

2025 Q4 Joshua Lesson 2

Surprised by Grace

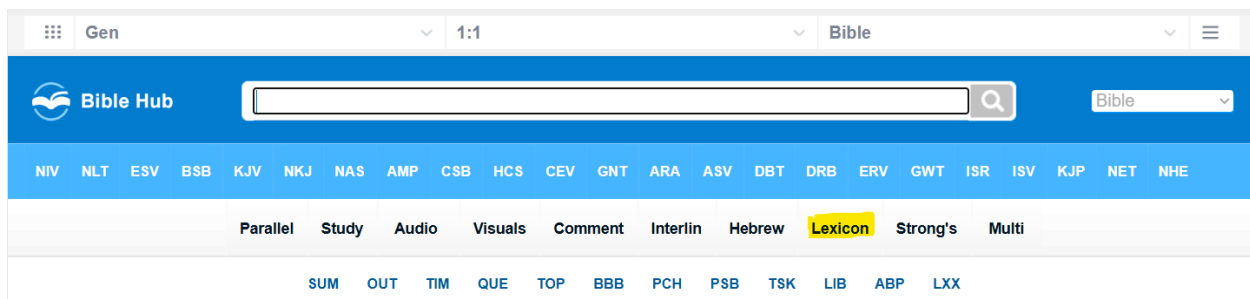
by Eve Knight

SABBATH

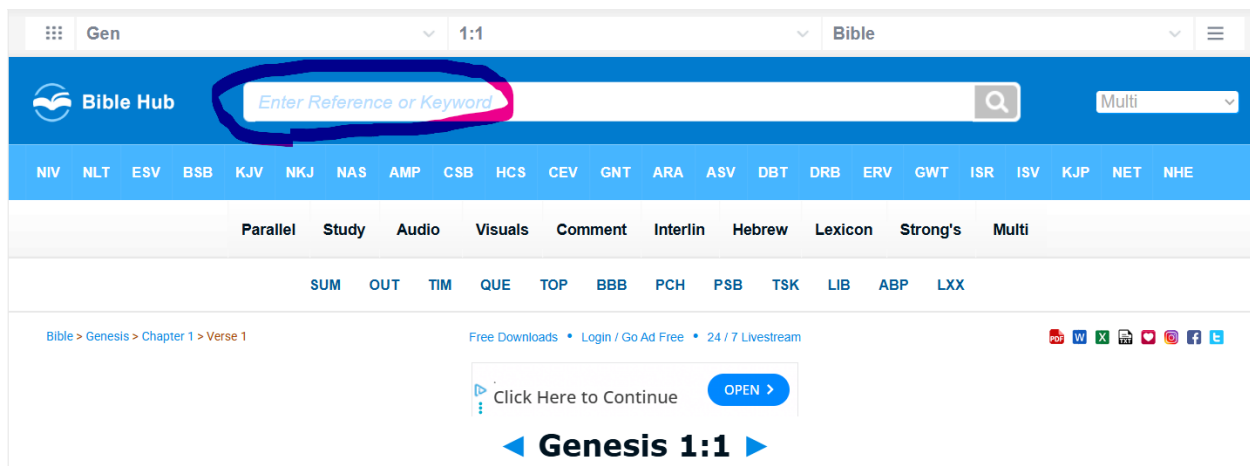
At the end of Sabbath's lesson, it says,

This week, we will explore two of the most fascinating stories of the book of Joshua and discover their relevance to our faith today. God's grace has infinite possibilities to surprise us.

I agree that indeed, God's grace can surprise us. But what is it? It's a word we use a lot, but what is God's grace? Do you know what the most common definition is? Usually, I hear the answer, "unmerited favor." What do you think of that definition? Does that make it sound like grace is just an attitude of God towards people? Is it a biblical definition? How do we find out what the biblical definition is? We let the Bible define it. And how do we do that? Well, a good start is to look at the original language, and we do that by using a lexicon. The one I use most frequently is found at biblehub.com. When you arrive at that site, you see something like this:



I went ahead and highlighted where you would click for the Lexicon. Once you click on that, you would see a screen like this, and it defaults to Genesis 1:1.



