



BIBLE LENS

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

God the Only Cause and Creator

May 29–June 4, 2023

from the **Responsive Reading**

Psalms 40:5

Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Reckoning or numbering was familiar to the Hebrew people—head counts verified tribe membership and overall population growth (see the book of Numbers, as well as examples in [Joshua 8:10](#); [I Samuel 11:8](#)). By contrast, God's works are proclaimed to be countless. And His saving power, earlier acknowledged for the individual psalmist (see [vv. 1–3](#)), is celebrated here as all-encompassing and infinite.

Ephesians 2:10, 20, 21

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. . . . and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.

"The purpose of God's creative activity," observes one source, "is not merely to have a people, as if he were constructing a work of art. Rather, this new creation is to be active and productive like the Creator."

"Apostles and prophets" refers to the early leaders of the Christian movement (see [Acts 13:1](#); [I Corinthians 12:28](#)). Now each believer is identified as an integral part of the "building" founded by Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:14–21

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all

that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

In humble prayer the author conveys the sweep of God’s might and Christ’s love with expansive language: “riches of his glory,” “breadth, and length, and depth, and height,” “the fulness of God,” “exceeding abundantly,” “world without end.” A scholar remarks, “It is as if [he] invited us to look at the universe to the limitless sky above, to the limitless horizons on every side, to the depth of the earth and of the seas beneath us, and said, ‘The love of Christ is as vast as that.’”

“This cause” indicates the writer’s fervent hope that his readers will be grounded in universal love, sharing the understanding of Christ with “all saints”—all believers. The Greek words rendered *Father* (*patēr*) and *family* (*patria*) are related terms, highlighting the close connection between everyone in God’s kingdom.

from Section 2

4 | [Genesis 1:26, 27](#)

God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

While *image* commonly applies to a physical form (such as an idol), it also means representation. A scriptural authority notes, “There is no status distinction among bearers of the divine image; they are equal while having distinct capacities and roles in fulfilling the divine mandate to steward the earth.”

from Section 3

7 | [Jeremiah 1:4, 5](#)

The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Translation

The LORD said to me, “I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations.”

—Good News Translation

Accounts of calls to prophecy generally open with the phrase “The word of the Lord came unto” (see introductions to the books of Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah). Though Jeremiah uses that phrase as well, his call is unique—it includes the assurance that God knew him and had appointed him to worldwide service before his birth.

References to “the word of the Lord” appear well over two hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. In a majority of cases (as in this text), *word* is translated from the Hebrew *dabār*, occasionally rendered *commandment*, *counsel*, or *promise*. Scholars explain that *word* encompasses both speech and the thought behind it. When representing God, it connotes the power depicted in Isaiah 46:11: “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.”

8 | [Isaiah 43:1, 6, 7](#)

Now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. . . . Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Translation

*Israel, the LORD who created you says,
“Do not be afraid—I will save you.
I have called you by name—you are mine.
.
Let my people return from distant lands,
from every part of the world.
They are my own people,
and I created them to bring me glory.”*

—Good News Translation

from **Section 4**

11 | [Galatians 3:3](#)

Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Translation

Having begun [your new life by faith] with the Spirit, are you now being perfected and reaching spiritual maturity by the flesh [that is, by your own works and efforts to keep the Law]?

—Amplified® Bible

12 | [Isaiah 45:8, 11](#)

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it. . . . Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.

Translation

“Rain down my godliness, you heavens above.

Let the clouds shower it down.

Let the earth open wide to receive it.

Let freedom spring to life.

Let godliness grow richly along with it.

I have created all these things.

I am the LORD.”

.

The LORD is the Holy One of Israel.

He made them.

He says to them,

“Are you asking me about what will happen to my children?

Are you telling me what I should do with what my hands have made?”

—New International Reader’s Version™

For desert dwellers, the image of blessings pouring as rainfall and springing up as plants would have brought deep comfort—especially as a foretelling of the end of exile and the return of the Israelites to their homeland.

Though some translations render verse 11 as a question—“Will you ask me . . . ?”—it has the spirit of [Isaiah 1:18](#): “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.” Verses 12 and 13 of chapter 45 strongly assert God’s omnipotence, beginning with the divine declaration, “I have made the earth, and created man upon it.”

13 | [Isaiah 40:26](#)

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

Translation

Look up into the heavens.

Who created all the stars?

*He brings them out like an army, one after another,
calling each by its name.
Because of his great power and incomparable strength,
not a single one is missing.*

—New Living Translation

In ancient times, stars were identified with pagan gods. In this text, the Maker and master of all creation is shown to be the one God. That He knows all by name attests to His omniscience; that not one fails or is missing affirms His protective care.

from **Section 5**

14 | [Psalms 138:8](#)

The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever.

Translation

*The LORD will fulfill His purpose for me.
LORD, Your love is eternal; . . .*

—Holman Christian Standard Bible®

15 | [Psalms 86:7, 10](#)

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me. . . . For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.

