



**LIBERATING  
FAITH STUDIES**

SAMPLE

***WORSHIP IN THE  
COVENANT COMMUNITY***

# **LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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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

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## 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

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## 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](http://www.iamame.org)- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

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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**

**August 26–September 1**

<b>Monday</b>	2 Corinthians 1:16-24 (God's Promises Are Always "Yes")
<b>Tuesday</b>	Genesis 12:1-9 (A New Life of Obedience)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Genesis 12:10-20 (Fear Not Faith)
<b>Thursday</b>	Philippians 4:10-19 (God Will Fully Satisfy Your Needs)
<b>Friday</b>	Colossians 2:6-12 (Walk in Christ With Thanksgiving)
<b>Saturday</b>	Psalms 16 (God Gives a Goodly Heritage)
<b>Sunday</b>	Genesis 13:8-18 (Gratefulness for God's Promises)

## Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 12–13

Focus Scripture: Genesis 13:8-18

*Key Verse: So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord. Genesis 13:18*

### GENESIS 13:8-18 (NRSV UE)

8 Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herders and my herders, for we are kindred.

9 Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

10 Lot looked about him and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

11 So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.

12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

14 The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,

15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

17 Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”

18 So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

### GENESIS 13:8-18 (KJV)

8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.

14 And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.

**KEY TERMS**

- **Sacred** – Dedicated to God; set aside for worship or service to God.
- **Avarice**—Great greed or covetousness.
- **Sacrament** – A religious ceremony or ritual regarded as imparting spiritual value/grace.
- **Equitable** – Fair and unbiased to the parties.
- **Rituals** – Religious (or solemn) ceremonies made up of a series or set of prescribed actions.

**INTRODUCTION****Unit Overview**

In this first set of lessons (lessons 1-4), we see four core pillars of religion (human recognition and interaction with God). First, we look at the importance of the altar for worship. Second, we see why it is necessary to have clearly defined sacred spaces. Third, Hezekiah highlighted for us why we should prioritize worship and our relations with God. And last, we look at the need for proper spiritual leadership in the worship of God. As you work through the first unit, keep the relationships between the four lessons before you. They build

on one another and give a strong initial overview of worship and its importance in our relationship with God.

**On Lesson 1**

If we look at the structure of modern altars in churches and temples today, and how religious people regard them, we can easily miss the importance that people in Abraham's era attached to the altar. In principle, an altar is a structure on which worshippers lay offerings and perform

rituals of worship. Both the Hebrew and Greek roots for the word *altar* make the altar a place of sacrifice. That is a place where we deny ourselves or submerge our desires and will under the desires and will of God. The altar is a sacred space where recognition, exaltation of, and obedience to God are paramount.

The altar is a sacred space where recognition, exaltation of, and obedience to God are paramount.

Note in the text how Abraham built an altar at each location where he dwelt. This underscored the importance Abraham attached to the altar. Wherever he was, he wanted, within easy reach, a sacred place to commune with God.

**TELLING THE BIBLE STORY**

Start this study with one foot riveted to Romans 4:3 and the other firmly planted

on Genesis 15:6. Please do not repeat the mistake that uninformed people made over the years. Nothing Abraham did earned him God's favor. God sovereignly called Abraham and Abraham recognized God and in faith responded to the Lord. Abraham's building of altars was not a vehicle to gain God's favor or to get God to answer his prayers for material things. Rather, the building and use of the altars were outward reflections of his inward (spiritual) recognition and commitment to the God who called him. Further, Abraham's altars showed his faith in the promises God made to him.

How Abraham dealt with the conflict between his staff and Lot's staff was exemplary and instructive. To grasp the importance of this event, appreciate that the welfare of Abraham, his staff, and his livestock was on the line. Given the scarcity of grazing land and water sources, access to these resources was a life-or-death matter. Keep this in mind when assessing how Abraham dealt with the conflict.

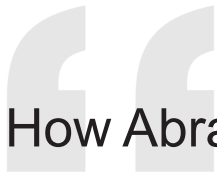
To make peace, Abraham gave Lot the first shot at choosing the land for his staff and herds. Abraham was prepared to take the resources that remained after Lot had taken the best. Note God did

not instruct Abraham on how to settle the dispute. Abraham decided out of his character and desire for peace. He did not waste time trying to determine the best or equitable solution. Moreover, he showed an absence of avarice. Abraham at his discretion allowed Lot to choose the best of the available resources.