You can see where I circled, would be where you would put in a reference or a key word. In this case, since we're looking at the word grace, that's what I typed into that search box. If I already had a list of places where the word was found, I could start with a specific text. On the results screen, I clicked on the top option that said, "[Strong's Greek: 5485. χάρις \(charis\) -- grace, kindness.](#)" The next screen gives me the ways the word is translated, provides some explanation and definition, and also on the right under "Englishman's Concordance," provides the beginning of a list of texts where the word is used.

◀ 5485. charis ▶

Lexical Summary

charis: Grace, favor, kindness, blessing

Original Word: χάρις

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: charis

Pronunciation: khar'-ece

Phonetic Spelling: (khar'-ece)

KJV: acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace(-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, thank(-s, -worthy)

NASB: grace, favor, thanks, credit, gracious work, thank, gracious

Word Origin: [from G5463 (χαίρω - rejoice)]

Englishman's Concordance

Luke 1:30 N-AFS

GRK: εὗρες γὰρ **χάριν** παρὰ τοῦ

NAS: for you have found *favor* with God.

KJV: for thou hast found *favour* with God.

INT: you have found indeed *favor* with

Luke 2:40 N-NFS

GRK: σοφία καὶ **χάρις** θεοῦ ἦν

NAS: in wisdom; *and the grace* of God

KJV: with wisdom: and *the grace* of God was

INT: with wisdom and *[the] grace* of God was

If you scroll to the bottom of that list, you'll see this:

Strong's Greek 5485

157 Occurrences

That tells us the word is used 157 times in the New Testament, and that is a clickable link that will take you to a complete list of all of those occurrences, along with a portion of the text to show a little bit of the context.

Today, before we get into the lesson, we're going to actually proceed through this word study. Now, to be clear, we don't have time to go through all 157 verses. So, I've narrowed it down to a more manageable number of texts to go through. If you want to do a complete study, you can follow the steps I just went through (and which will all be in the notes), and go through all 157.

We'll start by challenging what I call the "common" definition that we talked about earlier. Let's look at Luke 2:40 (NIV):

And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Who is the child in this verse? Jesus. What does "the grace of God was on him" suggest about the *nature* of grace? If grace were only "unmerited favor," would this verse make sense? Why/why not?

Of all the people on earth, Jesus was the One that would “merit” something, right? So right there, the “common” definition has a problem. Let’s go to another verse:

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2:52 (NIV)

Note that in this verse, our word, *charis* is translated as favor. What does this verse tell us about grace? It’s something you can grow in, right? It’s not static. Jesus grew in grace, much the same as He grew in wisdom and height. Let’s look at another few verses:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ...

For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. John 1:14, 16-17 (NASB)

How does John tie grace to the person/presence of Jesus? First, that Jesus was full of grace. So again, the idea that this is something “unmerited” doesn’t fit. Then from that fullness of Jesus, we also receive grace. What does it mean that “grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ?” Let’s look at the verse a little more closely using the lexicon.

This is part of what we see when I type in our reference (John 1:17), and look at the word “realized” in the lexicon:

were realized	ἐγένετο (egeneto)	1096: to come into being, to happen, to become
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If we click on the blue 1096 (this is the “Strong’s Number for the Greek word), then we see a more complete definition. In the extra information, we also find a section called, “Helps Word-Studies”, and there we find this:

M. Vincent, "1096 (*gínomai*) means *to come into being/manifestation* implying *motion, movement, or growth*" (at 2 Pet 1:4). Thus it is used for *God's* actions as emerging from eternity and becoming (showing themselves) in time (physical space).

So, could it be that what this verse is telling us is that grace and truth became more evident, were actually shown through Jesus? At the last part of the verse, “Grace upon grace”—does that sound like supply, sequence, layering, or growth? Why?

Let’s remember that, and look at another verse:

Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. Eph. 6:24 (NIV)

Who is Paul blessing here, and what does that imply about *receiving* grace? He's asking for grace only for those "who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." So, according to this, grace isn't for everyone, only for those who love Jesus. Does that surprise you? Why? As we keep going with our study, maybe we can understand why grace is only given to the group that loves Jesus.

For our next verse, I'm including some of the context as well.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks as well, preaching the good news of the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

The news about them reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And considerable numbers were added to the Lord. Acts 11: 20-24 (NASB)

What do you notice about our word in this passage? Barnabas could see the grace of God at work. There is something noticeable—even visible—about grace. What do you think caused Barnabas to be able to see this so clearly? Perhaps because he also had received grace?

