

KINGDOM.

LESSON 13

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God’s kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] 1 KINGS 3, 11, 17 and 18
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet time with God out of the assigned Bible passages (I Kings chapters 3, 11, 17 and 18). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH] (1) 1 PETER 2:5
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The tenth series of memory verses (J) is about “The Christian Church”. The titles of the five memory verses are:

- (1) The nature of the Church. 1 Peter 2:5.
- (2) The activities in the Church. Acts 2:42.
- (3) The ministries of the Church. Ephesians 4:12-13.
- (4) The tasks of Church leaders. Acts 20:28.
- (5) The glory in the Church. Ephesians 3:20-21.

Review two by two.

(1) The nature of the Church. 1 Peter 2:5. You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [THE PARABLES OF JESUS] THE WEDDING BANQUET
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**“The parable of the wedding banquet” in Matthew 22:1-14 is a parable about
THE CONDITION FOR ENTERING GOD’S KINGDOM.**

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study this parable by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

Read Matthew 22:1-14.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

This parable is full of significance and its three parts could even be viewed as three parables rolled into one.

The first part of the story is about the rejection of the king’s invitations. A king planned a wedding banquet for his son. Three times the king extended his invitation to his guests. First, he invited them to the wedding banquet. Then, he called those invited to come to the wedding banquet. Finally, he sent to say to them that everything is ready and that they must come to the wedding banquet (verse 3-4). Among the Jews it was not unusual to send out a general invitation first and later to call those who had been invited to come to the wedding banquet (Esther 5:8; 6:14). The people paid no heed to the invitation, maltreated the slaves and even killed them. In those days, the rejection of the king’s invitation was regarded as unacceptable and was severely punished. Therefore, Jesus says, “The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city” (verse 5-7).

The second part of the story is about the filling of the wedding hall. The king did not regard the original invited guests as worthy of any further special attention. But he was determined to have a good wedding feast for his son. So he

sent his servants to all the possible places where people passed by in order to invite to the banquet anyone they could find. The wedding hall filled with people. *The king's plan would not and could not fail!*

The third part of the story is about the person not wearing wedding clothes. When the king came to view his guests, he noticed one man who did not have wedding clothes on. There is historical evidence that even in post-biblical times in the Near East a person who wished to enter a king's presence was required to wear a robe sent to him by the king. In this parable, the king expected each wedding guest to wear a wedding robe! The man without a wedding robe had no excuse for not wearing it! The king ordered that this man be thrown outside into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of "the story" of the parable may consist of "the setting" and "the explanation or application" of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of this parable is contained in Matthew chapters 21 and 22.

The setting is during Jesus' last week before his crucifixion. Jesus had entered Jerusalem and the crowds had welcomed him as the coming Messiah. He had cleansed the temple from all the merchants, who probably paid money to the priests to be allowed to sell their goods in the temple! In the temple, he had healed the blind and the lame and the children shouted that he was the coming Messiah. Only the chief priests and the teachers of the law did not welcome Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, in the temple or in their hearts. After cursing the barren fig tree and facing the questioning of his authority by the chief priests and elders of Israel, Jesus told three parables: the parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked tenants and the parable of the wedding banquet.

It is therefore clear that the setting of the parable of the wedding banquet is *the bad attitude and opposition of the religious and political leaders of Israel against Jesus Christ*. They and their followers rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah, they regarded his miracles of healing as the work of Satan, and they rejected him as a preacher and teacher of the gospel of the kingdom. And at that time they had already plotted to kill him!

(2) The story of this parable is contained in Matthew 22:2-13.

(3) The explanation or application of this parable is contained in Matthew 22:14.

It says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Although the gospel is preached far and wide and reaches very many people, still most people will be like the man in the parable: they hear but do not believe or obey. In the last analysis, *inheriting the kingdom of God is not a human accomplishment, but the gift of God's sovereign grace*. According to John 15:16 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, it is God who chooses and calls people in a sovereign way to himself.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes. Because Jesus did not explain any of the details, the essential or relevant details must be determined from the context and parallel passages in the Bible.

