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

YEAR 3 BOOK 1

General Assembly of the True Jesus Church

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Junior 2 Year 3 Book 1

Historical Overview of the Christian Church and Word Religions

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

YEAR 3 BOOK 1

JUNIOR 2

Teacher's Guide

THEME:

Historical Overview of the Christian Church and World Religions

Be an example!

Fall Quarter:
September, October, November

There is no greater calling, no greater blessing, than to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. Serve Him with all your heart. Be an example. Walk in purity!

God knows that there is room enough in our hearts for only one "most precious thing." If it is not Jesus, then it's something else.

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YEAR 3 BOOK 1

JUNIOR 2

Teacher's Guide

THEME:

Historical Overview of the Christian Church and World Religions

THEMES

Historical Overview of the Christian Church and World Religions

unit 1:
Establishment of the Early Church

Young people often consider history an irrelevant and boring subject. Why learn about people long dead and events long past? We need to realize that God is the God of history. Abraham was chosen at a specific point in human history. The nation of Israel really did exist in ancient times. Jesus came into the world to become a part of world history forever. Within history humans did what was right before God, or offended God through sinful acts. It is therefore imperative that we should learn from the mistakes of our spiritual forebears. The first section of this text maps out the path that the first Christians took in establishing the church. We see how they gradually moved away from the will of God, and substituted their own will and ideas. But through prayer, the Holy Spirit will work in every heart that is willing to receive the Lord's guidance in utmost humility. Let us open our hearts and minds to discover the working of God in human history.

unit 2:
Many Names For Christianity

Christianity is a very diverse religion today. Most of us know of Christian churches from different denominations –the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church–to name a few. How did we get so many versions of Christianity? You may find it hard to imagine a time when the Catholic Church was the only church in the world. However, that was the case until the tenth century, when the Orthodox Church broke away from the Catholic Church in the West. All the various Protestant churches did not come into being until as late as the sixteenth century. This section follows the history of the Christian church as it divided into many branches. We look at the conflicts and controversies that caused major schisms within the churches. As we study this, we should think about our church, and learn from the mistakes of the past. Through prayer and knowledge, we can avoid the pitfalls that beset the secular churches around us.

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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:

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

Sample

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 (1)

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.	Jn 14-15; Acts 1-2; 2 Tim 1
2.	Acts 3-5
3.	Mt 10; Acts 6-7; Rom 8
4.	Jn 14-15; Act 8-9; 2 Tim 1
5.	Ps 32:8,9; Is 30:1-17; 1 Tim 4:1-5
6.	Jer 23:9-40; 2 Pet 2; 1 Jn 2-3
7.	Neh 1; Dan 9; Jn 17; 1 Tim 3; 2 Tim 2
8.	Ps 60; Rom 2-8
9.	Deut 28-30; Ps 18:20-36; Mal 3-4
10.	Deut 7-8, 12:29-13; Hos 4
11.	Is 45-46, 57; Ezek 14
12.	Josh 24; Jer 2, 10, 18:1-17,19

Memory Verses For September October & November

1. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)
2. "For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which you have prepared before the face of all peoples." (Lk 2:30, 31)
3. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (Jas 1:2-4)
4. "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."(Gal 1:8, 9)
5. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet 5:8)
6. "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of ram." (1 Sam 15:22)
7. """These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."" (Mt 15:8, 9)
8. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Rom 5:1,2)
9. "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." (1 Cor 2:11)
10. "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." (Rev 22:14)
11. "'You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image–any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.'" (Ex 20:3–5a)
12. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." (Col 1:15–16)

unit 1

Goals

Young people often consider history an irrelevant and boring subject. Why learn about people long dead and events long past? We need to realize that God is the God of history. Abraham was chosen at a specific point in human history. The nation of Israel really did exist in ancient times. Jesus came into the world to become a part of world history forever. Within history humans did what was right before God, or offended God through sinful acts. It is therefore imperative that we should learn from the mistakes of our spiritual forebears. The first section of this text maps out the path that the first Christians took in establishing the church. We see how they gradually moved away from the will of God, and substituted their own will and ideas. But through prayer, the Holy Spirit will work in every heart that is willing to receive the Lord's guidance in utmost humility. Let us open our hearts and minds to discover the working of God in human history.

Teacher Devotional

Deuteronomy 12:32 tells us: "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it." The Lord established the apostolic church, as He established our church. The early church was not careful in observing the Lord's commandments, and they added human teachings into the doctrines of the church. They bent to social pressures to conform to the world around them.

We are in a changing world. We face social pressures, just as during the times of the early church. We should be ready to learn from their errors and pray that the Holy Spirit will give us courage to stand firm in our beliefs. As we discover the history of the early church and trace the origins of its downfall, let us ask God to preserve our faith and keep us in His ways.

Keeping the Truth

"The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."
(Is 40:8)

Lesson 1

The Establishment of a United Church

Listed Scriptures

Acts 2, 13, 14, 15:39–18:22, 18:23–21:17

Lesson Aims

1) To learn about the development of the early Church.
2) To understand that the Holy Spirit is able to unite God's people when they call upon Him.

Memory Verse

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

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

Jn 14–15, Acts 1–2, 2 Tim 1

Bible Background

Around the first century AD, a charismatic Jewish leader named Jesus began a movement that changed the course of history. The beginning of this movement is recorded in the four gospels of the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles records the founding of the church, which was the meeting place for the adherents of this movement. Followers of this movement eventually became known as Christians.

Writings of various apostles record the internal growth and problems within the Christian community. One of the key factors affecting the early Christians was the persecutions that began with the execution of Stephen (Acts 6 and 7) and grew in intensity over the first two centuries. As their lives were threatened, many stuck to their faith, willing to die for Christ—sometimes through the most painful or tortuous death. Others, however, renounced their faith or modified the original teachings of the apostles in order to accommodate this difficult situation.

The Christian Bible is not the only source of this historical information. Historians of the time also recorded many of these events that match accounts mentioned in the New Testament. For example, Cornelius Tacitus (c.55–117) provided important confirmation of events recorded in the New Testament. He outlined the rise of Christianity, mentioned the execution of Christ, and wrote accounts of the persecution of Christians by Nero. Another writer who wrote about the Christian movement was Josephus. A Jew, Josephus wrote the *Archaeology* (or *Antiquities*) *of the Jews*, an immense work in twenty volumes, which appeared in AD 93–94. There is a passage about Jesus in book 18, while other passages deal with John the Baptist and James the Just.

As we read the Bible, we should be aware that we are also reading a part of mankind's history. However, we should remember that history is in God's hands. Psalm 22:28 reminds us that the "kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations." As we learn about the development of Christianity, we are also learning about the works of God and how humans respond to Him.

Warm Up

Ask students to think of an experience or event they remember very well and enjoyed. For example, it could be traveling abroad, a school trip, a surprise birthday party, a visit to Disneyland, a hiking trip, etc. It has to be something they would love to do or experience again. Ask them to share their experiences. Be sensitive to the fact that some students may not be comfortable sharing personal experiences, so not everyone needs to share.

Once everyone who wishes to share their stories has done so, ask them why they would wish to go through the experience again (i.e., go on that trip again, or visit Disneyland again, etc). How do they know they will enjoy the experience? [They have done this once before, and it was very enjoyable, so they know they will enjoy it again because of past experience.]

Next, ask one or two volunteers to try and persuade others in the class that they would also enjoy such an experience. It could be any relevant or appropriate experience. Use your judgment based on what you hear.

Afterwards, ask the other students if they have been persuaded to go. That is, if they had a choice, and were able to, would they go and

experience what their classmates described? If the answer is yes, ask them why. If they say no, ask them why also. How did they base their judgment of whether they would enjoy a described experience? [Based on what others have experienced; they trust their classmates to have given them an honest and true assessment of what they have enjoyed; they feel confident that they can use the experience of others to make a decision.]

Use the discussion as a springboard into history. Many students find history boring and irrelevant. Yet, all our decisions are based on history. Every moment that passes becomes the past, and therefore a part of our history. When we make important decisions, we need to base our decisions on past experiences. Do we enjoy thrill rides? If we have been on one before and have enjoyed the experience, then we would enjoy Disneyland. Do we love Disney characters? If we have always loved watching Disney cartoons, chances are that we would enjoy going to Disney World and seeing all these characters around us. On the other hand, even if we have never climbed the Rockies, and a good friend has had that experience and enthusiastically recommends it, we might decide to go and try it one day. All these decisions are really based on our or someone else's past experiences–in other words, historical perspectives. The Bible gives us many historical perspectives vital to our spiritual lives. The historical information found in the Bible spans from the creation of the world to sometime around the end of the first century AD. Our decisions about what we should believe, how we should worship God, or how we should conduct ourselves as true Christians must be based on this very important historical guide. The history contains spiritual guidelines critical to our salvation. We need to study history because God is the God of history. From the past, we learn about the mistakes of our spiritual ancestors and learn to avoid them. We learn from them what pleases God and try to emulate them. We read about the warnings of our spiritual forefathers, listen to their advice, learn from the revelations God gave them, and heed these things.

Let us therefore ask God to guide us as we take a trip through the history of the church, so that we may learn from the mistakes of the past, and make wise choices in matters of our faith.

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles

The Book of Acts is crucial to our understanding of events leading to the inception of the earliest church. The church was not established gradually. It came with a very loud sound, in tongues of fire, on one of the busiest days in Jerusalem.

a. **Read Acts 2:1–4.**

1. Write in point-form a summary of the sequence of events happening here.
   (1. disciples united together in one place on the Day of Pentecost;
   2. a sound of rushing wind from heaven filled the place;
   3. tongues of fire appeared to the disciples;
   4. each disciple had a tongue of fire upon them;
   5. once this happened, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues.)

2. Which two elements are portrayed in this passage?
   (wind and fire.)

3. God's presence is often linked to powerful elements and forces of nature. Can you think of stories or incidents in the Bible when God appeared within these powerful forces?
   (e.g. Exodus 3:2ff–Moses and the burning bush, 19:18–at Mt. Sinai; Num 16:28–35–punishment of God through earthquake and fire; 1 Kings 19:11–12–Elijah at Mt. Horeb; Ps 18:7–15–many images of forces of nature linked to God's presence/actions; Isa 66:15–16–the Lord will come with whirlwind and fire; other relevant examples also acceptable)

b. **Read Acts 2:5–13 carefully. Why were people confused about the situation?**
(Devout Jews from many different countries were gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost. Needless to say, many spoke the languages of their homelands. If you were there, you would hear a cacophony of voices and noises, many speaking in different languages. When this crowd heard a loud sound coming from a group of men and women, they came to see what was happening. They saw a group of people speaking aloud. Astonishingly, the multitude that was there heard their own language spoken by these people. Each heard their own language spoken by a group of simple men and women whose main language was Galilean. How could such simple people suddenly become multilinguists?)

c. **Peter stood up and spoke a powerful sermon that converted three thousand people instantly (Acts 2:14–41). This was the same Peter who denied Jesus three times when the Lord was arrested. That was the effect of the Holy Spirit on him. The New Testament is full of explanations or descriptions about the effect of the Holy Spirit on believers. Read the following verses to discover some of the effects the Holy Spirit could have on us. Think of other verses if you can.**

1. 2 Tim 1:7
   (gives us power and a sound mind, teaches us love)

2. Gal 5:22–23
   (fruit of the spirit)

3. Eph 3:16–19
   (gives us strength within, enables us to understand the completeness and entirety of God's love, allows us to be filled with the fullness of God)

4. Jn14:15–18
   (reassurance that Jesus is in us even though He's not here)

5. Jn15:26–27
   (helps us and gives us strength to bear witness to Him)

d. **As the young church gained a foothold in the world, the Holy Spirit guided the apostles and believers in preaching the truth and spreading the gospel of Christ. The church at the beginning was a unified entity. All the members shared the same beliefs and practices, as well as their possessions. This was the effect of the Holy Spirit on the church. Acts 2:42 describes a vital, growing church. Three things were key in the verse. List them, and explain what they mean in practice:**

1. Continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship
   (Meaning: Continue to learn the words of God and follow His teachings.)
2. Breaking of bread
   (Meaning: This refers to the Holy Communion, but is also an encouragement to participate fully in the church community.)

3. Prayer
   (Meaning: Support one another through prayer, pray for the church, etc)

e. **Having read the above verses on the effects of the Holy Spirit on a believer and the church, can you explain why the church described in Acts 2:42–27 was so unified?**
   (students' response)

Check for Understanding

1. Draw a timeline to illustrate the key events recorded in Acts 1 and 2. (From Jesus ascended to heaven to disciples prayed in a room)

2. Explain, in your own words, what we can learn about unity from the early church.

Life Application

Teaching Tips

This is an ongoing, weekly activity for the next 5 weeks. All teachers of the class need to be involved, as the students will need guidance. This is a good leadership and collaborative project for the class. The date for the fellowship can be flexible, depending on your church's schedule or situation. However, the activity is timetabled as part of lesson 6, so there is as little disruption or extra work as possible for teachers. It is best if all teachers for the class can be present for this fellowship.

Fellowship

It is essential for a healthy church to hold true to the teachings of Christ, for all members to take part fully in the community that forms the church, and find strength in prayer. Work together to plan one fellowship for your class, which takes into account these important needs of the community of Christ. You may invite other classes to join your fellowship if this is appropriate. Try to involve everyone in your class in the planning. Decide what activities you would like, and delegate different people to be responsible for each activity. Remember Acts 2:42 as your guideline. Your agenda should focus on:
–prayer
–community and faith-building activities that will help to draw people closer together.

Your fellowship will take place during the week of Lesson 6, after the lesson has been covered, so you have time to plan carefully. As you plan, think of the needs of your group and your church community. Take into account anyone who needs help or support, physically or spiritually. You could plan group games to give everyone an opportunity to get to know each other better. You could ask various counselors, pastors or deacons to help with discussions, and you could plan a question and answer session too. The possibilities are endless. Some considerations are:

a. Have an aim or a theme for the fellowship.
b. Decide on how much time you wish to plan for. E.g., a one-hour fellowship could include a discussion of a topic or issue, snacks, games, hymn singing. If it is less than an hour, you will have fewer items on your agenda.
c. Always have a counselor, deacon or pastor present. People are more likely to ask questions about faith or other issues in a more relaxed atmosphere, and you want to have someone more mature who is able to help out if this happens.
d. Delegate tasks. Everyone should be involved.
e. You could invite students from another class if you wish, or even truth seekers, if you plan for this.
f. Always allow time to pray together during fellowships, and try to make it a relaxing atmosphere so everyone feels comfortable.

This exercise gives you a chance to think about the success of the early church and how we can apply their strategies ourselves today. It also provides everyone with an opportunity to become involved in a collaborative project that is fun and beneficial in fostering closer ties within the household of God.

Reflection & Prayer

As we learn to take on more responsibility for our own faith, and the faith of our brothers and sisters around us, let us remember always the vitality of the early church described in Acts. It is something to strive for and maintain. We should depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us and keep us spiritually close to each other, so we may support one another in times of need, as the earliest church members did. They have provided us with a shining example to follow. Let us pray and ask the Lord to grant us the wisdom, courage and a loving heart to follow in their footsteps.

Lesson 2

God Prepares the Way

Listed Scriptures

Joel 2:28–32; Micah 5:2–5; Mt 1:18–2; Acts 6

Lesson Aim

1) To understand that God prepared the groundwork for the spreading of His gospel.
2) To let the students know that God guides His apostles and followers as they strive to do His will.

Memory Verse

"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which you have prepared before the face of all peoples." (Lk 2:30, 31)

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

Acts 3–5

Bible Background

We often worry about many aspects of our lives. We are concerned about making the right choices and sometimes filled with self-doubt. From the Bible and other historical accounts, we can see that God prepares everything for us. All we need to do is to ask for His guidance. This is clearly evident when we study the history of the Jewish people around the time of the birth of Christ and thereafter.

For example, the period around the first century AD was a turbulent time for the Jewish people. Although they had been granted the freedom to return to their homeland by King Cyrus, they did not regain their kingdom of Israel. In fact, they would later be controlled by the Greeks and then the Romans. Nor did all Jews return to the Promised Land. Many remained in the land of their captivity, becoming a part of the new culture while still maintaining their faith. Their worship centered around

synagogues where they met for prayer and reading of the Torah. Every city with any Jewish presence had a synagogue. These synagogues later became useful places for the apostles to preach the gospel. You could say that this was a situation that God engineered for the sake of the apostles.

God prepared the way for our Lord Jesus to complete His work on earth. Even before the birth of Christ, the path was being laid for His coming. As we study the history of the early church, our faith should gain strength in the knowledge that, whatever we are about to face, our Lord is already there facing it with us.

Warm Up

Although we do not remember much from our infant years, we can be quite certain that we did not have many things to worry about. This is because our parents took care of all our needs. From the food we ate to the clothes we wore, everything was laid out for us. All we had to do was enjoy ourselves. Then as we grew older, our parents picked out choice schools so we could have an education to pave our futures. Now, as young adults, we are able to reap the fruits of our early years. If we think back, we would realize how much our parents had done for us to make our paths as smooth as possible.

In today's lesson, our Father in heaven has also paved the way for our salvation. But like all things, it comes at a price: the hard work of the early believers and the lives of the apostles. Today, we enjoy a lot of religious freedom and the hope of eternal life because God has prepared everything for us. Let us remember to praise and repay Him so that all the work is not in vain.

Bible Study

God Paves the Way

Proverbs 8:15 says: "By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice." Long before the birth of Jesus Christ, the way was being prepared for the apostles' work through various events in history:

a. **God allowed Greece to become a world power under Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.), resulting in Greek being established as a common language.** Alexander was not satisfied with conquering countries. He wanted to teach them to appreciate Greek culture. He wanted to teach all the people in his empire Greek ways and beliefs. Hence under Alexander, the process of Hellenization (being put under Greek influence) began. Hellenization had far-reaching consequences. Many Jews who did not return to the holy land became Greek-speaking Jews, called Hellenistic Jews. Feelings between them and the Aramaic-speaking Jews of Palestine were not always cordial, leading to the first major conflict amongst the early believers.

   Read Acts 6:1–7.

   1. What was the conflict here?
      (The Hellenists complained that their widows were not given fair treatment in the daily distribution of food supplies, compared to the widows of the Hebrews.)

   2. What action resulted as a consequence of these accusations?
      (The division of labor between the apostles and seven chosen members who would deal with problems, freeing the apostles for prayer and the ministry of the word.)

   3. What qualities should the chosen seven possess?
      (Men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.)

   4. What were the names of the seven who were chosen?
      (Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas.)

   After the Romans gained ascendancy and became the world power, Greek was still the common language spoken in many cities. It was referred to as *koine*, the Greek word for "common." Paul and other Christians were able to use this language to preach the gospel.

b. **Amidst the power struggles between Greeks and Romans, the Jews gained special religious privileges and freedom of worship of which Christians initially took advantage.** Around the time of Jesus' birth, Augustus became the first Emperor of Rome. Some Jews had been cooperative when the Romans were attempting to take over from the Greeks, so when Augustus came into

his own, he rewarded his allies. Jews were given the freedom to practice their own faith. They had to acknowledge that the Roman Emperor was their king, but they did not have to worship his image, or practice the religious beliefs of those around them. Christians initially enjoyed this religious freedom together with the Jews because they were not seen to be different in the beginning. Jesus was Jewish after all, and so were His closest companions. Immediately after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, His disciples preached mainly to the Jewish community. Problems only developed when persecutions began in Jerusalem. Christians fled to other cities and the Word of God spread to the non-Jewish population. Non-Jewish believers did not have the same religious freedoms as the Jews. This became a most challenging issue for the believers at the time.

c. **The Pax Romana provided an atmosphere that was conducive to preaching the gospel.** From the time of the Emperor Augustus, for about three hundred years, there was peace and prosperity within the Roman Empire known as the Pax Romana, the "Roman peace." There were a few exceptions, and a few emperors certainly did not die of old age, but generally people enjoyed a time of stability that enabled widespread travel around the Mediterranean along the superbly constructed roads. The Roman government also provided its citizens protection under Roman law, something which Paul took advantage of during his missionary journeys.

