"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."
2 Timothy 3:16

YEAR 3 BOOK 2

General Assembly of the True Jesus Church

HTTP://WWW.TJC.ORG
printed October 2005

Junior 2 Year 3 Book 2

Prophets in the Old Testament

G.A. of the True Jesus Church U.S.A.

YEAR 3 BOOK 2

JUNIOR 2

Teacher's Guide

THEME:

Prophets in the Old Testament

Spiritual Battle!

Fall Quarter:
December, January, February

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but
against principalities, against powers,
against the rulers of the darkness of this age,
against spiritual hosts of
wickedness in the heavenly places.
(Eph 6:2)

Published by the General Assembly of the True Jesus Church

True Jesus Church
314 S. Brookhurst St., Suit #104
Anaheim, CA
92804-2472
U.S.A.
(714) 533-8808
(714) 533-8878 (Fax)

YEAR 3 BOOK 2

JUNIOR 2

Teacher's Guide

THEME:

Prophets in the Old Testament

THEMES

Prophets in the Old Testament

unit 1:
The Prophets of Today
The Old Testament prophets were ordinary men and women hand-picked by God to declare His messages to a stubborn and rebellious nation. In this unit, students will learn about the qualities, the mission and the messages of these prophets. Among the messages preached was the coming of the Messiah, the perfect servant of God. The Lord Jesus Christ will come to be the light of the world and liberate the captives. Our students will learn that we are the prophets of today. God has called us to be His spokesmen to an unbelieving and corrupt generation and to shine the light of the gospel in this dark world.

unit 2:
Preparing to Meet Our Lord
Despite the many warnings given by the prophets concerning the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible day when God would pour down His wrath upon His people, the Israelites refused to turn back to God. Just as God's punishment and devastation came at a time the Israelites least expected, the Lord's Second Coming will be like a thief in the night. In this unit, students will learn about preparing themselves to meet the Lord and recognizing the signs of the times. From the book of Jonah, students will also learn that they have to rise above their preoccupations to see the true needs of a pitiful world.

unit 3:
The Perfect Temple
In this unit, students will learn about the captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem, and how the Israelites had learned a very harsh and difficult lesson. God's abidance did not lie in the structural temple but rather in meeting the exact standards and holiness of God. In the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the people had returned from captivity. Their goal now was to rebuild the temple, the city walls and revive their faith. Just as how the Israelites returned to build the physical temple, our students will learn that we need to build the spiritual temple of God; the church and our own faith. To do this, we rely not on might, nor power, but on the Holy Spirit.

CONTENTS

Special Features

Welcome to the J2 Curriculum i-ii
Understanding Your Teens iii
Teens' Desires (1-2) iv-v
How Do I Effectively Communicate With My Students? vi
My.Students@tjc.org vii
How Can I Get Them Motivated and to Stay Interested? viii
Memory Verse Contest & Bible Reading Chart ix
Memory Verses for This Quarter x

Unit 1: Prophets of the Today

1. Overview of the Prophetic Books 1
2. Isaiah (1) 17
3. Isaiah (2) 29

Unit 2: Preparing to Meet Our Lord

4. Obadiah, Joel, Amos 41
5. Jonah, Hosea, Micah 57
6. Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk 73
7. The Book of Jeremiah (1) 87
8. Jeremiah (2) and Lamentations 103

Unit 3: The Perfect Temple

9. Ezekiel (1) 117
10. Ezekiel (2) 133
11. Daniel 145
12. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi 157
13. Review 173

WELCOME TO THE J2 CURRICULUM

This Teacher's Guide has been designed to help the teachers plan the class and become more effective in the teaching ministry.

Because of the impact of God's word, it is our prayer that we see our students understand and apply the Bible to their lives. Our ultimate goal of this curriculum is to see lives transformed. Here you'll find the materials you will need to teach the unchanging truth of God's word.

This Curriculum Includes:

Sample

LESSON TITLE

Getting Your Spiritual Life in Shape

LISTED SCRIPTURES

Eph 6:13 –18; Ex 33:17 – 23; 34:28 – 33; Num 12:6 – 8

LESSON AIM

1) To examine the important elements of spiritual growth
2) To discover how to win the battle between the spirit and the flesh
3) To implement a plan to get the students' spiritual lives in shape by using specific goals

MEMORY VERSE

"That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15) (NKJV)

BIBLE READING FOR THE WEEK

Eph 1-2

All of these sabbath lessons are built on:

1. (Not listed in the Student Workbook) **BIBLE BACKGROUND**
Extra resource related to the lesson for the students and teachers to know.

2. **WARM UP**
Something to capture their focus to get them started.

3. **BIBLE STUDY**
Lead your students in discovering the timeless truth of God's word through inductive Bible study.
(Student Worksheet is only in outline form)

4. **CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING**
Find out if the students comprehend the information that is being presented. Teachers can check for understanding in different ways. One way is to ask them questions related to what they've just learned.

5. **LIFE APPLICATION**
Help each student apply God's word to his/her life as the Holy Spirit leads him/her. Encourage students to come up with a plan of action to practice what they've learned. How are they going to implement their plans? When are they going to apply it?

6. **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**
Ask them to share with you what sticks in their mind after the lesson, before the concluding prayer.

A Reminder!

Unit goals and teacher devotional are listed before each unit. Bible reading for the week and the memory verse are listed in each lesson. Be sure to read through each lesson before you plan and teach your class.

Understanding Your Teens

It is important to teach teens in order to equip them with a strong foundation of good, solid faith. This generation that we are working with is searching for answers to truth. Although they may have many ups and downs in their lives or lack spiritual depth, they do want to know who makes a real difference in the real world.

Teens live in a time when believing in God is considered ridiculous. They also live in a world that is in constant violation of God's laws. Some of the results of this are health epidemics, environmental devastation and domestic violence. Therefore, they are faced with important decisions each and every day. What they decide can ultimately affect their values, faith, education, choice in friends, occupation, marriage, and church-life. In addition to these complexities, teens may be struggling with peer pressure, fashion expectations, substance abuse issues, family/relationship problems as well as issues of identity and self-concept. In other words, they are rocked with change, whether spiritual, emotional, social or physical.

Teens need something or someone to rely on, anything that they can look up to as their standard. Our job, then, is to lead our teens to see a powerful God in this ever-changing world. Surprisingly, teens want to be "spiritual," despite all the hype around them. Therefore, they need to hear personal testimonies, Bible truths, how God's love has touched the lives of other people and what kind of hopes we all have despite living in an often senseless world. The question we need to answer as we teach is, "How can we affirm their faith in a God who loves and cares for them like no other?"

Teens' Desires (I)

1. Love and Acceptance

Teens have a great need for acceptance by their peers, and they care about what others think of them. They are worried about how others perceive them physically (attractiveness: too tall, too short, too fat, too thin, the notion of sex) and mentally (intelligence: being too smart or dumb). They also look to peers, teachers, sports figures and media personalities as role models. Therefore, the way teachers express their faith and belief will be a positive witness for them.

2. Relationship with God/Finding Faith

At this age, teens will no longer come to church simply because their parents tell them to. They should be beginning to develop their own relationships with Jesus Christ. Although their reasoning skills will cause them to question what part God and the Bible play in their lives, it is important for teachers to continue to challenge them to make time for prayer and devotional life outside of the classroom and church so that they will be able to establish their own faith. Their spiritual goal is to find meaning and purpose in their lives through Jesus Christ.

3. Personal Experiences With God

Up till this point in their lives, teens probably have yet to have many personal experiences with God. Their devotional life has likely consisted of attending church services, going to classes and praying before going to bed. While this regularity is good, it is not enough. Now is the time to encourage them to pray consistently so that they may realize the roles God is playing in their lives. Share with them personal testimonies that will touch their hearts. Soon, they will begin to see God as a personal friend, comforter and advisor.

Teens' Desires (2)

4. Purpose in Life/True Fulfillment

Teens want to know who they are. At this crucial age, they are beginning to ask themselves, "What is my purpose in life?" and "What does it all mean?" A teenager needs to see himself as a separate and a worthwhile person in order to attain a successful transition into adulthood. Their drive for independence is strong and they feel a need to prove themselves as capable individuals. Some parents may have a difficult time letting go and end up being over-controlling because they find this "growing up" threatening. As a result, the teenager may end up rebelling. As teachers, we need to show support and encouragement, and provide helpful advice. We also need to affirm their talents and abilities to let them know their self-worth. Teenagers do respect parents and adults who show consistency and structure. As they make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes, it will allow them to find their own identities and seek out what it is they believe in. When they are able to do so, they can also become faithful to their beliefs and values.

5. Purity and Holiness

Perhaps because of their young age and their lack of experience in the real world, teens often feel they can overcome anything if they try hard enough. "I can handle it," they might think. "It may have happened to them, but it won't happen to me!" In one sense, it is great to have confidence. However, when they are faced with real temptations, they may also be unprepared to deal with the issues with a clear head. While we don't need to bombard them with stories of people who have failed to remain pure and holy, we do need to let them understand the reality and difficulties. Challenge them to think about what is important to them and encourage them to stand firm in what they believe.

How Do I Effectively Communicate With My Students?

1. Greet every student at every class session

A friendly and sincere greeting communicates undivided attention. "How's it going?" expresses genuine concern. "It's great to see you" can transform anyone's day. Your greeting may take only 30-40 seconds, but your students will deeply feel that you really care.

2. Send an occasional card/email or pick up the phone to find out how someone is doing

Saying, "I was wondering how you were doing," will make a big difference in someone's life. An investment of four or five minutes and the price of a postage stamp can literally make a teenager's day come alive.

3. Open your home for fellowship or special events

Our greatest memories result from serving the Lord together through fellowship and special services or events. Every fellowship or meeting will provide a new opportunity to "reach out and touch someone."

4. Pray with them

Teens need to know that their teachers are constantly praying for them. Even though they may be very busy with their daily chores, always remind them that praying together at a certain time is the only way to draw wisdom and strength from God.

MY.STUDENTS@TJC.ORG

In this 21st century, 99% of the youth communicate via email every day! With the help of the internet, many people have found a great way to keep in touch with those they normally wouldn't be able to talk to and with those who live far away.

As an RE teacher, using email to reach out to our students is a wonderful way to **build relationships**. Since you know your students already, send out an email that goes a little deeper than greetings and praise. Perhaps you could ask your students a thought-provoking question about what goes on in the world, about what he or she believes in, about relationships within their families, or maybe begin with a gentle question about their relationship with God.

The truth is, your students love to find email in their boxes even though you and your students don't really talk frequently. At the very least, consider sending your students an occasional encouraging email or e-card to let them know that they are in your thoughts or to wish them well on a test or sporting event. You can even make your student's day with a quick note of praise or a written pat on the back.

In order to reach out to your students effectively through email, keep your message brief—two or three short paragraphs is sufficient. And believe it or not, sometimes only a sentence is required. Living in this fast-paced society, not many of us want to scroll through a book-length email. Also, it is very vital to respond to messages within a day or two. Your students look to you for support and guidance. You will easily lose their confidence in you if a week goes by with no feedback.

Last but not least, try to use a gentle tone in your email. Let them know that you are always there, especially when you notice that one of your students is sick or simply feeling low spiritually. Quote Scripture sparingly and use liberal doses of humor. Teens do not respond well to teachers who always condemn. **Be there, and be an example.**

Email is a great door to communicating with your students. May God help us strengthen the faith of our students and nurture understanding with God's word.

HOW CAN I GET THEM MOTIVATED & TO STAY INTERESTED?

You can involve...

1. a game or debate
2. a video clip
3. brainstorming sessions
4. a poster
5. interesting questions and news stories
6. a touching testimony or hymn
7. quiet time for them to reflect
8. arts and crafts

When you deliver your lesson, it can be through...

1. lecture style
2. an in-depth Bible study
3. a skit
4. a meaningful and relevant video

Teachers can check for understanding by...

1. asking the students to share what they have learned
2. asking questions about the Bible study
3. asking the students to come up with a good moral for the lesson
4. asking which one of the characters they would have wanted to be had they been a part of the scene
5. asking the students to apply the Bible study and to make relevant connections to their own lives

Memory Verse Contest

Do you know that working on **memory verses** together in class can provide excellent teachable moments about the word of God? Most people think that J2 class students already know many of the verses in the Bible. However, that's not necessarily true. Therefore, we as RE teachers should emphasize this part of the lesson more than others. Why? Because memorizing the Scriptures can help students **resist temptations** and **build a stronger faith.**

Make sure that it's something that involves the **both** of you. Think about challenging your students to memorize the memory verse with you each week. Maybe you could suggest that both you and the students recite all 13 verses by the end of the quarter. This is a great way to motivate your students. Perhaps you could challenge your students to a contest. Make it a real challenge and see who can memorize the most verses by a certain time. If everyone wins, take your students out for ice cream or even out to lunch.

Since you need to recite the memory verse from week to week, you can spend more time talking about it with your students. Let the word of God impact them in their daily lives and be a part of their lives too. After a period of time, you will definitely see the lives of your students flourish just as God intended. The key point is that if your students see that you are serious about memorizing Scripture yourself, they will see that it is a **vital way of growing more like Jesus Christ**. May God strengthen our hands as we continue to serve Him.

Bible Reading For This Quarter

1. Jer 1-5
2. Isa 6, 9, 12
3. Isa 40-41, 53, 55, 65-66
4. Ob 1; Joel 1, 2; Amos 8, 9
5. Jonah 1-3; Hos 1,6; Mic 4
6. Nah 1; Zeph 1, 3; Hab 3
7. Jer 1-2, 16-17
8. Jer 45-46, Lem 1-4
9. Ezek 1-3, 18
10. Ezek 34, 37, 47
11. Dan 1-7
12. Hag 1, 2; Zech 1-3; Mal 3, 4

Memory Verses For December January & February

1. *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." (Deut 18:15)*
2. *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Is 9:6)*
3. *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." (Is 61:1)*
4. *"On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old." (Amos 9:11)*
5. *"He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Mic 6:8)*
6. *"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Hab 3:17-18)*
7. *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord." (Jer 31:31-32)*
8. *"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." (Lam 3:22-23)*
9. *"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." (Ezek 11:19-20)*
10. *"Also He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army." (Ezek 37:9-10)*
11. *"This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men." (Dan 4:17)*
12. *"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.'" (Zech 4:6)*

The Prophets of Today

unit 1

Goals

The Old Testament prophets were ordinary men and women handpicked by God to declare His messages to a stubborn and rebellious nation. In this unit, students will learn about the qualities, the mission and the messages of these prophets. Among the messages preached was the coming of the Messiah, the perfect servant of God. The Lord Jesus Christ will come to be the light of the world and liberate the captives. Our students will learn that we are the prophets of today. God has called us to be His spokesmen to an unbelieving and corrupt generation and to shine the light of the gospel in this dark world.

Teacher Devotional

This is a story about four people named, Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it. Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody. Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

Sounds familiar doesn't it? Sadly, this is the attitude of many Christians today when called upon to do the work of God. However, God has not given us a spirit that shrinks away, but one of courage and initiative. May God open our eyes to recognize the times that we live in and move us to venture into the fields of harvest.

And Let It Begin With Me

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'" ***(Is 6:8)***

Lesson *1*

Overview of the Prophetic Books

Listed Scriptures

Deut 18:9-22

Lesson Aim

1) To enable students to have an overview of the role and mission of the Old Testament prophets.
2) To enable students to develop awareness that they are the prophets of this generation.
3) To enable students to learn that God will bestow upon us the necessary gifts and talents to accomplish His work.

Memory Verse

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." (Deut 18:15)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Jer 1-5

BIBLE BACKGROUND

History of the Prophets

In the beginning, prophets were called and trained individually. Later, schools for prophets were established. Most of the schools seem to have been located in Ramaah, Gilgal, Jericho and Bethel (2 Kgs 2:3). Those who attended these schools were being trained to be spokesmen of God. These schools were not like schools today, but were a gathering of disciples around a certain leader (1 Sam 19:20).

Prophets Before Entering Canaan

Abraham (Gen 20:7)
Moses (Deut 18:15, 18)
Miriam (Ex 15:20)
Balaam (Num 22:9,11)

Prophets in the time of the Judges
Deborah (Judge 4:4)
Samuel (1 Sam 3:20)

Prophets in the time of the United Kingdom
David (Acts 2:30)
Gad (1 Sam 22:5)
Nathan (2 Sam 7:2)

Prophets during the Divided Kingdom (Israel)
Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kgs 11:29)
Ido the seer (2 Chron 9:29)
Jehu the son of Hanani (1 Kgs 6:1,7)
Elijah (1 Kgs 17:2)
Micaiah the son of Imlah (1 Kgs 22:7,8)
Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16)
Oded (2 Chron 28:9)

Prophets during the Divided Kingdom (Judah)
Shemaiah the prophet (2 Chron 12:5, 15)
Azariah the son of Oded (2 Chron 15:1,8)
Hanani the seer (2 Chron 16:7, 10)
Jahaziel the son of Zechariah (2 Chron 20:14)
Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs 22:14)
Urijah the son of Shemaiah (Jer 26:20)
Asaph the seer (2 Chron 29:30)

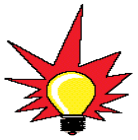
Table 1: Chronology of the Prophets Before the Fall of Samaria 722/1 B.C.

Prophet	Approximate Dates	Prophet of….	Kings of Judah	Related Verses	Kings of Israel	Related Verses
Obadiah	845		Joram	2 Kgs 8 2 Chron 21	Jehoram	2 Kgs 8-9 2 Chron 22
Joel	840-830	Judah	Joash	2 Kgs 11-13 2 Chron 22-24	Jehu	2 Kgs 9-10 2 Chron 22
Jonah	790-770	Israel	Amaziah and Uzziah (coregency Assyrian king: Shalmaneser IV)	2 Kgs 14 2 Chron 25-26	Jeroboam II	2 Kgs 14-15
Hosea	760-720	Israel	Uzziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah	2 Kgs 15-16 2 Chron 27-32	Jeroboam II Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea	2 Kgs 15-17
Amos	780-740	Israel	Uzziah	2 Chron 26	Jeroboam II	2 Kgs 14-15
Isaiah	745-695	Judah	Uzziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah Manasseh	2 Kgs 18-21 2 Chron 27-32	Pekah Hoshea	2 Kgs 15-17
Micah	740-700	Judah	Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah	2 Kgs 18-20 2 Chron 27-32	Pekah Hoshea	2 Kgs 15-17

Table 2: Chronology of the Prophets After the Fall of Samaria 722/1 B.C.

Prophet	Approximate Dates	Prophet of....	Kings of Judah	Foreign Kings	Related Verses
Nahum	630-610	Judah	Manasseh	Assyria: Ashurbanipal	2 Kgs 21 2 Chron 33
Zephaniah	739-608	Judah	Josiah		2 Kgs 22-23 2 Chron 34-36
Jeremiah	626-586	Judah	Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiachin Zedekiah Exile gover-nor:Gedaliah	Babylon: Nabopolassar Nebuchadnezzar	2 Kgs 22-25 2 Chron 34-36
Habakkuk	606-596	Judah	Jehoiakim	Babylon: Nabopolassar	2 Kgs 24 2 Chron 36
Daniel	606-534	Judah	Jehoiakim Jehoiachin Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar Neriglissar, Labashi-marduk Evil-Merodach Nabonidas Medo-Persia: Cyrus	2 Kgs 24-26 2 Chron 36
Ezekiel	592-570	Judah	Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar	2 Kgs 25 2 Chron 36
Haggai	520-516	Judah	Governor: Zerrubbabel	Medo-Persia: Darius I	Book of Ezra
Zechariah	520-516	Judah	Governor: Zerrubbabel	Medo-Persia: Darius I	Book of Ezra
Malachi	450-400	Judah	Governor: Nehemiah	Medo-Persia: Darius II	Book of Nehemiah

W A R M U P



Along the Path

A water bearer in India had two large pots, hung on each end of a pole that he carried across his neck. One pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house. The other pot had a crack in it and arrived only half full. For two years, this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments – perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor, cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am shamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old, cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old, cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again, the pot, apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took

advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have had this beauty to grace his house."

Each of us has our own unique makeup – flaws and all. But if we will allow it, the Lord will use us to grace His Father's table. Don't be afraid of our flaws, weaknesses, or inadequacies. Through the power of God, we find strength to fulfill the purpose and mission that God has for each of our lives.

BIBLE STUDY

Part 1

The Period of the Prophets

A. The Prophets

The future – that vast uncharted sea of unknown, holding joy or terror, comfort or pain, love or loneliness. Some people fear the days to come; others consult fortune tellers or mediums. But tomorrow's story is known only to God and to those special messengers, called prophets. The prophets and prophetesses were handpicked by God, men and women just like us.

The prophets played a very important role in Israelite society. The prophetic period started during the time of the Judges and lasted till the end of the Old Testament. This time frame was over 1000 years. However, the prophets were mostly active for 400 years between 800 B.C. and 400 B.C., around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 589 B.C. The chart below shows the prophets who worked before, during and after the exile. It also shows the audience that the prophets declared their messages to. These prophecies and messages have been recorded and compiled into what is known as the prophetic books. The Bible consists of sixteen books written by the prophets. These are divided into two main categories known as the major and minor prophetic books. These books are categorized based on the length of the book and not on the importance of the work. The major prophetic books consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The 12 minor prophetic books comprise of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Prophets Before the Exile				Exile Prophets		Post-Exilic Prophets
To Israel	To Nineveh	To Edom	To Judah	To Jews in Babylon	To the Babylonians	To the returned remnants
Amos Hosea	Jonah Nahum	Obadiah	Joel Isaiah Micah Zephaniah Jeremiah Habakkuk	Ezekiel	Daniel	Haggai Zechariah Malachi

B. The Names for the Prophets

a. **Prophet**

The term "prophet" was first applied to Abraham (Gen 20:7). Moses (Deut 34:10), Aaron (Ex 7:1), and Deborah (Judg 4:4) were also known as prophets of God. The Hebrew word for prophet is nabi, which comes from a root meaning "to bubble forth, as from a fountain," hence "to utter." Thus the Hebrew word for prophet means "to announce, declarer." A prophet was therefore a spokesman of God. They were responsible for delivering the messages that they received from God and communicated God's mind and will to men (Ex 7:1; 4:12; Jer 1:7, 9; Deut 18:18-20).

b. **Seer**

In the time of Samuel two other Hebrew words, ro'eh and hozeh were used to designate the prophet, both meaning "one who sees" or "seer." The word ro'eh is first found in 1 Samuel 9:9 and occurs seven times in reference to Samuel. Prophets such as Zadok (2 Sam 15:27), Gath (2 Sam 24:11), Samuel (1 Chron 26:28), Iddo (2 Sam 12:15), Jehu (2 Chron 19:2) and Amos (Amos 7:12) were also known as seers. This was a name sometimes applied to the prophets because of the visions granted to them and their ability to perceive spiritual matters. In 1 Chronicles 29:29 all these three words are used: "Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi'), Gad the seer" (hozeh).

c. **Watchman**

The Hebrew word zophim meaning "watchman" applied also to a prophet (Ezek 3:17; 33:7). A watchman's duty was to stand guard on the city wall and

blow the trumpet whenever danger approached. By the same token, the prophets were the spiritual watchmen of Israel who were responsible for declaring God's word, warning and judgment to the people.

d. Man of God

Moses (Deut 33:1; 18:18), Shemaiah (1 Kgs 12:22), Samuel, (1 Sam 9:6), Elijah (2 Kgs 1:9), Elisha (2 Kgs 6:6), and David (2 Chron 8:14) were all men of God. A person who was a man of God was a servant of God with godly qualities.

C. *The Responsibilities of a Prophet*

Prophets were the ambassadors of God. Their functions were as follows:

a. Show the people of God "their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa 58:1; Ezek 22:2; 43:10; Mic 3:8).
b. Call the people to repentance and obedience to God.
c. Warn the people of impending divine judgment and disasters (2 Sam 24:11-13; Jer 25:8-12).
d. Prophesy about the future of individuals and nations (1 Kgs 11:29-31; Jer 29:10; 1 Kgs 17:1).
d. Convey the message of consolation and pardon (Isa 40:1-2).
e. Bless (2 Kgs 4:8-16).
f. Intercede for others (Gen 20:7,17).
g. Anoint and advise kings and guide state affairs (1 Kgs 19:15; 2 Kgs 9:1-3; 2 Kgs 3).
h. Prophesy concerning the birth, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension.

D. *How God Reveals His Will to His Prophet*

A prophecy is a divine message inspired by God and conveyed to men. It concerns the things that shall take place in the future and the end time. Prophecies came to the prophets through the following ways:

a. The prophets spoke through the movement of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20,21).
b. God spoke face to face with the prophets (Ex 33:11).
c. God conveyed His message verbally (1 Sam 3:4; Jer 1:4; 2:1; Hos 1:2; Joel 1:1)
d. God conveyed His will and plan through dreams and visions (Num 12:6; Job 3:15-17; Ps 89:19; Ezek 1:1; Dan 7:1).

Part 2
The Qualities of a Prophet

A. *Loved and Obeyed God*

The prophets magnified the Lord in all things, and completely obeyed the will of God even at the risk of losing their lives. John 14:21 reminds us that those who love the Lord will keep His commands. This is easy when things are smooth sailing. But when challenges and difficulties arise, our obedience and love for the Lord is challenged. Prophets such as Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Hosea were among those who completely denied their own will and desires to accomplish God's work. They spoke what God wanted them to speak and went wherever God wanted them to go. Nevertheless, there were prophets who were not wholly obedient to God. Jonah, Balaam, Gehazi and the false prophets are examples of workers of God who could not decide which master to follow. Because they followed their own desires, they were ultimately punished by God (2 Pet 2:15; 2 Kgs 5:20-27). In these last days, we are all prophets of God, entrusted with the mission of proclaiming the good news to the unsaved. Let us value our noble status and carry out our mission faithfully.

B. *Carried Out Their Mission Courageously*

The prophets worked in some of the darkest times of the history of Israel. God describes Israel as a rebellious house whose hearts were hardened (Ezek 2). They had forsaken God and had turned to idols and all kinds of evil practices. Under such a chaotic and sinful environment, the prophets were sent to speak words of judgment, warning and doom to kings, religious leaders and the masses. The prophets criticized the policies and practices of evil kings, making them appear like traitors, and the people hated them for accusing them of their idolatrous lifestyles. Even if their message resulted in execution, punishment or alienation, the prophets did not beat around the bush, nor did they try to soften the truth. They conveyed God's words faithfully, clearly and boldly. Sometimes, we are afraid of certain consequences and so we disguise the truth or keep silent. But to be faithful workers of God, we need to imitate the courage of these prophets in standing up for righteousness and declaring the truth. Oftentimes, because of the prophet's timely warning, an entire nation returned to God and avoided God's full wrath (1 Kgs 18:1-46; Dan 4:27; 5:17ff; Jer 28).

C. *Cautious in Word and Deed*

The prophets were chosen to be the watchmen of their generation. They had to rebuke the people of their sins, warn them of judgment and turn the hearts of the people back to God. To do this, the prophets had to lead holy lives and have close communion with God. In Isaiah 56:10, God rebuked the leaders who were the watchmen of the nation as being blind and without knowledge. They were dumb dogs who didn't bark, who laid around and loved to sleep. God also rejected the false prophets who prophesied out of their own minds and filled the people with vain hopes. Such prophets led ungodly and corrupt lives and their purpose was to seek their own benefits (Jer 23:9-22). Consequently, they received no revelations from God and were rejected by Him. To be effective prophets of God, we need to be holy in word and deed, leading lives that are in line with the message we preach.

D. *Served With True Sincerity and Love*

Although the prophets often brought stern and harsh messages to the rebellious nation, the prophets were men full of emotion and love for their country. In the same way that the Lord wept while He rebuked the people of Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-44), the prophets often declared God's messages with feelings of grief and compassion. Jeremiah is widely known as the "weeping prophet" who for 40 years wept for the sins of the people and the suffering that they were very soon to encounter. Habakkuk was a prophet whose heart was filled with doubt and sadness at the injustice that was to befall his people. It was these feelings of love and compassion for their countrymen that carried these prophets through some the most formidable moments of their ministry.

Check for Understanding

1. Who are the present day prophets?
2. What kind of responsibilities did Old Testament prophets have?
3. Does the church today bear similar responsibilities?
4. What are some of the merits the prophets possessed?

Life Application

Here I Am! Send Me!

In Alexander Irvine's novel *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*, an old woman went to comfort a neighbor whose boy lay dead. She laid her hand on her friend's head and said, "Ah woman. God isn't a printed book to be carried aroun' by a man in fine clothes, nor a cross danglin' at the watch chain of a priest. God takes a hand wherever He can find it. Sometimes He takes a bishop's hand and lays it on a child's hand in benediction, the hand of a doctor to relieve pain, the hand of a mother to guide a child, and sometimes He takes the hand of a poor woman like me to give comfort to a neighbor. But they're all hands touched by His Spirit, and His Spirit is everywhere lookin' for His hands to use."

In each generation, God looks for hands, bodies and minds with which to make a difference and fulfill His divine mission. He looks for people just like you and me. The men and women that God chose were not perfect in any sense of the word. In fact they had their doubts, fears, inadequacies and weaknesses. But for the most part, each rose to meet God's challenge. God can use anyone no matter how insignificant s/he feels. God uses ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary work.

In the following exercise, look up the Bible references and write in your own words the different responses of those whom God chose to carry out His important missions. Consider how their responses relate us today.

a. Moses

Bible Reference: Exodus 3:7-4:16

Mission: To lead Israel out of bondage to the Promised Land

Reaction to God's calling:

1. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh …?" (Ex 3:11) – "God, I'm a nobody."
2. "They will not believe me or listen to my voice" (Ex 4:1) – "My words have no power."
3. "I am not eloquent. I never have been and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me … " (Ex 4:10) – "I'm a lousy speaker. See, even You can't change me."
4. "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person" (Ex 4:13) – "I suggest You send someone else."

God's response:

With each question that Moses asked, God gave an answer.

1. "I will be a sign for you that I have sent you."
2. "God said to Moses, "I am who I am. Say to Israel, 'I Am has sent me to you.'"
3. God gave Moses 3 signs to be used to convince the Israelites: the rod becomes a snake, the hand becomes leprous, and the water changes to blood. "Who has made man's mouth? Now go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."
4. God's anger was kindled against Moses.
5. God finally sent Aaron to be Moses' spokesman.

Application:

Sometimes the job that God has asked us to do seems too difficult. Like Moses, we try our best to excuse ourselves because we feel totally inadequate. These feelings become so strong that we can't even trust God's ability to help us. Moses had to deal with his deep sense of inadequacy many times. When we face such situations remember that God doesn't expect us to do it alone. With every doubt or query, God has the answer. He will offer us assurance and resources to complete the work. And if the job involves some of our weak areas, we can trust that God will provide words, strength, courage and ability where it is needed.

b. Isaiah

Bible reference: Is 1:1; 6:1-8

Mission: To call the nation of Judah back to God

Reaction to God's calling:

1. "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is 6:4)– The vision of God in His glory and power caused Isaiah to see his own sinfulness.
2. "Here am I! Send me" (Is 6:8).

God's response:

With Isaiah's response, God immediately sent Isaiah to speak to the rebellious people.

Application:

Before we accept God's call to speak for Him, we need to purify ourselves for His work, so that we can truly represent God. When the Lord calls us, He doesn't twist our arms to make us do something we don't want to do. The choice is ours. Isaiah took the initiative and responded actively to God's call.

c. Jeremiah

Bible reference: Jeremiah 1:1-10; 17-19

Mission: To warn the kings, false prophets and people of Judah before the captivity.

Reaction to God's calling:

1. "I don't know how to speak, for I am only a youth" – Jeremiah thought he was too young and inexperienced to be God's spokesman for the world.
2. Jeremiah was afraid because he knew the kind of people the Israelites were.

God's response:

1. "Whoever God sends, we must go, whatever God commands, we should speak" (Jer 1:6) – we need to be obedient to God's commands.
2. "I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls. Even though the kings, princes and priests, and people come against you, they will not prevail because I am with you to deliver you" (Jer 1:8).

Application:

Often we struggle to take on new challenges because we feel we are too young for the job and have inadequate ability, training or experience. The task may seem overwhelming and we consequently develop a sense of fear. We must never allow feelings of inadequacy to keep us from obeying God's call. God will be with us just as He promised to be with Jeremiah. If God gives us a job to do, He will provide all that we need to do it.

d. Jonah

Bible Reference: Jonah 1:1-3,4,17; 3:1-3

Mission: To go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire and call its people to repentance

Reaction to God's calling:

1. Jonah knew God had a specific job for him but he didn't want to do it.
2. Jonah fled to Tarshish instead.

God's response:

To accomplish the mission and to correct Jonah's erroneous attitude, God caused several miracles to happen: He caused a great wind to blow upon the sea, a great fish to swallow up Jonah, a plant to give Jonah shade, a worm to attack the plant and a sultry east wind to blow.

Application:

1. As a prophet Jonah was obligated to obey God's word, but he had tried to escape his responsibilities. What God requires of His servants is obedience

and faithfulness.

2. Jonah's personal reasons prevented him from obeying God's call. Don't let our personal prejudices or agenda hinder us from doing God's work. To fulfill God's will we need to deny ourselves.

e. Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus

Bible Reference: Luke 1:26-38

Mission: To be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ

Reaction to God's calling:

1. Mary was greatly troubled at the saying and considered what sort of greeting this might be (Lk 1:29).
2. "How shall this be for I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34)
3. "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).
4. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:46-48).

Application:

In a Jewish marriage, a couple became engaged when two families agreed to their union. When a public announcement was made, the couple became "betrothed." Betrothal was considered binding and could be broken only by death or divorce. Because Mary and Joseph were betrothed, Mary's apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had the right to divorce her and the Jewish authorities could have her stoned to death (Deut 22:23,24). Mary must have been aware of these implications. She would have thought about being rejected by Joseph, considered an outcast by society or stoned to death. The task that she was called to do would not bring success, fame or favor: rather, it would lead to much pain. And yet, Mary rejoiced in God and gave of herself completely. Because of her obedience, the world was to be blessed with the Messiah and she would receive tremendous blessing.

f. What do you think might be your response if God asked you to be a prophet for this generation? (Check those that apply)

1. Shock and disbelief
2. Honored
3. Feel totally incapable
4. Reject the work
5. Unwilling, but compelled
6. Give all kinds of excuses to get out of it

7. Suggest someone else
8. Others: please specify _____

If God asked you to serve Him, what things would prevent you from saying, "Here am I. Send me!" (Check those that apply)

1. Hard to deny own will
2. Less pay
3. Hardship
4. Being away from the family
5. Can't enjoy the things of the world
6. Less freedom to do what I enjoy doing
7. Too much responsibility
8. Having to pray and read the Bible too often
9. Others: please specify _____

g. How can we prepare ourselves for God's calling?

h. God wants us to serve Him where we are and with what we have. What simple things can we do to make a difference in the lives of those around us?