Let's look at another verse:

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Acts 4:33-35 (NIV)

What does this verse tell us about where grace is at work? It's something that works inside the believer. In this account, how does grace affect their behavior? It caused them to be others-centered, and they all looked out for each other.

Let's keep going:

When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. Acts 13:43

What do we learn about grace from this verse? That believers can continue in grace. If that's true, what else would also be true? That believers can also **not** continue in grace. Does it seem like we're definitely moving away from grace being an attitude of God? If it was merely an attitude, it seems like it wouldn't change, would it? We wouldn't be able to continue or not continue in it. So, for example, God is forgiving...He is always forgiving. There's nothing that we do that affects that attitude of His

towards us. But clearly something *can* affect grace. Interesting. In fact, this becomes more clear in our next verse:

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the Law; you have fallen from grace. Galatians 5:4 (NASB)

What is happening in this verse? What does it tell us about grace? Here we're told at least one thing that causes people to lose or "fall from" grace. Those who seek to be justified by the law. What are those people focusing on? Is there something wrong with the law? Of course not...but these people are using their "law-keeping" as their means of saying that they are righteous. What lens are they likely looking through? So, could we say that it's entirely possible that the "fall from grace" happens because they are interpreting things through an imposed law viewpoint? Why would that posture disconnect us from grace in practice? Let's keep this in mind as we continue.

But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are. Acts 15:11 (NASB) (note: "we" refers to Jews, "they" refers to Gentiles)

What does "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" emphasize about *source*? How does this level the ground between groups of believers? That we are saved/healed through—or on account of, or for the sake of—the grace of Jesus. And this is available to all believers equally; it puts all believers on the same footing. Does this verse bring any other verse to mind?

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)

What does this well-known verse tell us about grace? What's the relationship between grace (cause) and faith (conduit)? First, we're saved/healed by grace, and faith is how we receive it. Does this help us understand why grace is only for believers? We also learn that grace is a gift. We do not work to receive it, God gives it. What's another way to say that we don't have to work for this gift? It's free. This has a different feeling to it than the word, "unmerited," doesn't it? One word is more about God (freely giving), and the other feels a little more about us (we don't deserve it). So, it is a free gift that saves/heals us through faith...faith in what? Faith in the Giver.

Let's look at another verse:

And now I entrust you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32 (NASB)

What does "the word of His grace" do? Grace builds us up, and gives us the inheritance...what inheritance is that? The same one that all who are "sanctified" (made holy/purified) receive, the same one that was promised to Abraham, the ultimate fulfilment of which awaits us in heaven. Does this verse tell us how it does this? It certainly implies something: "among all those who are sanctified." What does that tell us? We can hang onto that question and keep going.

But by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free. Romans 3:24 (GNT)

What do we learn from this verse? First, we are reminded that grace is the “free gift of God.” How does being “set right” connect to healing and restored trust? What are we talking about when we say “put right”? We’re put back into harmony with God’s design, we are won back to trust. What is the end result? Freedom. Let’s look at another verse.

For if by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:17 (NASB)

What does this text say about how much grace is available to us? What does it cause? What does the contrast in this verse reveal to us about grace? Through the sin of Adam, death reigned in humanity. Through Christ, however, life reigns. Notice that again, grace is not just a static attitude. It is active, abundant, and causes a change from one heart motivation (selfishness & death) to another (love & life). Let’s keep going.

But by God's grace I am what I am, and the grace that he gave me was not without effect. On the contrary, I have worked harder than any of the other apostles, although it was not really my own doing, but God's grace working with me. 1 Cor. 15:10 (GNT)

What does this verse tell us about grace? Note that Paul is saying God’s grace has made him what he is, and that it has a clear effect. Even his work that he has done, he attributes to the work of grace with him. And what work was he doing? He actually tells us that in our next couple verses:

But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given to me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:15-16 (NASB)

So, what is the grace given to Paul from God? To be a minister of Jesus to the Gentiles. Now that seems a different use of the word, doesn’t it? How do we reconcile this with what we’ve already learned so far? God’s grace not only was for a task, but also provides what he needs to do that task. Paul affirms this idea in our next verse:

But when He who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles... Galatians 1:15-16 (NASB)

What does it mean for God to “reveal his Son *in me*” in the context of grace? What is the action of grace in this verse? It was God’s grace that called Paul to ministry and also reveals “His Son” in Paul so that Paul can preach to the gentiles. What do you find most surprising about this? And what does this mean for us?

