a dynasty usually starts with the physical resources his predecessors acquired. This gives the dynastic ruler an advantage over a new ruler who must find his own resources for new

projects. A dynastic ruler, other things being equal, should accomplish more in a shorter period.

Third, a high degree of stability is associated with dynasties. People with an interest in the dynasty do what they can to keep out intruders. This is natural as they have a vested interest in maintaining the dynasty. Also note, if the dynasty is



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established along a set philosophy or mode of operation, dynastic rulers seek to keep that philosophy or style of doing business or governing. This naturally leads to a higher level of stability, and a smoother transition of authority from one leader to another. In assessing this perspective, make allowances for personality differences.

We are aware that dynastic systems of governance may be outside the democratic model that people favor. However, we see certain distinct advantages in countries with ingrained dynasties, like the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia. This is something to note when considering the Davidic dynasty, which culminated in Jesus Christ.

We are aware that dynastic systems of governance may be outside the democratic model that people favor.

With this idea in mind, consider your attitude to “the way of peace” in verse 1:79. Looking at the state of the world today, is this a reality, or yet futuristic? Carefully consider how your faith in God’s promises allows you to walk “the way of peace” through the current world.

The word *peace*, as used in the text, has an interesting overtone. In Hebrew it is *shalom*; in Greek it is *eirene*. In both (original) languages the word signified a wholeness: a contentment and satisfaction that is both personal and communal. This points to a reality that members of the church must never overlook. Our personal peace in life is linked to and affected by the level of peace in our communities. Reflect on the extent to which

you see your enjoyment of life interwoven in the affairs of your communities (church and home).

Part of the function of prophecy is to give hope in times of despair. Consider the extent to which you use hope as a resource to face the valleys of life. Recall a time when hopefulness (your faith in God) provided a spiritual resource that

LIFE APPLICATION

Zechariah’s song shows a feature of prophetic declarations we must consider when reading prophecy. The language of the prophecy stated the prophesied events as completed events: they have already happened. Prophecy calls us to embrace as certain reality, an event God set for the future. Faith is the bridge we use to connect the divide of time.

helped to pull you through a difficult period. Give thanks to the God of all hopefulness.

Continuing the matter of hopefulness, consider how your hope in Christ is framing your outlook on current and future events. When you look at world events and trends in the church, politics, and family life, what hope do you see for the future? Does the prospect of the future fill you with anxiety or hope? If you can see prospects of hope, consider how you can share these prospects with others in your communities. If you notice your heart has significant amounts of despair and anxiety, make this a matter of personal devotion. If this bleak outlook persists, consider discussing the matter with people you consider qualified to help you.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you consider was at the root

of Zechariah's doubt of the angel's message?

2. In general, Israel had mistaken expectations about the identity and work of the long-awaited strong liberator/redeemer. To what extent may church members today be confused/mistaken about God's work in our era?
3. What characteristics, if any, did King David and Jesus Christ have in common?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It" (Fanny Crosby)

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, help me to identify you and your work in events around me. Steer me away from deceptions and delusions designed to take my eyes off the Christ, my redeemer. My prayer for today, in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

December 16-December 22

Monday	Isaiah 11:1-9 (The Coming King of Peace)
Tuesday	Isaiah 43:14-21 (God Is Doing a New Thing)
Wednesday	Isaiah 64 (O God, Come Down and Save Us!)
Thursday	Micah 5:1-6 (A Great and Peaceful King)
Friday	John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18 (The Word Became Flesh)
Saturday	Hebrews 1 (Christ Is King! Worship Him!)
Sunday	Luke 2:1-16 (Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!)

DECALOGUE

Superintendent—And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord hath made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

My soul be on thy guard;
Ten thousand foes arise:
And hosts of sins are pressing hard
To draw thee from the skies.

Superintendent—Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not kill.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not commit adultery.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not steal.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and write these laws upon our hearts.

Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!

Superintendent—Hear what Christ, our Savior, saith: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.



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