

September 1, 2024

Making Transitions or Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre
Genesis 13:8-18

Unifying Principle (Focus)

Throughout life, threshold opportunities arise that determine our future. How do we honor such opportunities with solemnity and gratefulness? Abram built altars to mark those occasions on which God called him to greater faithfulness.

Goals For the Learner

1. To explain the context of Abraham's worship with regard to altars.
2. To desire the spiritual maturity that develops through acknowledging God's activity in our lives.
3. To practice a worshipful response in recognition of God's presence and activity in the threshold moments in their lives.

Challenges For the Week

1. Explore the concept of liminality, or threshold events, and how God uses it to shape the lives of believers.
2. Recall property disputes that resulted in bringing families closer (or not). What was most helpful, or disruptive, to the families in settling the dispute?
3. What are some situations in which learners analyze conflicted situations and offer resolutions.
4. Review the covenant with Abraham and identify the threats to God's promises to Abraham.
5. Review the history of altars in the Middle East and their meanings for worship. See britannica.com/topic/altar.
6. Consider the meaning of altars in your church's faith tradition. When has the altar held importance in your memory of a particular event (baptism, marriage, conversion, etc.)?

September 8, 2024

Our House Is a Very Fine House or Solomon Dedicates The Temple

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

Unifying Principle (Focus)

Great events cause people to anticipate a better future. How can we keep a proper perspective during and after such events? At the worship-dedication of the Temple, Solomon called on God to hear and heed the Israelites’ future prayers.

Goals For the Learner

1. To analyze the structure and movement of Solomon’s prayer at the Temple dedication.
2. To find confidence in God’s presence in favorable and unfavorable life circumstances.
3. To identify a past time of God’s faithfulness as an assurance of God’s continuing favor.

Challenges For the Week

1. Look online for an architectural or archaeological analysis of a drawing or blueprint for Solomon’s Temple.
2. Prepare a brief presentation on the biblical history and theology of the Temple in Jerusalem.
3. Prepare an infographic poster that breaks down Solomon’s prayer structure and movement at the Temple’s dedication.
4. Using index cards, paraphrase the seven petitions and note on the cards how the paraphrases deepen a connection to Solomon’s experience of worship.
5. Name those in the congregation who have claimed God’s past faithfulness as an assurance of God’s continuing favor.
6. What is the purpose of confessing sin during the worship service.

September 15, 2024

Is It Inevitable? or Hezekiah's Prayer

2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31

Unifying Principle (Focus)

Disaster seems inevitable when a chain of events points to an inescapable outcome. What can people do when all seems lost? In a time of crisis, Hezekiah turned to worshipful prayer and was heard.

Goals For The Learner

1. To distinguish Hezekiah's response to God from that of other Old Testament kings.
2. To value prayer in the face of a crisis.
3. To journal, email, or text as a form of worshipful, reverent, honest prayer at a time of crisis.

Challenges For the Week

1. Prepare a character study of King Hezekiah.
2. Review the events that led up to Hezekiah's prayer.
3. What biblical evidence suggests that changing God's mind is possible and/or that God does not change?
4. What are some personal experiences that have called for the most courage and faith. How did you respond at the time?
5. Reflect upon fragility of both human and economic conditions during a crisis and why those conditions should not be a reason for despair for God's people.
6. Prepare a brief presentation on the development of Israel's view of Yahweh, from a regional deity akin to the gods of neighboring peoples to the cosmic perspective, "you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth" (v. 15).

September 22, 2024

Claiming The Treasures of the Past or Josiah Celebrates Passover

2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19

Unifying Principle (Focus)

Promises and commitments can become neglected over time as their importance is forgotten and otherwise not communicated. How can we keep our commitments? King Josiah called on his people to celebrate Passover as an act of renewed obedience to worship as prescribed in God's covenant.

Goals For the Learner

1. To evaluate Josiah's renewal of the Passover observance in terms of significance for Israel's ongoing relationship with God.
2. To notice interior distractions that compromise obedience to God.
3. To create a plan to renew/revitalize neglected spiritual practices.

Challenges For the Week

1. Compare the renewals of the Passover celebration under Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30:1-26) and Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:1-19). List the distractions and sinful practices that made renewal necessary. Then suggest parallels from our lives that can compromise our obedience.
2. Review the reason for the Passover's institution in the Exodus from Egypt. Then compare the two accounts of Josiah's Passover celebration (here and in 2 Kings 23) to evaluate his attempt at renewing the observance of this ritual among God's people.
3. Contrast two approaches to the Passover, the early simple family feast and Josiah's centralized religious festival, which was to become the central feast of the year. How did both contribute to helping the people remember God's covenant?
4. Watch "Chronicles" at bibleproject.com and place the themes of Josiah's reign in the broader context of the literary/historical goals of 1 and 2 Chronicles.
5. Invite a costumed actor to portray Josiah and offer a monologue imagining his emotional response to the recovery of Passover.
6. List spiritual rituals and practices that tend to get neglected or overlooked today. Choose one and plan a group celebration to revitalize it.

September 29, 2024

Time To Party! or Moses and Miriam Lead The People in Praise

Exodus 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21

Unifying Principle (Focus)

People enjoy finding opportunities to celebrate. What ways can we celebrate the victories in our lives? Moses and Miriam led the people with praises in song for God's victory in the lives of the Israelites.

Goals For the Learner

1. To trace the historical elements within Moses's and Miriam's celebratory songs of praise.
2. To keep faith whether facing a difficult situation or celebrating a victory.
3. To create a timeline noting God's answers to prayer across the history of the local church.

Challenges For the Week

1. Play a recording of Edwin Hawkins's "Oh Happy Day." How it is or is not a fitting complement to Miriam's song.
2. List ways to celebrate, such as dancing, drumming, singing, laughing, and smiling.
3. Review the video "Overview: Exodus 1-19" at bibleproject.com and set today's text in its literary/historical context.
4. Create a timeline noting God's answers to prayer across your local church's history and how the church celebrated God's responses.
5. Create a liturgy, song, or prayer for your congregation's worship that celebrates God's answers to prayer.
6. Name women in leadership roles and the reasons they command respect.