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.
Romans 12:6-9 (NKJV)

What do these verses teach us about grace? We are given different gifts “according to the grace that is given to us.” Grace provides the gifts. What gifts are we talking about? They’re usually called spiritual gifts, right? These verses do not provide a complete list of gifts, but it’s important to ask, what is our responsibility toward these grace-given gifts? We need to *use* these gifts, and specifically, we are to use them to benefit others. What happens to gifts we don’t use? The Law of Exertion...if we don’t use them, we lose them. Is it entirely up to us to do the work? No. As our next verse explains,

And God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;...

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NASB)

How does grace provide “all sufficiency” for “every good deed”? So, like it did with Paul, grace doesn’t just call us, it also provides what we need. How does it do that?

I was made a servant of the gospel by God's special gift [grace], which he gave me through the working of his power. Ephesians 3:7 (GNT)

How does grace come? God gives it “through the working of His power.” Let’s look at another, well-known verse:

But his answer was: “My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.” I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me. 2 Corinthians 12:9 (GNT)

What does this verse tell us about grace? That it is closely connected to God’s power! This is definitely not how we are used to thinking about grace, is it? How does weakness create room for grace? God specifically tells Paul that it’s ok for him to be weak, so that God’s grace (His power) can fill in the gap. Let’s see if we can’t understand more fully what grace does.

I always give thanks to my God for you because of the grace he has given you through Christ Jesus. For in union with Christ you have become rich in all things, including all speech and all knowledge. The message about Christ has become so firmly established in you that you have not failed to receive a single blessing, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be faultless on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is to be trusted, the God who called you to have fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (GNT)

What does this tell us about how grace works in us? It appears that it works to bring us into union with Christ, right? It provides richness (can also be translated “fullness”), and it guides us in speech and

knowledge. It settles us into the truth of who God is (as shown by Christ) and blesses us. It keeps us strong to the end and helps us have fellowship with Jesus. There's a lot there, right? Possibly more than we are used to thinking about, when it comes to grace. But grace isn't about just working in us, is it? It's intended for more.

Each one of us has received a special gift in proportion to what Christ has given. ... It was he who "gave gifts to people"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature.

We'll pause this passage here for a moment. What does this tell us about the purpose of the gifts (grace) given to us? It prepares us for service, helps us build up the body of Christ, brings us into unity of faith, grows our knowledge of Christ, and moves us towards maturity. Let's keep going in the passage:

Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love. Ephesians 4:7, 11-16 (GNT)

What do you see grace doing in the rest of this passage? Notice that once grace helps us, we then help others. We are no longer immature, easily swayed, and instead, take on God's methods, speaking the truth in love, and building each other up. How does this happen?

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior was revealed, he saved us. It was not because of any good deeds that we ourselves had done, but because of his own mercy that he saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us. God poured out the Holy Spirit abundantly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that by his grace we might be put right with God and come into possession of the eternal life we hope for. Titus 3:4-7 (GNT)

What connections do you see made to grace in this verse? How central is the Spirit to grace? What is this verse teaching us about grace? That it is connected to the Holy Spirit! Notice what it actually says here: God poured out the Holy Spirit abundantly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that by his grace we might be put right with God..." The "new birth," "new life," putting us right with God, is the work of the Holy Spirit and is connected to this gift of grace.

Note in our next two verses that again, there is more to grace than the work it does in us:

For all things are for your sakes, **so that grace, having spread [multiplied through the many] to more and more people**, will cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4:15 (NASB)

..which has come to you, just as in all the world also **it is bearing fruit and increasing** [spread abroad], even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard it and **understood [came to fully know] the grace of God in truth**;... Colossians 1:6 NASB

What action is grace taking in these verses? The work isn't just in us, it spreads through us. All by grace. From these passages, how would you finish this sentence: 'Grace is...?'

