

Studies for families in Belonging, Becoming, and going Beyond

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#### IN OVER OUR HEADS

### "THE POTTER'S PREROGATIVE" ROMANS 9:19-29

What about Israel? The nation's refusal to turn from its evil ways and evil practices (Jer 25:5), which led to Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C., followed by exile from the land, raised the same question. Was this how the history of Israel would end, and if so, what about the promise God made to Abraham (Ge 12:1-3; 15:5, 7, 15, 18-19) not to mention the one he made to David (2Sa 7:11b-16; Ps 89)?

What about Israel? The question was raised again by the nation's rejection of its Messiah (Mt 24:37-39), which led to another destruction of Jerusalem this time by the Romans in A.D. 70, followed by God calling Gentiles "my people" (Ro 9:24-26). Was this how the history of Israel would end, even though the same promises to Abraham and David remained largely unfulfilled? Of course, ethnic descendants of Abraham through Isaac and then Jacob existed for nearly nineteen hundred years, but there was no Israel, no Jewish nation until the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. This Day in History reports, "On May 14, 1948, in Tel Aviv, Jewish Agency Chairman David Ben-Gurion proclaims the State of Israel, establishing the first Jewish state in 2,000 years. In an afternoon ceremony at the Tel Aviv Art Museum, Ben-Gurion pronounced the words 'We hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, to be called Israel,' prompting applause and tears from the crowd gathered at the museum. Ben-Gurion became Israel's first premier" (www.history.com/this-day-inhistory/state-of-israel-proclaimed).

What about Israel? Does the creation of the Jewish State indicate that God's word has succeeded (cf., Ro

Paul takes a surprising tack, for he does not defend God's justice but champions his mercy.

- James R. Edwards

9:6), that is, that the promises to Abraham and to David have been fulfilled? It appears they have not. According to Paul, "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (v. 6); it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children" (v. 8). His words suggest that the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled to a believing people, which the contemporary nation is not. If the promises are to be fulfilled, all Israel must be saved. In the same way the whole nation rejected Jesus in the past, the whole nation will accept him in the future. Paul puts it this way, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved" (11:25).

### This Week's Core Competency

**Personal God** – I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Romans 9 assumes God's sovereignty at the same time defending his justice. Quoting Exodus 33:19 in answer to the question raised by God's choice of Jacob rather than Esau, before either were born or had done anything good or bad, Paul writes, "What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses.

'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (Ro 9:14-15).

And then two verses later he concludes from what God said to Pharaoh, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (v. 18).

God is sovereign; he had every right to choose Jacob rather than Esau, but was it right to do so? To the suggestion that God might be unjust, Paul responds in no uncertain terms, "Not at all!" which other translations variously render: "By no means"

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(ESV); "May it never be!" (NASB); "Absolutely not!" (NET); "That's unthinkable" (GW); "Heaven forbid!" (CJB). On Paul's use of the quotation from Exodus, one commentator writes: "Note carefully Paul's quotation from Exodus 33:19b. It speaks exclusively of God's decision to be merciful. It is not neatly balanced, as though God had said he would be merciful to whom he chose and wrathful to whom he chose. Such symmetry between grace and wrath, between mercy and condemnation, is missing here, as it is missing throughout the passage. The whole discussion is marked rather by the asymmetry of a dominating grace. That same point is clear in verse 22, where Paul, speaking of 'vessels of wrath made for destruction,' comes as close as he ever does to what is popularly called 'double predestination' but which would, in its popular understanding, be more accurately called 'double predeterminism.' It is the notion that grace is balanced by wrath, that God saves some and condemns other and that neither group has anything to do with its own fate. It is precisely that kind of symmetry between grace and wrath that Paul will have none of. Look carefully at verse 22; note the fate of those 'vessels of wrath.' They are not destroyed, they are 'borne with much patience.' To what end? To show the riches of God's mercy! If ever there were a place in Paul's letters where he could have expressed the terrible symmetry of grace and wrath, it is surely here. Yet he does not. In fact, he has carefully avoided it. That he has done so indicates that for Paul such a symmetry