Suggested Reading:

The Spirit of the Minor Prophets, Holy Spirit Times, December 1999.

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Everyone is born and made differently, but in the beautiful plan of God, all of us can become good workers of God. May God help us be sensitive to His will and give us the courage to say, "Here I am, Lord. Send me!"

Lesson 2

Isaiah (1)

Listed Scriptures

Isaiah 6, 9, 12

Lesson Aim

1) To examine God's holiness, love and sovereignty in the Book of Isaiah.
2) Students will be reminded to thank God for His greatness, the wonders of His creation and His love in their lives.

Memory Verse

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Is 9:6)

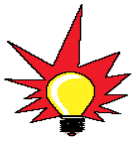
Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Isa 6, 9, 12

Bible Background

One exciting archaeological find, the Dead Sea scrolls, gives us insight into how accurately the prophet's words have been preserved. The Qumram community hid their sacred library some 180 years before Christ. The library was discovered in 1947. Apparently Isaiah (along with Deuteronomy and Psalms) was especially loved by these Old Testament believers. Among the findings was a copy of Isaiah, the first copy of any Old Testament book from the pre-Christian era. Before this time our earliest text of the Hebrew Bible dated from around 1100 A.D. The striking fact is that the text of the scroll authenticates the Hebrew text of our Bible; except for minor differences in vocalization, spelling and the presence or absence of an article ("the," "that"), this ancient text is the same as the text of some 1,300 years later! God has preserved across the centuries an accurate text of His word so that we can read our Old Testament with the confidence that what we see on its pages is a translation of the very words the authors penned.

Warm Up



The Seven Wonders

(Before reading the following story to your students, ask them to write down what they believe are the Seven Wonders of the World. Share student responses.)

There was a college professor who asked his students to make a list of what they thought were the current Seven Wonders of the World. The winners were:

Egypt's pyramids
The Taj Mahal
The Grand Canyon
The Panama Canal
The Empire State Building
St. Peter's Basilica
China's Great Wall

While he was gathering the votes, the professor noted that one student hadn't finished writing. She seemed to be deep in thought, so he asked her if she was having trouble.
"Yes," she replied, "A little. I can't quite make up my mind because there are so many."
The professor said, "Well, why don't you read to us what you have so far, and maybe we can help."
The girl nodded, cleared her throat, and began reading her list of the world's Seven Wonders.

The ability to touch
The ability to taste
The ability to see
The ability to hear
The ability to feel
The ability to laugh
The ability to love

The classroom grew quiet as everyone thought about the truth they'd just heard. This young lady understood what truly were the wonders of life.

Today we will study about the wonder of God through the eyes of the prophet Isaiah.

Bible Study

Part 1
General Overview

A. Author

The author of this book is Isaiah, son of Amoz (1:1). It is believed that Isaiah descended from the royal line of Judah. According to Jewish tradition, Amoz was the brother of King Uzziah's father, Amaziah, which meant that King Uzziah and Isaiah were cousins. Isaiah's wife was a prophetess (Is 8:3). He had two sons; one was called She'arjash'ub, meaning, "a remnant shall return", and the other Ma'hershal'al-hash'baz, which means "a spoil speeds, the prey hastes" (Is 7:3; 8:3). Isaiah had an active ministry for 60 years before he was executed. Jewish tradition has it that during the reign of the evil king Manasseh, Isaiah was sawed in two.

In recent times, however, the authorship of the Book of Isaiah has been a source of controversy. Some scholars attribute chapters 1-39 to the prophet Isaiah himself, but attribute chapters 40-55 (called "Deutero-Isaiah") to an unknown prophet in Babylon and chapters 56-66 (called "Trito-Isaiah") to another unknown prophet in Palestine. Conservatives, however, have argued persuasively that Isaiah wrote the entire book.

B. Date and Place of Work

Isaiah's long ministry ranged from 745-695 B.C. He began his ministry the year that King Uzziah died and continued through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manneseh of Judah. His work also coincided with the reigns of King Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hosea of Israel. Contemporaries of Isaiah were the prophets Micah in Judah, and Hosea and Amos in Israel.

C. *Historical Background*

Despite the agricultural, commercial and military successes in both the northern and southern kingdoms, the kings, priests and people departed from God and indulged in sin. Immorality, excessive drinking, idolatry, oppression of the poor, greed, and false prophets prevailed (Is 1:10-17; 5:7, 8, 11, 12, 23). With the prosperity and stability of the nation, the people became proud. They imitated foreign influences and worshiped their gods. Isaiah rose to revolutionize the social and religious decline.

D. *Theme and Characteristics*

The Book of Isaiah is the first book of the major prophets. It is often been called "the Prince of Prophets," "the gospel book of the Old Testament," "the Book of Romans of the Old Testament" and "the miniature Bible."

a. The Book of Isaiah contains 66 chapters. The entire Bible consists of 66 books.

b. The Bible is divided into the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament consists of 39 books and the New Testament consists of 27 books. The book of Isaiah is divided into two parts. The first section consists of 39 chapters and the second section consists of 27 chapters.

c. The Old Testament centers on the divine justice of God. The first part of Isaiah (chapters 1-39) also conveys God's message of justice and judgment upon the sinful nation, culminating with a promise of redemption.

d. The entire Bible concerns the salvation of God and the establishment of the kingdom of God. The overall theme of this book is found in Isaiah's name, which means, "Salvation is of the Lord." The word "salvation" appears twenty-six times in Isaiah but only seven times in all the other prophetic books combined. Throughout this book, Isaiah unfolds God's promise of future blessings through the Messiah.

e. The first Book of the Old Testament discusses how sin came into the world and God's redemptive plan. The first chapter of the Book of Isaiah discusses the sins of the Israelites and the promise of redemption and restoration.

f. The last chapters of the Book of Revelation speak of the new heaven and new

earth. The final chapters of Isaiah also speak of the new heaven and new earth.

E. *Teachings from the Book of Isaiah*

a. The Holy God of Israel

The two parts of the book of Isaiah exhibit two important aspects of God's divine nature. The 39 chapters in the first half of Isaiah reflect God's holiness, righteousness and justice. The second half of Isaiah, from chapters 40-66 dwells on the other side of God's divine nature, His love and compassion. How does God manifest His holiness in the Book of Isaiah?

1. Through visions of God's glory

The theme of holiness permeates the entire book of Isaiah. The title, "The Holy One of Israel" is used as many as 25 times (1:4; 6:1; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:1, 12, 15; 37:23) to remind the Israelites of God's holy and divine nature. In chapter 6, Isaiah sees a vision of God sitting on the throne; His train filled the temple and His glory and authority filled the entire earth. Above Him stood the seraphim saying repeatedly, "Holy, holy, holy." At a time when moral and spiritual laxity had reached its peak, God used the vision to remind the prophet of His greatness, power and holiness. By seeing God in all His glory, Isaiah saw his own sins and that of the Israelites more clearly. Oftentimes when we compare ourselves with others we feel pretty good about ourselves. But the moment we kneel before God and witness His glory and holiness, our imperfections become very blatant. Daniel (Dan 10:15-17), Job (Job 42:5-6) and John (Rev 1:17) experienced this too. Upon seeing the holiness of God, we need to humble ourselves and repent of our sins.

2. Through judgment

Since God is holy, He desires His chosen ones to be holy (Lev 11:44, 45). The word holy comes from the Hebrew word, qodesh, or hagiosune in Greek, both meaning "separation" or "setting apart." Unfortunately, the Israelites failed to separate themselves from ungodly people and evil ways. In the first five chapters of Isaiah, God charges Israel of many sins:

* Social injustice and evil prevailed (Is 28; 29).
* The people committed spiritual adultery by turning from a covenant with God to actively and lustfully seeking out foreign idols (Is 57:1-13).
* Their faith was superficial (Is 1:10-15; 29:13; 58:1-14). Although the people made sacrifices and kept the feasts, their hearts were far from God and their lives were dedicated to ungodliness.

* They did not put their trust in God; they sought allegiance with other nations for protection (Is 31).
* They profaned the Sabbath (Is 56:1-8).

These sins violated the very core of God's divine nature. God's holiness, justice and righteousness could not ignore, excuse or tolerate such sins. God will not permit the people called by His Name to tarnish His glory, or their filth to taint His Name and He will vindicate His holiness. Through punishment God calls His people to repent and reflect His image in their lives.

3. Through refinement and purification

In Isaiah 1:25, God promised to refine His people as metal in a smelting pot. The process of refinement involves melting the metal and skimming off the impure slag until the silversmith can see his own image in the liquid metal. In the same manner, God will purge Judah of her impurities so that once again she can be known as the City of Righteousness. Throughout the history of the Israelites, God used various ways to urge His people to depart from evil (Is 2:1-5; 4:1-6). Famine, plagues and disasters, and enemy oppression were some of the methods, yet, despite these efforts, the people remained stubborn. As a last resort, God sent them into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. God's purpose was not to bring evil upon them, but to discipline and cleanse them from their wicked and rebellious ways (Jer 29:11). Today, God may use trials of fire to cleanse us (Num 31:23; Mal 3:2). Hebrews 12:5-6 reminds us "not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when we are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

b. The Compassionate God

The second half of the Book of Isaiah sees a dramatic shift. After the pronouncement of judgment and stern warnings from chapters 1—39, God now tenderly comforts and consoles Jerusalem. Let us examine how God's love is manifested towards His people.

1. Restored the Israelites to their homeland

Even though God's patience was exhausted and He would later abandon the Israelites by allowing them to be taken into captivity, God showed His people in advance how He would preserve a remnant and restore them. A hundred years prior to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the captivity, God told Isaiah to name one of his sons Shear-jashub, which

means, "a remnant will return" as a reminder of God's mercy and salvation (Is 7:3; 14-1-2; 49:8). After the 70 years had passed, God gathered the dispersed from the four corners of the earth to Jerusalem where they restored the holy temple (Is 10:21; 11:11-12). Even in judgment God is merciful and compassionate. His faithfulness towards His covenant with Abraham and David endures despite the unfaithfulness of the Israelites (Gen 22:17-18; 2 Sam 7:8-9; Jer 33:19-19-26; Jer 31:36-37). Although in a brief moment of anger the Lord had forsaken Israel, His love and covenants are everlasting (Is 54:7-8; 49:14-16). "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed."

2. A highway for the returned exiles

One of the practices of ancient kings of the East was to send messengers to prepare the way prior to their travels. The messenger leveled out and straightened the highways to ensure a smooth and pleasant journey for the king. In Isaiah 35:8-10, the prophet prophesied how the God of Israel would prepare a way for His chosen people to return home from captivity (Is 11:16; 35:8-10; 62:10). Just as the Lord dried up the Red Sea for the Israelites to walk through, and as He paved a way through the River Jordan, God will once more open a way for the redeemed to return home. He will remove all obstacles; neither bandits nor wild beasts will be found there. God prepared the way through King Cyrus of Persia who allowed the remnants to return to their homeland in 539 B.C.

But God's love does not stop here. Since the beginning of time, God has prepared a highway for mankind so that through this new and living way all those who believe in Him can be saved (Heb 10:20). In the New Testament, John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus. He came proclaiming, "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth" (Is 40:3-4). John the Baptist came to remove the obstacles (described as valleys, mountains, crooked places and rough places) within men's hearts by calling them to repentance so that they could be ready to receive the salvation of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life," and those who come to Him can receive life everlasting.

Part 2

The Sovereignty of God

A. The Lord of All

The prophet Isaiah conveys how the destiny of individuals, kings and rulers, nations and events are under the absolute authority and dominion of God.

a. God controls the destiny of individuals

1. The Lord chose and called Isaiah to be His spokesperson. God alone decides whom He will use to fulfill His mission (Is 6:8).
2. God designated King Cyrus of Persia to be the one to liberate the captives and allow them to return to the land of Israel. Two hundred years before Cyrus was born, God chose him for this special task (Is 45:1; 44:28). Cyrus was granted military prowess and success for the sake of His chosen people (Is 45:4). Although Cyrus was a gentile, he was called God's "anointed" because he was commissioned to fulfill God's purpose (2 Chron 36:22-23).
3. God added 15 more years to King Hezekiah's life (Is 38). Only God can change the course of our lives. Our very breath are in His hands (Is 38:1-8; 16; 45:7; 1 Sam 2:6-7).

b. God controls the nations to fulfill His purpose

God uses foreign nations to carry out His will. Although Assyria and Babylon were gentile nations who did not know or worship God, they were used as God's instruments of discipline.

1. God used the Assyrians as the rod of His anger and the staff of His indignation (Is 5:26-30; 10:5-6). During his reign, King Ahaz relied on the military strength of the Assyrians rather than on God. His trust on idol-worshiping countries was considered an act of rebellion in God's eyes and these very people became the tool that God used to purge the people of their ignorance and wickedness (Is 5:26; 10:5-19).
2. God used the Babylonians as an instrument of punishment. Although King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was a gentile king, God called him "My servant." Nebuchadnezzar was sent by God to come up against the land, against its inhabitants, and against the surrounding nations to utterly destroy them (Jer 25:9; Hab 1:6). Even though King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, attempted to escape, he and the nation could not flee from the iron yoke that God had destined to be placed around their necks.

c. God's will cannot be shaken

In the year 734 B.C. an alliance of the northern kingdom (Israel) and Syria came up against Ahaz, king of Judah (Is 7:1-9; 2 Kgs 16:5-9). Ahaz was so frightened that "his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." God sent the prophet Isaiah to console Ahaz and told him that their plan would not succeed because it was against God's will. And as Isaiah predicted, the kingdom of Judah did not come to an end at that time. God's will is supreme over all in authority, over nations, all historical events and all hostile forces. Knowing that He is in control of every aspect of life, does He not deserve our full faith and trust?

B. The Omniscient God

God's wisdom and understanding is unsearchable. The book of Isaiah contains many prophecies which were fulfilled exactly as predicted.

a. Prophecies fulfilled in Isaiah's lifetime:

Judah's deliverance (7:4-7, 16)
Destruction of Syria and Israel (8:4; 17:1-14)
Assyria's invasion of Judah ((8:7-8)
Philistines subjugated (14:28-43)
Moab plundered (15 & 16)
Egypt and Ethiopia conquered by Assyria (20:4)
Arabia pillaged (21:13-17)
Tyre subdued (23:1-12)
Jerusalem delivered from Assyria (36)
Hezekiah's life extended 15 years (35:8)

b. Prophecies fulfilled after Isaiah's lifetime:

Babylonian captivity (39:5-7)
Babylon overthrown by Cyrus (46:11)
The Medes and Elamites (13:17; 21:2; 48:14)
Babylon's perpetual desolation (13:20-22)
Cyrus called by name (44:28; 45:1,4)
Cyrus' conquest of the world (41:2-3)
Cyrus' liberation of the captives (45:13)

Cyrus' rebuilding of Jerusalem (44:28; 45:13)
Israel restored (27:12-13; 48:20; 51:14)
Israel's religion to permeate Egypt and Assyria (19:18-25)
Israel's religion to spread over the whole world (27:2-6)
Tyre's captivity and restoration (23:13-18)
Edom's perpetual desolation (34:5-17)

Check for Understanding

1. What are the two main themes of the Book of Isaiah?
2. How does God manifest His holiness and love in the Book of Isaiah?

Teaching Tips

For this lesson, you may wish to consider using the following materials:

1. *Map of Israel and surrounding nations (to be posted up throughout the course of the twelve lessons)*
2. *TV and video player*
3. *Nature video / pictures of God's creation or changing landscapes*

For each lesson, have students fill out the worksheet for each prophet (found in Student Workbook, see sample below). Have students briefly record the following:

a. *Original meaning of the prophet's name*
b. *Time and place of his activities*
c. *The economic, social and political scenes during his days (E.g. Was the country in economic prosperity? What was the name of the king in power? Was the country at war? Etc.)*
d. *If possible, determine whether the prophet worked during the pre-exilic, exilic or post-exilic era of Jewish history.*
e. *Identify the key messages of the prophet. What is the key theme? Was the prophet proclaiming a message of judgment or hope? Was he posing the question of righteous suffering as in the Book of Habakkuk?*

Name of prophet	
Meaning of prophet's name	
When and where the prophet worked	
Who the prophet was speaking to	
What was happening historically	
Some of the key messages	

Life Application

How Great Thou Art!

Have you praised God today? As we go about our busy lives, we often fail to see clearly the things going on around us. In the same way, we often fail to see all that God has given and done for us. Have you gone through times when you did not give thanks at all? What did you find happening? And when you did thank Him, how did you feel then? If you praise and love Him, you will have a greater love for God, for others and also for yourself.

Let us celebrate God's majesty by singing the following hymns:

1. Majesty
2. How Great Thou Art (314)
3. He's Everything to Me (500)
4. Thank You Lord (393)
5. Joyful, Joyful (7)

Say to your Students:
Next we will watch a video called _____(teacher's choice). As you view it, take time to think once again about the unfathomable greatness of God and His wonderful redeeming love for us. (show video of God's creation. If you are unable to have access to one, use pictures/photos of landscapes or animals.)

Saints of old have written down their reflections as they meditate on the power and almightiness of God. Read the following Bible passages to see what they thought:

1. Job 26:1-14; Job 38
2. Psalm 135:6-7
3. Isaiah 40:12-17, 21-31

What things can we give thanks and praise to the Lord for? Write a psalm to the Lord for all His marvelous doings.

Suggested Reading and Videotapes:

1. Pao, Senhor, Max Lucado, p19. Stories for a Faithful Heart compiled by Alice Gray
2. Awesome Faces of God's Creation, Moody Publications, CBD Stock Number: WW670569
3. The Wonder of Creation: Ireland, CBD Stock Number: WW42344, $11.99
4. The Wonder of Creation: Scotland, CBD Stock Number: WW42336, $11.99
5. Eyewitness Series: Ocean Video, CBD Stock Number: WW42147X, $10.00 (For more selections, log on to cbd.com)

Reflection & Prayer

"O Lord, my God, how excellent is Your name in all the earth. The Pleiades and Orion sing your praise. Sparrows and chickadees mimic their song. All creation sing in harmony. And most wonderful of all, Lord, thank you, for saving my soul."

Lesson 3

Isaiah (2)

Listed Scriptures

Isaiah 40-41, 53, 55, 65-66

Lesson Aim

1) Students will learn that the Lord Jesus fulfilled each of the Old Testament prophecies.
2) Students will learn that because of Christ's advent, our lives are filled with hope, joy and peace.

Memory Verse

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." (Is 61:1)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Isa 40-41, 53, 55, 65-66

Bible Background

Please see Bible Background section in Lesson 2.

WARM UP

Indulgence says, "Drink your way out."
Philosophy says, "Think your way out."
Science says, "Invent your way out."
Industry says, "Work your way out."
Communism says, "Strike your way out."
Militarism says, "Fight your way out."
Christ says, "I AM THE WAY OUT!"

BIBLE STUDY

Part 1

The Servant of God

A. God s Servants

The overall theme of the book of Isaiah is found in Isaiah's name, which means "Salvation is of the Lord." In the latter half of his book, Isaiah prophesies about the restoration and redemption of Israel and the world. God's plan of redemption is accomplished through His servants. Let us examine who these servants are.

a. King Cyrus

In the Book of Isaiah, chapters 40-66 reveal the events that will occur after the captivity of Judah. Although the generation of the prophet still lived in darkness and the people stubbornly rebelled against God, the prophet was able to foresee the entire salvation plan of God. Here, Isaiah looks beyond the present times, beyond the Assyrian invasion, beyond the Babylonian captivity, to the time of the Persian Empire. Isaiah sees God raise a gentile king who would deliver His people – this king was Cyrus King of Persia. Isaiah who lived from about 740-681 BC called Cyrus by name almost 150 years before he ruled (559-530 BC). Isaiah 41:27-29 mentions how good tidings will be given to Jerusalem. The good tidings referred to the raising of King Cyrus who would destroy Babylon and allow the captives to return to their homeland.

b. Israel

The nation of Israel is also specifically identified as Gods servant (Is 41:8-9; 49:3). God called Israel to be His servant, the agent through whom He could make Himself known to mankind (Is 44:21). God had chosen the Israelites to be lights to the foreign nations around them.

However, Israel failed to recognize the meaning of the covenant and rather than glorify Gods name, Israel became like the surrounding nations and brought shame and disgrace to God.

c. The Messiah, the Servant of God

Isaiah goes on to introduce a servant who was totally unlike Israel; a servant who was faithful in fulfilling the task set before Him and bringing redemption to all of mankind. God was to send His servant, the Messiah, to come to take away the sins of the people and to proclaim salvation to the gentiles. Just as how Cyrus released the captives, the Lord Jesus would come to release those bound in sin and darkness (41:2, 17-20; 42:1, 6-7; 43:16, 25).

B. Prophecies Concerning the Servant of God, the Messiah

Throughout the prophetic books, particularly in the book of Isaiah, there are many prophecies concerning the servant of God, the Messiah. To enable men to recognize Him, God laid down specific details. From chapters 42-53, there are four "Servant Songs" (42:1-9; 49:1-9; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) which describe the Messiah's character, mission, suffering and death. When the Lord Jesus came, He fulfilled these prophecies of long ago right down to the tiniest detail. To those who watched Him carefully, there was no doubt that He was the promised Messiah.

a. Prophecies concerning the Servant's birth

1. His advent (40:3-5)
2. His virgin birth (7:14)
3. A branch from Jesse (11:1)

b. Prophecies concerning the Servant's attributes

1. Might and gentleness of His reign (40:10-11)

2. Righteousness and beneficence of His reign (32:1-8; 61:1-3)

3. His justice and kindness (42:3-4, 7)

4. Full of might and authority
   The Lord Jesus came in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. He is mighty in deed and He is the source of all power and life (Mt 19:26; Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17; Job 37:23; Rev 11:17). The Lord Jesus demonstrated power over sickness, sin and death.

5. Full of wisdom
   Although the Lord Jesus did not receive much education, the Jewish leaders and the people perceived that the Lord spoke with great authority, wisdom and power (Mt 7:28-29; Mt 13:54-58; Mt 22:15-22; Jn 7:15). Through His words, the Lord will "smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked (Is 11:4; 9:6). Through His words, the Messiah will also bring consolation and peace because He has "the tongue of the learned, knowing how to speak a word in season to him who is weary" (Is 50:4; Col 2:3).

6. Full of peace and humility
   "He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break and a smoking flax He will not quench" (Is 42:2-3). These verses illustrate the peace, gentleness and humility of the Lord Jesus. When the Lord came to the world, He emptied Himself and took the form of a lowly servant (Phil 2:5-8). He walked the roads of Palestine serving the needy and associated with the poor, the sinners and the outcasts of society. He comforted those who were oppressed, bitter in spirit, and whose faith was weak to the point of breaking. Despite the admiration of the crowd, the Lord never drew attention to Himself. On occasions He even instructed the multitude not to speak of His deeds (Mk 5:42-43), and when they wanted to make Him king over them, He quietly slipped away. Even when the Lord was beaten and mocked and was tried six times, He remained as silent and gentle as a lamb led to the slaughter and He humbled Himself to the point of dying on the cross.

7. Full of righteousness and justice
   "And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth…" (Is 11:3-4) Unlike the people of the world who base their judgments upon appearances and their own criteria, the Lord will not judge by what He sees or hears, but through the Spirit who is able to see into the hearts of men. The Lord shows no partiality but judges with absolute righteousness (Jer 32:19).

c. **Prophecies concerning the Servant's ministry**
   1. Galilee to be the scene of His ministry (9:1-2)

   2. His rule over the Gentiles (2:2-3; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 55:4-5; 56:6; 60:3-5)

   3. He will bring forth justice to the nations (42:1,4)

   4. Isaiah 49:6 tells us that God had set the Jews to be a light for the gentiles. He wanted them to be the privileged announcers of salvation to the ends of the earth. But it was not to be. Here, Isaiah prophesies that the Lord Jesus would come to be the light of the nations (Lk 2:32). He would come to offer those who were willing to accept the gospel hope and eternal life. Through the light of the gospel, souls that are bound in darkness would be released and sight bestowed to those who were spiritually blind (Acts 13:47, Lk 2:32). Are we enslaved to anxiety, passion, greed, self-doubt and sin? Come to the Lord for He offers freedom from all bondage.

d. **Prophecies concerning the Servant's suffering, death and burial**
   1. His sufferings (53)

   2. Death with the wicked (53:9)

   3. Burial with the rich (53:9)

   4. He suffered hardships in life
      Nowhere in the Old Testament does it describe with such vivid detail the sufferings of the Servant than in Isaiah 53. While on earth, the Lord spent each day going from village to village laboring for the souls of mankind. He would often be denied of physical comforts, going without sleep, food, or drink to help those in need.

   5. He was rejected and despised
      The Jews had preconceived notions of what the Messiah should be like. He should come from an extraordinary background, and be a great military commander who would free Israel from Rome's oppression. When

the Lord came professing that He was Christ, they refused to acknowledge Him. Without any outward appearance or qualities, the Jews missed the meaning of the prophecies and instead despised and rejected the Lord and His followers.

6. He was stricken for the sins of the world
As the Servant's obedience led Him into deeper suffering and finally death, His contemporaries were convinced that He had been "stricken and rejected by God." For our sins, the Lord willingly gave Himself up as the sacrificial lamb to be slaughtered. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Isaiah says of the Lord Jesus, "I turned not backward, I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is 50:5-6; Mt 26:67; 27:30). The Lord was completely without sin and yet carrying our sins upon His shoulders, He was numbered among the sinners in God's sight. He was spiritually separated from the Father and His soul condemned to Hades (Mt 27:45-46). Jesus Christ suffered this double death so that we would never have to experience eternal separation from God.

Part 2
The Characteristics of the Kingdom of God

From the last chapters of Isaiah, we catch a glimpse of the day toward which history is moving. Not only does it refer to the day that the captives would be restored to their homeland, but Isaiah made it clear that this picture of restoration is not primarily physical but spiritual. It refers to the establishment of the spiritual kingdom of God: the true church, the kingdom of God in our hearts and the future heavenly kingdom.

a. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb

Isaiah 11:6-9 depicts the scene within the kingdom of God where God is king and love prevails. The true church is made up of members of different character traits, walks of life, cultural backgrounds and upbringing. Despite these differences, we can all live harmoniously together. Even people whose temperaments were formerly as aggressive as that of the leopard, the lion, the bear and the asp can be transformed to become gentle and peaceable. They will be able

to dwell harmoniously with believers who were by nature meek and mild like that of the lamb, the kid, the calf, the child and the cow. Such hostile animals can dwell at peace with one another because of the knowledge of God and His love.

b. The new heaven and new earth

Throughout the entire Bible, the new heaven and new earth is mentioned four times. The new heaven and new earth recorded in 2 Peter 3:13 speaks of the heavenly kingdom. In the references recorded in Isaiah 65:17-25, 66:22-24 and Revelation 21:1 however, the new heaven and new earth does not refer to the future dwelling place, but to the true church and hearts that have been transformed by Christ. Since the fall of man, sin had entered into the world and the creation lies under the Satan's dominion. The original heaven and earth has become corrupt and filled with bitterness and unrest. Only in God's church can a new heaven and a new earth exist. Furthermore, upon our baptism we have become "a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor 5:17). Through the Lord, we are freed from the bondage of sin and our hearts are being transformed from one degree to another into a new heaven and a new earth.

c. A spiritual feast will be held

The holy mountain refers to the true church, and it is on this mount that the Lord will hold an abundant spiritual banquet for those who believe in Him with faith (Is 25:6). The people will feast of fat things which refer to abundant grace (Prov 9:2; Mt 22:4). The "fat things full of marrow and well-refined wines on the lees" refers to the spiritual food and drink which is the truth and the Holy Spirit that believers can satisfy their souls with.

Check for Understanding

There are no questions for this lesson.

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman.
He grew up in still another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.
Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.
He never wrote a book.
He never held an office.
He never had a family or owned a house.
He didn't go to college.
He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born.
He did not do things one usually associates with greatness.
He had no credentials but himself.
He was only 33 when public opinion turned against him.
His friends ran away.
He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial.
He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.
When he was dying, his executioners gambled away his clothing, the only property he had on earth.
When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone and today He is the central figure of the human race, the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, all these put together, have not affected the life of man as much as that One Solitary Life.

And because of that one solitary life…

a. **John Newton**, author of the all-time favorite hymn, Amazing Grace, was once a slave trader who transported shiploads of African slaves to the New World where they were traded for goods. One time, he found a book, *Imitation of Christ*, on board which sowed the seeds of his conversion. He left the sea for good and for the last 43 years of his life he preached the gospel. At 82, Newton says, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior."

b. **Saint Augustine** did not start out the way he did. His mother had taught him Christianity carefully, but during his teenage years, he threw away his faith to follow heresies. For nine years he went on to live a life of immorality until one day he heard a voice telling him to take up the Bible and read. It was turned open at Romans 13:13-14, "…. But put on the Lord Jesus and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Since then Saint Augustine went on to change the course of the history of Christianity.

c. **John Bunyan**, author of *The Pilgrims Progress* and *Grace Abounding*, said of his former life, "It was my delight to be taken captive by the devil at his will." He was the ringleader of all things unholy and delighted in the freedom of sin. Cursing, swearing, and lying were second nature to him. However, this same man who said to God, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways," was to be captured by God and His words. Of his conversion he says, "I began to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read as I never did before; I was then never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation; still crying out to God, that I might know the truth, and the way to heaven and glory."

d. **Fanny Crosby** (1820-1915), author of more than 8,000 and 9,000 gospel songs and hymns, such as "To God be the Glory", "Tell Me the Story of Jesus," "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior" and others, was blinded at six weeks old through improper medical treatment. And yet in more than 85 years Crosby had not once felt a spark of resentment against God but believed this to be the means by which God called her. Early in life she began memorizing the Bible and eventually could repeat by rote the entire Pentateuch, all four Gospels, many of the psalms, all of Proverbs as well as the entire books of Ruth and Song of Solomon. She states at the close of her life that "the Holy Book has nurtured my entire life."

Say to students:
Indeed there is not one single life that has impacted the lives of mankind so thoroughly and extensively as the life and words of our Lord Jesus. But have we ever thought about what it would be like if the Lord had never come? What if the Lord had not chosen us? What would our lives be like then? In this exercise, we will explore just that. With the newspaper/magazine, carefully cut out any items that graphically illustrate what the world would be like if the Lord had not come. Tape the newspaper cutting to a poster board. Next to this, graphically illustrate how

the Lord has impacted our lives and the world.

Some examples could be:
In place of war there will be peace (Is 9:4-7; 32:17-20)
In place of sin there will be holiness (Is 29:18-23; 35:8-9)
In place of tears there will be comfort (Is 29:22-23; 61:3-7; 66:13)
In place of injustice there will be justice (Is 42:1-4; 65:21-23)
In place of sickness there will be healing (Is 29:17-19; 35:3-6; 61:1-2)
Instead of death there will be eternal life (Is 41:8-14; 62:8-9)
Instead of poverty there will be prosperity (Is 4:1; 65; 21-22)
In place of strife there will be peace and harmony

1. In the space below, write a prayer to God on what His coming means to you.

2. How could your existence make a difference in the lives of those around you?

Reflection & Prayer

Dear Lord, just as You came to the world two thousand years ago to bring peace, love and the promise of eternal life to mankind, grant to us a complying heart so that we can lead a God-centered life and be instruments of Your grace.

Preparing to Meet Our Lord

unit 2

Goals

Despite the many warnings given by the prophets concerning the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible day when God would pour down His wrath upon His people, the Israelites refused to turn back to God. Just as God's punishment and devastation came at a time the Israelites least expected, the Lord's Second Coming will be like a thief in the night. In this unit, students will learn about preparing themselves to meet the Lord and recognizing the signs of the times. From the book of Jonah, students will also learn that they have to rise above their preoccupations to see the true needs of a pitiful world.

Teacher Devotional

Bobby, a little Skye terrier, belonged to an old shepherd called John Gray. One day, the shepherd dies of pneumonia and is buried in the old Grayfriars Churchyard. The next morning, the curator of the cemetery found Bobby lying on the newly-made mound. But because the cemetery did not allow dogs to be admitted, Bobby had to be driven out.

The next morning the curator found Bobby there again. He was sent out for the second time. The third morning was cold and wet, and the curator once again saw Bobby lying shivering on the grave. Bobby's devotion towards his master later granted him the right to make the churchyard his home, thus the name Grayfriar's Bobby. For the next fourteen years Bobby never spent a night away but faithfully kept constant watch and guard over his master's grave until his own death. What was going on in Bobby's mind as he watched over his master's grave for 14 years? Did he think or hope that his master would return someday? Regardless of the reasons, Bobby leaves us a wonderful example of faithfulness in keeping watch. Have we faithfully kept watch for Christ's coming as we go about our daily lives? Let us not waste the time that God has given to us in seeking our own goals, but to prepare ourselves and to fulfill the duties that God has given us.

Watch and Wait

"But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come."
(Mk 13:32-33)

Lesson 4

Obadiah, Joel, Amos

Listed Scriptures
Ob 1; Joel 1, 2; Amos 8, 9

Lesson Aim
1) Students will learn of the importance of preparing themselves to meet the Lord.
2) Students will realize that they will be accountable for every word and deed on the Day of Judgment.

Memory Verse
"On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old." (Amos 9:11)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*
Ob 1; Joel 1, 2; Amos 8, 9

Bible Background

Edom
Edom was a nation that laid south of the Dead Sea. The capital city was Sela, or Petra, meaning "rock." This was a spectacular city discovered by archaeologists a few decades ago. The city was literally carved into rock, and could be entered only by a narrow canyon easy to defend. Edom was occupied by the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Throughout history, constant conflict existed between the Edomites and the Israelites:

a. When the Hebrews left Egypt under Moses, the Edomites denied Israel passage through their lands (cf. Num 20:14-20).

b. Israel's kings were in constant conflict with Edom:
   Saul (1 Sam 14:47, 48)
   David (2 Sam 8:13, 14)
   Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14-22)
   Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:20-22; 2 Chron 21:8ff)
   Ahaz (2 Chron 28:16)

Locusts

There are ten Hebrew words used in the Bible to refer to locusts. Locusts belong to the class of Orthoptera, i.e., straight-winged. They are of many species. The legs and thighs of these insects are so powerful that they can leap to a height of two hundred times the length of their bodies. A locust will consume its own weight each day and they multiply at an incredible rate. A single female laying her eggs in June could potentially result in eighteen million offspring within four months. There are four different stages of development in the life cycle of the locust:

1. larval stage: black, hopping, wingless;
2. black and yellow with wings and jaws;
3. yellow and fully developed;
4. sexually mature adult.