   Under these circumstances, Christians traveled widely and preached wherever they could. In Acts of the Apostles, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Peter, Philip, and others were able to travel wherever the Spirit moved them to spread the gospel, with only a few exceptional circumstances.

d. **Pagan society was in a state of flux at the time, creating an atmosphere that prepared people to listen to and believe in the Christian gospel.** Pagans of the time were experiencing much insecurity. Political alliances were changing, in part due to the Romans, and traditional practices were altering, resulting in uncertainty. Moral and religious bankruptcy permeated society, and sensitive people were finding ways to escape their dissatisfaction and disillusionment in life. The following verses give us an idea of the type of people you would find in pagan society during Paul's time and the lifestyles they led. Read the verses and write down the various sins mentioned.
   1. Rom 1:24–31
      (lust, homosexuality, immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-minded, gossiping, irreligious, violent, proud, disobedient, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful)
   2. Eph 4:17–19
      (alienated from God, eagerly practicing immorality)
   3. Eph 5:3–7, 18
      (fornication, covetousness, foolish talk, coarse jokes, idol worshipping, deceitful, drunkenness)
   4. Col 3:5–9
      (fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil desire, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, lying)
   5. 1 Thess 4:3–8
      (immorality, lust, defrauding, uncleanness)
   6. 2 Tim 3:2–5
      (self-centered, greedy for wealth, boasting, proud, blasphemers, disobedient children, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, lacking self-control, brutal, despises good, traitors, proud, loves pleasure)

e. **Although the apostles were there devoting their time solely to preaching the Word of God, many early Christians worked to spread the gospel independently too.** Just from Paul's letters alone, we can find mentions of many fervent brothers and sisters who worked diligently for God in their own way. Refer to the following verses and make a list of the members mentioned and what they did to help spread the gospel.
   1. Rom 16:1–2
      (Phoebe: served at the church in Cenchrea; helped many members, including Paul, in their work)
   2. Rom 16:3–5
      (Priscilla and Aquila: risked their lives for Paul; prayer house at their home)
   3. Rom 16:12
      (Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis: all who have worked hard for God, according to Paul)
   4. Phil 2:25
      (Epaphroditus: preached the gospel; looked after Paul; almost died in the service of God and Paul)

It is God's will that His Word should spread amongst the people in the world. He made it possible for this to happen in the time of the early church. We should depend on the Holy Spirit and have faith that He will also make it possible for this to happen today, and prepare ourselves to work for Him when our time comes.

Check for Understanding

1. What were the key factors that helped spread Christianity in the first few centuries?

2. From the key factors, find evidence of God preparing the way for the gospel to spread.

3. Can you find parallels between the society in the apostles' time and our society today?

4. What can we learn from the early Christians about serving God?

Life Application

Role Play

Ask students to imagine themselves as a part of the Palestinian population in the first century AD. Divide into different groups. Each group takes on one role. Depending on time, select the roles you wish, or use all the roles. Some roles are interrelated and can be presented together (e.g. roles one and two). Allow students ten minutes to come up with a short skit or presentation. This does not need to be a long activity. Some students may only need to think of a couple of things to say in their role. Try to re-enact the bustling atmosphere, the confusion, and eyewitness accounts of the time. Have fun!

Roles:

1. Reporters
   Imagine you are a team working for a top Palestinian News Network during the first century AD. You are in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost covering the Jewish festival, when suddenly a commotion takes place. The team races to the scene of action, and discovers total confusion over a group of men and women who seem to be in a trance. They are uttering something, and you suddenly realize that you understand what they are saying. Then you also realize that the people around you, who speak different languages, also understand them at the same time. This is a newsworthy event indeed! Prepare an interview with the people involved, as well as some of the crowd.

2. Festival Goers
   You are all going about your business preparing for the festival, when suddenly a group of men and women nearby start shouting. You join the crowd going to see what's happening. You see people shaking and shouting. They seem to be in some sort of trance, but then you realize that you understand what they are saying! How strange! A group of reporters comes over and starts asking you questions.

3. Talk show host
   You are interviewing several guests regarding a remarkable new religious movement that is taking Jerusalem by storm. Prepare questions you might wish to ask a Pharisee, a new Christian convert, and a pagan.

4. Talk show guests
   A Pharisee, a Christian and a pagan give their point of view about this new religious movement.

Teaching Tips

Leave a few minutes for students to plan for the fellowship. They may wish to check their progress in preparation with their group, or ask for advice. See Lesson 1 Life Application section.

Reflection & Prayer

As the time draws near for our Lord's Second Coming, our enemy will increase his attacks on the church. It is easier to face obvious attacks against the Church, such as when we have visitors who debate with us about our doctrines. However, our enemy attacks in very insidious ways, which are very difficult to detect. Disagreements and dissensions within the church community are very hurtful to all of our faiths, and we must guard against it.

As we read on about the early church, we will see that many dissensions began very soon after the church was established. We must always remember the reason that God gave us the Holy Spirit. Read again the fruit of the Spirit,

and the positive and powerful effects that the Holy Spirit could have on us if only we open our hearts to Him. The Holy Spirit established the church from the beginning and He is present in our church today. We must pray constantly to depend on the Spirit to guide us, so that the wonderful fruit of the Spirit will keep the community of God united and whole.

Let us pray for the church and for ourselves.

Lesson 3

Persecutions

Listed Scriptures

Mt 10; Acts 6:8–7, 12; Rom 8; 1 Pet 3:13–4

Lesson Aim

1) To understand the social background that led to the persecution of Christians.

Memory Verse

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (Jas 1:2-4)

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

Mt 10, Acts 6–7, Rom 8

Bible Background

The first record of Christian persecution in the Bible is found in the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 6 and 7 tell us about a certain Hellenistic Jew named Stephen who stood up for the truth before a group of Jews. Stephen gave a moving account of parts of Jewish history, explaining how stubborn unbelief had been the cause of much tragedy. Unfortunately, his listeners were unconvinced and Stephen was stoned to death. Stephen's death inspired a zealous young Pharisee named Saul to continue with the persecutions until Saul was converted on the road to Damascus.

From the above account, we know that the first persecutions were carried out by Jews against Christians. During Paul's missionary journeys, there are many accounts of local Jews stirring up the community to attack Paul and his fellow Christians. They considered Judaeo-Christians to be heretics and saw the spread of Christianity as a danger to their Jewish beliefs. Deeply religious Jews were fighting to protect their own people from leaving the God of their fathers, never considering that this same God would wish them to turn to Jesus Christ and accept Him as the Messiah.

At the same time, Roman politics were also against the Christians, who claimed to worship the one true God. In a system where Emperors demanded to be worshiped as gods, this proved to be deeply problematic. Emperors could only keep their thrones, and indeed their lives, if they were seen to be powerful and omnipotent. They could not pass by a group of simple people who refused to bow down to them. This set a dangerous precedent for other groups to follow. They must therefore be made an example of.

As we learn more about the terrible sufferings early Christians endured for their faith, we should ask ourselves if our own faith is able to live up to their standards. Would we be amongst those who give up, or those who face death courageously? Most of us are blessed by God and live in a peaceful country that allows us freedom of worship. This is therefore a hypothetical question. Nevertheless, it is important for us to think about this, and measure ourselves against the faith of these early Christians.

Warm Up

Before class, find a poster or a large picture (from a calendar, for example). List six or seven interesting things about the picture you could describe.

Ask for 3 to 5 volunteers (depending on class size). The volunteers must leave the room. They will be called in one at a time. Show the picture to the remaining students in class. Tell them what you are going to describe to the first volunteer. Then put the picture away so that none of the volunteers can see it. The audience must remain quiet, no matter what is being said.

Ask the first volunteer to enter. The student faces you as you describe the picture to her. Tell the student to listen very carefully, as she will need to describe it to the next volunteer. After you have finished your description, ask the second volunteer to enter. Tell this new person that he must listen carefully, as he will have to describe the scene of a picture to the third volunteer. Then the first and second volunteers face each other and the first volunteer describes the picture as you have described it, to the second volunteer. The first volunteer then sits down. She must not say anything else until the game is over. Ask the third volunteer to enter, and repeat the process until every volunteer has had a chance to describe the picture to the next person. The last volunteer will describe the picture to the whole audience, after which you will take out the picture to show all the volunteers.

Are the descriptions different from the picture? Did anyone change your description? If so, how has it changed? Briefly describe why this happened.

Tell students that this is often the way rumors grow. One person starts repeating something incorrectly and the message is changed. That was how many misunderstandings regarding the beliefs of the early church started. Rumors and stories about the Christians grew to the extent that many reports about what Christians did during worship were no longer true. These rumors caused a great deal of trouble for the Christians. Feelings against them grew, making them easy targets for persecution.

Bible Study

Despite the growing divergence between traditional Jews and Christian converts, Christian communities worshiped and operated within the Jewish synagogues for more than a generation. As long as the church was regarded as another Jewish sect, the Roman authorities tolerated it under the agreement between the Emperor and the Jews. In the following examples we see how Paul and his fellow Christians were accepted in the synagogues and regarded as part of the Jewish community. Read the passages and summarize the events briefly in point form. State the place, the persons involved, what happened and evidence that the Christian missionaries were accepted by the Jewish community:

a. Acts 13:13–15

b. Acts 14:1
c. Acts 17:1–4
d. Acts 18:1–4

However, as more and more gentiles became Christians, problems arose that alienated Christians from the Jewish communities. For example, two of these major problems were:

a. The Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) decided that non-Jewish Christians did not need to be circumcised. These uncircumcised Christian believers were gradually rejected by staunch Jews.
b. Gentile Christians were not protected by the special agreement between the Romans and the Jews with regards to religious practices. They were therefore considered unpatriotic by pagans when they refused to take part in the cult of emperor-worship. Christianity became less and less acceptable. In this situation, it was perhaps inevitable that persecution would descend.

Persecutions were not uncommon, but they occurred in pockets. Hence, Paul's co-workers in Christ, Aquila and Priscilla, fled from Rome when the Emperor Claudius commanded all Jews to leave the city. The couple ended up in Corinth, where they met Paul (Acts 18:2). They were able to return to Rome later, as Paul sent greetings to them there in Romans 16:3,4. The persecutions were therefore not usually sustained for very long and occurred in different areas at different times.

The most vicious persecutions were started by Emperor Nero. Nero wanted to expand his palace grounds. Unfortunately, there was no room for expansion, as the area around the palace was occupied by a bustling city. Around 64 AD, a mysterious fire began which destroyed most of the area around the palace, therefore rendering it uninhabitable. Nero took over the area. A rumor began which pointed a finger at the Emperor for the tragedy. Tacitus, a historian who lived at the time, wrote in his "Annals 15.44":

> *To kill the rumors, Nero charged and tortured some people hated for their evil practices–the group popularly known as "Christians." The founder of this sect, Christ, had been put to death by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, when Tiberius was Emperor. Their deadly superstition had been suppressed temporarily, but was beginning to spring up again–not now just in Judea but even in Rome itself where all kinds of sordid and shameful activities are attracted and catch on.*
>
> *First of all, those who confessed to being Christians were arrested. Then, on information obtained from them, hundreds were convicted, more for their anti-social beliefs than for fire-raising. In their deaths they were made a mockery. They were covered in the skins of wild animals, torn to death by dogs, crucified or set on fire–so that when darkness fell they burned like torches in the night. Nero opened up his own gardens for this spectacle and gave a show in the arena, where he mixed with the crowd, or stood dressed as a charioteer on a chariot. As a result, although they were guilty of being Christians and deserved death, people began to feel sorry for them. For they realized that they were being massacred not for the public good but to satisfy one man's mania.*

Persecutions did not end with Nero, although his were considered more vicious and violent than most. Christians were certainly persecuted under the Emperor Domitian (AD 81–96). Letters have survived between the Emperor Trajan and the governor of Bithynia, Pliny the Younger (AD 111–113) which tell us that by this time, being a Christian was a capital offense. These letters also indicated that people found to be Christians would be given the opportunity to renounce their faith or be put to death. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180), who disliked the Christians intensely, believers were taken to Rome, the provinces of Gaul, and Africa for execution. Emperors Decius (AD 249–251) and Diocletian (AD 284–305) both embarked on vicious and systematic persecutions of believers.

There were several key reasons given for executing Christians, although the legal grounds always remained obscure:

a. Christians were cannibals–based on a misunderstanding of the Holy Communion.
b. Christians were atheists–like the Jews they had no images in their shrines to worship the gods.
c. Christians were incestuous–their "love" for one another was well known.
d. Christians refused to worship the Emperor–in itself a crime of treason.

Many Christians answered these charges in their writings. You could say that these Christians were the first theologians. They were called the Christian Apologists, but it does not mean that they were apologizing for their faith. They were called Christian Apologists because in their essays and letters, they defended their faith and replied to charges made against Christians. However, they were largely ignored by authorities bent on persecution. By the third century, in many areas simply bearing the name "Christian" became a crime in itself.

Check for Understanding

1. Why did Nero wish to persecute Christians?

2. Why were Christians hated and persecuted generally?

3. Church leaders tried hard to rally the believers throughout these difficult times. In their letters and during their missionary journeys, the apostles were constantly trying to encourage the believers to hold fast to their faith, no matter what happened. Read the following verses and think about how believers at the time might have been encouraged by them:
   a. Phil 1:27–30
   b. 1 Thess 3:1–5
   c. 2 Tim 1:8–12
   d. 1 Peter 1:6–9

Life Application

Persecutions in School Today

In North America, nobody arrests us or executes us for our beliefs anymore. However, there are other forms of persecution. In schools the most common form is bullying. Bullying is a form of persecution because it targets weaker victims and demoralizes them, sometimes so severely that victims commit suicide. What would you do in the following situation?

Mary is a very quiet girl in your class. She seldom smiles and she gets very nervous when the teacher calls on her to answer questions. She usually gets the answer wrong anyway. She doesn't seem to have any friends. To be honest, she is usually so sullen and unfriendly that no one really bothers trying to make friends with her.

After some time, you begin to notice certain things. A group of two boys and a girl two grades up go to Mary during recesses. They usually walk her to a corner and talk to her. You don't know what they're saying because they usually surround her. Sometimes, you see them walk off with the snack that Mary had brought with her. Mary also loses many things. She has pencils, coloring markers, bookmarks, and erasers in the morning, but she would lose them in the afternoon. When the teacher becomes exasperated with her, Mary cowers in her seat. On a few occasions, Mary even lost her field trip money. When this happens, Mary doesn't go on the trips because she says her parents can not afford to give her the money again.

You become very suspicious of these senior friends of Mary. The thought comes to your mind that Mary is the victim of bullying. You become convinced that these two boys and the girl are taking things from Mary–her snacks, all the items that she loses, including her money. You don't wish to get into trouble with the bullies. You are afraid they might target you if you tried to interfere. However, you are aware that Mary is becoming increasing depressed. What would you do?

(Suggestions: Talk to a teacher privately. Don't confront the bullies openly. If you have a group of friends, talk to them about Mary. Ask them to help you assist Mary. If necessary, explain to them that it is not right to persecute a person for being different or any other reasons. If possible, talk about what Jesus would do in the situation. If you are able to persuade your friends to help you, you could invite Mary to stay with you and your group at recess. Bullies don't usually wish to confront a group of people; they target vulnerable individuals. Ask Mary to talk to the teacher quietly. Most importantly, help Mary regain a sense of self-worth and self-confidence. This is a very good opportunity to talk to someone like her about God and how we can depend on God to help us in times of tribulation.)

Teaching Tips

Leave a few minutes for students to plan for the fellowship. They may wish to check their progress in preparation with their group, or ask advice. See Lesson 1 Life Application section.

Reflection & Prayer

Persecution can come in many shapes and forms. We should be thankful that most of us do not suffer as a result of our faith. However, we should ask the Lord to strengthen our faith, so that we can meet persecutions bravely, trusting fully in God to deliver us, should we ever experience it. Let us pray and ask God for such faith.

Lesson 4

Beginnings of Dissent

Listed Scriptures

Gal 1; Col 2; 2 Pet 2; 1 Jn 2, 4; 2 Jn; Jude

Lesson Aim

1) To trace the beginnings of disunity within Christianity.
2) To understand the importance of keeping to the original and true teachings of Christ.

Memory Verse

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."(Gal 1:8, 9)

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

Jn 14–15, Acts 8–9, 2 Tim 1

Bible Background

Persecution was not the only crisis faced by the early church. There were internal struggles as well. Many epistles in the New Testament hint at conflicts within the church communities. Historical accounts show that these conflicts led to some groups breaking off from mainstream Christianity. They formed the opposition parties to the original groups and were named by mainstream Christians as heretics.

Groups of heretics emerged because many believers tried to understand the gospel in their own way, rejecting the teachings of the apostles. Some believers became impatient when the Second Coming did not seem to be imminent. Others

enjoyed power and authority in a splinter group that they did not have within the true church. There were those who refused to put away their sin and lust after they converted and willingly joined heretical groups that allowed them to continue in their sinful ways while claiming to be so-called believers at the same time.

As apostles like Peter and Paul were executed, believers began to lose the truth. Various interpretations of the teachings of Christ, and even those of the apostles, arose. Social pressures and persecutions also resulted in compromises to doctrines and beliefs. Hence, early Christianity was in a constant state of flux, causing many believers to leave the true teachings of Jesus Christ. It is important for us to understand what went wrong at the time, so that we do not let history repeat itself and leave the true teachings of God.

WARM UP

You will need some floor space for this warm-up. A grid of 6 by 6 squares has to be drawn on the floor. Masking tape could be used to create the grid:

Start	1				
	2	3			
			4		
		5			
	6		9	10	11
	7	8			Finish

Before the lesson, the teacher has to think of a plan, going from the starting point to the finishing point. Students will have to move through the grid from the start point to the finish point. The teacher must plot a pattern, as shown in the example above. The numbers represent the order in which the student must step to cross from start to finish. Any order or sequence is fine, as long as the student is able to move from one spot to the next logically. The students must not see the order the teacher has.

Students take turns to step onto the grid. THERE MUST BE NO TALKING DURING THIS ACTIVITY UNTIL THE FINISH SQUARE IS REACHED. The first student steps on the start square and decides

which square to step on next. If it is the correct square (i.e., based on the pattern from the example above, from start square, the next one the student must step on is #1), the teacher nods, and the student decides on the next square. If it is the wrong square, the teacher tells the student to step off the square and move to one side of the grid. The second student steps on the starting square and moves. Anyone who had to leave the grid may help the person trying to move across by reminding the person which square to go on, based on their mistakes. For instance, if the student on the grid wants to move to a certain square that someone else knows is the wrong one, they can help by indicating to the student SILENTLY not to step on that square. The activity continues until someone reaches the end point. There could be a small treat for the students at the end.