Then note that God's intervention and instructions to Abraham came AFTER Abraham had separated from

Lot (verses 13:14-15). Often, we look to God for instructions and favors before we deal with demanding situations. But if this text is any guide, at times God will wait until we have dealt with the situation, using good judgment, before intervening to guide us to the blessings ahead.

The irony of this situation with Abraham and Lot was profound. Lot chose the best of all available resources. Yet later, he found himself in a situation where he would lose it all. He barely escaped destruction by the skin of his teeth only because of Abraham's good standing with God. Abraham got the worst of the resources: what Lot had refused. But those leftovers formed the basis of a forever-blessing from God.



How Abraham dealt  
with the conflict  
between his staff  
and Lot's staff was  
exemplary and  
instructive.



Because of Abraham's relationship with God, the rejects became the platform for prosperity, materially, socially, and spiritually. There is a lesson here for believers today. The dregs which God blesses bring more prosperity than the bounty offered by people. So, we can say, that avarice is a sign of lack of faith in God. We do not have to start with the best. Our God still does miracles with less. No wonder Jesus taught us to avoid ALL forms of greed.

### SANKOFA

When we think of altars today, a picture of a space or structure defined by rails or bars near or around the central platform (podium) in a church comes to mind. Members paint or varnish the rails or bars to give a pleasant, inviting look. And, at the places for kneeling, designers place cushions for the comfort of persons kneeling at the altar.

Worshippers consider the altar a sacred space; and, they use it as a special place of prayer and rituals like the administering of the Communion sacrament. But this is not the image we should see when thinking of the altars Abraham built. The first Hebrew altars were usually made

of earth or unfinished stone (stone with no shaping or finishing). Traditionally, the Hebrews erected altars in obvious (public) spaces with easy access for everyone.

In location and use, we see significant differences between the Hebrew altars and the Christian altars today. The main activities at the Christian altar are prayer, worship, and sacraments focused on Christ. This is in keeping with

the traditional Hebrew view of the altar as a place of sacrifice and communion with God. Judaism had no such Christ focus at its altar.

### CASE STUDY

Three articles dealing with the subject of reverence (in the church and wider society) inspired the comments in this section. One such article was "How Can

We Cultivate a Spirit of Reverence in Today's World?" by Lisa Loraine Baker, a contributing writer to *Bible Study Tools*, June 9, 2023. This article appealed to us because in both Judaism and Christian church history the central theme around the altar was reverence. The altar was the sacred place where people gathered to meet with and sacrifice to the Lord. Therefore, we display vital aspects of our

There is a lesson here  
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people.

attitudes to worship and God by how we regard and treat the altar and activities at the altar.

In Lisa Loraine Baker's article, she made an apt comparison about reverence using respect for the national flag. The flag is nothing more than a decorated piece of cloth on a stick or pole. Yet it represents the history, values, and national consciousness of a people. Respect for the flag signals respect for the people and their values. The same we can safely say for our reverence surrounding altars.

As noted before, the structure of altars ranged from a heap of earth, or a piece of stone, to polished, expensive marble structures. Yet their values do not rest in the material, shape, or monetary value of the item or structure. It is the value we assign to them in our hearts. To appreciate this point, consider how people approach a meeting with the English monarch at Buckingham Palace, or with the USA president in the Oval Office at the White House. We normally would not rush into those meetings dressed anyhow without the appropriate protocol. If indeed the altar is a sacred space where we meet

and commune with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, how much more reverence should we show when approaching the altars in our churches?

It is unlikely we will ever return to the days when people were afraid to chat casually at the altar. Gone, too, are the days when people "dressed decently" for church and men showed reverence by removing headgear when entering churches. In those days stealing items

from an altar was a disgrace. For all practical purposes, those days are over, never to return.

Yet we must consider how well we show reverence around our altars. People may advance the argument that how we behave is not as important as how we feel in our hearts. But that argument challenges all known research on human behavior. From both scripture

and secular studies, we know that our outward behavior is a good reflection of our heart's values. We cannot honor God in our hearts and dishonor him with our words and behaviors. So, it stands that our behavior toward the altar significantly reflects our understanding of the altar and our respect towards the things of God.