The devastation they make in eastern lands is often very appalling. The invasions of locusts are the heaviest calamities that can befall a country. Their numbers exceed computation – the Hebrews called them "the countless." The Arabs knew them as "the darkeners of the sun" since their flight obscures the sun and casts a thick shadow on the earth (Ex 10:15; Jdg 6:5; Jer 46:23; Joel 2:10). Locusts are unable to guide their own flight and are driven by the wind and woe to the countries beneath them if the wind fall and let them alight! They descend unnumbered as flakes of snow and cover the ground. It may be "like the Garden of Eden" before them, but after them is a desolate wilderness. Such an awful visitation swept over Egypt during Moses' time, consuming before it every green thing, and stripping the trees, till the land was bared of all signs of vegetation. A locust swarm only dies when the wind blows it out to sea.

WARM UP

A well-known insurance company uses cartoons to advertise their product. One cartoon pictures a piano falling from an upper-story window toward an unsuspecting man below. As it speeds toward its destination, a friend politely asks, "By the way, what's the name of your insurance company?" "Acme insurance, of course," the man replies. "Why do you ask?" Disaster often comes unexpectedly.

Have you ever had something sprung on you for which you were totally unprepared? What were some of your thoughts at the time?

Today, we will study how the Israelites were unaware that the full weight of God's judgment was about to fall upon them. We will also reflect on how we should prepare ourselves to meet the Lord.

Part 1

The Book of Obadiah

The healing of Naaman is a beautiful story about a sinner coming to grace. Naaman, whose name means "pleasantness," was transformed from being a proud and arrogant man to a contrite and God-fearing person. Naaman's journey of faith is a representation of the journey that non-believers tread in their search for the truth. Naaman also typifies those in the world today.

A. Author

The author of this book is Obadiah the prophet, whose name means, "worshiper of Yahweh" or "servant of Yahweh." Thirteen men named Obadiah are mentioned in the Old Testament, but none of these can be identified with any certainty as the author of this book, because nothing is known of his hometown or family. Obadiah was an obscure prophet who probably lived in the southern kingdom of Judah.

B. Date

There are two commonly accepted dates for the prophecies of Obadiah:

a. Between 840-830 B.C. when King Jehoram and Jerusalem were attacked by a Philistine/Arab coalition (2 Chron 21:16ff).

b. 586 B.C. when Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25; 2 Chron 36). Evidence for Obadiah being a post-exilic prophet can be found in Obadiah verse 20 where the word "exiles" are mentioned and the similarities between the book of Obadiah and the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Ob 1-9; Jer 49:9-22; Ezek 25:12-13; 35:5, 15).

C. Themes

The books of Obadiah and Nahum announce the doom of two separate nations who were enemies of Israel. In each case the charge was the same; the enemy had mistreated God's own, and the Lord was committed to punishing them.
Though the shortest of the Old Testament books, Obadiah carries one of the strongest messages of judgment. Because of her persistent opposition to God's chosen people, Obadiah prophesies the complete destruction of Edom with no possible deliverance.

D. Teachings from the Book of Obadiah

a. Edom's pride

The book of Obadiah states that pride was the cause of Edom's downfall. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Several years after the prophecy, Edom was destroyed by Babylon. There were four things that the Edomites were proud of:

1. Proud of their heritage

The Edomites were proud of their inherited advantages. Esau, their ancestor, chose Mount Seir to be their home (Gen 36:7-8). The Edomites were blood relatives of Israel and like their father Esau, they were rugged, fierce and proud warriors with a seemingly invincible mountain home in the hill country of Seir (Gen 36:8-9). Edom's capital at this time was Petra, a city considered impregnable because it was cut into a solid rock cliff and set in a canyon that could be entered only through a narrow gap. Therefore, they became proud and filled with self-confidence. But what Edom perceived as strengths would be their downfall. The safety that they felt with the city "set among the stars" would be sent plummeting from the heights. Though they soared aloft like the eagle, God was to bring them down (Obad 1:3-4). The Edomites felt secure and were proud of their self-sufficiency and merits. They did not realize that there was no lasting security apart from God. Upon what rock-like structures do we base our security? Do we feel secure and confident in the things we possess such as physical beauty, intelligence, wealth or family background? How much security do these things really offer? Instead of being confident of these false securities, we should give thanks to God and use it for the Lord.

2. Proud of their knowledge

The Edomites were proud of their knowledge and its city renowned for its wise men. The Edomites trusted in the counsels of the wise men to overcome their enemies, but God will destroy the wisdom of the wise and thwart the cleverness of the clever (1 Cor 1:19). Their wisdom and understanding will not be able to deliver them from the impending destruction that God was to bring upon them.

Perhaps like the Edomites, we have relied upon our own knowledge and experience rather than on God. We may do things a certain way based on past successful experiences. But this is not a fool-proof method. From Peter's experience of fishing the whole night and catching nothing, we are reminded that experience and skill does not guarantee success. Our human understanding, expertise and experience are limited and there are too many unknown factors. Proverbs 3:5 therefore reminds us to "trust the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding; in all our ways acknowledge Him and He will direct our path."

3. Proud of their mighty men

The Edomites were proud of their mighty men (v. 9). There were many warriors in the land of Edom, especially in the city of Teman. The Edomites trusted in their warriors to protect and defend them against the invaders, but history often proves that it is not always the strong who wins the battle (Eccl 9:11). Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain (Ps 127:1).

4. Proud of their allies

The Edomites were proud of their allegiance with many nations (v. 7). By making treaties with the surrounding nations Edom thought they would suffer no harm. However, God told Edom that it is these very allies that will "deceive you and drive you to the border; the confederates will prevail against you; your trusted friends have set a trap under you." God teaches them that reliance upon men and relationships are not sure things. Where do we place our confidence? Do we trust in ourselves or the people around us? (Ps 118:8,9; Ps 44:6; Ps 146:3.) Our best ally is the Lord Jesus Himself. Proverbs 22:11 tells us that with a pure heart and graceful lips, we can make allegiance with the Lord who is our ever present help.

b. Brothers should love one another

The Edomites were the offspring of Esau and blood relatives of the Israelites. In times past the Lord had forbidden the Israelites to invade Edom. God also allowed the Edomites into the camp of God, and gave them Mount Seir as

their inheritance (Gen 36:1,9; Deut 2:4-6; 23:7; Num 21:4). Despite this, Edom did not acknowledge the true God nor deal kindly with his brother. When Israel was attacked by the enemies, of all people the Edomites should have rushed to the aid of their brothers. Instead, they gloated over Israel's problems, delivered the fugitives into the hands of the enemies and even looted Israel's countryside (Ob 14). Because of their lack of mercy, God was to annihilate them.

Have we felt smug towards the misfortunes of others? Have we added to the suffering of those who are already in pain? When we see those around us needing a helping hand, do we fold our hands and say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). The Lord requires us to dwell in unity (Ps 133:1) and to treat others the way we want to be treated (Mt 7:2,12; 1 Tim 5:8).

c. **The kingdom shall be the Lord's**

From Obadiah verses 17-21, the prophet predicts how the Edomites would be destroyed and the Israelites restored. During the time of Obadiah's prophecy Edom seemed more likely to survive than Judah. When the Babylonians besieged the city of Judah, the Edomites assisted them and rejoiced at Judah's downfall (Ps 137:7). However, only 5 years later (583 B.C.), the Babylonians attacked Edom. The remnants of Edom settled in the southern parts of Judah. In 70 A.D., both the Edomites and Israelites rebelled against the Roman government but were eventually destroyed. Since then Edom has vanished from the face of the earth while the Israelite nation has reestablished itself as a nation in 1948. No nation that has been destroyed has ever been able to rebuild its nation save Israel. However, the prophecy does not end here. In the end times, the true church, the spiritual Israel, will rise and prosper and rule over Mount Esau.

Part 2
The Book of Joel

A. Author

Although there are several other Joels in the Bible, the prophet Joel is known only from this book. The Hebrew name Yo'el means "Yahweh is God," a name appropriate to a book which emphasizes God's sovereign work in history. We know very little about Joel, only that he was the son of Pethuel. From the frequent references

to Jerusalem, Zion, the temple of God and so on, we can deduce that Joel was a prophet in Jerusalem and his audience was Judah, the southern kingdom.

B. Date

Since the book includes no explicit time references, it cannot be dated with certainty. However, it has been traditionally dated at c.835 B.C., when the young King Joash ruled and Jehoiada the priest served as his mentor (2 Kgs 11; 12). This period seems to fit the text of Joel since the influence of the priesthood appears to be strong and there is no mention of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasion. The prophet refers rather to the enemies of Judah during the earlier period: Tyre, Sidon, Philistia (3:4) Egypt and Edom (3:19). This would have made Joel a contemporary of Elisha.

C. Themes

The book begins by describing a terrible plague of locusts that will come upon the nation. These locusts will cover the land and devour the crops, creating total devastation. The plague of locusts was but a foretaste of the coming Day of the Lord – a time of awesome judgment upon people and nations that have rebelled against God. Joel urges the people to turn from their sins and return to God. God promised that after His people return to Him, He will restore them to their former glory and pour out His Spirit in the end times.

D. Teachings from the Book of Joel

a. **The plague of locusts**

The book of Joel begins by describing a terrible plague of locusts that will come upon the nation. The cutting locust, the swarming locust, the hopping locust, the destroying locust will strip the trees and the land bare, creating total devastation. What seemed like the Garden of Eden at first would eventually become a desolate wilderness. The locusts consume every green thing, their numbers are innumerable (1:6), their appearance is like a powerful army (cf Rev 9:7; Job 39:20), they move like the sound of rumbling chariots (2:4-5), they march in strict order, they do not swerve from their paths (2:7-9) and the people grow pale at the sight of them. The locust plague was but one of the many disasters that God was to bring upon the people for their sins. In Deuteronomy 28:22 the Lord warned the people of the consequences for departing from Him; "The Lord will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching,

and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish." Today, we see that floods, wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes happening in different parts of the world are also a consequence of man's failure to acknowledge and fear God. To escape the great calamities of the last days, we need to call upon the Lord and serve Him zealously (Rev 3:10).

b. The promise of the Holy Spirit

Throughout the entire Bible, people such as Moses (Deut 11:14), Isaiah (Is 4:3-4; 32:15; 43:19; 44:3), Ezekiel (Ezek 11:19, 20; 36:26, 27; 37:14; 39:28, 29), Joel (Joel 2:23, 28, 29), Zechariah (Zech 8:12; 10:1; 12:10), Malachi (Mal 4:5,6), John the Baptist (Mt 3:11; Jn 1:32, 33) and the Lord Jesus (Lk 11:13; 24:49; Jn 4:14; 7:37-39; Ac 1:4, 5, 8) have spoken of the downpouring of the Holy Spirit. The prophet Joel elaborates further on how in the last days, God will pour down His Spirit on all those who thirst and seek for Him. The people will prophesy, dream dreams and see visions. God's spirit will descend upon men regardless of race, gender, age or worldly status (1 Cor 12:13). The Holy Spirit will fall in two different time periods, represented by the two seasons of rainfall in Israel. When the Holy Spirit first came down on the Day of Pentecost, Peter rose up and quoted from the book of Joel (Joel 2:23; Ac 2:16-18). This was the time of the autumn (early) rain that fell to establish the church and to plant the seeds of the gospel. The prophecy came to complete fulfillment when God poured down His Spirit once again in the beginning of the 20th century. This was the promised spring rain (latter rain) that was to revive the church of the apostolic times and enable the gospel to be preached to the ends of the world before Christ's Second Coming.

c. The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord is an important concept in the book of Joel (Joel 2:11, 31; 3:14) and throughout the entire Bible. Joel devotes five passages to describe the signs preceding the Day of the Lord and the day itself (1:15; 2:1-2; 2:11; 2:28-31; 3:14-15). The Day of the Lord is also known as the Lord's Day, the Day belongs to the Lord and the Day of God's wrath (Lam 2:22; Ezek 7:19; 13:5; Zeph 1:14-18; 2:2-3). It refers to the day or time when God will punish mankind through disasters and destruction. What does the Day of the Lord refer to?

1. The locust plague refers to the coming Day of the Lord.
2. The Day of the Lord refers to the day when the Judahites will be taken into captivity. In Joel 2:1-3, 20, it prophesies that on the Day of the Lord, a mighty army from the north will come to destroy and attack Israel (Ezek 38:14-16; 39:2). God uses this army to judge the nations (Joel 3:14; Ezek 38:18,21; 39:4-5) and to manifest His mighty power (Ezek 38:16,23).
3. The Day of the Lord refers to the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus, that great and dreadful day (2:11,31). This is the final period of history when God will judge all nations.

Description of the Day of the Lord	Events in the Last Days
Before the Day of the Lord, God will cause the captives of Judah and Jerusalem to return from Babylon (3:1).	In the end times, the Israelites will be called and chosen by the Lord (Is 11:11-12; Ezek 39:28; cf. Mt 24:32).
The Lord will gather all the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2) where they will be judged for the violence upon Judah.	In the Last Day, God will gather the nations before His throne and He will execute judgment. The enemies of Judah represent all those who oppose and persecute the followers of the Lord. When Christ returns, such people will face judgment (2 Thess 1:6-10).
There will be a worldwide battle in the valley of decision (3:9-12).	Before the Judgment Day, there will be a worldwide battle at Armaggedon (cf Rev 16:13-16; 19:19; 20:7-8).
The earth will quake and the celestial lights will darken (2:10-11).	These are the signs of the last days (Mt 24:29; Rev 6:12-13). God's wrath will burst forth and the powers of heaven will be shaken and there will be great disasters (Lk 21:26; Rev 16:17-20; Is 13:13).
On that day, the Lord will take vengeance upon the wicked (3:4-7, 21) and judge the nations (3:12).	In the Great Judgment, all men will know that the Lord is God. He will judge and repay every man for what he has done. The wicked will be condemned forever, while the righteous will enjoy eternal rest.
Egypt and Edom will become desolate while Judah will be inhabited forever. In that day, the mountains will flow sweet wine, milk and water. A fountain shall come forth from the house of God (3:18-19).	This is a prefiguration of the true church. In the last days, the Holy Spirit will pour down and establish the spiritual Jerusalem which is the true church. Blessings and grace can be found in abundance to satisfy the thirsting and hungering souls of the world. The believers will bear much spiritual fruit. When the Lord comes, the church will be as a bride lifted up to meet her husband and will dwell with the Lord forever.

Teaching Tips

Have students divide into groups to find the various descriptions of the Day of the Lord in the Book of Joel. Discuss each group's findings.

Part 3
The Book of Amos

A. Author

The author of this book is Amos, whose name means "one who bears heavy burden." Amos lived in a rustic town six miles south of Bethlehem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, called Tekoa. Amos was not a professional prophet, but was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees by profession (1:1, 7:14). Although he was born in Judah, Amos was called by God to go to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to be His spokesman there (7:15).

B. Date

According to 1:1, Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah and Jeroboam, king of Israel. Amos ministered after the time of Joel and Jonah and just before Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. At this time Uzziah reigned over a prosperous and militarily successful Judah. In the north, Israel was ruled by the capable King Jeroboam II. Economic and military circumstances were almost ideal, but prosperity only increased immorality and injustice among the people.

C. Themes

During this period, both Israel and Judah were enjoying prosperity and freedom from external threats. Egypt was in a period of decline, Assyria was also in a temporary decline and Babylonia had not yet come on the scene as a major power. Both Israel and Judah squandered the wealth that this period of peace brought them. The rich were becoming richer at the expense of the poor. But instead of using their wealth to serve the needy, the upper classes were deaf to their cries. Bribery and injustice permeated the courts and immorality multiplied. Both nations were on their way to storing up for themselves God's righteous indignation.

D. Teachings from the Book of Amos

The book of Amos opens with denunciations directed at Israel's neighbors and enemies: Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, Edom, Ammon and Moab. No doubt Israel greeted these denunciations with loud amens. Then Amos turned his attention to Judah and Israel. Israel's sins that Amos enumerated were social sins of Israelite against Israelite, neighbor against neighbor. Amos pronounces judgment on various groups of people for their sins:

a. **The self-seeking leaders of Israel (Amos 6:1-7) and the arrogant women of influence (Amos 4:1-3)**

God has brought judgment upon the people in Judah and Israel because of their luxurious lifestyle. "They did not know how to do right" and the woman lived in such fatness that they were described as "cows of Bashan." Bashan is a region on the east of the River Jordan between the mountains of Gilead in the south and Mt. Hermon in the north (cf. Deut 32:14) noted for its fertile land and fine breed of cattle. Israel's wealthy women were compared to the cows of Bashan – pampered, sleek and well fed (Ps 22:12). These women selfishly pushed their husbands to oppress the helpless in order to supply their lavish lifestyles.

In Amos 6:4-6, Amos continues to attack the leaders who indulged in excessive wealth and pleasures. They built "houses of ivory" (3:15) and laid upon "beds of ivory." They ate and drank sumptuously, anointed themselves with finest oils and idled their lives away. Since ivory was imported and very expensive, its use spoke of great extravagance even as the poor went without food.

Why did Amos condemn them for such sins? Is it wrong to live a comfortable life? Is it wrong to enjoy what we've worked so hard for? Did the Book of Ecclesiastes not permit us to enjoy our food and drink and take pleasure in our toil (Eccl 2:24; 3:13)? It is without doubt that God has given the things in life for us to enjoy. However, for the people in Amos' days, enjoyment was the primary goal in life. Their pursuit of pleasure was at the expense of their brother's suffering. The rich gained their wealth, not by hard work and frugality, but by using illegal methods to exact their toll from the poor. They used their ill-gotten wealth to indulge in careless and irresponsible living. They lived lives of drunkenness and sexual immorality, without a care for poor fellow brothers. In 1 Timothy 6:17-19 Paul instructs the rich how to live and to use their wealth.

They are to use their money to do good and to be rich in good works, giving to those in need.

b. The wicked who cheated and oppressed others (Amos 5:10-12; 8:4-7)

Although wealth had made the people prosperous, they had also become greedy and unfair. They had become cruel and indifferent to the poor and needy to the point that they oppressed and took advantage of them. Amos describes vividly the social injustices and the inhumane behavior of the wicked against their fellow people; the innocent were sold by harsh money lenders, the poor were trampled under foot by well-to-do competitors. They took bribes, deprived the poor of justice, and the greedy were so eager to acquire land that they did not hesitate to use devious ways to acquire it. Because of their evil dealings they hated those who reproved in the gate and abhorred those who spoke the truth (5:10). Such people cannot endure sound teaching and reproof because of their sins (2 Tim 4:3-4).

c. The religious hypocrites

1. Worshiped in illegitimate places

Besides their flamboyant lifestyles, Amos also pronounced judgment upon the religious sins of the people. A century and a half earlier, King Jeroboam I had set up a place of worship at Bethel and Dan, where he erected two golden calves (1 Kgs 12:28, 29). He did this to prevent the people from going to Jerusalem, the rightful place of worship, knowing that he would have trouble maintaining their loyalty if they went to Judah to worship. The people now worshiped in the north and other places of worship such as Gilgal, rather than traveling to the temple in Jerusalem (4:4-5). But God viewed this worship as an act of rebellion. Amos sarcastically urged the people to continue their false worship, thus piling up their sins.

2. Their worship was empty

Amos 4:4-5 describes the fervency of the people in worshiping God. They sacrificed each morning, offered tithes every three days and gave thanksgiving sacrifices and freewill offerings. They celebrated their feast days, their Sabbaths and their new moons and were doing far more than was prescribed by the law. And yet, God had no pleasure in their sacrifices. God refused to smell the smoke of their burnt offerings and refused their praise (5:21-24). The reason for this was because the people went through the motions of worship but continued to lead a life of sin and wickedness. All their empty worship could not avert God's judgment.

In Amos 5:21-24, the prophet reveals to the Israelites the true meaning of worship. Religion is more than offerings and sacrifices, attending services and praising God with songs and music. True religion demands righteous living and doing what is right in the sight of God. Failing this, all other actions and efforts become superficial and meaningless. Do we see ourselves in the Israelites? Do we come to church each week to study God's words and pray loudly only to return to a life that grieves God? Knowing that such things are not fitting for a Christian to do, do we behave like the Israelites who thought that so long as they offered sacrifices and offerings, God would ignore their behavior? God abhors this kind of worship. What God wants is not our sacrifices, but our hearts and changed lives.

d. The five visions of judgment

God showed Amos a series of five visions concerning His judgment on Israel. When Amos saw the disasters that were to fall upon the Israelites, Amos interceded for them. As a result, God relented from sending the first two disasters upon Israel. But Israel persisted in her disobedience. God was to still carry out His judgment.

1. The swarm of locusts (Amos 7:1-3).

2. Fire (Amos 7:4-6).

3. The plumbline (Amos 7:7-9). A plumbline was a device used in construction to ensure the straightness of a wall. A wall that was not straight will eventually collapse. Here, the plumbline was used to measure the people against God's standard, but unfortunately they had fallen far below what God required.

4. The summer fruits (Amos 8:1ff). Summer fruits imply maturity and ripeness to the point of being almost rotten. Although the nation had a brilliantly colored exterior, inside they were rotten and full of corruption. This demonstrated how the Israelites were on the edge of being disciplined by God.

5. God standing beside the altar (Amos 9:1ff).

e. Rebuilding the fallen booth of David (9:11-15)

According to the justice of God, a sinful nation needs to be destroyed.

However, because of God's promise, a remnant will be preserved and will return to the holy city to rebuild the fallen booth of David. Not only does this prophecy speak of the restoration of Israel, but of the rebuilding of the spiritual Israel, the true church.

Check for Understanding

There are no questions for this lesson.

Life Application

Are you ready?

Have students read the lyrics to this hymn:

Redemption Draweth Nigh

Usual time have come and gone
Since I first heard it told
How Jesus would come again some day
If back then it seems so real
Then I just can't help but feel
How much closer His coming is today

Wars and strife from every land
And violence fills our land
Still some people doubt He'll come again
But the Word of God is true
He'll redeem His chosen few
Don't lose hope, soon Christ Jesus will descend

Chorus:
Signs of the times are everywhere
And there's a brand new feeling in the air
Lift your eyes upon the eastern sky
Lift up your hands redemption draweth nigh.

The hymn speaks of the signs of the times. What are the signs of the times? (Ask students to list the events that will occur before the Lord's Second Coming. Answers can be found in Matthew 24).

a. **The Natural World:**
Earthquakes (Mt 24:7)
Pestilence (strange diseases caused by viruses such as SARS, aids, etc.) (Lk 21:11)
Famines (Mt 24:7)
Strange cosmic phenomena (Lk 21:11)

b. **The Present World:**
Iniquities and sins will increase (Mt 24:10,12; 2 Tim 3:1-6)
Knowledge increases (Dan 12:4)
Many wars and world wars (Mt 24:6, 7)
The revival of the Israelite nation (Mt 24:32)
The establishment of many countries in the world (Lk 21:30)

c. **The Spiritual World:**
The downpouring of the latter rain (Joel 2:28-32)
The rise of the true church (Is 2:3; Rev 6:1, 2)
The preaching of the gospel throughout the world (Mt 24:14, 27)
The appearance of false christs and false prophets (Mt 24:11, 23, 24)
The rise of the anti-Christ (Rev 6:3, 4)
Great persecution of the church (Dan 9:27; Mt 24:9)

What does the Lord's Second Coming mean to you? What are your thoughts when you see all these events happening?

Getting Prepared

We often hear about the necessity of preparing ourselves in the event of earthquakes, hurricanes or other such natural disasters. In the same way, we need to make vital preparations to meet the Lord so that we will not be swept away with the rest of the world. After the Lord explained about the signs of the end times in Matthew 24, He continued to elaborate on how we need to prepare for His coming. What are the indispensable provisions that we would need to prepare for His return?

a. **Prepare a heart of watchfulness (read Mt 25:1-13)**
1. What does oil represent?
2. How is taking enough oil significant to us?

3. Here are some of the ways I will prepare oil:

b. **Prepare a heart to serve God faithfully (read Mt 25:14-20)**
1. List some of the talents that God has given you.
2. What will you do with the talents God has given you to prepare for His coming?

c. **Prepare a heart of love for others (read Mt 25:31-46)**
The ways I can:
Feed the hungry and quench the thirsty _____
Take in strangers _____
Clothe the naked _____
Visit the sick _____
Go to those in prison _____

Reflection & Prayer

As we see the prophesies of the Bible being realized, let us pray the Lord will grant us a heart of wisdom to number our days and to effectively seize every moment to prepare ourselves for His return, so that each of us can welcome the Lord with a clear conscience on that glorious Day.

Lesson 5

Jonah, Hosea, Micah

Listed Scriptures
Jonah 1-3; Hos 1,6; Mic 4

Lesson Aim
1) To learn about God's unceasing love.
2) To learn that God desires all men to be saved.
3) Students will reflect upon their own levels of love.

Memory Verse
"He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Mic 6:8)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*
Jonah 1-3; Hos 1,6; Mic 4

Bible Background

Canaanite religion

By the time of Hosea, many of the practices of Canaanite worship were actually integrated with the worship of the Lord. The religion of Canaan was essentially a fertility faith that linked the land's fruitfulness to the supposed sexual activity of gods and goddesses. When the male lord or owner god (Baal) and his consort (Astarte, or Asherah) had sexual intercourse, the land was stimulated to produce crops. The fertility of animals and people were assumed to be linked to the sexual activity of these nature gods. As an expression of this belief, the worship of the pagan gods and goddesses at local shrines and high places was typically marked by drunkenness and orgies. Male and female prostitutes engaged in sexual activity to stimulate the gods to make the land fertile. Idolatry and sexual looseness became very much linked.

Homeless Man?

It was a cold winter's day. The parking lot to the church was filling up quickly. I noticed as I got out of my car that fellow church members were whispering among themselves as they walked to the church. As I got closer I saw a man leaned up against a wall outside the church. He was almost lying down as if he were asleep. He had on a long trench coat that was almost in shreds and a hat topped his head, pulled down so that you could not see his face. He wore shoes that looked thirty years old, too small for his feet, with holes all over them, and his toes stuck out. I assumed this man was homeless, and asleep, so I walked on by through the doors of the church.

We all fellowshipped for a few minutes and someone brought up the man lying outside. People snickered and gossiped, although no one bothered to ask him to come in, including me. A few moments later church began. We all waited for the preacher to take his place up front, when the doors to the church opened. In came the homeless man walking down the aisle with his head down. People gasped and whispered and made faces. He made his way down the aisle and up to the pulpit where he took off his hat and coat. My heart sank. There stood our preacher… he was the "homeless man." No one said a word. The preacher took his Bible and laid it on the stand. "Folks, I don't think I have to tell you what I am preaching about today…"

What message was the pastor making that day? (Allow students to respond)

Today we will look at how God reminded the Israelites what the true essence of love is.

Part 1
The Book of Jonah

A. Author

The book of Jonah has no stated author, though tradition ascribes it to Jonah, a prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the eighth century B.C. Jonah, whose name means "a dove," was the son of Amittai (1:1) and a native of Gath Hepher in Zebulun, a town about two miles north of Nazareth. Jonah ministered under Jeroboam II, Israel's most powerful king (793-753 B.C., see 2 Kgs 14:23-25). He worked after the time of Elisha and just before Amos and Hosea. During this period, Israel was enjoying a period of resurgence and prosperity. However, there was the threat of the Assyrians, Israel's greatest enemy, who later conquered Israel in 722 B.C. Jonah was given the task of bringing God's judgment upon these people.

B. Date

The book was written approximately between 785-760 B.C.

C. Themes

God's loving concern for the gentiles is not a truth disclosed only in the New Testament. More than seven centuries before Christ, God commissioned the Hebrew prophet Jonah to proclaim a message of repentance to the Assyrians. God called him to preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which at that time was the most powerful nation on earth. The more we know about Assyria, the more we understand why Jonah was reluctant to preach there. The Assyrians were a fierce warring people who often treated their captives ruthlessly. Jonah had good reason to be afraid. But fear was not the only thing that made Jonah reluctant. Jonah could not imagine that God could care for other nations – especially one as vile and idolatrous as Assyria. The prophet Jonah represents the arrogance and bigotry of the Jewish nation and their failure to see how the gospel is for all who repent and believe. God wanted Jonah to know that He loves all the people of the world and that He does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9).

D. *Teachings from the Book of Jonah*

a. God is sovereign

When God commissioned Jonah to go preach to the people of Nineveh, Jonah fled to Tarshish, a city about 2,000 miles in the opposite direction of Nineveh. He thought that by escaping to Tarshish he could flee from the presence of God and evade his commission. How ironic that a prophet of God should fail to understand God's will and sovereignty (Ps 139:7-8). The sovereignty of God over life, elements and circumstances is clearly stressed throughout the entire book. God appoints the storm (1:4), the fish (1:17; 2:10), the plant (4:6), the worm (4:7) and the sultry wind (4:8) to achieve His purpose and to teach important lessons to Jonah.

2 Chronicles 18:12-33 records an incident where the prophet Micah predicted the death of Ahab, king of Israel. Although King Ahab purposely disguised himself to fool the enemy during battle, a random arrow from the Syrian army killed him. We can see that no human scheme can prevent the will of God. God can use anything, even an error, to bring His will to pass. Proverbs 21:1 says "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." As His children, our purpose is to submit to God's divine arrangement and to do His will.

b. True repentance averts disasters

The concept of repentance is a central theme in the book of Jonah. When the Ninevites heard Jonah's message, they proclaimed a fast and repented immediately. Such sincere and true repentance is rare. When God saw how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not destroy them. The repentance of the Ninevites, however, stands in stark contrast to Israel's stubbornness. The people of Israel heard many messages from the prophets, but they refused to repent. The Lord Jesus says that on the Day of Judgment, these Ninevites will rise up to condemn the Israelites for their failure to repent (Mt 12:39-41). Repentance is crucial in our journey of faith. We constantly transgress in our thoughts, speech and actions. Our iniquity separates us from God (Is 59:2), and causes us to lose peace and strength (cf Ps 32:3-5). Through confessing our sins and repentance, God's wrath can be averted (Ps 7:12), and we can receive His mercy and blessings.

c. God does not desire anyone to perish

When Jonah saw the generosity and compassion of God he was furious. In two instances, Jonah becomes angry, but each time, God teaches Jonah valuable lessons regarding his misconceptions and the nature of God.

1. God corrects Jonah's prejudice

   In Jonah 4:1, Jonah is angry because he has seen the Ninevites' repentance and how God did not destroy them (Jon 3:10). Nineveh was the capital city of the great, but evil, Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians flaunted their power before God and the world through numerous acts of heartless cruelty (Nah 1:9,10; 2:12,13; 3:4). In the wake of an Assyrian invasion in Palestine, Jonah felt reluctant to preach to his enemies because they were undeserving. His intense patriotic feelings towards his country made him unwilling to share God's favor with those who were non-Jews. But God used this occasion to teach Jonah and the Israelites that God was not only God of the Jews, but of all those who repent and believe (Rom 3:29). Sometimes we wish that judgment and destruction would come upon sinful people whose wickedness demand immediate punishment. But God is more merciful than we imagine. He feels compassion for the sinners we want judged. Do we possess Jonah's narrow-minded and self-righteous attitude? What is our attitude towards those whom we dislike or those who are especially wicked? Do we wish the worst for them? Would we wish that they too can experience God's mercy and forgiveness?

2. God corrects Jonah's values

   In Jonah 4:8-9, Jonah again is extremely angry because God has destroyed the plant that has been a shade for him. God asks Jonah how he can feel sorry for a plant, yet not feel sorry for the many thousands of people in the city of Nineveh. Jonah would have been happy about Nineveh's destruction, but he wanted to die because of the death of a vine. Through the castor oil plant, God gently showed Jonah his wrong sense of perspective and the heart of God. By pitying the plant, Jonah is placing more value on the plant than the salvation of the Ninevites. There's nothing wrong with our being concerned about the smaller matters in life. But like Jonah we often have misplaced values. We care more about a wrecked automobile or a broken computer than we do about those who die daily without food or without Christ. Through this lesson God manifests His compassion and graciousness and enables Jonah to see how mixed up his values had become. Similarly, God wants us to overcome our preoccupation with ourselves, our interests and prejudices. God desires that we learn about His mercy and forgiveness and to be sensitive to the needs of people around us.

E. Questions to Think About

1. Was there anytime in your life when you knew you had to obey, but deliberately set out to go against it? What lessons did you learn? Did you regret that decision?

2. When have you "run away" from God?

3. What "storms," then and now, bring you back?

4. What things in our lives has God used to bring about His purpose?

5. How do you respond when things do not go your way?

6. In what ways can you identify with Jonah's anger?

7. In what ways are we sometimes more concerned with petty things (as Jonah was when the plant withered) than about those things under God's judgment?

8. In the end do you think Jonah understood God's attitude toward Nineveh? Why or why not?

9. In what area of your life might you be resistant to seeing things from God's perspective?

10. What can we do to begin seeing things more from God's perspective?

Part 2
The Book of Hosea

A. Author

Little is known of the life of the prophet Hosea. His place of birth is not given, but his familiarity with and concern for the northern kingdom indicates he lived in Israel, not Judah. Hosea whose name means, "Salvation" coincides with his message concerning God's salvation and unfailing love. Hosea was the son of Beeri (1:1), husband of Gomer (1:3) and father of two sons and a daughter (1:4, 6,9).

B. Date

Hosea's ministry stretched for about 40 years from c. 755-710 B.C. Hosea began his ministry during the latter years of Jeroboam II, during a time of great material prosperity. His ministry spanned the reigns of the last six kings of Israel from Zechariah to Hoshea. The reigns of Israel's last six kings were relatively brief since four were murdered and the fifth was carried captive to Assyria.

C. Themes

The book of Hosea was written to a northern kingdom of Israel on the brink of disaster. Politically the nation was very unstable and the land was under the constant threat of the Assyrians and the Egyptians. Spiritually, moral corruption and spiritual adultery permeated the lives of the people. It is at this juncture that God used the prophet Hosea to convey His messages to His people. As Gomer is married to Hosea, so Israel is betrothed to God. Both relationships disintegrate – Gomer runs after other men, and Israel runs after other gods. Just as Hosea was to find, redeem and reconcile with his unfaithful wife, God is merciful and fully committed to be faithful to those He has chosen despite their spiritual infidelity. The book of Hosea is commonly called the Gospel Book of the Old Testament.