Regarding Pharaoh's hardening, nine times in Exodus his hardening is God's doing (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). Another nine times is hardening is his own doing (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35). He alone was the agent of his hardening in each of the first five plagues. Not until the sixth plague did God confirm the Pharaoh's willful action. One commentator concludes: "The hardening of Pharaoh's heart can profitably be related to the principle laid down in Romans 1, that God's method of dealing with those who reject the revelation of himself in nature and history (and in Pharaoh's case also in miracles) is to abandon them to still grater excess of sin and its consequences" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 10:106).

does not exist" (Paul J. Achtemeier, Romans, Interpretation, 162). God's sovereignty is biased in favor of mercy.

Regarding verse 18, it has an undeserved unfair ring to it like verse 13. "I raised you up" (v. 17) most likely refers to God's providential sparing of Pharaoh up to that time. The verb in Exodus 9:16 means "maintain you alive" (NET Bible, 32tm on Ex 9:16). Pharaoh deserved to die for his oppression and insolence, but God chose to spare his life, as well as the lives of countless Egyptians. In Exodus 9:15, God says to him, "For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth." God again acts sovereignly to show mercy. "The result of Pharaoh's hardening was Israel's exodus from Egypt, so that God's purpose of blessing all humanity through a people descended from Abraham could be continued. It was from this people, as Paul pointed out, that Christ himself came (v. 5), the Christ who is the redeemer of all who trust him, whether Jew or Greek (1:16)" (Achtemeier, 163). Again, God's sovereignty is biased in favor of mercy.



# **ENCOUNTER** – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 9:19-29

19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" 20 But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

22 What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"

26 and,

"In the very place where it was said to them,

'You are not my people,'

there they will be called 'children of

the living God."'

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the Israelites

be like the sand by the sea,

only the remnant will be saved.

28 For the Lord will carry out
his sentence on earth with speed
and finality."

29 It is just as Isaiah said previously:
"Unless the Lord Almighty
had left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah."

### **EXAMINE** – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Highlight the questions in v. 19.
- \* Circle "talk back" in v. 20.
- \* Circle "the potter" in v. 21.
- \* Box "although" indicating concession in v. 22.
- \* Bracket "objects of his wrath" and "objects of his mercy" in vv. 22-23.
- \* Underline "prepared" and "whom he prepared" in v. 23.
- \* Circle "even us" in v. 24.
- \* Underline "not my people" in vv. 25, 26.
- \* Circle "remnant" in v. 27.



# **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

- 1. Identify the questions that might be asked hypothetically in response to verse 18.
- 2. Given the context of chapter 9 (cf., vv. 3, 4, 6, 10-12), whom do you think "us" (v. 19) refers and why?
- 3. What do the words "talk back to God" suggest to you regarding the attitude of the questioner?
- 4. In the words of verse 21, what does the potter have the right to do with the same lump of clay?
- 5. Some infer *this* verse teaches *double predestination*—from the mass of humanity God makes some whom he destines to inherit salvation and others whom he destines to suffer wrath. Do you agree? Explain why or why not?
- 6. The patience of God puts the display of his wrath and power in perspective (v. 22). How so?
- 7. The purpose of God does the same thing (v. 23). How so?
- 8. If Paul identifies "the objects of his mercy" (v. 23) as "us," believing Jews and Gentiles (v. 24). Who would that suggest are "the objects of his wrath" (v. 22)?
- 9. **Discussion:** Talk about how the Old Testament quotations in verses 25-29 substantiate the fact that God has now called people "not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles" (v. 24).

## day 3

# **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

God's sovereignty extends to his control over history, especially with respect to the outworking of his purpose to bless "all peoples on earth" (Ge 12:3). In Galatians 3:8, Paul writes, Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." God has every right to use Israel, as well as other nations and individuals, as he sees fit to accomplish his purpose.