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## LIFE APPLICATION

People have always regarded the altar as a special place or symbol for offering worship or sacrifice to God. Considering this, a personal altar in the home may be a useful representation to help us focus on God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the atonement of the world. Personal altars need not be elaborate or fancy. Any space we can designate and use as sacred space is acceptable. Personal altars in or around the home help people to develop stronger attitudes to prayer and meditation.

In the Hebrew culture, people develop altars to commemorate special encounters with God. You can use this historical framework to your advantage. Think about any time you had a special intervention from God. This could have been an event during worship, a solution to a problem, or a special revelation that deepened your understanding or relations with God. Find something, anything appropriate, that reminds you of that special event. This in no way suggests that you should worship the item. But let it be a constant reminder of God's goodness to you.

In the text, we see Abraham settling

a conflict between his staff and flocks, and those of Lot. Abraham's attitude and decision were truly remarkable. Consider Abraham's offer to Lot. How does your attitude to settling conflicts align with Abraham's? Ask yourself what would have to happen for you to make such a selfless, generous offer to a person fighting you for scarce resources. Note that Abraham decided on his own without any prompting from God.

## QUESTIONS

“Personal altars in or around the home help people to develop stronger attitudes to prayer and meditation.”

1. In your opinion, how healthy are believers' attitudes to the sacredness of the altar?

2. What is the value (if any) of having a personal altar at home?

3. Did the way Abraham dealt with the conflict with Lot teach us anything useful? Would it

not have been a better solution to share the resources (land and water) equally?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn:** “Is Your All on the Altar?”, AMECH #333

**Closing Prayer:** Dear God, help me to

approach you and the symbols of your presence with the reverence that is due to you as the *Creator, Redeemer, Savior*, and *King of Kings*. Remind me that no

person or thing should take the place of priority and worship that is exclusively yours. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 2-September 8

<b>Monday</b>	Romans 8:18-28 (Sighs too Deep for Words)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Psalms 34:11-22 (God Hears Our Cry for Help)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Nehemiah 12:27-30, 44-47 (Celebrate With Rejoicing, Thanksgiving, Singing)
<b>Thursday</b>	2 Chronicles 7:12-22 (Bring Your Requests Before God)
<b>Friday</b>	Luke 11:1-13 (Lord, Teach Us to Pray)
<b>Saturday</b>	1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-30, 37-43 (God the Promise Keeper)
<b>Sunday</b>	1 Kings 8:44-53 (Hear Our Plea and Grant Compassion)



# Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Lesson Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-53

Focus Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50a (end with “committed against you”)

*Key Verses: “Whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the suffering of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; then hear in heaven your dwelling place.” 1 Kings 8:38-39a*

1 KINGS 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50A (END WITH  
“COMMITTED AGAINST YOU”) (NRSV UE)  
1 Kings 8:22-24

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands to heaven.

23 He said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart,

24 the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand.”

37-39

37 “If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar; if their enemy besieges them in any of their cities; whatever suffering, whatever sickness there is;

38 whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the suffering of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house;

39 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know – according to all their ways, for only you know the human heart –...”

46

46 “If they sin against you – for there is no one who does not sin – and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near...”

48-50a (end with “committed against you”)

48 “...if they repent with all their heart and soul

1 KINGS 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50A (END WITH  
“TRANSGRESSED AGAINST THEE”) (KJV)  
1 Kings 8:22-24

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

23 And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

37-39

37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be;

38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)...

46

46 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;...

48-50a (end with “transgressed against thee”)

48 And so return unto thee with all their heart,

in the land of their enemies who took them captive and pray to you toward their land that you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name,

49 then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, maintain their cause,

50 and forgive your people who have sinned against you and all their transgressions that they have committed against you,..."

and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:

49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

50 And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee,...

### KEY TERMS

- **Covenant** – An agreement between parties with duties and benefits for each party.
- **Pestilences** – Epidemics (pandemic) outbreak of fatal disease.
- **Exiles** – People barred/prevented from returning to their own country.
- **Petition** – A serious appeal to a higher authority for relief or favor in a matter.
- **Judaism** – The religion of the native Hebrews characterized by Old Testament laws.

