

UNIT 3: BIBLE LESSONS FROM THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

Lesson 9

August 2, 2026

Consider the Birds:

God's great love includes every human being.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson examines how the Bible symbolically uses birds to illustrate God's care and protection for humanity. For example, God's provision for sparrows serves as a reminder of His greater concern for humans. The eagle, a symbol of strength, represents God's ability to lift His people above earthly dangers and keep them from harm in His presence. Jesus likened His care to a hen gathering her chicks under her wings, signifying His desire to draw His people close for safety and guidance. However, this metaphor also highlights humanity's tendency to resist His protective embrace. These examples reveal God's promise to care for and protect His creation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the Bible, birds frequently serve as symbols, reflecting spiritual truths, divine care, and moral lessons. Doves symbolize peace, purity and the Holy Spirit, as seen in Jesus' baptism. Ravens reveal God's provision, feeding Elijah in the wilderness. At the same time, eagles represent strength and divine protection, as in Isaiah 40:31. Sparrows show God's care for the smallest beings, mirroring His concern for humanity (Matthew 10:29-31). Some birds, like vultures, signify judgment and desolation. Around twenty types of birds are mentioned in the Bible, collectively illustrating God's sovereignty, grace, and deep involvement in creation.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. PROVISION AND PLACE - SPARROWS: Psalm 84:1-4; Matthew 10:29-31.**
 - A. A Place to Praise, (Psalm 84:1-4)
 - B. God's Caring Attention, (Matthew 10:29-31)
- 2. ON EAGLE'S WINGS: Exodus 19:3-5; Deuteronomy 32:10-12; Isaiah 40:27-31.**
 - A. God Lifts Up His People, (Exodus 19:3-5; Deuteronomy 32:10-12.)
 - B. God's Strength for His People, (Isaiah 40:27-31)
- 3. UNDER GOD'S WINGS: Psalm 91:1-4; Matthew 23:37-38.**
 - A. Abiding Close to God's Heart, (Psalm 91:1-4)
 - B. Refusing Shelter Near God's Heart, (Matthew 23:37-38)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. PROVISION AND PLACE - SPARROWS: Psalm 84:1-4; Matthew 10:29-31.

A. A Place to Praise, Psalm 84:1-4.

This passage is a poetic celebration of God's dwelling place, and it presents a beautiful image of birds finding shelter in His house. The psalm begins with the writer expressing his desire to be in the presence of the Lord. He longs for God's presence, and he observes that even the birds find their way into His courts: "The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God" (v. 3). This imagery is deeply symbolic. Often seen as small and insignificant, birds represent those who might feel unworthy or overlooked. Yet even the humblest creatures find a home in God's house. These birds literally found their way into the tabernacle, and later the temple.

The altar, a place of worship and sacrifice, became a sanctuary for the birds – reminder that God welcomes everyone into His presence. The birds' nearness to the altar symbolizes intimacy with God, a closeness we all long for. The fact that seemingly insignificant birds could dwell in the tabernacle and nest near His altar encouraged the psalmist to believe he could likewise draw near to God. As readers of Psalm 84, this passage is our invitation. Like the sparrow and the swallow, we are called to seek refuge and belonging in God's presence. No matter how small or unworthy we may feel, His house is open to us as a place of peace, safety, and love.

B. God's Caring Attention, Matthew 10:29-31.

In this passage, Jesus illustrates the profound worth of humanity with the example of the sparrow – a small, inexpensive bird. Though sparrows were considered insignificant and sold cheaply in ancient markets, Jesus emphasized that no one escapes God's attentive care. The illustration causes us to ask: If God watches over even these humble creatures, how much more does He care for us? This powerful metaphor expresses the unconditional value we hold in the eyes of God – not for our achievements, but because we are deeply known and cherished by our Creator. The passage highlights God's oversight, reminding us that we're never overlooked, even in moments of fear or doubt. Every lowly sparrow picking seeds and insects from the grass reminds us of God's love and provision for us.

The detail of God numbering the very hairs on our heads reveals His intimate knowledge of and care for our lives. If a single hair falls from our head, He knows. In a culture that often assigns value to productivity, wealth, or status, these verses provide a striking contrast: Our worth is innate, gifted by God's unwavering love. Sparrows also embody resilience. Despite their smallness, they flourish under God's provision. This offers hope in challenging moments, reassuring us that nothing escapes His notice and no life is too insignificant in His eyes. Ultimately, Matthew 10:29-31 calls us to rest in the comfort of a Creator whose profound care for sparrows reflects His infinite care for us. As such, we need not fear, for Jesus said we "are of more value than many sparrows" (v. 31).

