

EXPLORING THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Course Overview

This course is a survey of the Old Testament. Each lesson will include several activities. You should allot 90-120 minutes for the class in addition to time for doing assignments outside of class.

Most lessons will begin with an **assignment to read the book or books of the Bible** that will be studied in the lesson. This should be done prior to studying the lesson as a group. This will ensure that students know the basic content of the book prior to the study. In the case of a longer book, such as Psalms, you may need to spread the reading out over a longer period of time.

Each lesson will begin with a short **Scripture memory assignment**. This consists of key verses from the books to be studied.

If studying as a group, you may take turns reading the material. You should stop periodically for class discussion. As the class leader, you are responsible to keep discussion from wandering from the material being studied. It is helpful to have a time limit for each discussion period.

Discussion questions and **in-class activities** are indicated by arrow bullet points ►. Try to make sure that all students in the class are involved in the discussion. If necessary, you can call on students by name.

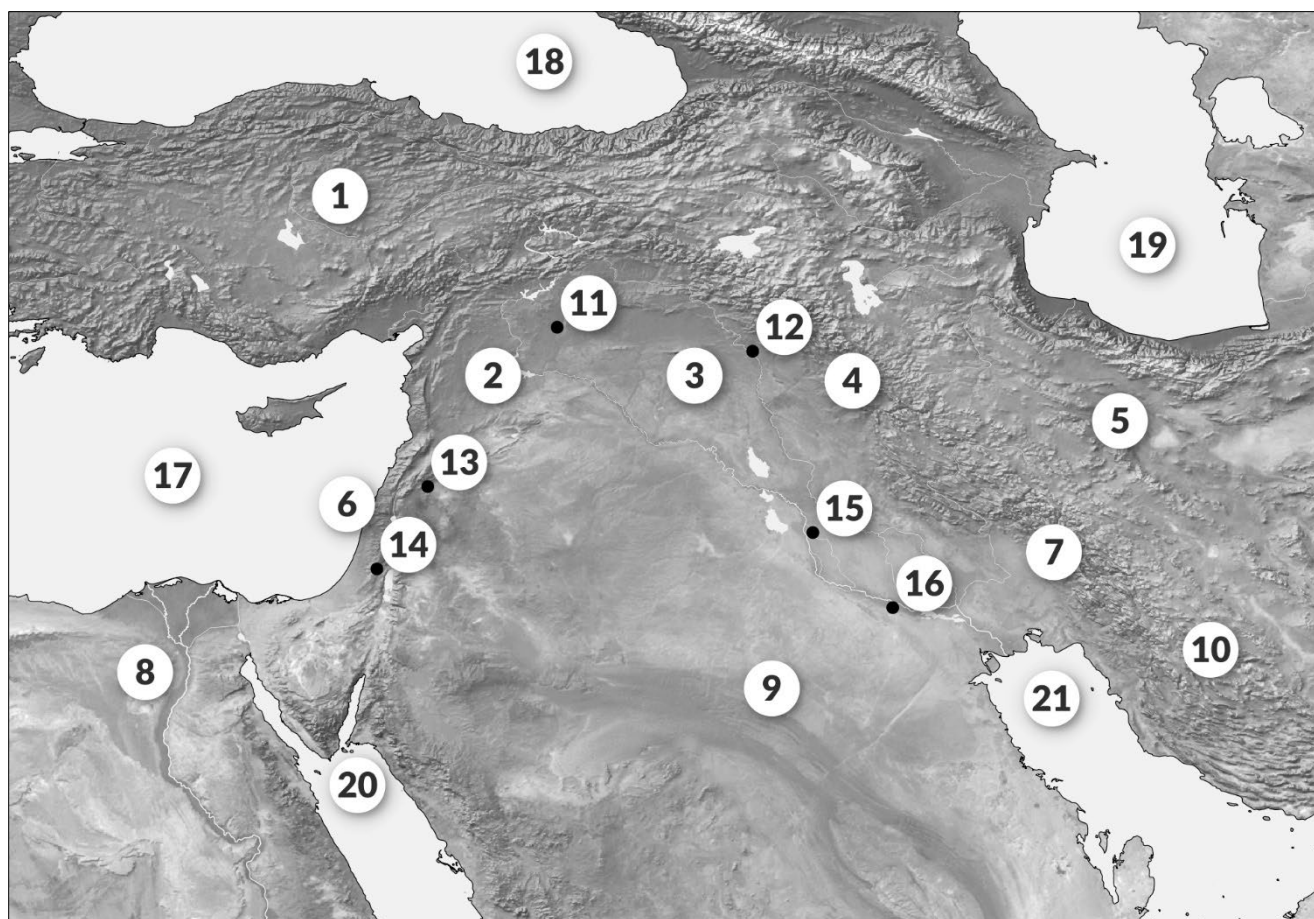
Many footnotes refer to a Scripture reference. Please have students look up the verses and read them to the group.

Each lesson will include an **assignment**. In the case of group presentations, give time at the beginning of the next class meeting for the presentations.

Each lesson will include **test questions**. At the end of each class, the leader may review these questions with the students. The following class session should begin with a short test with these questions. This can be done orally or in written form.

Map of the Old Testament World¹

Please reference this map throughout the course.



(1) Asia Minor	(8) Egypt	(15) Babylon (city)
(2) Syria	(9) Arabian Desert	(16) Ur (city)
(3) Mesopotamia	(10) Persia	(17) Mediterranean Sea
(4) Assyria	(11) Haran (city)	(18) Black Sea
(5) Media	(12) Nineveh (city)	(19) Caspian Sea
(6) Canaan	(13) Damascus (city)	(20) Red Sea
(7) Elam	(14) Jerusalem (city)	(21) Persian Gulf

¹ "Map of the OT World" was created by SGC with open data from NED and Bible Geocoding (CC BY 4.0), available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52344014341>, public domain (CC0).

Timeline of the Old Testament	
Date	Person/Event
Before 4000 B.C.	Adam
2400 B.C.	Noah
2000 B.C.	Abraham
1450 B.C.	Moses
1000 B.C.	David
950 B.C.	Solomon
722 B.C.	Fall of Israel (Northern Kingdom)
586 B.C.	Fall of Judah (Southern Kingdom)
500 B.C.	Ezra
400 B.C.	Malachi

Lesson 1

Introduction to the Old Testament

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Understand the doctrine of inspiration.
- (2) Identify the standards that guided the formation of the Old Testament canon.
- (3) Trust the Old Testament text as we have received it.
- (4) Appreciate the value of the Old Testament in the life of the Christian.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Psalm 119.

Memorize Psalm 19:7-11.

Introduction

► In the past year, how often have you preached from the Old Testament? How important is the Old Testament in your church services?

Christian theology teaches the inspiration of all Scripture. However, in practice, we often ignore large sections of God's Word. If we truly believe that all Scripture is God-breathed,² we should value the Old Testament just as we value the New Testament. We should study and preach the Old Testament as the Word of God.

Because of the distance between the world of the Old Testament and the 21st century, the Old Testament can be difficult for modern readers. The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to each Old Testament book. While it is impossible to deal with the entire Old Testament in detail in such a brief course, you will learn background information that will help you understand these books, and you will gain an overview of the primary themes of each book. Two areas of focus in this course will be how the Old Testament relates to the message of the New Testament and how the Old Testament speaks to the church today.

In this initial lesson, we will study background issues that affect our understanding of the Old Testament. We will look at three questions related to the Old Testament:

- What books can be accepted as God's Word? *Canon*.
- How was the Old Testament communicated to mankind? *Inspiration*.
- Is the text we have received faithful to the original manuscripts? *Textual Integrity*.

² 2 Timothy 3:16

Canon

The canon of Scripture is an important issue for the Christian. How do we know that the Old Testament books are truly God's Word? The concept of canon answers the question, "Which books are God's Word for God's people?"

The term *canon* comes from a Greek term meaning "rule" or "standard." The Old Testament canon consists of the books that measure up to the standard used by the Jewish rabbis to determine those writings that were truly God's Word. These scholars applied three tests to books which were claimed as Scripture. Books of the canon met all three standards.

- 1. Author.** The book was written by a person who was gifted as a prophet. These books bring God's message spoken through a human author.
- 2. Audience.** The book was addressed to all generations. Even books such as the Minor Prophets, which bring God's warning to a specific group of people, have a message for all people and all times.
- 3. Message.** The message of the book did not conflict with earlier biblical revelation.

The canon of the Hebrew Bible was widely accepted by 165 B.C., when Judas Maccabeus made a list of Jewish Scriptures. When rabbis met at the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90 to discuss the canon, they confirmed a list that had been accepted for more than 200 years.

The early church also accepted this list and by the fourth century, the canon used in Christian churches included the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

The rabbis divided the Hebrew Bible into three sections:

(1) The Law (Torah) contained the five books of Moses.

(2) The Prophets was divided into two subcategories:

- Former Prophets – Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings
- Latter Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and The Twelve³

(3) The Writings included books associated with Jewish festivals and books that did not fall into either of the first two categories:

- Poetical Books – Psalms, Proverbs, Job
- Five Scrolls (*Megilloth*) – Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, and Ecclesiastes
- Historical books – Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles

³ The "Book of the Twelve" consists of the twelve Minor Prophets in the English Bible.

Christians divide the Old Testament into five sections:⁴

1. **The Pentateuch** consists of the five books of Moses.
2. **The Historical Books** include Joshua through Esther.
3. **Poetry and Wisdom** include Job through Song of Solomon.
4. **The Major Prophets** are Isaiah through Daniel.
5. **The Minor Prophets** are the last twelve books of the Old Testament.

Inspiration

Paul wrote that all Scripture is “God-breathed”; it is “given by inspiration of God.”⁵ This verse teaches that God is the author of all Scripture. The doctrine of divine inspiration means that God breathed his words into the minds of the human authors, and they wrote as God inspired them.

Divine inspiration is more than the inspiration that an artist or composer receives when they create a masterpiece of art or music. The inspiration of the Bible means that God spoke his words through the vocabulary and style of the human author. More than inspiring the thoughts of the author, the words themselves are inspired by God.

God inspired the words of Scripture in different ways at different times. Sometimes God spoke audibly, dictating the words of Scripture.⁶ Sometimes God spoke through dreams and visions.⁷ In many cases, the Bible does not tell us how God inspired the writer. Peter wrote that the biblical authors were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit.⁸ The words of Scripture are trustworthy because God himself is trustworthy.

An evangelical doctrine of inspiration teaches that God spoke through the personality of the human author, but that he guided the process so that the very words they spoke are the Word of God. Because it is the Word of God, the Bible is inerrant (without error) and infallible (cannot fail). Every statement (both doctrinal and historical) is without error in the original manuscripts of Scripture.⁹

Textual Integrity

Some skeptics argue that, even if the original manuscripts are true, we cannot trust the text we have received. They argue that mistakes were made in the copying of the Scriptures. These critics insist that even if the original text was inspired, we have no way to know that the Bible we have today is accurate.

⁴ In the Old Testament, Christians recognize the same inspired books as the Jewish Hebrew Bible. We simply divide them into different categories.

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁶ Leviticus 1:1, for example

⁷ Daniel 7 and 8, for example

⁸ 2 Peter 1:21

⁹ For more on this topic, see the book *I Believe* listed in the bibliography section for this lesson. In addition, a lesson on inspiration is included in the Shepherds Global Classroom course, *Christian Beliefs*.

Can we trust the textual integrity of our Bible? The answer is “Yes!” It is true that the Old Testament books were passed down in handwritten form, and it is true that mistakes can be made when copying a manuscript by hand. However, because this was the Word of God, the copyists approached their task with great care.

Originally, priests were responsible for copying the biblical texts. Beginning around 500 B.C., scribes copied the texts. Scribes (a title which means “counter”) were given this name because they counted all the letters in the Torah as a way of checking the accuracy of the text. A scribe could not copy even a single letter from memory; every letter had to be checked with the earlier copy. The rules for copying were very strict because the scribes respected the Scriptures as the Word of God.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, a group of ancient scrolls were discovered near the Dead Sea.¹⁰ These contain copies of the Old Testament made between 250 B.C. and A.D. 135. Because they are approximately 1,000 years older than later available copies, the Dead Sea Scrolls are valuable for checking the accuracy of more recent copies. Part of every book of the Old Testament except Esther is included in these scrolls.

Comparing the Dead Sea Scrolls to later copies, scholars found remarkable accuracy. For instance, the Isaiah Scroll is 1,200 years older than any later copy. More than ninety-five percent of the text is identical to later copies. The small number of variations are primarily spelling changes and obvious slips by copyists. There are no changes that would create a doctrinal difference.

Isaiah 53 in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Isaiah 53 shows the accuracy of the Old Testament text. Isaiah 53 contains 166 Hebrew words. There are seventeen letters different in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are:

- Ten letters are spelling differences – words that have changed spelling in 1,200 years
- Four letters are stylistic differences – different ways of expressing the text
- Three letters are a word added (“light”) to clarify the meaning in verse 11: “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see (light) and be satisfied.”¹¹

No biblical teaching is affected by the change. God guided 1,200 years of copying the Old Testament by hand to preserve his Word for his people.

Conclusion: The Old Testament and the Christian

Yes, the Old Testament can be difficult to understand:

- The Old Testament represents cultures much different from our world.
- The Old Testament covers a vast period of time (at least 1,000 years).

¹⁰ Garry K. Brantley, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Biblical Integrity.” Found at <http://www.apologeticspress.org>.

¹¹ Isaiah 53:11, *English Standard Version*

- The Old Testament involves four major empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia).
- The Old Testament includes more than 3,000 names of places and people.

The Old Testament can be difficult, but it is God's Word for God's people. Jesus preached from the Old Testament. Referring to the Old Testament, he reminded those who doubted him that the Scriptures "testify of me."

"The Old and New Testaments are one book of the one God inspired by the one Spirit testifying to the one Son."
- Paraphrased from
Geoffrey Bromiley

The Old Testament was seen as God's Word by the early church. Deuteronomy is quoted more than eighty times in the New Testament. The early church preached that the life and ministry of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament continues to speak to us today:

- From the Old Testament, we learn of the majesty and holiness of God.
- From the Old Testament, we learn of man's sin and need for a redeemer.
- From the Old Testament, we learn of God's plan to create a holy people set apart as his special possession.

The Old Testament is God's Word for God's people of all times.

Lesson 1 Assignment

Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 1 Test

- (1) What does the word *canon* mean in reference to the Bible?
- (2) List three standards used in establishing the Old Testament canon.
- (3) List the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible.
- (4) List the five divisions of the Christian Old Testament.
- (5) What does the term *divine inspiration* mean?
- (6) What do the terms *inerrant* and *infallible* mean?
- (7) How do the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate the textual integrity of the Old Testament?
- (8) List three ways in which the Old Testament speaks to us today.
- (9) Write Psalm 19:7-11 from memory.

Lesson 2

Genesis

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Genesis.
- (2) Appreciate the importance of the doctrine of creation for Christian theology.
- (3) Understand the role of the Abrahamic covenant in salvation history.
- (4) Identify the major characters in Genesis.
- (5) Relate the message of Genesis to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Genesis.

Memorize Genesis 3:15 and 12:3

The Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible are called the *Pentateuch*.¹² In the Hebrew Bible, these are called the *Torah* or *Law*, from a word meaning "to teach."

The Pentateuch is the foundation of the Bible. It provides a historical framework for the rest of Scripture.

- In Genesis 1–11, God creates a perfect world and then responds with both grace and judgment to man's sin.
- In Genesis 12–50, God chooses Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the messianic line through whom he will redeem all nations.
- In Exodus, God brings Israel out of Egypt and establishes a relationship with his people.
- In Leviticus, a holy God teaches Israel how to live as a holy people.
- In Numbers, God demonstrates his faithfulness to his people in spite of their disobedience.
- In Deuteronomy, God prepares his people to live in the land of promise.

¹² From Greek: *pente* is five and *teuchos* is scroll. Pentateuch means the "Five Scrolls" or five books.

	Theme	God is the...	Jesus is the...	Israel is...
Genesis	In the Beginning	Sovereign Creator	Second Adam	Chosen
Exodus	Redemption and Relationship	Divine Warrior	Passover Lamb	Delivered
Leviticus	Holiness	Holy Sanctifier	Perfect Sacrifice	Set Apart
Numbers	The Consequences of Disobedience	Just Sustainer	Brazen Serpent (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14)	Disobedient
Deuteronomy	Renewal	Loving Lord	Coming Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 7:37)	Prepared

In the Pentateuch, we see themes that are traced through the rest of the Old Testament.

- 1. The sovereignty of God.** In creation, in the plagues and deliverance from Egypt, and in guiding Israel through the desert, God shows his authority over his creation. Israel's history becomes the stage on which God's sovereignty is acted out.
- 2. The sinfulness of man.** Man's rebellion impacts all of human history. The flood, Babel, and Israel's disobedience in the desert all show the pervading sinfulness of man. However, beginning in Genesis 3:15, God acts to reverse the results of man's Fall.
- 3. God's plan for salvation.** God's covenant with Abraham, the birth of Isaac, Israel's rescue from Egypt, the giving of the Law, and the entry into the Promised Land are steps in God's provision of salvation for sinful man. In Exodus, Passover becomes a lasting symbol of God's redemptive work.
- 4. Holiness.** God is a holy God; he cannot ignore sin. The Pentateuch shows how God has created a holy people who can live in his presence. Holiness is not the result of man's goodness; it is the work of a gracious God who transforms his people from a sinful people into a holy people. We are holy *only* through continuing relationship with a holy God.

Authorship of the Pentateuch

Until the eighteenth century, there was little or no debate about the authorship of the Pentateuch. All Christians accepted the testimony of Scripture to Mosaic authorship. With the rise of modern criticism, many scholars today deny Moses as the author.

However, for evangelicals who accept the inerrancy of Scripture, the testimony of Scripture is clear. The Pentateuch itself identifies Moses as the author; New Testament writers quote Moses as the author; Jesus referred to Moses as the author. Because of this, we accept that the Pentateuch was composed by Moses, most likely in the fifteenth century B.C. For students who wish to study this issue in more detail, the Recommended Resources for this chapter can guide you.

It is important to understand the nature of authorship in the ancient world. If you write a book today, it is finished; no one will change it after you publish it. If we think of Moses as the author of the Pentateuch in the same way an author writes today, we will have many questions. For instance:

- Deuteronomy 34 tells of the death and burial of Moses.
- Numbers 12:3 calls Moses the meekest man on the earth. As a student asked, "If a person calls himself the most humble person on earth, is he really humble?"
- Genesis 11:28 refers to Ur of the Chaldees. The Chaldeans did not rule the area around Ur until 700 years after Moses' death.

Each of these examples is clear when we understand the nature of authorship in the ancient world. To identify Moses as the author of the Pentateuch means that Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned the primary content of these five books. A later author (perhaps Joshua) was inspired by the Holy Spirit to add the story of Moses' death and burial. Guided by the Holy Spirit, a later scribe identified Moses as the meekest man on the earth. Guided by the Holy Spirit, a scribe added of the Chaldees to help readers distinguish between Ur of the Chaldees and another city named Ur.

Such changes do not cast doubt on Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. Instead, they help us understand the process of inspiration with greater clarity.

