



BIBLE LENS

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Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*®

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from the **Responsive Reading**

Isaiah 41:10

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

The Hebrew word rendered *uphold* (*tāmak*) ranges in meaning from grasp or hold fast to support, attain, or lay hold of. One scholar interprets “I will uphold thee” as “I will enable you to bear all your trials.”

Upholding appears many other times in the Hebrew Bible to portray God’s care for His creation. A psalmist writes, for example, “Thou upholdest me in mine integrity” ([Psalms 41:12](#)). And [Isaiah 42:1](#) announces, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.”

Isaiah 41:15

Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.

Ancient threshing instruments used to separate grain from straw after a harvest were heavy, sled-like devices studded on the underside with sharp stones or metal spikes. The Hebrew word translated here as *teeth* (*pîpiyā*) describes a two-edged sword in [Psalms 149:6](#). To the Israelites, the imagery of mountains and hills reduced to worthless husks affirms divine triumph over their enemies.

Translators agree that “make thee” means “make of thee” or “make thee into” rather than “make for thee.” God’s servant is to become the instrument by which foes will be destroyed.

threshing instrument: tool used to separate grain from chaff

chaff: seed or grain coverings; husks

Isaiah 40:29

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

faint: weak

from Section 1

1 | Jeremiah 2:1, 2, 5, 11, 13

The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. . . . What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? . . . Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. . . . For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Translation

The LORD spoke his word to me, saying: “Go and speak to the people of Jerusalem, saying: This is what the LORD says:

*‘I remember how faithful you were to me when you were a
young nation.*

You loved me like a young bride.

You followed me through the desert,

a land that had never been planted. . . .’

This is what the LORD says:

“I was fair to your ancestors,

so why did they turn away from me?

Your ancestors worshiped useless idols

and became useless themselves. . . .

Has a nation ever exchanged its gods?

(Of course, its gods are not really gods at all.)

But my people have exchanged their glorious God

for idols worth nothing. . . .”

“My people have done two evils:

They have turned away from me,

the spring of living water.

And they have dug their own wells,

which are broken wells that cannot hold water.”

Before chastising Israel for its faithlessness, Jeremiah depicts God looking back to the early days of His covenant with her—a period the seer compares to the loving commitment of a youthful marriage relationship. (The “land that was not sown” is a reference to the barren desert of the Exodus journey.) A commentary suggests, “The point of the divine memory is not to identify an ideal time but to point to a relationship as it was and is still meant to be.”

Jeremiah adopts two symbols—a fountain and a cistern—for his sharp rebuke. Where an ever-flowing spring exists, a cistern to collect water is unnecessary. God supplies an infinite wellspring of good, yet the people have turned from Him to worship other gods—“broken cisterns”—that cannot provide for or preserve them.

Mentions of fresh or living water occur elsewhere in Scripture. [Isaiah 58:11](#) promises, “Thou shalt be like . . . a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” [Zechariah 14:8](#) prophesies, “Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem.” And to a Samaritan woman, Christ Jesus defines “living water” spiritually, as “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” ([John 4:10, 14](#)).

espousals: commitments, especially relating to marriage

vanity: emptiness, uselessness

cisterns: reservoirs or containers for storing water

2 | [John 6:63](#)

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.

Translation

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh conveys no benefit [it is of no account]. . . .

—Amplified® Bible

from **Section 2**

3 | [Exodus 3:11, 12](#)

Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee.

Moses’ protest is understandable. Speaking with Pharaoh is dangerous, perhaps especially since Moses fled Egypt after killing a man (see [2:11–15](#)). Since then his work has been humble—that of a shepherd in Midian. God’s pledge of His presence echoes divine promises to Jacob (see [Genesis 28:15; 31:3](#))—and is later voiced to Joshua and Gideon (see [Joshua](#)

1:5; 3:7 ; Judges 6:16).

A Bible authority observes, “Moses’ sense of his own inadequacy (3:11) is not met with an assurance of his adequacy, but an assertion of Yahweh as the God who will be present (3:12).”

4 | Exodus 4:1–4

Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee. And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand.

Experts explain that picking up a snake by the tail is a dangerous move—the snake can thrash and bite the person holding it. Moses’ courage and trust in God are being tested, and his obedience proves that he possesses both qualities.

Snakes were both feared and revered in Egypt. Many people carried amulets to protect themselves from Apophis, a god in serpent form that symbolized evil—and Pharaoh appropriated the serpent figure to represent his power. Subjugation of a snake would be, according to one source, “. . . a direct assault on Pharaoh’s sovereignty; indeed, it was an attack on Egypt’s entire belief system.”

5 | Deuteronomy 5:6, 7

I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me.

Near the end of his life, Moses assembles the people to prepare them for entry into Canaan. (After forty years in the wilderness, this gathering would have included many members of a new generation.) Deuteronomy contains a detailed review of their covenant with God, starting with this pivotal statement about God’s role in their nation’s history—and the First Commandment charge to worship only Yahweh.

bondage: slavery

SIDEBAR: About Egypt in Bible times

Egypt played a significant part in the history of Abraham and his descendants. But its largest impact arose from Joseph’s enslavement (see [Genesis, chaps. 39–41](#))—an injustice that ultimately led to the relocation of Joseph’s entire extended family to Egypt (see [Genesis, chap. 46](#)).

The children of Israel flourished in Egypt for several generations, so much so that a new king felt threatened by their numbers. It was at that point that they were enslaved, enduring harsh and cruel treatment for about eighty years, until the Exodus (see [Exodus 1:9–14](#)).