In a world that often feels like a race for "likes," followers, and external validation, it is reassuring to know God is a constant source of love and acceptance. His attention is steadfast,

His care is unconditional, and His love doesn't need to be earned or measured. It just "is." No matter how much we might try to hide parts of ourselves, He sees us fully – our strengths, our flaws, and even the struggles we keep tucked away. Still, He remains with us, offering grace, understanding, and the strength to rise above life's challenges. Isn't it comforting to know that He loved us enough to give His only begotten Son to save us? We can take heart in this truth today. We are seen. We are loved. We are never alone.

2. ON EAGLES' WINGS: Exodus 19:3-5; Deuteronomy 32:10-12; Isaiah 40:27-31.

A. God Lifts Up His People, Exodus 19:3-5; Deuteronomy 32:10-12.

In Exodus 19:3-5, God's statement that He delivered the Israelites "on eagles' wings" (v. 4) is a profound metaphor that conveys both His power and tender care. Eagles are known for their strength, soaring to great heights, and their ability to carry their young on their wings, symbolizing God's protections and guidance. This imagery captures the essence of God's relationship with His people, illustrating how He lifted them out of bondage in Egypt with unmatched might and unwavering love. It speaks to His role as a deliverer who not only rescues but also nurtures and sustains. The eagle's wings evoke a sense of divine elevation, reminding us that God raises His people above their struggles and carries them toward His covenant promises. This passage invites God's people to reflect on the security and purpose that is found in trusting the One who carries them with such care and strength.

In Deuteronomy 32:10-12, the imagery of an eagle for its young beautifully illustrates God's tender and protective love for His people. Just as an eagle hovers over its nest – feeding, guarding, and guiding its young – God watches over His children with unwavering attention. The eagle stirs its nest to teach its young to fly, yet remains close, ready to catch them if they falter. In a sense, Egypt had become Israel's nest, but God stirred them up, motivating them to leave. Sometimes, we become nested and comfortable where we are spiritually, and God has to stir us up to move out and into the plans He has for us.

This metaphor reflects God's naturing guidance, encouraging growth and progress while also ensuring His constant presence for support and rescue when we need it. The passage underscores the balance between discipline and compassion in God's care, expressing His desire for His people to thrive under His protection and provision. Through this illustration, we see a powerful depiction of divine love – both fierce and gentle, challenging yet comforting.

B. God's Strength for His People, Isaiah 40:27-31.

These verses offer a profound reminder of God's unwavering strength and faithfulness, especially in moments of weariness and doubt. The passage begins by addressing the feelings of abandonment and despair that many experience, reassuring us that God does not grow tired or weary, nor does He overlook our struggles. He is not indifferent to our situations. His understanding is infinite, and His power is boundless. For those who feel faint or powerless, this passage serves as a beacon of hope, promising that God will renew their strength. It challenges us to trust in Him even when circumstances seem overwhelming, and to remember that His timing and provision are perfect.

The imagery of mounting up with wings like eagles is particularly striking, symbolizing a divine empowerment that lifts us above life's challenges. Eagles soar effortlessly, carried by the wind rather than their own strength, and this is a beautiful metaphor for what happens when we place our trust in God. By waiting on the Lord – seeking Him in prayer, worship, and dependence – we are given the strength to “mount up with wings as eagles ... run, and not be weary ... walk, and not faint” (v. 31). This passage invites us to exchange our limited strength for God's limitless power, encouraging us to rise above adversity with the confidence that He will sustain us every step of the way.

To be delivered by God means experiencing His saving power when we face challenges, dangers, or burdens we cannot overcome alone. Deliverance is His loving intervention, pulling us out of despair, sin, or difficult situations and placing us on a path of hope and purpose. Once delivered, being strengthened by Him means receiving the grace, courage, and resilience we need to move forward, grow, and thrive. God doesn't just rescue us and leave us to figure things out alone – He equips us with His wisdom, peace, and unwavering presence to face life's battles confidently. Through His strength, we find the ability to endure, overcome, and live with a renewed sense of faith and joy.

3. UNDER GOD'S WINGS: Psalm 91:1-4; Matthew 23:37-38.

A. Abiding Close to God's Heart, Psalm 91:1-4.

Psalm 91 paints a beautiful picture of God's protection and care for those who trust in Him. To “abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (v. 1) is to dwell in His constant presence, finding refuge in His strength and love. It speaks of a relationship of intimacy and trust, where we choose to stay close to Him, allowing His power to overshadow our fears and uncertainties. Just as a shadow provides relief from the heat of the sun, God's presence offers comfort and peace in life's trials. This abiding is not a fleeting moment but a continual posture of reliance on Him, where we find safety and rest in the One who is greater than any challenge we face.