In Romans 9-11, Paul elaborates on Israel's role in salvation history, and as far as chapter 9 is concerned, a number of facts must be kept in mind if the chapter is to be understood along with its place in the third part of Paul's letter. According to one commentator, "The first is the fact that Paul is addressing the problem of Israel and its relation to Christ, present and future. Paul is not addressing the fate of some individuals . . . The context of this discussion, namely the fate of Israel as chosen people, must be honored, especially in verses 6-13 and 24-29" (Achtemeier, 154).

The same commentator explains further: "Paul is dealing in this passage with the place of Israel in God's plan of salvation. He is not dealing with the fate of individuals. What he says of God's gracious purposes in effecting that plan has significance, of course, for us as individuals; but the passage will be misunderstood if its message is taken in individualistic terms . . . One will not find here in Paul's intention anything of the 'double predestination' of individuals, and that for the two reasons we have mentioned: First, the passage is not concerned with individuals; and second, Paul speaks of the asymmetry [unbalanced proportions] of God's grace, not the symmetry [balanced proportions] of grace and wrath. Everywhere in Paul's argument to this point grace has held the upper hand: It comes to those who do not deserve it (3:22-24; 5:8-10), it is more abundant than sin (5:20-21) and breaks its power (6:22; 7:6), and there is nothing anywhere that can thwart it (8:38-39)" (163).

In verses 19-21, Paul answers those who might question God's prerogative expressed in verse 18. His terse reply is not meant to silence all human questioning but suggests "he is speaking to those with an impenitent, God-defying attitude who want to make God answerable to them for what he does

and who, by their questions, defame the character of God" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on 9:20). After all, like a potter, who rightfully makes pottery for special occasions and for everyday use from the very same clay, the Creator God rightfully chooses to use people, even someone like Pharaoh, and nations, even one like Rome, as he deems appropriate. Put differently, "A potter makes vessels for various purposes. God likewise ordains times and events and peoples for purposes of his choosing, some for noble purposes and some for common use" (Edwards, 240).

God's exercise of sovereignty in salvation-history needs to be put in perspective. Paul does that in verses 22-24. He says it must be understood considering God's patience. Although God desired to show his wrath and make his power known, he "endured with much patience objects of wrath ready for destruction" (v. 22 HCSB), for example, Pharaoh and his nation (v. 17; cf., Ex 9:16 NET). God spares Pharaoh's life and the lives of the Egyptians until he finishes demonstrating his power over the gods of Egypt and finally delivers the Israelites. Paul also says it must be understood considering God's purpose. God desired to "make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy that He prepared beforehand for glory" (v. 23 HCSB). Paul carefully distinguishes the "objects of wrath" from "the objects of mercy," suggesting the first have prepared themselves for destruction but asserting the second have been prepared by God for mercy. And who are the objects of mercy to whom Paul refers? In verse 24, he identifies them as Jews and Gentiles, a remnant of Jewish believers, like Paul, as well as Gentile believers, like those in Rome, who together belong to the church. In wisdom, God sovereignly purposed to use the unbelief of Israel, resulting in its rejection, to bring salvation and "reconciliation to the world" (11:15).

In verses 25-29, Paul strings together a number of Old Testament quotations to show that the *inclusion* of Gentiles in the people of God and the *exclusion* of Jews apart from a believing remnant fits with the message of the prophets. The two quotations from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 speak of a reversal in Israel's status from being called "not my people" due to disobedience that brought exile, to being called "my people" in anticipation of future restoration. Paul

applies the prophet's words to Gentiles, who were not the people of God previously but by his grace are now "children of the living God." The quotations from Isaiah 10:22-23 and 1:9 speak of the depletion of Israel by reason of the Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib, described from God's point of view as "the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath" (Isa 10:5). Israel

would be reduced to a remnant but not destroyed. Apart from God's mercy, the nation would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. Paul applies the prophet's words to the believing remnant of rejected Israel in his day that together with believing Gentiles belonged to the church.



**EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

### The Message of the Passage

God patiently endured Israel's stubborn refusal to recognize Jesus as the Christ, so that he might show mercy to a new community of believers called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

The Creator is sovereign. What does that imply, practically speaking?

God exercises his sovereignly with a bias toward showing mercy. What does that mean to you?

God used Israel's unbelief to include Gentiles in the people of God. What do you think of that?

### **notes** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 19 **why** Paul uses a question and answer, diatribe style, throughout chapter 9. In verses 14 and 30 the beginning of new paragraphs is marked by the question, "What say we say then?" And in verse 19 he poses the question raised by his statement in the previous verse, "Therefore, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." "The diatribe style continues in verse 19 with Paul countering in the words of an imaginary objector: If God pities some and harden others, who can be blamed? In resisting his will is not the one only acting out a role predetermined by God? And if this be the case, how can one be held morally accountable?" The author goes on to explain that Paul is not referring to "the final salvation or damnation of individuals . . . The subject continues to be the purposes of God [in history] from the call of Abraham to the establishment of the church" (Edwards, 239).
- v. 20 talk back "Paul is not here denying the validity of that kind of questioning of God which arises from sincere desire to understand God's ways and an honest willingness to accept whatever answer God might give. It is the attitude of the creature presuming to judge the ways of the creator-to 'answer back'-that Paul implicitly rebukes" (Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 602).
- Cf., Wisdom of Solomon 15:7. The meaning of the image is understood in two ways by interpreters. According to one group, "The verse is asserting God's right to use nations, or individuals, for different purposes in his unfolding plan of salvation;" according the other, "Paul is asserting God's right to make from the mass of humanity (the 'lump') some persons who are destined to inherit salvation and other who are destined for wrath and condemnation" (Moo, 603). The first better fits the context. "God likewise ordains times and events and peoples for purposes of his choosing, some for noble purposes and some for common use. Even if those purposes are not apparent, that is no reason to doubt that God's righteousness and holy love are also operative in them. It would be an odd potter who made vessels simply to destroy them" (Edwards, 240, italics added).
- v. 22 although The NIV rightly begins verse 22 with a concessive clause (although) rather than a causal clause (because). "'What if God, although he willed to show forth his wrath, . . . nevertheless endured vessels of wrath with much long-suffering in order to make known the riches of his glory upon vessel of mercy.' Paul could be saying that, though God would show forth his wrath against the vessels of wrath, nonetheless he had patience with them for an extended period of time" (Witherington, 257).
- v. 22 objects of his wrath I.e., the nation of Israel in Paul's day that, apart from a believing remnant, had rejected the Messiah and opposed the gospel. "So 'prepared for destruction' designates a ripeness of sinfulness that points to judgment unless there is a turning to God, yet God is not made responsible for the sinful condition. The preparation for destruction is the work of man, who allows himself to deteriorate in spite of knowledge and conscience. Presumably, and in view of what follows, when Paul speaks of the 'objects of [God's] wrath (v.22), he has in mind those in Israel who have remained obdurate in opposing the gospel, yet are still the object of the divine longsuffering" (Harrison, 10:107).
- v. 23 objects of his mercy "In contrast to [the objects of his wrath] are 'the objects of his mercy' (v.23) in whom God wills to show the riches of his glory (in contrast to his wrath). These, whom he has prepared for glory, include both Jews and Gentiles (v.24), in line with the previous teaching (1:16; 2:10, 11; 3:22) and with the prophetic announcement" (10:107).
- v. 25 not my people The quotations in vv. 25-26 come from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10. "In the original context these passages from Hosea refer to the spiritual restoration of Israel. But Paul finds in them the principle that God is a saving, forgiving, restoring God, who delights to take those who are 'not my people' and make them 'my people.' Paul then applies this principle to Gentiles, whom God makes his people by sovereignly grafting them into covenant relationship (see ch. 11)" (The NIV Study Bible, note on 9:25-26).
- v. 26 children of the living God "It is just possible that he does not intend the second passage (Hosea 1:10) to apply to Gentiles (though this is by no means certain), in which case by the sequence of the passages he may be giving a hint of something developed in chapter 11-namely, the influx of Gentiles during Israel's temporary rejection, to be followed by the turning of Israel to the Lord in great numbers (11:25-27)" (Harrison, 107).
- v. 27 remnant "Paul has used Scripture [Hos 2:23; 1:10] to show that it teaches God's purpose to extend his mercy to Gentiles, so now, returning to the main subject of Israel's unbelief, he uses Scripture again [Isa 10:22-23; 1:9] to make clear that the election of Israel does not preclude her reduction through chastening judgments, yet in the sparing of the remnant his mercy and faithfulness are to be seen . . . Even as he wrote there was a remnant of Israel to be found in the church" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, rev. ed., 10:155).