Genesis

Theme: In the Beginning

Genesis is a book of beginnings. Genesis traces the beginning of the world (Genesis 1–11), followed by the beginning of the Jewish people and salvation history (Genesis 12–50).

Modern skeptics deny the historical truth of these chapters. However, these chapters are foundational to the rest of Scripture. They show the sovereignty of God over the world and his grace in providing redemption for sinful man.

Overview of Genesis

Primeval History: Genesis 1–11

Genesis 1–11 is often called "Primeval History." These chapters cover more than 2,000 years. Genesis 1–11 narrates four major events:

- **Creation** shows God's sovereignty over the world. His authority to give the law is based on his sovereignty as creator of the universe.
- **The Fall** shows man's sinfulness and the need for salvation. The rest of Scripture shows God's gracious remedy for the effects of the Fall.
- **The Flood** shows God's holiness and justice. We must never believe Satan's lie that sin does not bring God's judgment. The flood illustrates the principle that "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."¹³
- **The Tower of Babel** shows man's continuing rebellion and pride. In the Garden, Satan tempted Eve with the promise that "ye shall be as gods."¹⁴ At Babel, man tried to "make us a name."¹⁵ In both stories, man acts from pride; in both cases, man tries to take God's role; in both cases, man's pride brings God's judgment.

Genesis 1 shows the creation of the world by *Elohim*, the all-powerful God of the universe. Genesis 2 focuses on the creation of man in the Garden and the relationship between Adam and *Jehovah*, the covenant-making God.

Genesis 1–2 shows that man has value because we are created in the image of God.¹⁶ David sang:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.¹⁷

Genesis 1–3 shows man's rebellion against God. In a beautiful garden, surrounded by every good thing that God had created, enjoying intimate fellowship with God, Adam and Eve turned against God and listened to the voice of the serpent. In spite of man's rebellion, these chapters show God's gracious promise of a Redeemer.¹⁸

Finally, Genesis 1–11 shows the increasing rebellion of man which led to the flood. After the flood, man again rebelled at Babel. This rebellion resulted in the confusion of languages and dispersion of the nations. These stories show the need for redemption, provided by the covenant with Abraham.

¹³ Ezekiel 18:20

¹⁴ Genesis 3:5

¹⁵ Genesis 11:4

¹⁶ The importance of the doctrine of the image of God is seen when we compare the Genesis account with Ancient Near East creation myths. In the Babylonian *Atrahasis* tablet, humans are formed out of clay to dig ditches for the gods. The gods do not want to work, so humans are made as slaves. In *Atrahasis*, the gods are jealous and fickle; in *Atrahasis* humanity has no value. In contrast, Genesis shows that a holy God created humankind in his own image; we are to be holy as God is holy.

¹⁷ Psalm 8:3-5

¹⁸ Theologians call Genesis 3:15 the "proto-evangelium," the first promise of the gospel. In response to man's sin, God promised redemption; he did not leave us in our sin.

Patriarchal History: Genesis 12–50

Genesis 1–11 covers more than 2,000 years and is summed up in four events. Genesis 12–50 is the story of the patriarchs. These chapters narrate the lives of four people in about 300 years:

- Abraham (Genesis 11–25)
- Isaac (Genesis 25–26)
- Jacob (Genesis 27–36)
- Joseph (Genesis 37–50)

Genesis 1–11 tells the story of the beginnings of the world; Genesis 12–50 tells the story of the beginnings of the Hebrew people. Genesis uses the formula “these are the generations of...” to show a narrowing focus from the creation of the world (“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created”)¹⁹, to the creation of mankind (“This is the book of the generations of Adam”)²⁰, through Noah, Shem, Terah, Abraham, Isaac, and finally, Jacob (“These are the generations of Jacob”).²¹

The covenant with Abraham is central to salvation history. This covenant is revealed in three scenes:

- In Genesis 12:1–3, God promised to make a great nation of Abraham’s descendants. He would bless those who blessed Israel and curse those who cursed Israel. God promised to make Abraham’s descendants a blessing to all nations. The election of Israel was election of a people as the vehicle of blessing for all people.
- Genesis 15 is a remarkable chapter in salvation history. In other Ancient Near East covenants, the weaker party is placed under a blood oath requiring loyalty to the stronger party. In Genesis 15, God puts himself under an oath pledging his everlasting faithfulness to Abraham.
- Genesis 17 gives the sign of circumcision by which Abraham and his descendants would demonstrate their faith in the covenant. Salvation in the Old Testament, as in the New Testament, was by faith not by works. Circumcision itself was never the basis of salvation; circumcision was a sign of faith in the promises of the covenant.²²

The story of God’s provision of the messianic line continues with:

- The miraculous birth of Isaac.
- God’s testing of Abraham’s obedience with His call to sacrifice Isaac.
- The provision of a substitute for Isaac.
- God’s blessing of Jacob’s family in spite of Jacob’s character flaws.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:4

²⁰ Genesis 5:1

²¹ Genesis 37:2

²² Romans 4:9-12

Genesis 37–50 moves from a focus on the messianic line (Abraham – Isaac – Jacob – Judah) to a focus on Joseph. Joseph has been often seen as a type of Christ. Both Joseph and Jesus were rejected by their family, both were sold, both sacrificed themselves for others, and both forgave those who wronged them. Joseph provides a beautiful Old Testament example of the human character of Jesus.

One reason for Joseph's prominence at the end of Genesis is that his story shows how God providentially preserved the messianic line during the years of famine. Joseph's story provides a transition to Exodus by showing how the children of Israel came to be in Egypt. Genesis ends with Israel experiencing favor in Egypt. Exodus begins 400 years later with Israel experiencing oppression in Egypt.

Important Themes in Genesis

Election

The theme of election is central to the Old Testament. Abraham was chosen to be the vehicle of God's blessing for all nations. Similarly, Isaac and Jacob were chosen not for their works but as the vehicle for God's promises. The patriarchs were chosen as part of the messianic line. This was not election to individual salvation; it was election for service.

Individual participation in the covenant was based on faith in God's promises. We will see this in the historical books. Rahab was not part of the elect nation of Israel, but she inherited God's promises because of obedience in faith. The opposite is true of Achan; although he was part of the elect nation, he did not receive God's promises because of his disobedience and lack of faith.

The Doctrine of Election in the Old Testament	
Israel is elect	for the sake of all nations
Israel is elect	for service
Individuals are elect	only by faith in God's promises

Covenant

God made covenant with Noah (Genesis 9). This was followed by his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17). The next step in covenantal history will be at Mount Sinai as God makes a covenant with Moses (Exodus 19). In 2 Samuel 7, God will establish his covenant with David. All of these point to the New Covenant established through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20).

Each covenant builds on the foundation of the previous covenant. Instead of replacing the previous covenant, each covenant adds new details. This explains Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to

destroy, but to fulfil.” The New Testament does not replace the Old Testament; it builds on the foundation of the Old Testament.

Genesis in the New Testament

New Testament history grows out of the promise of Genesis 3:15. Jesus fulfills God’s promise of a Redeemer who will defeat the serpent. The curse of Genesis 3 is reversed in Revelation; the promise of Genesis 3 is fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

Jesus is seen in the New Testament as the second Adam who reverses the failure of the first Adam.²³ He is the promised seed of Abraham through whom all nations of the earth are blessed.²⁴

A Closer Look at Creation

► How is the doctrine of creation important to understanding the message of the Bible? Does it matter if Genesis 1–2 is myth rather than factual history?

In 1998, I taught a class for pastors in a limited access country. The government of that country forbids publication of Christian literature. However in 1998, this government allowed the publication of a children’s Bible story book.

I was excited by this news – until I saw a copy of the book. The government had insisted on approving each page before publication. The first page showed God driving Adam and Eve out of Eden. The second picture showed children screaming in terror as the flood waters rose. The third showed Abraham with a knife raised above his son.

The government forced the publisher to omit the stories of creation and the fall. A Bible without creation and the fall gives a distorted picture of God. Children reading this Bible saw an angry deity who drowns children and forces fathers to kill their sons. This Bible story book was missing the foundational story of creation that shows why God has authority over this world.

The creation account is essential to the Christian faith. Perhaps this is why so many skeptics begin their attack on the Christian faith by denying the truth of the Genesis account. Sadly, even many Christian writers claim that the Genesis account is untrustworthy. They argue that Genesis 1–2 is myth, not history. However, the rest of Scripture testifies to the truth of the Genesis account.

Part of the problem is that many Christians have become prisoners of a secularist mindset that claims that science contradicts the Bible. They have accepted the arguments of atheistic scientists who insist that Scripture cannot be trusted. However, throughout history the

²³ Romans 5:12-21

²⁴ Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:15-22

greatest scientific minds have been committed Christians.²⁵ Scientific truth does not conflict with biblical truth; both science and Scripture point to God as the creator. Properly understood, Genesis 1–2 is a historical account of creation. Properly understood, science provides a window on the wonders of God’s creation.

Genesis 1–2 teaches that:

- God created the world out of nothing (rejecting both **ancient myths** that teach that other gods made the world and **modern myths** that teach that the world evolved by chance).
- There is one sovereign God (rejecting the polytheism of the ancient world)
- Man is created in the image of God (rejecting evolution that says we are the result of time and chance).

No believer should deny these essential teachings of Genesis 1–2. In the beginning, the sovereign God created our world out of nothing. In the beginning, God created mankind in his image. When the creation week was done, God saw that it was very good. Christians may differ on details involving the interpretation of Scripture; they must not differ on the truth of Scripture.

Conclusion: Genesis Speaks Today

Genesis is an important book for the twenty-first century Christian. It speaks to issues faced by the contemporary church.

Because God made us in his own image, **human life is valuable**. Contemporary social issues such as abortion and euthanasia are addressed by the ancient testimony of Genesis 1 and 2. If we are created in the image of God, all human life is sacred and must be protected.

Because man was given stewardship of the earth, we are responsible to **care for our world**. While recognizing the precedence of human life over other forms of life, Christians should value all aspects of the earth as God’s good creation.

²⁵ Great scientists who were committed Christians include:

Nicolaus Copernicus (recognized that the sun is at the center of the universe)

Galileo (considered the “Father of Modern Science”)

Johannes Kepler (explained the movement of the planets)

Sir Isaac Newton (formulated the law of gravity)

Robert Boyle (considered the first modern chemist)

Rene Descartes (one of the key minds of the Scientific Revolution)

Michael Faraday (an important chemist)

Louis Pasteur (invented pasteurization and created the first vaccines for rabies and anthrax)

Max Planck (founded quantum mechanics)

Because of the covenant with Abraham, the church has a **mandate for evangelism and discipleship**. Jesus commissioned the church to fulfill Israel's mission to the nations.²⁶ Israel failed to fulfill her mission in the Old Testament; we must not fail to fulfill our mission today.

Lesson 2 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Assign one of the four great events of Genesis 1–11 to each member of your group. Each member of your group will prepare a short summary in which you present:

- A summary of the biblical story
- How the event was important to biblical history
- What the event teaches us today

Option 2: Individual Assignment.

Choose one:

- Write a 1–2 page detailed outline for a sermon or Bible study on one of the four great events of Genesis 1–11. Your sermon should show how the event was important in biblical history and what the event teaches us today.
- Write a 1–2 page detailed outline for a sermon or Bible study on one of the four major characters of Genesis 12–50. Your sermon should show how the character provides a positive model or a negative warning for believers today.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

²⁶ Matthew 28:18-20

Lesson 2 Test

- (1) What does the Hebrew word *Torah* mean?
- (2) How is Jesus presented in each of the books of the Pentateuch?
- (3) List four Old Testament themes introduced in the Pentateuch.
- (4) What is the theme of Genesis?
- (5) List the two major sections of Genesis.
- (6) List the four major events of Genesis 1–11.
- (7) List the four major characters of Genesis 12–50.
- (8) In one sentence each, summarize the three aspects of the covenant with Abraham.
- (9) List three things that Genesis teaches about creation.
- (10) List three ways in which Genesis speaks to the contemporary church.
- (11) Write Genesis 3:15 and 12:3 from memory.

Lesson 3

Exodus–Deuteronomy

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Exodus–Deuteronomy.
- (2) Know the main content of Exodus–Deuteronomy.
- (3) Identify the major events of Exodus–Deuteronomy.
- (4) Understand the relationship between the law and the Christian.
- (5) Relate the message of the Pentateuch to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Memorize Exodus 3:14; Leviticus 20:7–8; Deuteronomy 6:4–5.

Introduction

The books of Exodus through Deuteronomy recount events from the early days of the nation of Israel. These books tell the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, the years of wandering in the wilderness, and preparation to enter the Promised Land.

Like Genesis, Exodus through Deuteronomy were composed by Moses. Exodus begins after Israel has been in Egypt for 400 years. Although there is some disagreement about the date, the most likely date for the exodus from Egypt is 1446 B.C.²⁷ Deuteronomy concludes as Israel is preparing to enter Canaan in about 1405 B.C.

Exodus

Theme: Redemption and Relationship

Exodus traces two primary themes. Exodus 1–15 looks at God's redemption of Israel from Egypt. Passover memorializes this redemption. Throughout Israel's history, the celebration of Passover will be an annual reminder of God's grace in delivering Israel from bondage.

Exodus 16–40 looks at God's gracious relationship with Israel. The giving of the law at Mount Sinai is a central moment in the establishment of this relationship.

²⁷ Evangelicals have considered two possible dates for the exodus. Based on 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26, the most likely date is 1446 B.C. Based on archaeological data and a symbolic understanding of 1 Kings 6:1, some evangelicals support a date of approximately 1275 B.C. However, a straightforward reading of 1 Kings and Judges suggests that 1446 B.C. is the most likely date.

Exodus		
Chapters 1-15	Redemption from Egypt	Passover
Chapters 16-40	Relationship with Jehovah	10 Commandments

Overview of Exodus

Redemption: Exodus 1–15

Exodus begins with Israel suffering oppression in Egypt. While the Pharaoh had welcomed Joseph's family, 400 years have passed and Jacob's descendants are now seen as a threat to Egypt. God heard the cry of his people and raised up Moses as a deliverer.

Four events portray the redemption of Israel from Egypt:

- The **miraculous birth and call of Moses** is God's answer to the cry of his people.
- The **ten plagues** demonstrate God's sovereignty. The plagues are more than a demonstration of God's power; they are a direct attack on the false gods of Egypt. Egyptians saw the Nile as the source of life; God turned the water to blood. One of the Egyptian goddesses was portrayed as a frog; God sent a plague of frogs. The firstborn of each Egyptian family belonged to the gods; God took the firstborn sons. The plagues demonstrated, both to Egypt and to Israel, that Jehovah was sovereign over all people.
- **Passover** marks Israel's position as the chosen people of God. This festival became a permanent memorial to God's mighty act of salvation.
- The **crossing of the Red Sea** demonstrated God's power to deliver his people.

Relationship: Exodus 16–40

God redeemed Israel in order to build an intimate relationship with his people. The events of Exodus 16–40 take place at Mount Sinai. There God met his people and marked them as his treasured possession.²⁸

Two symbols mark the relationship between Jehovah and Israel:

(1) The giving of the Ten Commandments provided a covenant structure for the relationship. Like circumcision in the covenant with Abraham, obedience to the law did not earn salvation. Instead, obedience to the law was the result of relationship with Jehovah.

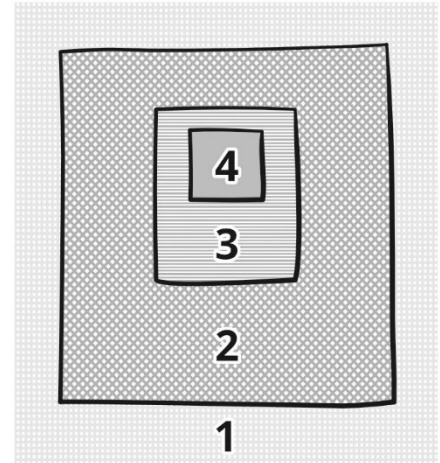
(2) The tabernacle provided a visual symbol of God's presence among his people. Located in the center of the camp, the tabernacle was a constant reminder that Jehovah dwelt among his chosen people.

²⁸ Exodus 19:5, *English Standard Version*

The tabernacle taught the concept of holiness to Israel. As Israelites moved towards the tabernacle, they were aware that they were moving from unclean space (outside the camp) to clean space (inside the camp) to the tabernacle itself which was holy and set apart for God and the priests. The Holy of Holies was a visible symbol of God's dwelling place. This demonstrated the holiness of God and his expectations for a holy people.

Exodus in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus is the perfect Passover Lamb.²⁹ He fulfills the promise of Passover and the tabernacle. John uses the Greek word for tabernacle to describe Jesus' ministry on earth when he writes, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us."³⁰ As the tabernacle had represented God's presence among his people, Jesus was God's presence among all humankind.



Leviticus

Book	What It Teaches about God	Symbol
Exodus	God is present.	Tabernacle
Leviticus	God is holy.	Sacrifices

Theme: Holiness

It is unfortunate that Leviticus is neglected by so many Christians. Although Leviticus describes practices that seem foreign to us, the book communicates an important message: a holy God requires a holy people. The book of Leviticus answers the question, "How should God's people live in the presence of a holy God?" The theme of Leviticus is holiness.

It is important to understand Leviticus' place in the Pentateuch. God had already redeemed Israel from Egypt and called them to himself. The sacrifices and law are not intended to provide a way to earn God's favor. Rather, the sacrifices and the laws of the holiness code provide a framework for living in the presence of a holy God.

A key to reading Leviticus is the balance seen in Leviticus 20:7-8. "Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you."³¹ We are commanded to sanctify ourselves and be holy. But, we must never forget that he is the Lord who sanctifies us. The God who redeemed Israel

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:7

³⁰ John 1:14. The word *dwelt* literally means "tabernacled."

³¹ Leviticus 20:7-8, *English Standard Version*

by his grace in Exodus is the God who sanctifies Israel in Leviticus. The God who calls us to himself is the God who makes us holy.

Overview of Leviticus

Laws of Sacrifice (Leviticus 1–7)

Ralph Wood, a professor at Baylor University, once asked a group of students to compare two scenes: a modern scholar who says that the doctrine of sin is a superstitious myth and a pagan boy who sacrifices a chicken on an altar in a remote village. Professor Wood asked, “Which man is further from the truth?” The students soon realized that the pagan boy, however primitive, understands something that the modern scholar does not: sin requires a sacrifice. Sinners need a means for atonement. While the pagan boy was seeking forgiveness in the wrong way, even a pagan understands that sin requires atonement.³²

The need for sacrifice is seen throughout Scripture:

- In Genesis 3:21, God made clothes for Adam and Eve from the skin of an animal.
- In Genesis 4, the unworthy sacrifice of Cain was rejected.
- In Genesis 22:14, Abraham named the place of sacrifice, “Jehovah-jireh,” which means “The Lord will provide.”
- In Leviticus, the sacrificial system was defined.
- In Hebrews 9 and 10, Jesus is seen as the once for all sacrifice who bears the sins of many.

Leviticus 1–7 presents the laws of sacrifice. These sacrifices helped Israelites understand how to approach a holy God.