For now, I have settled on this: "Grace is God's gift of His presence and power, working in us through His Spirit." With this definition in mind, is it easier to understand how and why it's possible to "fall from grace"? What is essential for us to even receive grace? Our invitation, willingly receiving the gift, and our cooperation with the work! If we refuse His working in our hearts, we're literally closing the door to the Holy Spirit, and grace can no longer work in us.

Notice how much more we've discovered about God's grace and how His gift of grace can work to heal, restore, strengthen, and grow us. Now, perhaps, we can understand why the gospel writers refer to it so frequently. To see just a few (all from NASB):

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:2

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 1 Corinthians 16:23

Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love. Ephesians 6:24

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, for His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 2 Peter 1:2-3

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (NASB)

With what we now know and understand, why do you think grace—in general—is so misunderstood? If we think it's just an attitude of God, then it's just information. It's not something that has any real power. In fact, worded as "unmerited favor" it tends to make us feel undeserving. Could it be that the enemy has worked to make us think this way so it doesn't occur to us to ask for the gift? Remember, gift is one of the ways our Greek word for grace could be translated. Grace is a gift. It's a gift of power available to every single one of us. Perhaps it's time for us to start asking for that gift a little more earnestly.

As we continue into this week's lesson, let's keep this understanding of grace in mind, as the author seems to have a different definition of grace.

In the second to last paragraph on Sabbath's lesson, it says,

“One would think that God's promise of giving the land to the Israelites did not require any effort from them. Yet, the assurance of divine support does not override human responsibility. Israel stands at the border of Canaan for a second time. Expectations run high, but the last time Israel was at the border and had the same task, it resulted in an abysmal failure.”

What was God's original plan for the Israelites that the lesson points out they missed?

Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished. Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God. Deuteronomy 7:20-21 (NIV)

Originally, God was planning to push their enemies out. The Israelites wouldn't have had to do much more than follow His lead. So why are they expected to do more the second time around?

When they were at the first preparing to enter Canaan, the undertaking was attended with far less difficulty than now. God had promised His people that if they would obey His voice He would go before them and fight for them; and He would also send hornets to drive out the inhabitants of the land. The fears of the nations had not been generally aroused, and little preparation had been made to oppose their progress. But when the Lord now bade Israel go forward, they must advance against alert and powerful foes, and must contend with large and well-trained armies that had been preparing to resist their approach. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 436

Notice that this significantly “harder” task is a direct consequence of the earlier failure to trust God. Yet, they *are* given a second chance to conquer the land promised them. Where they failed an earlier, easier test, they are now faced with a harder trial. Yet they were still reassured of God's presence.

When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: “Hear, Israel: Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory. Deuteronomy 20:1-4 (NIV)

God's promise to them was His presence with them. That is the actual “grace” we can see at work in this story. Have you ever had a hard time remembering God's promises when facing a trial? What happens in areas where we fail? Consider these words:

In their contest with Og and Sihon the people were brought to the same test beneath which their fathers had so signally failed. But the trial was now far more severe than when God had commanded Israel to go forward. The difficulties in their way had greatly increased since they

refused to advance when bidden to do so in the name of the Lord. It is thus that God still tests His people. And if they fail to endure the trial, He brings them again to the same point, and the second time the trial will come closer, and be more severe than the preceding. This is continued until they bear the test, or, if they are still rebellious, God withdraws His light from them and leaves them in darkness. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 437

As God works by bringing the same test and trials to us where we've failed before, what end result is He hoping for? He wants us to claim His promise and overcome. Could this work be part of the continued work of grace?

SUNDAY

In Sunday's lesson, it says,

God is a God of second chances (and more!). The Bible calls the second chance (and more!) 'grace.' Grace is simply receiving what we don't deserve.

I think we've already established that God's grace is far more than that. The lesson goes on to say,

Think about the experience of the Israelites when they were given a second chance to enter Canaan and about the grace extended to Peter after he denied his Lord. What should these incidents teach us about how we should extend grace to those who need it?

In reality, is grace something we can extend to others? No. I can't push the presence of God's power in me to somebody else. I think what the lesson probably means here is mercy, or maybe even love. Because grace itself has been so misinterpreted, we think it's just an attitude of ours towards others as well. However, if grace is truly working in us, how will we treat others? What is the difference between extending mercy to others and receiving grace so we can act wisely and lovingly?