If there is time, the teacher can then start the activity again by plotting another pattern, or dividing the students into two groups, with each group plotting a plan on the grid for the other. The group that reaches the end first will win.

After the exercise, discuss why successful groups were able to achieve their goal. Aim the conversation towards achieving a common goal, cooperation, helping each other, collaboration. Remind students of the success of the early church as recorded in Acts. These early believers were able to succeed in their lives of faith because they all practiced these same values. It was when they disagreed on what they believed in that the church began to fail. Groups began to propagate their own views on doctrines, in-fighting began within the church, and the truth was brushed aside to make way for human opinions. Our goal is to reach God after this life. Like the activity above, we cannot reach this goal alone. God is our main help, but He has also given us brothers and sisters to support us, so we may all keep to the true path. Many believers in the early church failed to achieve their goals in the end. In this lesson, we will try to learn from their mistakes.

Part 1

False Teachers

Unity within the church did not last long. False teachers arose quickly. In 2 Corinthians 11:13–14, Paul wrote of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ." In Galatians 1:6–9, he raged against those who would pervert the gospel of Christ, stating categorically that whoever preaches a gospel other than the original truth will be accursed. In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul identified threats to church unity. Doctrinal dissent was evident even at this early stage. Philippians 3:2 warned believers to beware! There were those who argued strictly for the legality of the law–the old debate of circumcision. Paul kept reminding believers that they should now worship in the spirit, rather than adhere to practices of the flesh.

Other apostles gave similar warnings. 2 Peter chapter 2 mentions false prophets and teachers secretly bringing in heresies. The whole chapter deals with the depravity and deception of these false teachers, and warnings of their awful end. The apostle John wrote of the last days, when the Antichrist will come (1 Jn 2:18–19). In this passage, we are told that even in John's time, "many antichrists have come." A major part of the book of Jude also deals with these false teachers infiltrating the churches.

These problems persisted until, by the turn of the first century, the truth taught by the apostles had largely been lost or distilled. The Holy Spirit no longer dwelled with the believers, and the world had to wait for almost two thousand years before people received the Holy Spirit again during the time of the Latter Rain.

a. **Read 2 Peter 2:12–19. How does Peter characterize false teachers in this passage?**
(1. Moral laxity. Peter described them as "spots and blemishes," "having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls."
2. They make empty promises. "Wells without water" is how Peter described them. "Clouds carried by a tempest," they speak great swelling words of emptiness." They show you rain clouds, but there is no rain. Their promises come to nothing.
3. Promise liberty while they are themselves slaves of corruption.)

b. **1 Jn 2:18–23 depicts the situation towards the end of the first century. Briefly describe, in your own words, what the believers are experiencing.**
(False teachers appearing among the believers. "Went out from us"–began within the fold of the church, but later left ("they were not of us"). Denied that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. How would you feel under those circumstances? Confusion, consternation, ask church leaders what is true–accept any reasonable suggestion or view; main aim is to get students to imagine the chaos of the situation)

c. **2 John mentions one important doctrinal heresy. Can you find it?**
(v.7: Those who claim that Jesus Christ did not actually come in the flesh.)

d. **The book of Jude gives a graphic description of what false teachers were. Read v.12–13 and write down the four nature images he used for this purpose.**
(clouds without water, carried about by the wind; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.)

Part 2

Heresies and Heretics

"Heresy," Greek *hairesis*, can be defined as a belief or practice contrary to the orthodox doctrine, or an opinion contrary to what is normally accepted or maintained (*Oxford English Reference Dictionary*). The word usually refers to a group within a parent body that has sectarian views. There were many heretical groups within the early church, some of which survived for a long time. Three of these are described briefly below.

A. Gnosticism

Gnosticism is a term which refers to a variety of religious movements in the early Christian centuries. These movements stressed salvation through a secret "knowledge," or *gnosis* (Greek). Many Christian theologians in the second century wrote against these movements, calling them heresies. It is difficult to confirm the origins

of Gnosticism. Some scholars think various groups affiliated to the movements were around before the beginning of Christianity. Another theory points a finger at Simon Magus as the possible origin.

The only record of Simon Magus in the New Testament is found in Acts 8:9–25. We read about a sorcerer who was recognized as a god by the locals until Philip preached the gospel to them. Even Simon was apparently converted and followed Philip in his missionary work. Later, Peter and John were sent to Samaria to lay hands on the believers so they could receive the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw the Holy Spirit descend upon the believers, he was amazed. He offered them money for the power to give the Holy Spirit, and was sternly rebuked by Peter. Simon repented and asked Peter to intercede for him so that God might forgive him.

This is the only account we have of this character in the Bible. However, later Christian writers mentioned Simon Magus. Justin Martyr, one of the prominent Christian writers, wrote that Simon was a native of Gittain Samaria. He was widely acclaimed to be a god. Simon was in Rome during the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54). Other important Christian writers and theologians considered Simon to be the source of later Gnostic heresies. However, Simon was not like later Gnostics because he actually claimed to be divine, and salvation could be gained through knowledge of himself alone rather than knowledge of oneself. Simon was followed by another Samaritan called Menander, who taught that if you knew him (Menander), you would not die. When Menander himself died, it became obvious that he was a false prophet! There were many well-known and even influential Gnostic teachers, but perhaps the most famous was Valentinus, who taught at Alexandria and later went to Rome (around 140 AD).

Beliefs

Although there were many different branches of Gnosticism, all believe in a sharp dualism. They believe in a transcendent God and an ignorant lesser god referred to as the demiurge. The demiurge was supposedly the god who created the cosmos, the god of the Old Testament. Some Gnostics taught that the creation itself was the result of a fall from *Sophia* (Greek for "wisdom"). Hence, all creation was evil, because all physical, material things were evil. However, some of the transcendent light (sparks of divinity) was trapped within the bodies of a few individuals. These individuals are destined for salvation, but they are unaware of this. When God sent down Christ as redeemer, salvation in the form of a secret knowledge (*gnosis*) was brought to Earth. The special individuals made aware of their special status. Upon physical death, the awakened "spirituals" were then able to ascend safely through the planetary regions controlled by hostile demons to be

reunited with the transcendent God.

Since Gnostics believed that salvation came through knowledge of one's spiritual nature, some Gnostics concluded that any action taken by the body which houses these sparks of light would not affect salvation. All things physical were evil, but the light trapped within was not a part of this evil. It was not affected by anything the physical body did. As a result, Gnostics who believed this indulged in all sorts of very sinful behavior. For example, a Gnostic called Carpocrates urged his followers to sin. His son Epiphanes taught that promiscuity was God's law. A group calling themselves the Cainites honored Cain and other villains in the Old Testament. Another group known as the Ophites worshiped the serpent for bringing "knowledge" to Adam and Eve.

Group Work

References to Gnosticism in the New Testament often warned believers against licentious and sinful behavior. Believers were also warned about Gnostic views of Christ. Can you find a few of these passages? Some of them have been mentioned above. (cf 1Cor 5:1–8; 2 Pet 2; 1 Jn 3, 4:1–6, 5:2; Jude)

B. Docetism

Docetism was another heresy connected to Gnosticism. It began in Hellenistic and oriental areas. The main idea was that matter–whatever is physical–is essentially evil, and the divine is incapable of suffering. This led to the belief that Jesus Christ was not really a man and that He only appeared to be so. This undermined the Christian beliefs of incarnation, atonement and resurrection.

Incarnation

If Christ was not really a physical human being, then Mary did not really give birth to a physical being, only one who appeared to be so.

Atonement

Christians believe that our sins are atoned for by the suffering and death of Christ. However, if Christ only appeared to be physically present, then He could not really have suffered or died. He only appeared to have suffered and died. Hence Christian belief in atonement is threatened.

Resurrection

Obviously, if Christ was not really physically present, He could not have resurrected. What the disciples saw must have been a form of projection of Christ, a kind

of spiritual manifestation, not really a physical being. This causes major doctrinal problems as Christians base their doctrine of salvation upon the belief that the risen Christ–the physically risen Christ–has conquered death by reversing the process of death itself through resurrection.

As in 2 John above, Elder John took great pains in all his epistles to dispute these heretical beliefs. The Gospel of John and 1 John both begin by drawing our attention to the "Word which became flesh." John emphasizes the fact that the apostles have indeed "seen with our eyes," "looked upon, and our hands have handled" (1Jn 1:1). This particular emphasis was necessary due to the challenges, not only from Docetism, but also from many Gnostic groups.

C. Montanism

Around the mid-second century AD, a new Christian convert named Montanus, who lived in a village at the border of Mysia and Phrygia, began to go into trances and utter strange sounds. Some believers warned against false prophets, possibly remembering Matthew 7:15, while others thought that he did have prophetic gifts. Two women who called themselves prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, soon shared this ability to "prophecy in tongues." Montanus soon proclaimed himself to be the chosen prophet of God. The main beliefs of this group were:

a. The Holy Spirit is poured upon individuals, a signal that the New Jerusalem was arriving.
b. A strong leaning towards the apocalyptic and eschatological focus in the Bible. Hence, Montanists believed in the imminent coming of the New Jerusalem.
c. The believers of this sect were the "elite" who would prepare for the coming of New Jerusalem by leading acetic lives (that is, practice severe self-discipline and abstain from all forms of pleasure) to the extent of withdrawing from the world.
d. Taking part in special fasts to prepare themselves for the coming of the New Jerusalem.
e. Expect and even encourage persecutions so that the church would be a purified Bride for Christ.

By around 230 AD, the group was virtually excommunicated. The Synod of Iconium refused to recognize the validity of the Montanist baptism. The movement continued underground, mostly in protest of the growing formalism and worldliness of the official church.

D. Research and Discussion

The two letters of Paul to the Thessalonian church are very much concerned with eschatological (end time) events. Interestingly, every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to Christ's second coming. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:13–18, 5:23–24. Take note of what Paul wrote regarding the second coming in each of these passages.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Paul wrote this epistle because he was concerned that some believers may have misunderstood his earlier message in 1 Thessalonians regarding the coming of Christ. Ask the students to:

a. Summarize what Paul wrote in this passage,
(Believers seem to be troubled about when the second coming of the Lord is to be expected. Paul clarifies that certain events must first take place–falling away, man of sin revealed, son of perdition exalting himself. Paul reminds the believers that lawlessness must first come with power, signs and lying wonders, and with unrighteous deception. After that, the Lord will consume them when He comes.)
b. Think about how the believers at Thessalonica might have misunderstood Paul's message on the second coming,
(Believers urged to wait for the Lord, the hope of all believers is to be in His presence at His coming, their hearts will be established for His second coming, the description of what will happen at the second coming, preserve themselves for the coming of our Lord–all these messages may sound urgent to the believers, as though the coming of the Lord is imminent; hence, their actions in preparation are extremely important.)
c. Discuss how these misunderstandings might have influenced the spread of Montanism later on.
(Some believers may still have believed that the coming of the Lord was imminent. When Montanism spread to their area, they may have believed the "visions" of Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla.)

Check for Understanding

1. Summarize the beliefs of the Gnostics.

2. Docetism teaches that the divine can never suffer physically. How did this teaching impact on the Christian belief in incarnation, atonement and resurrection?

Life Application

Different Views

Most of us are very blessed in our lives. We live in countries where there are no religious persecutions. In North America, the social trend is towards religious tolerance (which means people try to accept that others may have different beliefs). Christian communities bend over backwards to preach tolerance towards other world faiths as well as philosophies. On the surface, such tolerance seems like a good thing. However, it means that anyone who insists on one correct way to salvation is then seen as intolerant or even fundamentalist. The word "fundamentalism" tends now to be linked to terrorist groups, a tag we certainly do not wish to have.

Imagine you are speaking to a person who has very tolerant views. How would you respond to his/her views?

1. **Your religious beliefs may be true for you but not for me. There is no absolute right or wrong when it comes to religion. Who is to say which religion is right?**
   (Isn't the statement: "there is no absolute right or wrong" an absolute belief? If so, then it is self-defeating in its attempt to claim that there are no absolutes. Religious beliefs must be based on what is true. This truth should not come from humans, as we are all subjective creatures. We tend to opt for what we feel comfortable with, what is convenient, or what we wish for, regardless of whether it is good for us. In order to find out what is the truth, we must therefore turn to God, from whom all truths come. If the truth comes from one source, there must only be one truth. How can there be a truth for you and a different truth for me? The Bible tells us that God says "You shall have no other gods before me"(Exodus 20:3). Jesus said, "He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18). It is therefore crucial that we find out what the real truth is according to God, not according to our subjective views.)

2. **All religions are pretty much the same.**
   (Religions actually have very different ideas about the afterlife and how to get there. Some religions teach about a heavenly afterlife while others deny that heaven exists. Yet others believe in the cycle of reincarnation. They can't all be right. Given that it is our lives at stake, we should find the right answer.)

3. **As long as I do the right thing, it doesn't matter what I believe in. God will accept me if I am a good person.**
   (It is not enough to be good. The Bible tells us that we have all sinned (Rom 3:23). No sinner is able to save himself no matter how "good" he is (Rom 3:20). A criminal cannot escape punishment just because he has done good things in his life. Salvation can only be gained by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8,9; Titus 3:5)

Teaching Tips

Leave a few minutes for students to plan for the fellowship. They may wish to check their progress in preparation with their group, or ask advice. See Lesson 1 Life Application section.

Reflection & Prayer

Luke 21:12 tells us that in the last days, believers will be persecuted and thrown into prison. Verse 16 warns that even the closest family, relatives and friends would betray true believers, and some will be put to death.

Even though we are still safe from the frightening scenario described above, we know that Jesus Christ's words are true, and these things will come to pass. Even today, many of us are questioned by friends or family regarding our beliefs. We must prepare ourselves to defend our faith by striving to understand the Words of God and through prayer. Jesus Christ has promised us "'a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist'"(Lk 21:15). We must therefore depend on Him fully when we have to bear testimony to our faith. Let us pray together and ask God for understanding and wisdom.

unit 2

Goals

Christianity is a very diverse religion today. Most of us know of Christian churches from different denominations –the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church–to name a few. How did we get so many versions of Christianity? You may find it hard to imagine a time when the Catholic Church was the only church in the world. However, that was the case until the tenth century, when the Orthodox Church broke away from the Catholic Church in the West. All the various Protestant churches did not come into being until as late as the sixteenth century. This section follows the history of the Christian church as it divided into many branches. We look at the conflicts and controversies that caused major schisms within the churches. As we study this, we should think about our church, and learn from the mistakes of the past. Through prayer and knowledge, we can avoid the pitfalls that beset the secular churches around us.

Teacher Devotional

We are surrounded by many different types of Christianity today. It is extremely important to uphold our true doctrines, and not allow ourselves to be swayed by arguments of other denominations. As we study some of these denominations, let us take note of where they have departed from the teachings of the Lord. In the Garden of Gethsemene, Jesus asked the Father to "sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn 17:17). The prophet Isaiah also tells us: "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever" (Is 40:8). The word of God is therefore the only truth we must abide by, and His word endures forever. Man may try to twist the word of God to suit them, but they will never change the truth of His word. We should continue to pray together and ask the Lord for His guidance, so we may understand His truth ever more deeply.

Standing Firm Against the Tide

"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong."
(1 Cor 16:13)

Lesson 5

The Development of Christianity

Listed Scriptures

Ps 32:8,9; Is 30:1–17; 1 Tim 4:1–5

Lesson Aim

1) To understand some of the events that led to believers falling away from the truth.
2) To understand that Satan works in subtle ways, and we must always be watchful.

Memory Verse

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet 5:8)

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

Ps 73, 1 Tim 4:1–5; 1 Pet 3–4

Bible Background

Despite persecutions and heresies, the early Christians preached the gospel with single-minded intensity. The earliest believers were poor, uneducated people. The fortunes of the church turned as a growing number of people from upper class society began to convert to "the Way." Some of these educated converts became the apologists, writing about Christianity, defending their faith to the emperors and the public. These were the Apostolic Fathers, also called the Church Fathers. The Apostolic Fathers came a generation after most of the first apostles died. They became key figures of the church, influencing decisions about doctrines and beliefs that grew out of the chaos of persecutions and heresies.

The writings of the apologists helped promote Christianity to many learned people. By the end of the second century, the new faith was well on its way to becoming a force to be reckoned with in the Roman Empire. This may be one reason for the

periodic severity of persecutions, especially under Emperors Decius (249-251), Valerian (253-260) and Diocletian (284-305). However, as more and more intellectuals converted, the influence of the religion grew, until a landmark event happened. An Emperor of Rome converted to Christianity.

With the conversion of Constantine in 312 AD, the world's view of Christianity changed. After Constantine became the Emperor of Rome, he pronounced an edict making Christianity a legal and respected religion. Following this, Christianity spread throughout the empire like wildfire, gaining converts from all levels of society. The Catholic Church became a powerful institution in Roman society, with the Bishop of Rome holding power that gradually equaled the Emperor's.

This seemed like a blessing from God. After all, His church could now expand freely, and multitudes could worship Him openly in peace. Unfortunately, this freedom came at a price. The price came in the form of compromises to the original beliefs and teachings of Christ and the apostles. Eventually, around the 10th century, the Catholic Church divided into the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church due to opposing views of what the truth should be. The truth was lost as humans tried to interpret God's will using their own wisdom.

Warm Up

Because Christianity has been around for so many centuries, it is hard for us to know much about it other than what we know today. But when we study its history, we come to realize that many aspects of this religion have been changed over time, often to suit the needs of the people. If we compare present day Christianity to that of the early apostolic church, we see that we have drifted extremely far away from God's teachings.

When John Paul II passed away in 2005, many followers expressed that they wanted a more liberal Pope, someone who would embrace the trends of today. It seems that the trend of Christianity is to modernize and conform to the world, rather than sticking to the truth. This is why it is important for us to know our history, how it has been changed by people over the course of time, and understand God's words so that we can keep the truth, no matter what the world thinks and believes.

Bible Study

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:6,7).

These were prophetic words indeed. Most scholars believe that Paul was executed around 64 AD, during the intense period of Nero's persecution. A short hundred years later, his words would have applied to most Christians. Unfortunately, by that time, most Christians would not have thought so. They still believed that they kept the true faith. There were many reasons for this happening. In this lesson, we will look at three key events that contributed to the loss of truth.

Part 1
The Apologists and the Veneration of Martyrs

The apologists were admired and respected because they debated doctrines with the pagans and Jews who constantly attacked Christianity. Poorer, less educated believers allowed themselves to be led by these intellectual converts without questioning whether their teachings were according to the teachings of Christ and the apostles. One reason for this was that the apologists, these Apostolic Fathers, were very willing to die for their beliefs rather than deny Christ.

There were always Christians willing to die for their faith. These people are called martyrs. Stephen was only the first of countless thousands of Christian martyrs. The martyrdoms of Peter and Paul were given special significance by the churches. There were other important martyrs. The following is a description of the martyrdom of Polycarp, taken from *History of the Church (IV 15)* by Eusebius, one of the church historians who lived at the time:

Polycarp

He stepped forward, and was asked by the proconsul if he really was Polycarp. When he said yes, the proconsul urged him to deny the charge.