- The **burnt offering** (Leviticus 1) was the primary Old Testament offering. Before killing the animal, the worshiper placed his hand on the head of the animal, showing that it was the sinner himself who deserved the penalty of death.³³ The animal was then burned completely on the altar.
- The **grain offering** (Leviticus 2) was a gift offering that often accompanied a burnt offering or peace offering.
- The **peace offering** (Leviticus 3) celebrated fellowship between the worshiper and God. It affirmed the covenant relationship between God and Israel. It is the only offering shared between the worshiper, the priest, and God.³⁴

³² Paraphrased from Jill Carattini, “Lamb of God” at A Slice of Infinity, April 23, 2012.

³³ Leviticus 1:4–5

³⁴ The part that belonged to God (the fat – the best parts) was burned up. The rest was eaten by the worshiper and the priest.

- The **sin offering** (Leviticus 4:1–5:13) was given to atone for unintentional violations of the law or for failing to do something that was required by the law. Sin made the person unclean; this offering restored them to purity.
- The **trespass** or **guilt offering** (Leviticus 5:14–6:7) also dealt with violations of the law. This offering is very similar to the sin offering, but seems to address more serious violations, particularly those that required restitution and restoration of property.

Although Israel would later treat the sacrifices as mere ritual, the sacrificial system was intended to represent true repentance. “Sins of a high hand” (sins committed in deliberate defiance) were not covered by these offerings.³⁵ A worthy offering must be given from a truly repentant heart.

Establishment of the Priesthood (Leviticus 8–10)

Because God is holy, all worship must be done in the manner that he prescribes. Exodus 32 shows the result of attempting to combine worship of Jehovah with the gold calf of Egypt.³⁶ Leviticus 10 shows God’s judgment on those who worship in an improper manner. A holy God requires that we approach him as he prescribes.

Laws of Cleanness and Uncleanness (Leviticus 11–16)

For 400 years, Israel lived in Egypt, surrounded by pagans who had no awareness of holiness. When God called Israel to be holy, they had to learn separation from the sins of the surrounding nations. This allowed Israel to represent God’s holy character to the nations.

God used the laws of cleanness and uncleanness to give an object lesson in the meaning of holiness and purity. Using aspects of everyday life (food, childbirth, skin diseases, and bodily discharges), God showed that all of life belongs to him.

Some of the distinctions between clean and unclean are not clear to a modern reader. One of the most likely explanations is that a clean animal fit what a person would expect to see in its classification. For example, a water-dwelling creature without the expected fins or scales was unclean; flying insects with many legs were unclean.³⁷ While the reasons for the classifications are not always clear, the underlying message is clear: God’s people must distinguish between that which is pure and that which is impure.

³⁵ According to Numbers 15:30-31, there was no sacrifice for the sin of a high hand. Instead the sinner was to be cut off. In Psalm 51, David knows that his deliberate and calculated murder of Uriah is not covered by a sin offering. Instead, he casts himself on God’s mercy; “Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

³⁶ See Exodus 32:4 (“These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt”) and Exodus 32:5 (“Tomorrow is a feast **to the LORD**”).

³⁷ A water-dwelling creature could be expected to have either fins or scales. Legs on an insect are associated with crawling, not flying. Thus, these creatures had characteristics that did not fit the expected norm for its class.

The Holiness Code: The Walk with God (Leviticus 17–27)

The last section of Leviticus moves from rituals of sacrifice, the priesthood, and ritual purity to a focus on holy living. In the holiness code, Israel is called to exemplify holiness in every area of life: social relationships, family, sexuality, holy days, and treatment of the poor. The call to holiness is based on the character of God: “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.”³⁸ A reminder that “I am the Lord” or “I am the Lord your God” occurs forty-seven times in these chapters. The holiness of God’s people is to mirror the holiness of God.

Leviticus in the New Testament

Many specific applications of Leviticus are no longer in force since the coming of Christ; he fulfilled the law.³⁹ However, the principles of holiness taught in Leviticus are still in effect. These laws reveal the holiness of God, a holiness which is available through Christ to all believers.⁴⁰

A Closer Look at the Law

► If we are saved by grace, what practical role does the law play in our lives as New Testament believers?

The law is often misused in today’s church. For many, the law is outdated and completely meaningless for the Christian. They quote Paul’s warnings against trying to earn God’s favor by obedience to the law,⁴¹ while ignoring other statements such as, “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.”⁴² Both statements must be considered in our study of Old Testament law because “all Scripture... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”⁴³

For others, obedience to the law becomes a vehicle for earning God’s favor. They pride themselves on their careful adherence to every detail of the law. They believe this will earn God’s favor; this is the very fault of which the Judaizers were guilty.

How should a Christian approach the law? Many Christians respond by dividing the Old Testament law into three categories. They argue that **moral law** (such as the Ten Commandments) continues in force today. They argue that **civil law** (laws specific to Israel as a nation) and **ceremonial law** (laws related to sacrifice, the priesthood, and ritual purity) are no longer applicable.

While this is a common division, we encounter some difficulties in determining which laws fit each category. Read through Leviticus 19, putting each law into one of the three

³⁸ Leviticus 19:2. This same idea is repeated in Leviticus 20:7, 26; 21:8. In the New Testament, it is repeated in 1 Peter 1:15-16 and the same idea is found in Matthew 5:48.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2

⁴⁰ Matthew 5:48

⁴¹ Galatians 2:16-21, for example

⁴² 1 Timothy 1:8

⁴³ 2 Timothy 3:16

categories. You will find this to be very subjective. Is the law of gleaning (Leviticus 19:9-10) a civil law related only to Israel as a nation, or is it a moral mandate to care for the poor in all societies? The just balances of Leviticus 19:36 are a civil law, but they also express the moral principle of honesty.

Nowhere in Leviticus 19 does Moses indicate any difference between the civil, ceremonial, and moral laws. Since there is no distinction made, and since God's Word is eternal, a better approach to the law may be to read it as a revelation of God's character that guides God's people in all times.

In this approach to the Law, we ask: "What does this law reveal about God's holy character and about his requirements for a holy people?" We then read the law **through the coming of Christ** and apply it to our circumstances today.

How to Approach the Law

1. Read the Old Testament law.
2. Find the principle taught or the aspect of God's character revealed.
3. Look for changes in application made by Christ's coming.
4. Determine the modern practice.

To apply this model, take the example of the law of gleaning (Leviticus 19:9-10):

1. The ancient law states: "Thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger."
2. The law is based on God's character: "I am the LORD your God." God cares for the poor; he loves the needy.⁴⁴
3. Jesus modeled this care for the needy throughout his earthly ministry. Jesus did not change this law; instead, he demonstrated the principle in daily ministry.
4. In an agricultural society, modern practice may be very close to Israel's practice – leaving food for the needy to harvest. In an industrial society, modern practice may involve giving money or practical assistance to the poor. The application may differ, but the principle remains in force in every society. God's people are to love and care for the poor just as God himself loves and cares for the poor. This is reiterated in 1 John 3:17-18 and James 2:14-16. The principle of this ancient civil law applies today.

Leviticus 19 serves as a model of how all the holiness code can be interpreted. It calls God's people to holiness in all areas of life. Some aspects of Leviticus 19 are a reflection of the Ten Commandments; some are based on the laws of sacrifice; some are based on the ideas

⁴⁴ To find the principle, we must often ask, "Why did God give this command?" For example, God forbids a creditor from taking a man's millstone (Deuteronomy 24:6). Why? This would take away the man's means of making a living. Understanding the reason for a specific command helps us find the universal principle that is taught.

of cleanness and uncleanness; some are based on love towards one's neighbor; **all** express our obligation to be holy as the Lord our God is holy.

Numbers

Theme: The Consequences of Disobedience

The English name of the Book of Numbers comes from the two censuses that are part of the book; one at the beginning and one at the end of the book. The Hebrew title ("In the Desert") describes the forty years of wandering in the desert after Israel left Mount Sinai. Numbers shows the terrible consequence of disobeying God. As a result of Israel's disobedience, an entire generation died during forty years of wandering in the desert.

Unlike other books of the Pentateuch, Numbers does not follow a clear literary pattern. The book is in chronological order, but does not have any other overarching structure. Instead, it reads like a travel journal with many different types of material: narrative, poetry, prophecy, blessings, law, and two censuses.

Although Numbers contains many different types of material, its basic purpose is clear: to show the consequences of Israel's disobedience *and* to show God's continuing faithfulness to Israel. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself."⁴⁵

Overview of Numbers

Israel at Sinai (Numbers 1:1-10:10)

Numbers begins with a census of the people as they prepare to leave Mount Sinai and travel to the Promised Land. The census is followed by instructions for arranging the camp, laws to be observed by Israel, and preparation for departure.

Israel in the Desert (Numbers 10:11-21:35)

The central part of Numbers records the years of wandering in the desert, the result of their disobedience at Kadesh. Even before the failure to enter the Promised Land, Israel's lack of faith is seen in their complaint at Taberah,⁴⁶ their complaint about manna at Kibroth-hattaavah,⁴⁷ and the rebellion of Aaron and Miriam against Moses' leadership.⁴⁸

After the spies reported on their mission into Canaan, the people refused to believe God's promise of victory. In judgment, God killed the faithless spies in a plague and declared that no one over the age of twenty, except Caleb and Joshua, would enter the Promised Land.

The rest of this section includes a series of laws regarding sacrifice, judgment on a rebellion by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, confirmation of Aaron's priestly line, and laws related to the tabernacle and uncleanness. While some scholars see this order as random, this section

⁴⁵ 2 Timothy 2:13, *English Standard Version*

⁴⁶ Numbers 11:1-3

⁴⁷ Numbers 11:4-35

⁴⁸ Numbers 12:1-16

demonstrates God's grace to Israel. By following the message of judgment with a renewal of laws regarding sacrifice, God shows that he has not abandoned his people. Just as the laws at Sinai show God's gracious care for his people, the laws in Numbers show that God cares for Israel in spite of her disobedience. In the same way, the confirmation of Aaron's priestly line and the laws related to the tabernacle show the continuing importance of the tabernacle and the priesthood to Israel. God has not forgotten Israel; he will continue to dwell in the midst of his people.

In chapter 21, the people were plagued with fiery serpents because of rebellion.⁴⁹ In response to the people's repentance, God instructed Moses to mount a bronze serpent on a pole. By looking at the serpent, a person who had been bitten would live. In John, Jesus pointed to this as a type of his saving work for all who look to him in faith.⁵⁰

Israel on the Plains of Moab (Numbers 22:1-36:13)

The last section of Numbers shows Israel's second preparation to enter Canaan. These chapters take place approximately forty years after the opening of the book. Because of disobedience, an eleven day journey took forty years.⁵¹

In the intervening years, the entire generation of unbelieving Israelites died. None of the deaths in Numbers 15-21 resulted from enemy attack. The death of the unbelieving generation was the result of God's judgment, not the strength of Israel's enemies.⁵²

While Israel waited on the plains of Moab, the Moabite ruler Balak hired Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel. God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing on the people. Balaam's blessing includes one of the Old Testament's great messianic prophecies. In spite of Israel's disobedience, God continued to preserve his nation.

This story of God's protection of Israel is followed immediately by another story of judgment. Israel turned to the gods of Moab and were judged with a plague that killed 24,000 Israelites.⁵³ Again, the consequences of disobedience are clear.

This is followed by a second census, preparations for leaving the plains of Moab, a review of the laws of sacrifice, and instructions regarding the division of the land. God did not forget his people.

⁴⁹ Numbers 21:4-9. "Fiery serpents" probably refers to poisonous snakes.

⁵⁰ John 3:14-16

⁵¹ Deuteronomy 1:2-3

⁵² Similarly in Joshua, the deaths at Ai come because of Achan's sin, not because of the strength of the town of Ai.

⁵³ Numbers 25:1-9

The Old Generation (Numbers 1-14)	The New Generation (Numbers 21-36)
First census: 603,550 warriors (Numbers 1)	Second census: 601,730 warriors (Numbers 26)
Journey from Sinai to Kadesh	Journey from Kadesh to Moab
Laws of sanctification (Numbers 4-9)	Laws of offerings and vows (Numbers 28-30)

Numbers in the New Testament

Paul pointed to Israel's sin at Moab, their rejection of authority, and their complaints as a warning to the Corinthians. These New Testament believers were in danger of the same failures. Paul warned, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Along with this warning, Paul encouraged his readers, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."⁵⁴

In Hebrews, the author warns Christians against the unbelief that kept Israel out of Canaan. Because the Israelites hardened their hearts, they were prevented from entering the land of promise. In the same way, readers of Hebrews who have an evil heart of unbelief will not enter the Sabbath rest promised through the gospel.⁵⁵

Deuteronomy

Theme: Renewal

Deuteronomy is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. It is the culmination of the Pentateuch and the foundation of the historical books. Through the rest of the Old Testament, the prophets will measure Israel against the principles taught in Deuteronomy.

The name Deuteronomy means "second law." This second law is not new, but is a renewal of the covenant for a new generation. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness in the desert, God has not forgotten his people. Deuteronomy shows that the covenants with Abraham and Moses are still in effect.

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

⁵⁵ Hebrews 3:7-4:13

DEUTERONOMY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS-
NUMBERS



DEUTERONOMY



JOSHUA-
KINGS

Overview of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy contains three speeches by Moses. These speeches look back at Israel's history and look forward to their future as God's people.

Speech 1 – Historical: What God Has Done (Deuteronomy 1-4)

In his first speech, Moses reviews Israel's history. This is not simply a historical review; it is a theology of history. Moses shows the importance of keeping covenant by reviewing Israel's history. He shows the consequences of Israel's disobedience when they refused to enter Canaan. He then shows God's protection when Israel was obedient to God's commands. Moses even points to himself as an example of one who is kept out of Canaan because of disobedience. Israel must not forget the covenant.⁵⁶

This first speech lays an important theological foundation for later Old Testament history, the doctrine of sowing and reaping.⁵⁷ The rest of the Old Testament history will demonstrate this principle. When Israel is obedient, God blesses her; when she turns to the worship of idols, God sends her into exile.

Speech 2 – Legal: What God Requires (Deuteronomy 5-26)

The core of Deuteronomy is a review of the covenant. In Deuteronomy 5-11, Moses reviews the general stipulations of the law; in Deuteronomy 12-26, Moses applies the covenant to the specific conditions of Israel's society. These chapters show how the covenant will be applied to Israel's life in Canaan.⁵⁸

Moses' overview of the law begins with a review of the Ten Commandments. The two principles at the root of covenant are the fear of God and the love of God.

⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 4:9, 23

⁵⁷ Biblical scholars call this the principle of "deuteronomic theology" or "retribution theology." It is the foundation of the historical books, the prophetic books, and is restated in Galatians 6:6-7.

⁵⁸ An example is Deuteronomy 22:8: "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it" (*English Standard Version*). This law is not included in Exodus or Leviticus. Laws related to the building of a house were not needed for the people in the desert. They are needed for applying the law to the new setting of established cities in Canaan. While the application is new, the principle is not. Deuteronomy 22:8 applies the previously stated principle, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). It also relates to Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder" (*English Standard Version*). Fulfilling this command is more than an absence of murder; it is active protection of other human beings – a principle that is reiterated by Jesus in Matthew 5:21-24.

In Deuteronomy 5:29, God said, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" The proper fear of God will preserve Israel.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 contains the core of the covenant: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."⁵⁹ Jesus will point to this as the first and great commandment.⁶⁰

These two principles, fear of God and love for God, are not antagonistic. Both fear and love are terms of relationship. In the Old Testament, to fear God means to live in proper relationship to him. Fear of God is not the cringing fear of a slave; it is a proper awareness of who God is and our response to him. Fear and love are both positive terms.

The rest of this speech develops these two principles and applies them to daily life. Through a review of the Ten Commandments and application of the law to life in Canaan, Moses shows how the fear of God and love for God is demonstrated in daily life. The law was more than a list of rules; it was the means for living out a relationship of love.

Speech 3 – Prophetic: What God Will Do (Deuteronomy 27-31)

Looking to the future, Moses' final speech prepares Israel for a transfer of leadership to Joshua and challenges Israel to remain faithful to the covenant.

Deuteronomy 27-28 contains instructions for a covenant renewal ceremony to be performed after Israel enters Canaan. In this ceremony, Israel is to build an altar near Shechem, a city between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The tribes will be divided into two groups, with half of the tribes on one mountain and half on the other. The Levites will chant the warnings of the covenant, and the people will respond with the blessings and curses of the covenant. This ceremony was performed in Joshua 8:30-35. It was a dramatic way to remind a new generation of the obligations of the covenant.

Deuteronomy 29-30 contains Moses' final message. After reminding Israel of God's faithfulness in the past, Moses predicts that Israel will turn to other gods and will be taken into exile. However, he also predicts God's mercy in bringing them back to the land. Moses closes with a choice: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."⁶¹

In Deuteronomy 31, Moses commissions Joshua as his successor and makes provision for the law to be read every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles. This reminds each generation of the provisions of the law.

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is called the *Shema*.

⁶⁰ Matthew 22:38

⁶¹ Deuteronomy 30:19

Appendices (Deuteronomy 32-34)

Under God's direction, Moses made provisions to help Israel remember the covenant. Moses taught Israel a song summarizing the covenant. This song reviews God's goodness to Israel, predicts Israel's future rebellion and exile, and promises God's forgiveness and restoration. The song of Deuteronomy 32 is another reminder of the provisions of the covenant.

Deuteronomy 33 contains Moses' final blessing on each tribe. Like a patriarch blessing his sons, Moses pronounces a blessing on each of the tribes.⁶²

Deuteronomy 34 is an obituary that may have been composed by Joshua. Due to Moses' sin at Meribah, he was not allowed to enter the land of promise.⁶³ However, God allowed Moses to see the land from Mount Nebo. God buried Moses in Moab, and Joshua became the leader of the people of Israel.

Deuteronomy in the Later Old Testament

The covenant in Deuteronomy provides a basis for the later prophetic lawsuit against Israel. Israel's prophets point to Deuteronomy when they show Israel's unfaithfulness to God. The structure of Deuteronomy follows a pattern that was common to political covenants or treaties at the time of Moses. Coming from Egypt, this form would have been familiar to Israel and would have helped them to understand the seriousness of their covenant with God.

Sadly, Israel soon forgot her promises and broke the covenant. By the book of Judges, Israel has already begun to abandon the covenant. Judges, Kings, and the prophets will show Israel's failure to remain faithful to the covenant presented in Deuteronomy.

⁶² See Genesis 49 for Jacob's parallel blessing on the tribes.

⁶³ Numbers 20

God's Covenant with Israel	
Ancient Near East Treaties	God's Covenant with Israel
Preamble introducing the treaty	Deuteronomy 1:1-5
Historical prologue reviewing the relationship between the two parties	Deuteronomy 1:6-4:49
Stipulations of the covenant	Deuteronomy 5:1-26:19
Curses and blessings for breaking or keeping the covenant	Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68
Provision for reading the covenant periodically	Deuteronomy 31:9-29
List of witnesses to the covenant	Deuteronomy 32:1-47

Deuteronomy in the New Testament

Deuteronomy is cited more than eighty times in the New Testament, one of the most frequently cited Old Testament books. Deuteronomy promised that God would raise up a prophet like Moses; this is fulfilled in the earthly ministry of Jesus.⁶⁴ Jesus cited Deuteronomy many times, including his response to Satan's temptation in the wilderness.⁶⁵

Conclusion: The Pentateuch Speaks Today

For many churches, much of the Pentateuch is ignored. The creation and flood stories are the basis for children's lessons and the text for debates about creation and evolution. The Ten Commandments are memorized in Sunday School. However, much of Exodus through Deuteronomy is ignored by many Christians. This is unfortunate, because these books are important for 21st century Christians.