All of us love to celebrate the successful completion of tasks or projects. Celebrations stir in us a deep sense of success and spur us on to further accomplishments.

projects. Celebrations stir in us a deep sense of success and spur us on to further accomplishments. When what we

are celebrating relates to God's kingdom on the earth, that sense of achievement is even more exhilarating even as it is humbling. Such success we usually interpret as a sign of God's favor.

To feel what Solomon must have felt, consider that the building of the temple was a national project which his father King David wanted to undertake. God agreed

that the nation needed such a sacred house of prayer. Yet the Lord blocked David from starting the project. Then God assigned it to Solomon. We are now at the point where Solomon has completed the assignment successfully. Oh, what a sense of relief and joy he must have experienced! He was sharing that joy and pride and putting the use of the temple in

### INTRODUCTION

All of us love to celebrate the successful completion of tasks or

its proper perspective. The secular king was taking a leading role in the spiritual life of his nation.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In studying this text, note the central idea of the presence of God, the faithfulness of God, and the people's responses to that presence and faithfulness. Mark also references to the ark of the covenant, the Holy of Holies ("inner sanctuary," v. 6), and "A cloud filled the house of the Lord" (v. 10). These were all signs and symbols of God's presence (v. 11). Watch how Solomon prayed, praising God for God's covenant faithfulness through the Mosaic covenant (Deuteronomy 4:39; 7:9) and connecting it to the dynastic promise given to David (2 Samuel 7:11b-16).

Verse 30 speaks to an attitude that was common among the pre-exile Jews. They held that God's presence rested and manifested only in the temple. Hence, they prayed, raised their hands towards or faced the direction of the temple when seeking God's favor. Later, the period of exile helped to break this view that God's presence and protection were only available in and around the temple. The Jews in exile, for

their comfort, had to expand the presence and protection of God beyond the temple to the lands where they were in captivity. They would have been hopeless if God could only hear prayers from the temple. Understanding this puts the text from verses 34 to 48 in context.

Verses 33 to 37 give us great insight into the belief system of the Jews of that era. They associated tragedies (droughts, famines, pestilences, attacks, or defeats in wars) with a loss of God's

favor. The remedy for such situations was repentance and appealing to God's mercy through prayer. Therefore, in the text, we see clear references to the pleading and repentance process. Check the repeated references of *to pray*, *prayer*, *pleas* and *pleading*, *crying to God*, and *asking God to hear their prayers* and *forgive their sins*.

The temple was the

ideal place for such pleadings.

In specific terms, Solomon's pleading includes seven petitions asking the Lord to hear his people when they pray toward the temple. These covered when the people sin against a neighbor (vs. 31-32), suffer defeat (vs. 33-34), are in a drought (vs. 35-36), in famines (vs. 37- 40), in

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war (vs. 44-45), praying for foreigners (vs. 41-43), and when in exile seeking compassion and comfort (vs. 46-53).

The position that Solomon took initially in verse 22 was the normal position for public prayer: stand and stretch out the hands (1 Kings 8:22). Psalm 134:2 and 1 Timothy 2:8 paint a similar picture. However, note also in verses 54-55 that as a sign of reverence to the presence of God, he kneeled, facing the altar before standing to bless the people. We do not have to adopt these positions in prayer. However, when approaching God, whether in formal or informal prayers, a posture of reverence and respect should be evident. We cannot worship a God we do not respect.

### SANKOFA

Solomon's prayer of dedication highlighted where the people were spiritually and culturally. His key points centered on God, how people reach out to God in worship, and the desired responses from God. In the New Testament church, those key planks remain. Yet because Jesus Christ is the star in the church age, our church

dedication narrative is markedly different. Here is an example of what this difference looks like.

This is from a new church (building) dedication in Vere, Clarendon, Jamaica, on May 10, 2009, by Archbishop Dr. Rowan Williams. In the dedication sermon, he noted:

“So, the church is a place that tells the community that God is faithful. The church is a place that tells the whole community the Holy Spirit is always at work and always seeking new places to come fully alive. And then remember the words that Jesus speaks to his disciples: ‘This is the Spirit of Truth.’ This church, like every church, is a place where the truth is told. We as Christians, we must be people who tell the truth.