D. Teachings from the Book of Hosea

a. Spiritual infidelity

The book of Hosea opens with God's instructions to the prophet Hosea to marry a woman of harlotry. God also told Hosea ahead of time that Gomer, his wife, would be unfaithful to him. God uses Hosea and Gomer's relationship to symbolize the husband and wife relationship between God and His people. Just as Gomer ran off to be with her lovers, Israel forsook God, her rightful husband, to seek "illicit" relationships. In Hosea alone, the word harlotry is mentioned 11 times (Hos 1:2; 2:4; 4:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18; 5:3, 4; 6:10). The word harlot comes from the Hebrew word, *zanah*, which means to commit adultery. In what ways did the Israelites commit spiritual adultery?

1. Israel trusted in men

During the time of Hosea, the nation of Israel was politically very unstable. Internally, assassinations and killings became commonplace. Within a span of 25 years, there were changes of five dynasties and seven kings. Furthermore, the Assyrians and the Egyptians constantly threatened

the entire nation. Under such precarious times, the kings did not rely on God, but went back and forth allying themselves with different nations. They trusted that military power could keep them safe and their kingdom secure. With money, they formed an allegiance with Assyria hoping they would not invade them (2 Kgs 15:19,20). They also sent olive oil to Egypt in the hope that Egypt would help them in times of trouble. But such efforts were futile. God would allow Israel to be taken into captivity by the very hands that they sought refuge from. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians besieged Israel and tore the people from their homeland (2 Kgs 17:3-23). Like the leaders of Israel, have we looked for security in wealth, pleasure, learning or relationships? Have we have looked everywhere except to God for happiness and security in life? In reality, without God there is no lasting security. Only God can truly satisfy the deep longings of our soul. Look first to heaven, to the Most High God (Hos 7:16). He will meet our needs.

2. Turned to idols
   During the time of Hosea, the Israelites were steeped in idolatry. They burned incense to idols (Hos 2:13), they inquired after wooden images (4:12), they used their silver and gold to carve out images and they consecrated themselves to Baal (9:10). Idol worship was so attractive because it was typically marked by drunkenness and orgies (Hos 4:11-14). Under serene settings (Hos 4:13), the people offered sacrifices and engaged in ritual prostitution to stimulate the gods to make the land fertile.

   With such beliefs, the people were actually deceived into thinking that it was Baal who gave them the grain, wine, oil, silver and gold (Hos 2:8). They refused to acknowledge that God was their husband and the giver of all blessings (Hos 7:15). And so God was to make them like the morning mist, like the dew and chaff on the threshing floor, and like smoke, which disappears in an instant (13:3). Very soon, God would send this rebellious nation into the hands of the Assyrians. Have we given God the rightful praise and honor for all the blessings that He has given us, or have we attributed our successes to our own efforts and abilities?

b. Lack of Knowledge of God
   In Hosea there are many references explaining why the leaders, priests and people sinned against God. One of the main reasons was that the people did not know God and had rejected knowledge (Hos 4:1, 6, 14). Because of their lack of understanding, they failed to practice or know God's will. How did the people demonstrate that they did not know God?

1. In Hosea 4, God confronted the people of the land for their lack of faithfulness, kindness and knowledge of God. Although the people professed to know God, they did all kinds of evil; they lied, stole, murdered, committed adultery and worshiped idols. While practicing unrighteousness, the people came to the temple to offer their gifts to God. They did not understand what God really desired. If they knew God and His laws they would have known that God is just, faithful and compassionate and He desires His people to treat others in the same manner. God desires steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (Hos 6:6).

2. Hosea also rebuked the priests for preventing the people from knowing God. The priests were supposed to be spiritual leaders, but they became leaders in wrongdoing. Every time a person brought a sin offering, the priests received a portion of it. The more the people sinned, the more the priests received. The priests thus profited from the continuation of sin. So instead of trying to lead the people out of sin by teaching the people the laws of God, the priests encouraged wickedness and even rejoiced in the people's sins to have greater profit. Thus being ignorant of the law, the Israelites sinned more and more against God (Hos 4:6; 14). Let us resolve to learn and know the laws of God. The more we know of God's words, the more we will know God, and the more we will fear and love Him.

c. God's steadfast love and faithfulness
   After Gomer married Hosea, she ran away from Hosea to be with her lovers. Later, she lost her freedom and became a slave. In Hosea 3, God asked Hosea to do the unthinkable – he was to buy back his unrepentant, adulterous wife from slavery and continue to love her. This act was to demonstrate how God still loved the unfaithful Israelites even when they turned away from Him time and time again to be with their false gods. Hosea 11:1-11 records a monologue given by God Himself. The struggle within God's heart is intense. On the one hand, because the Israelites are bent on turning away from God, God is determined to punish and destroy them. He considers giving up on Israel forever. But God's steadfast love and compassion restrains Him. In the throes of love for Israel, God cries, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I make you like Admah and Zeboiim?" (two cities that were destroyed together with Sodom and Gomorrah).

God is a God of absolute justice and love. Because of His divine justice, God will execute punishment. In Hosea 11:5, God has prophesied that the Assyrians will invade the land. But at the same time, because of His eternal love, He will restore the people back to their homeland after the 70-year captivity (Hos 11:10-11). Not only this, in 1948 the nation of Israel was restored after being completely annihilated. In the course of human history, no nation has been able to resurrect out of the dust except Israel. God also prophesies the restoration of the spiritual Israel, which is the true church.

E. Questions to Think About

1. How does the Book of Hosea illustrate spiritual unfaithfulness?
2. How might we be unfaithful to God?
3. What does the Book of Hosea teach us about God's love? Is there a limit?
4. The Israelites professed to know God but their deeds belied them. What does truly knowing God mean?
5. What are the ways that we can get to know God better?

Part 3
The Book of Micah

A. Author

The prophet Micah, whose name means "who is like God," was one of the eighth-century prophets, together with Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Jonah. Besides Micah 1:1 and the book of Jeremiah 26:18, there are no other biblical references concerning Micah's background. Micah's home was Moresheth Gath (1:14) a town probably located about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem, close to the border of the Philistines. Micah and Isaiah were contemporary prophets. Although Isaiah preached in the courts and Micah in the villages, the content of their message is similar.

B. Date

Micah prophesied in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Although Micah deals primarily with Judah, he also addresses the Nnorthern kingdom of Israel and predicts the fall of Samaria. Much of his ministry therefore took place before the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 722 B.C..

C. Themes

The book of Micah is somewhat difficult to analyze because of its loose organization. Nevertheless, certain important themes are clearly evident. Samaria's doom is certain and Judah's is not far behind. Both Judah and Israel were strong and prosperous, many evils existed. From Micah's message two main sins can be identified – the perversion of worship (1:7; 3:5-7, 11; 5:12, 13) and injustice toward others (2:1, 2, 8, 9; 3:2, 3, 9-11; 7:2-6). Micah's spirit burned with indignation at how these sins, rampant in the capital cities, had now infiltrated the entire country. These internal evils eventually led to the downfall of the kingdom. When the enemies invaded the country, Micah severely warned them of their sins, proclaimed the impending disasters, but also proclaimed hope, repentance and the future blessings of God.

D. Teachings from the Book of Micah

a. True worship

Here the prophet Micah rebuked the cities of Jerusalem and Samaria, idol-worshiping centers, for their evils. Micah charged the rulers of Israel, the prophets and the people with injustice of many kinds. The rulers had rejected justice. They hated good and loved evil (3:1,9). They robbed and devoured the people of all that they had and were violent and murderous (3:1-3, 10). The prophets and priests served only to fatten their own pockets. They blessed those who gave contributions to them, but cursed those who didn't. The people were guilty of worshiping carved images and false gods (5:12-14). They traded dishonestly (6:11) and the rich men were full of violence. Although the people carried out religious ceremonies, they did not know what God truly desired. They tried all kinds of ways to please Him. They suggested offering up burnt offerings of rams and calves, or great rivers of oil. If this did not please God, they would even offer up their own children as burnt offerings. But God does not desire such things. Micah preached that God's greatest desire is not the offering of sacrifices, but changed lives where they love God

and their neighbors. God desires that His people do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God (Mic 6:6; Amos 5:24; Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13). In our efforts to please God, let us examine ourselves in these areas continuously. Are we fair in our dealings with people? Do we show mercy to those who wrong us? Are we humble? True worship is to offer ourselves up as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1), not just to do holy work or offer tithes.

b. **The mountain of the Lord shall be the highest of the mountains**
In this prophecy Micah foretells how in the end time, God will establish a kingdom for Himself which is His church (Micah 4:1-3). This same prophecy was also declared by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 2:2-5. Both prophets predict how the true church, represented by the mountain of the Lord, will be highest of the mountains. The true church will surpass all other religions in the world and the people of all nations shall flow to it (cf Heb 12:22-23) because the laws of God will issue out of Zion (1 Tim 3:15). Many people will come to the true church because the truth, God's justice and judgment are found here.

Check for Understanding

Due to the nature of this lesson, some questions can be found under "Questions to Think About".

Life Application

Aspects of Love

Several years ago, Gary visited Russia at the dawn of their new republic. On one of his free afternoons he visited historical Red Square just outside the Kremlin. As he began to take in the incredible splendor, he noticed a crowd gathering in front of one of its monuments. The monument turned out to be Lenin's tomb. The crowd had gathered to watch the famous changing of the guards. Gary found himself surrounded by a crowd of Russian-speaking spectators. Since Gary doesn't speak Russian, the sound was all a blare.

As the replacement guards began to march to the tomb, the spectators began taking pictures, pointing at the scene unfolding before them. Suddenly, to Gary's left, he heard a familiar sound.

"Hey, Larry! Come over here. You can get a great picture."

Instantly, Gary tuned in. Why? Because someone was speaking his native language. No one else turned toward the other two Americans, for one obvious reason: They didn't speak English. And while they quickly realized another language was being spoken, they could not relate to it.

While the crowd at the tomb stretched to see the event, Gary accidentally bumped into the man standing behind him. Gary turned his head and said, "Excuse me." Although those words came to him spontaneously, he realized the person he spoke to had no idea what he just said. While English was Gary's primary language and the one he would naturally speak, it did not make sense to his neighbor.

Say to students:
This story provides a great analogy for the language of love. Most of us here tend to speak English but this may come across to some other people in another part of the world as an unknown tongue. As a result, our efforts to demonstrate love can be frustrated or misunderstood. But if this was taken into the context of God and His people – sometimes God and His people do not speak the same language of love. From our lesson we discover that the Israelites thought they loved God whereas in fact God abhorred their behaviors. Contrastingly, there may be times when we have misunderstood God's love; sometimes God's love is interpreted as unkindness, neglect or joviality. God's version of love and human understanding of love are very different. In the following exercise, list the different qualities of God's divine love and our own human understanding of love.

1. **What does love look like to God?**

2. **What does love look like to you?**

3. **Look up the following Bible verses to see what love truly is:**
   Jn 14:15, 21, 24
   Rom 5:8
   Rom 13:8-10
   1 Jn 2:5
   1 Jn 3:17; 3:18; 4:8; 4:20
   Eph 2:4-7

Now let's look at a famous Bible passage on love – 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. As you read, list the seven characteristics of what love is and the eight that it is not (1 Cor

13:4-7). Rewrite each of the "Love is…." qualities to show what love looks like in their specific situation, at home, work, church. Examine yourself and think of real situations in life where you have failed to practice these aspects of love. The first is done as an example.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7	Areas where I have failed to love	Love in action
Love is patient	I screamed and yelled at my brother to get off the computer after chatting online for hours	I need to let him know kindly
Others		

Discussion:

1. Which aspect(s) of love do you feel you need to work on most?

2. How can we love others when we really don't "feel" like it?

3. How can we love others who are unlovable?

4. How does this passage enhance your understanding of what true love is?

Reflection & Prayer

A League of Their Own is a film about the women's professional baseball league that existed during WWII. At one point in the movie, the star catcher for the Rockford Peaches, Dottie Hinson, tells the manager, Jimmy Dugan, that she's quitting the team to go home.

"It just got too hard," she says.
"It's supposed to be hard," Dugan says. "If it weren't hard, everyone would do it. The hard is what makes it great."

Jesus spoke similar words to His disciples when He said, "If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collects do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else?"

Love isn't right only when it's easy; it's right when it's hard too. The most holy God demonstrated this by sending His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners, not desiring that anyone should perish. Let's not excuse or explain away our unloving attitudes and actions toward such people because it's too hard or that we don't feel like it. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love, so that we may love as the Lord loves.

Lesson 6

Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk

Listed Scriptures

Nah 1; Zeph 1, 3; Hab 3

Lesson Aim

1) To enable students to understand that God repays each person according to his/her deeds.
2) To know that God is in full control.
3) To learn to trust God no matter in good or bad times.

Memory Verse

"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in the God of my salvation." (Hab 3:17-18)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Nah 1; Zeph 1, 3; Hab 3

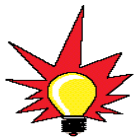
Bible Background

Nineveh

The subject of Nahum's prophecy was Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Nineveh is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 10:11-12. Nimrod built several cities in southern Mesopotamia and then "went to Assyria where he built Nineveh." Nineveh is situated on the east bank of the Tigris River and is over 250 miles from Babylon. According to history, Assyria was noted as being one of the cruelest, vilest, and most powerful and most idolatrous empires in the world. Gross idolatry was practiced in Nineveh and throughout the Assyrian Empire. The religion of Assyria was Babylonian in origin but in Assyria the national god was Assur, whose high priest and representative was the king. Historical writings show the

pride and brutality that characterized the city. After one of his conquests Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) boasted, "I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool… The heads of their warriors I cut off and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens and burned in the fire (Luckenbill, ancient records of Assyria and Babylonia 1:148). Little wonder why God sent his prophet to proclaim destruction upon the city. The fall of Assyria is also mentioned in several other Old Testament passages (Is 10:12-19; 14:24-25; 30:31-33; 31:8-9; Ezek 32:22-23; Zeph 2:13-15; Zech 10:11).

W A R M U P



Different Answers

They're almost unbelievable –
some prayers' answers
You sent so fast
they took my breath away
And made me laugh.
I thank You.

I thank You there were other times
it seemed
You've left me
way out
in the dark
to wait…..
Until You became
more important
than any answer
I was looking for.

B I B L E S T U D Y

Part 1

The Book of Nahum

A. Author

The name "Nahum" means "Comfort" or "Consolation." His message of doom for Nineveh was doubtless a source of comfort to the inhabitants of Judah who had suffered under the cruelty of the Assyrians. According to Nahum 1:1, the prophet was called the "Elkoshite." Although the precise location of Elkosh is unknown, many scholars believe that Elkosh was a town in southern Judah between Jerusalem and Gaza. This would make Nahum a prophet of the southern kingdom and may explain his interest in the triumph of Judah.

B. Date

Like Jonah, Nahum's message speaks of the destruction of the city of Nineveh. Nahum's message was delivered some one hundred years after Jonah, some time before 612 B.C. when the city was destroyed by the Babylonians.

C. Themes

In contrast to his predecessor Jonah whose ministry resulted in the repentance of the Ninevites, the prophet Nahum proclaims the ultimate downfall of the great Assyrian city of Nineveh. An end is to be made of this boasting, pagan citadel. The Ninevites had forgotten their revival and had returned to their habits of violence, idolatry, bloody cruelty and arrogance. As a result, the Babylonians would destroy the city and no trace of it will remain. Besides the message of Assyrian destruction, a note of comfort rings for God's people. The rod of Assyrian oppression will be broken; Judah can celebrate her solemn feasts and perform her sacred vows, for the wicked one shall no longer pass through her.

D. Teachings from the Book of Nahum

a. **God is just and avenging**

A hundred years earlier, when the prophet Jonah preached in the streets

concerning God's impending wrath, the people of Nineveh turned from their evil ways and God turned from what He said He would do to them. In the book of Nahum however, God is determined to bring destruction upon Nineveh. Why is God set on destroying Nineveh? It was because the Ninevites had failed to learn from past lessons. They had forgotten about their revival and God's mercy and instead had allowed evil to reign again. Because of their sins, Nahum predicted that this proud and powerful nation would be utterly destroyed. The end came within 50 years. God is slow to anger, but He will not allow sin to go unchecked forever. God's tolerance and grace is only for a while (Heb 6:4-8). In 2 Corinthians 6:2, apostle Paul reminds us, "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Let us therefore, repent and return God while we have the chance, before it is too late.

b. **The destruction and shame of Nineveh**

Assyria was one of the great civilizations of ancient times and had dominated the world for three centuries destroying anyone in her path. Nineveh the capital city of Assyria was considered impregnable, but the Lord prophesied that it would become a barren wilderness, a place of wild beasts. To predict the destruction of Nineveh would be equivalent to predicting the destruction of great cities such as Tokyo, London or New York. Nineveh was the Middle Eastern center for culture, technology and beauty. It had great libraries, buildings and a vast irrigation system that created lush gardens in the city. The city was 60 miles long, 100 feet high and over 30 feet wide and was fortified with 1,500 towers. Yet, despite the beautiful exterior, the prophet likens Nineveh to a beautiful harlot full of sins and wickedness (3:4). Her harlotries and charms were her gods, her fortified and prosperous cities, her armies and strength. History also tells us that Nineveh was a one of the cruelest, vilest and most powerful empires in the world. Assyria conquered and destroyed many nations. "The horsemen charging, flashing sword, glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end …" (Nah 3:3) depicts how the Assyrians used callousness and brutality to establish their nation. She also used her beauty, prestige and power to seduce other nations. Like a prostitute she enticed them into false friendships. When the nations put down their guard, thinking Assyria a friend, Assyria destroyed and plundered them. For these reasons, God will punish the "bloody city, all full of lies and booty." He will cause shame to fall upon it and it shall never rise again. Indeed, God's word never fails. The entire city was destroyed so completely that its very existence was questioned until it was discovered with great difficulty, by 19th century archaeologists. The area where it reigned in splendor had indeed become a wasteland. Today's world is likened to the city of Nineveh. It is like a harlot that is beautiful and impressive on the outside but is full of seduction and death. Let us not be deceived by it or lay our confidence on it, for God will cause it to come to utter ruin.

Part 2

The Book of Zephaniah

A. Author

The author of this book is the prophet Zephaniah. His name means, "He whom God hides." He was the fourth generation grandson of King Hezekiah (Zeph 1:1) and a distant relative of King Josiah. Ordinarily, the genealogy of the prophet is traced back no further than his father. Zephaniah however, traces his ancestry back four generations to demonstrate that he was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah (1:1). Zephaniah worked during the reign of King Josiah. During this time, the nation of Israel had long been destroyed by the Assyrians. Zephaniah came to preach the judgment of the Lord to the nation of Judah. When Hezekiah's son Manasseh and grandson Amnon were king, the country worshiped idols, defiled the temple, and were socially and religiously corrupt (2 Chron 33:1-11). When King Josiah reigned, Zephaniah counseled the young King Josiah to seek after God and his message greatly impacted the reforms that took place at the time (2 Kings 23:2-3).

B. Date

Zephaniah fixes the time of his prophecy on the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah who reigned from 640 to 609 B.C. Since the destruction of Nineveh had still to occur (612 B.C.), the book of Zephaniah can be dated between 640 and 612 B.C.

C. Themes

On the whole, Zephaniah is a grim book of warning about the coming day of the Lord. Because of their sins, the wrath of God will sweep over them. Desolation, darkness and ruin will strike Judah that even its silver or gold will not be able to

deliver it (1:18). Zephaniah also speaks of the judgment upon surrounding nations for the violence done to Jerusalem. Amidst this terrible pronouncement, there is hope – God will restore His people from captivity and show mercy to the faithful.

D. *Teachings from the Book of Zephaniah*

a. **The day of the Lord is at hand**

The prophet Zephaniah describes the terror of the disasters that will befall the city of Jerusalem on the day of the Lord. It was the day that the Babylonians would come and destroy Jerusalem. Zephaniah portrays the "great day of the Lord" as one of bitterness and wrath. "It is a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements."

The day of the Lord is also near us. God promises a final judgment, a day of worldwide destruction and judgment upon each person (Is 13:9; Ezek 7:19; Joel 2:2; Rev 18:14-19). However, the Lord also offers a means of escape – we need to depart from sin and turn back to God to avoid impending disaster. From the book of Zephaniah, who are those that will be judged on the day of the Lord?

1. Those who will be judged (1:4-13):

   i. Those who worshiped God and all the other gods of the land. Such people bowed down to God while swearing to Milcom, the national god of the Ammonites, and to other gods such as Baal (1:4-5). Maybe we too have been guilty of loving God and loving the world at the same time.

   ii. The officials and the king's sons and "those who clothe themselves in foreign apparel" will be punished for their sins. Those who wore heathen clothing represents those who desired foreign gods, foreign ways and who submitted to foreign corrupt practices. The leaders were adopting these practices and showed contempt to the Lord by ignoring His commands. Have we, like the Israelites, adopted the values, trends and ways of the world?

   iii. Those who use violence and fraud to fill their master's house.

   iv. Those who say in their hearts "The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil." Because the Lord did not take immediate reaction, the people became indifferent to God and did as they pleased. They became complacent in their sins and no longer cared about the consequences. Have we allowed sin to harden our hearts to the point that we no longer care? We need to turn back. Otherwise God's chastisement may come down on us, each time a little more severely.

2. Those who can avoid punishment:
   Although God's judgment is imminent, He calls the people of Judah to repent before the day of the Lord comes. Who are those whom the Lord will hide on the day of the Lord?

   i. The humble (2:1-3)

   ii. Those who seek the Lord

   iii. Those who obey His commands

   iv. Those who seek righteousness

b. **An invitation to repentance and restoration**

As with most of the other prophetic messages, imbedded in the announcement of judgment lies God's invitation for repentance. Before the coming of the terrible day when the wrath of God was to sweep everything away, the people of Israel were told to seek the Lord while He can be found and to turn from their rebellious ways. Although Zephaniah opens with a message of doom, he does not end on a dark note. He moves beyond the dark clouds of divine judgment to portray scenes where God will "gather those who have been scattered" to "bring them home" (Zeph 3:19,20). God's love and compassion is unfathomable. He desires that we return to Him. If we do, He will restore us. Manasseh was a king who did just that. Although he initially provoked the Lord to anger with his idolatry and rebellion, God later forgave and restored him when he saw that Manasseh truly repented and humbled himself (2 Chron 33). Manasseh showed his repentance by bearing fruits that befit repentance. Have we witnessed God restoring us after true repentance?

Part 3

The Book of Habakkuk

A. Author

The author of this book is the prophet Habakkuk. His name is derived from the Hebrew word which mean, "embrace" or "embracer." No other reference is made to Habakkuk's family background. Habakkuk worked when the Babylonian invasion was an imminent event. His work spanned from 625-610 B.C. during the reigns of King Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. His contemporaries were Zephaniah and Jeremiah.

B. Date

Although the book of Habakkuk includes no reference to the reign of a king, internal evidence indicates a date between the death of King Josiah (609 B.C.) and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. The only explicit time reference in Habakkuk is the warning of God's approaching judgment through the Babylonians. This prophecy was fulfilled in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar deported ten thousand of Jerusalem's prominent citizens to Babylon.

C. Themes

While other prophetic books brought God's words to men, the book of Habakkuk is unique in that it is a dialogue between God and the prophet. Habakkuk is perplexed over the corruption he sees around him. In his dialogue with God, Habakkuk first asks: "Why does God often seem indifferent in the face of evil? Why does evil people seem to go unpunished?" When Habakkuk learned that Judah's punishment would come at the hands of the Babylonians, Habakkuk was appalled and asked a second question: "How can God employ the Babylonians, a nation more wicked, to chastise His children?" God revealed to him that the Chaldeans will in turn face punishment and be destroyed. God's message to Habakkuk is twofold:

a. everyone will face judgment and justice will surely come.
b. God is in absolute control even when it seems evil and injustice triumph.

D. Teachings from the Book of Habakkuk

a. Habakkuk's perplexity

Have you ever experienced a time in your life when things just didn't make sense – when things didn't happen as the Bible says it would? Maybe we've questioned: "If we are the true church, why do the believers sin and do not behave any better than non-believers? If God is in charge of this universe, why does He allow the world to continue on its course of self-destruction? Why doesn't He put an end to all the cruel and bizarre things happening in our society? Why does God allow the wicked to prosper?

Habakkuk was a prophet who asked God the same kinds of questions. Habakkuk asked God a question: "Why did you do nothing with the wickedness, violence and injustice that prevailed among your people?" Not only did the wicked go unpunished, they lived in prosperity. God's response to Habakkuk's first question was that He was going to use the Babylonians as a tool to punish the sins of His chosen people. Upon hearing God's answer, Habakkuk posed a second question to God: "Why do you use such wicked people to punish your chosen people? Is this not allowing the Chaldeans to continue in their cruelty?" Habakkuk must have agreed that the people needed to be disciplined and punished, but what perplexed him was why God would use the Babylonians who were more evil and ungodly than the Jews.

b. Habakkuk deals with the problem

When Habakkuk was overwhelmed and confused by what he saw, how did he resolve his problems?

1. He brought his problems before God
   Habakkuk's name means "one who embraces." When Habakkuk felt anguish over the sins and iniquity of the people and over God's seeming silence, he acted true to his name–Habakkuk embraced God. He did not bury his frustration or conceal his feelings or questions under a cloak of spirituality. Rather he dealt with his problems in the right way – he brought them to God. He continued to pray till he received an answer from God. In the Old Testament, another prophet who was perplexed about God's doings was Jonah. He did not understand why God wanted him to preach to the Ninevites. Rather than bringing his struggles before God, Jonah tried to evade his problems. A man named Asaph also had many

questions regarding the justice of allowing the wicked to thrive while the righteous endured hardship (Ps 73). When he saw the injustice, Asaph was tempted to walk on the path of the wicked, until he entered the temple and found the answer (Ps 73:16-17). How have we dealt with the doubts and queries of life? The Lord Jesus openly invites those of us who are weary and burdened to come before Him and He will give us rest (Mt 11:28).

2. He waited for God in silence
"I will wait for you, like silence waits for sound, darkness for light, I will wait for you."

Simple as these words may seem, it conveys an all-important lesson of waiting for God. After Habakkuk presented his struggles to God, he went up to the watchtower to wait for God's answers (2:1). The watchtower was often used by the prophets to show an attitude of expectation (cf Is 21:8; Jer 6:17; Ezek 3:17). These stone towers were built on city walls or ramparts so the watchmen could see people (enemies or messengers) approaching the city while at a distance. For Habakkuk, the watchtower was the best position to receive God's message while he waited and watched. While we wait for God's answers to our inquiries, we need to keep silent. In the process of waiting, we will discover that through prayers, our attitudes change and we have the inner strength to face the difficulties and the challenges before us. Oftentimes, God's good will is not manifested until an appointed time (2 Cor 4:5). Meanwhile God's answer to Habakkuk is the same answer He gives to us, "Be patient! God will work out His plans." We need to fully trust God even when it seems nothing is happening.

2. He kept on believing
When things happen to us we need to have trust and faith in the almighty God. King Solomon spent much time seeking for answers but at the end he discovered that there are things that are incomprehensible (Eccl 8:16-17). In Ecclesiastes 3:11, Solomon reveals, "God has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." And in Deuteronomy 29:29 it says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." When things seemed unfair and unfathomable, Habakkuk still maintained his faith in God. Even when he did not understand, he believed

that God knew what He was doing. In times when our limited understanding restricts us from really understanding God's ways and thoughts (Is 55:8-9), let us continue to trust and believe that God is in absolute control and is working things out for His eternal purpose.

c. God Answers Habakkuk

1. The good and evil shall be repaid
God answers Habakkuk by revealing to him that the Chaldeans will suffer for their offenses. Although Habakkuk could not comprehend why God used the Chaldeans as his instruments, he knew that God had His reasons (Prov 16:4). But one thing is certain; no cruelty, no crime, no injustice escapes the attention of God. He will punish the Babylonians as well as His own people for their wickedness. Hence we need not fret when we see the wicked prosper or when we face injustice because ultimately God will repay every man for what he has done (Ps 37:1; 44:21; Jer 29:23; Is 59:18; Mt 16:27; Rev 22:12).

2. The righteous shall live by faith
After Habakkuk received the revelations of God, the situation had not changed. God was still going to send the Babylonians to destroy His people, and deliverance from the enemy was not going to come. At the thought of this, Habakkuk says, "When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble" (Hab 3:16). But God gave Habakkuk an important message – "the righteous shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4). This verse has inspired countless Christians. The apostle Paul refers to it in Romans 1:17 and quotes it in Galatians 3:11. The writer of Hebrews quotes it in 10:38. With these very words, Habakkuk was able to rise from despair to rejoicing. In the final chapter of Habakkuk, the prophet raises a prayer of thanksgiving to God. He concludes, "Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fails, the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in the God of my salvation" (Hab 3:17-18). Here, the prophet was able to go beyond the present circumstances and see the sovereignty and greatness of God. Perhaps he still didn't know God's purpose for using the Babylonians, but his faith enabled him to see that God was in full control. God was still on the throne as the Lord of history and the Ruler of the nations. Can we hold onto God in good times as well as bad? Can we

still experience peace of heart even if things don't go smoothly? In difficult times, God may not change our circumstances or remove our burdens, but through faith in His word, God can bring us to the point where we can rejoice in Him and we find that His grace is sufficient for us.

E. *Questions to Think About*

1. How do you deal with injustice in your life?

2. Are there situations or problems in your life that cause you to be confused and question God's almightiness and control of the situation?

3. Do we feel a sense of injustice towards those who do evil? Do we feel injustice because of our own personal benefits, or because of the sake of God's law and righteousness?

4. Share an experience where you trusted in God although you did not understand at the time. What lessons did you learn?

Check for Understanding

There are no questions for this lesson.

Life Application

Life is Not Fair!

Injustices happen the world over. It happened in the Bible, it happens around us each day. We see events that go contrary to biblical principles, our ideals, and our expectations of life. Do we become angry because we have no control over it? Are there times when we feel angry even at God? Why does God allow such things to happen? What should we do in situations like these? How should we handle our feelings? Christians are not exempt from such feelings and even the spiritually mature can encounter such experiences.

Look up the passages to see how the people in the Bible dealt with similar situations.

Case 1
1. Read 1 Kgs 21:1-19 and 2 Kgs 9:30-36 to see what we should do.
2. What would you do when faced with such injustice?

Case 2
1. Read Gen 26:17-25 to see how the Bible speaks about a similar issue.
2. Write down how you would respond to such an injustice.

Case 3
1. Read Ps 73 to find out how the psalmist dealt with this.
2. How would you respond in such a situation?

Case 4
1. Read Gen 37:21-28 and 44:1-8 to see what the Bible says.
2. How would you respond to see someone you cherish suffer helplessly?

Case 5
1. Read James 1:1 to see how we should handle such a situation.
2. How would you react to such a situation?

Reflection & Prayer

Dear Lord,
We are not good at resting in the hollow of Your hand. Nothing in our experience has taught us this resting. We have been taught how to take charge and to be in control but not how to rest and trust. You have set us an example to submit everything to Your will and control. Help us to walk as You have walked. When things are not going right, or when things are not going our way, help us to see what You see. At times when we see the schemes of the wicked succeed and their ways prosper while the way of the righteous is a thorny and perilous one, help us to live by faith. For those who remain still and trust in You will not be put to shame. You never fail and we wait for Your appointed time.

Lesson 7

The Book of Jeremiah (1)

Listed Scriptures

Jer 1-2, 16-17

Lesson Aim

1) To enable students to realize the importance of knowing the truth in order to discern between right and wrong beliefs.
2) Students will recognize that false christs and heresies will arise in the end time.

Memory Verse

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord." (Jer 31:31-32)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Jer 1-2, 16-17

Bible Background

Jeremiah was a prophet who ministered during the reigns of Judah's last five kings – Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet during the 13th year of King Josiah's reign. King Josiah began as a God-fearing man and in the first 18 years of his reign, he repaired the holy temple, destroyed all the idols and restored the nation back to God (2 Kgs 22-23). However, in the 31st year of his reign, when King Neco of Egypt was marching through Judah to Assyria to battle against Babylon, King Josiah, dismissing the prophet's warnings, tried to stop the Egypt's army from marching through his land. Josiah was killed in battle, his army was defeated, and the nation of Judah became a vessel to Egypt. Neco took Josiah's son Jehoahaz to

Egypt and appointed Jehoiakim, another of Josiah's sons, king of Judah instead. In 605 B.C. Egypt was defeated by Babylon and Judah became a vessel of Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1).

While Josiah followed God, Jehoiakim his son, was evil. The winds of idolatry revived and he persecuted the prophet Jeremiah and killed the prophet Uriah (Jer 26:20-23). He was dishonest, greedy and unjust. He even destroyed the scroll on which the law of God was written (Jer 36:23). Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon, switching his alliance to Egypt, but this proved to be a crucial mistake. Nebuchadnezzar crushed Jehoiakim's rebellion and carried him to Babylon (2 Chron 36:6). This was the first of three Babylonian invasions of Judah that occurred over the next 20 years; the other two invasions occurred in 597 and 586 B.C.. During the first invasion, captives such as Daniel and his three friends were taken to Babylon. After Jehoiakim, his son Jehoiachin became king of Judah but he reigned for only 3 months, before the Babylonians came and invaded the land a second time. During the second invasion, the Babylonians looted the temple and took most of the leaders, including the king, as a captive. Nebucadnezzar placed Zedekiah, another of Josiah's sons, on the throne. When Zedekiah was king, the prophet Jeremiah urged him to submit to Babylon because Babylon was God's tool to punish his people (Jer 21:27, 29, 34, 38), but Zedekiah refused to listen and had Jeremiah shut up in the court of the guards as a deserter. Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon and in the final invasion, Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed the temple, carried away all its treasures, tore down the city's massive walls, removed the land of its people and stripped the nation of its very foundation.

Part 1
Background Information

A. Author

The author of this book was Jeremiah (1:1), who dictated all his prophecies to his secretary Baruch. Only chapter 52, a supplement which is almost identical to 2 Kings 24:18-25:30, was evidently not written by Jeremiah. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, the priest and lived about two miles north of Jerusalem in the town of Anathoth. Although it is not specifically known how old Jeremiah was when he was called to be a prophet, we know that he was young in years. His ministry stretched from c.627 to c.580 BC and he served for 40 years. Jeremiah worked as a prophet during the time of King Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. His ministry can be divided into three main periods: From 727 to 605 B.C. he prophesied while Judah was threatened by Assyria and Egypt. From 605 to 586 B.C. he proclaimed God's judgment while Judah was threatened and besieged by Babylon. From 586 to about 580 B.C., he ministered in Jerusalem and Egypt after Judah's downfall. Jeremiah's contemporaries were Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel during the time of exile.