Exodus models God's plan for redeeming and building relationship with mankind. Rightly understood, the law reveals God's desire to establish and maintain relationship with his people. To us, as to Israel, God says: "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not."⁶⁶ Right relationship with God means that we do not need to fear anything else.

Leviticus models holiness. It shows that a holy God requires a holy people. Although the system of sacrifices is no longer in force, the principles of holiness are still essential for living in right relationship with God.

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 18:14-22; Deuteronomy 34:10-12; John 6:14

⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 6:13, 16; 8:3; Matthew 4:1-10

⁶⁶ Exodus 20:20

Numbers warns the church against disobedience. In the Old Testament, God's people were judged for their disobedience. Today, God's people will be judged if we are disobedient.

Deuteronomy provides a pattern for applying the principles of the law to changing situations. In Deuteronomy, Moses taught Israel how to apply the principles of the law to life in the Promised Land. While the circumstances in which we live will change, the principles of God's law do not change. A study of Deuteronomy teaches us how to apply biblical principles in new situations.

Lesson 3 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

After reading "A Closer Look at the Law," study Leviticus 19. For each command in this chapter, determine the principle that is taught and then discuss how this principle can be applied in today's world. Each member of your group should write a short essay showing at least one contemporary application of Leviticus 19.

Option 2: Individual Assignment.

After reading "A Closer Look at the Law," study Leviticus 19. Write a 1-2 page essay in which you list each command in this chapter, determine the principle that is taught, and then show how the principle can be applied in today's world.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 3 Test

- (1) What is the most likely date for Israel's exodus from Egypt?
- (2) List the theme for each book.
- (3) List the two major sections of Exodus.
- (4) List the four events in Exodus that portray Israel's redemption from Egypt.
- (5) List the two events in Exodus that mark the establishment of relationship between Jehovah and Israel.
- (6) Identify each of the offerings from Leviticus.
 - _____: a gift offering that accompanies another offering
 - _____: the primary offering of the Old Testament
 - _____: addresses violations that require restitution
 - _____: atones for unintentional violations of the law
 - _____: celebrates fellowship between the worshiper and God
- (7) The _____ of Leviticus 17-27 taught Israel how to live in a manner that exemplifies holiness in daily life.
- (8) List the four steps for applying Old Testament law today.
- (9) List the three major sections of Numbers.
- (10) Moses' three speeches in Deuteronomy are...
- (11) Write Exodus 3:14, Leviticus 20:7-8, and Deuteronomy 6:4-5 from memory.

Lesson 4

Joshua–Ruth

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.
- (2) Know the major events of the conquest and the period of the judges.
- (3) Recognize the importance of preparation for the transfer of leadership.
- (4) Understand the concept of Yahweh (or Holy) War in Joshua.
- (5) Relate the message of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.

Memorize Joshua 1:8-9.

Introduction

The Historical Books		
Theocracy	Joshua–Ruth	1405-1043 B.C.
Monarchy	Samuel–Chronicles	1043-586 B.C.
Return from Exile	Ezra–Esther	536-420 B.C.

In the English Bible, the books from Joshua through Esther are called the “Historical Books.” They report Israel’s history from the conquest of Canaan, through the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., to the return beginning in 536 B.C.

In the Hebrew Bible, most of these books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) are called “Former Prophets.” A prophet brings God’s message to the people. The historical books are more than interesting stories about Israel; they proclaim God’s message to God’s people.

In Joshua and Judges, God teaches that he rewards faithfulness and judges unfaithfulness. In Kings, God shows that the exile was the result of Israel’s rebellion. In Ezra and Nehemiah, God reassures Israel that he has not forgotten them. The historical books show God’s faithfulness to his people, his everlasting mercy to Israel.

These books are history with a purpose. They show God at work in Israel’s covenantal history. Because of this, these books are valuable for Christian readers today; they demonstrate how God works in human history to accomplish his purposes.

The first three historical books record Israel's early history as a theocracy (direct rule by God). With Moses and Joshua as God's representatives, this type of government was successful. Unfortunately, Israel's unfaithfulness during the time of the judges led to social problems. A monarchy (rule by a king) became necessary in order to unify the nation.

Joshua

Theme: The Conquest of Canaan

Redeeming Israel from bondage was the beginning of God's plan for his people; the possession of Canaan was the next step in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. In Joshua, the Divine Warrior brings his people into the promised rest. Joshua continues the story that started in Exodus and was delayed by Israel's disobedience in Numbers.

Joshua shows God's faithfulness to Israel when they are faithful to him. Obedience to God brings his blessing, the principle taught in Deuteronomy. This is demonstrated at Jericho and in the battle against the coalition of kings in Joshua 10. Disobedience to God brings his judgment; this is demonstrated at Ai. In this way, Joshua foreshadows Israel's later history.

Author and Date

The events of the book of Joshua occurred from 1405–1380 B.C. During this period, Canaan was under nominal Egyptian control, but with little direct rule by Egypt. As a result, the Canaanites were unable to present a unified force against Israel's attack.

Joshua was probably written soon after the events recorded in the book. Joshua 24:26 suggests Joshua as the author of the book. As in Deuteronomy, verses were added later that describe the death of the author.⁶⁷

Overview of Joshua

The Conquest of Canaan: Joshua 1-12

Crossing into the Land (Joshua 1-5)

The book of Joshua begins with God's appearance to Joshua after the death of Moses. God promised to be with Joshua as he had been with Moses.

In preparation for the conquest, Joshua sent two spies to view the land, particularly Jericho. The spies were protected by Rahab, a prostitute in the city. Rahab asked the spies to protect her when Israel conquered the city. She testified to her faith in Israel's God. In an Old Testament example of salvation by grace through faith, this Gentile prostitute inherited the promises given to Israel and became part of the messianic line.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Joshua 24:29-31

⁶⁸ Matthew 1:5

Rather than having Israel enter Canaan from the south (the most direct route), God had Joshua lead the tribes across the Jordan River. This miracle, duplicating the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses, confirmed Joshua as God's chosen leader for his people.⁶⁹

After crossing the Jordan, Joshua reinstituted two covenant memorials. First, after the years of wandering during which Israel had neglected the practice of circumcision, the males were circumcised. Second, the Passover was celebrated for the first time in the Promised Land.

Taking the Land (Joshua 6-12)

The conquest of Canaan shows that as Israel was faithful to God, God gave them victory over their enemies. Obeying God's instructions to march around Jericho, Israel won a great victory. However, because of Achan's sin, Israel was defeated at a much smaller city, Ai. After Achan was punished, God gave Israel victory over Ai and then Bethel.

The story of the Gibeonites serves as a warning to leaders. God's plan was for Joshua to defeat all the people of Canaan. The leaders of Gibeon, a city in Canaan, deceived Joshua by pretending to come from a great distance. Without seeking God's direction, Joshua made a covenant with the Gibeonites.⁷⁰ The results of this foolish decision caused suffering for Israel hundreds of years later during the reign of David.⁷¹

The immediate result of the treaty was that Canaanite kings from the south attacked Gibeon. Because of the treaty, Israel came to Gibeon's rescue. God fought on behalf of Israel, and on the day that the sun stood still, God rained hailstones on Israel's enemies. The theme of God's power on behalf of his people recurs throughout Joshua 10:

- "The Lord discomfited them."
- "The Lord cast down great stones."
- "The Lord delivered up the Amorites."
- "For the Lord fought for Israel."

Victory over the Canaanites was won through God's power, not through Israel's strength.

Joshua 11 narrates the victory over northern Canaan. By the end of Joshua 12, Israel controls the majority of Canaan after a conquest of approximately seven years.

The Settlement of Canaan: Joshua 13-24

Dividing the Land (Joshua 13-21)

While Israel now had effective control of the land, there were pockets of resistance by native peoples. The individual tribes were given responsibility for completing the conquest. Unfortunately, Judges shows that the tribes did not accomplish this mission.

⁶⁹ Joshua 3-4; compare to Exodus 14-15. See especially Joshua 4:14.

⁷⁰ Joshua 9:1-27

⁷¹ 2 Samuel 21:1-14

Joshua 14-19 records the division of the land between the tribes. Of particular importance to Israel's history was the assignment of six cities of refuge and forty-eight cities for the Levites. The cities of refuge provided protection for a person who accidentally killed someone.⁷² A person who fled to a city of refuge was protected from unjust vengeance by the family of the person they had killed. At the same time, the fact that the killer had to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest showed the high value of life in the Mosaic law; even an accidental death was taken seriously.

The Levites did not receive a land inheritance of their own. Instead, this tribe was scattered throughout the land, so that they would live among all the people and provide spiritual guidance for all Israel.

Serving God in the Land (Joshua 22-24)

This section begins with a story illustrating the unity of the nation. Israel was not a confederation of independent tribes; they were one nation serving one God. Joshua 23 and 24 gives Joshua's final challenge to the people. In scenes similar to Moses' final speeches in Deuteronomy, Joshua calls on the people of Israel to reaffirm their commitment to God in a covenant renewal ceremony. The book ends with the death of Joshua at 110 years of age.

► As a church leader, how can you prepare your church for a transition of leadership? Discuss practical steps for this transition.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses laid hands on Joshua to symbolize the transfer of leadership. At the end of Joshua, there is no clear transfer from Joshua to another leader. Instead, in a phrase that hints at the coming problems in Judges, Joshua records, "Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel."⁷³ The beginning of Judges will show that the values of Joshua were not passed to the next generation.

Deuteronomy	Joshua
Ends with a covenant renewal (29-32)	Ends with a covenant renewal (23-24)
Ends with the death of a great leader, Moses	Ends with the death of a great leader, Joshua
Provisions for transfer of leadership	No provisions for transfer of leadership

A Closer Look at Yahweh War

Yahweh war, or holy war, is regulated in Deuteronomy 20. This chapter gives guidelines for Israel's conduct of war.

⁷² Numbers 35:9-15

⁷³ Joshua 24:31, *English Standard Version*

In recent years, two factors have led to renewed discussions of God's commands to destroy the Canaanites. First, skeptics point to this command to argue that Jehovah was a bloodthirsty deity who should be condemned, not worshiped. Second, the rise of Islamic *jihad*, the Holocaust, and genocide in places such as Rwanda and Bosnia have caused some Christians to ask, "Is *jihad* the same as the holy war commanded in Joshua? Was Old Testament Israel guilty of the same atrocities committed today in the name of Allah?"

While this question is beyond the scope of a short survey, a few principles should be considered when studying Joshua.⁷⁴

- 1. Yahweh war reflects God's justice.** The Canaanites (like all people) were sinners who were subject to God's just judgment. It can be argued that the surprise is not that God destroyed the Canaanites, but that he spared the rest of the human race.⁷⁵ All humans deserve God's judgment.

Rahab's testimony to the Israelite spies shows that the Canaanites had heard of God's power.⁷⁶ However, with the exception of Rahab, no Canaanites repented and turned to God. God's willingness to spare Rahab (and in a later generation, Nineveh) suggests that repentance by the Canaanites might have brought God's mercy.

- 2. Yahweh war reflects God's sovereignty over the earth.** The Promised Land (like all the earth) belongs to God. God did not take the land from the Canaanites; the land was God's to give to whomever he chose. In the ancient Near East, all war was seen as holy war, war between the gods.⁷⁷ In the plagues on Egypt, Jehovah proved himself greater than Egypt's gods; in the destruction of the Canaanite cities, Jehovah proved himself greater than the gods of the Canaanites. Israel's war against the Canaanites was war against Canaan's gods. Israel's victory demonstrated God's sovereignty over all the world.

- 3. Yahweh war reflects God's holiness.** A holy God sought to protect his people from the corruption of Canaanite idolatry. The seriousness of this issue is seen in Judges; Israel was soon attracted to the gods of the surviving Canaanites. Only complete destruction of the Canaanites would protect Israel from apostasy. The holy war of Joshua taught Israel and the nations about God's holy nature.

⁷⁴ For more on this issue, read:

Stanley Gundry, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003)
Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*, (Ada: Baker Books, 2011)

⁷⁵ Daniel Gard in Stanley Gundry, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 140.

⁷⁶ Joshua 2:9-11.

⁷⁷ Surviving art from ancient Assyria shows both the king and the Assyrian god Ashur drawing a bow to fight the enemies of Assyria; a victory by the Assyrian king is seen as a victory by Ashur. Also, see 1 Samuel 5:2 where the Philistines interpret their victory over Israel as Dagon's victory over Jehovah.

4. Yahweh war reflects God's love. From Genesis 3:15 through the rest of the Old Testament, God's purpose is to send the Messiah through Abraham's line. Abraham and his descendants are blessed in order to bless all nations. In order to achieve this purpose, God must protect the nation of Israel from the corruption of Canaanite idolatry. As difficult as it may seem, the destruction of the Canaanites reflects God's loving purpose for all people.

Yahweh war came at a unique time in history and is not a pattern for modern day Christians. It is not a defense for modern atrocities committed in the name of religion. Mosaic law distinguished between battles fought outside the Promised Land and battles fought inside the land; no one today is in the position of Israel at the time of the conquest of Canaan.⁷⁸ As we saw in "A Closer Look at the Law," we must read Joshua through the lens of the coming of Christ.

Finally, in response to skeptics, we should note that this was not ethnic cleansing; it was religious war against idolatry. There is no neutrality regarding God; one either turns to God in faith or rejects God in rebellion. Those who reject God (both in the Old Testament and the New Testament) face his ultimate judgment.

In her later history, Israel turned to idolatry. In response, God declared war on his own people.⁷⁹ The war against the Canaanites was terrible; however, it was not genocide. As uncomfortable as it makes us, the war of Joshua was a reflection of a holy, just, and loving God who does not excuse sin.

Judges

Theme: Apostasy in Israel

Judges begins with the tribes cooperating in the conquest of Canaan; the book ends with the tribes engaged in civil war after a terrible crime by members of the tribe of Benjamin. Judges begins with the people serving God; the book ends in religious apostasy and social chaos.

The cause of Israel's decline is summarized in Judges 2:6-11. After the great victories recorded in Joshua, and after the renewal of covenant at the end of Joshua, Judges shows how quickly Israel fell into apostasy. Seven times, Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.⁸⁰

What was the cause of this tragic decline? The book of Judges answers this question with two statements.⁸¹ First, there was no king in Israel. Judges was probably written in the early days of the monarchy and shows the need for a king to unify the nation. Second,

⁷⁸ Deuteronomy 20:10-18

⁷⁹ See Deuteronomy 28:25; Lamentations 2:5; Amos 9:7-8

⁸⁰ Judges 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1

⁸¹ Judges 17:6; 19:1; 21:25

every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Rather than a nation united in faithful obedience to God, each man followed his own path.

The purpose of Judges is to show the results of Israel's apostasy. Repeatedly, Judges shows that God sold Israel into the hands of her enemies because of Israel's sin. The curses of Deuteronomy 27-28 are fulfilled in Judges.

Author and Date

The events of Judges cover the years from approximately 1380-1050. There is no author identified in the book itself, although Jewish tradition identifies Samuel as the author. It was probably written in the early days of the monarchy, before David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites.⁸²

What is a Judge?

A *judge* was not a legal official as we think of a judge today. Nor was the judge a political official like a king or religious official like a priest. The judges were military leaders gifted by God to deliver his people from oppression. The judges ruled over individual tribes, not the entire nation. The rule of the judges probably overlapped, with a judge ruling in one tribe or group of tribes while another judge ruled another tribe or group of tribes.

Overview of Judges

The Roots of Israel's Apostasy (Judges 1:1–3:6)

At the time of the Judges, Israel's tribes controlled the hill country while the Canaanites were in control of the coastal regions; Israel failed to complete the conquest begun under Joshua. Judges gives two reasons for the incomplete conquest. Judges 1:19 shows a human reason; Judah could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. From a human perspective, the Canaanites were too strong for Judah.

However, we might ask, "Isn't God stronger than the chariots of the Canaanites?" Judges 2 reveals a deeper cause for the incomplete conquest. Even in the days of the conquest, Israel failed to fully obey God. God judged their disobedience by leaving some inhabitants in the land to be as thorns in your sides and to test Israel.⁸³

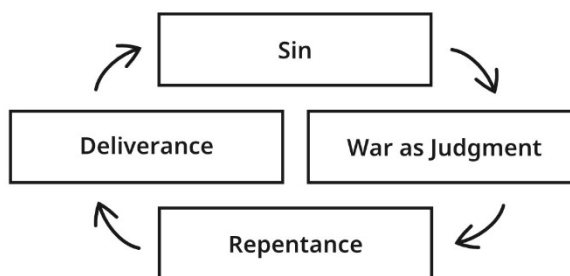
⁸² Judges 1:21

⁸³ Judges 2:1-3, 20-23; 3:1-4

Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance (Judges 3:7–16:31)

These chapters describe six cycles of apostasy and deliverance. The pattern is introduced in Judges 2 and then illustrated in the life of the judges. Six times:⁸⁴

- The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord (Sin).
- The Lord sold them into the hands of their enemies (War as Judgment).
- They were greatly distressed and cried out to God (Repentance).
- The Lord raised up a judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies (Deliverance).



Judges shows a steady decline in the quality of the judges. Nothing negative is said about the first judge, Othniel. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him and he was used by God to deliver Israel.⁸⁵ However, succeeding judges fail to measure up to Othniel's description.

Ehud wins victory through trickery.⁸⁶ Deborah is a faithful leader, but her song of victory reveals a nation that is divided into rival factions.⁸⁷

Gideon is slow to believe God, requiring three miracles as confirmation of God's call. He later leads Israel into false worship.⁸⁸

Unlike the earlier judges, there is no note that God raised up Jephthah. Instead, the people choose him to lead Gilead. Jephthah sees God as a deity with whom he can strike a bargain and makes a foolish vow to win God's favor.⁸⁹

The last of the judges, Samson, is a mere shadow of God's ideal for a leader. He breaks his Nazarite vows and is guilty of immoral unions with the Canaanites. Ultimately, Samson is more successful in his death than in life.⁹⁰

God used the judges to deliver his people. However, a survey of Judges shows the steady decline of the nation into spiritual apostasy, moral decay, and social chaos.

⁸⁴ Judges 2:11-18

⁸⁵ Judges 3:9-11

⁸⁶ Judges 3:12-30

⁸⁷ Judges 4-5

⁸⁸ Judges 6-8; especially 8:22-27

⁸⁹ Judges 11:1-40

⁹⁰ Judges 13-16

The Collapse of Israel's Society (Judges 17–21)

Judges ends with two stories that show the collapse of Israel's society. The story of the tribe of Dan taking Micah's idol and his priest shows the breakdown of religious life.⁹¹ Israel is now guilty of the idolatry that brought God's judgment on the Canaanites. Why was there such a spiritual decay? "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."⁹²

The horrible story of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine is similar to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Israel is guilty of the same sexual sins and violence committed by the Canaanites. In response to the crime of the Benjaminites, Israel broke into civil war. Why was there such moral and social decay? "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."⁹³

Ruth

Theme: Faithfulness in an Age of Apostasy

Two phrases show the importance of Ruth to Old Testament history. First, the story of Ruth took place in the days when the judges ruled.⁹⁴ This shows that in a time of religious apostasy, there was a young lady who remained faithful to God. Amazingly, this model of virtue was a Moabitess. While the people of Israel were descending into the chaos seen at the end of Judges, a Moabitess was faithful to Jehovah.