The kingdom of heaven (the kingdom of God). Whenever Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is like ..." (Matthew 22:2) he wants to teach:

- what happened *in the past* during the kingship (reign) of God in the Old Testament period
- what is happening *in the present* during the kingship (reign) of God in the New Testament period
- and what will certainly happen *in the future* when the final phase of the kingship (reign) of God is unfolded at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

On the final judgement day, all the events described in the parables will certainly have taken place. This means that people living today are also included in the events described in the parables! Each parable of Jesus Christ has a message for you and me today!!!

The king. "The king" (Matthew 22:2) represents God, who first invites and then calls those who have been previously invited. According to the application in verse 14, he not only invites and calls, but also chooses. This is a relevant detail.

The son. The suggestion is strong that "the son" (Matthew 22:2) represents Jesus Christ, because he is God's Son. Nevertheless, this is not certain, because he is not mentioned again and one would have expected him to play a more significant role in this story if he represented Christ. Because this detail is not explained, nor further mentioned, he is

not a relevant detail *in this story*. The mentioning of the king and his son intends to emphasise the fact that this was a very important banquet, a royal banquet.

The wedding banquet. The wedding banquet (Matthew 22:2) is a relevant detail. “The wedding banquet” is a symbol for the kingdom of God in its final stage at the second coming of Christ (cf. Revelation 19:7). It represents the joy at the second coming of Jesus Christ and the joy of living in the new heaven and new earth, where everyone there will exuberantly acknowledge the reign of God in Christ. It is pictured as a wedding banquet in a spacious banquet hall flooded with light where guests recline together on couches at tables loaded with food. There is joyous communication with each other and with the host.

The word “wedding banquet” in the original is used in the plural or singular without difference of meaning (compare verse 2-4 with verse 8). The plural, “wedding festivities”, may have arisen from the fact that the wedding celebrations lasted several days (Judges 14:17) and must have included many festive activities.

The first three invitations to the first group of people. The first three invitations to the first group of people (Matthew 22:3a,3b and 4) are relevant. They represent God’s invitations throughout the Old Testament period to the nation of Israel, right up to the time of the first coming of Jesus Christ. They show the great love and immense patience with which God called the nation of Israel to himself (Romans 10:21). Compare this with his present love and patience to Jews and Gentiles alike (2 Peter 3:9).

- **The first invitation.** The first invitation is relevant. The king’s original invitation strongly suggests God’s calling of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants (Genesis 12:1-3; 26:24; 28:13-15) and to a certain extent God’s calling of Moses (Exodus 3). None of them rejected God’s invitation.
- **The second invitation.** The second invitation is relevant. The context of the story of the parable was the bad attitude and opposition of people in Israel against the Old Testament prophets. Thus, the king’s second invitation through the first group of “servants” naturally suggests God’s speaking to Israel again and again through the Old Testament prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets (Matthew 21:34-35).
- **The third invitation.** The third invitation is relevant. The king’s third invitation naturally suggests God’s speaking to Israel through John the Baptist, Jesus himself, the disciples of Jesus (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1-2) and later Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60) and Paul (Acts 13:13-52).

All three invitations were directed to God’s Old Testament covenant people, *the natural nation of Israel* (Deuteronomy 4:9-13,32-36).

The response of the people to the kings’ invitations. This is relevant (Matthew 22:5-7). On the whole, Israel during the Old Testament period and the Jews during the first coming of Jesus Christ paid no attention to the king’s invitations. In the context of the parable, it represents Israel’s attitude of indifference and active hostility against Jesus Christ and his invitation to God’s kingdom. The people of Israel were more interested in earthly, material matters like agriculture and commerce than in heavenly, spiritual matters like salvation (Luke 14:18-20; 17:26-30). They saw Christ’s miracles and heard his teachings and yet were unwilling to repent and believe (Matthew 21:31-32).