B. Date

According to Jeremiah 36:1-3, the writing of portions of Jeremiah may be dated with precision to the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 BC) when Jeremiah was commanded by God to write down the prophetic messages he had delivered to the people over the previous twenty years. This material apparently corresponds to chapters 1-20. The remaining chapters contain prophecies and historical accounts in topical rather than chronological order, covering the latter twenty to twenty-five years of Jeremiah's ministry.

C. Themes

When Jeremiah became a prophet, the northern kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed. Judah meanwhile was immersed in sin and moving head-on towards destruction. Jeremiah's passionate pleas to the rebellious nation were only

met with hatred and persecution. He cried and wept for the plight of his nation and thus became known as the "weeping prophet." Although Jeremiah warns the people of impending doom, the message of the future that Jeremiah gives to the people is one filled with hope. Jeremiah lived to see many of his prophecies come true – most notably the fall of Jerusalem. Yet, Jeremiah did not despair. Jeremiah had predicted that after the destruction of the nation, the nation of Israel would be restored and the kingdom of God would be re-established. All the people who had been scattered to foreign lands will return to Israel and God will establish a new covenant. God would send a new Shepherd, the Messiah who would lead the people into a new future and new covenant. He would accomplish this by changing their sinful hearts into hearts of love for God.

Part 2
Teachings from the Book of Jeremiah

A. The Sins of the People

In order to prove how corrupt the people had become, God asked them to run through the streets of Jerusalem to see if they could find a man who did justice and sought the truth. If so, God would pardon the city. No matter where they searched, in any level of society; rich or poor, none could be found. All had turned against God (Jer 5:1-5; Rom 3:23). What sins were the people guilty of?

a. **They worshiped idols**

The greatest sin that Judah and Israel were guilty of was idolatry (Jer 1:16; 2:11-13, 27-28; 3:9, 24-25; 7:18; 10:8-10, 14-15; 11:13; 18:13-15; 19:13). In Jeremiah 2:13, God rebuked the people for forsaking the fountains of living water and hewing out cisterns for themselves. Who would set aside a sparkling fresh spring of water for a cistern, a pit that collected rain water? God told the Israelites that was what they were doing when they turned from Him, the fountain of life-giving water, to idols. Not only that, they had made for themselves cisterns which were broken and empty. These cisterns were idols made from their own hands, which could not move, speak or save (Jer 10:1-16; 2:26-28). The people ran wildly after them and yet their devotion was useless (Is 44:9; 45:20). What are the cisterns that we have hewn for ourselves?

b. **They relied on foreign powers**

Another type of broken cistern the people had made for themselves was their

reliance upon foreign powers. The leaders had turned from trusting in God to other nations. Kings Jehoiachin and Zedekiah both relied on Egypt for help, but like broken cisterns, these foreign powers failed them. Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord…" Blessed rather are those who put their trust in God (17:7-8).

c. **Their faith had become a formality**

In Jeremiah 7, God sent Jeremiah to the temple gates to confront the people and the leaders of their empty religion. Jeremiah said to the people, "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, `The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.'" The people mistakenly thought that so long as the temple existed, God would continue to abide with them. Despite their evil and immoral ways, God would never let the holy temple be shaken (Ps 46:4,5), and so long as they worshiped in the holy temple, there would be peace. But the people did not realize that if they did not depart from their evil ways, God will depart from the temple, in the same way that the ark was captured from Shiloh (1 Sam 4:10-11; Ezek 9-10; cf. Josh 18:1, 21:2; 22:9,12; Jdgs 21:19-21). God will completely raze the southern kingdom and the temple in the same way that the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed (722 BC).

d. **Questions to think about**

Do we see any parallels between how the people of Judah viewed their temple and how we view the church today? Are we more concerned about going to church for appearances than the substance of a changed life? Do we see the church as a mental crutch, thinking it will protect us from evil and problems?

B. The Sins of the Leaders

In Jeremiah 23, God condemned the shepherds, the judges, officials, kings, priests and prophets whom God had appointed to rule the nation, of destroying and scattering the sheep (Jer 2:8; 1 Kgs 22:17; Ezek 34:1-10).

a. **The sins of the priests**

In the temple, the two most important roles were those of the prophets and the priests, who acted as mediators between God and His people. But Jeremiah summarizes the chaotic state of the religious climate of the time: "An

appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction" (Jer 5:30-31). These very leaders were leading the people astray. On the one hand these men served God, but on the other they violated their covenant with God by serving false gods (Jer 22:8-9; Jer 23:11; 7:3-11, 30). They were arrogant, self-serving and they persecuted the prophets of God. Jeremiah received countless persecutions from their hands. He was beaten (20:1-2), mocked (20:7-8), put in stocks (20:2-3), bounded and threatened with death (26:8), and imprisoned (38:6).

b. The sins of the prophets

The false prophet was the greatest obstacle that prevented the people from hearkening to the words of Jeremiah. In the book of Jeremiah, chapters 5, 14, 23, 27, 28, 29 are devoted to describing true and false prophets. While Jeremiah prophesied how God will use Babylon to punish His people, the false prophets declared that disasters will not come and peace would prevail (5:31, 6:14, 14:13-16, 23:17, 27:15,19; 28:9, Mic 3:5; Ezek 12:24; Is 30:10). While Jeremiah prophesied how the people and temple treasures would all be carried to Babylon and remain there for 70 years, the false prophets prophesied that within two years, God will bring back the vessels and all those exiled to Babylon (Jer 28:1-17). The false prophets professed to be prophets of God, yet their prophecies were not from God. They spoke visions from their own minds and not from the mouth of the Lord (14:14; 23:21; 28:1-4). Consequently, God will wipe them out and He will bring perpetual shame upon them.

C. *The Prophecies of Warning and Punishment to Judah*

Besides verbal warnings, God uses visions and symbolic actions to portray His judgment to His people.

a. The Rod of Almond (1:11-12)

In this vision, God shows Jeremiah a rod of almonds. The coupling of the image of the scourging rod with that of an almond tree had a special meaning. The almond tree is known to be among the first to blossom in spring. In the Bible the rod had several meanings; it could refer to the stem of a growing plant (Ezek 19:11-14), a soldier's weapon (1 Sam 14:27), a king's scepter (Ps 110:2) or the wonder-working rods of Moses and Aaron (Ezek 4:7,8; Num 17). It is used by the shepherd to marshal and count his sheep (Lev 27:32, Mic 7:14), or defend his flock (Ps 23:4), but it is usually taken to be an instrument of punishment (Is 10:5). God reveals to His people that He will carry out swift judgment and that the destruction of Judah will come soon.

b. The Boiling Pot (1:13-14)

The boiling pot tipping southward and spilling over Judah refers to the judgment that will come upon Judah by enemies from the north (1:14; 4:5-13; 6:1-8, 22-26; 8:14-17; 5:15-17; 25:9). The bible uses "north" as the source of disaster (Joel 2:20; Ezek 38:15, 39:2). In Jeremiah 20:4, Jeremiah for the first time designates the Babylonians as the enemies from the north. They are like a lion (4:7), hot wind (4:11), cruel and merciless like the roaring sea (6:23).

c. The Ruined Loincloth (13:1-11)

God instructed Jeremiah to buy a linen loincloth and hide it in a hole in the rock by the Euphrates River. A long time afterwards when it was brought out, the loincloth was ruined. This was to tell the people of Judah that because they refused to listen to God they too would be like the ruined loincloth - filthy, and good for nothing.

d. The Potter and the Clay (18:1-12)

In this message, the prophet uses the analogy of the potter and the clay to illustrate God's sovereignty and judgment upon the nations and individuals. Man is like the clay in the hands of the potter (18:1-10). How God uses the clay depends on Him entirely. He has the right to even reject the spoiled clay vessels. Through this vision, the prophet urges the people to repent and submit to God before He is forced to bring judgment.

e. The Broken Vessel (19:1-26)

God told Jeremiah to buy an earthen flask and smash the flask before the elders of the people and priests. God wanted the people of Judah to know that God would smash into pieces the arrogant city of Jerusalem if they do not turn back.

f. The Two Baskets of figs (24:1-10)

Three months after Jehoiachin became king, the city of Jerusalem was besieged by Babylon. Jehoiachin gave himself up and he, his mother, his servants, princes, and palace officials were taken captives to Babylon. Those who were left in Jerusalem considered themselves as "the holy remnants" and regarded those who were exiled to Babylon as being forsaken by God.

However, through the vision of the two basket of figs, Jeremiah explained that in actuality, the good figs were those who submitted to the will of God by going into captivity. God would preserve them and eventually bring them back to their homeland. The bad figs, on the other hand, were those who remained behind in Judah or those who escaped to Egypt. The people believed that remaining in Judah was God's blessing, not realizing that it was God's intention to refine His people through the captivity.

g. **The Cup of Wrath (25:15-38)**
Judah would not be the only nation to drink the cup of God's wrath. Jeremiah listed other wicked nations who would experience God's wrath at the hands of Babylon. Finally, Babylon itself would suffer the same fate because of its sin.

h. **The Iron Yoke (27:1-28:17)**
God told Jeremiah to put a yoke around his neck and to then go and see King Zedekiah, to persuade him not to rebel against Babylon. Any nation who refused to submit to Babylon's yoke of control would be punished.

D. *The Promise of Restoration and Return*

When the people continued in their hard-heartedness, God punished them by carrying them off to foreign lands. Although for a moment of anger the Lord brought destruction upon the entire city and country, yet God's favor and love for them is eternal (Ps 30:4-5). God will restore the fortunes of Jacob and He will rebuild the land from ashes.

a. **Their sins will be wiped away (33:8-9)**
Because of their sins, God had turned His face away from them. But when the sins of the city was rid of, it will be a land of joy and laughter. The people will walk on the path to the temple to offer sacrifices of praise.

b. **They will have a shepherd (33:12)**
The leaders of the nation had failed tragically in their role as shepherds of the people and so God was to establish a shepherd who will lead them and protect them from danger. This prefigures the coming of the Lord Jesus who would be the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep (Jn 10:11).

c. **God will establish an everlasting covenant (31:1-40)**
God promises to establish an everlasting covenant which will be written upon

their hearts. Through the Holy Spirit, the people will worship not out of formality but in spirit and truth.

Check for Understanding

In this world there are many people who have built broken cisterns for themselves to satisfy their inner thirst. But these broken cisterns cannot provide living water or true satisfaction. What kind of broken cisterns have people created for themselves to satisfy their inner thirst?

Life Application

The King's Song

Three knights sat at a table and listened as their prince spoke. "My father, the king, will give the hand of my sister to the first of you who can prove himself worthy." The prince paused to let the men take in the news. He looked at their faces – each weathered from miles and scarred from battles. The three had much in common. They were the strongest warriors in the kingdom and they each wanted to marry the daughter of the king. The king had promised each a chance - a test to see which was worthy of his daughter. And now the time for the test had arrived.

"The test is a journey," the prince explained, "a journey to the king's castle by way of Hemlock."

"The forest?" one knight quickly inquired.

"The forest," answered the prince.

There was silence as the knights thought about the words. Each felt a stab of fear. They knew the danger of Hemlock, a dark and deadly place. Parts of it were so thick with trees that the sunlight never found the ground. It was home of the Hopenots – small, sly creatures with yellow eyes. Hopenots were not strong, but they were clever, and they were many. Some people believed the Hopenots were lost travelers changed by the darkness. But no one really knew for sure.

"Will we travel alone?" Carlisle spoke - a strange question to come from the

strongest of the three knights. His fierce sword was known throughout the kingdom. But even this steely soldier knew better than to travel Hemlock alone. "You may each choose one person to travel with you all the way to the castle."

"But the forest is dark. The trees make the sky black. How will we find the castle?" This time it was Alon who spoke. He was not as strong as Carlisle but much quicker. He was famous for his speed. Alon left trails of confused enemies. He had escaped them by ducking into trees or scampering over walls. But quickness is worthless if you have no direction. So Alon asked, "How can we find the way?"

The prince nodded, reached into his sack, and pulled out an ivory flute. "There are only two of these," he explained. "This one and another in the possession of the king." He put the instrument to his lips and played a soft, sweet song. Never had the knights heard such soothing music.

"My father's flute plays the same song. His song will guide you to the castle."
"How is that?" Alon asked.

"Three times a day the king will play from the castle wall. Early in the morning, at noon, and again in the evening. Listen for him. Follow his song and you will find the castle."

"There is only one other flute like this one?"

"Only one."

"And you and your father play the same music?"
"Yes."

It was Cassidon who was asking. Cassidon was known for his alertness. He saw what others missed. He knew the home of a traveler by the dirt on his boot. He knew the truth of a story by the eyes of the teller. He could tell the size of a marching army by the number of scattered birds in flight. Carlisle and Alon wondered why he asked about the flute. It wouldn't be very long before they found out.

"Consider the danger of Hemlock and wisely choose the one who will be with you on your journey," the prince cautioned.

And so they did. The next morning the three knights mounted their horses and entered Hemlock. Beside each rode the chosen companion. For the people in the

king's castle, the days of waiting passed slowly. All knew of the test. All wondered which knight would win the princess. Three times a day the king sent his song soaring into the trees of Hemlock. And three times a day the people stopped their work to listen.

After many days and countless songs, a watchman spotted two figures stumbling out of the forest. No one could tell who they were. They were too far from the castle. The men had no horses, weapons, or armor.

"Hurry," the king commanded his guards, "Bring them in. Give them medical treatment and food, but don't tell anyone who they are. Dress the knight as a prince, and we will see their faces tonight at the banquet." He then dismissed the crowds and told them to prepare for the feast.

That evening a joyful spirit filled the banquet hall. At every table the people tried to guess which knight had survived Hemlock Forest. Finally, the moment came to preset the winner. At the king's signal the people became quiet, and he began to play the flute. Once again the ivory instrument sang. The people turned to see who would enter. Many thought it would be Carlisle, the strongest. Others felt it would be Alon, the swiftest.

But it was neither. The knight who survived the journey was Cassidon, the wisest. He strode quickly across the floor, following the sound of the flute one final time, and bowed before the king.

"Tell us of your journey," he was instructed. The people leaned forward to listen.

"The Hopenots were crafty," Cassidon began. "They attacked, but we fought back. They took our horses, but we continued. What nearly destroyed us, though, was something far worse."

"What was that?" asked the princess.
"They imitated."

"They imitated?" asked the king.

"Yes, my king. They imitated. Each time the song of your flute would enter the forest, a hundred flutes would begin to play. All around us we heard music – songs from every direction."

"I do not know what became of Carlisle and Alon," he continued, "but I know that strength and speed will not help one hear the right flute."

The king asked the question that was on everyone's lips. "Then how did you hear my song?"

"I chose the right companion," he asked as he motioned for his fellow traveler to enter. The people gasped.

It was the prince. In his hand he carried the flute.

"I knew there was only one who could play your song exactly like you," Cassidon explained. "There is no one else I would have trusted to be with me all they way. So I asked him to travel with me. As we journeyed, he played your song. I learned it so well that though a thousand false flutes tried to hide your music, I could hear your song above them all. It was with me all the way."

And with that, the celebration began.

Say to students:
This story is a great illustration of the importance of being able to discern between right and wrong. In Jeremiah's days, the people were led into wrongful thinking because what the false prophets preached seemed right at the time. Sometimes the difference between right and wrong is ever so subtle. Just as how false prophets prospered then, in the end time, one of the greatest dangers is the coming of many antichrists who will lead many astray (1 Jn 1:18).

In various letters of the Bible, the apostles such as Peter, Paul and Jude encouraged the believers to confute, contend, and restore the truth (Acts 20: 28-31; 2 Thess 2:1-12; 2 Pet 3:1-18; Jude 3, 17-19). While on earth, the Lord Jesus also warned that in the end time "false Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect" (Mk 13:22). What forms do these false prophets and false Christs take? What can we do to defend our faith against such influences? The most important way to maintain a pure faith is to be rooted in the words of God. We must learn the "King's Song".

True and False Statements
Below are some true and false statements. Read them carefully and consider whether the statements are true or false. After everyone has completed the exercise, go through each statement one at a time. Discuss why you believe that the statement is true/false.

1. God is so great so there really is no one way to be saved. All religions are true because we are all worshiping God.

2. It is all right to hug and kiss during dating, so long as we don't step over the line. It is a way of developing a meaningful relationship and to see whether we're compatible or not.

3. God does not control us. He would rather we obey Him because we want to and not because we have to. Therefore, it is alright not to do certain things that God asks because we do not want to.

4. We should not judge others because God says, "Do not judge." Rather we should forgive and love others, afterall we are not perfect ourselves.

5. As believers we have the freedom to marry believers and non-believers alike. The Bible does not say that we cannot marry outside of the faith. It is a great way of bringing people to the faith and if our unbelieving spouse accepts the faith, it is evidence of God's choosing.

6. If we look at the churches around us, we wonder why they are thriving, while very few enter the TJC. It's time to make the truth more palatable and less harsh. We could start with praying more with words of understanding rather than in tongues because in this way, more people would not be scared off so soon.

Things to consider:

1. The spirit of error can come under the guise of love and acceptance. God is love and He accepts you regardless of what you believe. God's love has given people the license to condemn those who preach Jesus as the only way of salvation. If we don't accept them, we are not open and intolerant of differences. But the Bible tells us there is only one way to salvation, and that is through the Lord Jesus. The truth cannot be compromised for the sake of love.

2. Kissing and hugging are the initial steps to expressing our sexual feelings. But God has set limits on our expression of sexual feelings before marriage. This is a safeguard for us, since who can guarantee that we will end up marrying that person we date and have expressed our sexual feelings to? By being too close too soon our future marriage can be affected. The relationship that

should be a wonderful special experience just for the two of you is no longer so special if others have had a sample. The shadow of failed relationships will always loom over us even after we have married someone else.

3. God has given us pretty clear instructions. He has shown us the way that we can obtain eternal life and to live a life pleasing to Him and satisfying to us. When we choose to obey these instructions we will be rewarded while wrong choices may result in sin and suffering. Because of His love, God has given us the freedom of choice. We can choose to obey or disobey Him. While it is true that God desires that we obey Him because we want to, God still desires that we obey Him even at those times when we don't want to. Our feelings of not wanting to do what God wants may be understandable, normal or even justifiable at times (e.g. the Lord Jesus). But when we obey, it demonstrates our true love for Him because we place God above ourselves.

4. When we assert a certain view on something, we inevitably make a judgment about others who do not conform to our viewpoint. When the Lord says that we should not judge, He is referring to those that judge out of a hypocritical attitude of condemning others when we are worse than the one we are condemning. To be a mature Christian we need to have the ability to make right judgments in all things and to have good spiritual discernment. This is different from the worldly view which thinks that love is what makes you feel good and it is willing to sacrifice moral principles in order that others do not feel uncomfortable, threatened or intimidated.

5. Throughout the Bible there are certain passages that show God's desire for His people to marry in the faith. There are reasons behind God's command:

   a. For the sake of our own salvation
   * In 2 Corinthians 6:14 – Paul urges believers not to marry with non-believers because it will weaken our Christian commitment, integrity and standards and compromise our faith.
   * Deuteronomy 7:1-6 – God instructs the people not to marry gentiles because our faith may be compromised and we will be influenced by worldly values.

   b.For our own happiness and to have support in our journey of faith
   * Joshua 33:12-13 – Oftentimes because of conflict of interests and faith, arguments and disagreements arise. These are the snares, scourges and thorns in our marriage. As a result we cannot enjoy the true happiness and freedom that God had intended.

   c.For the sake of our descendants
   * Malachi 2:15 – One of the purpose for marriage is so that we can bear godly offspring. It is much easier for children to be rooted in the faith when both parents are of the same faith.

   While it is true that when an unbelieving spouse accepts the faith, it is evidence of God's selection and mercy, it does not however, cancel out our act of disobedience. The fact that a non-believing spouse enters the faith does not cover up our sins. God will still hold us accountable for our actions.

6. False teachers are popular because like false prophets of the Old Testament, they tell people what they want to hear. Christians who faithfully teach God's words will not win any popularity contests in the world. People don't want to hear their sins denounced, they don't want to listen to demands that they have to change. Today, many churches employ all sorts of strategies, activities to attract membership. While we may take some of these as reference, the main attraction should be the truth and the Holy Spirit. God's work is accomplished "not by our might or power, but by God's Spirit."

Suggested reading:
The Spirit of Truth or the Spirit of Error? Manna, Issue 41, July-Sept 2003, p.28

Reflection & Prayer

As we live in the end times, may the Lord grant us a spirit of wisdom and discernment to have the courage to contend for the faith.

Lesson 8

Jeremiah (2) and Lamentations

Listed Scriptures

Jer 45-46

Lesson Aim

1) Students will recognize that in times of suffering, we need to turn to the source of hope, the Lord Jesus.
2) To enable students to know the importance of obedience in times of trials.
3) Students will learn of the importance of repentance.

Memory Verse

"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." (Lam 3:22-23)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

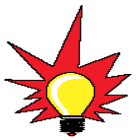
Jer 45-46, Lem 1-4

Bible Background

When Jeremiah finally made his way to Babylon, he found the Hebrew people in far better condition than most of us might imagine. There were no concentration camps and no slave labor. Instead the exiles enjoyed royal protection and a great amount of self-government. They married, kept in touch with Jerusalem (Jer 29:1) and some enjoyed special prerogatives such as owning their homes and land (Jer 29:5, 7; Ezek 8:1; 12:1-7). Jeremiah 29:5-7 indicates that they were so successful financially that they were able to send money to Jerusalem, and when the exiles were given permission by Cyrus to return home, some preferred to remain in Babylon. Yet the experience was a bitter one for many of the exiles. After the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, when all hopes of return

seemed gone, the people of Israel began to realize how much they had lost. The birthright they had so lightly traded away for pagan Baals and Asherahs suddenly seemed precious. Israel realized at last that if they were not God's people, they had no identity. If they no longer retained the promises, life had no meaning. This sense of loss is communicated in the brief book of Lamentations.

Warm Up



The Signal

The young man sat alone on the bus and most of the time stared out the window. He was in his mid-twenties, nice looking with a kind face. His dark blue shirt matched the color of his eyes. His hair was short and neat. Occasionally he would look away from the window and the anxiety on his young face touched the heart of the grandmotherly woman sitting across the aisle. The bus was just approaching the outskirts of a small town when she was so drawn to the young man that she scooted across the aisle and asked permission to sit next to him.

After a few moments of small talk about the warm spring weather, he blurted out, "I've been in prison for two years. I just got out this morning and I'm going home." His words tumbled out as he told her he was raised in a poor but proud family and how crime had brought his family shame and heartbreak. In the whole two years he had not heard from them. He knew they were too poor to travel the distance to where he had been in prison and his parents probably felt too uneducated to write. He had stopped writing to them when no answers came.

Three weeks before being released, he desperately wrote one more letter to his family. He told them how sorry he was for disappointing them and asked for their forgiveness. He went on to explain about being released from prison and that he would take the bus to his hometown – the one that goes right by the front yard of the house where he grew up and where his parents still lived. In his letter, he said he would understand if they wouldn't forgive him.

He wanted to make it easy for them and so he asked them to give him a sign that he could see from the bus. If they had forgiven him and wanted him to come back home, they could tie a white ribbon on the old apple tree that stood in the front yard. If the signal wasn't there, he would stay on the bus, leave town and be out of their lives forever. As the bus neared his street, the young man became more and more anxious to the point he was afraid to look out the window because he was so sure there would be no ribbon.

After listening to his story, the woman asked simply, "Would it help if we traded seats and I'll sit near to the window and look for you?" The bus traveled a few more blocks and then she saw the tree. She gently touched the young man's shoulder and choking back tears said, "Look! Oh, look! The whole tree is covered with white ribbons." And is this not our Heavenly Father's response when we repent and return to Him?

Bible Study

Part 1

Jeremiah the Prophet

What is success? Most definitions include references to achieving goals and acquiring wealth, prestige, favor and power. Successful people enjoy the good life – financially and emotionally secure, surrounded by admirers, and enjoying the fruits of their labors. They know who they are, and where they are going.

By these standards, Jeremiah was a miserable failure. For 40 years, he served as God's spokesman to Judah; but when Jeremiah spoke, nobody listened. Although he urged them consistently and passionately with tears, nobody moved. And certainly he did not attain material success. Throughout his life, Jeremiah stood alone, declaring God's messages of doom, announcing the new covenant, and weeping over the fate of his country. Certainly, in the eyes of the world, Jeremiah was not a success. But in God's eyes, Jeremiah was a great success – he fully obeyed God and was faithful in proclaiming His words. In today's lesson we will look at Jeremiah's trials and struggles of being a prophet of God and how he was successful in the eyes of God.

A. The Calling of Jeremiah

During the 13th year of Josiah's reign, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of God at the tender age of about 20. He was God's spokesman for about 40 years, right up to the time the people were taken into captivity. Even then, Jeremiah continued to preach God's words. But Jeremiah's calling as a prophet did not begin at 20. In Jeremiah 1:5 and 1:10, God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Samson the judge (Judg 13:2-5), John the Baptist (Lk 1:15), the apostle Paul (Gal 1:15) were also called from the womb and separated for the work of God. Each Christian has a purpose in life, but some are appointed for specific assignments. Jeremiah was chosen for his generation and for the work that God wanted to accomplish. Similarly, in each generation, God will raise workers to meet the needs of each generation. Let us not be discouraged when we look around and see that there are not enough workers. Instead, let us pray that God will inspire His workers, beginning with ourselves.

B. The Trials of Jeremiah

a. **Jeremiah's physical trials**

The commission that God gave to Jeremiah was a heavy and difficult one. His mission was twofold; Jeremiah was sent to Judah not only to build and to plant: he was to pluck up, break down, destroy, and overthrow (Jer 1:10). When Jeremiah loudly and publicly prophesied concerning the destruction of the temple and the end of David's kingship, the people and leaders could not tolerate it. In their eyes, Jeremiah was a traitor who had to be silenced. Out of all the prophets, Jeremiah was one who suffered and was persecuted the most. Besides a smattering of kings, priests and people, everyone else hated, opposed, and persecuted him; particularly, the priests and false prophets. Jeremiah was beaten (20:1-2), mocked (20:7-8), put in stocks (20:2-3), bounded, threatened with death (26:8), imprisoned (21:1,3; 37:11-17; 37:21; 38:7-28; 40:1,6; 43:6-7), and several times came close to death.

b. **Jeremiah's inner trials**

What was perhaps greater than Jeremiah's physical suffering was the intense inner struggles and frustration that he faced. On the one hand, Jeremiah had committed his whole life to serve the people, yet, it was these very people who cursed and rejected him. His faithfulness to God brought nothing but hatred, isolation, and persecution. He felt God had made him a prophet

against his will and instead of glory and honor, his life was filled with rejection, disappointment and shame. Yet, at the same time, Jeremiah felt the heartache of a father who could only stand and watch as his beloved child continued in his stubborn and destructive ways. At times, Jeremiah 's struggle becomes so intense that like Job, he wished he had not been born (20:14-18). When Jeremiah decides that he will no longer speak for God, a burning in his heart moves him to speak which ultimately brings him further rejection from his people (Jer 20:7-10). Despite the hardships and his frustration with God, Jeremiah plodded on. God had called him to endure and he must continue to do God's work. Eventually Jeremiah was able to rise above his struggles to see a God who would execute justice, and administer mercy afterwards. We may be able to identify with Jeremiah's weakness, doubts and frustrations in our work for God. Workers of God are not supermen or women. As we carry out God's purpose, we will meet with inner challenges and struggles, but we need to realize that Jeremiah's life is an encouragement to us to be faithful in God's work regardless of what we come up against. God promises us that His grace will carry us through.

C. The Sacrifice of Jeremiah

Throughout his prophetic ministry, Jeremiah was asked to deny his own desires and make certain sacrifices in order to fulfill the plan of God.

a. **Jeremiah was not to marry**

No matter which generation, denying the desire to marry and have a family is painful, but even more so in Jeremiah's time. The Jews recognized God's will for them to marry and to have children (Gen 1:28; 2:24). In the Talmud, it records that if a man is not married by the age of twenty he will be cursed. Getting married and having children was seen as a blessing from God and to be without children was seen as a curse from God. Without children, a man's inheritance could not be secured, and his name would discontinue. Despite this, God asked Jeremiah to refrain from marriage (Jer 16:1-2). Through Jeremiah, God wanted to illustrate to the Judahites how close judgment was and that there was no time to establish a family (1 Cor 7:26). When Jerusalem is besieged, children would die of disease, famine, or the sword; and, there would be no time to bury the dead (Jer 16:4).

b **Jeremiah was prohibited from entering the house of mourning or to the house of feasting**

God instructed Jeremiah not to enter the house of mourning to show Judah

that on the day of calamity, God too will not mourn their deaths. God also prohibited Jeremiah from entering the house of feasting because the time will come when there will no longer be the voice of mirth and gladness in Jerusalem (Jer 16:5,8). By refraining from mourning or feasting with his people, Jeremiah could not share in the people's grief or joy. This meant that Jeremiah became more and more isolated from his friends and acquaintances. This was a great sacrifice that Jeremiah had to make.

D. Jeremiah s Merits

a. He prayed for his enemies

Jeremiah is often known as the weeping prophet who for 40 years, pleaded, warned, and exhorted the people to depart from their evil ways. Although they often sought to harm Jeremiah, he continued to pray for them with tears. This is one of the finest examples of Christian love. How many of us would pray for our enemies? If we do, how many of us can pray with tears for them? When Jeremiah saw that his people would die of the sword, famine, and starvation (14:17-18), he pleaded earnestly for them. No matter how they hated him, he continued to love them and did not wish harm upon them. May we pray, earnestly and unceasingly for those who hate and persecute us, as Jeremiah did (Heb 13:3).

b. Faithful spokesman of God

Jeremiah obeyed God's commands fully. He performed whatever God wanted him to do, and he preached whatever God wanted him to say. Jeremiah does not speak of his own accord. Every utterance begins with, "Thus says the Lord." In the first chapter alone, this phrase is used 11 times (chapter 2, 10 times; chapter 3, 10 times and likewise for subsequent chapters). This proves that Jeremiah was literally the mouthpiece of God.

c. He did not emphasize on the results

Although Jeremiah labored his entire life, the people did not change and the country was still invaded. It seemed as if his efforts were a flop. Despite the results, Jeremiah did not lose heart - he continued to convey God's message regardless. Let us also learn not to emphasize on the results when we do God's work. All we need to do is to faithfully accomplish what God has given us and leave the outcome to God.

Part 2
The Lamentations of Jeremiah

A. Author

Although Jeremiah is not named in the text, the book of Lamentations has traditionally been attributed to him.

B. Date

According to tradition, Lamentations was composed shortly after the destruction of the Holy City and the temple between 584-586 B.C.

C. Themes

While the book of Jeremiah predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, Lamentations looks back on it. The five chapters of Lamentations consist of five mournful poems, describing the funeral of a city. It is a tear-stained portrait of the once-proud Jerusalem, now reduced to rubble by the Babylonians. It is written during the years which Judah spent in exile in Babylon, and shares the inmost feelings of the Jews who had been torn from their land and separated from the now-destroyed temple because of their sins. But in the middle of the book there shines a ray of hope. God's compassion is ever present. The book shows us the serious consequences of human sin and how in the midst of tragedy we can still have hope in God if we pray for forgiveness and turn to Him for deliverance.

D. Teachings from the Book of Lamentations

a. The effects of sin

When God created the world, He saw that everything was good. However when sin came in, the world was cursed. In history, no matter how splendorous or strong a nation and its people were, sin became the cause of its destruction. Although Judah and Israel were God's very own people, although Jerusalem was THE holy city, but due to the rebelliousness of the people and their reluctance to obey God or his prophets, they too were punished and destroyed. Their land was invaded (1:3,5-6,18,14; 2:9; 4:18,19), Zion laid desolate (1:1,4; 2:5,8; 4:2) and God's name was disgraced (1:7,8,10;

2:13,15,16,20; 4:7,8; 5:15-18). These are the consequences of sin. The author of Lamentations grieves over sin and its devastating effects (4:5,6; 1:5,9 8,18,20,14).

b. **God's faithfulness**

From the Lamentations of Jeremiah we can learn that God is not to be mocked (Gal 6:7). In Isaiah 46:9-11 God says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." For 40 years Jeremiah had warned the people that this would happen, but the kings, priests and prophets regarded Jeremiah's message as nonsense. However, through time, every word of doom and promise was fulfilled. This confirmed that Jeremiah was God's faithful prophet, and that God's words will never fall away empty.

c. **Hope amidst despair**

The disaster that befell Jerusalem was great. She that was once a princess had now been reduced to a widow. All her glory had gone and her friends had become her enemies. No one walked on the road to Zion, foreigners trampled in the temple of God and her enemies prospered and ruled over her (1:16; 2:1; 2:11; 3:48, 49; 2:18, 19, 10, 3:42, 18, 44).

Although Jeremiah was in bitter despair, his hope towards God remained strong. Although the dark clouds hid the sun, yet with eyes of faith, he could see the sun's rays (3:21-23; 3:24,25,26,40,41,31,32,50; 5:21). Jeremiah understood that God is just and He will punish the sinners. However, in judgment Jeremiah could see God's mercy and grace. Jeremiah remembered that not only was he instructed to pluck up, break down, destroy and overthrow but also to build and plant. When Jeremiah was reminded that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and His mercies never come to an end" (Lam 3:22-23), his hope in God was reaffirmed. God's compassion is ever present. His faithfulness is great. Jeremiah realizes that it is only the Lord's mercy that has prevented total annihilation. Therefore, when we face storms of life and times of deep despair, let us remember that God is abundant in love; "He has plans for our welfare and not for evil, to give us a future and a hope" (Jer 29:11).

Check for Understanding

1. Have you ever been too timid to take on a task presented to you?
2. What are your thoughts regarding God's selection of His workers?
3. What can we learn from the trials of Jeremiah?
4. What is your understanding of God's treatment towards the gentile nations and His people?
5. How can we see God's love in the midst of punishment?
6. How can we buoy our hope in a helpless and despairing situation? Share an experience.

Life Application

Return to Me

In the history of Israel, sin was always the cause of her downfall. The prophet Isaiah pointed out to the people why God seemed so distant to them: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Is 59:2). Our fellowship with God can likewise suffer as a result of our sins. If we do nothing about our sins, our hearts becomes hardened and we turn away from the living God. Therefore, the Lord offered the Israelites a way to restore their relationship with Him. God cried out to them, "Return to me, and I will return to you." In our daily lives we constantly commit sins in our thoughts, speech and actions. We may repent, but find that our relationship with God is not as sweet as it was. In the exercise below, we will examine what true repentance is.