"Respect your years!" he exclaimed, adding similar appeals regularly made on such occasions: "Swear by Caesar's fortune; change your attitude; say: Away with the godless!"

But Polycarp, with his face set, looked at all the crowd in the stadium and waved his hand towards them, sighed, looked up to heaven, and cried:

"Away with the godless!" The governor pressed him further:

"Swear, and I will set you free: execrate Christ."

"For eighty-six years," replied Polycarp, "I have been his servant, and he has never done me wrong: how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"

"I have wild beasts," said the proconsul. "I shall throw you to them, if you don't change your attitude."

"Call them," replied the old man. "We cannot change our attitude if it means change from better to worse. But it is a splendid thing to change from cruelty to justice."

"If you make light of the beasts," retorted the governor, "I'll have you destroyed by fire, unless you change your attitude."

Polycarp answered: "The fire you threaten burns for a time and is soon extinguished: there is a fire you know nothing about–the fire of the judgment to come and of eternal punishment, the fire reserved for the ungodly. But why do you hesitate? Do what you want."

The proconsul was amazed, and sent the crier to stand in the middle of the arena and announce three times:

"Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." …Then a shout went up from every throat that Polycarp must be burnt alive… The rest followed in less time than it takes to describe: the crowds rushed to collect logs and faggots from workshops and public baths…When the pyre was ready…Polycarp prayed:

"O Father of thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have come to know thee, the God of angels and powers and all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous who live in thy presence; I bless thee for counting me worthy of this day and hour, that in the number of the martyrs I may partake of Christ's cup, to the resurrection of eternal life of both soul and body in the imperishability that is the gift of the Holy Spirit…"

When he had offered up the Amen and completed his prayer, the men in charge lit the fire, and a great flame shot up.

Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna (Izmir in modern Turkey), became a martyr at the age of around eighty-six, around 156–160 AD. His eagerness to meet death for his faith was a common attitude amongst many Christians. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, saw his journey to Rome for execution as imitating the Lord's last journey to Jerusalem and the cross. Martyrdom came to be seen as the ultimate sign of discipleship, and many Christians did not flee when persecutions came to their city.

Polycarp's church celebrated the event of his martyrdom annually. This was not unusual, as followers of other celebrated martyrs did the same thing. In fact, martyrs became so revered that later, a belief developed that prayers to God addressed through the martyrs were especially effective. This later grew to the practice of the veneration (the reverence of a sanctified and holy being) of the martyrs. Events of persecutions became embroidered in the telling, the scale and extent of earlier executions became exaggerated. The numbers of the martyrs and their sufferings grew with each telling, and stories of fantastic miraculous happenings appeared with each account.

Converts from paganism contributed to this too. They brought their own superstitions and beliefs into the church, so that martyrs began to take on the role of the gods of pagan cultures. Possessions of martyrs were preserved lovingly. People believed that these possessions had the power to work miracles or guarantee special blessings to believers. Eventually, although not all church leaders approved of the veneration of martyrs, the practice grew to immense proportions amongst the believers.

Thoughts For Discussion:

1. Review the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Which of the commandments have been broken with the belief in the veneration of martyrs?

2. Refer to the memory verse for this lesson. How do you think the "roaring lion" has devoured believers through their beliefs and practices described above?

Part 2
Theologians of the Early Church

The teachings of the church kept evolving after the death of the apostles. Theologians of the church grappled with what the central beliefs of Christianity should be in turbulent times. What, for example, should be done about believers who denied their faith under threat of torture and death? What of those who gave in and sacrificed to idols to save themselves or loved ones from horrific deaths? These were the "lapsed," people who did not take the noble path of martyrdom. Church leaders had to come up with a solution to the many who repented after a series of persecutions had passed. During these times, many church writers contributed to the evolution of Christian doctrines that gradually led further and further away from the original teachings of Christ and the apostles.

One such writer was Tertullian, the first major Christian author to write in Latin. He lived around the mid-second to third century. He was a key person in developing the doctrine of the Trinity. He developed this doctrine as he wrote against the heretic Praxeas. Tertullian also attempted to defend the use of the Old Testament by Christians, and explain the oneness of God the Creator and Savior.

Another writer was Irenaeus. Like the writers of the letters in the New Testament, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, tried to counteract the influence of the heretics by writing against their teachings and warning the believers of the errors of these heretics. The passage below was written by Dr. Everett Ferguson, a Professor of Church History in Texas. Read the arguments Irenaeus made against some heretics:

Irenaeus

Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor and studied under Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. He then went to Gaul where he became Bishop of Lyons in AD 177. His books aimed to counteract the Gnostic ideas common in this region. Two major writings by Irenaeus survive: Against Heresies ('Five Books Exposing and Overthrowing the So-Called "Knowledge"') *and* Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, *an instructional book, demonstrating that the basic Christian faith fulfills the Old Testament. Irenaeus stressed the fundamental Christian doctrines that were being challenged by Gnosticism: that the world was created by one God; that Jesus Christ, son of the Creator, died to save men; that there will be a resurrection of the body. He appealed to the historical roots of the Christian faith, and argued that Scripture contained a succession of covenants through which "one and the same God" progressively revealed his will to men, as they were ready to receive it.*

Irenaeus developed the idea that Christ, fully man as well as fully God, retraced the steps of Adam, with a different result. Because Christ passed through every age of life, all humanity shares in his sanctifying work. The Gnostics claimed to possess secret traditions passed down from the apostles. To counter this, Irenaeus developed an argument involving another kind of apostolic succession. He claimed that the churches preserved public, standard beliefs handed down from apostolic times by the teachers in the churches. Irenaeus thus developed Christian theology in several ways; for example, the "canon (or rule) of truth" preserved in the church as the key to interpreting Scripture; his view that the Eucharist (the Holy Communion) contains "an earthly and a divine reality;" and the place of the virgin Mary (the new Eve) in his theology. At the same time he tried to base his teachings and arguments on Scripture.

There were some important developments of Christian doctrine in this passage. However, two we should be familiar with are:

a. Irenaeus' focus on apostolic succession, which led eventually to the formation of Papal authority (the Pope as head of the Roman Catholic Church)–Roman Catholics believe that the Pope is the direct spiritual descendent of Peter;
b. Irenaeus' theology of the virgin Mary as the new Eve–this led to the importance of the Virgin Mary in Catholic worship.

Thoughts For Discussion:

1. How do you think the "roaring lion" used the Christians' defense against heretics and other attackers to undermine the truth?

Part 3
Conversion of Constantine

The single most significant event for Christianity in the early centuries was the conversion of a future Emperor of the Roman Empire–Constantine. Constantine was sympathetic towards Christians because his mother was a convert. He had defeated a rival named Maxentius at the famous battle at Milvian Bridge in 312 AD. It was just before this battle that the conversion experience took place.

Constantine related his experience to the church historian Eusebius towards the end of his life. It seemed that Constantine was alarmed by reports of Maxentius' possession of mysterious magical arts. He prayed to the "Supreme God" for help. On

the eve of the battle, as Constantine was walking about at noon, he saw a vision. It was the sign of a cross in the noonday sky "above the sun," and with the sign were the words, "Conquer by this" in Latin. That night Constantine had another vision, a vision of Christ appearing to him in a dream commanding him to use the sign as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies. He obeyed, and was victorious.

This made Constantine the sole master of the West (the area surrounding Rome). He then went on to meet his rival Licinius, who had control of the East of the Roman Empire (the area around Palestine), and was also victorious. Thus, in 323 AD, he became the sole emperor of the whole Roman Empire. He established his seat of power at Byzantium, later known as Constantinople, now Istanbul.

Although Constantine embraced Christianity and treated it as a favored religion in his empire, he did not let go of his previous pagan beliefs. His own favorite god, the Unconquered Sun, seemed to have been integrated in his beliefs with the worship of the Son of God in Christianity. In 321 AD, he established a day of rest on the first day of the week, and called it "the venerable day of the Sun"–that is, Sunday. Christian leaders of the time did not wish to alienate their latest, most powerful ally, and eventually changed the Sabbath day to Sunday in order to align their day of worship with the rest of the pagan world. They conveniently used the key event of the resurrection of Christ on Sunday as the reason for the change, stating that the resurrection was so important that it was right to change the day of rest in order to remember it.

Christian artwork of the time also made it easy to blend paganism with Christianity. Christ, for instance, was often portrayed with the sun shining around his head like a halo. He was even portrayed as the sun god in a chariot. From sun worship came the celebration of Christmas on December 25, the birthday of the sun. The celebration of Saturnalia, the Roman winter festival of December 17–21, provided the basis for later Christian practices of exchanging gifts and lighting candles.

The importance of Mary in Christian worship probably grew because there were parallels in paganism. Some believe that the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis (Diana) transferred itself to the veneration of Mary. Another pagan goddess was the Egyptian goddess Isis, who was known as the "universal mother," the "Great Virgin," and the "Mother of the God." It seemed natural that such pagan parallels would transfer itself to Christianity so that the worship of the Virgin Mary took a significant place in Christian worship in the Catholic Church.

Thoughts For Discussion:

1. The conversion of a powerful figure such as Constantine would seemingly change the fortunes of the early church for the better. However, as we have seen above, this was another subtle way for the "roaring lion" to devour many Christians. Indeed, the true church could no longer be found on earth, and would not appear again until the True Jesus Church was established by the Lord Himself. Use the information given in this section to list the ways in which the "roaring lion" subverted the truth even in an atmosphere of religious freedom.

Check for Understanding

See Thoughts For Discussion under each Bible Study section.

Life Application

The Roaring Lion

As a group, discuss the following question: "How does the 'roaring lion' devour, undermine and subvert believers and the truth within our present-day society of religious freedom?"

Teaching Tips

Leave a few minutes for students to plan for the fellowship. They may wish to check their progress in preparation with their group, or ask advice. The fellowship for which the students have prepared over the past weeks will take place next week, after lesson 6. See Lesson 1 Life Application section.

Reflection & Prayer

There are many things today that seem good for us. However, we must learn to discern between God's will and the subtle manipulation of the devil. As we continue to enjoy the fruits of technology, we need to be aware of the evils inherent in technology. The computer is a useful tool, but also a dangerous weapon of Satan if we wander into unsuitable sites or make contacts in chat rooms that are unwise. Even democracy can be a weapon of Satan. Witness the way society accepts homosexuals, even within secular churches. Single parenthood is an accepted alternative to traditional two-parent families. These are only two examples of the many dangers facing us today. We must be diligent in seeking the will of God so that we keep to His truth. Let us pray and ask God to guide us and keep us safe.

Lesson 6

Catholicism

Listed Scriptures

Josh 6; 1 Sam 15; Mt 3

Lesson Aim

1) To understand that we will lose the way to salvation if we disobey God's teachings.

Memory Verse

"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of ram." (1 Sam 15:22)

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

Jer 23:9–40; 2 Pet 2; 1 Jn 2–3

Bible Background

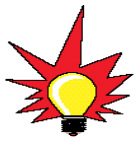
The word "catholic" originally referred to a united, global community of believers. Hence, the early church that existed after the death of the Apostles was called the Catholic Church. Up to the eleventh century AD, there was only one church. Deep-rooted differences in theology led to the first major schism (division) within the church.

Apart from heresies, the Catholic Church struggled with controversies about beliefs. One major controversy that plagued the church during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries was about the humanity of Christ. Debates raged regarding how Christ, the Son of God, was God Himself (the doctrine of the Trinity), and how he was both man and God (the doctrine of the person of Christ, or Christology).

These theological issues became very serious. The Emperor Constantine tried to settle these differences by calling on meetings which important church leaders from all over the Roman Empire would attend to debate the issues and hopefully settle on an agreed doctrine that all churches would follow. These meetings were called councils. Many councils of Bishops were held, but four of them came to be accepted as general of ecumenical (universal) councils. These were the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), the Council of Constantinople (AD 381), the Council at Ephesus (431 AD), and the Council at Chalcedon (451 AD). The decisions reached at these ecumenical councils were binding upon the whole church all over the Roman world. Many statements of beliefs called "creeds" were formed at these meetings.

The problem for the early church was that not everyone agreed with the creeds that came out of the ecumenical councils. There were deep divisions between the churches of the West, centered around Rome and Alexandria in North Africa, and the churches of the East, centered around Antioch. The division between east and west never healed, and led to a permanent parting of ways in 1054. The Eastern Church became what we now know as the Eastern Orthodox Churches, while the Western Church became the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the original teachings of the apostles were forgotten, lost or changed through time as people relied more and more on their own wisdom instead of following closely the guidance of the Lord.

Warm Up



Begin a discussion by brainstorming. Ask students the following questions, writing down their answers on the board in point form:

- How many of you have friends who are Christians?
- Do you know what church they go to?
- Apart from the churches mentioned here, do you know of other types of Christian churches?

Depending on the answers given and prior knowledge of the students, either point out that they have given many different groups of Christians, or that what is on the board is just a small sample of the many groups of Christians. The teacher could add other groups that the students may not be aware of.

Next, tell them that we live in a world where significant portions of the world population call themselves Christian. However, the similarity often ends there amongst the myriad Christian groups.

Certainly, they all claim to believe in God. Some are adamant that God is the only being to be worshiped. How do these people define God though? Some would say He is but one aspect of the three beings that form the Trinity. Some churches include the Virgin Mary and the Saints as those whom we should revere. There are many questions asked by people, such as: Who is Jesus Christ? Is He God? Was He fully human or not when He was on the earth?

How will we know what to say to friends regarding the true church? Most Christians today feel that, as long as we believe in Jesus Christ, we are all the same and will receive the same salvation. How can we refute that claim? The most important way is to study the truth diligently. We need to read the Bible, pray regularly, and ask God for wisdom and understanding. This is the only way we are able to fully understand the will of God. However, another way is to explore the source of all the confusion. How did we end up with so many different types of Christianity? When did this happen? We must look to history for answers. The purpose of the next three lessons is to give you a brief overview of the development of the Catholic Church from the time of Constantine to the Protestant Reformation.

Bible Study

Part 1

The Problem of Circumcision

The first major disagreement within the early church is actually recorded in Acts of the Apostles. Read Acts 15.

a. What was the main point of dissension in this chapter?
(Jewish converts insisting that circumcision was still necessary for gentile converts.)

b. What was Peter's argument in vs. 7–11?
(God himself chose to save the gentile Cornelius and his household. He chose Peter to preach the gospel to them, and gave the whole household of Cornelius

the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:34–48). If God should open the door of salvation to the gentiles freely, why should Jewish converts block the grace of God by imposing circumcision upon gentile believers? We should believe that the grace of Christ alone will save any who would believe in the same way.)

c. How did Barnabas and Paul witness to God's work?
(They spoke of all the miracles and wonders that God had worked through them as they evangelized to the gentiles.)

d. What decision did the council make regarding circumcision?
(Gentiles would not be troubled by circumcision. The only rules they must obey are to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood (Acts 15:19–20).)

e. How did the leaders of the council come to their decision?
(Based on the works of God, and from the teachings of the scriptures (Acts 15:13–18).)

The conflict over circumcision was resolved when the believers obeyed the direction God showed them through His works and visions. They also used the Scriptures as a guiding principle. They were therefore able to keep to the true faith and teachings of Christ.

Part 2

The Question of the Divinity or Humanity of Christ

Believers tried to understand who Jesus Christ really was and how He related to God. This led to the heresies described by the apostles in the New Testament letters. After Constantine became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire, this question continued to plague the church. The conflict came to a head with the preaching of Arius, senior presbyter of one of the churches in Alexandria. In 318 AD, he clashed with Bishop Alexander on this issue.

Arius believed that Jesus Christ was different from the Father. Jesus Christ was only the Son and did not possess the divine qualities of the Father, such as immortality, sovereignty, perfect wisdom, goodness and purity. The Son was begotten by the Father and did not exist before that. The Father produced the Son as a creature, but the Son was the creator of the rest of creation. The Son did exist outside of

time, before all things. Yet he did not know the Father perfectly and did not share the same being as the Father. He did, however, receive enough grace and wisdom from the Father so that he was able to reveal the Father to humankind.

This began a vigorous debate regarding the nature of Christ that lasted over the next few centuries and shaped the doctrine of the Trinity in the Catholic Church. Arius was quickly branded a heretic together with all his followers. However, he did have support from some of the bishops. Over the next few decades, as the various factions within the church fought over this issue, supporters of Arius rose in favor but were banished again. The controversy was fuelled by political rivalries between the eastern and western churches. Two main rival groups emerged, one based in Alexandria in the west, and one in Antioch in the east. The Alexandrian and Antiochene theologians never agreed in their doctrines of the divinity or humanity of Christ.

Into this mix came the emperors. Once Constantine became the first Christian emperor, he was anxious for any divisions within the church be settled. He sent his religious advisor, the Spanish Bishop Ossius, to try and reconcile the different factions, but Ossius did not succeed. Hence, Constantine summoned a meeting of bishops from east and west to settle the issue. The meeting was initially planned for Ancyra (modern Ankara). Then the venue moved to Nicaea, near Nicomedia (today's city of Iznik). This was the Council of Nicaea. This council was significant because several things happened that influenced the future of the church:

a. The meeting resulted in the writing of the Creed of Nicaea. This creed stated the official beliefs of the church. It was formulated to combat the position of Arius and stated that the Son and the Father shared the same substance. They rejected Arius' claim that there was a time when the Son did not exist, or that the Son was inferior to the Father in any way.

b. From Nicaea also came important regulations (called "canons") about church organization. The bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea and Jerusalem were given special status. They had superiority over other churches and bishops. Soon after, the Bishop of Constantinople was also included, since the Roman Emperor ruled from there, and it was considered the new Rome. There were also canons that outlined the importance of certain church practices such as the performing of the Holy Communion (called the Eucharist) for those about to die but had not been baptized, or stopping the clergy (a name referring to ordained ministers in the Catholic Church, that includes priests and bishops) from transferring from one city to another. There were

twenty canons that were drawn up from the meeting, dealing with these issues of organization.

c. Constantine himself called the meeting, presided over the meeting, and influenced the decisions. He gave the decisions reached by the council the status of imperial law. This was the beginning of a change in relations between church and state. Other emperors later on would also involve themselves in church debates, supporting one side over the other and making doctrinal decisions a law to be obeyed.

The Council of Nicaea did not have the widespread support that the Emperor hoped for. Very few bishops from the west attended it. When the decisions were imparted to all the churches, there were many who opposed the decisions. The debates over these decisions continued to rage over the next few centuries and ensured the permanent rift between eastern and western churches.

Check for Understanding

As we have seen, there were conflicts within the church even from the time of the apostles. However, the way they approached the solutions were different. Consider the accounts from both sections above, and make a list of similarities and differences in approaches and results.

(Similarities: Councils were called to resolve differences; debates were heard; decisions were made based on the arguments made at the meeting; any other relevant points are acceptable. Differences: In Acts, the apostles called the council and were actively involved in seeking the solutions, whereas later on, the church allowed the Emperor to take the leadership role in decisions relating to doctrinal beliefs; the apostles based their decisions on Scripture and the works of God, while decisions made by the Bishops during Constantine's time were more politically oriented (east vs. west); decisions made by the apostles were accepted by the whole church, whereas the creeds and canons of Nicaea became contentious issues within the church for a long time afterwards; any other relevant points are acceptable.)