Translation

*When I am in trouble, I pray,
knowing you will listen.*

.

*You perform great wonders
because you alone are God.*

—Contemporary English Version

16 | [John 12:44–46](#)

Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

Translation

In a loud voice Jesus said:

Everyone who has faith in me also has faith in the one who sent me. And everyone who has seen me has seen the one who sent me. I am the light that has come into the world. No one who has faith in me will stay in the dark.

—Contemporary English Version

John 1–12 has been called the Book of Signs, a recounting of seven of Jesus’ works, chosen as proof of his Messiahship. Throughout this Gospel, the writer repeatedly focuses on a strong faith in Christ.

In this passage, the Master makes an appeal for belief—in him and in God. A Bible authority points out, “As Jesus will make clear in his private teachings among his disciples (14:10), . . . when the world makes a decision about Jesus, it is really making a decision about God.”

The concluding verses of chapter 12 ([vv. 44–50](#)) mark the end of Jesus’ public ministry. His final days leading to the passion events will be spent with his closest friends—his disciples.

from **Section 6**

18 | [Matthew 9:35–38](#)

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Harvests are a recurring symbol in the New Testament, from the Baptist's caution about the wheat and chaff and Jesus' parable of the tares and wheat to the Revelator's figure of the Son of man as reaper (see [Matthew 3:11, 12](#); [13:24–30](#), [37–43](#); [Revelation 14:14–18](#)).

Jesus' message about the abundance of the harvest and fewness of the laborers (restated when he prepares the seventy disciples for their missionary work; see [Luke 10:1, 2](#), citation 21) reveals an urgent need—for workers whose love for God and neighbor impels them to join the outreach effort. And his metaphor of a cultivated crop shows that he expects people's hearts to be ready for the gospel of Christ. After this instruction, the Savior sends his 12 disciples out to preach and heal (see [Matthew 10:1, 5–8](#)).

20 | [Luke 9:49, 50](#)

John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.

Here concern for position may be uppermost in the disciples' thoughts—a concern also voiced by James and John in asking for places of honor with Jesus “in [his] glory” (see [Mark 10:35–37](#)). Both are firmly rebuked. (A similar episode happened centuries before, when Moses' companions demanded that he forbid what they considered improper prophecy; see [Numbers 11:24–29](#).)

In this story, the objection to an unauthorized exorcism is somewhat ironic, given the disciples' recent failure to heal a young man of demon possession (see [Luke 9:38–42](#)). Soon, however, Jesus' followers find “the devils subject unto us through thy name” and earn the Master's commendation (see [10:17, 18](#), citation 21).

Jesus' response to the disciples' report has a counterpart in [11:23](#): “He that is not with me is against me.” A commentary suggests a way to reconcile the two declarations: “The first welcomes the support of any who will join in; the second warns that only those whose commitment leads them to make a difference are really disciples—‘with me.’ In each case it comes down to the question of who is actually doing the work of the kingdom. . . .”

21 | [Luke 10:1, 17–20](#)

After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. . . . And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

The number of Jesus' emissaries recalls other groups entrusted with sacred tasks—such as the seventy elders appointed to assist Moses (see [Numbers 11:24, 25](#)), the seventy members of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish governing council), and the seventy scholars said to have translated Hebrew Scripture into Greek.

Sending out disciples in pairs was a frequent practice in early Christianity (see [Mark 6:7](#), for instance). It offered safety and support in their travels and provided two witnesses, as outlined in Hebrew law (see [Deuteronomy 19:15](#)). A Bible authority describes their task this way: “They are to go like spiritual commandos on a mission—urgently, with simple equipment and a powerful message.”

from **Section 7**

23 | [Acts 5:12, 17–21, 34, 35, 38, 39, 42](#)

By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; . . . Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. . . . Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. . . . And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. . . . And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Gamaliel was a respected member of the Sanhedrin and is traditionally identified as the grandson of the distinguished Hebrew elder Hillel. In [Acts 22:3](#) he is named as Paul's teacher in Jerusalem. Sources characterize Gamaliel as his time's greatest authority on Hebrew law and as a judge known for consistently interpreting the law in favor of the common good.

In the case of Peter and his fellow apostles, Gamaliel—a Pharisee—challenges the aggressive acts of the Sadducees. (While usually united in opposing Jesus' teachings and works, these two Jewish groups often disagreed about doctrinal principles.) Gamaliel's well-reasoned argument and moderating influence undoubtedly save the apostles' lives.

The divine rescue in this account is the first of three such deliverances. On two other occasions, imprisoned believers Peter, Paul, and Silas are freed by spiritual means as well (see [12:1–11](#); [16:19–40](#)).

Read a related article, “[Seeing with greater clarity](#)” by Janet Heineman Clements, at csjournal.com/greater-clarity.

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