“And what does that mean? Of course, it means something very obvious and basic at first. It means we must be trustworthy people;

people whose word is our bond. We must be honest, straightforward people; we must not dress up our failures; we must not deny our weaknesses; we must be able to be trusted by those around us. Yes,

We do not have to adopt these positions in prayer. However, when approaching God, whether in formal or informal prayers, a posture of reverence and respect should be evident. We cannot worship a God we do not respect



of course, but something even deeper than that. We are here to tell the world the truth about God and the truth about human beings.” (<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/884/sermon-of-dedication-of-the-new-church-of-st-john.html>)

Something to consider when we reflect on the role and function of the church.

### CASE STUDY

It may be natural to consider the modern Christian church as an extension of the temple which Solomon dedicated. People may say, with good justification, that the temple and the church are both places of worship dedicated to God. However, we must not push the similarities too far. A central activity in the temple were animal sacrifices, with

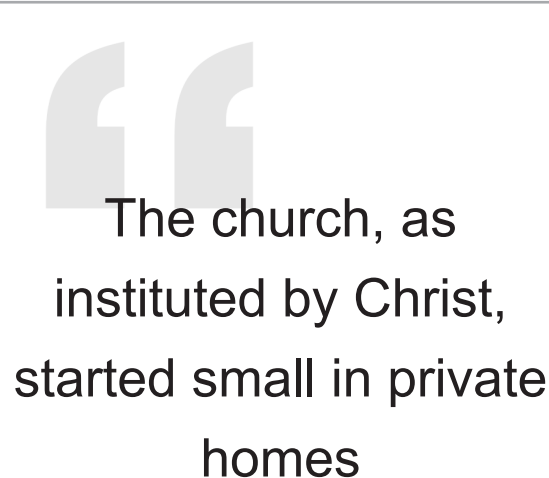
the related rituals and activities. Consider also that the Jews directed worship in the temple to God (the Father) and a yearly atoning ceremony was necessary. Further, the priests restricted access to certain areas in the temple. The temple was an imposing structure designed to accommodate large audiences at varying levels.

The church, as instituted by Christ, started small in private homes. Part of the reason for this was that in the first three hundred years of its existence, the Judaism zealots and the Romans viewed the church with heavy suspicion. It took the Editct of Milan in 313 CE to give Christians the legitimacy to freely practice their religion. This opened the door for Christians to construct and dedicate churches without fear of persecution.

Understand also, that as for the temple, believers dedicated church buildings to prayer and worship of God. But there was a major difference. The central focus in the church was Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice, and not the sacrifice of animals. The churches were open structures with access for all people. The restricted Holy of Holies became

obsolete.

Over time, while prayer and fellowship of believers remain central activities, the church expanded its social outreach to the community. Expanded relief for the poor, education, health care, and even political influence gradually became hallmarks of the church. Today, several observers feel that the church's involvement in these ancillary activities may now be



The church, as  
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overshadowing the core activities of prayer and (traditional) worship to God. These zealots are afraid that in its effort to be earthly relevant, the church may have become spiritually ineffective. On such matters, each sect and each believer must find their own balance and level of comfort.

### LIFE APPLICATION

We do not want to suggest that the physical position we take during prayer has magical powers to make God hear or answer our prayer. Nevertheless, we want to advance the proposition that our stance during prayer can reflect our reverence for the presence of God. Of course, we know that contentious people will hastily say that what matters is how we feel in the heart. Yet that is not a position we take when in the presence of significant people like the president of the country, the CEO of a large company, our employer, or our bishops. We show them respect due to their office. How much more should we show respect to our Creator and Lord?

Therefore, consider if your position during prayer reflects the seriousness of your outreach to God. In your own

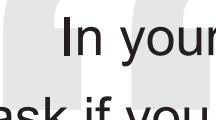
heart, ask if you are satisfied that you are showing to God that you honestly believe he can hear and see you. Does your physical posture in prayer show that you respect God's presence? Consider this and let it guide you accordingly.

Likewise, consider your mental picture of God when you are praying. In times of trouble, do you see an angry God who is dragging you through torment and defeat because he is angry with you? Alternatively, in times of stress and

failure, can you see a loving God taking you through events that draw you closer to him and mature you in your Christian faith? Traditional Jews held the outlook that hardship and failure signaled God's wrath. Success and prosperity showed his blessings. Consider your views and how they fashion your attitudes to life's

twists and turns.