The fact that they mistreated and killed the king’s servants is relevant. It represents Israel’s treatment of the Old Testament prophets (Matthew 21:35-36; 23:33-36). This attitude of indifference and hostility towards Jesus Christ, whether it is of Jews or Gentiles, will also be the reason why all unbelievers will be punished at Christ’s second coming.

The punishment of the rejecters. This is relevant (Matthew 22:7). The king concluded that the original invited guests did not deserve the honour of being included in his wedding banquet. The destruction of those murderers and the burning of their city by the king’s soldiers are relevant details. Because these events were literally fulfilled, they indicate *whom* Jesus Christ had in mind. In 70 A.D. Titus, the son of the Roman emperor (Vespasianus, A.D. 69-79), captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and much of Jerusalem, and killed more than one million Jews, so that the nation of Israel stopped to exist as a political unit (Josephus: “History of the Jewish War, books 4-6).

Nevertheless, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was already the end of the nation of Israel as God’s special favoured people (Matthew 8:11-12; 21:41-43; 27:51; compare Matthew 10:5-6 with Matthew 28:18-20). This does not mean that God had rejected all Jews (Romans 11:1-10). Among those who responded and entered the wedding banquet there were many Jews.

The final invitation to the second group of people. This is relevant (Matthew 22:8-10a). This represents God’s invitation at the present time to anybody who cares to listen! This invitation will only last till the second coming of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 6:2). This shows that God perseveres to reach his goal: namely, to completely fill the wedding hall!

This second group of people represents the tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 21:31-32) and the Gentiles (Matthew 8:11) who were all despised in the eyes of Israel’s religious and political leaders. Since the first coming of Jesus, the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins has been preached by God’s servants to all the nations in the world (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). The king will persevere to invite people until his wedding hall is absolutely filled! The king is determined that his plan cannot and will not fail! This detail represents God’s determination that his purpose and plan as outlined in the New Testament cannot and will not fail (cf. Isaiah 14:24,27)!

The filling of the wedding hall with the good and the bad. This is relevant (Matthew 22:10b). Since the first coming of Jesus Christ, the gospel of salvation (and the kingship of Christ) has been preached to everyone in the world, regardless of race, nationality, sex or social standing. Since the first coming of Christ no single ethnic nation in the world has any special standing before God anymore (John 1:10:18; Romans 10:12-13; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11)! Many Jews and many Gentiles (non-Jews) are brought into God's kingdom.

But not all these people are genuine born-again believers.

- As also the parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30)
- and the parable of the dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)
- the parable of the wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14) teaches that the gospel of the kingdom continually catches good and bad people.

The people may be "good" or "bad" *according to pure human standards*. In the eyes of the world they may be respectable, philanthropists or very religious, but they may also be thieves, prostitutes, tax collectors and murderers (Matthew 21:31).

Or the people may be "good" or "bad" *according to God's standard*, namely, with or without wedding clothes. True Christians as well as nominal-Christians claim to have a share in the kingdom of God (Matthew 7:21-23) and they live together in the kingdom of God in its present phase (the Church) until the second coming of Christ. At the end of the age, that is, at the great harvest at the final judgement, Jesus Christ and his angels will separate the unbelievers (the unrighteous, nominal Christians) from the genuine believers (the righteous) (Matthew 13:41; 25:32)!

The wearing of wedding clothes. This is relevant (Matthew 22:11-13). Although in the parable there is no mention of offering a wedding robe to the entering guests, there is enough evidence that this was the practice in those days. Guests from the underprivileged people did not possess such a wedding robe and could not have obtained it in any other way. The king expected each guest to wear such a wedding robe at the royal wedding. The man without a wedding robe was not able to offer any excuse for not wearing one.

The Bible has some significant passages about the figurative meaning of clothes, for example, representing "Christ and his righteousness and holiness" (Romans 13:14; Ephesians 4:24). Finally, the king himself ordered the man without a wedding robe to be punished severely. Thus, the wearing of a wedding robe is an essential detail in the parable. It represents *God's condition for entering his kingdom*.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message (the central theme) of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 teaches about "the condition for entering God's kingdom."