Connect the **FAMILY**. Kids Kindergarten thru 6th grade receive Kid Pix tokens for discipleship activities completed during the week.

#### Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

A few years ago, Greg and I took our three kids to the state fair. After corndogs and funnel cakes, we stopped in a tent in the children's area. Inside there were potters who were spinning beautiful creations on their pottery wheels. They had a section set up when kids could try their hands at spinning pottery. Two of my kids did pretty well. Though misshapen, they were definitely bowls that could actually be used. The other kid, however, made something else. I'm not even sure what to call it. I've kept it all these years, but I still wonder what he was going for and what I should do with it. He says it's "art". In our passage today, we learn that the Potter can choose to use the clay as He wishes. He could leave the original lump of clay in its original condition or He could choose to make it into something useful and beautiful. We can take great comfort in God's sovereignty. Because none of us are righteous on our own, we need Him to show mercy and extend grace to us. Parents, you and your children are in the loving Potter's hand. Those He has redeemed and rescued from a hardened heart are being shaped into useful vessels for His glory. I'm praying you as you partner with Him in the discipleship of your children.

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 9:19-29

- 1. What right does the Potter have?
- 2. Why does God ultimately do what He does? (v. 23)
- 3. Why didn't the Israelite obtain righteousness? (v. 32)

#### What Do You Think

Read 2 Corinthians 6:2 and Hebrews 3:12-13. When should people put their trust in the Lord? Have you done that?

#### What R U Going To Do

Make your own clay creation. Find a recipe at:

https://www.familyeducation.com/fu n/clay/homemade-clay-recipes

Put it somewhere to remind you that you belong to the Potter!

#### Core Comp

Personal God - I believe God cares about everything in my life.

#### Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 2:10 - These are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

KIDPIX COUPON			
I memorized my verse,	completed Scrolls	, brought Bible	, brought a friend
Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.			
Child's name Earn 1 token by completing the l	Grade PantegoKids Bible stu Questions: Kids	dy and another toker	n by reciting the memory verse.

# CORE COMPETENCIES

### **10 CORE BELIEFS**

**Trinity** 2 Corinthians 13:14 I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians* 2:8-9 I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Authority of the Bible** 2 *Timothy* 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2 I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

**Identity in Christ** John 1:12 I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

**Church** *Ephesians* 4:15-16 I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

**Humanity** *John 3:16* I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior. Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to

show compassion to those in need. Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

**Stewardship** 1 Timothy 6:17-19 I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

#### 10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7 I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

**Prayer** *Psalm* 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

**Single-mindedness** *Matthew* 6:33 I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

**Spiritual Gifts** Romans 12:4-6 I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

**Biblical Community** *Acts* 2:44-47 I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world. Giving Away My Time Colossians

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians 6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1 I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

#### 10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

**Peace** *Philippians* 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

**Faithfulness** *Proverbs* 3:3-4 I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

**Self-Control** Titus 2:11-13 I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

**Humility** Philippians 2:3, 4 I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12 I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15 I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

**Gentleness** Philippians 4:5 I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

**Hope** *Hebrews* 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

#### **About the Authors**

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.