Bible Passage	Sin	Action Taken	Consequences
2 Sam 12:1-15			
Mt 27:3			
Lk 19:1-10			
Lk 18:10			

1. What happens to our hearts if we do nothing about our sins?

2. What is your understanding of true repentance?

3. Think of a time that God has called you to repentance. How did He do it? What was your response?

4. Fill in the following:

Benefits of repenting	Consequences of not repenting

5. Fill in the following:

Things that can prevent me from repenting	Ways that I can overcome them

6. Action Steps:
Make a short list of some of the areas in our lives that need repenting (i.e., what you could improve upon or change your mind and actions about).

Things that need repenting	Actions that I will take

Possible teacher Answers:

1. If we sin and do not repent, sin will deceive our hearts (Heb 3:12-13).

2. Dictionary definition: to feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrong doing or sin.
Biblical definition: Repentance means recognizing and turning from the wrongful behaviors that we have. We must be determined to turn from our evil ways (Prov 28:13b), make restitution for our wrongs, change our values, walk in righteousness and bear fruit worthy of repentance (Mt 3:7-8).

3. Ways that God may call us to repentance:
The word of God (Heb 4:12; Jon 3:1-5)

Holy Spirit (Jn 16:8)
Through visions or dreams (Joshua 7:10ff)
Conscience (Prov 20:27)
Repentance is brought about through God's chastisement such as sickness or adversity
Through witnessing miracles
Through the people around us such as sermon-speakers, peers, teachers, parents, etc.

4.

Benefits of repenting	Consequences of not repenting
a. Find mercy and forgiveness of sins (Prov 28:13d) b. God's wrath is removed and He will withdraw His punishments (Joel 2:12-13) c. To receive peace and blessings d. Leads to salvation (2Cor 7:10)	a. Prayers hindered (Lk 13:1-9; 1Jn 1:8-9) b. Severe judgement (Ps 7:12; Mt 11:20-24) c. Rotting in the bone and burning and no peace inside (Ps 32:3-5) d. Lose salvation e. No way to accept God's word & kingdom (Mt 3:2) f. Without repentance we cannot progress or improve spiritually

5.

Things that can prevent me from repenting	Ways that I can overcome them
a. Insensitive to sin (Jer 8:4-8) b. Our pride - fear of losing face (Acts 17:30) c. Complacency d. Self-righteousness (Jer 2:35; Lk 18:9-12) e. When we believe that our sins are too great for God's forgiveness (1Jn 1:8-9), (Lk 15:7,10) f. When we fear punishment	a. Student answers

6. Student answers

Reflection & Prayer

The journey of faith is an endless struggle. In our spiritual battle we are often caught in the lust of our flesh and we often fail to be watchful. We ask the Lord to search us so that we may know ourselves – and Him – in fuller measure. The sacrifices that God desires are not tens of thousands of oxen and sheep or rivers of oil, but rather a broken and contrite spirit. May God grant us the courage to see ourselves clearly and the boldness to change.

The Perfect Temple

unit 3

Goals

In this unit, students will learn about the captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem, and how the Israelites had learned a very harsh and difficult lesson. God's abidance did not lie in the structural temple but rather in meeting the exact standards and holiness of God. In the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the people had returned from captivity. Their goal now was to rebuild the temple, the city walls and revive their faith. Just as how the Israelites returned to build the physical temple, our students will learn that we need to build the spiritual temple of God; the church and our own faith. To do this, we rely not on might, nor power, but on the Holy Spirit.

Teacher Devotional

In the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes, Calvin, a six year old boy and his toy tiger Hobbes, which comes alive in Calvin's imagination, decide to build a model of a phantom jet. Eager to have it finished, Calvin decides that it's easier to improvise on his own than figuring out the complicated instructions. When he has finished, he looks at his model and is upset because his plane doesn't look anything like the picture on the box. Similarly, when we build the spiritual temple of God, we need to be careful on how we build it. We need to read God's instruction manual carefully and to follow the directions precisely. There is no room for us to improvise or deviate. Only then can we experience the glory of the Lord and have His abidance.

Building the Temple of God

"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."
(1 Pet 2:5)

Lesson 9

Ezekiel (1)

Listed Scriptures
Ezek 1-3, 18

Lesson Aim
1) Students will learn of the reasons for the Israelites' captivity.
2) Students will realize that without holiness, no one can see God.
3) Students will gain a better understanding of God's discipline.

Memory Verse
"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." (Ezek 11:19-20)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*
Ezek 1-3, 18

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Glory of God

The word glory is a significant one in the Old Testament and the glory of God is a major theme in the book of Ezekiel. The Hebrew word, Kabod, comes from a root that means "heavy" or "weighty." It suggests what is impressive or worthy about a person or thing. The term is often associated, in ancient cultures, with kings who possessed both high position and great wealth. In the Old Testament the phrase, "the glory" or "the glory of God" is closely linked with God's revelation of Himself. It is the manifestation of God's character – His ultimate power, transcendence, and moral perfection.

Warm Up

The Oyster

There once was an oyster
Whose story I tell,
Who found that some sand
Had got into his shell.
It was only a grain,
But it gave him great pain.
For oysters have feelings
Although they're so plain.

Now, did he berate
The harsh workings of fate
That had brought him
To such a deplorable state?
Did he curse at the government,
Cry for election,
And claim that the sea should
Have given him protection?

No – he said to himself
As he lay on a shell,
Since I cannot remove it,
I shall try to improve it.
Now the years have rolled around,
As the years always do,
And he came to his ultimate
Destiny – stew.

And the small grain of sand
That had bothered him so
Was a beautiful pearl
All richly aglow.
Now the tale has a moral;
For isn't it grand
What an oyster can do
With a morsel of sand?

What couldn't we do
If we'd only begin
With some of the things
That get under our skin.

What are some of the things that God has used in your life to refine you?

Bible Study

Part 1
General Overview

A. Author

The author of this book was Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, a Zadokite priest. The meaning of Ezekiel's name is "God will strengthen." At the time of the second Babylonian invasion of Judah (597 B.C.), 25 year-old Ezekiel was taken to Babylon along with King Jehoiachin and 10,000 other captives. The nation was on the brink of complete destruction. Five years after being deported God called Ezekiel to be a prophet at the age of 30. Ezekiel had a unique two-part ministry. Between 592-586 B.C., Ezekiel's messages contained warnings about Jerusalem's destruction before its final destruction in 586 B.C. For the 15 years after that, Ezekiel was silent. Then, in 571 B.C. the prophet took up a new ministry. His message now was one of hope, promise, and comfort for the exiles.

Two of Ezekiel's contemporaries were Jeremiah and Daniel. When Ezekiel was called to be a prophet, Jeremiah was advanced in age and approaching the end of his prophetic career. God thus raised a prophet from among the exiles to continue in the work. While Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem just before the imminent destruction, Ezekiel worked among the captives already in Babylon, by the River Chebar - a tributary of the River Euphrates. Meanwhile, the prophet Daniel had been taken captive eight years before Ezekiel and was serving the king in the royal palace in Babylon.

B. Date

Ezekiel was carried off to exile in Babylon after the city fell a second time to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. His first vision dated around 593-92 BC and the date given for his last oracle is probably around 571-70 B.C. This book is the easiest of the Old Testament books to date because of Ezekiel's unique orderly sequence of dates. Each section of prophetic oracles begins with the year and day of the month.

Part 2

The Calling of Ezekiel

While Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem about the imminent destruction of the city to the Babylonians, Ezekiel was called by God to declare the exact same message to the captives who were taken to Babylon during the first deportation. Like those in Jerusalem, the captives refused to believe that Jerusalem would fall. They were convinced that they would return to their land soon. Ezekiel warned them that because of their stubbornness, punishment was certain and that God was to use the captivity to purify His people. Through visions, Ezekiel received a personal vision of the unchangeable holiness of God and his commission to be a prophet and watchman of Israel.

A. The Vision of the Four Living Creatures

a. **The faces of the four living creatures**

In this first vision, Ezekiel sees four living creatures, each having the face of a man, lion, ox and eagle. These four faces symbolize God's perfect nature and the attributes a servant of God and a true believer should possess.

The face of a man: Man is superior of all living creatures and created after the image of the living God, filled with righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). As servants of God, we need to imitate the likeness of our Lord Jesus who is full of holiness, compassion, and humility.

The face of a lion : The lion is the king of beasts and is a majestic, bold and

powerful animal. As servants of God we need to have the courage to eliminate sin and to preach the word of God fearlessly.

The face of an ox : Oxens are animals known for their strength, hard work and willingness to serve. When we serve God let us imitate the diligence, strength, patience, long-suffering and humility of the oxen (Prov 14:4).

The face of an eagle: Eagles are considered to be the most superior of all birds. They fly to majestic heights transcending mountains and earth. Their eyes are sharp and piercing. As servants of God we need to rise above the world and look to matters above. We should have the spiritual knowledge to discern all things and to know what is the good and perfect will of God. Furthermore, we need to carry the word of God afar to the four corners of the earth.

b. **They had four wings (Ezek 1:6,11)**

The four living creatures each had four wings; two wings touched the wings of others, while two covered their bodies. When we do holy work, we need to stay connected with each other and be united in our service. Unity and teamwork is the secret for executing the work of God effectively. The two wings that covered the body remind us to serve God unobtrusively and to give glory to God in all things.

c. **Under their wings they had four hands (Ezek 1:8)**

The hands beneath the wings symbolize how God's work is humbly carried out by man.

d. **Their legs were straight and they had the sole of a calf's foot (Ezek 1:7)**

As servants of God we need to be committed to walking on the right path. Our feet cannot stray to the left or to the right.

B. The Vision of the Four Wheels

Beside the four living creatures were four wheels. The four wheels represent the continuous and unceasing motion of the gospel and God's power. The wheels move with order and regularity. Similarly the entire universe and the history of mankind are all governed by the invisible power of God.

a. **A wheel within a wheel (Ezek 1:16)**
The wheel within a wheel depicts two wheels, one facing north-south and the other facing east-west, demonstrating the ability to move anywhere. God is omnipresent and there is nothing that can hinder or restrict Him.

b. **The spirit of the creatures were in the wheels (Ezek 1:19-20)**
Wherever the wheels went, the creatures went also. God's spirit guided and governed the movements of the four living creatures. As servants of God we need to totally submit to the Holy Spirit's direction.

c. **The wheels were full of eyes (Ezek 1:18)**
This represents God's wisdom and omniscience. God's eyes are in every place, keeping watch over the good and the evil (Prov 15:3), therefore let us be faithful in our service to Him.

C. *The Vision of the Glory of God*

Appearing over the heads of the four living creatures was a firmament and above the firmament, the Son of Man was seated upon a throne. His body shone like bronze and all around was the appearance of a bow. The throne was the glorious throne of God: the throne of mercy, of authority, and of judgment. This throne appeared to the captives in Babylon and suggests that God's wrath and judgment was but for a moment. His grace and love will abide with His people, even in captivity. The rainbow over the throne assures the people of God's never-ending faithfulness towards His chosen ones.

Part 3

The Prophecies Concerning the Destruction of Jerusalem

Using visions, parables, allegories, and symbolic action, God pronounces judgment upon His people. The judgments of God were as follows:

A. *Each person will be judged according to his or her deeds (14:14; 18:11, 22, 30)*

During the time of Ezekiel, a proverb was circulating among the people: "The

fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek 18:2). When the people were first deported to Babylon in 597 B.C., some of them believed that they were being unjustly punished for the sins of their forefathers. Here Ezekiel flatly refutes that misconception. He reminds the people of Judah that they were punished for their own rebelliousness. Although we often suffer from the effects of sins committed by those who came before us, God does not punish us for someone else's sins; and we cannot use their mistakes as an excuse for our sins. The people also thought that they would live and escape punishment because of their righteous ancestors (18:5-9). Taking Noah, Daniel and Job as examples of righteous men, the Lord said that on the day of judgment, the righteousness of these men cannot be used to cover up anyone's evil or wicked deeds. Our salvation is between God and us alone. The righteous deeds of our parents, siblings or any other person will only save themselves. We need to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

B. *God would send His people to exile (Ezek 12:1-20; 17:1-21)*

It was not enough to just use words to warn the rebellious house of Judah of God's wrath. God asked Ezekiel to perform unusual actions to graphically portray the fate of Jerusalem to a people whose heart, eyes and ears were dulled by sin.

a. Using a brick, a map of Jerusalem, and an iron plate, Ezekiel enacted the coming siege and fall of Jerusalem (Ezek 4:1ff).

b. Ezekiel was instructed to lay on his left side for 390 days and 40 days on his right side to show Israel the years of punishment that will befall Israel and Judah (Ezek 4:4-6).

c. The prophet followed specific cooking instructions (4:9-17). The amount of food he was allowed to eat was the normal ration provided to those living in a city under siege by enemy armies. The food cooked over cow dung was a symbol of Judah's spiritual uncleanness and Ezekiel's restricted movement illustrates how the people of Jerusalem would be imprisoned within the walls of the city.

d. Ezekiel was directed to shave his head and beard, and then to divide the hair into three parts (Ezek 5:1-4). This represents how the Israelites would die of famine, pestilence, and the sword.

e. God asked Ezekiel to prepare an exile's baggage, eat bread with quaking and drink water with trembling and fear because the Lord would send His people into exile. This sign was fulfilled 5 years later - the Babylonians invaded the city for a final time and the last king of Judah joined the exiles already in Babylon (Ezek 12:2-7; Jer 52:7).

f. Ezekiel sang a death dirge to show Judah that there was no hope for a quick return from exile and no escape from the approaching Babylonian armies (Ezek 19:1ff).

g. In the parable of the cooking pot (Ezek 24:1-14), Ezekiel was to put some choice meat in a pot and boil it well in the fire. The people in Judah thought they were the choice meat because they had not been taken into captivity in 597 B.C. when the Babylonians last invaded the land. Ezekiel used this illustration to show that though the people thought they were safe and secure inside the pot, this pot would actually be the place of their destruction. This message was given to the exiles in Babylon the very day the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, beginning a siege that lasted over 2 years and resulted in the city's destruction.

h. God instructed Ezekiel that He was going to take away his wife, but the prophet was not allowed to mourn, bare his head or feet, or accept the food brought to him (Ezek 24:20-24). Ezekiel showed his fellow exiles that this would be the scene when Jerusalem is besieged.

C. *God s glory departs from Jerusalem*

The glory of God is the manifestation of God's divine nature and represents the abidance of God. If we trace the history of the Israelites, the glory of God had always been with His chosen people.

a. When the Israelites departed from Egypt, God's glory could be seen in the pillar of cloud and fire which directed the people through the wilderness.
b. The beginning of the temple began with the tent of meeting at the time of Moses (Ex 40). After the tent of meeting had been built, the glory of the Lord filled it and was so great that not even Moses could enter it.
c. After the tabernacle was built, God's presence and glory filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35).
d. At the dedication of Solomon's temple, God also filled the temple with His glory (2 Chron 7:1-2) so that the priests could not enter.

But when Israel turned from God, persisted in sin and profaned the temple with idols and wickedness, God departed from the temple and His people. Although the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel describe the splendor of God's glory, chapters 8-11 graphically present the glory of God departing from the temple step by step:

a. The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house (9:3; 10:4). He left the cherubim, guarding the mercy seat.
b. The glory of the Lord went from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim (10:18).
c. The glory of God mounted up from the earth and stood at the door of the east gate of the house of the Lord (10:19)
d. The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city (Mt of Olives) (11:22-23).
e. The glory of the Lord left the temple, the holy city and the earth (11:24).

God was reluctant to leave His people. His heart was still with them and He hoped that the people would change. But they didn't. And so God left Jerusalem and abandoned His altars, temple and people. From chapters 12 to 42, there is not a single reference to the glory of God. The glory of God would only return when the Israelites had received the full punishment from God and were cleansed. This occurs in chapter 43 onwards when the glory of God reappears instantaneously and in full splendor. Today, the temple of God is the body of believers. In order to have the abidance of God, we need to strive for holiness and keep His commands.

Check for Understanding

1. What can we learn about servitude from the vision of the four living creatures?
2. What is the glory of God?
3. Reflect on the glory of God in the history of the Israelites.
4. What lessons can we learn from the departure of God's glory from Jerusalem?

5 Why were verbal messages not sufficient – why did God ask Ezekiel to perform symbolic actions also?

6 What are some of the symbolic actions that Ezekiel performed?

Life Application

The Lord's Pruning

Just as a farmer uses various methods to ensure that his fruit trees bear abundant fruits, our Heavenly Father too uses different ways and means to bring His children back when they stray so that they might bear good fruits.

1. My view on discipline
   (students' response)

2. God's view on discipline
   God's discipline is never out of vengeance or with evil intent. It is a sign of His love (Rev 3:19; Jer 31:20; Heb 12:6).
   As a means of receiving benefit (Heb 12:10; Is 48:17)
   To help us discern the right way (Ps 31:8; 119:67, 71, 75)
   To gain peace and eternal life (Is 38:17; 54:13; Prov 23:14; 19:18)
   To help us change so that we strive for holiness (Prov 3:19; Heb 12:10)
   To bear good fruit (Heb 12:11-12; Ps 119:67)

3. In the first tree, list some of the things a farmer might do to improve the size, quality, and productivity of his fruit trees.

   What a farmer does:
   Apply water – apply the right amount at the right time
   Apply fertilizers – to give the plant nutrition
   Remove damaged or malformed fruit
   Prune – cuts off older branches to produce new growth
   Remove broken limbs, dead or diseased wood
   Thinning – remove immature fruit which will improve size and quality of fruit
   Control the direction of tree growth – to enable proper shape to develop

4. In the next tree, list the ways our Heavenly Father would prune and discipline us so that we can bear fruits of righteousness.

   What God does:
   Through Holy Spirit (Jn 16:7-8; Eph 4:30; Jer 20:8-9; Ac 2:37)
   Through the words of God (2 Tim 3:16; Ps 118:17)
   Through God's servant or the people around us (Tit 1:3; Heb 1:1; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Prov 27:5)
   Visions and dreams (Job 33:14-18; Gen 31:24)
   Through creation (Rom 1:20; Heb 3:4)
   Through punishment/disasters (Job 36:15-16; Jer 18:11)

5. Share an experience where you were disciplined by God.

6. What were your feelings or thoughts throughout that time?

7. What good things have resulted in your life from God's discipline?

8. Read the following testimonies of God's discipline in the lives of people that He loves. Share your thoughts with the rest of the class.

Testimony 1

One truthseeker received the Holy Spirit upon coming to the True Jesus Church. Reluctant to take the next step in getting baptized she prayed to God to show her what she should do. The first time the Lord answered her prayers was during one Sabbath service. During the sermon, the elder quoted from Acts 16:22: "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." The sister stared with astonishment at the speaker and wondered if this was truly God speaking to her.

That same evening while making a final prayer for the day, the sister asked the Lord a second time about whether she should get baptized and if this was the right time to be baptized or if she should wait for her husband who was still an atheist. As she prayed in this way, the Holy Spirit came down upon her mightily. Her tongue began to roll very fluently and her entire body vibrated greatly. The entire room shook; the bed vibrated and even the windows rattled loudly. Her non-believing husband was stunned to witness such a scene. Still, the sister was not fully convinced.

The next evening she asked God a third time. This time, the Lord answered her

question through a dream. In her dream she saw two people engaged in conversation, in a place that was filled with glory and light. Both were wearing white robes. She noticed that she was one of them and the other was the Lord Jesus. In the conversation, the sister asked the Lord about getting baptized and about her concerns. The Lord had a very soft, kind and smiling demeanor and He listened attentively and patiently. The more the sister spoke, the more emotional and agitated she grew, and the louder her body gestures became.

As the sister continued in this manner, the Lord suddenly raised His hand and slapped the sister on the face. This woke the sister up from her sleep. Even though it was a dream her face felt painful and stung from the slap. Feeling extremely hurt and angry, she said to God, "I only asked You whether I needed to be baptized, why did You need to go and slap my face?" She turned in her bed and decided there and then that she would not get baptized.

During the following two weeks the sister refused to read the Bible. One day while sitting on the sofa in her living room, she noticed her Bible lying on the coffee table. She picked it up and began to flick through the pages when her eyes fell on the words recorded in Hebrews 12:5–6. She read the words to herself: "And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by Him. For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives."

After the sister read the passage, the hurt, anger and sorrow that she harbored inside subsided immediately. She was greatly moved by God's love for her. In her heart she heard the Lord say to her, "Your Father disciplined you for your own good". The sister decided then to receive baptism.

Testimony 2

Brother N was baptized into the True Jesus Church only a couple of days after he was born. Although he grew up in a Christian family, he was not interested in church. He would much rather gamble and have fun. He'd use his lunch money to play the slot machines in the arcades, and instead of going to church on the Sabbath, he would go out with friends. Lying, stealing and getting into fights became his way of life. No matter what his mother said or did, brother N would not change. At times when his mother used a bamboo stick to discipline him, he would beg for mercy and apologize to his mother. But as soon as the beating was over, he would go back to his old habits. In a desperate search for a solution, his mother sent him to the United States to study in the hope that a change of environment would change her son. At the age of 11, brother N departed for San Diego where he was to stay with his aunt and her family who were atheists. Over time, he began to lose his faith. He stopped going to church and lived a life pursuing worldly things. Gradually, he did not believe in the existence of God and forgot how to pray.

At the age of 17, something happened that was to change Brother N for life. One night, when he was alone in the house, he suddenly heard a soft and kind voice telling him to, "Go to pray." He became scared and quickly looked around the living room to see if anyone was there. There was no one. Thinking that it was probably his own imagination playing tricks on him, he returned to his own room. He closed the door behind him immediately and turned on the light. Just when he felt safe, he heard the voice again saying to him, "Go to pray." This time he knew it was not his imagination. It was a kind and tender male voice, the likes that could never be heard on this earth. Brother N knew instantly that it was the Lord Jesus calling him. He felt he could not refuse to pray and he was afraid that if he did not pray, God might discipline him the way his mother did many years ago. Without realizing it, Brother N knelt down, clasped his hands, and said, "In the Name of the Lord Jesus I pray, Hallelujah praise the Lord Jesus, Hallelujah praise the Lord Jesus…." Less than five minutes later, tears streamed down his face, and he began to cry bitterly. Suddenly, God opened his eyes to see a vision. In the vision, brother N saw thousands of small TV screens. Each screen displayed all the bad things that he had done since childhood, deeds done in secret and the deeds done in public. God later showed him the consequences of his deeds; his deeds incurred anger, loss, injury and sorrow to the people around him. He could not deny any of it.

One scene showed an incident that occurred when brother N was still in Taiwan. Curious about deflating a tire, brother N placed a handful of tacks underneath one of the tires of his neighbor's taxi. Hiding behind a bush he watched to see what would happen. To his disappointment, the taxi driver simply drove off. In the vision however, God revealed to brother N the consequences of his actions. He saw an angry taxi driver staring at a deflated wheel that had been punctured by the tacks. Another scene that brother N saw was one of his mother. He saw his mother praying alone for her lost son. The air was heavy with sadness and sorrow. And in the light of the moon, he could see teardrops flowing down his mother's face. For seven years his mother had prayed unceasingly for her son to return to God. Upon witnessing these scenes, brother N realized that he was a sinner and repented bitterly of all the evil things that he had committed. He resolved to change his ways and to make the Lord Jesus, His Savior and God.

Testimony 3

One summer, two brothers planned for a day of fishing. A few days prior to this, they logged onto the Internet to check the fish count. Seeing that there was plenty of fish, they decided to go. They decided to go for only half a day thinking that if there is a lot of fish, then they should be able to catch plenty and save on boat fare at the same time. At five in the morning, the brothers set out with eager anticipation of catching a lot of fish. But for the whole morning, they did not catch a single bite. They returned to the shore full of disappointment. They comforted each other with the thought that there was probably no fish that day. Even the captain of the boat was puzzled that there was no catch. To have absolute zero counts was extremely rare, particularly when it was a good fishing season. Since this was the case, brother X then asked brother Y if he would come with him to church to help plant a tree. It was only then that brother Y realized that brother X was responsible for planting a tree at church but he had set aside his responsibilities to go fishing instead. The reason why they could not catch any fish that morning was because brother X had not finished the work he had promised to do. The next day, brother X again logged onto the Internet to check the fish count. He learned that the boat that the brothers had gone out on that morning had zero count. But what surprised him was that the other boats that went out that same morning had all returned with great catches.

Testimony 4

One evening, a newly converted sister had a desire to watch an X-rated movie. Although she realized it was wrong, the temptation was too hard to resist. Justifying herself, she said to God, "This would be the last time" and without further thought, she sat and watched the entire movie. Not long afterwards, a sty developed in her eye. It swelled to such an extent that when she went to the doctors, they commented that this was one of the worst cases they had ever seen. Besides the swelling, there was a secretion of pus and blood. The only thing the doctors could do was to prescribe her some medication. That night at 2 am, the sister drove around town looking for an open pharmacy. The cost of the entire treatment set her back about $500-600. The sister understood that this was a lesson from God. In her prayers, she repented of her actions and about a week later, the swelling subsided.

Suggested Reading:
The Lord's Pruning, Manna, Issue 29.

Reflection & Prayer

Dear Lord, how painful it is to be struck with Your rod of love. But through its stripes, we are healed of our waywardness and our souls of stubbornness. From the experience we can bear an abundant harvest of righteousness. Lord, teach us to be grateful when we are disciplined by You for You discipline those whom you love.

Lesson 10

Ezekiel (2)

Listed Scriptures

Ezek 34, 37, 47

Lesson Aim

1) To enable students to understand that God is a just God who will hold nations and individuals accountable for their deeds.
2) Students will learn that the restoration of Israel, the church and the individual are solely dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit.
3) Students will learn about the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit to change their old natures.

Memory Verse

"Also He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army." (Ezek 37:9-10)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Ezek 34, 37, 47

Bible Background

Please see the Bible Background section in Lesson 9.

Warm Up

Give each student a blank piece of paper and a pencil.

Say to students: Let's try a little experiment. I am going to show you a picture for about 10 seconds. Copy it to the best of your ability. (Now show the group a drawing with different shapes. Give students a minute to recreate it on their own papers.)

I'm going to show you the picture again and you are going to compare your drawing to it. If you need to, fix your drawing so it looks just like the picture. (Repeat this several times).

Do you realize that the more times you look at the picture and the more closely you look, the better you are at replicating the picture? In the same way, when we focus our attention on God and through relying on the Holy Spirit and His words, we can be transformed to Christ's likeness.

Bible Study

Part 1
God's Judgment Upon the Nations

The book of Ezekiel can be divided into two sections.: The first section (Chapters 1-24) records the prophecies concerning the judgment of Judah. The second section (Chapters 25-48) records the prophecies concerning the restoration. In this latter section, the prophet speaks of the judgment on the gentile nations surrounding Judah. Upon witnessing the destruction of the holy city and the captivity of the people, these seven nations have derided God and taken advantage of His people. God gave these messages so that the people would know that He is the Lord.

A. *Judgment on Ammon (Ezek 25:1-7)*

When the land of Israel laid in ruins and the people were taken into captivity, the Ammonites "clapped their hands and stamped their feet and rejoiced with all the malice within them." The Ammonites sneered and applauded over the desecration of the temple. The bible also records the Ammonites' past offenses; during the time of king Jehoiachin, the Ammonites joined forces with the Babylonians to invade Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:2). And during the reign of king Zedekiah, the Ammonites along with the Moabites, the Edomites and other nations, supported Zedekiah in rebelling against the Babylonians, but when Israel was captured, the Ammonites looted the city (Jer 49:1-2). For these sins, the Lord will stretch out His hand against them (Ezek 25:6-7).

B. *Judgment on Moab (Ezek 25:8-11)*

The Moabites will face God's judgment because they said, "Behold the house of Judah is like all other nations." Moab derided God by saying that God is powerless in saving His own people. Because of their arrogance and rebellion the Moabites will be defeated by the people of the east and will be dissolved amongst the nations and will not be remembered (Ezek 25:10).

C. *Judgment on Edom (Ezek 25:12-14)*

The Edomites were blood brothers of the Jews, both nations being descended from Isaac (Gen 25:19-26). Edom shared its northern border with Israel; but the two nations were always at odds. When Jerusalem was captured, the Edomites helped the Babylonian armies kill the fugitives. They were filled with hatred (Ezek 35:5-6, 9; Ob 10, 14), they rejoiced at the desolation of Israel (35:15), and they took possession of the land (Ezek 35:10, 36:5). Out of all the nations, the Edomites hated the Israelites most and were considered Israel's leading enemy. Like its founding father Esau, Edom was bent on taking revenge against Israel. As a result, God will punish Edom through the hands of Israel. In the same way that Edom rejoiced over the desolation of Israel, God will make desolate the entire country of Edom.

D. *Judgment on Philistia (Ezek 25:15-17)*

The people of Philistia were the indigenous people of Canaan. During the time of Eli and Samuel, the Israelites and Philistines were constantly at war with each other (1 Sam 4-6). When Judah was destroyed, the Philistines sold the people as cap-

tives to the Edomites (Amos 1:6). Because Philistia took revenge against Israel, God was to destroy them and the entire sea coast.

E. *Tyre (Ezek 26-28:19)*

Ezekiel 26-28 records the prophecies concerning the city of Tyre. The meaning of Tyre is "rock." Tyre was a neighboring city of Canaan, located on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, north of Israel. Part of the city was on the mainland and the other an island. Tyre was a thriving and prosperous city, making its wealth through trade (Ezek 27:1-25). When Israel fell, Tyre was delighted and took advantage of Israel's suffering. They jeered and laughed saying, "Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken, it has swung open to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste" (Ezek 26:2). Tyre was also guilty of great pride and arrogance. The King of Tyre believed he was a god saying, "I am perfect in beauty." The main cause of Tyre's pride was its sea trade and prosperity. Ezekiel 27 compares the pride and splendor of the city of Tyre to a ship. These ships, built with the finest materials, were secure, and carried many precious cargo.

However, this gloating did not last long because God was to destroy the pride of Tyre and make this joyous city into a pitiful wasteland (Ezek 26:12, 14). In 585 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar attacked the city of Tyre. It took him 13 years to capture the mainland because the backside of the city was an island and fresh supplies could be shipped in daily. The rest of this prophecy was only fulfilled during the reign of Alexander the Great. When Alexander besieged the island city of Tyre, Tyre refused to surrender and so Alexander threw the rubble of the mainland city into the water forming a bridge to the island. This fulfilled what the prophet had said, "They will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water." Today, the island city is still a pile of rubble, "a place for fishermen to spread their nets" and a testimony to God's judgment.

F. *Sidon (Ezek 28:20-26)*

Sidon was another famous seaport, located a few miles north of Tyre.
God charged this city with contempt for His people. Sidon had been a thorn that hurt the people of God. God prophesied that pestilence will enter into Sidon and will cause bloodshed in the streets.

G. *Egypt (Ezek 29-32)*

The Nile was Egypt's pride and joy, a life-giving river cutting through the middle

of the desert. But rather than attributing glory to God, Egypt's king declared, "My Nile is my own; I made it." Because of his pride, God was to treat him as a fish in the sea, which will be drawn out and cast into the open field where he will be as food for the animals. Furthermore, Egypt's wealth and power made her seem like a good ally. Egypt offered to help Judah only because of the benefits she hoped to receive from such an alliance. When the Egyptians didn't get what they hoped for, they bailed out of their agreement. God condemns Egypt as being a staff of reed to the Israelites. When the Israelites grasped hold of her, Egypt broke away causing Israel "to tear their shoulders and their backs to quiver" (Ezek 29:6-7; Jer 2:36,37; 37:5-7). Consequently, God will hand them over to the Babylonians. God will cause them to be dispersed among the nations. Egypt will lie desolate for 40 years and will once again revive, a humbled country. God will punish those who treat others unjustly and unmercifully.

Teaching Tips

Have students read the related bible verses. Then write down the sins of each nation and the judgment that God pronounced for each nation.

Bible Verse	Nation	Pronounced Judgment
Ezek 25:1-7		
Ezek 25:8-11		
Ezek 25:12-14		
Ezek 25:15-17		
Ezek 26-28:19		
Ezek 28:10-26		
Ezek 29-32		

Part 2
The Prophecies Concerning the Restoration of Israel

Chapter 33 onwards sets forth new direction for Ezekiel's prophecies. Up to this point, Ezekiel has pronounced judgment upon Judah (chapter 1-24) and the surrounding evil nations (chapters 25-32) for their sins. Now that Jerusalem

has fallen, he turns from messages of doom and judgment to messages of comfort, hope and future restoration for God's people. God previously appointed Ezekiel to be a watchman warning the nations of pending judgment (3:17-21). Here God appoints him to be a watchman again, but this time to preach a message of hope, restoration, and renewal.

A. *To remove a heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh*

God showed the prophet Ezekiel (after the captivity) how He will gather His people from the lands and give them one heart (Ezek 11:17-20). He will remove the disbelieving heart of stone and will put in a heart of flesh. God uses a "heart of stone' to describe the wickedness and stubbornness of His people. God will put in its place a heart of flesh; a humane heart that is sensitive to sin. God will write His commands on their hearts so that they can walk in His statues and obey His commandments (Jer 24:7; 31:33; 36:26-27). This prophecy refers to the last days when the spiritual nation of Israel, the true church, will be revived and the Lord will gather His chosen people to Him. God will pour down His Spirit and cause the believers to be united as one. Unlike the Israelites who refused to turn back to God despite many warnings, God's Spirit will soften our hearts to be sensitive to sin and to obey His commands (1 Cor 12:3; 2 Thess 2:13).

B. *The resurrection of the dry bones*

Ezekiel was brought into the wilderness of Babylon, where he was shown a vision of a valley full of dry bones that were without hope of life. When God's breath entered these bones, they resurrected and became a vast army (Ezek 37:1-14). This vision can be applied to 3 levels:

a. The dry bones are a picture of the Jews in captivity – scattered and dead with absolutely no hope. But through the vision, the prophet encouraged the captives that there is still hope in God. Their captivity is not forever. God will save them and cause them to return to their homeland just as how He brought these dry bones back to life. The vision of the dry bones demonstrates God's incredible power to accomplish what is deemed impossible in the eyes of men. This prophesy was fulfilled in 538 B.C. when Cyrus king of Persia decreed that the Israelites return to their land and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1-4). Those Israelites returned home fully believing that God's hands made this possible.

b. The heap of dry bones represents the spiritual condition of those who are not in Christ. Although they are physically living, they are in fact spiritually dead (Lk 9:60). But through the baptism of water and the Holy Spirit those who are spiritually dead can resurrect and become a new and living person (Rom 6:4,9,11).

c. The dry bones can also be used to describe the condition of our own individual faith or the condition of the church. Sometimes the church may seem like a heap of dried-up bones, with no hope of vitality. But just as God promised to restore His nation, He can restore the church or our individual faith, no matter how dry or dead it may seem. We need to pray for God to pour down His Spirit on us, so that we can live a full and abundant life in Christ.