Life Application

Fellowship Time

Fellowship time. Remember to begin with a prayer, and perhaps hymn singing if there is time. Make sure everyone is involved. Fellowship is a special time to bond with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Make an effort to speak to someone you do not normally speak to. Learn at least one new thing from those you know well. Such times help us to form a special, spiritual relationship with one another. Once we have this bond, we will always have someone to turn to in times of difficulties and trouble. In this way, we are able to help each other to keep to the true path of salvation.

Reflection & Prayer

At the end of the fellowship, reflect on the fact that the early church drew further and further away from the truth because believers were not diligent enough to keep to the original teachings of Christ and the Apostles. People began to voice their own interpretations of what was taught, using their own wisdom and knowledge. This was their downfall. As Paul says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile'" (1 Cor 3:1–20).

Let us remember to turn always to God for the truth. We must be watchful, and guard against using our own human wisdom to determine matters of God. If we do that, we will fall. There are many warnings in the Bible of people who followed their own reasoning and disobeyed God. We have read some examples of these instances in our Bible readings this week. In our prayer, let us ask God to help us remain humble before Him, always seeking His guidance, and bowing to His will. Let us pray.

Lesson 7

The Decline of the Worldly Church

Listed Scriptures

2 Kgs 22–23:30; Ezek 8, 11, 13–15

Lesson Aim

1) To realize the importance of good leadership within the church.

Memory Verse

"""These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."""
(Mt 15:8, 9)

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

Neh 1; Dan 9; Jn 17; 1 Tim 3; 2 Tim 2

Bible Background

The year 800 was a significant year. Pope Leo III crowned a new king to be emperor of the Romans. He was Charlemagne, and he saw his position as king of the Christian empire, rather than the old Roman Empire. His son integrated more of the Roman imperial ideals, but with Charlemagne's successors, the idea of the Holy Roman Empire came into being.

Under this arrangement, the Pope and the Emperor each had dominion over his own sphere but would cooperate with each other and promote the interests of the other. However, in reality, the papacy and the rulers periodically engaged in power

struggles. In people's minds, the Holy Roman Empire was really the same as Western Christendom. In the whole western area, everyone born within the empire was baptized in the Roman Catholic faith and remained within the church for life. Beyond the empire, in England and Spain, the Roman church was also the recognized religious authority.

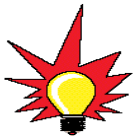
Charlemagne won control of an empire that stretched from the Atlantic eastward to the Elbe and Danube Rivers, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, and included much of Italy and parts of Spain. He therefore maintained a rather effective control of the pope and the Roman church. His laws had to do with both church and secular affairs. Unfortunately, his son was not as able a ruler as him, and his grandsons split the empire into three ways in 843 at the Treaty of Verdun. Thereafter, the empire declined rapidly. External attacks increased. Vikings terrorized the northwestern and western parts of the empire in the ninth century. Muslims ravaged Sardinia, Corsica and the coasts of southern France and western Italy. There were also attacks by the Magyars from Russia.

With the empire's decline also came the decline of the papacy. Rome had to contend with Muslim invaders as well as anarchy within Italy during the period between 800 and 1000. Wealthy families often bought the election of sons to become Popes. Indeed, the chair of St. Peter was occupied by some very unworthy individuals between 880 and 1060. It is surprising, therefore, that Christianity actually spread far and wide between 800 and 1073. Before the middle of the ninth century, there was a bishop at Hamburg. Bohemia and Moravia also became Roman Catholic at this time, followed by Poland a century later, and Norway soon after that. Missionaries went to Iceland and converted the people there to Christianity, and the Swedish king adopted the faith for himself and his people. In the east, the church there went north to Moravia, Bulgaria. Around the tenth and eleventh centuries, Russians became Orthodox Christians.

With widespread beliefs in Christianity, the popes were able to gain enormous power over ordinary people as well as rulers. The threat of excommunication was often enough to ensure obedience to the dictates of the pope. If not, the church would withhold essential services from the people. For instance, there would be no sacrament of the Holy Communion (known as the Eucharist), or last rites for the dead. In such cases, the population brought enough pressure on the rulers to ensure a victory for the pope.

Hence, although Christianity seemed to have flourished at this time, the truth was lost. The church was more about political power than salvation. The ordinary people were the ones caught in-between these power plays. Faith was not a choice but something enforced, and often the grace of Jesus Christ was not truly felt by believers. This situation led eventually to the Protestant Reformation, the biggest crisis faced by the Catholic Church, and the most serious schism in church history.

Warm Up



Discuss changes in social views of morality. Write a couple of issues that could open up the discussion, such as "single parenthood" or "divorce." Point out to the students that people accept these behaviors as socially acceptable. Yet, there was a time in history when they were not. For example, a mere hundred years ago, society tended to view divorced or unmarried women with children as immoral. These women were treated with certain contempt by many people.

Ask the students if they can come up with other social views that have changed over time. Other examples are the reference to "partner" rather than "husband" or "wife," gay rights, and so on.

Point out to the students that we live in a changing society. Not only does technology change, but moral and ethical views change too. In order to keep ourselves pure and pleasing to God, we must constantly measure our views, behavior and morality against the standards set by the Bible. We must avoid the temptation of flowing with the tide of the world, or we will risk sinning against God.

Bible Study

The Decline of the Medieval Church

A. Leadership

Read Ezekiel 8. What were the abominations that Ezekiel saw in his vision? (v.5: image of jealousy north of the altar gate; v.10: creeping things, abominable

beasts, all the idols of Israel around the wall; v.11: 70 men of the elders of Israel, each holding incense in his hand, worshipping idols; v.14: women sitting at the north gate weeping for Tammuz, a Babylonian god of nature or vegetation; v.16: 25 men at the door of the temple, their backs to the temple, faces toward the east worshipping the sun.)

What we have just read in Ezekiel shows us the importance of leadership. A good leader guides his people towards the right path. The religious leaders portrayed in the passage in Ezekiel did not do that. In fact, they themselves committed terrible sins against God. Contrast this with Josiah, who led Israel back to God. Read 2 Kings chapter 22, and take note of some religious reforms undertaken by King Josiah (i.e. repaired the house of the Lord, turned to the Lord for guidance with regards to the Law, realized the people had not obeyed the words of God in the Book of the Law, repented and was humble before the Lord. The reforms of Josiah can be seen in chapter 23 as well.).

The medieval church did not have leaders such as Josiah. In fact, the church was much more concerned with land, wealth, and political power than the faith of the people. Church leaders allowed themselves to be swept away by secular concerns, regarding these as far more important than spiritual concerns. The church gradually suffered a decline in fortune. She no longer provided the necessary spiritual leadership. The truth and the Holy Spirit departed from her. As the Lord said in 2 Kings 23:27, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'" Indeed, the apostolic church had disappeared many centuries ago at this point.

B. Reasons for the Decline of the Church

Society may change, but people do not really change. We make the same mistakes. It is therefore necessary to study the mistakes of the past, so that we may learn from them and avoid them. This section will provide some historical insights as to why the medieval church failed. There were many reasons for the decline of the medieval church. Amongst the most important are:

a. The rise of nationalism: The rise of monarchs accompanied the rise of a sense of nationalism and increased loyalty of people to their rulers. The church claimed a kind of supernatural loyalty that was threatened by this new, more visible type of nationalism. As strong rulers rose, they became more and more jealous of the immense wealth and power that the church had acquired.

b. The rigid enforcement of doctrine and practice: This was one of the most effective means the church had of maintaining control over the people. It had the feared name of the Inquisition. The Inquisition was designed to look into the spread of heresy and bring Roman Catholics suspected of heretical beliefs before the tribunals . It was meant to keep the faithful in line. However, the movement got carried away, especially in Spain where the Inquisition became linked to terrible tortures and executions. Often, confessions were obtained through torture, and testimony against the accused may have been obtained in the same way. There was no legal representation for the accused since any lawyer who represented a heretic may well have been accused of being one. Those who confessed and were reconciled with the church were subjected to various punishments, including penances (payment of money to the church to obtain forgiveness of sins), pilgrimages, scourging, or fines. Those who refused to admit to guilt were executed, usually by burning. The Inquisition is now known for its violation of human rights and its reign of terror perpetuated by the church.

c. Maintenance of the church hierarchy: To maintain the various levels of clergy, as well as the numerous churches that had flourished over the past centuries, the medieval church had to use different means of getting money. There were many ways of deception, such as the sale of relics, which alienated many devout Christians.

d. Lack of moral standards amongst churchmen: Moral standards among the clergy were often questionable. Churchmen who vowed to forsake marriage and family life often had concubines or were often drunks. This did not inspire confidence in churchmen.

e. Onset of the Renaissance: After the Middle Ages came the period of development known as the Renaissance. This was a period of rebirth of the classical spirit and knowledge. The middle class grew wealthier during this time. Therefore, people began to think of spending their money on making the present life better, rather than giving money to the church to improve the afterlife. Art, music, architecture and theatre flourished while people became more critical of the church.

f. The Crusades: This contributed to the decline of the church because of the masses of people who went away to fight for Christendom against the Muslim "infidels." Most of these people would have lived their lives within the confines of their ruler's lands, knowing nothing more than what they grew up with.

When they traveled to distant lands, they saw new things and learned new ways of life. The knowledge and ideas they acquired from these distant lands weakened the hold that the church had on them.

g. The Babylonian Captivity: This was a term used to describe the 70 years when the pope ruled from Avignon in France, between 1305–1377. This was a result of political power struggles between the king of France and the pope. There were seven popes who ruled from Avignon. The papacy did eventually return to Rome. However, this incident further eroded the authority of the church.

Based on the information above, can you find some parallels with our own society today? (I.e. Nationalism, which often leads to violence; greed for wealth of other groups or nations; fundamentalism in any religious group that might hinder our church's work in the future; decline in morality in many societies; wealth leading people away from God; danger of allowing outside influence to affect our faith, especially when we leave home for studies or work; conflict within the church; any other relevant points.)

Check for Understanding

1. What were the reasons for the decline of the medieval church?

2. Refer to Neh 1, Dan 9, and Jn 17:6–26. What do these passages tell us about strong leadership? Are there any similarities in these passages? (eg. all these leaders prayed for the believers, for the Church, etc.)

Life Application

Qualities of a Good Shepherd

You will need a poster board and post-it notes for this activity. In the center of the poster board, write the title: Qualities of a Good Leader in the Church, or Qualities of a Good Shepherd.

As we have seen, good leadership is important. We all have a responsibility to become good leaders in our church. Our pastors, elders and deacons provide us with many good examples of how to be a good leader. We, in our turn, must learn

to lead the younger brothers and sisters within our church.

In pairs or in a small group of no more than 3 or 4, brainstorm what you feel a good leader within the church should be like. Think about qualities such as faith, humility, responsibility, and so on. Try to find biblical examples to back up your views.

Once you have the students thinking, give each student a few post-it notes and a pen. Ask them to write down a few qualities they think a good leader in the church should have. Hang up the poster board somewhere in the classroom. Then stick everyone's post-it notes containing their views around the title. The poster could be left on the wall, and added to in the future.

Discuss what everyone has written. What were the most popular qualities? Most unusual? **Ask the students to write a journal entry with the following topic: If I became a leader in the church, how would I lead my younger brothers and sisters? The class will share their entries with each other next week.**

Reflection & Prayer

It is important to reflect on our faith constantly. We should not follow blindly, but understand why we believe what we believe. The problem with Christians during medieval times was that they didn't really understand their faith and allowed themselves to be led blindly. Unlike the leaders during the time of the apostles, the leaders of the church did not provide the spiritual guidance that they should have. We must ask the Lord to protect us from the same mistakes in the true church. We are the church of the latter rain. The salvation of God will be fulfilled with us. We must always be conscious of our responsibilities towards God and towards our brothers and sisters. Let us pray to ask God for guidance.

Lesson 8

The Protestant Reformation

Listed Scriptures

Rom 2:1–16, 3, 5–8

Lesson Aim

1) Remind students to be diligent in keeping to the original teachings of Christ.
2) Show students that God has prepared a way for the true church to emerge at the right time.

Memory Verse

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Rom 5:1,2)

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

Ps 60, Rom 2–8

BIBLE BACKGROUND

"Popular religion" refers to the religious beliefs of the ordinary men and women, who are also called "laymen". During the Middle Ages, over 80% of these people were illiterate. It was therefore impossible for them to read the Bible that was printed in Latin. Even the few who were educated would not be able to read the Bible in Latin unless they were part of the clergy. The most important parts of the church services were also spoken in Latin, so most people would have no idea of what the priests were chanting.

Without any means of understanding the formal worship in the church, lay people turned to other ways to express their religious fervor. They turned to the saints, the

famous holy people who were reputed to have lived such pure and sacred lives that they had a special spiritual link with God. Of course, one could not become a saint while alive, so all saints were dead. Nevertheless, it was believed that they were such special people that even in death, they had great influence and power.

In fact, most ordinary Christians were pagan converts. They found it easy to transfer their pagan forms of worship to Christianity. The old pagan shrines transformed into shrines for worshipping the dead saints. Pagan festivals easily became Christian holy days, such as All Saints' Day, which we still have. In some communities, there were so many days to honor the numerous saints that the whole year was interrupted by festivals. There were saints who made the fields fertile, saints to bless the birth of a child, saints to ward against evil–the list was endless. The Virgin Mary grew rapidly in significance from the twelfth century onward. People would undertake pilgrimages to certain shrines built for her, reputed to have special powers such as healing. Catholics still make such pilgrimages today.

Relics were another popular thing. These were mementos supposedly belonging to certain powerful saints. It could be the bowl a saint used in his or her lifetime, a piece of fabric from a garment, even the saint's teeth, pieces of bone, a walking stick. People would pay vast amounts of money for relics because they believed these things had healing powers, power to protect against evil, or power to grant wishes. A growing market in relics resulted. Peasants bought drops of the Savior's bloody sweat and the Virgin's milk at local fairs. Cities cherished and stole from one another the bodies of famous saints. The church encouraged these superstitions because they brought in a lot of money. In fact, many relics were probably manufactured by the church.

One important sale item was indulgences. Christians at the time believed that when a person died, he would spend a period of time in purgatory. This was the place where the soul suffered for all the sins committed during life. The length of time spent in purgatory depended on how good a person had been in life. After an allotted time, people were released to heaven. Everyone went to heaven unless they had been excommunicated by the church. If that happened, they were condemned to eternal hell. This was why the threat of excommunication was so effective against rulers.

Initially, the church provided indulgences for the remission of punishment imposed by the church. The punishment would have been imposed on someone for a specific sin. The theory behind the indulgence was that no one could ever do enough to clean their "sinfulness" or take away their sin fully–whatever they have done. The

Roman Catholic Church had a system of penance, which was what an individual had to do to make up for or expiate a particular sin. Since no penance an individual could do would ever expiate the sin they committed, it was necessary to draw on a bank of "merits" to help them. The idea was a bit like this: if you owed someone a lot of money, far more than you could ever repay, you would go somewhere to borrow the amount. These "merits" were extra brownie points to help you pay off your penance for your sins.

How did this bank build up in points? Well, Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints contributed to it. They were so pure and holy that they were able to provide endless merits for sinners. The way to get these merits was through the pope. The pope gave out merits to sinners through indulgences. With your indulgence, your sin could be fully forgiven, your penance complete.

In the early days of the indulgence, you could get one for doing a great deed, such as fighting in the Crusades. Later on, you could buy these indulgences. The money the church received from selling indulgences financed new church buildings, monasteries, hospitals, and so on. Later on, indulgences were bought, not just for absolving one sin, but for all guilt you could possibly incur before God. This was the bone of contention that led to the Protestant Reformation.

W A R M U P

"2 Truths and a Lie"

You might need to prepare this beforehand. You could involve your students in the game eventually, but you will need to start them off. Be prepared to jump in if they're stuck.

You have to offer three statements from the Bible. Two of them are true, and one is not. They have to figure out which is not true. The three statements must be connected in some way, i.e. doctrinal statements, part of a parable or story, and so on. You could begin with something simple, for example:

1. Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. (True)
2. Joseph was the husband of Mary. (True)
3. Jesus was born in Nazareth. (False, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.)

If you have time, you could give your students some time to prepare 3 statements each to ask each other. If not, you can prepare a few beforehand to ask them. You could even do this as a game. Divide

your class into two groups, and see which group wins when you ask them a series of "2 truths and a lie."

At the end of the warm-up time, ask your students how they might find out whether a statement was true or not. Hopefully, they will answer: "Find out from the Bible," or even "Ask a minister." Tell them that during medieval times, the church had gone so far off the truth that they no longer knew what was true and what was not. They made the mistake of not constantly going back to the Bible to check the truth, so they wandered farther and farther away from God. This is something we must constantly guard against.

Bible Study

The Protestant Reformation

A. Sin

Read the following verses and discuss what each says about sin and being saved from sin:

a. Rom 3:21–26 (we have all sinned before God, we are justified by His grace through Jesus Christ, the sins we have previously committed have been passed over)

b. Rom 5:18–19 (our life is a gift, granted us by the actions of Jesus, we are made righteous by His act of obedience)

c. Rom 6:7–14 (just as Christ has triumphed over death, we are also saved from death, made alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord, we must therefore not allow sin to be in our body, we must be instruments of righteousness to God, sin has no dominion over us because we are under grace)

d. What is the main message in the above verses? (we are saved freely through grace, and must remain pure because we have been saved from the dominion of sin by Jesus Christ)

The medieval church did not preach this same message. Instead, they invented tickets called "indulgences" to salvation. The Catholic Church taught that when Christians died, they went to purgatory to "purge" all the sins they committed in life. If you were very good, the time you spent there would be shorter. After 'serving time' in purgatory, you then proceeded to heaven. Obviously, everyone would wish a very short time in purgatory. The church knew that, and that was how indulgences became popular. By buying indulgences, you could buy forgiveness for all your sins. This was possible because the indulgences were officially given by the pope, or the head of the church.

B. Martin Luther

Most ordinary Christians were so confused about their beliefs, and so superstitious in their daily lives, that they were easily deceived into believing that indulgences could actually save their souls from purgatory. What was more, you could also buy indulgences for deceased loved ones to shorten the length of their suffering in purgatory. The problem was, once people had a means of getting out of punishment, they no longer cared about their behavior. It was all right to commit any sin, because you could buy your way out of any punishment through indulgences. This was what one Augustinian monk realized.

Martin Luther was the son of a miner, born in 1483. He had an excellent education, and even received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Erfurt, Germany. He was so bright that his father urged him to enter law school, which he did. However, in July of 1505, he experienced a profound conversion experience that changed the course of his life. He ended up in a monastery belonging to the Augustinian order of monks. At the monastery, he came under the influence of a mentor, a leader of his order named Johann Von Staupitz. Von Staupitz encouraged Luther to think upon the love of God for the sinner, evidenced in Christ's death. Luther studied the Bible very diligently. During 1513–1528, he lectured on Psalms, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and Titus. Around this period, he came to understand the doctrine of "justification by faith."

It was the issue of indulgences that bothered Luther greatly because it promised full remission of sin and punishment in purgatory for living persons as well as dead. He observed the negative effect the sale of indulgences had on moral and ethical standards of believers. On October 31, 1517, he posted his Ninety-five Theses (topics for debate) on the door of Castle Church at Wittenberg, to protest against the sale of indulgences. He did not know that the sale of indulgences went

ahead with the blessings of the pope. He felt that the pope would surely put a stop to them once he knew what was happening. Luther was shocked to gradually learn that the sale of indulgences was approved at the highest level for money that the pope needed.