MONDAY

On Monday's lesson, it talks about Rahab's decision to acknowledge God as the one true God, and to place herself on the side of His people. How do you think she arrived at that decision?

Clearly, she had heard the stories of how God moved on behalf of His people. Regardless of the 40 years of wandering, it was still clear He was with them. She examined the evidence, she possibly even looked around at her own culture, and realized that it was time for a change.

The lesson goes on, however, to say,

Her moral choice recognizes that, in light of Yahweh's judgment, there were only two possibilities: to continue in rebellion against Him and be annihilated, or to choose to surrender in faith. By choosing the God of the Israelites, Rahab became an example of what could have

been the destiny of all the inhabitants of Jericho had they turned to Israel's God for mercy. What does this story teach us about how God must have our ultimate allegiance?

What does the author reveal about how he sees the story? That he views it through an imposed law lens. What does it feel like the lesson is suggesting here? That we must claim God or He'll kill us? It's also claiming that the people only had two choices. Is that true? Couldn't they just have left? Walked away? Based on God's viewpoint, were any of the people in that city annihilated? No, they are simply sleeping. If we read this through design-law (God's restorative purposes), what options open up that fear-based readings miss?

The story of Rahab is encouraging. It reminds us that God accepts all those who come to Him. It is a mistake, however, to try to mold the story of the conquering of Jericho into something to push people to choose God out of fear. I believe that we need to represent Him better, more truthfully, than that.

TUESDAY

On Tuesday's lesson, we read:

Rahab's deal is very clear: life for life and kindness for kindness. The word *chesed* (Josh. 2:12), "loving-kindness," has a richness of meaning that is difficult to express in one word in other languages. It refers primarily to covenantal loyalty, but it also carries the notion of faithfulness, mercy, benevolence, and kindness.

What exactly was the deal that Rahab made with the Israelites? That she and any who were in her house would be spared. Notice that she was the one who made the decision to honor God. Yet her whole family—at least, anyone that she convinced to stay with her—was also spared. Does this mean that they all chose God? We aren't told that, so we don't know for sure. For all we know, only Rahab later joined the Israelites, and the rest of her family may have moved on. If they stayed, though, they too would have joined the Israelites. What we are told is that Rahab's descendants "have lived in Israel to this day." Joshua 6:25b (GNT) What does it tell us about God that He so willingly accepts those who choose Him?

WEDNESDAY

On Wednesday's lesson, we are looking at the story of the Gibeonites. These were the people who decided to fool Israel into a treaty with them. They put together a group, made it look like they had traveled a long distance, and approached the Israelites to ask for a treaty as if they were from a far-off place.

Did the Gibeonites have other choices? Could they have approached the Israelites honestly? In the story, why were the Israelites fooled? They didn't consult God...they made the decision on their own. Yet, in spite of that, the treaty was still honored. But what was the result of the deception?

But it would have fared better with the Gibeonites had they dealt honestly with Israel. While their submission to Jehovah secured the preservation of their lives, their deception brought them only disgrace and servitude. God had made provision that all who would renounce heathenism, and connect themselves with Israel, should share the blessings of the covenant. ... But they had adopted the garb of poverty for the purpose of deception, and it was fastened upon them as a badge of perpetual servitude. Thus through all their generations their servile condition would testify to God's hatred of falsehood.—*Conflict and Courage*, p. 122.

In the second paragraph on Wednesday, we read:

The word translated as “craftily” or “cunningly” can be used with a positive meaning, denoting prudence and wisdom (Prov. 1:4; Prov. 8:5, 12), or negatively, implying criminal intent (Exod. 21:14, 1 Sam. 23:22, Ps. 83:3). In the case of the Gibeonites, behind their treacherous action lies a less-destructive intent of self-preservation.

Question...is self-preservation truly a “less-destructive intent”? What does self-preservation often lead to? Where does it stem from? The selfish heart, right? It's evidence of worldly methods and motives instead of being in harmony with God. Which means there is no way it can be classified as “less destructive.” All actions that are out of harmony with God's design carry consequences that are destructive.