The main message of the parable is the following. "People must respond to God's invitation to enter into his kingdom. And they must enter God's kingdom, not on their own personal terms, but on God's terms!" Every person is exhorted to accept God's gracious invitation, lest while others enter into glory, he be lost.

But he must remember that membership of the visible Church in the world does not guarantee his membership of God's final and eternal kingdom, that is, it does not guarantee his salvation. What is really needed for salvation is putting on Jesus Christ with his perfect righteousness and holiness. Only that guarantees complete salvation and renewal.

Entering God's kingdom on God's condition is one of the basic characteristics of God's kingdom. The genuine people of God's kingdom have given up their own conditions like "a good personality", "good works" or "a self-styled religion" and have submitted to God's condition for entering God's kingdom and living in it.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

(1) Comparison of the three parables:

the two sons, the wicked tenants and the wedding banquet.

Read Matthew 21:28-32; Matthew 21:33-44; Matthew 22:1-14.

The three parables in Matthew 21 and 22 are arranged in climactic order.

The parable of “the two sons” in Matthew 21:28-32 teaches that those people who disobeyed God’s command and rejected his messenger, John the Baptist, will never enter God’s kingdom if they continue in their state of impenitence.

The parable of “the wicked tenants” in Matthew 21:33-44 teaches that those people who rejected and maltreated God’s prophets and even killed his Son, will be brought to a dreadful end and *all their privileges and opportunities will be given to another people*.

The parable of “the wedding banquet” teaches that those people, who rejected God’s invitation, will be destroyed and that *despised Jews and Gentiles will come pouring into God’s kingdom (the Church)*. Nevertheless, God requires of every person, Jew or Gentile, that he wears wedding clothes!

(2) God’s view of the nation of Israel in relationship to the other Gentile nations.

Read Matthew 8:11-12; 21:41-44. Compare Matthew 10:5-6 with 24:14 and 28:18-20. Read also John 10:14-16; Acts 10:24-35,42-43; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Galatians 3:8-9; 3:23 to 4:7; Ephesians 3:4-6; Colossians 3:9-12; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 5:9-10.

During the Old Testament period, the nation of Israel was *chosen to possess certain privileges* above all the other nations in the world (Romans 9:4-5; Ephesians 2:11-12). Nevertheless, Israel remained a people bound in slavery to the Law. Israel had the status of “a minor, an underage child subject to guardians and trustees” (the ceremonial laws) until the time of the first coming of Christ (Galatians 3:18 – 4:7). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ destroyed “the dividing wall of hostility” (the ceremonial laws) that held Israel separate from the other nations in the world (Ephesians 2:13-22; Colossians 2:13-14).

From the first coming of Christ until his second coming, Christians from the Gentile nations are heirs together with Christians from the nation of Israel *on absolute equal footing* (Ephesians 3:2-6). They are members of one and the same Body of Christ (the Church). They share equally in all God’s promises made to his old covenant people and to his new covenant people (2 Corinthians 1:20). The only “nation” which now has a special standing before God, is the nation consisting of born again believers in Jesus Christ, whether originally Jews or Gentiles (non-Jews) (1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 2:4-10). The only “chosen people of God” consists of believers during the Old Testament period and believers during the whole New Testament period, regardless of their race, nationality, sex or social standing!

God does not have two programmes of salvation: one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. People in both the Old and New Testaments are saved only by grace through faith (Genesis 15:6; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9).

The words of the Old Testament prophets remain “veiled” and are only fully understood in the light of the New Testament revelation. And the words of the Old Testament prophets are only fulfilled to people who turn to Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:7-16). The words of the Old Testament are a “shadow” of the “realities” in the New Testament (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). The prophets of the Old Testament did not know “the mystery”, which was only revealed to the apostles and prophets in the New Testament, namely, that through the preaching of the gospel the believers in Jesus Christ from all the nations on earth during the New Testament period would *on absolute equal footing* be heirs together with the believers in the Messiah from the nation of Israel during the Old Testament period (Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:4-6; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:19)! Therefore, the prophecies in the Old Testament may not be interpreted apart from the New Testament!