Luther was summoned to Rome to answer for his theses. It was here that he realized the extent of moral decline within the church. In fact, he was excommunicated eventually, and might even have burned at the stake if he had not been protected by the ruler of the area he came from. Frederic of Saxony had always forbidden the sale of indulgences in his domain. He therefore gave sanctuary to Luther. Amazingly, increasing masses of people came to support Luther. The real extent of disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church was revealed when Luther finally parted company with Rome. While there were difficulties and drawbacks initially, the Lutheran Reformation gathered speed steadily until an alternative church was established. The ordinary people found in Luther's church the hope and faith that they could not find within Roman Catholicism. The Epistle to the Romans played a very important part in initially guiding Luther. Luther's studies of Romans led him to think about justification by faith.

The Lutheran Church contained several distinctive features:

a. Justification by faith alone
b. Salvation by grace alone
c. The Bible alone as the authority for doctrine and practice
d. The priesthood of the believer
e. Promotion of congregational singing

After the Lutheran Reformation, there were further splits within the new church. The vast number of different denominations that we take for granted today began with Luther. If this had not taken place, the true church would not have emerged so easily. We would certainly have been considered heretics by the Roman Catholic Church, probably put through the Inquisition and perhaps burned at the stake!

Check for Understanding

1. What were indulgences?

2. Why was Luther so concerned about them?
3. Why do you think people were prepared to follow Luther and not the Catholic Church?

Life Application

A Leader of the Church

Share your journal entries: If I became a leader in the church, how would I lead my younger brothers and sisters? (See previous lesson Life Application section.) It would be good if the teacher also had something to share with the students regarding what good leadership is.

The students will need blank paper (larger than the usual letter size would be better), one per group, as well as some pens or markers for the scribe (the following information is not in the students' workbook).

Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 (maximum). Each person within the group should have a role:

1. Reader: this student will read out what the group has written at the end of the discussion.
2. Encourager: this student should encourage everyone within the group to take part in the discussion.
3. Scribe: this student will write down all the main points for the group.
4. Time keeper: if you have groups of 4, this student will remind everyone of how much time they have to complete the task. If you have groups of 3, then the teacher will be the timekeeper.
5. The roles can be written on cards and students can pick a role randomly, or you can assign the roles.

Task:

1. Set a time for this task (around 10 minutes). Students may read their journal to others within the group, or they may offer opinions on what qualities a good leader should have, based on their journal entry. The scribe will write down the main points as the discussion moves along. At the end of the discussion, each group should have a list of qualities that they feel a good leader in the church should have.

2. The reader will then share with the rest of the class all the qualities the group has on paper. The sheet could be put up on the wall.
3. When every group has presented, discuss as a whole class the most common qualities everyone put down. Discuss why everyone thinks these qualities are so important. Perhaps mention examples of biblical characters who possess these qualities.

Remind students that these are the qualities that they feel are the most important in a leader. If we do not have some of these qualities, then we should ask God for them so that we may develop into good leaders for His church.

Reflection & Prayer

We must remember that each of us has a responsibility to pass on the truth to the next generation of believers. In doing that, we must ensure that what we pass on is the original truth, not something that we invented for our convenience, or for gain. This is the mistake that the Roman Catholic Church made. It drew farther and farther away from God and the true gospel as each generation passed, until what they preached bore no resemblance to the teachings of Christ and the apostles. We must learn from their mistakes and always keep to the true teachings of the Bible. Let us ask God to grant us wisdom and to give us strength in our endeavors. Let us pray.

Lesson 9

Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anglicans

Listed Scriptures

2 Kgs 11–12, 22–23:30; 2 Chron 19–20, 29–31

Lesson Aim

1) Remind students to be diligent in keeping to the original teachings of Christ.
2) Show students that God has prepared a way for the true church to emerge at the right time.

Memory Verse

"For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." (1 Cor 2:11)

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

Deut 28–30; Ps 18:20–36; Mal 3–4

Bible Background

Martin Luther was excommunicated by the pope in 1520 and outlawed by Emperor Charles V in 1521. However, his dramatic stand against pope and emperor fired the imagination of the people in Europe. Growing nationalistic feelings also helped him. Most people were tired of bowing to the whims of the Roman Catholic Church and the Emperor in Rome. People in Europe were beginning to gain a sense of belonging to their region or ruler. Frederick the Wise of Saxony, the most powerful ruler in Germany at the time, supported Luther and kept him safe. The people under frederick also supported this decision.

Over the next twenty-five years, Luther wrote book after book. He wrote in German for ordinary people to read. The invention of the printing press about a century before assisted with the process of disseminating knowledge. Because of Luther's

translation of the Bible, many lay people could read the Scriptures and see for themselves the truth of Luther's teachings. Luther published each of his disputes with Rome so that people could read and judge the issues. At last, the ordinary Christian could decide theological issues for himself for the first time in a very long time. Luther's followers multiplied.

There were many years of struggle and war as a result of the Reformation. In the year of Luther's death in 1546, one of these wars broke out. Finally, at a meeting called the Diet of Augsburg in 1555, the struggles ended, and both Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism were recognized as legal religions in the Holy Roman Empire. It was decided that the religion of the prince of the region would be the religion of the people he governed.

Luther's movement split Europe in two. It gave rise to three main traditions: the Lutheran (in Germany and Scandinavia), the Zwinglian and Calvinist (in Switzerland, France, Holland and Scotland), and the Church of England. From there, the number of Protestant churches grew, but these three main groups–Lutherans, Presbyterians and Anglicans–still form the main groups of Protestantism. There were lasting social and political effects following the years of reform. However, people rediscovered the Bible and God's saving grace in Christ. People's eyes were opened to the truth and saw the customs and practices that corrupted it. New forms of worship enabled the congregation to be a part of the services. Luther also became well known for the hymns that inspired so many of his followers. The tradition of hymn singing that is so important to Christian churches today has Luther to thank for this.

Warm Up

You will need a small piece of paper and a pencil or pen for each student. For the first part of this game, everyone works independently. No one is allowed to see what someone else is writing. Secrecy is important!

Give the class a general issue to reflect on. For example, ask them:
- What they think being a good friend means.
- What being a good Christian means.
- What being an obedient son/daughter means.

Allow students to spend 5 minutes or so writing down their views. This can be in point form.
When they are done, put them in pairs and ask each pair to decide

if they are A or B. A will first try to guess what B wrote on the piece of paper. B has to answer "yes" or "no" to the guesses. B must not elaborate. If the guess is inaccurate, just say "no." Give A 30 seconds to guess, then switch roles.

At the end of the exercise, discuss with the whole class the percentage of accuracy in their guesses. Did most of them guess what their partner thought? Were all their guesses mostly accurate?

Now, put them in different pairings. Do the same exercise all over again, but this time, each person shares with his/her partner what they wrote on their piece of paper, so there is no need to guess. Give them a minute or so to do this, then discuss as a class again. Ask volunteers to tell the class what his/her partner feels about the issue they are writing about.

Ask the class the differences between the two times they worked with a partner. Hopefully, they will see that the first time was a "hit and miss" situation; they could not really know what the other person was thinking but could have guessed correctly. The second time though, they knew exactly what their partner thought because they could read what their partner had written. They were able to really know what their partner was thinking because they were told by the source of the information–their partner.

That is the way with understanding God. In order to understand His will, we need to go to the source of the information–God Himself, through reading the Bible, or through prayer. Unfortunately, people tend to guess what God thinks, and act according to their "best guess." However, we as humans can never truly understand God because He is so much greater than we are. That is why there are so many churches in the world today. Everyone thinks they understand God, but most people do not go to God Himself. This is what we need to guard against.

Part 1
Reforms in the Old Testament

Reform is not a new idea that came about with Martin Luther. There have been many reformers in the Old Testament. Below, we look closely at two of them. However, the Bible readings for this week will also lead us to other royal reformers. Read the following passages, and using point form notes, fill in the boxes for each passage (see student workbook):

2 Kings 12:1–16 (Jehoash's reform)

a. What type of reform was made (i.e., things that were done to correct the situation)?
b. Was there anything missing in the reformation (i.e., things that should have been done that were not)?

2 Chron 19:4–11, 20:31–37 (Jehoshaphat's reform)

a. What type of reform was made (i.e., things that were done to correct the situation)?
b. Was there anything missing in the reformation (i.e., things that should have been done that were not)?

As we see above and from the Bible readings for this week, there were many reformers amongst the kings of Judah. However, not everything was done perfectly, or the way God would have wanted it. Leaders often make important changes that affect the people under their charge. In the church it is important that these changes serve to draw us closer to God and help us understand His will better. Unfortunately, people often try to understand God's will through their own human wisdom. This week's memory verse reminds us that only the spirit of God knows the things of God. Therefore only God is able to show us the right way in any reform, large or small.

Part 2
The Three Main Branches of the Protestant Reformation

A. Lutheranism

Lutherans separated themselves from the Roman Catholic Church by declaring:

a. The pope has no divine right to spiritual matters. The Roman Catholic Church believed that the pope had the final say in spiritual matters, including matters regarding doctrines.
b. The pope was not infallible. That is, the pope is also human and can make mistakes. The Roman Catholic Church believed that since the pope was a spiritual descendent of St. Peter, God would inspire him so that his decisions were all correct.
c. Scripture, not a priest or the church, had final authority over conscience. So in matters of morality, in right or wrong, believers need to turn to scripture for final decisions, although they may go to the priest or the church for guidance.

Lutherans believe that our sins are forgiven through the grace of the Holy Spirit, not by any good works we do, or by going through any church rite. This was a key idea of the Reformation.

There are two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion). Lutherans believe that in the Holy Communion, Christ is really present in the bread and wine (they do use wine) in some miraculous way. They ordain their priests, and their Sunday service consists of prayer, meditation, and readings from the scripture. Unlike Roman Catholic priests, Lutheran priests are allowed to marry.

Although there were criticisms that Luther did not go far enough to break with Roman Catholic practices (he retained the crucifix, candles and other physical elements of the Roman Catholic Church), the above features were quite revolutionary. The faith of the people no longer depended on one powerful individual (such as the pope). Believers were considered equal, sharing the ideal of priesthood. In the Roman Catholic Church of the time, ordinary believers always felt that the priests were closer to God, and therefore forgiveness and salvation came from God through them. There was no involvement by the congregation in the Roman Catholic Church, as everything was done by the priests and the clergy. In contrast, the Lutheran congregation was actively involved in worship through singing.

B. Presbyterianism

Presbyterians are known as Calvinists. The word "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, meaning "elder." This refers to the people who direct the operations of the church.

Presbyterians are Protestants who trace their beginnings to John Calvin and France. Calvin wrote "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," in which he outlined the belief system of the Protestant churches. He then moved to Geneva, Switzerland, where he preached his beliefs. The Calvinist faith spread rapidly across Europe. One of his converts was a Scott by the name of John Knox, who spread Calvinism in Scotland. Presbyterianism then spread to North America and the rest of the world.

Calvin emphasized the sovereignty of God in his teachings. Humans are completely dominated by and dependent on God. Our lives are unconditionally predestined. Presbyterians try to live a morally strict and clean life to show a good example. Calvin's reform ideas included education, liberation of the oppressed and the establishment of democratic forms of government in church and state.

They have two main sacraments: baptism for infants and adults, and the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion). The Communion is open to all baptized Christians and not just Presbyterians. The consecrated bread and wine in the Holy Communion are symbols representing Christ's body and blood.

Presbyterians believe in the Trinity. The Bible is the foundation of their faith. They believe that they are saved "by faith alone, by God's grace only, through scripture only."

The churches are governed by elders who are elected by their congregations. The congregation also elects and ordains pastors. All elders and pastors would gather to form presbyteries for mutual support and cooperative governance. They do not believe in a hierarchical structure of church governance. It is a policy for Presbyterians to seek community with all Christian churches.

C. Anglicanism

The Church of England is the mother church of the Anglican Communion. The church was created in the sixteenth century by King Henry VIII, who wished to annul his marriage to the elderly Catherine of Aragon (his first wife) so he could

marry Anne Boleyn. The Pope refused to grant the annulment, so King Henry took over the English church and made himself head of the church. He broke with Rome and thus formed the Anglican Church. He then had the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, pronounce his first marriage null and void before proceeding to marry Anne.

The Church of England spread throughout the British Empire. Its influence spread into India and North America, where it evolved into the Episcopal Church, an independent church that came about after the American Revolution.

Anglicans retain many elements of traditional Catholic worship. However, they also accept basic insights from the Protestant reform. The Anglican Church has few firm rules and allows great flexibility in the interpretation of doctrines. It considers the Bible to be divinely inspired and sees the Lord's Supper as the central act of Christian worship. Anglicans respect the freedom of individuals, permitting a great deal of variety, independent thinking and religious liberty. They recognize both the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. They also have a *Book of Common Prayer* that is used in worship.

Check for Understanding

You will need chart paper and markers for each group. Work in groups of three. Draw a circle in the middle of the chart paper and write the word "similarities" in the circle. Now divide the rest of the space into three sections: Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans. Each student will write in one section. Using the information given above, highlight the key teachings of one of these Protestant churches. (So each student will work on a different one.)

Once this is done, the group will look at the key points that each group member has written down and identify points that are similar in all three groups. Write these similarities in the center. Use another color to highlight points that are specific to each group, and not found in the others.

Once each group has completed the task, they should copy the information in a Venn diagram with three circles. Write similarities in the common space in the center, and differences in the area belonging to the individual group. If there are any overlaps between only two groups, these could be written in the appropriate overlapping section of the diagram. Keep this diagram for review.

Defending the Basic Doctrines

Provide each student with a copy of the Basic Doctrines of our church. Also have copies of our church publication, "Q & A on the Basic Beliefs" (at least one per group). Divide the students into at least two groups. You can have more groups if you have a big class. You will need at least 3 or 4 students per group.

Each group takes on one basic doctrine to defend. It could be water baptism, foot-washing, Holy Communion or Holy Spirit. As you have at least 2 groups, there will at least be 2 basic doctrines for the debate. Give students time to prepare for the debate that will take place in two weeks' time. These are the rules:

1. Each group has one basic doctrine to defend. The group must be able to answer any criticism of their basic doctrine.
2. The other groups will prepare arguments against this doctrine.
3. During the debate, the group defending the doctrine will speak first. They must explain what the doctrine is about, and convince the other groups that they have the truth.
4. The other groups will then criticize the teachings of the doctrine. There should be one group speaking at a time, and the defenders must have the opportunity to answer to the charges.

Set a time limit for each basic doctrine. Once one group has finished, the next group will take their place and present the next basic doctrine. Since each group must prepare their own doctrine to defend, as well as some critical points for other doctrines that people outside our church might ask us, the preparation may take time. Students have this time, and next week to prepare.

Ask students to think about all the questions their friends may have asked them about our church doctrines and see how they answer them. They can also use the "Q & A on Basic Beliefs" to help them in their preparations.

We might face criticisms of our faith in our daily lives. We have to prepare ourselves for such occasions. This activity will help us to think about our faith, and how we might apply it when someone challenges us. The teacher should be prepared to help the students in their preparation. Perhaps the other teachers or a minister could be present during the debates to help out in case there are any complicated questions that arise.

With so many Christian denominations today, we must be firm in our own faith. We must be sure that we really know what we believe in, and be able to stand up to those beliefs. The only source of true understanding comes from God. Let us pray and ask Him to grant us a deeper understanding of His truth.

Lesson 10

Islam and Judaism

Listed Scriptures

Gen 15–18, 21:1–21, 25:1–27; Gal 4:21–31

Lesson Aim

1) To understand that the belief in Jesus Christ as our Savior is absolutely essential to our salvation.
2) To understand the importance of obeying every part of the Bible because it is the inspired word of God.
3) To learn that being devout and earnest in one's faith does not necessarily lead one to salvation.

Memory Verse

"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." (Rev 22:14)

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

Deut 7–8, 12:29–13:; Hos 4

Bible Background

Islam is a monotheistic faith that incorporates elements of Judaism and Christianity and Arab traditions that were prevalent during its inception. The prominent figure of the religion is Muhammad. He was born in 570 AD in Mecca. This was a very busy trading center considered to be a holy city by its inhabitants.

Muhammad's family was part of the Hashim clan. He was orphaned shortly after birth and raised in poverty by his uncle. At the age of 24, he married a wealthy widow and returned to Mecca to live the life of a prosperous merchant in his community.

When he was about 40 years old, Muhammad began to have a series of revelations from God through the angel Gabriel. He received these revelations while praying and meditating in a cave near Mecca. Gabriel presented the message of Islam, which was to confirm what the previous prophets of Judaism and Christianity had taught, and correct the mistakes that had entered the teachings of these faiths.

After receiving these revelations, Muhammad began to preach to the people of Mecca. He proclaimed the absolute one-ness of Allah, denounced idolatry, and urged the rich to give to the poor. His teachings met with resistance, as the people of the region worshiped a number of gods. He was persecuted and went to Yarthrib (later known as Medina, the City of the Prophet), where he converted a number of followers. In the summer of 622 AD, he organized an exodus of his followers at Mecca to go to Medina. This journey is called the Hegira and marks the beginning of the Muslim era.

Converts to Islam grew. By 630 AD, Muhammad was able to return to Mecca as a victorious religious leader. Ten years after that, the whole Arabian Peninsula was converted to Islam. Within one generation, an area almost as large as the United States was converted. Within a century, Islam had spread to Spain and Morocco in the west and India and Thailand in the east. Shortly after the consolidation of an Arab Islamic state, Muhammad died in Medina in 632 AD.

Warm Up

Prepare a chart paper. Divide the paper into two columns. On one side write "Islam" as a heading, and on the other write "Judaism" as the heading. Put this up at the board or on the wall. Divide students into groups–2 or 3 should do. Tell them that one student from each group will be asked to give an answer for the group, but they don't know which student. You will pick the student randomly so everyone will have to be involved in the discussion.

Give the students a few minutes to think about the two religions and test their prior knowledge. They may need a piece of scratch paper to jot down ideas. When the time is up, pick a student from each group. You could pick in any way you choose: those wearing red, the student nearest the board, the tallest of the group, etc. You might wish to pick particular students, but do so discreetly. Or you could number the students: 1, 2, 3. Ask all the number 2's to speak, etc. As each student reports, write their points on the chart paper. This will give you an idea of how much the class already knows, how much stereotyping is involved, misinformation, etc. At the end of the lesson, you could come back to the chart, and compare what is on the chart with what they have learned.

Bible Study

Part 1
Islam

A. Brief Outline of Islam

In Arabic, Islam means "purity, by submission to Allah's will" and "obedience to Allah's laws." Allah is the God of perfection and beauty; Islam is the religion based on the revelations and teachings of Allah to his prophet Muhammad.

These revelations were said to have occurred around 610 AD. The angel Gabriel (Jibril) appeared to Muhammad and told him to "recite." He refused three times, until the angel said, "Recite in the name of the Lord who created." The revelations received during the encounter became the opening lines of the Qu'ran, or "recitation." The Qu'ran is the sacred text of the Muslims.