C. *The restoration of the temple*

Chapters 40-48 depict the vision that Ezekiel saw regarding the building of the holy city. In the vision, Ezekiel was carried by the Holy Spirit to a very high mountain where he saw the structure of a city. Ezekiel's experience corresponds to elder John's experience recorded in Revelation 21:9. In the vision, Ezekiel describes how the temple is built according to the exact measurements and instructions prescribed by God. The structure of the temple, the laws of the sanctuary, the rules concerning sacrifices are described in great detail and specificity. In chapter 43 the glory of God returned to the temple. From our previous lesson we learned that the glory of the Lord had departed from the temple because it was filled with idol-worshipping and all kinds of unrighteousness. In this vision, the glory of God returns and fills the temple because it is built according to God's standards. The holy temple witnessed by Ezekiel depicts the spiritual city, the true church of the last days. To have God's presence the church needs to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

D. *Water from the temple*

Ezekiel sees water issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (Ezek 47:1-12). Wherever the river flows, many wonderful things happen. The water represents the living water, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will bring about rich blessings and salvation to the people of the world. The characteristics of the river are:

a. The angel of God measures the river

In this vision, the angel of God measures the river three times. Each time, the river rises higher and higher. First it is only ankle-deep. It rises to knee level, then waist high until eventually it becomes a river that no one can cross. This is in fact a beautiful description of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When a person is not filled with the Holy Spirit, his movements are not restricted and he has the freedom to do and speak as he pleases. This is likened to a person who walks in water that is only ankle-deep. Contrastingly, when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, he has given up his own will and desires and has allowed himself to be "carried along" by the great river.

b. **The stagnant waters will become fresh**
When the river flows into stagnant waters, the waters will become fresh. This symbolizes the transformation that occurs after we know Christ. Our lives, formerly bitter, hopeless, and lifeless are filled with joy, peace and satisfaction when Christ enters.

c. **The waters will teem with living creatures and many fish**
Wherever the river flows, it brings with it life and vitality. Places where there was no sign of life is now filled with living creatures and teeming with fish. Similarly, the Holy Spirit brings life and vitality. Our lives which used to be filled with discontent, jealousy, rivalry, envy, selfishness are transformed to a life of zeal and fervor for God and men.

d. **Many trees grow on the banks of the river**
The river will cause trees to flourish on both banks and fruits will grow every month. A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is like a tree planted beside waters and bears fruit in abundance. Such people will reflect the image of Christ in their lives and they will continually grow in the grace and truth of the Lord. Not only do they enrich themselves but will also enrich the lives of others.

e. **The swamps and marshes will remain unchanged**
When the river flows into swamps and marshes, such areas will remain stagnant and unchanged. Swamps and marshes refer to men whose hearts are darkened, hardened and unrepentant. Although the gospel has been preached for 2,000 years, there are still many hearts that remain unaffected. Such hearts are places where sin and wickedness continue to dwell and where Satan rules.

Check for Understanding

There are no Check For Understanding questions for this lesson.

Life Application

The Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit

Have you ever beheld the beauty and freedom of a butterfly? But did you realize that its origins are extremely humble. The butterfly's lifecycle goes through four different stages. It starts off being an egg, which changes into a caterpillar. When a caterpillar reaches its full size, it prepares to make the radical change in body form that turns it from a caterpillar into a butterfly. This process takes place in the pupae, or chrysalis, a hard, sometimes thorny oval structure. After about two weeks, it undergoes a great struggle to break free from its shell, but once free; it emerges and transforms into a butterfly. This complete process is called metamorphosis.

(see cartoon in Student Workbook)
Box 1: God has chosen me, I'm baptized…
Box 2: I have the Holy Spirit
Box 3: I'm confident that I will be saved, what more is there?

The cartoon illustrates a common belief amongst many believers today: "I'm baptized, I have the Holy Spirit, I am saved." But in actuality, we are not quite there yet. Like the butterfly, we need to break out of our shell – go through a spiritual metamorphosis, as it were. The Bible calls this process, sanctification.

My understanding of sanctification is…
To be sanctified means to be separate from the rest of mankind. The thoughts, ways and attitudes of a Christian need to be different from that of the world. We need to develop a new set of goals and attitudes. Greed, selfishness, hatred, jealousy must give way to love, compassion, generosity and humility. Bringing glory to God, serving our fellow human beings, growing in knowledge of the Word, and in effectiveness in prayer must now receive priority. The Bible speaks of this as putting off the old nature and putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).

Why do I need to be sanctified?

1. It is the will of God (1 Thess 4:3-7; 1 Pet 1:14-16).
2. Being holy is the duty of believers. God has chosen us to be His children and we have to live a life worthy of His calling.
3. We need to be sanctified to obtain salvation (Rom 6:22; Ac 20:32; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 12:14).

How can I pursue sanctification?

1. We can't become holy on our own. God gives us His Holy Spirit to help us (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2).
2. By doing daily spiritual cultivation (reading and meditating upon the Bible and praying in the Spirit).
3. We can put to death our fleshly nature by fully submitting to the Holy Spirit and walking according to His direction.

What are some of the obstacles that I have faced in my pursuit to be more holy?

1. Sometimes we fail to grow because we do not realize that we need any change. To see where our blind spots and weaknesses are, we need to read the Bible and wash ourselves with the truth continuously (Jn 17:17; Eph 5:26). Colossians 3:9-10 tells us that our new nature is being renewed through knowledge of the Lord. The more we know of Christ, His work, and His word, the more we are being changed to be like Him.
2. We need to set our hearts on things above. This means that we have to strive to put heaven's priorities into daily practice. We need to concentrate on the eternal rather than the temporal. Thoughts can influence actions, so if we place our thoughts on things above and not of the earth or our desires, then the choices we make will lead us to do what is right and holy in God's sight.
3. Sanctification requires great effort and determination. In Matthew 11:12, the Lord reminds us that the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force. This reminds us that the kingdom of God requires new attitudes and actions and that only those who are willing to undergo drastic changes are able to receive eternal life. To cut off sin and the old self is an ongoing battle. It takes practice, conscious daily decision, patience, and concentration to keep ourselves in line with God's will.

How Do I Measure?

1. You have planned something with your friends that evening, but unexpectedly, your parents tell you that you have to cancel your plans because they have an important engagement. What would your immediate reaction to this be? I would...

2. You're hanging out with your friends and the topic turns to dirty jokes. What do you do? I would...

3. It the big sale, and you've been lining up to pay for an item for about ten minutes. Someone has cut into the line in front of you. You tell them that they should get in line, but they don't get the message and continue to stand in front of you. How do you react? I would...

4. You have a close friend in church whom you do everything with. It seems however that s/he gets noticed and praised more than you do even though you both do more-or-less the same things. How do you feel?

5. Your friend has invited you over for dinner with his/her family. His/her mom has cooked a meal that is not to your liking. They ask you how you like it. How would you answer them? I would...

6. Your membership at the wholesale computer store has expired, but you discover that they have a sale on some items that you've been eyeing for sometime. You don't want to renew your membership because it's too costly, but the items would be a real buy. What would you do? I would...

7. You hear a very ugly rumor about a person you don't like very much. How do you feel and respond? I would...

8. You have grown up believing that people of a certain race are basically inferior to yours. When a person of that race enters the church, what would you do? I would...

9. Your friends have stopped by the store and picked up a couple of lottery tickets. They say, "It's okay. You could win. But even if you lose, a portion of your dollar goes to fund education and cancer research. It is for a good cause." What would you do? I would...

Taking Action:

1. From the exercise above, make a short list of some the things that you find you have to improve upon.
2. Find some Bible verses or stories that point to the area you picked, then study what the Bible teaches in those verses/stories.
3. Write out the verses, or the stories in outline form.

4. If possible commit the verses/stories to memory.
5. The most important thing is to remember the teachings found in the verses/stories.
6. Over a period of time, evaluate yourself on whether you have improved. Whenever you encounter a challenging situation that calls for application in defeating your weakness, try to mentally run through all ten or so verses and to ask God to give us the strength to overcome our weaknesses.

Weakness to improve upon	Bible verses	How I can deal with it

Reflection & Prayer

O Lord, there is nothing we want more than to be like You. Help us to remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh. Help us to no longer be slaves to sin. Create in us a clean heart so that we can succeed in our battle with the old self and proceed to a brighter and better transformation with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson 11

Daniel

Listed Scriptures

Dan 1-7

Lesson Aim

1) Students can understand the sovereignty of God in human history.
2) To imitate Daniel's commitment to holiness in an ungodly world.
3) Students will establish better understanding and rapport with each other.

Memory Verse

"This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men." (Dan 4:17)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Dan 1-7

Bible Background

The Babylonian policy for taking captives was different from that of the Assyrians, who moved most of the people out and resettled the land with foreigners. The Babylonians took only the strong and skilled, leaving the poor and weak to rule the land, thus elevating them to positions of authority and winning their loyalty. The leaders were taken to Babylonian cities, but they were permitted to live together, find jobs and become an important part of the society. Many of the Jews like Daniel, Mordecai and Esther rose to prominent positions within the nation of the ruling empire. This policy kept the Jews united and faithful to God throughout the captivity and made it possible for their return in the days of Zerubbabel and Ezra as recorded in the book of Ezra.

Warm Up

What do the following have in common? (Have students answer)

* A baseball player's contract
* Wedding vows
* A dentist appointment
* A loan agreement

All the above are commitments of one kind or another. They are promises. A baseball player commits to play for a particular team. A bride and groom promise to love each other and be faithful to each other. A dentist promises to save a certain time of day for a patient. A bank agrees to loan money to someone who agrees to make regular payments.

Commitments are important. When you make a commitment to something or someone, you're not saying, "I'll do this if I feel like it," or "I'll do it if it's easy." Instead you're saying, "I'll do it whether I feel like it or not." "I'll do it even if it's hard."

Have you ever made a commitment of any sort? Did you abide by your decision? Today, we will look at a well-known character, Daniel, who committed himself to a life of holiness.

Bible Study

Part 1
Overview

A. Author

The authorship and date of Daniel are two of the more contested issues in the field of biblical studies. Daniel claimed to write this book (Dan 12:4) and he used the autobiographical first person from Daniel 7:2 onward. The Jewish Talmud agrees with this testimony, and in the New Testament the Lord Jesus attributed a quote from Daniel 9:27 to "Daniel the prophet" (Mt 24:15; Dan 11:31; 8:11). Facts and

events of Daniel mentioned in Hebrews 11:33-34 are also quoted in Daniel chapters 3 and 6.

Daniel's name means "God is my judge." He was also known by King Nebuchadnezzar as Belteshazzar, which means, "His life is protected" (Dan 4:8). Nothing is known of the ancestry and early life of Daniel, except that he was from the line of Judah and of noble descent (Dan 1:3-6). At about 16 years of age, Daniel was taken captive to Babylon when King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. He remained there for some 73 years and he lived to about 90 years of age. During this period from 606 B.C. to about 536 B.C., Daniel served under three empires; Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Belshazzar his son, and Darius of Medes and Cyrus of Persia. This coincided with the reigns of kings Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah of Judah.

B. Date

Some believe that the book was written sometime between the latter part of the Babylonian empire and the rise of Medes (Dan 1:1-2; 10:1).

C. Theme

Daniel, the "Apocalypse of the Old Testament," presents a comprehensive sweep of prophetic history. The book is divided into two natural parts. The first section begins from chapters 1 to 6, which talks about Daniel's life and works. The second section from chapters 7 to 12 contains the prophetic visions of Daniel during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius of Medes and Cyrus king of Persia. These dreams dramatically outline God's future plans, beginning with Babylon and continuing to the end of the age. They demonstrate God's sovereignty and control of history and the destinies of men. The theme of God's sovereign control in the affairs of world history clearly emerges and provides comfort to the future church, as well as to the Jews whose nation was destroyed by the Babylonians. The Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans will come and go, but God will establish His kingdom through His redeemed people forever.

The book also emphasizes on being made separate, with Daniel as the ultimate example. Daniel is one of the few well-known biblical characters about whom nothing negative is written. His life was characterized by faith, prayer, courage, and lack of compromise. Daniel was mentioned three times by his contemporary, Ezekiel, as an example of righteousness.

D. *Teachings from the Book of Daniel*

a. Leading a godly life in an ungodly world

As people of God, our trademark is holiness. God wants His people to be holy, just like He is holy. Holiness means to be set apart and distinct from ungodly people and from sin and its influences. What make us different are God's qualities in our lives. Yet, holiness does not come naturally. It is easy to be tainted by the trends and thoughts of the world. But Daniel was a man who lived in a sinful society yet remained untainted. He remained devoted throughout his life and became a precious vessel for God's use. How did Daniel achieve and maintain holiness?

i. He understood the God he worshiped

Deuteronomy 10:17 depicts God as, "God is the God of gods, and Lord of lords, He is the great, the mighty and the terrible God." He is the Creator of the universe; holy, almighty, righteous, pure, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present and full of mercy (Josh 2:1; Deut 7:21; Ps 116:5). When we have a true understanding of God, we will stand in fear and reverence of Him. Our desire would be to please God and remain within the boundaries set by Him.

ii. He worked at it

After we commit our lives to Christ, we still feel a pull back to our old ways. Therefore to maintain holiness requires hard, conscious effort. God helped Daniel because he helped himself first. Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's rich food and wine and God provided the means for him to achieve it. Oftentimes, we desire to be holy, but we either remain inactive or we continue down the same old path. 2 Timothy 2:22 instructs us to "Flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." To grow in holiness requires us to first forsake and depart from our ungodly ways, and then to pursue what is pleasing in the sight of God. The Lord Jesus describes the attitude we should have when striving for holiness and dealing with sin: "When our hand or foot causes us to sin, cut it off and throw it away. Or if our eye causes us to sin, gouge it out and throw it away" (Mt 18:7-9). We must never take lightly the "little sins" that we commit, but rather instantly remove the stumbling blocks without hesitation. By doing so we can preserve the holiness of soul, body and spirit (Rev 17:5; 18:1-4; 1 Thess 5:23).

iii. Through God's help

When God sees our desire to draw closer to Him, He will lend a helping hand. After Daniel resolved not to defile himself, God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief eunuch so that he was willing to accept Daniel's proposal despite the threat to the eunuch's own life. God also caused Daniel and his three friends to be better in appearance than all the other youths. It is not solely through our own efforts that we attain holiness and perfection, but through the mercy and grace of God (Tit 3:5).

b. He prayed constantly

Throughout his life, Daniel led a consistent life of prayer. Despite his official duties, Daniel faithfully prayed three times a day, even at the grand age of 80 (Ps 55:17; Dan 9:1-4; 10:12; Deut 9:18-20; Lk 2:36,37). He fasted and prayed for the restoration of Jerusalem, for the chosen people of God, for his own sins, and that of Judah. At times when Daniel did not understand the revelations of God (chapter 11), he humbled himself and fasted for 21 days before he received an answer. Daily prayers engage us in spiritual warfare and we must be persistent and faithful in prayer. It was these prayers that enabled Daniel to be victorious over many of life's trials (1 Thess 5:17; Phil 4:6-7; Ac 12:5,12; Mt 18:19).

c. He was loyal to the king

Throughout his life, Daniel not only served under four different monarchies but he held top positions in the various empires. King Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Belshazzar made him third ruler in his kingdom (5:29). Darius first made Daniel one of the three presidents of his kingdom, then later promoted him as Prime Minister (6:3). Aside from the fact that it was God's arrangement, one of the reasons for Daniel's success was his loyalty towards his earthly masters. Daniel did not serve for personal gain. When King Belshazzar promised Daniel gifts, honor and position for interpreting the dream, Daniel replied, "Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another..." (Dan 5:17). King Darius made Daniel one of the three presidents because he knew that he could "trust Daniel to ensure that he suffered no loss" (Dan 6:2). We need to work with the goal of pleasing our employers and with the welfare of those whom we serve in mind. Through our hard work and faithfulness we can bring glory to God and allow others to know God through us (1 Pet 2:14-17; Mt 5:14-16).

d. Concerned with the matters of God

Although Daniel fared well in a foreign land, his heart was with his people in Israel. Daniel grieved for his fallen nation and the desolation that had come upon the holy city. He fasted and prayed for the people's sins and inquired of God to restore the people to their own country to rebuild the holy city. While we may enjoy certain comforts and status in society, our hearts should not be on the things of the world but on the matters of God. While on earth, our Lord Jesus set His heart on carrying out the Father's business (Lk 2:49). Nehemiah was a cupbearer in the city of Susa, but his heart was with the remnants in Israel. Are our hearts inclined towards the affairs of God? Have we placed the affairs of God and our brothers and sisters in our hearts and prayers? (Amos 9:11; Rev 10:11; 2 Cor 11:28; Rom 12:1; Heb 10:7; Is 6:8).

Part 2

The Most High Rules in the Kingdom of Man

A. God is Lord Over Nations

A major theme in the Book of Daniel is God's sovereignty over the course of history and individual destinies. Through visions and dreams revealed to Daniel, God demonstrates that "dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations" (Ps 22:28; Is 46:9b, 10; Dan 2:31-45; 7:3-14). "He makes nations great, and He destroys them; He enlarges nations, and leads them away" (Job 12:23).

a. The great image

Read Daniel 2:1-13. Through the dream of the great image, God showed to King Nebuchadnezzar the progress of history, the rise and fall of empires even before it occurred. God showed how the Babylonian Empire represented by the golden head would later be conquered by the Medes and Persians (539 B.C.). The Medo-Persian empire would later be defeated by the Greeks under Alexander the Great in 334-330 B.C. (belly and thighs of bronze respectively). The legs of iron represent the Roman Empire, which conquered the Greeks in 63 B.C. The feet and toes of clay and iron represent the break-up of the Roman Empire and all the existing nations before Christ's second advent. As we see today, nations continue to divide and are unable to stay united. The stone that breaks the great image into pieces refers to Christ descending from heaven to establish the heavenly kingdom and to execute judgment upon the world (2 Pet 3:10–13).

b. The four beasts

Read Daniel 7:1-28. In this vision, Daniel saw four beasts each representing a world empire. This is similar to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two, except there the dream is told from a man's point of view while chapter 7 from God's point of view. The lion with eagle's wings represents Babylon with her swift conquests (there have been statues of winged lions that have been recovered from Babylon's ruins). The bear who ravaged the lion is Medo–Persia. The bear has great strength but is slower in movement. Medes and Persia had great strength but it could not match the successes of Babylon. The three ribs in its mouth represents the conquests of three major enemies: Babylon, Libya and Egypt (Dan 8:4). The leopard is Greece. Its wings show the swiftness of Alexander the Great's campaign as he conquered much of the civilized world in four years. The leopard's four heads are the four divisions of the Greek Empire after Alexander's death. The fourth beast represents the Roman Empire and the end times. Rome was militant and relentless, employing every possible torment to torture and slay its captives. It has ten horns, which refer to the ten kings. The ten has the connotation of wholeness and symbolizes every form of government in the last days. The emergence of the little horn refers to the persecutor of God's chosen people in the last days before Christ comes to bring judgment upon the world.

c. The ram and the he-goat

Read Daniel 8:1-27. In this vision, Daniel sees a ram with two long horns, which refer to Media and Persia. The longer horn represents the growing dominance of Persia in the Medo-Persian Empire. Next came a he-goat, which refers to Greece and its large conspicuous horn refers to Alexander the Great. This is an amazing prediction because Greece was not considered a world power when this prophecy was given. The he-goat that charges across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground refers to the swiftness of the wars raged by Alexander. He conquered the world with great speed and military strategy. But he was filled with pride after he conquered Medes, Persia and the other countries and in the height of his power, the great horn was broken and he died at the age of thirty-two. From the root of the horn came up four conspicuous horns like the four heads of the leopard: this refers to Alexander's four generals who divided his kingdom after his death. Then out of the four horns came forth a little horn. Part of this prophecy concerning the little horn had already been fulfilled in Antiochus IV Epiphanes who was the king of Syria. A further fulfillment of this prophecy will occur in the future with the coming of the Antichrist.

	Chapter 2	Chapter 7	Chapter 8
Vision	Great image	Four great beasts	Ram, he-goat
Babylon	Golden head	Lion	---
Medes/Persia	Silver breast	Bear	Ram
Greece	Bronze belly	Leopard	He-goat
Rome	Iron legs	Beast	---
Nations of the end-times	Half iron and half clay feet	Ten horns and a little horn	Little horn
The second coming of Christ	The stone smites the great image into pieces	The saints receive their kingdom	The little horn is destroyed

B. *God is Lord Over Individual Destiny*

God not only controls over the destinies of kingdoms, but also of individuals. There are numerous examples of God's dominion over man's destiny in the Book of Daniel.

a. God delivered Jehoiakim, the king of Judah with some of the vessels of the house of God into the hand of the Babylonian king (Dan 1:2).
b. God caused Daniel and the rest of the exiles to be carried to Babylon.
c. God caused Daniel to find favor in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs (Dan 1:9).
d. God gave Daniel and his companions learning and skill in all letters and wisdom (Dan 1:17).
e. God gave Daniel the opportunity and the ability to interpret dreams (Dan 2:28; 4:19-26; 5:13-27).

Check for Understanding

1. Give examples from the book of Daniel that show God's dominion over the fate of nations and individuals.
2. What does the fact that God is sovereign over man means to us in our daily life?
3. How can we "be holy to the Lord" in our daily lives?

Life Application

"Do you know who I am?"

Meeting the challenges of an ever-changing world with values different from the Bible is not a battle we can fight on our own. Besides knowing himself well and having a close relationship with God, Daniel had a special bond with three of his closest friends. We may see each other in class every week, but how well do we know each other? How well do you know the person across the room? Do you know each other's fears, hopes or struggles? Do you recognize each other's strengths, or what each of us enjoys doing in our spare time? By developing deeper understanding and rapport between us, our journey of faith can be an easier and joyful one.

Material List:
Poster board
Four different colors of paper
Die
Markers (equal to the number of students in class)
Print out of cards

Teacher Instructions:
1. Using a poster board, draw squares around the four outside edges. In some squares write penalties like these: take two steps back, start again; lose a turn. Each square should be colored into the four different colors representing the four different categories of cards.
2. Print out and cut out individual cards with questions. Use different colors for each category.
3. Prepare a die and markers.
4. Feel free to come up with your own questions pertinent to the needs of your class.
5. Teachers or students can add their own rules to those listed.

Rules:
1. Take turns moving your marker around the board.
2. When the marker falls on a certain colored space, player draws a card from that category and shares an experience.
3. If two players land on the same block, the last player to land on the block can either send the first person back four spaces or draw another card and do what it says.

4. Players should spend no more than a minute to answer the questions.
5. The first person to move around the board once wins.

Categories:

You and Others

1. What is a characteristic in others that you admire?
2. Have you ever been pressured to doing something you feel you should not have?
3. Have you ever been teased? For what?
4. Where do you feel most comfortable? At church, at school, at work. Why?
5. Tell about the kids you grew up with.
6. Tell of a person you know whose behavior changed noticeably after becoming a Christian.
7. Tell about a person who has influenced you in your life.
8. Do you and your friends ever talk about religion or what your faith means to you?
9. Tell about a time when you could have helped someone, and regret that you failed to do so.
10. It's a Saturday night. What do you and your friends do to relax?
11. What characteristics would you look for in a friend?
12. Name something that someone did for you that touched you.
13. How many brothers/sisters do you have? Name something that you like about them.

About You

1. What is the best thing about being a teenager?
2. What is one of your greatest fears? Why?
3. If you were in an interview for a job and you were asked to describe yourself, what three qualities would you list?
4. What is something you would do with your time if you didn't watch television?
5. Describe a way that credit cards have affected your life.
6. What was one of the most courageous things you ever did?
7. What effect do commercials have on you?
8. If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?
9. Name the color that best describes you and why.
10. If your house was on fire and you only had enough time to save three material possessions, what would you choose?
11. What is one thing you would like to do before you die? Why?

12. Describe one of your first experiences of living away from home.
13. What is one of your hobbies? What do you like about it?

You and God

1. Who is your favorite bible character and why?
2. Share an experience where you "Let go, and let God."
3. Identify a teaching that you have struggled to keep. Why?
4. Tell about a prayer that was answered.
5. Did you ever go through a period of doubting God? Tell about it.
6. Name a time where you had to stand up for your faith. What did you do?
7. What is one of your earliest memories about God?
8. Tell about a time when God seemed far away.
9. What is one of your favorite Bible passages? Why is it significant to you?
10. When during the day or night do you feel closest to God? Why?
11. Name two things you are most grateful to God for.
12. In what situation would it be the most awkward for you to talk about your faith. Why?
13. Did anyone ever make fun of you for what you believed? How did you feel about that?

Alternatives

1. Move backward one space and choose another card
2. Give this card to someone else to answer
3. Miss a turn
4. Give this card to the person on your left
5. Take another turn
6. Move to the very front
7. Go back to start
8. Move forward three spaces
9. Take a card from the middle of the pack
10. Pick another card
11. Skip over 2 markers
12. Person after you misses a turn

Questions to think about:

1. Having played the game, was there anything that you learned about someone which you did not know before?
2. Is there anything that you learned about yourself?
3. What did you learn about God's doings?

Reflection & Prayer

From the history of the chosen people, it is clear that God desired His people to be a blessed and holy nation. The messages of the prophets, the teachings of our Lord, and the epistle of the disciples all express the same desire of the Lord: "Leave! Separate yourselves from them!" And yet like the Israelites, we do not separate ourselves from the world but rather we want to be "like all the nations" (1 Sam 8:5). We are not of the world - we are citizens of God's kingdom. May our lives be a reflection of this in every way.

Lesson 12

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Listed Scriptures

Hag 1, 2; Zech 1-3; Mal 3, 4

Lesson Aim

1) Students will study about visions and messages concerning the construction of the temple.
2) Students will learn of the right attitudes towards serving God.

Memory Verse

"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts." (Zech 4:6)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Hag 1, 2; Zech 1-3; Mal 3, 4

Bible Background

In the year 538 B.C., some 50,000 people returned to the promised land from Babylon to rebuild their temple. The people had quickly laid the foundation of the temple, but meeting with strong opposition from the Samaritans, the work on the temple came to a stop. During the interim of about 15 years, the people's efforts shifted to their own personal needs, while the temple lay desolate. Then in the second year of King Darius (520 B.C.), God called His prophets Haggai and Zechariah to the task of urging the people to rise up and complete the temple, which was completed during the 6th year of King Darius' reign (516 B.C.).

Warm Up

I Wonder

You know, Lord, how I serve You
With great emotional fervor
In the limelight.
You know how eagerly I speak for You
At the woman's club.
You know how I effervesce when I promote
A fellowship group.
You know my genuine enthusiasm
At a Bible study.
But how would I react, I wonder,
If you pointed to a basin of water
And asked me to wash the calloused feet
Of a bent and wrinkled old woman
Day after day
Month after month
In a room where nobody saw
And nobody knew.

Bible Study

Part 1
The Book of Haggai

The last three books of the Old Testament are known as post-exilic prophetic books. They were written after the Jews returned from the seventy years captivity in Babylon. Prior to the captivity, the prophets from Hosea to Zephaniah all preached a common message – turn from idolatry and evil ways before it is too late, before the Lord sends them into captivity. In the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi there is a shift in message and tone. The people have returned from captivity. They have learned a difficult lesson. The prophets no longer speak of departing from Baal worship or doom. Rather, their message pertains to the rebuilding of the temple and the revival of faith.

A. *Overview*

a. **Author**

The author of this book is the prophet Haggai whose name means "festive." Besides what is written in this book and two references to him in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, little else is known of Haggai's personal history. Haggai was a prophet who returned from Babylon after the 70 years captivity and was the first prophet to prophecy after the captivity. He began his ministry in 520 B.C., the second year of King Darius of Persia. He worked from the 1st day of the 6th month to the 24th day of the 9th month. Although their ministry lasted less than four months, Haggai and Zechariah were successful in mobilizing the people to complete the work on the temple.

b. **Date**

All five messages of Haggai are precisely dated in the year 520 B.C., the second year of the reign of Darius I, King of Persia.

c. **Theme**

The basic theme of this book is the importance for the remnants to reorder their priorities and complete the temple before they can expect the blessings of God. Haggai also prophesies that the glory of the temple in the latter days will be greater than the former.

B. *Teachings from the Book of Haggai*

The book of Haggai is divided into 5 sections based on the messages that Haggai received.

a. **First message (Hag 1:1-11)**

In 586 B.C., the armies of Babylon had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and taken the people into captivity. But in 538 B.C. King Cyrus of Persia decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. After they began the work, opposition from the enemies brought the work to a standstill. Over a period of 15 years, the temple laid in ruins and the people had forgotten about their purpose and had lost sight of their priorities. And so, on the 1st day of the 6th month, God spoke to Haggai the prophet to rebuke the people for not completing the work on the temple. The people replied that the time had not yet come to rebuild the house of God (Hag 1:2). In actuality, the time had come a long time ago. While the temple laid incomplete, the people had shifted their attention to building paneled houses for themselves. Because of

their misplaced priorities, Haggai urged the remnants to examine themselves and give careful thought to their ways.

The true reason why the house of God was incomplete was not because of financial insufficiency, a lack of ability or the obstruction of the enemies, but because the people looked to the matters of the world rather than to the matters of God. They focused primarily on their physical needs while ignoring their spiritual lives and their relationship with God. Like the remnants we may have strayed away from God; we may have neglected the work of God or have minded our own affairs above the needs of God or the brothers and sisters. Maybe our jobs, studies, loved ones, vacations, leisure activities rank higher on our list of importance than God. Like the people, we provide all kinds of excuses to push aside the holy work or defend our motives. Do not be deceived: do not give ourselves excuses which come from a lukewarm faith.

The people were told to examine their lives. To consider how "you have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes" (Hag 1:6). Spiritual decline can influence our physical lives. There may be times where we have striven hard, yet all our efforts have become futile and fruitless. We may have invested much time studying to the point of forgoing services and doing holy work, yet the grades we receive are not up to par. We encounter such difficulties because our spiritual temple still lies in ruins and God has withheld His blessings. At such times, we need to go up to the mountain to obtain wood so that we can rebuild our spiritual temple (Hag 1:8). This means that we have to turn back to God and amend our relationship with Him and in so doing He will bless the fruit of our labor and the work of our hands (Cf. Judg 6:1ff).

b. Second message (Hag 1:12-15)

After hearing Haggai's first message, the leaders and the people obeyed and feared the Lord. Just 23 days later, they began to rebuild the temple. On the 24th day of the 6th month, God told them through Haggai, that He would be with them and bless them. Having been apathetic for 15 years, the people were quick to respond to God's calling and were stirred by just one message. When we are moved by God's words, do not quench the Spirit's movement. Rather, we should quickly put God's words into practice.

c. Third message (Hag 2:1-9)

On the 21st day of the 7th month, the word of God again came to Haggai. By this time the new foundation of the temple was laid. However, upon witnessing it, many were discouraged because the rebuilt temple was inferior to King Solomon's. Many of the older people could remember the incredible beauty of Solomon's temple and when they saw the new one, they wept with a loud voice so that the joyful shouts and the people's weeping could not be distinguished. But Haggai told them to take courage because the glory of the new temple will surpass the glory of the former temple. Although the new temple lacked the luster and splendor of Solomon's temple (Mal 3:12-13), but because the people departed from the sins of their forefathers and served God faithfully, the glory of the temple was in fact greater than the first. This also tells us that the true church of the end times will be more glorious than the apostolic church. As the last day approaches, the true church will become more perfect, like a bride ready for her Husband.

d. Fourth message (Hag 2:10-19)

On the 24th day of the 9th month, God used two questions to demonstrate to the priests that their service in the temple will not remove sin and wickedness. When the priests harbor wrong attitudes and sins, their service to God will be tainted. When a nation sins, whatever they touch or offer will become unclean. Their offerings or worship will not be accepted or blessed. God asked them to consider why everything went wrong in their lives. When they expected a twenty-bushel crop, there were only ten. When they came to draw fifty gallons from the olive press, there were only twenty.

However, since the people began to return to God, things began to change. From the 24th day of the 9th month onwards, when the people had laid the temple foundation, when they had merely taken the first few steps towards obeying God, God immediately blessed them. God was very eager to bless His people; He did not wait for the entire project to be completed before sending down blessings. Thus, the very day when we forsake our evil ways, our bad habits, and when we begin to rebuild the temple, God will shower down His blessings; that day will be to us the 24th day of the 9th month.

e. Fifth message (Hag 2:20-23)

That very same day, a fifth message came to Haggai, which was directed to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah. God assured Zerubbabel that He would abide with him, and he would be victorious in the work of rebuilding the temple. Zerubbabel was also chosen to be the signet ring of God. A signet ring

was worn by monarchs and served as the king's signature or as a seal of approval. The signet would represent the king himself. Similarly, Zerubbabel was chosen to represent God. He had the power, authority and selection of God to complete the task. Today, God has made each of us His signet ring and He has given us the Holy Spirit as a seal (Eph 1:13; 4:30). Since this is the case, we need to value our noble status. In Jeremiah 22:24, Coniah king of Judah was the signet ring in God's right hand, but because he transgressed against God, God tore this ring from his finger. Let us faithfully reflect the image of Christ in all that we say and do.

Part 2
The Book of Zechariah

A. Overview

a. Author

The author of this book is Zechariah, whose name means, "Jehovah is renowned" or "Yahweh remembers." The name "Zechariah" was a popular one in the Old Testament, being shared by no fewer than twenty-nine Old Testament characters. Zechariah is described in Zechariah 1:1 as "the son of Berechiah" and in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 as "the son of Iddo." Iddo was in fact Zechariah's grandfather, who had been among the priests and Levites who returned to Palestine with Zerubbabel from Babylon (Neh 12:1-7,16). Zechariah was called to be a prophet during the 2nd year of King Darius (520 B.C.), the same year that his contemporary, Haggai was called. While Haggai began to work in the 6th month, Zechariah was called in the 8th month and he worked till the 9th month of the 4th year of King Darius (Zech 7:1).

b. Date

The book of Zechariah consists of two distinct parts. The first section from chapters 1-8 was written from 520 to 518 B.C. The second section from chapters 9-14 was written 40 years later around 480 B.C.

c. Theme

Zechariah is one of the three post-exilic prophets, along with Haggai and Malachi, who ministered to the small remnant of Jews who had returned to Judah to rebuild the temple and their nation. Like Haggai, he encouraged

them to finish rebuilding the temple but his message went far beyond those physical walls and contemporary issues. In a series of eight visions, four messages, and two oracles, Zechariah portrays God's future plans for His covenant people. The first eight chapters were written to encourage the remnant while they were rebuilding the temple. The last six chapters were written after the completion of the temple to anticipate Israel's coming Messiah. The last six chapters are not clearly tied to a specific historical situation in the life of the prophet but look forward to the events leading up to and including the coming Messianic age.