(3) The meaning of wearing wedding clothes.

Read 2 Kings 10:18-22; Revelation 19:7-8. We have evidence that in biblical times it was the custom to wear wedding clothes to a royal banquet. King Jehu organised a great assembly for the servants of Baal and ordered the keeper of the wardrobe to bring “robes” for all these servants to wear. In this way they could be clearly identified before they were put to death.

And at the wedding of the Lamb after the second coming of Christ, “the bride”, who represents all the genuine Christians, has made herself ready and she was given fine, bright and clean linen to wear.

Most of the guests who attended this wedding banquet were drawn from the underprivileged ranks in society (Luke 14:21-23) and did not own such a robe. Nevertheless, the king expected each guest to wear a wedding robe. Therefore, the man who was not wearing a wedding robe *had refused to wear the wedding robe which the king had offered to him*. The man had no excuse and was severely punished!

Read Isaiah 64:6; Colossians 3:5-14. The wedding robe cannot signify our moral goodness or good works as a prerequisite or condition for salvation, because “our human righteous acts are like filthy rags” in the eyes of God (Galatians 3:16,21). The only “good work” is to believe in Jesus Christ and his acquired righteousness (John 6:29).

Read Job 29:14; Isaiah 11:5; 61:10; Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Revelations 19:7-8. The people wearing a wedding robe are a symbol of:

- “those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”, Jesus Christ (Revelation 7:14)
- “those who have put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24)
- “those who have put on Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27). Those who have accepted the righteousness, holiness and salvation in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

“The wedding robe” represents the righteousness of Jesus Christ:

- which Christ *acquired* through his death and resurrection
- which God has *imputed* (*ascribed*) to the believer in a legal sense
- which God has *imparted* to the believer in a concrete sense
- so that God may *regard and treat* the believer as perfectly righteous in his eyes
- and so that the believer may *live* righteous in God’s eyes!

The wedding robe represents justification by grace through faith. Only this leads to a holy and righteous life.

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or messages of this parable? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) The condition for entering God’s kingdom is determined only by the King.

“The King” represents God who invites people patiently and persistently to enter his kingdom. People must respond and must enter on his condition or perish forever.

Other religions and their prophets produce conditions in which a man must acquire his own righteousness. The God of the Bible however requires only that a believer accepts and clothes himself with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, which God by grace imputes (*ascribes*) and imparts to the believer in Jesus Christ. There is no other way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)!

(2) This parable is full of significance and its three parts could even be viewed as three parables, each with a significant message:

- The first part of the story is about the rejection of the king’s invitations. The significant message is that God is very patient, especially with the godless and wicked people in the world. But there is a limit to God’s patience (Matthew 8:11-12; 21:41-44). “My Spirit will not contend with man forever” (Genesis 6:3).
- The second part of the story is about the filling of the wedding hall. The significant message is that God’s purpose and plans cannot and will not be frustrated (cf. Isaiah 14:24,27). If the Jews as a nation have failed to be God’s instrument to reach his plan, then he uses Christians from all the nations in the world to accomplish his eternal plan (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:44-47; 1 Peter 2:9-10).
- The third part of the story is about the person not wearing wedding clothes. The significant message is that people can only enter God’s kingdom on God’s terms and never on their own terms. Jesus Christ is the Way and no one comes to the Father but by him (John 14:6). This part of the parable emphasises man’s personal responsibility to receive the wedding clothes and put them on.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD
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Take turns in the group **to pray short** to God in response to what you have learned today.

Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(**Group leader.** Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. **Preach, teach or study** “the parable of the wedding banquet” together with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of **2 Kings 5, 6, 17 and 25** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** (2) The activities in the church: **Acts 2:42**. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. **Romans 4:1-16**. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. **Update your notebook** on preaching God’s kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.