Muslims believe that Muhammad had many divine encounters over the years that inspired the remainder of the Qu'ran, which was compiled by his secretary, Zaid, in Thabit. There were different versions of the Qu'ran until the time of the Caliph Uthman. A caliph is the leader of the Islamic faith, essentially the ruler of the Islamic empire. Twenty years after the death of Muhammad, Uthman ruled in favor of Thabit's version of the Qu'ran and all other versions were destroyed.

B. The Qu'ran

The Qu'ran was written in Arabic and considered authoritative only in that language. It consists of twelve chapters, or "sutras." It contains three kinds of teachings:

a. direct doctrinal messages
b. historical accounts that also have metaphorical meanings

c. mystical expressions of sublime beauty that inform and support a divine message.

The key messages in the book deal with:
a. the importance of faith in Allah and the consequences of unbelief
b. moral duties to one another
c. Allah's unity
d. the need to acknowledge the believers' dependence upon Allah
e. the believers' ultimate unity with Allah
f. human life being a test: we are rewarded or punished according to our actions in this short life
g. reward and punishment being given immediately after the funeral, but there will also be a Day of Judgment and a resurrection

It also contains a number of stories that parallel events familiar to Jewish and Christian faiths. For instance, Muslims consider themselves children of Abraham. However, they claim their genealogy from Ishmael. Muslims say that Ishmael came to Mecca and settled there, and his descendents became Muslims. Therefore they consider themselves direct descendents of Abraham. Like the Hebrew Bible, the Qu'ran acknowledges that Isaac's descendents formed the tribes of Israel.

C. The Five Pillars

The Five Pillars are considered the anchor in a Muslim's life. They are:
a. Recitation of the Shahadah: This is a profession of faith stating that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.
b. Salat: Daily prayers. A Muslim must pray five times a day facing Mecca–before sunrise, just after noon, later in the afternoon, immediately before sunset, and after dark.
c. The Zakat: Almsgiving. A purification tax on property is paid by all Muslims for the benefit of the poor. The amount is fixed, usually about two and a half percent of one's wealth, although it could be more.
d. Saum: Fasting. A Muslim must fast during the month of Ramadan (the ninth Muslim month). Fasting begins at sunrise and ends at sunset.
e. Hajj: Hajj means "pilgrimage." A Muslim must make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime, as long as they are physically able and can afford it financially.

Today, there are two main divisions within Islam: the Shiite sect and the Sunni sect.

The Sunni sect is much larger. They are culturally and religiously diverse. Instead of trying to arrive at one united doctrine, Sunni Islam has opted for a more general set of theological principles. The Shiites places heavy emphasis on individual leaders and clerical authority. One other group that had an influence on Islam was the Sufis. Sufis were mystics. They sought union with God through contemplation, asceticism (living a deliberately deprived lifestyle), and prayer.

Part 2
Judaism

A. Brief Outline of Judaism

As we know about the origins of Judaism, which is also the origin and history of the people of Israel (of which we are the spiritual descendents), this section will deal mainly with the beliefs of modern Judaism. There are various branches of Judaism today, but regardless of denomination or sect, practicing Jews believe:
a. That there is one and only one God with whom each individual has direct personal experience, and to whom prayers are addressed.
b. God is the ultimate authority and has final dominion over the universe.
c. Life is holy.
d. The Torah is the guide to good moral living and reveals the words of God.
e. Group worship and prayer are a must in righteous living.
f. Jews all over the world share a broad common destiny and a sense of collective purpose and responsibility to one another.

There are three main Jewish sects today: Orthodox, Reform and Conservative.
a. Orthodox Jews keep very strictly to Mosaic Laws as laid down in the Torah, including foods they may or may not eat and keeping the Sabbath. They desire to live according to the faith and have no wish to conform to new social conventions. They believe the old traditions reflect God's will and are not subject to debate or revision. They seek to pass on existing traditions without changing them.

b. The Reformed Jews modify the Mosaic Law to conform to modern life. For instance, men and women may sit together during worship (this is not allowed in Orthodox synagogues). For Reformed Judaism, the entire Torah is inspired by God but it is open to study and interpretation. God's relationship with Jews is a process that is ongoing for them. They accept that Jews are citizens of the

nation in which they live and not bound by narrowly interpreted traditional and historical laws.

c. Conservative Jews fall somewhere in the middle of the above two, and form the largest group in modern Judaism in America. They reject the principle that there can be no contact with new societies and cultures, but they try to retain as much continuity with the ancient traditions as possible. Appropriate traditions are preserved and honored, but not all the old ways need to be retained.

There are many different movements within Judaism. One is a movement called Hasidism, which is a more mystical movement. Hasidism focuses on the "*devekut*," or communion with God's presence in all things, trying to sanctify every day.

B. The Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections:

a. The first five books of the Torah, also known as the Pentateuch, comprise the most important section and are placed right at the front of the Hebrew Bible. These are the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

Study of the Torah is part of the act of worship. It is read religiously every Sabbath. Over the course of the year, the entire Torah will be read on Sabbath and festival days. Daily and weekly classes are usually available for those who wish to study the Torah.

"Talmud" means study or learning. The Talmud is a reference book to help in the interpretation of the Torah. The Talmud is the sourcebook of the Law, as it takes all the rules and regulations listed in the Torah and describes how to apply them under different circumstances. The first part of the Talmud is called the "Mishnah."

b. The second section is the Nevi'im, or Books of the Prophets. The Nevi'im is divided into two sections; the former prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings) and the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

c. The third section of the Bible contains what is called "The Writings." This is a collection of poetry and proverbs. The books contained in this section are: Psalm, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles.

The books listed above are in the order that they appear within the Hebrew Bible.

C. Profession of Faith: The Sh'ma

Originally, it was a requirement to study the Torah night and day. This was later recognized as a very difficult thing to do, so a confession of faith called the Sh'ma (Shema) was created using three scriptural passages from Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Sh'ma became the minimum requirement of study, and Jews will memorize the Sh'ma as their confession of faith. Some say that pious Jews hope to die with the Sh'ma on their lips.

The Sh'ma

> Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Never forget these commands.... Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away.... Tie them on your arm and wear them on your forehead as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your house. (Deut 6:4–9)

Part 3
Devotion Without Obedience is Empty

A religion that believes there is only one God is called a monotheistic religion (monotheism). One that believes in many gods is polytheistic (polytheism). There are only three major religions in the world that are monotheistic: Islam, Judaism and Christianity. All three draw upon the same origins. All three believe that Abraham is a significant character and all believe in the prophets. However, each has gone its different way. Although they have created traditions and rites to enable them to draw closer to God and become more devout, they have nevertheless wandered far from God's original teachings. They replace God's divine commandments with human will.

Read the following passages. What do they tell us?

a. Luke 10:16
b. Mt 10:40

c. Jn 12:44–45
d. Rev 22:12–16

(Each passage tells us that we must accept Jesus as Christ if we accept God–Jesus is God Himself. To accept one without accepting the other would not be possible. When we believe in Jesus Christ we really believe in God. When people looked upon Jesus Christ, they saw God. Jesus Christ tells us in Revelation that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. He is therefore God, and if we don't accept Jesus Christ, we cannot accept God.)

Based on what you learned in the above passages as well as what you have learned in this lesson, can you say what is the most significant mistake that Islam and Judaism have made? (Accept any reasonable answer, i.e. They both deny that Jesus Christ is God; they both do not accept Jesus as the Savior; Islam has changed much of the Bible, thus changing the message that God has given us; the Hebrew Bible only regards the Old Testament as revelation, completely denying the message of grace in the New Testament, thus ignoring the prophesies of their own prophets regarding the Messiah.)

Check for Understanding

1. What does Islam mean?
2. What kinds of teachings are found in the Qu'ran?
3. What are the key messages in the Qu'ran?
4. What are the Five Pillars? List them.
5. What are some common beliefs of all Jews?
6. What are the three main Jewish sects today?
7. Name the three sections of the Hebrew Bible.
8. What is the Sh'ma?

Life Application

Debates

Ask students to continue preparing for the basic doctrines debates. This will take place at the end of the next class.

Reflection & Prayer

As we can see, being devout will, in itself, not lead us to salvation. There are many devout Muslims and Jews, yet they will not receive salvation because they do not follow the commandments of God. Satan is cunning and deceives many people into imagining that they have the true path of salvation. However, we must always measure what we think against the words of God. That is the only way we will truly know if we have followed everything that He asks us to do in order to gain salvation. In our prayer let us ask God to show His mercy to all those who are lost, so that more will find their way into His fold. Let us pray.

Lesson 11

Hinduism and Sikhism

Listed Scriptures

Deut 18:9–14; Jer 50, 51; Ezek 14

Lesson Aim

1) Understand that God will utterly destroy those who worship other gods and disobey His commandments.

Memory Verse

"'You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image–any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.'" (Ex 20:3–5a)

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

Is 45–46, 57; Ezek 14

Bible Background

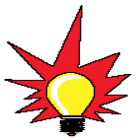
When the apostle Paul was at Athens, he was moved to preach to the people there because he saw idolatry everywhere. In his opening speech, he said, "'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD'" (Acts 17:22–23).

If Paul had made it to India and observed the religious practices there, he might have said the same thing, because the religion that is known as Hinduism is not really a single religion but a variety of religious beliefs and practices. The word "*Hindu*" is a Persian word that refers to the people and culture of the Indus River area in northwest India. The word "Indus" sounds like "Hindus", so Westerners used the name to describe the people there.

Scholars believe that Hinduism began around 3,500 years ago, out of interactions between the Aryans who conquered the region and the traditions already present there. When we refer to the Aryans, we must be careful not to associate them with the Aryans mentioned by Hitler in the twentieth century. The Aryans who influenced Hinduism are a completely different group.

The story of Hinduism arose out of what is present day Pakistan, in the Indus Valley. The people who lived there were civilized and sophisticated people for their time. Their civilization is known as the Indus Valley Civilization. At the height of its advancement, this civilization extended farther than the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian civilizations, two of the greatest civilizations in history. Around 1,500 BC, a wave of Aryan invaders from the northwest conquered the region. The interaction between the two peoples produced an integrated form of practices and beliefs that resulted in what we now call Hinduism. It is therefore a unique religion in that it claims no specific founder or founding historical event. Sikhism, on the other hand, is a religion that came through the revelations of messengers who lived in Northern India between 1469 and 1708. These men were called Sikh Gurus. They came from the protector or warrior class of Hindu society, called the Kshatriyas. They had the right to study the Hindu holy book, the Vedas, but could not teach them. Sikhs insist that their revelation came to them directly from God, who gave them a message to preach and the authority to proclaim it.

Warm Up



The class will be making sculptures, so you will need enough modeling clay for each student to make a sculpture. The amount of modeling clay you give the students will depend on your budget, how much time they have, and the size of the class. Each student should be given an equal amount of modeling clay.

Tell the class to use the modeling clay to create something that they wish. It does not matter what they create–this is their own sculpture.

Once they are done (you may set a time for this), ask the students to share their products. There must be no negative comments as they appreciate each other's artwork. Now ask them what they would think if one of them suddenly decided to talk to their sculpture. What about if they asked their own creation to do something for them (give them money, help them pass their exams, etc). Would they think such behavior was normal?

If we see someone speaking to inanimate objects, we would probably think they were a little strange at the least, or think the person has some psychological problems. However, a large number of people seem to feel this is perfectly acceptable. They make sculptures (images) and not only do they speak to these creations, they pray to them as though they were gods. This would be the same as the class praying to their little clay figures that they have made. They would not think of doing that–in fact, they would look extremely silly. So why do so many people feel it is perfectly acceptable to do this to certain images?

Today, we will look at the background of two major religious groups that pray to objects. As we study these religions, remember what our true God did to nations who sinned in the same way.

Bible Study

Part 1
Hinduism

A. Overview of Hinduism

Hinduism is based on the "*Sanatana Dharma*," the Eternal Truths or Laws. These have been developed and taught over ten thousand years by great seers called "*rishis*." Hence, Hinduism claims to be the oldest religion in the world.

The British began using the word "Hinduism" around the beginning of the nineteenth century. Some Hindus prefer to be called by the ancient name Vedic. The Vedic teachings are contained within texts called the Vedas. These texts provide the only source for understanding the religious life of ancient India. Each of the texts is called a Veda, which means "sacred knowledge" or "learning" in Sanskrit, the oldest written language in India.

The Vedas consist of over 1,000 hymns describing the human relationship with

God. Over the years, rites surrounding the use of the Vedas have become so complicated that only highly trained priests can read the texts and explain them. The theologies found within the texts have also evolved through a collection of philosophical writings known as the "Upanishads." The Upanishads were compiled between 500 BC and 200 AD.

Other texts are the sutras and shastras, which are collections of proverbs. The sutras contain instructions for priests and guides for human conduct. The sastras are concerned with personal conduct and code of ethics. Around 500 AD, Buddhism influenced Hinduism in a way that encouraged Hindus to depend less on priests and develop a more personal relationship with God.

B. Hindu Gods

Hindus do not worship any single god, but worship a number of gods. However, they believe in a supreme being known as Brahma, who has unlimited forms, and who is omnipotent, omniscient, and beyond any confines of time and space. The search for this Supreme Being is done through the various gods. Hindus believe that gods often enter the world in human forms called avatars. Hindus would not argue about the true God because they believe that God can be represented through any form, all forms, or no form.

Hindus believe that three main gods represent three major aspects of the universe:

a. Creation, connected to the god Brahma,
b. Preserver of the Universe, called Vishnu,
c. Destroyer, called Shiva or Siva.

The Hindu belief in this cycle is closely linked to their belief in reincarnation.

C. Reincarnation

Hindus believe that one keeps being reborn from one form to another. The idea of reincarnation in Hinduism is tied to the principle of karma. Karma is the cause and effect under which a past life may affect one's present (that is, what one is reborn as). What we become in our rebirth is dependent on the actions in our previous life. People are born over and over again until they achieve unity with the Supreme Being. Then the soul becomes one with the Supreme Being. This is the ultimate goal of every soul, because once that has been achieved, there will be no need for any more reincarnation for that soul.

D. One God, Many Gods

Hindus claim to believe in one Absolute Being–that is, one God. However, they also believe that this Being is able to become incarnate in many different forms through many different times. Hence, they worship gods in many forms but think that all these different forms are just expressions of the same unchanging Absolute Being.

<u>Warnings from the Bible:</u>
Read the following verses and briefly explain why God was angry with His people in these passages.

a. Judges 2:11–15
   (The Israelites left God and served the Baals. They worshiped other gods, so God punished them by allowing enemies to plunder their country.)
b. Judges 3:5–11
   (The Israelites inter-married with other races, and served their gods. They forgot their God, so He allowed them to be attacked by the enemies around them. However, when the Israelites cried out to God for help, He gave them a deliverer.)
c. Judges 10:6–9
   (Once again, the people of Israel sinned and served other gods, so God again allowed their enemies to overcome them.)
d. Is 19:1–4
   (The Lord will enter Egypt and destroy the idols there. The Egyptians will be punished for their beliefs, and a fierce conqueror will rule them.)
e. Jer 2:7–9
   (God gave His people a bountiful country, but they defiled it. They worshiped idols and turned away from God. God will bring charges against them for their sins.)

The above are only a few examples of the many instances when the Israelites disobeyed God and served other gods. Once His anger was kindled, God often punished His people. However, He was always merciful and helped them again once they repented. What the people did was to turn away from God and look at other things as more important. Today, although we may not worship idols, we place many other things in our lives as more important than God. We must learn from the history of the Israelites, and remember that when God becomes angry, His anger can be frightening. We must never place other things (such as money, career, technology, etc) before God. These are our modern-day "idols" that we must be careful not to worship in our lives.

Part 2
Sikhism

A. Overview of Sikhism

The word Sikh means "learner" in Sanskrit. The Sikh's faith began with the birth of their first Guru, Guru Nanak, in 1469. According to Sikh legend, Nanak, at the age of 30, went to bathe in a nearby stream. Suddenly, he disappeared in the fast flowing water. A search bore no results and he was presumed drowned. However, three days later, he miraculously appeared again, recovered from his drowning. Nanak told people that God had spoken to him. He was taken to God's court, given nectar to drink, and instructed to rejoice in God's name and teach others to do so as well. This event is described in detail in Nanak's writing, "Birth Stories," or "Janam Sakhis."

Before he died, Guru Nanak appointed a disciple, Angad, to carry on his mission. Angad's successor was his disciple, Amar Das, who then appointed his son-in-law, Ram Das Sodhi. From this point on, all the Gurus came from the Sodhi family. Here is the list in order:

a. Guru Nanak (1469–1539)
b. Guru Angad (1539–1552), disciple of Nanak. He united the community and gathered together the hymns of Guru Nanak.
c. Guru Amar Das (1552–1574), disciple of Angad. He declared a gathering of Sikhs at his headquarters three times a year, during the times of Hindu festivals. This forced the Sikhs to choose between serving their Guru and observing Hindu rituals. They could not be both Sikh and Hindu.
d. Guru Ram Das (1574–1581), son-in-law of Amar Das. He began the building of the *Harimandir*, or Golden Temple, at Amritsar, the place that was to become the center of Sikhism.
e. Guru Arjun (1581–1606), son of Ram Das. He completed the Golden Temple. He also collected the hymns of his four predecessors, those written by himself, and some Hindu and Muslim holy men. He produced the first version of the Sikh scriptures. It was given the title *Adi Granth*. The Mogul rulers captured him and he died in captivity.
f. Guru Hargobind (1606–1644), son of Arjun. He led the Sikhs to arm themselves against the Mogul conquerors.

g. Guru Har Rai (1644–1661), grandson of Hargobind. His leadership was uneventful.
h. Guru Har Krishan (1661–1664), son of Har Rai, selected as Guru at the age of 3, and died of smallpox as a child.
i. Guru Tegh Bahadur (1664–1675), youngest son of Hargobind. He was also imprisoned by the Moguls, and was beheaded.
j. Guru Gobind Singh (1675–1708), only son of Tegh Bahadur. In 1699, on the Punjabi New Year's Day, he baptized the Brotherhood of the Pure Ones, or the *Khalsa*, and gave them and himself a new family name of Singh, which means "lion." Sikh men now keep the name Singh, while women use the name of Kaur, which means "princess." Before his death, Gobind Singh proclaimed that the line of Gurus would end. The sacred book, the Adi Granth, would be regarded as the living Guru and be known as the Guru Granth Sahib. Gobind Singh died at the hands of an assassin.

B. Beliefs and Practices

Guru Nanak taught that God can only be known through the divine name of "Nam." The aim of life was union with God, which can be achieved only by blending your light with the eternal light. This blending can be achieved through meditation, when chanting the various names of God would free one from the physical world. This illusion (or *maya*) of the physical world must become detached and the base desires and mind must be overcome in order for one to obtain the true knowledge of God. Nanak thought that realization of Truth came from one's heart through the light and sound of God.

Sikh Gurus are the mediators of divine grace and the closest embodiments of divinity that can be known on earth. Through them, one can purify oneself and achieve a higher state of consciousness. Sikhs believe that we are all born in ignorance of God's grace, become awakened to this Truth through the grace of the Guru, and then awaken to realize God. The bliss of this realization allows one to approach God.

The sacred book of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib, is a collection of hymns and poems composed by various Gurus and lay people. It is a unique book compared to other faiths in that it also contains writings by non-Sikhs (Muslims and Hindus, for example). In the Sikh place of worship, called a Gudwara, the Guru Granth Sahib is treated like a human guru. It is put on a raised platform at the front, and treated as a living Guru. When it is not in use, it resides in a special room. Families

who own a copy will also set aside a room for the book. Whenever the Guru Granth Sahib is to be moved, whether from its own room to the Gudwara, or elsewhere, it is attended by five Sikhs who represent the Khalsa.