At the end of Wednesday's lesson, we read:

The fundamental duty of a theocratic leader, and of any Christian leader, is to seek God's will (1 Chron. 28:9, 2 Chron. 15:2, 2 Chron. 18:4, 2 Chron. 20:4). By neglecting it, the Israelites were compelled either to violate the fundamental conditions of conquering the land or to break an oath made in the name of the Lord, which was equally binding. How often have you found yourself struggling between what appears to be two conflicting biblical values?

Question: Do biblical values conflict with each other? No, they don't. What could make someone think that there is a conflict? Usually looking at it from the wrong law lens...if we are looking at imposed-rules, instead of design-law principles, it's often easy to get confused. We should be very careful when reading stories like this to avoid trying to claim that biblical values can conflict, as that usually means that we're looking at the situation with the wrong lens.

Were the Israelites actually struggling between two conflicting biblical values? No. They brought the trouble on themselves by not consulting with God in the first place. Yet when they went to Him with it after their mistake, He provided them with the answer and made the Gibeonites servants, as we read earlier. In other words, even though they made a mistake, God stepped in and helped them with the solution. What lesson can we learn from this part of the story? Even if we make a mistake, it's important to run straight to God with it?

THURSDAY

In the last paragraph on Thursday's lesson, we read,

The subterfuge of the Gibeonites has to be perceived as an appeal to God's mercy, to His kind and just character.

Were the Gibeonites actually appealing to God? No. They were simply trying to trick the Israelites. Did God still treat them kindly? Absolutely. Not only that, but God provided them with work that would put them at the center of the worship system for Israel. God took what they did do (which was to acknowledge Him) and placed them in a position where they could learn more about Him, and grow to worship Him in truth instead of from a place of fear. This is the beauty of God's character, that He loved them enough to accept them where they were, and then put them where they could grow and become more mature. The lesson says it well in the last paragraph on Thursday:

God honored the recognition of His supremacy by the Gibeonites, as well as their desire for peace rather than rebellion, and their willingness to give up idolatry and to worship the only true God.

FRIDAY

On Friday's lesson, we read a beautiful description of God's love and character:

And her [Rahab's] conversion was not an isolated case of God's mercy toward idolaters who acknowledged His divine authority. In the midst of the land a numerous people—the Gibeonites—renounced their heathenism and united with Israel, sharing in the blessings of the covenant.

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 369, 370.

Is this how we often present God? Shouldn't it be?

One of the questions on Friday's lesson says,

Discuss the whole question of “second chances” (and more) and how we are to extend them to others. At the same time, how can we also be careful not to abuse this concept? Think, for example, about a woman in an abusive relationship, in which she is counseled to keep going

back (“grace”), only in some cases for the abuse to continue? How do we find the right balance here?

What is wrong with this question? First, it has the completely wrong definition of grace. This is one reason why it is so important to be able to learn and study for ourselves, so we can have discernment. Notice how the wrong definition leads to a “rule” about constantly giving people “another chance.” What does this idea leave out? Design law, and principles of living out true, Godly love. In the case of an abused woman, is it a loving action to go back to the abusive spouse. No! If she goes back, not only is she damaging herself, but she’s also providing the opportunity for her spouse to continue to abuse her, which damages him as well as risking her health and safety. What is the actual, loving response? To remove herself from the equation, letting him know that she cannot accept his harmful behavior, cares about him enough to give him space to work on his own issues without providing the opportunity for him to harm both of them with his choices. If he chooses to find help, heal, and grow to be more mature, great. If not, that is his choice to make, but she will no longer participate in letting him damage himself.

True grace, as we defined it earlier, is “God’s gift of His presence and power, working in us through His Spirit.” We will certainly act differently when we invite God in, and allow His grace to heal, transform, and mature us into the kind of people who represent Him well because we act in harmony with His character and in harmony with His design. That is the kind of person I want to be, and by His grace, we all can be. In Chapter 9 of *Christ’s Object Lessons*, regarding the story of the Hidden Pearl, Ellen White says,

These scenes [revival at Pentecost] are to be repeated, and with greater power. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the former rain, but the latter rain will **be more abundant. The Spirit awaits our demand and reception. Christ is again to be revealed in His fulness by the Holy Spirit’s power.** Men will discern the value of the precious pearl, and with the apostle Paul they will say, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Philippians 3:7, 8. (COL, p. 121)

I believe it is time to ask for the true gift of God’s grace, so that we can reflect His love to those around us and spread the news of God’s true character with the world.