Notice in Solomon's petitions how he covered the foreigners. Now is a wonderful time for believers to examine their attitudes to people of different races and religions. Can we see these "foreigners" whose beliefs and lifestyles differ from ours as children of God? Do we appreciate that like us they need God's favor and protection? Do we see that



In your own heart,  
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under the second great commandment (love others) we owe “foreigners” a duty of love, God’s love? Solomon’s prayer in this regard can be a wake-up call for us to see one God with the same love for all people.

Solomon’s prayer centered on congregational worship and pleadings. We accept that there is joy and blessings in solitary personal worship. However, as a body of believers, God calls us to engage in congregational worship and fellowship. This is the vehicle God uses to encourage, mature, and strengthen us. Take time to reflect on the benefits of corporate worship. Actively consider what you can do to contribute to the appeal and effectiveness of corporate worship.

## QUESTIONS

1. Are there any significant differences

between temple worship of Solomon’s day and church worship today?

2. How closely do you support the view that good times and success mean God’s favor, while challenging times and failure signal God’s wrath?
3. Why would Solomon cover the non-Jews in his prayer, and to what extent is this a model for us?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn:** “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” AMECH #522

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Father, I thank you for the church, your vehicle on earth for encouraging, maturing, and preparing believers for holy living that pleases you. Help me, Lord, to do my part to contribute to your presence and power in the earth. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 9-September 15

<b>Monday</b>	Romans 8:29-39 (We Are More Than Conquerors Through Christ)
<b>Tuesday</b>	2 Corinthians 4:8-18 (Do Not Lose Heart)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Psalms 69:1-15 (God Protects Me)
<b>Thursday</b>	Psalms 69:16-21, 29-36 (The Lord Hears the Needy)
<b>Friday</b>	2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (God Will Strengthen and Guard You)
<b>Saturday</b>	2 Kings 19:14-19 (A Humble Prayer for Help)
<b>Sunday</b>	2 Kings 19:20-31 (God Is a Powerful Defender)

## Hezekiah's Prayer

Lesson Scripture: 2 Kings 19:1-34

Focus Scripture: 2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31

*Key Verse: "So now, O Lord our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone." 2 Kings 19:19*

### 2 KINGS 19:14-20, 29-31 (NRSV UE) 2 Kings 19:14-20

14 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.

15 And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said, "O Lord the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.

16 Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.

17 Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands

18 and have hurled their gods into the fire, though they were no gods but the work of human hands – wood and stone – and so they were destroyed.

19 So now, O Lord our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone."

20 Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I have heard your prayer to me about King Sennacherib of Assyria."

29-31

29 "And this shall be the sign for you: This year you shall eat what grows of itself and in the second year what springs from that; then in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit.

30 The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear

### 2 KINGS 19:14-20, 29-31 (KJV) 2 Kings 19:14-20

14 And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.

15 And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.

16 Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

17 Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands,

18 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

19 Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

29-31

29 And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.

30 And the remnant that is escaped of the



fruit upward,

31 for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.

31 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this.

### KEY TERMS

- **Worldview** – Mental image or concept of a person, thing, or event which influences how we see events involving that person or thing.
- **Intermediary** – A person or process which acts as a link (go-between) between two or more parties.
- **Profile** – Literally, a person’s face especially from a side view. Figuratively, a mental image of a person, thing, or event that represents that person, thing, or event.

“God does not always work in the confines of the neat religious or political boxes we construct for resolutions.”

an electrical earth-wire in faith in God. Hezekiah displayed such leadership. As you work through this lesson, examine Hezekiah’s worldview of God. Look at how seriously he took the threat and his resulting actions. Look closely at God’s responses and the hope they generated.

Further, use the **Sankofa** and the **Case Study** sections to see what godly hope in action looks like. Remember, God does not always work in the confines of the neat religious or political boxes we construct for resolutions. And, although it may be subtle, this lesson cautions us to be careful

### INTRODUCTION

In a crisis, it is natural, indeed expected, that believers will say, “Pray about it.” And with that advice comes an almost magical expectancy that the crisis will somehow just disappear or resolve itself. The assigned text shows it is usually not that simple. Facing and resolving a crisis often calls for strong leadership: a leadership grounded like

in how we try to reframe God’s solutions to fit the narrative (at times revisionary) we build to assess God’s intervention in the crises we encounter in life.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Verses 14 and 15 are pivotal in understanding Hezekiah’s profile of God. This can help us to assess why Hezekiah was confident God Jehovah would come

through for him. He saw the Hebrews' God as the ONLY true living almighty God, whose powers extended over all the world. Such a God was capable of handling Sennacherib and Assyria. People who receive from God have this general profile of God (Psalm 47:2-9).