Sikhs are expected to rise before dawn, bathe, then recite the sacred prayer of Nanak. Many Sikhs will recite verses from their sacred book during their daily activities. They believe in the discipline of purification and the overcoming of greed, anger, false pride, lust and attachment to materialistic things. At the end of life, a person's good and bad conduct is put on a balance, and the result determines the family, race, and character of the person when reborn. There is no direct belief in heaven or hell. The soul develops through the various reincarnations, until it finally becomes united with the infinite one.

Sikhs developed a warrior attitude because of their history. The conquering Moguls were violent, and the Sikhs formed rebellions against them. When the Khalsa was established, the five K's were instituted:

a. Kesh (uncut hair)
b. Kangha (comb)
c. Kirpan (sword)
d. Kara (steel bracelet)
e. Kachch (short pants for use in battle).

As a result Sikhs wear long uncut hair with a comb in it, and a steel bracelet on the right wrist. The sword and short pants are usually reserved for battle.

Sikh infants are given a name at the naming ceremony at a Gudwara. Hymns are sung, and the sacred book is opened at random. The child is given a name beginning with the first letter of the first word on the left page. The parents take some time to consider the name they want, then more hymns are sung when the name is chosen. Sikhs have many ceremonies held to celebrate the birth and death of the ten gurus. They also commemorate the deaths of martyrs, and the festival for the anniversary of the Baisakhi, the date the Khalsa was founded, which was originally a harvest festival. Five major observances include:

a. Baisakhi
b. Birthdays of Gurus Nanak and Gobind Singh
c. Martyrdom of Gurus Arjan and Tegh Bahadur.

All Sikh festivals are marked by continuous forty-eight hour readings of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Check for Understanding

1. What is the Vedas? What other sacred texts are there in Hinduism?
2. What is the sacred text of the Sikhs, and what does it contain?
3. What are the five K's in Sikhism?
4. What are the idols we must beware of in our lives?

Life Application

The Authority of the Bible

Have copies of the TJC publication "Q & A on the Basic Beliefs" ready. Ideally, each student should have a copy for this class and the next lesson. Each group will need one sheet of chart paper, and each student will need a marker.

Our beliefs are revealed to us in the Bible, which is the inspired word of God. Even though all sacred texts contain teachings on how to become a better human being, they do not contain the truth that will lead people to God. In order to be able to defend our beliefs convincingly, we need to understand our church's position regarding the Bible. Today and next week, we will use the Q & A book to help us in our understanding.

Task:

1. Divide students into 5 groups if possible. A group can be a pair, threes or fours.
2. Each group gets one piece of chart paper and each student a marker. Draw a fairly large circle in the middle of the chart paper.
3. Refer to pages 34 and 35 from the Q & A book. Each group will read one of the points: unity, historical and geographical accuracy, prophetic accuracy, scientific accuracy and fulfillment of promises.
4. Have the class do a brainstorming exercise around their circle. Jot down key

words to the point in their Q & A book.

5. After 5 minutes, ask the students to rotate the chart paper clockwise to another group. Each group should have the chart paper from another group in front of them now.
6. The new group has to make sure that all the key points have been written down around the circle. They will need to refer to the book and read the point the previous group read. Add anything that is missing to the chart. (5 mins)
7. Rotate the chart paper clockwise again. The job for this next group is to pick out the key ideas and write it neatly, in point form, in the center circle. They should not refer to the book. Give them 5 minutes to do this.
8. The chart paper rotates clockwise again. It will now be read by the fourth group. This group will read everything that's there, and agree on what's been written in the center. They may add or edit. (5 mins)
9. Rotate the chart paper to the next group. Each group selects one person to read aloud what is in the circle, then puts the chart paper up on the wall in class.

At the end of the exercise, every group will have read all the 5 points about the reliability and divine authority of the Bible, as well as thought about the key ideas within each point.

Reflection & Prayer

In a multicultural society, it is very difficult to insist that we have the truth. Those who proclaim their message in this way are often labeled "religious fundamentalists." The term is used in a negative way. However, we must hold on to the truth that God teaches us through His Holy Spirit. Let us now pray and ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the courage to embrace the truth despite all external pressure within society. Let us pray.

Lesson 12

Buddhism and Scientology

Listed Scriptures

Mt 15 & 16; Gal 1:1–12, 3–5

Lesson Aim

1) To learn about other faiths and understand the differences between their beliefs and ours.

Memory Verse

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." (Col 1:15–16)

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

Josh 24; Jer 2, 10, 18:1–17, 19

Bible Background

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Buddha. The term "Buddha" was derived from the Sanskrit language–*budh* means to "awaken." Buddha means "awakened" or "enlightened one."

The Buddha was a name given to Siddhartha Gautama. Scholars agree that he was born in Kapilavastu in Nepal near the Indian border. However, scholars disagree about the date of his birth, which was either around 448–368 or 563–483 BC. Siddhartha was born a prince in the kingdom of the Sakyas. His father, Suddhodana, and his mother, Mahamaya, ruled an area called Magadha. Siddhartha was reported to have married a young princess named Yasodhara at the age of sixteen, and to have had a son called Rahula.

Siddhartha lived a very sheltered life. He was shielded from all knowledge of suffering and death that took place outside the palace walls. However, he became restless and one day managed to take a trip outside his palace. While out there, he saw four things which changed his life: a sick person, an old person, a corpse, and an acetic. When Siddhartha asked his charioteer whether he, a prince, could ever be sick, grow old or die, he was amazed to be told that these were a part of life. Then he found out that the acetic was trying to understand the impermanence and suffering of life.

Siddhartha reflected on what he saw and decided that he wanted a happiness and peace that were not dependent on youth and wealth. One night, he left his sleeping wife and son in the care of his family, said goodbye to his charioteer, cut off his own black hair with his sword, and wandered away to become an acetic. He spent the next few years around the valley of the Ganges. He had two meditation teachers to help him, but he felt that he did not find his goal. He fasted and lived a life of deprivation, yet did not find peace. One day, as he sat under a banyan tree, he resolved to sit in meditation and not leave until he attained enlightenment. During this time, he was apparently tempted and experienced an ordeal with Mara the evil one. Finally, Siddhartha received Enlightenment. He was 35 at the time.

Like Siddhartha Gautama, the believers of Scientology also aim to raise humankind to a higher level of consciousness.

Scientology was founded by Lafayette Ronald Hubbard. Hubbard was born in Tilden, Nebraska, on March 13, 1911. He attended Woodward Preparatory School and George Washington University. At 16, he began to travel extensively, exploring, observing and writing down his ideas. The culmination of these travels and writings is a philosophy and science he called "Dianetics," which means "through thought of mind."

Hubbard published his ideas in a book in 1950, entitled *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health.* It became a bestseller. In 1951, he published *Science of Survival*, which contained his findings on the spirit of man. This contained the foundation of the religion of Scientology.

The first church of Scientology was founded in 1954 by a zealous group of followers in Los Angeles. In 1955, Hubbard became the executive director of the Founding Church in Washington. A few years later, he moved his base to East Grinstead in England. In 1966 he resigned his position as director and devoted his time to writing and research. He later returned to his first love, the writing of science fiction. He published novels such as *Battlefield Earth: A Saga of the Year 3000*, followed by the ten-volume *Mission Earth*. Hubbard died in 1986. In all, he published over 589 works, delivered over 4000 lectures, and spread the science of Dianetics to every continent.

WARM UP

We will play a very old children's game–pin the tail! You will need to draw an animal that has a tail: a pig, horse, donkey–anything you fancy!! Draw the animal with its tail. Then draw the tail separately with a pin to stick it to the animal. Put the picture of the animal up on the board.

You need four volunteers and two blindfolds. Ask for one pair of volunteers, and blindfold one partner. The student who is blindfolded will be the one to pin the tail on the picture. The other student (not blindfolded), will guide the blindfolded student by giving directions so the tail gets pinned on to the correct part of the animal.

Ask the other two students and this time, blindfold both of them. One of them will be the guide and the other will pin the tail onto the animal. Give them some time to try and get this right.

After the game, discuss what the volunteers did with the class. It was obviously ridiculous to expect two blindfolded students to try and guide each other. Neither could see. Tell the students that some so-called religious "enlightenment" experiences are like that. When people try to find the truth, whether they call it enlightenment or something else, they need guidance to reach that truth. God provides this guidance through His words and the Holy Spirit. Only God can help us find the way to Him. Without His guidance, we are merely groping about in the dark, just as the second pair of volunteers was. Founders of religions who claim that they arrived at such enlightenment through deep thought and meditation only perceive the truth through human eyes. They can never reach God's enlightenment.

Part 1
Buddhism

A. Teachings of the Buddha

When Siddhartha reached enlightenment, or "nirvana," he adopted a balanced form of discipline called the Middle Path. Both extremes of self-denial and self-indulgence are to be avoided. He became known as the Buddha. His first sermon was at the deer park near Benares. The sermon at Benares was presented as a diagnosis on the impermanence of life, and the unsatisfactory condition of people. It claimed that the cure was a life of morality, meditation and wisdom. This first sermon also included teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism are:

a. Duhkha, the universal fact of suffering;
b. Samudaya, the cause of suffering;
c. Nirodha, the defeat of suffering; and
d. Magga, the way of overcoming suffering.

The way of overcoming suffering can be found through the Noble Eightfold Path:

a. Right understanding (wisdom): This involves seeing life as it is, in all its transient and unsatisfactory nature.
b. Right thought (wisdom): Here one acknowledges the power of one's mind, which should be filled with thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion.
c. Right speech (morality): Such speech ranges from not telling lies to not gossiping.
d. Right action (morality): Such action is not taking life, stealing or indulging in sexual misconduct.
e. Right livelihood (morality): One must be careful to have a job that does not involve one in destroying life or hurting people.
f. Right effort (meditation): This is needed to think about what one says and does.
g. Right awareness (meditation): One must be wholly alert or awake in life.
h. Right concentration (meditation): With this one achieves a deeper level of attentiveness, characterized by peace and calm.

Buddhists believe that the practice of this spiritual path will lead to truth or *dharma*, enabling people to achieve nirvana. For Buddhists, not even gods are immortal. They are not the creators, although they are considered higher beings. Only the state of enlightenment and nirvana lasts forever.

While historians see Siddhartha Gautama as the founder of Buddhism, Buddhists see him in a different light. To them, he is merely the one who discovered *dharma*, the truth about the way life is. Life is unsatisfactory as long as people cling on to their self-absorption. When one is able to lose oneself in love, compassion and sympathetic joy, then eternal peace can be found. Hence, Buddhists believe that the truth, or *dharma*, is the foundation of Buddhism, not the person named Gautama.

Siddhartha Gautama died after a long life of teaching. After his death, the Buddhist community consisted of two groups: those who continued to lead ordinary lives with jobs and families, and those who gave up everything to meditate and teach dharma. The latter group consisted of monks and nuns. The word Sangha is used for an assembly of monks and nuns. The householders offer the Sangha food, clothes and somewhere to live. They even thank the monks for this opportunity. This is because the householders hope to be like them in another reincarnation and achieve nirvana. Although it is possible for anyone to reach that state, it is extremely difficult for householders because they are distracted by their jobs and families.

B. Branches of Buddhism

Within Buddhism there are two main schools of thought and practice. One is the Theravada-Hinayana, or "small vehicle" also known as the "school of the elders (Theras)." This is the original line of teachings. The larger group is called the Mahayana, or "great vehicle." The Theravada is considered more orthodox, while the Mahayana is a more reformed teaching that developed later.

Part 2
Scientology

The Church of Scientology was formally established in the United States in 1954. It is considered a religio-scientific movement that has generated controversy and even extreme anger. The core of the movement is based on a system of psychology and the way the mind works. Its aim is for humanity to evolve, indi-

vidually and collectively as a society, to a higher state of being. According to L. Ron Hubbard, the objectives of Scientology are to create a "civilization without insanity, without criminals, and without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where Man is free to rise to greater heights." The faith of the religion lies in man, and the teaching is concerned with showing man how to set himself free. The route to freedom lies in knowledge, in knowing how to know. The purpose in life is to know yourself, and then to find greater meaning in your existence.

The word "engram" is used by Scientologists to mean a memory trace that is supposed to be a permanent change in the brain. It accounts for the existence of a memory that can only be found in the subconscious, but can be brought into consciousness when triggered by new experiences. New experiences are supplied by what is known as an "audit." The audit is conducted by an auditor in a one-on-one session. The auditor confronts the engram in order to bring it to the surface and clear, or free, the potential convert's mind to it. The purpose is to free an individual's mind of engrams and allow the devotees to achieve improved health and outlook.

The movement appoints its own ministers who perform the same duties as ministers of other religions. A sermon may be given at weekly services that address the idea that a person is a spiritual being. Weddings and christenings are celebrated with formal ceremonies, and death is marked by funeral rites. An escalating fee structure for services rendered is strictly applied.

The Church of Scientology and its officers have had many private lawsuits brought against it. Government prosecutions have been laid for fraud, tax evasion, financial mismanagement, and conspiracy to steal government documents. Former members testified that Hubbard was guilty of using a tax-exempt church status to build a thriving, profitable business.

Check for Understanding

1 Read the following passages: John 4:13; 6:32–35, 51; 11:25–26; 14:6; 15:1–4. What is Jesus Christ telling us about how we can attain the truth and reach eternal life?

2 Consider the teachings of Buddhism and Scientology. What are they teaching that is contrary to what Jesus Christ taught us?

Life Application

The Holy Bible

Use the Q & A book from last week. This time, use pages 36–41.

Divide the students into groups of 5. Each student should be assigned one of the following sections to read: 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.11. Give them 10 minutes to read their section and summarize the key points. Then each person must share what they have with others in their group.

Now that the students have read most of this chapter in the book regarding the Holy Bible, discuss how they can use this information when they speak to friends from other faiths. They may refer to any of the faiths covered in this text.

Reflection & Prayer

The two religions we learned about today show us how easily humans can be mislead. Even with the best intentions, people cannot achieve spiritual understanding that reaches the truth about God. Only through God can we arrive at true answers. We need to ask God to show us the truth through His Holy Spirit. Let us pray.

Lesson 13

Review

Listed Scriptures

1 Cor 10, 15; 2 Cor 4, 5; Gal 3; Eph 2; Rev 22:12–21.

Lesson Aim

1) Review key concepts from this text.

Bible Reading for this week

Deut 10:12–22, 11; Is 61; Ezek 18:19–32; Joel 2.

R E V I E W

All the assignments below should be done in groups. Each group can work on every assignment given below, or each group can work on one and share it with others at the end. It will depend on how much time is available. Each assignment should take around 20 minutes to complete. They may use chart paper and display the end results when the assignments are completed.

Assignment 1:

Complete the table below (answers in brackets should not appear in the students' version).

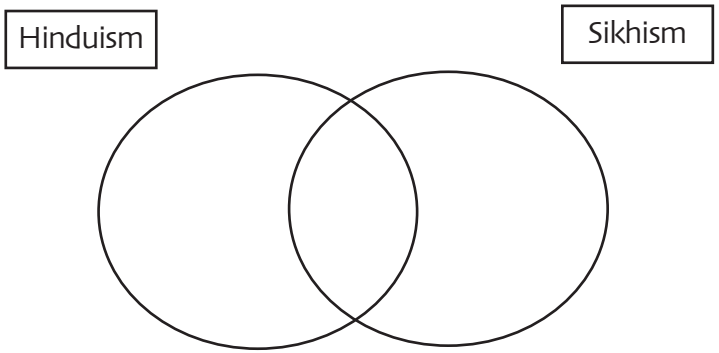
Belief System	Significant Person or Founder	One Religious Text	3-5 Key Teachings
Christianity	(Jesus Christ)	(Bible)	(Accept all reasonable answers found in the text)
Islam	(Mohammed)	(Q'uran)	
Judaism	(Abraham)	(Torah or Hebrew Bible)	
Hinduism	(None)	(Vedas)	
Sikhism	(Guru Nanak)	(Guru Granth Sahib)	

Assignment 2:
After the conversion of Constantine, the Christian church enjoyed freedom of worship. This would seem to be a good thing. However, as we learned from some of the lessons in this text, this became the main cause of the truth being lost. Look at the development of the church during this time again, and fill in a chart like the one below, indicating what was positive, what was negative and what we can learn from the history of the church, from the time of Constantine.

Positive	Negative	What we can learn
Eg. Christians could worship God freely.	Eg. Christians no longer followed the teachings of the apostles closely.	Eg. We must not allow good fortune to turn us away from our true beliefs.
Eg. other examples		

Assignment 3:
Using information from Lesson 3, create a crossword puzzle. Add as many key facts as you can, as well as key people (eg., Emperor Nero).

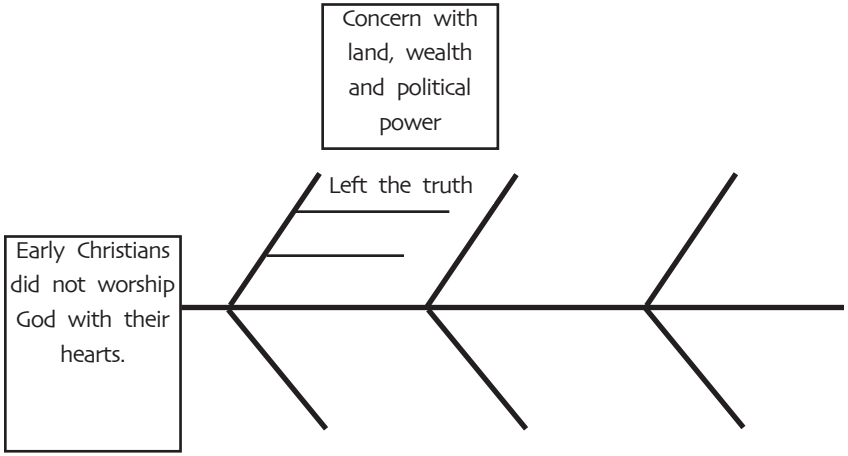
Assignment 4:
In groups create a Venn Diagram. Put "Hinduism" on one side and "Sikhism" on the other. In the overlapping area list all the similarities between the two religions. The space on either side of the overlap should contain characteristics that are particular only to that religion. Use the text to help you.



Assignment 5:
The memory verse in Lesson 7 says:

"These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
and honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from me,
And in vain they worship me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."
(Mt 15:8,9)

How do you think the Christians of the early church drew near to God only "with their mouth" while "their heart is far from" Him? Use the text to help you find examples of this happening in the history of the early church. Display your views on a graphic organizer known as a fishbone, like the one below. An example of how to display your points is also given.



A fishbone is often used as a cause and effect display organizer. You will need to think about the issues, as these may not all be in the text.

Reflection & Prayer

During this quarter, we learned about the early church, its decline, as well as many different religions and beliefs. Although it is important to know history and the tides we are faced with, it is even more crucial that these lessons brought us to an understanding: that God is the only God and He is the only one who can give us eternal life. All else in this world is fleeting, ever-changing and perishable. May all glory be unto His holy name.

"My business is not to remake myself, but make the absolute best of what God made."

– Robert Browning

"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)