Second, Boaz and Ruth had a son: "And they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David."⁹⁵ As the great-grandmother of David, Ruth is important in the national history of Israel.

Ruth: A Drama in Four Acts

Act 1: Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1)

Ruth takes the form of a short story in which the characters and setting are established in a brief paragraph. The setting is the time of the judges. The places are Bethlehem and Moab. The main characters are ordinary Israelites and Moabites.

Elimelech and his family travel to Moab to escape a famine in Judah. They are there for ten years, during which time both of Elimelech's sons marry Moabite wives. The three men die in Moab and Naomi prepares to return to Bethlehem alone.

⁹¹ Judges 17-18

⁹² Judges 17:6

⁹³ Judges 21:25

⁹⁴ Ruth 1:1

⁹⁵ Ruth 4:17

Orpah, one of the widows, remains in Moab. The other widow, Ruth, insists on returning to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law. In a timeless statement of commitment, Ruth promises to live and die with Naomi and to serve Israel's God.

The two ladies return to Bethlehem, but Naomi has suffered so much that she asks the people of the city to call her Mara ("Bitter") rather than Naomi ("Pleasant").

Act 2: The Encounter Between Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 2)

Because of the law of gleaning,⁹⁶ Ruth is able to collect food for Naomi and herself. She happens to land in the field of Boaz, a wealthy relative of Elimelech, her deceased father-in-law.

When Boaz sees Ruth working in his field, he arranges to protect her and to provide her with extra barley. Although it might appear that the meeting between Boaz and Ruth was chance, Naomi recognizes the hand of God.⁹⁷ She tells Ruth to stay in Boaz's field during the barley and wheat harvests.

Act 3: Ruth Proposes Marriage to Boaz (Ruth 3)

As a close relative of Elimelech, Boaz stands in the position of the kinsman-redeemer, fulfilling the Old Testament tradition of levirate marriage.⁹⁸ In Israel, all land was to remain in the family to which it was given after the conquest. If a family was forced to sell property during difficult times, the kinsman-redeemer was responsible to redeem the property and restore it to the original family. Hoping that Boaz would fill this role, Naomi devised a plan by which Ruth proposed marriage to Boaz.

Through a ritual action at Boaz's threshing floor, Ruth proposed marriage to Boaz. He responded gladly to Ruth's request, although he admitted that another relative was closer than himself. This relative must be given an opportunity to redeem Naomi's inheritance.

Act 4: Boaz Acts as the Kinsman-Redeemer for Ruth (Ruth 4)

The next morning, Boaz went to the gate of the city where business was transacted. As the near kinsman passed, Boaz told him of the opportunity to purchase the land which had belonged to Elimelech. This unnamed kinsman wants to redeem the property. However, when Boaz tells him that he must marry Ruth as part of the redemption, the relative does not want to mar his own inheritance. If he marries Ruth, their children will carry the name and inheritance of Ruth's first husband. This might break up his own estate and affect the inheritance of his children. To protect his estate, the relative turns down the opportunity.

⁹⁶ Leviticus 19:9; 23:22

⁹⁷ Ruth 2:20

⁹⁸ Levirate marriage was marriage by a near relative to a deceased man's widow for the purpose of carrying on the name and inheritance of the first husband. The unnamed relative in Ruth 4:6 does not want to marry Ruth because it will damage his own inheritance rights.

This clears the way for Boaz and Ruth to marry. God gives them a son, and Naomi becomes the central character at the end of the book. She had lost her two sons; now she holds in her arms the son of Ruth and Boaz.

Like Esther, another short story featuring a woman who is faithful in a difficult situation, the book of Ruth shows God's sovereignty in what appears to be chance. Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of David and, ultimately, an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Joshua–Ruth in the New Testament

Jesus is the New Testament Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua. As Joshua led God's people out of Egypt into Canaan, Jesus leads God's people out of bondage into Sabbath rest.⁹⁹

In spite of the decline of Israel's society, some of the judges are seen as examples of faith in Hebrews 11. Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and even Samson are honored for their faith in God. Although these men did not always live up to their potential, God worked through them to accomplish his purposes.

Ruth is one of four women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy.¹⁰⁰ The faithfulness of this Moabite widow gains her a place in the lineage of the Messiah. There are several similarities between the stories of Ruth and Mary. Both involve a birth in Bethlehem. Both involve women of little prestige (a Moabite and an unmarried woman who becomes pregnant) who are faithful to God. Both show that God blesses those who are faithful to him.

These books demonstrate the principles of sowing and reaping introduced in Deuteronomy. Joshua and Ruth show God's blessing on those who are faithful. Judges shows God's judgment on those who are disobedient.

Joshua–Ruth Speak Today

In countries torn by strife between Islam and Christianity, the issue of holy war continues to confront the church. Christians in those countries should carefully study the principles outlined in the "Closer Look at Yahweh War" in light of today's conflicts.

On a broader scale, Christians today face the issues of faithfulness and unfaithfulness that were faced by Joshua, Ruth, and the people of the time of the Judges. Today, when we no longer live in a theocracy, God's response is not often as immediate and as temporally visible as in the Old Testament. This does not mean, however, that unfaithfulness is not judged or that faithfulness is not rewarded. The models of Joshua and Ruth as well as the negative example of Samson serve to remind us that God continues to look for a people who are faithful to him.

⁹⁹ Hebrews 4:1-11

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 1:5

Lesson 4 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Assign one member to study each of the following judges: Gideon, Deborah, Jephthah, and Samson. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each judge.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

Write a sermon on the life of one of the judges. Show how God worked through the judge to achieve his purposes.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 4 Test

- (1) What is the name of the historical books in the Hebrew Bible?
- (2) Define *theocracy*.
- (3) List the theme for each book:
- (4) The two major sections of Joshua are:
- (5) What is the main purpose of the book of Joshua?
- (6) What was the purpose of the cities of refuge?
- (7) List four principles to be considered when studying Yahweh War in Joshua.
- (8) What is the main purpose of Judges?
- (9) What are the four steps of the cycles of apostasy and deliverance in Judges?
- (10) Define *levirate marriage*.
- (11) Write Joshua 1:8-9 from memory.

Lesson 5

Samuel–Chronicles

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.
- (2) Know the most significant kings in Israel's history.
- (3) Recognize the synoptic relationship between Kings and Chronicles.
- (4) Understand the fulfillment of deuteronomic theology in Israel's history.
- (5) Appreciate the message of hope found in Chronicles.
- (6) Relate the message of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles.

Memorize 1 Kings 9:4-7 and 2 Chronicles 7:13-14.

Introduction

The books of Samuel and Kings trace the history of Israel's monarchy. 1 Samuel tells of the beginning of the monarchy, the kingship of Saul. 2 Samuel traces the history of David's rule. In 1 and 2 Kings, wicked kings lead Israel and Judah into apostasy. In response, the judgments promised in Deuteronomy 27-28 are poured out on the nation. By the end of 2 Kings, the Northern Kingdom has been destroyed and Judah is in exile in Babylon.

Chronicles looks at the same period of history from a different perspective. Written after the return from exile, Chronicles looks at Israel's history from the perspective of salvation history and sees God's continuing purpose for his people. Chronicles assures God's people that there is hope for the future. God has not forgotten his covenant with his people.

► Was Israel wrong to ask for a king? In your discussion, consider both 1 Samuel 8:6-22 and Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

1 Samuel

Theme: The Beginning of Israel's Monarchy

1 Samuel traces the transition from Israel's last judge, Samuel, to Israel's first king, Saul. Covering the years 1100-1011 B.C., 1 Samuel shows the early days of the monarchy. Instead of a theocracy in which God spoke directly through judges and prophets, Israel would now be ruled by a king. Prophetically, Moses had described the type of king Israel should seek. However, it was not long before Saul and his successors were far from God's plan for a king. 1 Samuel shows the promise of the first king as well as his tragic failure to achieve his potential as God's anointed.

Overview of 1 Samuel

The Transition to a Monarchy (1 Samuel 1–15)

The transition from rule by the judges to a monarchy begins with the story of Samuel. The son of a godly mother, Hannah, Samuel was dedicated to God from birth by a Nazarite vow.¹⁰¹ As a child, he was taken to the temple to serve under Eli the priest.

Scenes from this transition include:

God's call of Samuel and judgment on Eli and his family (1 Samuel 1–3)

1 Samuel 1–7 shows the continuing decline of Israel begun in Judges. Even the priesthood is corrupted, as Eli's sons desecrate their office with sexual immorality and misuse of the sacrifices.¹⁰² As a result, God brings a message of judgment through Samuel.

The capture of the Ark by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4–7)

Israel's misuse of the covenant is seen in their treatment of the ark of the covenant. When the Philistines attack, the Israelites bring the ark to the battlefield, believing that this divine object will protect them from their enemies. However, because of Israel's apostasy, God no longer protects the people. The ark is captured and held by the Philistines for seven months. When the ark brings plagues on the Philistines, they return it to Beth-shemesh.

The choice of Saul as king (1 Samuel 8–12)

In his old age, Samuel appointed his sons as judges over Israel. Unfortunately, like Eli's sons, Samuel's sons were unfaithful. In response, the elders of Israel asked Samuel to anoint a king. There is a tension between Moses' earlier prediction of a king whom the Lord their God would choose¹⁰³ and God's statement to Samuel that "they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."¹⁰⁴

The key seems to be the motivation for the elders' request: "Make us a king to judge us **like all the nations**."¹⁰⁵ While Moses foresaw the day when a king would be part of God's plan, Israel's motivation was that she wanted to be like the nations. Sadly, Israel's kings would lead the nation down the path of their neighbors; Israel would indeed become like all the nations in her idolatry and injustice.

¹⁰¹ 1 Samuel 1:10-11; Numbers 6:1-21

¹⁰² 1 Samuel 2:12-25

¹⁰³ Deuteronomy 17:15

¹⁰⁴ 1 Samuel 8:7

¹⁰⁵ 1 Samuel 8:5

The early reign of Saul (1 Samuel 13–15)

At first, Saul appeared to be a model king. He showed humility at his selection, and he enjoyed military success against the Philistines. However, three events reveal deep-seated problems in Saul's heart.

- Saul took Samuel's priestly role. When confronted, Saul blamed Samuel.¹⁰⁶
- Saul made a rash oath which nearly resulted in Jonathan's death.¹⁰⁷
- Saul disobeyed God's command to destroy completely the Amalekites. When confronted by Samuel, Saul blamed the people.¹⁰⁸

Each of these scenes shows Saul's failure to be the king that Moses described in Deuteronomy. As a result, Samuel brings God's message of judgment: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king."¹⁰⁹

The Decline of Saul and Rise of David (1 Samuel 16–31)

The first half of 1 Samuel traces the transition from a theocracy to a monarchy; the second half of 1 Samuel traces the transition of the kingship from Saul to David.

Introduction to David (1 Samuel 16–17)

Three stories introduce David. First, the anointing of David emphasizes the importance of the heart of the king. Saul looked like a king to the people; David looked like a king to God.¹¹⁰

The second story introduces the relationship between Saul and David. God rejected Saul as king, and an evil spirit began to torment Saul. Because of his reputation as a skilled musician, David was chosen to play for Saul and to calm his spirit.¹¹¹

The third story tells of David's victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath. Against the backdrop of Saul's increasing pride and self-reliance, this story shows David's humble reliance on God.¹¹²

Conflict between Saul and David (1 Samuel 18–27)

As Saul watched the people praise David following the slaying of Goliath, he became increasingly jealous of this perceived rival. The story of the conflict between the rejected King Saul and God's chosen King David includes four major scenes:

- The growing friendship between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18)

¹⁰⁶ 1 Samuel 13:8-14

¹⁰⁷ 1 Samuel 14:24-46

¹⁰⁸ 1 Samuel 15

¹⁰⁹ 1 Samuel 15:23

¹¹⁰ 1 Samuel 9:1-2; 16:7

¹¹¹ 1 Samuel 16:14-23

¹¹² 1 Samuel 17

- Saul's efforts to kill David (1 Samuel 19–20)
- David's escapes from Saul, and his refusal to harm the Lord's anointed (1 Samuel 21–26)
- David's temporary shelter among the Philistines (1 Samuel 27)

The death of Saul and his sons (1 Samuel 28–31)

The final step in Saul's decline was his visit to the witch of Endor as he prepared for battle with the Philistines. He now participated in the occult practices that he had once sought to destroy.¹¹³ Samuel appeared and gave a message of judgment; the Philistines would defeat Israel, and Saul and his sons would die in the battle. As prophesied, Saul and his sons were killed in the following day's battle, and 2 Samuel begins with David's rise to the throne.

2 Samuel

Theme: The Reign of King David

At the age of thirty, David became king. 2 Samuel covers the years 1011–971, from the death of Saul through the death of David. This book records the success of David's early years as king. It also records the tragic aftermath of David's sin with Bathsheba.

Overview of 2 Samuel

David's Rise to Power (2 Samuel 1–4)

2 Samuel begins with David's response to the death of Saul. Rather than rejoicing at the death of an enemy, David lamented Saul's death and punished the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul. David was first anointed king over Judah; Saul's son, Ishbosheth, was crowned king over Israel. 2 Samuel 3:1 says, "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." After seven years, Ishbosheth was killed by two of his commanders, and David was crowned king over all Israel.

David's Years of Prosperity (2 Samuel 5–10)

The early years of David's reign were successful. Militarily, David secured Israel's border. Politically, he united the nation after civil war. By moving the capital from the southern city of Hebron to the more central city of Jerusalem, he was able to ease political tensions.

Most importantly, David had spiritual success during these years. 2 Samuel 7 is one of the important chapters in Old Testament history. God's covenant with David builds on the covenants with Abraham and Moses. The Davidic covenant includes five promises:

- God will provide a secure dwelling for Israel (2 Samuel 7:10–11).
- God will raise up David's son to build the temple (2 Samuel 7:12–13).

¹¹³ 1 Samuel 28:8–10

- God will establish David's kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:13).
- God will establish a father-son relationship with David's descendants (2 Samuel 7:14).
- God's mercy will not depart from David's line (2 Samuel 7:14-15).

This covenant is important for understanding Israel's history. One of the key questions underlying 1 and 2 Kings will be, "Why is there no longer a Davidic king on the throne?" To Israel, it appeared that God had forgotten his covenant with David. 1 and 2 Kings give God's answer to this question.

The Davidic covenant is also important for New Testament history. The gospels show that the Davidic covenant is fulfilled ultimately in the coming of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁴

David's Sin and Its Aftermath (2 Samuel 11–24)

2 Samuel 11 records a tragic event that marred David's reign. David attempted to conceal his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba by murdering Uriah. The rest of 2 Samuel shows God's judgment on David. In 2 Samuel 7:15, God promised that "my mercy shall not depart"; this blessing is part of the covenant relationship. In 2 Samuel 12:10, God promises that "the sword shall never depart from thine house"; this judgment is also part of the covenant relationship. Covenant with God brings responsibility to God.

A Closer Look at Sin and the Believer

The story of David and Bathsheba is one of the dark spots in Old Testament history. For those who believe in God's call for his children to live free of willful sin, the story is particularly difficult. While we do not believe that it is necessary for a believer to fall into sin, the story of David shows that it is possible for God's children to fall. This story teaches valuable lessons for believers; it shows what a believer should do if he falls into willful sin.

(1) We must confess our sin.

When Samuel confronted Saul with his sin, Saul tried to excuse himself ("Because thou camest not...").¹¹⁵ When Nathan confronted David about his sin, David immediately confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD."¹¹⁶ This shows the difference between David, a man after God's own heart, and Saul, a man who was rejected by God.

Whether it is a big sin such as adultery or a small sin such as gossip, we cannot receive God's forgiveness until we confess our sin. Like Saul, we are sometimes tempted to excuse our sin, or even to deny it by calling it a "mistake" or "weakness." However, when God reveals that we have sinned, we must confess our sin and seek his forgiveness.

¹¹⁴ Matthew 1:1

¹¹⁵ 1 Samuel 13:11

¹¹⁶ 2 Samuel 12:13

(2) We must recognize the seriousness of our sin.

When Samuel confronted Saul about offering the priestly sacrifice, Saul tried to justifying his sin. He said, "I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering."¹¹⁷

When Nathan confronted David, the king realized that the seriousness of his sin was not based merely on the act itself. The seriousness of his sin was because of the One against whom David had sinned. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."¹¹⁸

When we recognize that our sin is an offense against God himself, we understand that there is no small sin. This is why God said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."¹¹⁹ We must recognize the seriousness of our sin; sin deserves death.

(3) We must believe that we will receive God's forgiveness.

David prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." David knew that there was no provision in the sacrificial system for a premeditated sin such as he had committed.¹²⁰ However, he cast himself on God's mercy: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."¹²¹ David repented with faith that a merciful God would forgive his sin.

In the New Testament, John wrote, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."¹²² As Christians, we do not have to fall into sin; but if we do sin, John gives the good news that we have an advocate.

Psalm 32 may have been written soon after Psalm 51. In Psalm 51, David confessed his sin. In Psalm 32, he rejoiced in God's forgiveness. "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."¹²³

(4) We must understand the long-term cost of our sin.

Because David repented, God forgave his sin. However, the rest of David's reign was affected by that night with Bathsheba. David's son Amnon raped Tamar, Amnon's half-sister. David's favored son Absalom led an attempted coup. Sheba, a Benjaminite, led a revolt. As David was on his deathbed, his sons fought over the throne. The sword never

¹¹⁷ 1 Samuel 13:12

¹¹⁸ Psalm 51:2-4

¹¹⁹ Ezekiel 18:20

¹²⁰ Numbers 15:30

¹²¹ Psalm 51:7, 16, 17

¹²² 1 John 2:1

¹²³ Psalm 32:5

departed from David's house. Even the genealogy of Jesus includes a reminder of David's sin: "David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah."¹²⁴ David's story is a reminder of the terrible consequences of sin.

We must never take sin lightly. Paul warned, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."¹²⁵ An awareness of the seriousness of sin and of the cost of sin can help us stand firm in the moment of temptation.

1 and 2 Kings

Theme: The Failure of Israel's Kings

In 2 Samuel 7, God promised a secure dwelling place for Israel, a temple in Jerusalem and that David's descendants would remain on the throne of Israel forever. 1 and 2 Kings are written from the perspective of the exile. When these books were written, Israel was in exile, the temple had been destroyed, and there was no Davidic king on the throne.

Kings answers the question, "Why?" Why are the promises unfulfilled? Has God forgotten his promises? Is Marduk, the god of Babylon, more powerful than Jehovah, the God of Israel? Kings answers these questions by pointing to Israel's failure to remain true to the covenant.

Using the language of deuteronomic theology, Kings shows that Israel is reaping just punishment for her sin. These books are historical, but they are more than history; they explain why Israel's history occurred as it did. This is why the Hebrew Bible classifies these books as the Former Prophets. These books bring a prophetic word from the Lord: "This is why I have brought judgment on my chosen people."

