



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

God the Preserver of Man

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from the **Golden Text**

[Psalms 55:22](#)

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.

Burden is translated from the Hebrew noun *yē hāb*, often rendered *worries*. The author of First Peter echoes this verse in encouraging Christians to “[cast] all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (5:7).

from the **Responsive Reading**

[Luke 12:24, 25, 27, 28](#)

Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? . . . Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?

While Matthew’s account refers generically to the “fowls of the air” ([Matthew 6:26](#)), Luke specifies ravens. Because they were regarded as among the least valuable of birds—and classed in the Torah as ritually unclean (see [Leviticus 11:13, 15](#))—their mention underscores God’s all-embracing care.

Although thought by some to encompass an array of wildflowers, “lilies” is an accurate and specific term. In the desert, where wood was scarce, dried flowers and grasses were indeed used as fuel.

[Luke 12:29–32](#)

Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

A heavenly kingdom governed by a divine monarch is an idea grounded in ancient Eastern cultures. Most people imagined their gods as having defeated other gods—as reigning supreme in the heavens and overseeing the earthly nations that worshiped them. Experience revealed to the Jews one omnipotent ruler, Yahweh. His kingship is a frequent theme in Hebrew Scripture (see examples in [Psalms 5:2](#); [Isaiah 33:22](#)).

In the New Testament, “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” occur one hundred times. Christ Jesus’ teaching elevates the concept from a geographical or political entity to the spiritual kingdom “at hand” and “within you” ([Matthew 4:17](#); [Luke 17:21](#)).

from **Section 1**

2 | [Nehemiah 9:7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 21](#)

Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; . . . and didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; . . . And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; . . . Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. . . . And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. . . . Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing.

Soon after completion of Jerusalem’s wall under Nehemiah’s leadership, the Hebrews gather for a reading of the Torah (see [8:1–8](#)). Then the Levites (members of Israel’s priestly tribe) recount Yahweh’s acts of deliverance and guidance, preparing the people to renew their covenant with Him (see [9:36–38](#)).

Recitals of Jewish history often begin with the pivotal events surrounding Abram, Israel’s first patriarch (see a New Testament summary in [Acts 7:2–47](#)). Ur, his traditional birthplace, was a principal city of southern Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and a center for the worship of the moon-god Sin. (Chaldees is another term for Chaldeans, residents of Babylonia.) Abram’s God-directed journey out of Ur to Haran and Canaan (see [Genesis 11:31](#); [12:1–9](#)) launches the Hebrew, Arab, and Edomite nations.

from **Section 2**

4 | [Psalms 40:11, 12](#)

Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have compassed me about.

Some commentaries see a prayer of confidence instead of petition in this passage. Hebrew scholar Robert Alter has, for instance:

You, Lord, will not hold back
Your mercies from me.
Your steadfast truth
Shall always guard me.
For evils drew round me
Beyond count.

5 | [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.

In ancient times, the right side was considered to be the strongest. The right hand was used for swearing oaths, the right eye was deemed the most vital part of the body, and the seat to the right of a host was the seat of honor. The imagery of God’s right hand appears throughout Scripture, representing divine might and majesty (see example in [Exodus 15:6](#)).

Yea can signify yes, moreover, or also. Here, as in hundreds of biblical statements, it conveys certainty and affirmation (see other instances in [Genesis 17:15, 16](#); [Psalms 16:6](#); [II Corinthians 1:20](#)).

8 | [II Timothy 1:7](#)

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Addressed to Paul’s young disciple Timothy, this assertion identifies four qualities that define the Christian: courage, power, love, and self-control. Of courage and self-control, a scriptural authority points out: “. . . courage comes from the continual consciousness of the presence of Christ It is Christ alone who can give us that self-mastery which will keep us alike from being swept away and from running away.”

from **Section 3**

10 | [Psalms 92:13, 14](#)

Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age.

Building on a tree metaphor from [verse 12](#), the Psalmist commends deep-rooted commitment to God as the key to growth and prosperity. “The righteous are able to take root, grow, and be fruitful,” one source reflects, “because God is both their foundation and their constant source of nourishment.”

Although the Temple in Jerusalem, including the courtyards in the Temple compound, was viewed as God’s house (see [I Kings 9:1](#); [Nehemiah 8:16](#)), here “courts of our God” describes the kingdom of heaven.

from **Section 4**

15 | [Matthew 15:32–38](#)

Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

A basic food in ancient times, bread was considered a gift from God and a daily reminder of His continuous love. This story beautifully demonstrates the abundance of that spiritual gift. Later, the Savior identifies himself as the “bread of God,” the “bread of life,” and the “living bread which came down from heaven” ([John 6:33, 35, 51](#)), elevating the symbol of bread to the understanding of God that is essential to life.

from **Section 5**

20 | [Matthew 17:14–20](#)

When they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

In Mark’s record, Jesus likewise laments his disciples’ faithlessness. But there his response to their question is, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” ([Mark 9:29](#)). Matthew, in contrast, focuses his account on faith. A commentary suggests, “The faith in which they come up short is the trust in God’s power that facilitates the extraordinary feats of the Christian mission”

On another occasion, Jesus replies to the apostles’ request to increase their faith, “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you” ([Luke 17:6](#)). The Master also speaks about mountain-moving faith after his withering of the fig tree (see [Matthew 21:19–22](#)).

“Faithless and perverse generation” recalls Moses’ indictment of the wayward Israelites: “They are a perverse and crooked generation” ([Deuteronomy 32:5](#)). *Diastrephō*, the Greek verb rendered *perverse*, alludes to distortion or turning away. One paraphrase interprets Jesus’ depiction as “an unbelieving and difficult people.”

from **Section 6**

21 | [Galatians 6:2, 9](#)

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. . . . And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Translated *burdens* here, the Greek noun *baros* describes heavy encumbrances. (It is distinct from *phortion*, used in [verse 5](#) to indicate more normal loads.) In this passage, burdens are seen figuratively as sin, sorrow, and suffering—troubles that call for care and love among believers.

A scholar writes, “. . . those who have received the Spirit and have been set free from the Mosaic law actually fulfill the requirements of the Mosaic law (see [Rom 8:4](#)) summed up in the single command ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’! Christlike, Spirit-empowered love fulfills the law.”

22 | [Matthew 11:28–30](#)

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Zygos is the Greek word for the yoke put on draft animals. It represents bondage or servitude, and can imply as well a way of getting work done or sharing a load. To Jews listening to Jesus, a yoke is a symbol of submission to Torah requirements. Later, Jesus censures Hebrew leaders: “They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders” ([23:4](#)). Now the Savior guides his followers to teachings free of the religious strictures of the Pharisees.

Easy is translated from the adjective *khrestos*, which can signify well-fitting. A Bible expert offers this explanation: “In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. . . . The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor made to fit the ox. . . . What [Jesus] means is: ‘The life I give you is not a burden to gall you; your task is made to measure to fit you.’ ”

Read a related article, “[Progressing in the wilderness](#)” by Elizabeth E. Sweder, at jsh.christianscience.com/progressing-in-the-wilderness.

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