Egypt also served as a place of refuge—for Abram during a famine, King Jeroboam of Israel fleeing Solomon, some Israelites fleeing the Babylonians, and the infant Jesus’ family (see [Genesis 12:10](#) ; [I Kings 11:40](#) ; [II Kings 25:26](#) ; [Matthew 2:13–15](#)).

By the time of Christ Jesus, thousands of Jews had relocated to Egypt’s capital of Alexandria. And earlier, translators of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the Septuagint) were among its Jewish population.

from **Section 3**

6 | [Psalms 56:4](#)

In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

Translation

I praise God’s word.

I trust God.

I am not afraid.

What can mere flesh and blood do to me?

—GOD’S WORD Translation

7 | [Psalms 5:3](#)

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.

Translation

Listen to my voice in the morning, LORD.

*Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait
expectantly.*

—New Living Translation

8 | [Psalms 19:7, 8, 12–14](#)

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. . . . Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; . . . Let the words of my

mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Translation

*The instruction of the LORD is perfect,
renewing one's life;
the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy,
making the inexperienced wise.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
making the heart glad;
the command of the LORD is radiant,
making the eyes light up. . . .
Who perceives his unintentional sins?
Cleanse me from my hidden faults.
Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins; . . . May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.*

—Christian Standard Bible

Two kinds of errors are mentioned in verses 12 and 13—those that are hidden or unknown and those stemming from arrogance and pride. (*Zēd*, the term translated *presumptuous* here, is sometimes rendered *willful* or *deliberate*.) Whatever the fault, this psalmist is confident of God's power to ensure his native innocence.

9 | [Romans 8:6](#)

To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Translation

If people's thinking is controlled by the sinful self, there is death. But if their thinking is controlled by the Spirit, there is life and peace.

—New Century Version

from **Section 4**

10 | [Matthew 8:14, 15](#)

When Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.

Ancient households typically included extended family under the same roof. Peter's support of his mother-in-law indicates his respect for the Commandment to honor one's parents (see [Exodus 20:12](#))—a law Jesus clearly respected, citing it to the Pharisees: “God commanded saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death” ([Matthew 15:4](#)). An account of this healing also occurs in the Gospels of Mark (see [1:29–31](#)) and Luke (see [4:38, 39](#)). Though there are small differences, all three end with the words “ministered unto them.” This woman's ability to assume her Sabbath duties as a hostess without delay shows the immediacy and completeness of the cure.

11 | [Romans 12:1, 2](#)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Translation

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

—New Living Translation

“Reasonable” (Greek, *logikos*) service represents something beyond what is sensible or rational. *Logikos* is derived from *logos*, often denoting the Word of God, and can be translated *spiritual*. Authorities see the sacrifice of self to the service of God as the logical response to God's mercy. More than the ritual sacrifice of animals, spiritual sacrifice is “holy, acceptable unto God.”

12 | [II Corinthians 10:3, 4](#)

Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

carnal: fleshly; related to the physical body

from **Section 5**

14 | [Matthew 15:11](#)

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

defileth: makes unclean or impure

15 | [Matthew 6:25, 32, 33](#)

I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Translation

“ . . . I tell you, stop being worried or anxious (perpetually uneasy, distracted) about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, as to what you will wear. . . . for your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But first and most importantly seek (aim at, strive after) His kingdom and His righteousness [His way of doing and being right—the attitude and character of God], and all these things will be given to you also.

—Amplified® Bible

Merimnaō, the Greek term rendered *thought*, can signify both anxiety and focused attentiveness. In this verse it is used to caution against worrying about or planning for daily needs instead of relying on God’s provision.

To seek the kingdom of God is to desire His goodness and righteousness; to seek it *first* is to place it above everything else, not so much in chronology as in esteem and priority.

16 | [Mark 16:17, 18](#)

These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Translation

“ . . . those who believe will be able to do these things as proof: They will use my name to force demons out of people. They will speak in languages they never learned. They will pick up snakes without being hurt. And they will drink poison without being hurt. They will touch the sick, and the sick will be healed.”

—International Children’s Bible

For centuries, the Hebrew people had looked for signs of the prophesied Messiah. Simeon voiced his recognition of the Christ child after Jesus' birth as "a sign which shall be spoken against" ([Luke 2:34](#)). And believers and critics alike asked about signs concerning Jesus' Messiahship (see [Matthew 24:3](#) ; [Mark 8:11](#) ; [John 6:30](#)). Now, in his final promise to the disciples, the Master specifies the signs that verify the Christ-power.

from **Section 6**

17 | [Psalms 8:3, 4](#)

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?

ordained: ordered; established

18 | [Revelation 12:1, 10](#)

There appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: . . . And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ.

The book of Revelation is an apocalypse—a text that predicts great upheaval leading to the end of evil. The term *apocalypse*, from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, signifies unveiling or revealing—thus the book title.

Apocalyptic writing in Hebrew Scripture often arose in periods of crisis and uncertainty, and employed images and symbols to convey its message of hope (see [Daniel, chaps. 7–12](#) , for instance). In the New Testament, Jesus foretells apocalyptic events in [Luke 21:9–33](#) and the destruction of evil in [John 12:31](#) .

At the time of this work, Christians were sometimes persecuted by Roman authorities. "In the face of such persecution," a commentary notes, " . . . Revelation repeatedly reminded them, as it still reminds us, that the God they served is Almighty. God controls history; he has accomplished our salvation and continues to work out his purposes."

Read a related article, "[The axiom of Christian Science](#)" by Dorcas W. Strong.



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Resources quoted in this issue

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