Why?	
Promise of 2 Samuel	Reality of 2 Kings
A dwelling place forever	Exile in Babylon
A temple in Jerusalem	The temple has been destroyed
A throne established forever	No king in Jerusalem

Author and Date

In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Kings are one book. Hebrew tradition identifies Jeremiah as the author. However, nothing in the books of 1 and 2 Kings identifies an author. Most scholars identify the book as anonymous.

¹²⁴ Matthew 1:6

¹²⁵ Galatians 6:7-8

The last event in 2 Kings occurred in 561 B.C. Kings does not mention Cyrus' edict of 539 B.C. allowing Judah to return. It can be assumed that Kings was written sometime between these two dates.

Structure of 1 and 2 Kings

Israel United Under Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)

These chapters cover the years 971-931 B.C. They trace the glories of Solomon's reign: his wisdom, his wealth, and God's blessing on the temple. They also trace Solomon's apostasy in his later years.

The Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17)

These chapters cover the years 931-722 B.C., from Solomon's death until the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria. Due to the foolish actions of Rehoboam, the nation divided into two kingdoms following the death of Solomon. The ten northern tribes followed Jeroboam; only Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam and the Davidic line. The account in Kings alternates between the two kingdoms, tracing the rapid apostasy of the Northern Kingdom and the more gradual decline of Judah.

Northern Kingdom of Israel	Southern Kingdom of Judah
19 kings	19 kings; 1 queen
All the kings were evil	8 good kings bring periods of revival
Capital is Shechem, then Tirzah, then Samaria	Capital is Jerusalem
Worshiped at Bethel and Dan	Worshiped in Jerusalem, the city of David
Destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C.	Taken into exile by Babylon in 586 B.C.
The kingdom is lost	Returns from exile in 536 B.C.

Judah after the Fall of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 18-25)

These chapters cover the years 722-561 B.C., from the destruction of the Northern Kingdom to the release of Jehoiachin from captivity in Babylon. Because of periods of revival during the reigns of a few good kings, Judah survived for more than a century after the fall of the north. However, because of the wicked rule of Manasseh, God pronounced judgment on Judah.¹²⁶ There was one final period of revival during the reign of Josiah, but in 586 B.C. Babylon conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and carried the people into exile.

¹²⁶ 2 Kings 21

2 Kings ends with the history of Judah under Gedaliah, the governor appointed by Babylon. It concludes with the report that the king of Babylon released Jehoiachin from prison. This took place in 561 B.C. and, to the early readers of Kings, was a reminder that God was watching over the descendants of David. God had not forgotten his promise to David.

Important Dates, Kings, and Events¹²⁷

Northern Kingdom of Israel		Southern Kingdom of Judah	
931-910 B.C.	Jeroboam I leads Israel into idolatry	931-913 B.C.	Rehoboam causes the division of Israel
885-874 B.C.	Omri moves the capital to Samaria	911-870 B.C.	Asa is a godly king
874-853 B.C.	Ahab and Jezebel	872-848 B.C.	Jehosaphat, a good king, but makes alliance with Ahab
875-848 B.C.	Ministry of Elijah		
760-750 B.C.	Ministry of Amos	792-740 B.C.	Uzziah is struck by leprosy for violating the laws for priestly functions
753-715 B.C.	Ministry of Hosea		
732-722 B.C.	Hoshea – last king of Northern Kingdom	716-687 B.C.	Hezekiah
		740-681 B.C.	Ministry of Isaiah
722 B.C.	Destruction of Northern Kingdom by Assyria	641-609 B.C.	Josiah – last godly king of Judah
		627-586 B.C.	Ministry of Jeremiah
		609-598 B.C.	Reign of Jehoiakim, who rejects Jeremiah's warnings
		597-586 B.C.	Zedekiah – last king of Judah
		586 B.C.	Destruction of Jerusalem

¹²⁷ Dates are approximate. Based on E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

Important Themes in 1 and 2 Kings

The Kings

The way in which 1 and 2 Kings looks at the rulers of Israel is both similar to and different from ordinary books of history. Like other historical sources, 1 and 2 Kings presents basic biographical information: the age of the king when he came to the throne, family background, length of his rule, place of burial, successor, and the source of information about the king.

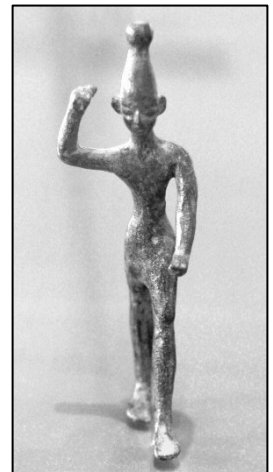
Unlike other historical sources, the primary concern of Kings is an evaluation of the king's faithfulness to God. For each of the kings, the writer says either, "And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father"¹²⁸ or his "heart was perfect with the LORD all his days."¹²⁹

Each king is evaluated on the basis of faithfulness to God, not primarily on his political or military success. For example, in secular history, Omri is one of the best known Israelite kings. The Mesha Stele, now in the Louvre Museum, tells of Omri's military conquests. Long after Omri's death, Assyrian sources referred to Israel as the "land of Omri." Omri was a well-known king, but in 1 Kings, only six verses are devoted to Omri. To the biblical writer, "Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him."¹³⁰ To the biblical author, Omri's sin outweighed any political significance of his rule. Kings is covenantal history; it traces Israel's history in relationship to her faithfulness to covenant.¹³¹

The Prophets

As part of its picture of Israel's decline, 1 and 2 Kings gives careful attention to the role of the prophets. While Omri is almost ignored in Kings, the reign of his son Ahab is traced in detail.

There are two reasons for this. One is that Ahab's wicked rule led to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.¹³² A second reason is Elijah's conflict with Ahab. The conflict between Elijah and Ahab demonstrates God's faithfulness to warn Israel of her sin. The confrontation on Mount



Baal, called the "Lord of Rain and Thunder." Israel traded worship of the almighty Jehovah for this powerless idol. (See Jeremiah 2:11.)

¹²⁸ 1 Kings 15:3

¹²⁹ 1 Kings 15:14

¹³⁰ 1 Kings 16:25

¹³¹ Image: "Baal Ugarit Louvre AO17330" taken by Jastrow in 2006, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baal_Ugarit_Louvre_AO17330.jpg, public domain.

¹³² 1 Kings 16:33

Carmel brought Israel face to face with her apostasy. The drought proclaimed by Elijah brought Israel face to face with the cost of her apostasy.¹³³

The prophets show God's faithfulness to his people. Through Elijah and Elisha in the north, and through Isaiah and his contemporaries in Judah, God repeatedly warned Israel of her sin. Sadly, in spite of God's faithfulness, Israel persisted in her rebellion.

Deuteronomic Theology

The conflict between Elijah and Ahab demonstrates not only God's faithfulness to warn Israel, but Israel's stubborn refusal to repent. From the perspective of the exile, the writer of Kings shows that Judah and Israel suffered God's righteous judgment.

To the questions posed at the beginning of this section, the author of Kings responds, "No, Marduk is not more powerful than Jehovah. No, God has not forgotten his covenant promises. Judah and Israel are suffering the results of unfaithfulness to covenant. The covenant promised blessing to the faithful and punishment to the unfaithful. God is doing just what he promised."¹³⁴

The relationship between Deuteronomy and Kings is seen in several specific instances.

- Deuteronomy commanded Israel to worship at "the place which the LORD your God shall choose." Jeroboam set up new places of worship in Dan and Bethel.¹³⁵
- Deuteronomy showed the kind of king that God intended for Israel. Kings shows how Israel's kings failed to live up to God's standards for a king.¹³⁶
- Deuteronomy provided a test for a true prophet. The ministry of Elijah and Elisha demonstrated the validity of this test.¹³⁷
- Deuteronomy predicted specific curses if Israel broke covenant. These are fulfilled in tragic detail in Kings.¹³⁸

1 & 2 Chronicles

Theme: A Message of Hope

1 and 2 Chronicles were written more than a century after 1 and 2 Kings. Chronicles comes from a difficult moment in Israel's history. Cyrus has allowed the people to return – but more Jews live in Babylon than in Jerusalem. The temple has been rebuilt – but it is smaller

¹³³ 1 Kings 17. In the lesson on Exodus, we saw that the plagues were an attack on the false gods of Egypt. The drought in Elijah's day is a similar attack on Baal. Baal was a Phoenician fertility god introduced to Israel by Jezebel. Baal was called the "Lord of Rain and Thunder." Elijah proclaims that Jehovah, the creator of the world, is the only one with power over nature.

¹³⁴ See 2 Kings 17:7-23

¹³⁵ Deuteronomy 12:5; 1 Kings 12:26-30

¹³⁶ Deuteronomy 17:14-20

¹³⁷ Deuteronomy 18:21-22

¹³⁸ Deuteronomy 28

and less impressive than Solomon's temple. There is no Davidic king on the throne. The Messiah has not appeared. Chronicles is written to a people who need to know that "God has not forgotten us. We are still his people. There is hope."

Ancient tradition credits Ezra as the author of Chronicles. This is partly because the last two verses of 2 Chronicles are repeated as the first two verses of Ezra. Chronicles itself does not identify an author. Because of this, the author is usually called the "Chronicler."

In the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is the last book in the canon. This is appropriate because of Chronicles' likely date as one of the last Old Testament books to be written, between 450 and 400 B.C. It is also appropriate because of Chronicles' purpose. Chronicles is not primarily a historical book, although the history in Chronicles is true. Its primary purpose is to bring a message of hope by looking at Israel's history through a new lens. Chronicles looks to the future fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, promises that will be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Chronicles and Kings

The relationship between Chronicles and Kings is similar to the relationship between the three synoptic gospels; they look at the same material from contrasting points of view. Chronicles surveys the same history as Samuel and Kings. However, it looks at these events from a new perspective. Kings asked, "Why are the promises of the covenant unfulfilled?" Chronicles asks, "Is there hope for the future? Does God have a purpose for his people?"

The Chronicler's purpose is seen in his selection of material. He does not give a complete history of Israel. Instead, he chooses material that shows how God has worked in Israel's history to accomplish his purposes. The author is not trying to deny the dark times in Israel's history; his readers knew those dark times very well. However, the purpose of Chronicles is not to explain God's judgments; the purpose of Chronicles is to give hope to a people who are in despair. By ending with the proclamation of Cyrus, Chronicles concludes with a message of hope; God is still protecting his people.

Samuel/Kings	Chronicles
Why did God judge his people?	Is there a future for God's people?
Includes the story of Saul's reign	Includes only the death of Saul
The history of both kingdoms	The history of Judah
Emphasis on the prophets	Emphasis on the priests and temple
"Did the king walk in David's path?"	"Was the king faithful to temple worship?"
God's righteous judgment	God's everlasting mercy

Overview of Chronicles

Genealogies (1 Chronicles 1-9)

Genealogies? Boring! Yes, these chapters can be boring, but they are important. Why? They remind God's people that he has not forgotten them.

Advice for new Christians:
Don't start your Bible reading
with 1 Chronicles 1-9!

Advice for older Christians:
Don't ignore 1 Chronicles 1-9!

In the 5th century B.C., a genealogy of Israel's tribes seemed meaningless. The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom had been destroyed by Assyria and would never recover their identity. The people of Judah were scattered throughout Egypt, Babylon, and Persia.

In this situation, the genealogies carried an important message: "God has not forgotten us. We are his chosen people. We still know who we are; we can trace our genealogy back to Adam." Although the Northern Kingdom has disappeared, the chronicler wants Judah to remember that God chose "all Israel" and has not forgotten them.¹³⁹

One excerpt will demonstrate how the genealogies fit the chronicler's purpose. In Hebrew, the name Jabez is similar to the word for pain." Jabez was a man with no great heritage, but he "called on the God of Israel.... And God granted him that which he requested."¹⁴⁰ The prayer of Jabez is not a magic formula for getting things from God. The prayer of Jabez is a reminder that God hears those who call on him, even when they have no personal or family advantages. The story of Jabez encouraged the early readers of Chronicles to call on God; even in dark days, he would hear their cry.

The Reign of David (1 Chronicles 10-29)

Saul is included in the genealogies, but the only detailed information about Saul is his death. Saul's reign is of little interest to the chronicler. The chronicler's interest in Saul is summed up, "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD ... therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."¹⁴¹

The focus of the chronicler is on David and his kingly line. Chronicles tells of David and his mighty men. It does not tell of David's sin with Bathsheba. The readers of Chronicles already knew the story of David's sin; this was not important to the purpose for Chronicles.

Interestingly, although the Bathsheba story is not included in Chronicles, David's sin in numbering the people is included. Why? This story is important to the chronicler's emphasis on the temple. In his repentance, David bought Ornan's threshing floor to build an altar for sacrifice. This became the site of the temple.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ The phrase "all Israel" is used 42 times in Chronicles. It recognizes God's continuing purpose even for a nation that has been disbanded. God's redemptive purpose will be accomplished in spite of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.

¹⁴⁰ 1 Chronicles 4:10

¹⁴¹ 1 Chronicles 10:13-14

¹⁴² 1 Chronicles 21:18-28; 2 Chronicles 3:1

The temple is important to Chronicles. Following the story of David's census in 1 Chronicles 21, Chronicles tells of David's plan for building the temple and his organization of the Levites, priests, musicians, gatekeepers, and temple treasurers. The chronicler reminds a discouraged people that the temple is central to their identity; he writes to encourage faithfulness to temple worship.

The Reign of Solomon (2 Chronicles 1–9)

The reign of Solomon is important to the chronicler because of the temple. Chronicles omits Solomon's apostasy, but devotes six chapters to the building, furnishing, and dedication of the temple. Chronicles shows God's response at the dedication of the temple: "The fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house."¹⁴³

Later in this chapter, God promises Solomon that "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."¹⁴⁴

This promise is important for Israel after the exile. It assures them that God has not forsaken his people. The promises of the covenant remain unfulfilled, but if Israel will call on God, he will hear from heaven and will heal their land. This parallels the message of Malachi, writing at about the same time as the chronicler. True repentance for sin and faithfulness to God's commands will bring God's blessing to the returned exiles.

The Kingdom of Judah (2 Chronicles 10–36)

Kings follows both the Northern Kingdom and Judah after the division of Israel; both kingdoms show the effects of God's judgments. The chronicler, however, is interested in a message of hope; only Judah shows God's promise for the future. Following the division of Israel, Chronicles traces only the history of Judah.

Again in this section, the purpose of the chronicler guided his choice of material. In Kings, Hezekiah's spiritual reforms are treated in one verse.¹⁴⁵ In Chronicles, three chapters are devoted to the details of Hezekiah's reforms.¹⁴⁶ Chronicles emphasizes Hezekiah's devotion to the temple and his faithfulness to God.

Another interesting contrast between Chronicles and Kings is seen in the story of Manasseh. Kings shows Manasseh as the worst of Judah's kings, the one whose sin made exile

¹⁴³ 2 Chronicles 7:2-3

¹⁴⁴ 2 Chronicles 7:13-14

¹⁴⁵ 2 Kings 18:4

¹⁴⁶ 2 Chronicles 29-31

inevitable.¹⁴⁷ Chronicles tells us that while he was in captivity, Manasseh repented. Manasseh was released from Babylon and returned to Jerusalem. He did away with the idols in the temple.¹⁴⁸

For the author of Kings, the primary message of Manasseh's rule is that sin brings God's judgment. For the author of Chronicles, the primary message of Manasseh's rule is that repentance brings God's forgiveness. Both messages are vital to understanding the history of Israel. Chronicles is more than a repeat of Kings; it is a companion to Kings, showing another aspect of God's word for his people.

Conclusion

Samuel–Chronicles in the New Testament

The Davidic covenant provides a historical foundation for the ministry of Jesus the Messiah. In the Davidic covenant, God promised that a Davidic king would sit on the throne of Israel. Yet at the end of 2 Kings, there is no king on the throne. This situation continues as Israel is ruled by the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

In the Davidic covenant, God promised to dwell in his temple. Yet at the end of 2 Kings, there is no temple. Even when the temple is rebuilt, it does not have the grandeur and beauty of the first temple.

The gospel writers show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises to David. He is the one who has come to sit on the throne of David. While he was rejected during his earthly ministry, he will return to reign forever. He is the one who reveals God's glory in the temple.

The promise to David was not forgotten. Even though Israel was unfaithful, God remained faithful to his promises. The hope seen in Chronicles is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

Samuel–Chronicles Speak Today

In the twentieth century, a movement called "Christian Reconstructionism" argued that the Old Testament law governing Israel should be the model for a modern political structure. Less dramatically, many Christians have seen the political arena as a vehicle for spiritual revival.

While Christians have a right to be involved in civil government, we do not live in a theocracy. Nor did Christ suggest that we should. Instead, the promises to Israel are fulfilled through the ministry of the church. In the Old Testament, God blessed all nations through Israel's direct influence. Since Pentecost, God is blessing all nations through the spread of the gospel via the church.

¹⁴⁷ 2 Kings 21:11-15.

¹⁴⁸ 2 Chronicles 33:10-20

The Old Testament historical books provide not a model for the establishment of a Christian political structure but a testimony to God's faithfulness in preserving his people and his promise of a coming Messiah.

Lesson 5 Assignments

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Assign each member to study an important king of Judah. Write one page in which you summarize the king's rule. Evaluate the king's faithfulness to God and then show how his rule influenced Judah for good or bad. Choose from the following kings: Rehoboam, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Josiah, or Zedekiah.

Option 2: Individual Assignment.

Choose one:

- Write a 1-2 page (450-800 word) essay in which you compare two of the following kings of Judah. Evaluate the kings' faithfulness to God and then show how their rule influenced Judah for good or bad. Choose from the following kings: Rehoboam, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Josiah, or Zedekiah.
- Write a detailed outline for a sermon on God's faithfulness based on Chronicles. Use examples from Chronicles that demonstrate God's faithfulness to his people.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 5 Test

(1) List the theme for each book.

1 Samuel: _____

2 Samuel: _____

1 & 2 Kings: _____

1 & 2 Chronicles: _____

(2) List three events early in Saul's reign that show his failure to be the king God desired.

(3) List the five promises of the Davidic covenant.

(4) List four principles from David's sin that should guide a believer who falls into sin.

(5) 1 & 2 Kings cover which years?

(6) After the division of Israel, which tribes remained loyal to the Davidic king?

(7) How are kings evaluated in 1 and 2 Kings?

(8) Contrast the content of Chronicles and Kings regarding the kings of Judah.

(9) Why is the reign of Solomon important for Chronicles?

(10) Contrast the content of Chronicles and Kings regarding Manasseh.

(11) Write 1 Kings 9:4-7 and 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 from memory.

Lesson 6

Ezra–Esther

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
- (2) Recognize the chronological relationship between Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
- (3) Know the major events of the Restoration Period.
- (4) Understand leadership principles from the life of Nehemiah.
- (5) Appreciate God's providence in the book of Esther.
- (6) Relate the message of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther to today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Memorize Nehemiah 2:17 and Esther 4:14.

Books of the Restoration

The last three historical books are from the years following Cyrus' decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem.¹⁴⁹ They trace the exiles' return to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, and the difficulties returning exiles faced in reestablishing the city. These books are important in covenantal history for two reasons.