B. Teachings from the book of Zechariah - Zechariah s eight visions

a. The horses among the myrtle trees

In this first vision, Zechariah sees a man riding a red horse standing among the myrtle trees in the glen (Zech 1:8-11). Also in the scene were red, sorrel, and white colored horses that were sent out to patrol the earth. When they returned, they announced to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees that the earth was at peace and that there was no more war. During this time, the people had endured the 70 years of captivity and had returned to build the temple. The work came to a halt for 15 years, during which their attentions turned to their own affairs. In this vision, God comforted and assured his people that He was still in their midst. Through the report of the messengers, God reminded the Israelites that this was an opportune time to restart work on the temple while they had the protection of King Cyrus of Persia and while the land enjoyed peace and rest. The Lord Jesus also reminds us that we should work while it is day, while we have the chance, because when night comes, no one can work (Jn 9:4).

b. Four animal horns and four craftsmen

In this vision Zechariah sees four animal horns, which were later taken hold of by four craftsmen (Zech 1:18-21). In the Bible, horns represent power and authority (1 Kgs 22:11; Ps 75:4-5, 10; Dan 7:24; Lk 1:69). These horns had scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. The four world powers (four horns) that oppressed and scattered the people of Judah and Israel, were Assyria (Jer 50:17), Babylon, Medes and Persia, and Greece. However, after the horns came four craftsmen who would pound and cast down these horns. These craftsmen refer to the world powers that arose to destroy those who preceded them, namely Babylon, Medes and Persia, Greece and Rome (Dan 2:36-41).

God revealed this vision to inform the Israelites that no matter how strong these empires may seem, they will be destroyed eventually for God is in control of human history.

c. The man with the measuring line

In this third vision, a man with a measuring line informs Zechariah that he is going to measure Jerusalem (Zech 2:1-5). A measuring line is an instrument used in construction. Through this vision God told the Israelites that He was going to rebuild and restore Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be a city blessed with innumerable people, it will be a city without walls. In actuality Jerusalem then was only a tiny community of about 40,000 people who had returned from Babylon (Neh 7:4). But God promised them that if they continued in His words, He will cause the inhabitants to prosper and thrive. Peace, freedom and glory will prevail and God will be a wall of fire to protect the city. This proclamation also served as an invitation to the captives who had decided to remain in Babylon. God wanted them to see the future of Jerusalem and to invite them to return and participate in the work of rebuilding the temple. This vision also refers to the abidance and blessings of God upon the true church in the last days. God will open the door of grace and many will flock to it.

d. Joshua the high priest

In this vision, Joshua the high priest is accused by Satan of wearing filthy garments (Zech 3:1-5). Joshua the high priest was a man who returned to Israel with Zerrubbabel during the first return (Ez 2:2; 3:2). During the captivity in Babylon, the priesthood had become unneeded, but upon returning to Israel, the priesthood and religious worship would be reinstated. In this vision, Joshua wears filthy garments instead of the high priest's holy garments. Garments in the Bible represent our conduct and deeds (Is 64:6; Rev 19:8). Since Joshua the high priest symbolized the Israelite nation, God used the vision to remind the people that they still wore filthy garments, which were their sins. While we serve God, Satan uses every opportunity to accuse and oppose us. As God's chosen race and royal priests, our conduct needs to be holy. We need to take off our filthy garments and put on the rich apparel and clean turban (Zech 3:1-6), which is Christ Himself (Gal 3:27). We need to serve God with a clean conscience and to be watchful so as not to give Satan a foothold (Eph 4:27).

e. The golden lampstand and the olive trees

In this vision, Zechariah sees a lampstand made of pure gold with a bowl on top of it (Zech 4:1-14). On top of the bowl were seven lamps with seven pipes on each of the lamps. In the Old Testament the lampstand represents the

Israelites, and the fact that they are made of pure gold suggests that they are most precious in the sight of God. By each side of the bowl are two olives trees which refer to the two anointed of God; namely, Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. These men were appointed by God to be in charge of rebuilding the temple. This vision however, was addressed specifically to Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah in the days of Zechariah, and he was given the responsibility of administering to the rebuilding of the temple. God's message to Zerubbabel was that he had to rely not on might nor on power but on the Spirit of God.

When King Solomon built the first temple, he utilized large work forces; he conscripted 30,000 workers; 70,000 burden-bearers; 80,000 hewers of stone and 3,300 foremen. He employed in total 180,000 men for the work on the temple. In contrast to this, Zerrubbabel had only 50,000 people, which included the elderly and infants. Despite financial insufficiencies, lack of manpower, and enemy attacks, God promised to work with them. Even if obstacles were as great as a mountain, God would cause it to become a plain before them. Similarly, despite the lack of people of wealth, high education or power in our church today, the work has prospered nonetheless. God reminds us that we should not rely upon our own ambitions, leadership or organizational plans to establish the church but upon the Holy Spirit, which is given without measure.

f. The flying scroll

In this sixth vision, Zechariah sees a scroll flying through the air (Zech 5:1-4). The scroll is 20 cubits long (30 ft) and 10 cubits wide (15 ft). The scroll represents God's judgment and curse. The fact that the scroll is flying suggests that God's judgment will come swiftly upon the sinners. The size of the scroll is larger than ordinary scrolls and suggests that many have committed sin (Rev 14:6-7). The scroll will enter into the houses of those who steal and have sworn falsely. Those who steal refer to those who have sinned through their actions, and those who have lied are those who sin through speech. During the construction of the temple, the people had to examine their behaviors, otherwise their sins will affect the work of their hands, and rather than receiving God's blessings they will incur His wrath.

g. The woman in the ephah

In the seventh vision, Zechariah sees a woman sitting in an ephah which is sealed with a leaden cover (Zech 5:5-11). Zechariah goes on to see two women with wings like storks take the ephah to the land of Shinar, where they build a house for it and set it down. An ephah is a unit of measurement for phys-

ical elements such as grain. But here, the ephah was used to measure the "iniquity in all the land." The woman sitting in the ephah represents all the wickedness and sins of Israel. A heavy lead cover is clamped down over the woman, which means that sin will no longer prevail because God is to execute judgment. The two women with wings like storks represent two wicked nations. In the Old Testament, storks were considered unclean animals (Lev 11:19) and so these two women represent Assyria and Babylon, both gentile and wicked countries. Both Assyria and Babylon took Israel and Judah to Babylon where they dwelt for 70 years. Through this vision, God reminded the Israelites that the captivity served to purge the people of their rebelliousness. Having returned to the holy land, they had to put their old ways behind them, live a holy life and complete the construction of the temple.

h. **Four horses and chariots**

In the eighth and final vision, Zechariah witnessed four chariots come out from between two bronze mountains (Zech 6:1-8). The first chariot was pulled by red horses, the second by black horses, the third by white horses and the fourth by dappled gray horses. Bronze in the Bible represents power, authority and judgment (cf. Rev 1:15; 2:18; Ps 60:12; Lk 10:19). Mountains represent something that is immovable and unchangeable. The brass mountain refers to God's unshakable will and judgment. As the horses appear, they travel in certain directions. The chariot with the black horses was to go to the north country, the white horses followed after them, and the dappled ones to the south country. The four different colored horses represent the messengers of God sent to carry out His will in history. They are in fact the world powers that ruled in history. At this juncture, the red horses are no longer mentioned. This is because by Zechariah's time, the nation of Babylon (red horses) had been defeated by the Persians, and had ceased to exist. The black horses and the white horses (Medes followed by Persia) go northwards which means that they are heading to Babylon. From history we learn that Babylon did receive their rebuke in the hands of the Medes and Persians. The dappled horses headed to the south country (Egypt) and they were to patrol the earth. The dappled horses represent the Grecian empire under Alexander the Great. In the vision, God says that those who go to the north have set my spirit at rest (Zech 6:8). Why is it that Medes and Persia has comforted the heart of God? It is because King Cyrus and King Darius have allowed their captives, the Israelites, to return home and rebuild the temple.

Part 3
The Book of Malachi

A. Overview

a. **Author**

The author of this book is the prophet Malachi, whose name means, "My messenger" or "angel." Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets and the writer of the last book of the Old Testament. Nothing is known of him beyond what is contained in his book of prophecies.

b. **Date**

It is believed that Malachi worked as a prophet some 50 years after the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, between the years of 434 and 415 B.C. He may have been a contemporary of Nehemiah working during the religious reformation.

c. **Theme**

Under the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, the people arose to complete the construction of the temple. Following that there was a period of renewed faith and worship. Prosperity as well as independence had returned. But almost a century had gone by, since then the new generation of Jews had seen a decline in zeal and fear of God. With blessing had come a peculiar reaction; the sense of need for God had receded. God was ignored, even despised. Many of the sins that had brought the downfall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., which Nehemiah strove to reform, were still being practiced in Judah; there was hypocrisy, infidelity, mixed marriages, divorce, and failure to observe the Sabbath and offer tithes. Malachi confronted the hypocrites with their sin by portraying a graphic dialogue between a righteous God and His hardened people.

B. Teachings from the Book of Malachi - A Dialogue between God and His people

Using a series of questions, Malachi directed God's message of judgment and warning to the Jews.

a. **First Question**–*"'I have loved you,' says the Lord. But you say, 'How hast thou loved us?'" (Mal 1:2-5)*
Throughout the history of the chosen people, God had unceasingly manifested His love to them. He led them out of the land of slavery, He gave them the promised land as an inheritance, He raised up judges and prophets to discipline and warn them when they went astray, and even when they were led away to captivity, God brought them back to their homeland. Despite all this, the people asked God, "How have You loved us?" God answered that His love is manifested in His selection. Instead of choosing Esau, the firstborn and the rightful heir, God chose Jacob to be the one through whom the nation of Israel and the Messiah would come. God also revealed the fate of those whom God has not chosen: "Their hill country will be laid waste and their heritage left to jackals of the desert." God's wrath will be upon them because of their sins. In times when we doubt God's love and ask, "How have You loved us, God?" recall the words of 1 John: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God" (1 Jn 3:1; 4:9,10).

b. **Second Question**–*"'A son honors his father, and a servant his master… Where is my honor?… to you, O priests, who despise my name.' You say, 'How have we despised thy name?'" (Mal 1:6-14)*
Although worship in the temple had been reinstated, the prophet now turns his accusations to the priests. The duties of the priests were to offer sacrifices, teach the laws of God and bless the people. According to the laws of sacrifices, animals with defects were not acceptable as sacrifices (Lev 22:17-33), but the priests were guilty of offering up lame, blind and sick animals to God. They did not filter the animals brought in by the people. Instead, they accepted whatever was offered. God therefore rebuked the priests and the people saying that even the gentiles have exalted God's name and given Him the best, but the Israelites have given to God things that were cheap, convenient and rejects. God had no pleasure in them. This is a good reminder to us that we must give God our best. If we give God only our leftover time, money and energy, we repeat the same sin as these worshipers.

c. **Third Question**– *"'You cover the Lord's altar with tears because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand'. You ask, 'Why does He not?'" (Mal 2:13-16)*
In those days, the men questioned why God refused their offerings. God told them that it was because they had married gentile women, abused their wives, and divorced them. They had ignored the bond between a husband and a wife and God's purpose for them, which was to raise godly children. Through God's answer, we are reminded that problems in a marriage cannot be resolved in a worldly manner, but we need to honor the sanctity and permanence of marriage.

d. **Fourth Question**– *"You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied Him?'" (Mal 2:17)*
Due to suffering and oppression, the people's faith in God weakened especially when they could not see God's justice or deliverance. They began to twist God's truth by falsely asserting that God delights in those who do evil. They questioned God's justice when they observed how the wicked were not punished but blessed. God was tired of the people's ignorance and their failure to understand Him. In times when God appears to be silent, we need to wait for God and believe that He can never go against His own nature.

e. **Fifth Question**–*"'Return to me, and I will return to you,' says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How are we robbing thee?'" (Mal 3:6-12)*
Malachi urged the people to stop holding back their tithes. The system of offering a tenth of one's land and possessions was one that began during the time of Moses. The tithes were used to support the Levites who dedicated their lives for the service of the Lord. Sadly, during Malachi's day, the people withheld their tithes and the Levites were forced to work to earn a living. God pointed out that by withholding tithes, the people were robbing God of what belonged to Him (Lev 27:30-34; Num 18:21; Deut 14:27) and as a result, God had cursed the land and its people with locusts (Mal 3:11). But if the people were to return to God by offering tithes, He will open the windows of heaven and pour down an overflowing blessing. This promise holds true for us when we offer God the first part of our income and supply the needs of the church.

f. **Sixth Question**– *"Your words have been stout against me, says the Lord. Yet you say, 'How have we spoken against thee?'" (Mal 3:13-15)*
These few verses reveal the people's attitude toward God. When they see the evildoers prosper and the arrogant blessed, they question, "What good does it do to worship God?" What is the point of being so serious about our faith? The Lord reminded the people that there is no need to envy the wicked because on the Day of Judgment, God will remember and save those who have feared and served Him.

Check for Understanding

1. What is the necessary attitude we should have while doing God's work?

2. Why had the Israelites experienced loss in their lives despite much effort?

3. Have we seen "famines" or fruitlessness in our lives despite our efforts?

Life Application

Labor for Jesus

Although Haggai served the shortest time of all the prophets (3 months and 24 days), he was successful in his work. Haggai walked the streets and alleys of Jerusalem urging the people to reorder their priorities and get back to doing God's work. His faithfulness and zeal was a catalyst for the people to complete the work on the temple. While Haggai was a faithful worker, the chosen people were content with beautifying their own homes and had neglected the work of God. These two parties can represent the two different attitudes in doing church work. In the following activity, look up the listed Bible verses, then discuss and examine our own attitudes towards doing God's work.

1. Read Haggai 1:2-4
   The prophet Haggai rebuked the people for excusing themselves by saying that the time had not yet come for rebuilding the temple of God. What attitude do we have towards church work? What is our immediate response when asked to help?

2. Read Haggai 1:6-9
   The people hoped for more, but they received less. What can Christians do to be blessed?

3. Read Haggai 2:4
   The Lord encouraged the people to be courageous and complete the work. God promised that He would be with them and nothing will be too hard for them. Share your experiences in this area.

4. Read Haggai 2:9
   The glory of the latter temple will be greater than the former temple. Reflect on the situation of the church today compared with the promise of God. What are your thoughts?

Answers for teacher reference:

1. The people focused their energies on building their own homes and orchards. They used many excuses to push aside the work of rebuilding the temple of God. We should be cautious of creating excuses saying, "The time has not yet come" for doing God's work. Because we focus on "building our own houses," the temple of God still lies in ruins. May God help us overcome our selfishness and enable us to understand that our labor for the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

2. The people lacked a heart of zeal for doing God's work. On the surface it appears that they were able to enjoy many pleasures but in fact they had suffered great loss. Matthew 6:33 remind us that we should seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we look to God's matters and obey His commands, God will bless us.

3. Psalm 127:1 reminds us that those who build and those who watch over the city can only do so if God abides with them. When Elisha's servant saw the armies of Syria surrounding them, he was afraid. But when he perceived how the mountains were surrounded by the armies and chariots of God, his fear subsided because he saw the abidance of God. Today, we need only be strong in the power of God while we serve Him as God will work with us (2 Tim 1:6).

4. Today, when people see the situation of the church they lose hope. When people lose hope they lose the determination, the faith and even courage to continue in God's work. This in turn will affect the holy work. Instead, we should ask God for a peaceful heart, to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to be renewed in strength and courage. We need only do our part and leave the rest to God.

Reflection & Prayer

As we do holy work, let us continuously examine our inner selves, so that our works will be accepted by Him. Let us also look to the Lord for guidance and strength as we complete His work.

Lesson 13

Review

Lesson Aim

1) To enable students to gain an overview of the major and minor prophets.
2) To understand the role of the prophets in the history of the Israelite nation.
3) To realize the great task that each prophet shouldered in declaring God's words to a resistant people.

Review

Spin the Wheel

Making the Wheel:

1. Use a large piece of cardboard.
2. Draw a large circle. You may wish to cut out Styrofoam and attach it to the cardboard to strengthen it.
3. Divide the circle into the following categories, like a pie. Color each category in a different color.

Categories:

a. Spin Again
b. Miss A Turn
c. Who Am I
d. Famous Sayings
e. Meaning of Names
f. Lessons 1-12

4. Cut out a large arrow with the remaining cardboard. This should be stiff so that it can spin easily.

5. Use a pin to attach the arrow to wheel. Or, if you prefer, you can spin a small empty bottle.

6. Rules of the game:
   Have class split into small groups of 2-3. Designate someone to keep score. Take turns to spin the arrow. Each correct answer gets one point. There is a one point deduction for a wrong answer. Any question not answered by one group gets passed to the next group for a bonus point. At the end of the game, count the points earned by each team. The winning team can be presented with a small token or prize.

Famous Sayings

1. Which prophet responded to God's calling by saying, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."
   A. Ezekiel
   B. Daniel
   C. Isaiah
   D. Hosea
   (Answer: C)

2. Which prophet said, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah)

3. Which prophet spoke these great words of faith even when faced with injustice – "Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls – yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."
   A. Isaiah
   B. Joel
   C. Jeremiah
   D. Habakkuk
   (Answer: D)

4. Which prophet responded to God's calling by saying, "I don't know how to speak, for I am only a youth."
   A. Amos
   B. Isaiah

   C. Jeremiah
   D. Ezekiel
   (Answer: C)

5. Which prophet delivered these words to the people: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,"says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi)

6. Which prophet said the following words to Zerubbabel, the governor: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah)

7. Which book records this prophecy: "The glory of the new temple will surpass the glory of the former temple." (Haggai)

8. This proverb was circulating among the people at the time of this prophet: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Ezekiel)

9. Who said "You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." (Haggai)

Meaning of Names

1. What does Isaiah mean? (Salvation is of the Lord)

2. What does Zechariah mean? (Jehovah is renowned)

3. What does Malachi mean? (My messenger or angel)

4. What does Jonah mean? (Dove)

5. What does Haggai mean? (Festive)
6. What does Nahum mean? (Comfort/consolation)

7. What does Zephaniah mean? (He whom God hides)

8. What does Habakkuk mean? (Embracer)

9. What does Daniel mean? (God is my judge)

Who Am I?

1. I was the first person to be called a prophet in the Bible. (Abraham)

2. I was taken to Babylon when I was 25 years old, during the 2nd invasion of Judah by the Babylonians. Five years later God called me to be prophet at the age of 30. (Ezekiel)

3. Which prophet was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees by profession?
   A. Hosea
   B. Obadiah
   C. Amos
   D. Nahum
   (Answer: C)

4. I am from Judah but I was sent to the northern kingdom of Israel to pronounce judgement to the rich. (Amos)

5. My mission was to pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow and to build and to plant. (Jeremiah)

6. Among all the prophets, I served for the shortest time – less than 4 months. (Haggai)

7. A hundred years ago, another prophet also prophesied to this foreign nation concerning God's judgment. They repented then, but sadly they sinned again. (Nahum)

8. I was called by God to be a prophet from my mother's womb. (Jeremiah)

9. God showed me this vision of dry bones resurrecting to become a vast army. (Ezekiel)

10. I decreed the Israelites to return home to rebuild their temple. (Cyrus King of Persia)

Lesson 1

1. Why are the major/minor prophetic books categorized as they are? (These

books are categorized based on the length of the book and not on the importance of the work.)

2. List the four major prophetic books in order. (The major prophetic books consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel.)

3. List the 12 minor prophetic books in order. (The 12 minor prophetic books comprise of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.)

4. Who were the pre-exilic prophets?

To Israel	To Nineveh	To Edom	To Judah
Amos	Jonah	Obadiah	Joel
Hosea	Nahum		Isaiah
			Micah
			Zephaniah
			Jeremiah
			Habakkuk

5. Who were the post-exilic prophets? (Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah)

6. What are the four different names designated to a prophet? (Prophet, Seer, Watchman, Man of God)

7. What were the purposes of raising prophets in the Old Testament? (Show the people of God "their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins"; call the people to repentance and obedience to God; warn the people of impending divine judgment and disasters prophesied about the future of individuals and nations; convey the message of consolation and pardon, bless, intercede for others; anoint and advise kings and guide state affairs; prophesy concerning the birth, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Messiah)

Lesson 2

1. The book of Isaiah is often known as "the miniature bible". Name some similarities that Isaiah has with the Bible as a whole. (Please see lessons 2 and 3.)

2. Which two aspects of God's divine nature are discussed in Isaiah? (God's holiness and love.)

3. How does God manifest His holiness in the book of Isaiah? (Through visions

of God's glory, through judgment, through refinement and purification.

4. Which year was Judah finally taken to Babylon? For how long? (586 B.C. For 70 years)

5. How did God open a way for the remnant to return to their homeland? (God prepared the way through King Cyrus of Persia who allowed the remnants to return home in 539 B.C.)

6. What 3 gentile kings/nations were God's servants, used to achieve His purpose? (Assyria was the rod of God's anger. God used Assyria as a tool to purge Israel of her sins; The Babylonians were the instrument of punishment upon the nation of Judah; King Cyrus is called "My anointed" because he allowed the Israelites to return home.)

Lesson 3

1. Who were the three servants discussed in the book of Isaiah? (King Cyrus, Israelite nation, the Messiah)

2. Which prophetic book contains the most prophecies concerning the Messiah's character, mission, suffering, and death? (Book of Isaiah)

3. Which chapter in the book of Isaiah depicts the suffering, death, and burial of the Messiah? (Chapter 53)

4. Explain what "the world shall dwell with the lamb" means. (This is a depiction of the scene within the kingdom of God where God is king and love prevails. Such different animals can dwell at peace with one another because of the knowledge of God and His love.)

5. What does new heaven and new earth refer to? (It can refer to the heavenly kingdom, the true church or our hearts.)

6. Explain how the new heaven and new earth can take place in our hearts/church. (Through the Lord, we are freed from the bondage of sin and our hearts are being transformed from one degree to another into a new heaven and new earth.)

Lesson 4

1. Which country did Obadiah speak judgment against? (Edom)

2. What things were the Edomites proud of? (Proud of their heritage, their knowledge, their mighty men, their allies)

3. What is the great natural disaster that was to come upon Israel in the book of Joel?
   A. Flood
   B. Locusts
   C. Earthquake
   D. Gnats
   (Answer: B)

4. Joel speaks of the Day of the Lord. What 3 main events does this refer to? (The locust plague refers to the coming Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord refers to the day when the Judahites will be taken into captivity. The Day of the Lord refers to the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus.)

5 In his book, Amos denounces the "cows of Bashan" for their luxurious lifestyles. Who was he referring to? (Israel's wealthy women were compared to the cows of Bashan – pampered, sleek and well fed.)

6. The people committed two great religious sins in Amos' day. What were they? (Instead of worshipping in Jerusalem, the people worshiped in worship centers that were not designated by God. There they worshiped golden calves. Although the people worshiped and sacrificed to God, they continued to lead a life of sin.)

Lesson 5

1. What five things did God do that demonstrated His control over life, elements, and circumstances in the book of Jonah? (God appointed the storm, the fish, the plant, the worm, and the sultry wind.)

2. What two possible reasons prevented Jonah from fulfilling his commission? (Jonah felt reluctant to preach to his enemies because they were undeserving. His intense patriotic feelings towards his country made him unwilling to share God's favor to those who were non-Jews.)

3. What two important lessons did God teach him concerning his prejudice? (God used this occasion to teach Jonah that God was not only God of the Jews, but of all those who repent and believe (Rom 3:29). Sometimes we wish that judgment and destruction would come upon sinful people whose wicked-

ness demand immediate punishment. But God is more merciful than we imagine. He feels compassion for the sinners we want judged.)

4. In the book of Hosea, the leaders, priests, and people had sinned against God because they did not know God and had rejected knowledge. How did the people demonstrate that they did not know God? (Although the people professed to know God, they did all kinds of evil; they lied, stole, murdered, committed adultery and worshiped idols. While practicing unrighteousness, the people came to the temple to offer their gifts to God. They did not understand what God really desired.)

5. God is a God of justice and love. Because the Israelites were bent on turning away from God, God is determined to punish and destroy them. But God's steadfast love and compassion restrain Him and He is reluctant to make an end to them. How does God resolve the dichotomy of the two sides of His nature in the book of Hosea? (Because of His divine justice, God will execute punishment. In Hosea 11:5, God has prophesied that the Assyrians will invade the land. But at the same time because of His eternal love, He will not make a total annihilation of Israel but will restore the people back to their homeland after the 70 years captivity.)

6. Why is the mountain of the Lord the highest of all mountains? (Because out of Zion, the truth, God's justice and judgment are found here.)

Lesson 6

1. Zephaniah prophesies against those who "clothe themselves in foreign apparel." Who are these people? (Those who wore heathen clothing represent those who desired foreign gods, foreign ways and who submitted to foreign corrupt practices.)

2. "The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil." What were these people guilty of? (These people became indifferent to God and did as they pleased. They became complacent in their sins and no longer cared about the consequences.)

3. How is the book of Habakkuk different from the other prophetic books? (While other prophetic books brought God's words to men, the book of Habakkuk is unique in that it is a dialogue between God and the prophet.)

4. What were the two questions that Habakkuk asked God? (Why did God do

nothing with the wickedness and injustice that prevailed among the people of God? Why does God use the Babylonians who were more wicked to punish His chosen people?)

5. The way Habakkuk resolves his problem serves as a model for us today. What did he do? (He brought his problems before God; He waited for God in silence; He kept on believing in God's goodness and sovereignty)

6. God answers Habakkuk by telling him two truths. These truths enabled Habakkuk to rise above his problems. They can carry us through times when we may face injustice in our lives. What are they? (The good and evil shall be repaid; The righteous shall live by faith)

Lesson 7

1. Who were Jeremiah's contemporaries? (Ezekiel, who preached to the captives in Babylon, and Daniel who worked in the king's palace in Babylon.)

2. Which country was Jeremiah preaching to? (Judah, northern kingdom had already been destroyed by the Assyrians.)

3. Jeremiah rebuked the people for rejecting the fresh spring of water and hewing out broken cisterns for themselves. What did these cisterns refer to? (Foreign powers; idols)

4. The people refused to believe that the Babylonians would come and destroy the land so long as this existed. (The temple)

5. What main messages did the false prophets preach that were contrary to that of Jeremiah? (While Jeremiah prophesied that God would destroy Judah through the Babylonians, the false prophets declared that disasters will not come and peace would prevail. While Jeremiah prophesied that the people would be in captivity for 70 years, the false prophets prophesied that they would return within 2 years.)

6. Name 2 of the visions that Jeremiah saw concerning judgment upon Judah. (The boiling pot, the ruined loin cloth, the potter and the clay, the broken vessel, the basket of figs, the cup of wrath, the iron yoke)

Lesson 8

1. Out of all the prophets, which prophet was persecuted, tortured, and isolated

most for the message that he preached? (Jeremiah)

2. Jeremiah was asked to deny his own desires and make certain sacrifices. What 2 things did the Lord ask Jeremiah to refrain from doing? (Jeremiah was not to marry; Jeremiah was prohibited from entering the house of mourning or the house of feasting)

3. Why did the Lord ask Jeremiah to refrain from marriage? (Through Jeremiah, God wanted to illustrate to the Judahites how close judgment was and that there was no time to establish a family. When Jerusalem is besieged the children that were born would die of disease, famine, or the sword, and there would be no time to bury the dead (Jer 16:4).)

4. Why did the Lord prohibit Jeremiah from entering the house of mourning and feasting? (God instructed Jeremiah not to enter the house of mourning to show Judah that on the day of calamity God too will not mourn their deaths. God also prohibited Jeremiah from entering the house of feasting because the time will come when there will no longer be the voice of mirth and gladness in Jerusalem.)

5. From the Book of Lamentations, how can we see God's love and mercy in the midst of punishment? (God's compassion is ever present. The book shows us the serious consequences of human sin and how in the midst of tragedy we can still have hope in God if we pray for forgiveness and turn to Him for deliverance.)

6. The book of Lamentations reminds us to repent before it is too late. Why is repentance so important? (For mercy and forgiveness of sins; God's wrath is removed and He will withdraw His punishments; To receive peace and blessings; Leads to salvation)

Lesson 9

1. Which prophets were called by God through visions? (Isaiah, Ezekiel)

2. Where did Ezekiel work? (In Babylon with the captives)

3. In the vision of the four living creatures, what were the four different faces that each had? (Each had the face of a man, lion, ox and eagle.)

4. Briefly explain what each face represents.

(The face of a man– Man is created after the image of the living God, filled with righteousness and holiness. As servants of God we need to imitate the likeness of our Lord Jesus.
The face of a lion– The lion is the king of beasts and as servants of God we need to have the courage to eliminate sin and to preach the word of God fearlessly.
The face of an ox– When we serve God let us imitate the diligence, strength, patience, long-suffering and humility of the oxen.
The face of an eagle– Eagles fly to majestic heights and have eyes that are sharp and piercing. As servants of God we need to rise above the world and look to matters above. We should have the spiritual knowledge to discern all things and to carry the word of God afar to the four corners of the earth.)

5. What does the glory of God represent? (It is the manifestation of God's divine nature and represents God's abidance.)

6. How has the glory of God abided with chosen people since the history of the Israelites? (When the Israelites departed from Egypt, God's glory could be seen in the pillar of cloud and fire which directed the people through the wilderness. The beginning of the temple began with the tent of meeting at the time of Moses (Ex 40). After the tent of meeting had been built, the glory of the Lord filled it and was so great that even Moses could not enter it. After the tabernacle was built, God's presence and glory filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35). At the dedication of Solomon's temple, God also filled the temple with His glory (2 Chron 7:1-2) so that the priests could not enter.)

Lesson 10

1. Name three visions that Ezekiel saw concerning the restoration of the Israel? (To remove a heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh; The resurrection of the dry bones; The restoration of the temple; Water from the temple)

2. What does "to remove a heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" mean? (God will remove the disbelieving heart of stone and will put in a heart of flesh. This prophecy refers to the last days when the spiritual nation of Israel, the true church, will be revived and the Lord will gather His chosen people to Him. God will pour down His Spirit and cause the believers to be united as one. God's Spirit will soften our hearts to be sensitive to sin and to obey His commands.)

3. Ezekiel saw the vision of the dry bones. What can these dry bones refer to?

(The dry bones are a picture of the Jews in captivity. The heap of dry bones represents the spiritual condition of those who are not in Christ. The dry bones can also be used to describe the condition of our own individual faith or the condition of the church.)

4. The glory of God departed from the temple. Later in the vision of the temple, the glory of God returns. What are the conditions for the return of God's glory? (To have God's presence the church needs to be built upon the exact measurements set by God. The true church needs to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.)

5. The river has many transforming powers. Name some changes that the river brought? (The stagnant waters will become fresh; The waters will teem with living creatures and many fish; Many trees grow on the banks of the river)

6. Why do we need to be sanctified? (It is the will of God; Being holy is the duty of believers. God has chosen us to be His children and we have to live a life worthy of His calling; We need to be sanctified to obtain salvation)

Lesson 11

1. What does it mean to be holy? (Holiness means to be set apart and distinct from ungodly people and from sin and its influences. What makes us different are God's qualities in our lives.)

2. How did Daniel maintain holiness in an ungodly world? (He understood the God he worshiped; He worked at it; Through God's help)

3. What are the dreams/visions in the book of Daniel that illustrate God's sovereignty over nations and individual destiny? (The great image; The four beasts; The ram and the he-goat)

4. In the dream of the great image, what does each part of the image represent?

Vision	Great Image
Babylon	Golden head
Medes/Persia	Silver Breast
Greece	Bronze Belly
Rome	Iron legs
Nations of the end-time	Half iron and half clay feet
The second coming of Christ	The stone smites the great image into pieces

5 Which of these world powers are listed in the chronological order:
A. Babylon – Medes/Persia – Greece – Rome
B. Babylon – Persia/Medes – Rome – Greece
C. Persia/Medes – Babylon – Greece – Rome
D. Medes/Persia – Babylon – Rome – Greece
(Answer: A)

6. From the book of Daniel, give two examples of God's dominion over individual destiny. (God delivered Jehoiakim, the king of Judah with some of the vessels of the house of God into the hand of the Babylonian king. God caused Daniel and the rest of the exiles to be carried to Babylon. God caused Daniel to find favor in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. God gave Daniel and his companions learning and skill in all letters and wisdom. God gave Daniel the opportunity and the ability to interpret dreams.)

Lesson 12

1. Why did the people not complete the rebuilding of the temple? (The people had misplaced priorities. They looked to the matters of the world rather than to the matters of God. They had shifted their attention to building paneled houses for themselves while ignoring their spiritual lives and their relationship with God.)

2. Why had the Israelites experienced loss in life despite much personal effort? (Spiritual decline can influence our physical lives. There may be times where we have striven hard, yet all our efforts have become futile and fruitless. We may have invested much time studying to the point of forgoing services and doing holy work, yet the grades we receive are not up to par. We encounter such difficulties because our spiritual temple still lies in ruins and God has withheld His blessings.)

3. In the vision of the golden lampstand and the olive trees, who does the lampstand represent? Who were the two olive trees? (Israelites; Joshua and Zerubbabel)

4. In the book of Malachi, the people accused God of not loving them. How does God respond to this accusation? (God answered that His love is manifested in His selection. Instead of choosing Esau, the firstborn and the rightful heir, God chose Jacob to be the one through whom the nation of Israel and the Messiah would come.)

5. God accused the people of despising and dishonoring Him. What were the Israelites guilty of? (According to the laws of sacrifices, animals with defects were not acceptable as sacrifices (Lev 22:17-33), but the people and priests were guilty of offering up lame, blind and sick animals to God.)

6. What is one of the reasons why God established marriage in the book of Malachi? (Godly offspring)

The rain falls on all the fields, but crops grow only in those that have been tilled and sown.

Chinese Proverb

"Whatever your task, work heartily as serving the Lord and not men."

(Col 3:23)

"Be an example...of good deeds of every kind. Let everything you do reflect your love of the truth."

(Titus 2:7)