In verse 16 note Hezekiah's reference to "reproach of the living God." Untrained Christians today may not understand the emotions behind such a reference. In this age, we readily tolerate any insult people throw at our God. But zealots in other religions understand it. Insulting their sacred things can lead to unpleasant consequences. Note that it was such an insult from Goliath that enraged the young David who felt compelled to avenge God. The older King David still showed that disgust for people who insulted his God (see Psalm 69:9).

In this regard, note the supporting passages outside our set text. Isaiah 26:11 and 59:17 make clear that Yahweh will not allow others to profane his name or destroy his people. We see the same sentiments in Isaiah 9:7 with the promise to establish David's son on the throne

forever.

Theologians and Bible commentators have always advocated that in serious appeals to God, we should pray God's words. They tell us to remind God of his promises. This advice in no way suggests that God is forgetful and needs our prompts to remember his promises.

However, praying God's promises gives us a sure footing on which to stand and plead before God. Check how

He saw the Hebrews' God as the ONLY true living almighty God, whose powers extended over all the world.

Hezekiah did this in verse 19. And observe the use of the same approach at 1 Kings 8:42 and 1 Samuel 17:46. Perhaps the earliest use of it is in Exodus 32, where Moses used it to persuade Yahweh not to destroy a rebellious Israel.

Watch how in this situation God responded to

Hezekiah's prayer through the prophet Isaiah, who announced the certain defeat of the Assyrian army and restoration of the land of Judah. This in no way should suggest that today God's answer must or will come through a third party. Unlike in the days of Hezekiah, we have full and free access to God's answers through the Holy Spirit. This is a distinguishing

feature of the church age. Yes, God in his absolute discretion can respond to us through designated leaders. However, know that God can also respond directly to us. We need no intermediary (apart from Christ).

Verse 29 hints at a principle of God's intervention that at times can baffle even mature believers. Often when we speak of God's intervention in a situation, we project a speedy microwave-like resolution. And several testimonies tell us dramatic resolutions do happen.

However, in most situations, God's solutions take time to manifest. In Hezekiah's situation, it took two years for life to return to normal after the invasion and siege. Why some injustices are resolved instantly, and others take a lifetime, is a question no religious leader, no theologian nor this writer can answer. That is just God's way of working.

### SANKOFA

Hezekiah turned to the Lord for help in a time of war. Today the war-leaders faces come in all forms. In 2020 the war was in the form of a raging coronavirus

pandemic. According to international news reports, Malawi's new president took the Hezekiah stance against the pandemic.

In his second week in office as president, Lazarus Chakwera called his people to three days of prayer and fasting as a pushback against the pandemic. We noted that before he became the political president, President Chakwera

Why some injustices are resolved instantly, and others take a lifetime, is a question no religious leader, no theologian nor this writer can answer. That is just God's way of working.

was the spiritual leader of the Assemblies of God, the country's largest Christian denomination. This may be a challenge for people who see a wall of separation between politics and religion. Whatever your views on this matter are, Chakwera's explanation is noteworthy. He said God's words to him were, "I am not putting you out of ministry.

Instead, I am extending your ministry. I want you to get into politics." This is remarkably interesting when we know that in Bible days, the good kings of Israel gave both political and secular leadership. They led the nation using the principles that pleased God.

### CASE STUDY

According to trusted presidential historians and observers, American President Ronald Reagan cherished a picture of another great American leader, General George Washington. The image showed General Washington kneeling in the snow at Valley Forge. At that time, the odds for his army's success looked dauntingly low. Hope had fallen and was falling even further.

President Reagan explained why that image meant so much to him. He said that it "personified a people who knew it was not enough to depend on their own courage and goodness: they must also seek help from God their Father and their Preserver." To appreciate this comment, we must review what happened at Valley Forge. Below is an extract from [history.com](http://history.com) which gives an overview.