- Ezra and Nehemiah show the challenges God's people face in maintaining their spiritual and national identity. The rebuilding of the temple and the revival in Ezra restore Israel's spiritual identity. The rebuilding of the walls in Nehemiah is an important step in restoring Israel's national identity.
- These books show God's providential care for his people in the years following the exile. Ezra and Nehemiah show God's care for the returnees; Esther shows God's care for those who were still in Persia.

¹⁴⁹ 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4

Timeline of Events in the Restoration Books	
Date	Event
538 B.C.	First return – led by Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-4)
516 B.C.	Temple is completed (Ezra 5-6)
483-473 B.C.	God spares the Jews in Persia (Esther)
458 B.C.	Second return – led by Ezra (Ezra 7-12)
444 B.C.	Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem

Unity of Ezra-Nehemiah

In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book. They were not divided in Christian Bibles until the fourth century. These books share much in common:

- They share the same historical setting.
- Both relate returns to Jerusalem under Artaxerxes I of Persia.
- Both include rosters of the Jewish people.
- Nehemiah 7-12 summarizes the reforms of both Ezra and Nehemiah.

Persian Rulers in the Restoration Period	
Cyrus 559-530 B.C.	Zerubbabel's return (Ezra 1-2)
Cambyses 530-522 B.C.	
Smerdis 522 B.C.	
Darius 522-486 B.C.	Supported construction of the temple (Ezra 3-6)
Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) 486-465 B.C.	Esther
Artaxerxes I 465-423 B.C.	Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7-Nehemiah 12)

Ezra

Theme: Return from Exile

Date: 538–458 B.C.

The book of Ezra traces two returns. It shows the rebuilding of the temple as well as the challenges faced by the returnees.

Ezra: Return from Exile		
Chapters	Leader	Year
Ezra 1-6	Zerubbabel	538 B.C.
Ezra 7-10	Ezra	458 B.C.

Traditionally, Ezra was recognized as the author of Ezra-Nehemiah, as well as the possible author of 1 & 2 Chronicles. The repetition of Cyrus' decree at the end of 2 Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra shows the unity of these books.

Ezra was a Levite, a descendant of Aaron.¹⁵⁰ He ministered to his fellow Jews in captivity and then led a group to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. He was serving as a spiritual leader when Nehemiah returned in 444 B.C. Together, they led a spiritual, ethical, and moral revival. Ezra was particularly important in leading the people back to the Word of God.

Structure of Ezra

Zerubbabel's Return (Ezra 1–6)

The Return (Ezra 1–2)

After capturing Babylon, Cyrus gave permission for the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Historically, this fits the policy of Persian rulers. Persian rulers often allowed defeated nations to remain in their homeland. God worked through a pagan ruler to accomplish his sovereign purpose for his people. This same pattern will be seen in the New Testament when God works through Caesar Augustus to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the birth of Messiah in the city of David.

Policy of Empires Toward Conquered Nations		
Assyria	Destroyed the national identity of conquered people by intermingling captives from different lands.	Destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
Babylon	Carried conquered nations to Babylon, but allowed them to maintain their identity in exile.	Conquered Judah.
Persia	Allowed conquered nations to remain in their homeland.	Allowed Judah to return to Jerusalem.

The book of Ezra begins with the return under Zerubbabel, including a census of the 49,697 returnees. Zerubbabel, a member of the line of David, was placed in a position of leadership by the Persians and was a symbol of hope to the returned exiles.

¹⁵⁰ Ezra 7:1-5

The Work: Rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 3–6)

After arriving in Jerusalem the people began work on the temple (536 B.C.; Ezra 3). They reestablished worship and laid the foundation for the temple. However, the Samaritans living near Jerusalem opposed the rebuilding and were able to stop the work (Ezra 4).¹⁵¹

There is a gap of about 15 years between Ezra 4 and 5. Ezra 4 ends in about 534 B.C. when the opposition of the Samaritans brought work on the temple to a halt. Ezra 5 begins with resumption of work in 520 B.C. at the encouragement of the temple prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. The temple was completed in 516 B.C.; Ezra 6 reports the celebration at the dedication of the temple.

Ezra's Return (Ezra 7-10)

The Return (Ezra 7-8)

Eighty years after Zerubbabel's return, Ezra led 1,758 people back to Jerusalem. "Ezra set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel."¹⁵² He led a spiritual revival among God's people.

The Work: Social Reforms (Ezra 9-10)

The challenge of the first group of returnees was rebuilding the temple. Ezra faced a different challenge: intermarriage between the Jews and neighboring people. This was not an issue of interracial marriage; it was a religious issue. In Judges and in the life of Solomon, we see how marriage with unbelievers quickly led Israel into religious apostasy. For two reasons, this was a particular problem for the restoration community:

- Jerusalem was surrounded by unbelievers. Idolatry was a constant temptation.
- Persia was a syncretistic empire.¹⁵³ The philosophy that made it easy for Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to their homeland was, at the same time, a philosophy that made it easy to accept multiple religious beliefs. The Persians were not committed to any one religious system. Instead, the Persians blended multiple beliefs. In this environment, the Jews could easily surrender their identity as the people of God.

Because of this, Ezra immediately confronted the issue of mixed marriages. His prayer of confession showed the seriousness of this issue and brought the people to a willingness to

¹⁵¹ Ezra does not trace everything in chronological order. Ezra 4:6-23 shifts from the time of Cyrus to the opposition of the Samaritans fifty years later under Ahasuerus. The entire chapter is unified by the theme of Samaritan opposition to the rebuilding. It shows that this opposition was more than a temporary conflict. The structure of Ezra 4 is:

A. Ezra 4:1-5 – opposition to rebuilding the temple under Cyrus (536 B.C.)

B. Ezra 4:6-23 – opposition to rebuilding the walls at a later time (perhaps after Ezra's return in 458 B.C.)

A. Ezra 4:24 – opposition to rebuilding the temple under Cyrus (536 B.C.)

¹⁵² Ezra 7:10, *English Standard Version*.

¹⁵³ Syncretism is the blending of different religious beliefs into one system.

confront the problem. Ezra 10 ends the book with Ezra's plan for dissolving the mixed marriages.

Nehemiah

Theme: Rebuilding the Walls

Date: 445–c.432 B.C.

Like Daniel, Nehemiah was a Jewish exile who rose to a high position in the Persian Empire. The cupbearer was a trusted position. Because of threats to the king, the cupbearer was responsible to guard against poison. In addition, because of his constant access to the king, the cupbearer often had great influence on political decisions.

In 445 B.C., Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and spent much of the next twenty years in Jerusalem. Ezra was a Levite who led in spiritual renewal; Nehemiah was a civic leader who led in the rebuilding of the walls of the city. Both were devoted to God's call and to God's people. Malachi's prophetic ministry may have overlapped Nehemiah's years in Jerusalem; the book of Malachi addresses the same evils addressed in the last part of Nehemiah.

► Read Nehemiah's prayers in Nehemiah 1:4-11; 4:4-5; and 13:29. Discuss the importance of prayer in his ministry and the role of prayer in your ministry. Is prayer important in your ministry as it was in Nehemiah's ministry?

Structure of Nehemiah

Rebuilding the Walls (Nehemiah 1-6)

Ezra records the rebuilding of the temple, a project that was completed in 516 B.C. However, due to the opposition recorded in Ezra 4, the walls were not completed. As a result, the city was under constant threat from enemies.

Nehemiah organized the rebuilding project, inspiring the people to work, confronting opposition, and completing the task in a remarkable fifty-two days. The book of Nehemiah provides a valuable textbook on biblical leadership.

Prayer was an important part of Nehemiah's ministry. Over and over again, the book of Nehemiah records his prayers in times of crisis. When Nehemiah heard the news of Jerusalem's condition, he sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.¹⁵⁴ Before bringing his request to the king, Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven.¹⁵⁵ When Sanballat and his associates opposed the rebuilding of the walls, Nehemiah prayed for God's protection.¹⁵⁶ In times of pressure, Nehemiah repeatedly turned to prayer.

¹⁵⁴ Nehemiah 1:4

¹⁵⁵ Nehemiah 2:4

¹⁵⁶ Nehemiah 4:4-5, 9; 6:9

Rebuilding the People (Nehemiah 7-13)

The second half of Nehemiah focuses on the spiritual reforms led by Ezra and Nehemiah. The list of returned exiles parallels the census in Ezra 2. Like the genealogies in Chronicles, the lists of exiles in Ezra and Nehemiah show God's protection of his people.

The last section of Nehemiah focuses on spiritual reforms. Nehemiah 1-6 shows the rebuilding of a physical wall around God's city; Nehemiah 7-13 shows the rebuilding of a spiritual wall around God's people. The history of Jerusalem demonstrates that a physical wall is no defense if God's people are unfaithful to God's law.

Nehemiah 8-10 reviews Ezra's ministry. As Moses had commanded, the law was read to the people in a covenant renewal ceremony.¹⁵⁷ The people confessed their national guilt and pledged faithfulness to the covenant. Nehemiah 11 and 12 gives another census followed by a report of the dedication of the wall.

At some point, Nehemiah returned to Susa for a time. When he returned to Jerusalem, he found that the people were profaning the Sabbath, an issue addressed by Malachi near the same time. In addition, some of the people had married wives from the surrounding (unbelieving) peoples, the issue addressed by Ezra two decades earlier. Nehemiah 13 reports Nehemiah's handling of these problems.

A Closer Look at Spiritual Leadership

Many books on spiritual leadership have been based on the principles taught in Nehemiah.¹⁵⁸ Leadership lessons from Nehemiah include:

(1) Spiritual leaders must be people of vision.

Nehemiah had the ability to see a goal and to see the steps necessary to accomplish the goal. After riding through Jerusalem at night, he said to the leaders, "Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem."¹⁵⁹ Where others saw only rubble, Nehemiah saw a wall.

A spiritual leader **seeks God's vision**. Nehemiah's emphasis on prayer is important, as it shows that he was finding God's plan. Without constant reliance on God, Nehemiah might have substituted his own vision. A spiritual leader must find God's vision for the organization he is called to lead.

Throughout the book, Nehemiah demonstrates his **ability to communicate his vision to others**. On one of the darkest days of World War II, Winston Churchill walked into the

¹⁵⁷ Deuteronomy 31:10-11

¹⁵⁸ For further study on Nehemiah and leadership, the following books are helpful:

Gene Getz. *Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).

J.I. Packer. *A Passion for Faithfulness: Wisdom from the Book of Nehemiah*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1995).

David McKenna. *Becoming Nehemiah: Leading with Significance*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005).

J. Oswald Sanders. *Spiritual Leadership*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007).

¹⁵⁹ Nehemiah 2:17

Cabinet Room and said, "Gentlemen, I find this rather inspiring." Churchill knew how to communicate a vision to his followers and to inspire them to move forward. Great leaders know how to challenge their followers to persevere in difficult times.

(2) Spiritual leaders must plan carefully.

A visionary leader who fails to plan carefully will rarely bring his vision to reality. Nehemiah was a master at planning. When the king asked his request, Nehemiah gave specific requests: time away from his palace duties, materials for the walls, letters of authority for the journey.¹⁶⁰ Nehemiah did not simply say, "This is God's work, so God will take care of the details."

Nehemiah carefully planned each step of the project, dividing the work between the people. He appointed workers to areas that were most meaningful to them, an important motivational strategy.¹⁶¹ Spiritual leaders seek God's vision, and then they seek God's guidance in planning the project.

(3) Spiritual leaders must be people of courage.

As Israel began to build, opposition arose. Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the project; they later made threats against Nehemiah. They plotted to invite Nehemiah to a meeting where they could harm him. Nehemiah's response is a great example of a leader's ability to focus on the vision in the face of opposition: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"¹⁶² Nehemiah refused to be deterred from the work. Even when his life was in danger, he pursued the vision that God had given him. A spiritual leader must be a person of courage.

(4) Spiritual leaders have a spirit of service, not a spirit of entitlement.

In a day when leaders often use their position for self-advancement, the example of Nehemiah is powerful. Some leaders in Jerusalem used their position for personal profit. Nehemiah says, "But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land."¹⁶³ A spiritual leader uses his position for the good of the people he serves, not for his own advancement.

Robert Morrison, the great missionary to China, wrote: "The great fault in our missions is that no one likes to be second."¹⁶⁴ Spiritual leaders look for opportunities for service, not for self-promotion. They use their position for the good of the people they lead.

¹⁶⁰ Nehemiah 2:4-8

¹⁶¹ For example, the priests worked at the sheep gate, the gate nearest the temple (3:1). Jedaiah made repairs near his house (3:10). Nehemiah gave assignments that were important to the workers; this gave them ownership of their job.

¹⁶² Nehemiah 6:3, *English Standard Version*.

¹⁶³ Nehemiah 5:15-16.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 63

(5) Spiritual leaders know the importance of prayer.

Prayer was central to Nehemiah's leadership. He made no major decisions without prayer. In Joshua, we saw the result when Joshua made a treaty with Gibeon before seeking God's guidance.¹⁶⁵ Nehemiah avoided this error; every decision was made after prayer.

The Gospel of Luke gives a powerful illustration of the importance of prayer for spiritual leaders. "And it came to pass in those days, that he (Jesus) went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles."¹⁶⁶ Before choosing the twelve, Jesus spent the night in prayer. If the Son of God saw the importance of prayer before a major decision, how much more should we pray before leadership decisions!

(6) Spiritual leaders must adapt to the needs of each situation.

A great wartime leader may be a disastrous leader in peace time. The pastor who builds a young church may struggle to lead a more mature church. Organizations require different types of leadership at different stages of their development.

Nehemiah provides a model for leaders facing this challenge. Spiritual leaders must have the discernment to adapt to the needs of each situation. "An effective leader is one who leads according to how the situation dictates. A person who leads one way in one situation would not necessarily lead the same way in the next."¹⁶⁷

As cupbearer, Nehemiah was in a place of influence. There, his influence was based on his ability to listen and to advise the king. The king would respect Nehemiah's suggestions; he would not have accepted Nehemiah's commands.

When rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah must take a different approach. Here, his leadership is based on his ability to organize and inspire. He cannot make quiet suggestions; he must command and encourage the discouraged people of Jerusalem.

Later, Nehemiah served as governor (Nehemiah 7-13). The people had broken the covenant and Nehemiah had to lead based on authority and conviction. We see this in Nehemiah 13; "I commanded"; "I contended with the rulers"; I "set them in their place." This was a different leadership style than that of a cupbearer or a builder. Spiritual leaders must have discernment to know how to lead an organization in each situation.

As a church or ministry leader, you will benefit from a careful study of Nehemiah and his approach to leadership. Nehemiah models true spiritual leadership.

¹⁶⁵ Joshua 9

¹⁶⁶ Luke 6:12-13

¹⁶⁷ Al Long, *Leadership Tripod*, (Indianapolis: Power Publishing, 2005), 33

Esther

Theme: God is in Control

Likely Date: 483-473 B.C.

► The book of Esther shows God's providence protecting his people. Can you point to an example of God's providence in your life or in the life of your church?

The events of the book of Esther take place between Ezra 6 and 7. While God was protecting his people in Jerusalem, he was also protecting his people who were still in Persia. Whether in Jerusalem or in Persia, God is in control.

The author of Esther is unknown. Some have proposed Mordecai as the author, but the book of Esther itself does not identify an author.

The events of Esther probably took place around 483-473 B.C. during the reign of Ahasuerus.¹⁶⁸ It is set in Susa, the capital of Persia.

Like the book of Ruth, the book of Esther is a short story featuring a young woman who models faithfulness in the face of adversity. Ruth is a Moabitess who is faithful to Jehovah while living in Israel; Esther is a Jewess who is faithful to Jehovah while living in Persia. Ruth's faithfulness wins her a place in the lineage of the Messiah; Esther's faithfulness saves God's people from destruction.

Contents of Esther

Some writers have questioned the value of the book of Esther. They see it as a secular book linked to a secular Jewish holiday, Purim.¹⁶⁹ The book of Esther never mentions God, prayer, or the covenant. It is never quoted in the New Testament, nor has it been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, this is a book of great encouragement to believers. Esther presents a powerful message of hope to the people of God. The book of Esther teaches:

The Sovereignty of God

While God's name is not mentioned, he is the unnamed central character of the book of Esther. What some people might call chance or coincidence is actually providence, God's hand at work. Consider some of the coincidences in this story:

- Of all the girls in the kingdom, Esther, a Jewess, happens to be chosen queen.¹⁷⁰
- Mordecai happens to be at the right place at the right time to overhear a plot to kill King Ahasuerus. He reveals the plot to Esther, who tells the king.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Ahasuerus is usually known by his Greek name, Xerxes I. He ruled Persia from 486-465 B.C.

¹⁶⁹ Purim is still celebrated today in the month of March. It comes from the word *pur*, or "lots." Haman chose the day for the destruction of the Jews by casting lots. On Purim, Jews are to celebrate their deliverance from their enemies.

¹⁷⁰ Esther 2:1-18

¹⁷¹ Esther 2:19-23

- Ahasuerus happens to suffer from insomnia the night before Esther plans to reveal Haman's plot to the king.¹⁷²
- Of all the records which could have been read to help Ahasuerus fall asleep, the reader happens to open to the record of Mordecai's service to the king.¹⁷³
- Haman happens to enter the king's room just as Ahasuerus is considering how he can reward Mordecai.¹⁷⁴

Just as a sovereign God brought Ruth to the field of Boaz, a sovereign God protected his people in Persia. Mordecai saw God's hand at work: "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"¹⁷⁵

The Importance of Faithfulness

Throughout the book of Esther, the faithfulness of God's servants is highlighted. The story of Esther contains many parallels to the story of Joseph. Both feature a young person who is faithful in a foreign land. Both characters are raised to positions of influence in the government. Both characters are used by God to preserve his people in a time of danger.

Esther's faithfulness to God is seen throughout the story. Her statement, "If I perish, I perish,"¹⁷⁶ is a commitment to faithfully pursue her responsibility regardless of the outcome.

The book of Esther shows the faithfulness of Mordecai. Like Joseph and Daniel, Mordecai is raised to a position of influence, a position which allows him to achieve God's purposes.¹⁷⁷

The Folly of Wickedness

During modern observances of Purim, plays reenact the story of Esther. Each time the name Haman is heard, the audience jeers and mocks this enemy of God's people. While the festival is secular in nature, and while many who celebrate Purim may have forgotten God's sovereignty in the story, even the manner of celebration reflects part of the message of Esther – the folly or absurdity of wickedness.

Both Ahasuerus and Haman become figures of mockery in the story. Ahasuerus is a powerful ruler over 127 provinces. He holds a festival for 180 days to celebrate his wealth and power, but he cannot control his wife.