The imagery of being covered by His wings further emphasizes God's tender care and protective nature. Like a mother bird shielding her young, God surrounds us with His faithfulness, offering us security and warmth. His wings are not just a barrier against harm but also a place of nurture and closeness, reminding us that His protection is deeply personal. In this covering, we are reminded that He is our refuge, our fortress, and our safe place in every storm. These verses invite us to trust Him fully, resting in the assurance that His love and power are sufficient to sustain us through life's uncertainties.

B. Refusing Shelter Near God's Heart, Matthew 23:37-38.

In this passage, Jesus expresses a profound lament over Jerusalem, symbolizing the Jewish people's persistent reluctance to embrace Him as their Messiah. His heartfelt cry, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings” (v. 37), reveals the depth of His love and desire to protect and nurture them. Yet, their unwillingness to come to Him expresses their tragic resistance rooted in hardened hearts and

misplaced priorities. Despite the countless miracles, teachings, and acts of compassion Jesus demonstrated, many rejected Him, clinging instead to their traditions, legalism, and preconceived notions of what the Messiah should be. This reluctance was not merely an intellectual misunderstanding but a spiritual refusal to surrender to the truth He embodied.

The consequence of this rejection is poignantly stated in verse 38: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” This desolation reflects both the immediate and eternal repercussions of turning away from the Savior. For the Jews of that time, it foretold the destruction of the temple and the scattering of their nation. Spiritually, it underscores the emptiness that comes from rejecting God’s presence and grace. Jesus’ lament is not one of anger but of sorrow – a divine yearning for a people He loved deeply despite their resistance. It serves as a sobering reminder that God’s invitation is always extended, but it requires a willing heart to respond. The reluctance of the Jews in this passage is a reflection of humanity’s broader tendency to resist surrendering to God’s will, even when it is for our ultimate good.

When we draw close to God, we find ourselves wrapped in unwavering love and peace that surpasses all understanding. Near His heart, there is no fear too great, no burden too heavy, for His protection is steadfast, and His care is boundless. He invites us to rest in His embrace and trust Him with our worries and dreams, knowing He is our refuge and strength. In His presence, we are reminded that we are never alone, cherished beyond measure, and guided by a hand that knows the way even when we cannot see it. We should learn to lean into His grace and find comfort in the shelter of His unfailing love.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Being a disciple of Christ means following His teachings with faith and letting Him guide our steps. Staying close to Him is about building a daily connection through prayer, trust, and living out His example.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

A ministry focused on staying close to Jesus encourages daily prayer, studying His Word, and obeying His teachings with love and grace. It’s about building a deeper relationship with Him and letting His presence guide our lives.

Birds Prominent in the Bible.

According to The New International Dictionary of the Bible, Israel is home to 375 kinds of birds. Of these, only about 50 are mentioned in the Bible. Following is information about some of the birds best known to Bible readers.

Eagles are mentioned in the Bible more than any other bird (33 times). From ancient times, eagles have been regarded as symbols of military and political power. It could be said that, as the lion is king of the beasts, the eagle is king of the birds.

Doves are mentioned in the Bible 32 times, only slightly less than eagles. Pigeons are mentioned 12 times. Both doves and pigeons are non-predator birds, often regarded as symbols of peace. Doves and pigeons were offered as sacrifices to God by poor Israelites who could not afford more expensive animal sacrifices.

Owls are mentioned in the Bible 9 times. Owls are predatory birds; they have excellent night vision and hunt at night, feeding mainly on small rodents. Owls have long been regarded as symbols of wisdom and sometimes as omens.

Ravens, the largest members of the crow family, up to two feet in length, are mentioned 14 times in the Bible (once by Jesus in Luke 12:24). A question about ravens in Job 38:41 is answered in Psalm 147:9.

Hawks are mentioned 4 times in the Bible. These predatory birds are known for their flying and hunting skills. God, speaking to Job, said, “Does the hawk fly by your wisdom, And spread its wings toward the south? (Job 39:26).

Sparrows are mentioned in the Bible three times in the Old Testament and four times in the New Testament. There are several different kinds of these small birds, and in the Bible, the word sparrow can also mean other similar small birds, such as wrens and finches. These small birds were an important part of the diet of the poor in the time of Jesus (Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 12:6-7). The sparrow’s claim to fame in the Bible is that Jesus spoke of them in His teaching, saying that God cares for sparrows and God cares for people.

WORKSHEET

Birds in God's Plan

In various situations, God used birds to fulfill His purposes. Here are four examples:

- **In Genesis 8:10-11, how did God use a dove?**
- **In Exodus 16:12-13, how did God use quail?**
- **In 1 Kings 17:6, how did God use ravens?**
- **In Acts 10:11-15, how did God use birds and other unclean animals?**