"The six-month encampment of General George Washington's Continental Army at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778 was a major turning point in the American Revolutionary War. While conditions were notoriously cold

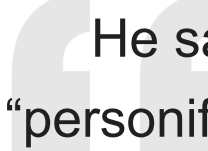
and harsh and provisions were in short supply, it was at the winter camp where George Washington proved his mettle and, with the help of former Prussian military officer Friedrich Wilhelm Baron von Steuben, transformed a battered Continental Army into a unified, world-class fighting force capable of beating the British."

The above passage underpins the reality that when we stand with God, he stands with us. Whatever our personal politics, whether revisionary, conservative, or progressive, the faith expressed by George Washington, when coupled with appropriate action, helps to build hope in times of national crises. As grateful believers love to say, "One person and God

is always a winning majority." Hezekiah and George Washington proved that godly leaders do not look at surveys and public opinion polls in times of national crises. They look to God.

### LIFE APPLICATION

Take a serious look at the current religious and political landscapes. What



He said that it  
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enough to depend on  
their own courage and  
goodness: they must  
also seek help from  
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their Preserver."



do you see? Does your assessment generate hope or despair? How does your worldview of God play in your assessment, and what happens if events do not play out as you predict or would prefer? Such an exercise will automatically measure your faith in God, so be as honest as you can.

Hezekiah faced his fears, asked God for help, and got a favorable outcome over time. We can use this approach as well. List your present fears on a sheet of paper or in your electronic device. Write a brief list beginning with “I fear ..... and hope for .....” Then make these matters a point of prayer and meditation. Plot your progress over time. What you see may amaze you. As the saying goes, “When God does not change the situation, he changes his child to deal with the situation.”

This next application calls for a little boldness and faith. Recall a message or an action of a current or recent past leader that gave you hope and/or encouragement. Write a letter expressing

thanks to the leader for their hopeful approach to leading. Be specific about how their approach impacted you. Now here is the brave part. Search out the address (even email) and send the letter to the leader. Even if you get no response, it is worth the effort.

Last, here is something you can apply immediately. Commit to memory (or use

How does your worldview of God play in your assessment, and what happens if events do not play out as you predict or would prefer? Such an exercise will automatically measure your faith in God, so be as honest as you can.

the song sheet or YouTube) the chorus, “Lord, of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise” (“For the Beauty of the Earth”). Sing or hum this chorus when you face a crisis, difficult decision, or relationship challenge. This is a superb tactic to keep your stress level low during life trials.

### QUESTIONS

1. Hezekiah's profile of God was that of an almighty God with unlimited power over the entire world. Explain in your own words your personal profile of God.
2. What is your opinion on why solutions from God sometimes take a long time to manifest?

3. How do you appeal for God's help when facing threats of violence?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn:** "Onward, Christian Soldiers," AMECH #414

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Father, in times of threats, whether religious, social, political, or physical, help me to believe in your capacity to keep and protect me. Thanks for your presence; thanks for your power: thanks for your peace. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

**September 16-September 22**

<b>Monday</b>	1 Corinthians 5 (Abstain From Immorality)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Revelation 5:6-14 (Worthy Is the Lamb!)
<b>Wednesday</b>	2 Chronicles 34:8, 14-27 (God Forgives Those Who Repent)
<b>Thursday</b>	Psalms 85 (Restore Us Again, O God)
<b>Friday</b>	Ephesians 5:3-14 (Living in the Light of Christ)
<b>Saturday</b>	Exodus 12:3-17 (A Day of Celebration)
<b>Sunday</b>	2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19 (Sanctify Yourselves)

# DECALOGUE

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**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.



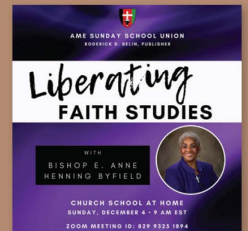
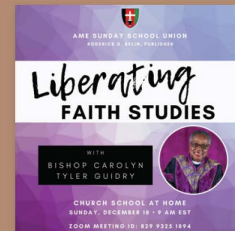
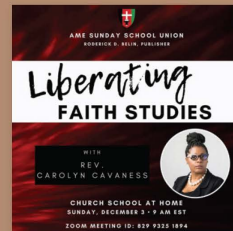
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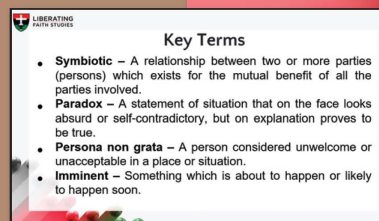
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