¹⁷² Esther 6:1

¹⁷³ Esther 6:1-3

¹⁷⁴ Esther 6:6

¹⁷⁵ Esther 4:14, *English Standard Version*

¹⁷⁶ Esther 4:16

¹⁷⁷ Esther 10:3

Haman finds his wicked plots turned against himself. Haman tries to honor himself, but is appointed to honor Mordecai, his enemy.¹⁷⁸ Haman tries to destroy the Jews, but destroys himself and his family.¹⁷⁹ As Proverbs teaches, God “scorneth the scorers.”¹⁸⁰

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther in the New Testament

2 Kings ended with the Jews in exile, the temple destroyed, no king on the throne, and no sign of a Messiah. The promise to Abraham seemed empty. Ezra and Nehemiah show the rebirth of that promise. Although there is no king, Israel is back in her homeland and the stage is set for the coming of Messiah. Esther is important because, like Joseph at the end of Genesis, her story shows how God preserved the messianic line. While these books have no prominence in the New Testament, they are essential to the birth of Messiah. Through Ezra (a priest), Nehemiah (a cupbearer), and Esther (a queen in a pagan land), God prepared the way for the birth of his Son.

The Historical Books Speak Today

In Lesson 4, we saw that the Hebrew Bible uses the title “Former Prophets” for the historical books. This shows their purpose: bringing God’s message to God’s people. Each of the historical books has a message for us today.

Judges, Samuel, and Kings demonstrate **the principle of sowing and reaping**. As God’s people were faithful to covenant, they experienced God’s blessing; when they broke covenant, they experienced God’s judgment. This principle has sometimes been misapplied in the church. We must be careful when applying the history of the nation of Israel to another situation. Some interpreters have used these books to teach that a Christian who obeys God faithfully is guaranteed financial prosperity and physical health. The book of Job and the psalms of lament demonstrate that godly men may suffer. However, the basic principle remains true; God’s approval and blessing rests on those who are faithful to him.

Joshua, Ruth, Nehemiah, and Esther show the **importance of faithfulness to God**. God is sovereign, but God works through human instruments. Both truths must be acknowledged if we are to remain true to the teaching of God’s Word. Mordecai expressed this truth when he said to Esther, “For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”¹⁸¹ Mordecai recognized God’s sovereignty; God would rescue his people in some way. However, Mordecai also recognized Esther’s responsibility to faithfulness. A quote attributed to Ignatius says that you should “pray as if everything depends on God, and work as if everything depends on you.”

¹⁷⁸ Esther 6:1-11

¹⁷⁹ Esther 7:7-10; 9:10

¹⁸⁰ Proverbs 3:34

¹⁸¹ Esther 4:14

What does this say to us today? Like Joshua, Ruth, Nehemiah, and Esther we should be wholeheartedly committed to God's service, holding nothing in reserve. Then, like those same saints, we should be resigned to his will. Like Esther, we maintain a spirit of surrender to God's purposes: "If I perish, I perish."¹⁸²

Finally, the historical books bring **a message of hope**. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles show that even in the exile God was not finished with his people. Today, we can be encouraged to know that God is still accomplishing his purposes. The historical books remind us of God's sovereignty in accomplishing his divine will. We can face the future with confidence; God is in control.

Lesson 6 Assignments

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Read the book of Nehemiah and make a list of leadership principles. You can begin with the principles shared in this chapter, but there are many more in Nehemiah. As a group, discuss the principles you find. Show how you will apply these principles in your ministry.

Option 2: Individual Assignment.

Choose one:

- Write a 1-2 page (450-800 word) essay on "Revival" based on Ezra and his revival in Jerusalem.
- Write a 1-2 page (450-800 word) essay on "Spiritual Leadership" based on Nehemiah. Find at least 2-3 leadership principles beyond the ones listed in this chapter. Show how you will apply these principles in your ministry.
- Write a 1-2 page (450-800 word) essay on "God's Providence" based on Esther.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

¹⁸² Esther 4:16

Lesson 6 Test

(1) List the dates for the primary events of the restoration period.

- First return led by Zerubbabel: _____
- Completion of the temple: _____
- Events of Esther: _____
- Second return led by Ezra: _____
- Nehemiah returns: _____

(2) List the theme for each book.

- Ezra: _____
- Nehemiah: _____
- Esther: _____

(3) List two similarities between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

(4) The _____ empire allowed conquered nations to remain in their homeland.

(5) _____ and _____ are called the “temple prophets” because they encouraged the rebuilding of the temple.

(6) Why was intermarriage between the Jews and their neighbors a serious issue in Ezra and Nehemiah?

(7) Which minor prophet addresses the same issues as Nehemiah?

(8) List three leadership principles from Nehemiah.

(9) List three major lessons taught in Esther.

(10) The Jewish holiday linked to the book of Esther is _____.

(11) Write Nehemiah 2:17 and Esther 4:14 from memory.

Lesson 7

Job and Psalms

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the primary theme and message of Job.
- (2) Understand God's self-revelation to Job.
- (3) Recognize the nature of biblical poetry.
- (4) Describe the structure of the book of Psalms.
- (5) Evaluate the use of psalms of imprecation for the Christian.
- (6) Relate the message of Job and Psalms to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Job and Psalms 1-29, 51-92, and 119-150.

Memorize Psalm 119:1-8.

Reading Hebrew Poetry

The Old Testament poetic books include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Many other books of the Old Testament include some poetry, but these books are predominantly poetic.

Unlike English poetry, Hebrew poetry is not based on rhyme. Understanding the characteristics of Hebrew poetry may help you better appreciate the beauty of the poetic books.

Parallelism

Parallelism is the most important element in Hebrew poetry. In parallelism, two lines use different words to express the same idea. A Hebrew poet says something and then repeats it from a slightly different perspective. Three types of parallelism are:

Synonymous parallelism: the second line reinforces the first line with similar words.

- "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths."¹⁸³
- "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death."¹⁸⁴

Antithetic parallelism: the first line is contrasted in the second line. This form is used in Proverbs to contrast the path of the wise and the path of the fool.

¹⁸³ Psalm 25:4

¹⁸⁴ Proverbs 12:28

- "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."¹⁸⁵
- "The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot."¹⁸⁶

Synthetic parallelism: the second line adds to the thought of the first line.

- "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."¹⁸⁷
- "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."¹⁸⁸

Figures of Speech

While all biblical books contain figures of speech, this imagery is particularly important in the poetic books. Figures of speech found in these books include:

- A **metaphor** compares two things that are similar. "The Lord is my shepherd"¹⁸⁹ is much more memorable and expressive than "God takes good care of me."
- **Hyperbole** uses deliberate exaggeration to emphasize a point. In a psalm of lament, David describes his grief, "Every night I flood my bed with tears."¹⁹⁰
- **Personification** gives human characteristics to something that is not human. "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs."¹⁹¹
- **Anthropomorphism** uses human characteristics to communicate a truth about God's nature. God's "eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man."¹⁹²

Acrostic Poetry

In acrostic poetry, each stanza begins with a succeeding letter of the alphabet. This form expresses completeness ("From A to Z...") Two of the most famous Hebrew acrostics are Psalm 119, on God's law, and Proverbs 31, on virtuous woman. In Psalm 119, each stanza includes 8 verses that begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Proverbs 31, each verse begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Background to Job

► Discuss your theology of suffering. Discuss theological questions, such as, "Why does God allow the innocent to suffer?" as well as pastoral questions, such as, "How can we help an innocent person to deal with their suffering?"

¹⁸⁵ Proverbs 10:1

¹⁸⁶ Proverbs 10:7

¹⁸⁷ Psalm 23:1

¹⁸⁸ Proverbs 4:23

¹⁸⁹ Psalm 23:1

¹⁹⁰ Psalm 6:6, *English Standard Version*

¹⁹¹ Psalm 114:4

¹⁹² Psalm 11:4, *English Standard Version*

Date and Author of Job

The book of Job does not give a date, but the events probably took place in the age of the patriarchs. The father offers sacrifices for his family; wealth is measured in livestock; and Job has a long lifespan. These facts suggest a patriarchal date for the events in Job.

As with the date, there is no indication of the author. Suggested authors include Job, Elihu, Moses, Solomon, and someone from the time of Isaiah.

Theme of Job

On the surface, the theme of Job appears to be suffering. The major event in the book is Job's loss of his possessions, family, and health. The dialogue revolves around the question of Job's suffering. In addition, there are other ancient Near East works similar to Job that examine the question of suffering.¹⁹³

However, Job itself does not suggest suffering as its theme. Job himself does not ask about the cause of his suffering, and God never addresses Job's suffering in his answer. If the book were primarily about suffering, we would expect God to provide an answer to the meaning of suffering. Instead, God never mentions Job's suffering.

Part of the message of Job is integrity in the midst of suffering. Job testifies to his integrity.¹⁹⁴ God witnesses to Job's integrity in his statement to Satan.¹⁹⁵ Job's integrity is an important aspect of the book.

The primary theme of Job is "A Search for God." Job does not ask for restoration of his property or even healing; his request is, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!"¹⁹⁶ Job had known God intimately; now he feels separated from God. His search is not for an explanation of suffering, but for a revelation of God.

This theme is confirmed by Job's response after God's revelation: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee."¹⁹⁷ When he sees God, Job is satisfied. The answer to Job is not an explanation of suffering; the answer to Job is God himself.

¹⁹³ Two Ancient Near East dialogues on suffering come from 1300-1000 B.C. "I will praise the Lord of wisdom" is a Mesopotamian monologue in which a noble Babylonian suffers great adversity and is then restored by the god Marduk. The *Babylonian Theodicy* is a dialogue between a sufferer and a friend who tries to explain suffering.

¹⁹⁴ Job 27:5 and 31:6

¹⁹⁵ Job 2:3

¹⁹⁶ Job 23:3

¹⁹⁷ Job 42:5

Overview of Job

The book of Job is divided into three large sections:

1. Prologue (Job 1–2)
2. Poetic Dialogue (Job 3:1–42:6)
3. Epilogue (Job 42:7–17)

The Prologue (Job 1–2)

In the prologue, we learn that Job is an innocent man; he is perfect and upright. Job's suffering is not caused by any sin on his part. He is a man of integrity to whom God can point as a model of faith. In spite of the loss of his possessions and family, his physical sufferings, and even the despairing counsel of his wife, Job did not sin with his lips.

In the prologue, we learn the limits of Satan's power. In his attacks on Job, Satan cannot go further than God allows. Contrary to much popular belief, Satan and God are not opposing equals; Satan cannot go beyond limits established by God.

In the prologue, we learn that there is a relationship between the physical world we see and the spiritual world we do not see. Though Job is unaware of the conversation between God and Satan, that spiritual conflict lies behind Job's trials.

Dialogue between Job and his three friends (Job 3–27)

At the end of the prologue, we are introduced to three friends who come to comfort Job. They sit silently for a week, mourning with Job. At the end of the week, Job breaks the silence with a complaint in which he curses the day of his birth and asks for relief through death. In response, the friends attempt to explain God's way of acting in the world.¹⁹⁸

The dialogue between Job and his friends is in poetic form. Because of that style, it can be difficult to read. There is much repetition and extended dialogue. However, at its root the dialogue is simple: the friends insist that Job's suffering is caused by sin in his life; Job insists that he is innocent of any wrong.

While each of the friends make the case in a different manner, their basic argument is:

- Suffering comes as punishment or correction for sin.
- God is a just God.
- Therefore, Job must be guilty of some sin for which God is punishing him.

Each friend argues in a different way. Eliphaz is the most careful speaker. He encourages Job to accept God's correction. Eliphaz is sure that God will restore a repentant Job. Bildad points to the traditional orthodoxy that a just God must punish sin; therefore, Job must be guilty of some sin. Zophar is the least sympathetic of the friends, saying that Job speaks

¹⁹⁸ *Theodicy* is an attempt to justify God's ways in the world. The book of Job is the largest theodicy in the Bible. Habakkuk also addresses this issue in the dialogue between the prophet and God.

“babble.”¹⁹⁹ Indeed, he insists, God has been merciful to Job; Job deserves even greater punishment than he has received.

In response to each of the friends, Job insists on his innocence. Job believes that God is persecuting him unfairly; but he also believes that, if he could defend himself before God, God would listen and would vindicate Job.

This conversation extends through three cycles of dialogue between Job and his friends. The friends become increasingly angry with Job’s refusal to admit wrong; Job continues to insist on his own innocence.

Job’s Speeches (Job 28–31)

At chapter 28, the style of the book changes. Job 28–31 consists of four speeches by Job.

- 1. Job 28 is a poem on wisdom.** Job praises the value of wisdom, shows that man’s attempts to find wisdom are futile, and asserts that God is the only one who has the way to true wisdom. This is an important step in Job’s search for God’s answer.
- 2. Job 29 is Job’s portrait of his past life,** his life before the events of the prologue. He was blessed in every way and respected in his community.
- 3. Job 30 is Job’s portrait of his present suffering.** Those who respected him in the past now mock him.
- 4. Job 31 is Job’s testimony to his integrity.** In response to the accusations of his friends, Job insists that he is innocent of any wrong. He ends his declaration with his signature avowing his innocence: “Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)”²⁰⁰ When reading Job 31, we should remember that God himself has testified to Job’s innocence in Job 1:8. Job is not speaking foolishly; he has truly lived a careful and godly life.

Elihu’s Speeches (Job 32–37)

Elihu is a young man who listens to each of the earlier speeches. He is angry with Job because Job tries to justify himself. He is angry with the friends because they have not convinced Job of his guilt.

Elihu argues that God speaks through suffering and pain; Job should humbly accept God’s correction. Elihu insists that God is just and that Job is wrong to question God. In his final speech, Elihu argues that God is so far above humankind that he is unaffected by events on earth. Our role should be humble submission.

While some aspects of Elihu’s speeches parallel God’s answer (particularly his picture of God’s sovereignty over nature), Elihu says nothing new. Job already knows that God is

¹⁹⁹ Job 11:3

²⁰⁰ Job 31:35, *English Standard Version*

sovereign; Job already knows that God speaks through suffering; Job's speech on wisdom has already stated that God is the only source of true wisdom. Even if Elihu points to some aspects of the truth, he, like the other friends, fails to recognize Job's central struggle: Job believes that he is being punished for sin of which he is not guilty.

God Speaks (Job 38–42)

If we read Job primarily as a study of suffering, God's answer makes little sense. He never mentions Job's suffering. He never answers Job's questions. Instead, God asks a series of questions that reveal himself to Job. The questions remind Job of his limited knowledge. God's questions then point Job to God's power and wisdom to manage the universe. They show that Job can trust God even when he doesn't understand God's ways. In response, Job states his satisfaction, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."²⁰¹ Job repents of his accusations against God and is comforted by his deeper, experiential knowledge of God.

The Epilogue (Job 42:7–17)

In the epilogue, God reprimands Job's friends for their false arguments and restores Job's fortunes. Satan is not mentioned in the epilogue; his case has been disproved. There is, indeed, a person who serves God out of love alone.

Job in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Job stands as an example of perseverance.²⁰² The questions raised in Job continue to perplex the people of the New Testament. The disciples ask if a man born blind was being punished for sin;²⁰³ Paul struggles with a thorn in the flesh that God will not remove;²⁰⁴ heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 die without receiving the promise.

Suffering is a continuing issue for believers. However, Romans 8:28–29 assures us that God is working his good through all that comes into the lives of his children. His ultimate purpose is to conform us to the image of his Son. This is being achieved in all who love God and who are called according to his purpose.

Job Speaks Today

Readers of Job often focus on the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Job does not answer this question. A more important question is, "Why do the righteous serve God?" For Satan, the answer was, "Job serves you because of the blessings he receives. Take the blessings and he will deny you." For the friends, the motivation for serving God is to avoid trouble. They assume that faithful obedience to God will prevent suffering.

²⁰¹ Job 42:5

²⁰² James 5:11

²⁰³ John 9:2

²⁰⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:7–9

For Job, the answer is much different. He serves God out of love alone. Though he does not understand what has happened, Job refuses to abandon his faith. In this Job provides a model for a true love for God. Daniel's friends testified, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.... **But if not**, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods."²⁰⁵ Even if God does not deliver us, we will not deny him.

Hebrews 11 tells of heroes of the faith who saw God's power on their behalf: Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and Rahab. It also tells of others who were not rescued from trial. "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." These people were also men of faith, but they did not receive the promise.²⁰⁶

These Scriptures press us to consider, "Why do I serve God?" Do I serve him because of the blessings? Do I serve him to avoid suffering? Or, do I serve him out of love alone? Job, Daniel's friends, and the others of Hebrews 11 show those who served God out of love alone. Today, as in their day, God is looking for people who serve him out of an unselfish love, people who love God with all their heart.

Background to the Book of Psalms

The word *psalm* comes from a Greek word meaning "song." The Hebrew title of this book means "praises," a title which shows the purpose for the book. Even the psalms of lament end with praise. The book of Psalms provides words with which God's people can express their praise to God.

Titles in Psalms

Over 100 psalms have a title giving information about the psalm. These titles include details about the author, the historical setting, and musical instructions. Although we do not know if the titles were included in the original manuscripts, they are found on very early copies.

Many of the psalms include the **name of an author**. Seventy-three are titled "A Psalm of David." Psalms 50 and 73–83 are attributed to Asaph, the chief musician for public worship under David. It appears that the sons of Korah, referenced in the title of ten psalms, were members of a guild of temple singers. Solomon is credited with two psalms. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses.

Other titles give information about the **historical setting** of the psalm. Psalm 3 was written as David fled from his son Absalom. When many were supporting Absalom's revolt, David remembered: "Thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head."²⁰⁷ David wrote Psalms 52, 54, 56, 57, and 59 during the years when he fled from

²⁰⁵ Daniel 3:17-18

²⁰⁶ Hebrews 11:36-38

²⁰⁷ Psalm 3:3

Saul.²⁰⁸ Most famously, David wrote the great prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 after Nathan confronted him about his adultery with Bathsheba.

For modern readers, the most obscure titles are those that give **musical and liturgical instructions**. Titles such as “upon Sheminith,”²⁰⁹ “upon Alamoth,”²¹⁰ and “upon Muthlabben”²¹¹ were musical instructions. Some titles specify the instruments to be used. Other titles refer to the tune to which the psalm was sung: “Upon Gittith,”²¹² “Altaschith,”²¹³ and “to The Doe of the Dawn.”²¹⁴

The Structure of the Book of Psalms

In many ways, the book of Psalms is similar to a modern hymnal. It was a collection of songs and prayers used both for corporate worship at the temple and for the personal worship of individual Israelites.

The book of Psalms is divided into five sections. Each section ends with a doxology.

Book 1 (Psalms 1–41) ends, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.”

Book 2 (42–72) ends, “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.... Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.”

Book 3 (73–89) ends, “Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen.”

Book 4 (90–106) ends, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.”

Book 5 (107–150) ends with Psalm 150, a doxology that concludes the Psalter with praise.

It appears that each of these five collections was gathered at a different time in Israel’s history. Some (such as book 1 and 2) are composed primarily of psalms by David and were very early collections. Book 5 refers to the exile and was probably collected much later.²¹⁵ Together these collections allow us to join ancient Israel in praising God, crying out to him in times of trouble, and worshiping him as our creator and redeemer.

²⁰⁸ The historical setting for these psalms is found in 1 Samuel 19–23.

²⁰⁹ Psalms 6 and 12

²¹⁰ Psalm 46

²¹¹ Psalm 9

²¹² Psalms 8, 81, 84

²¹³ Psalms 57–59, 75

²¹⁴ Psalm 22, *English Standard Version*

²¹⁵ See Psalm 137

Types of Psalms

The book of Psalms contains several different types (or genres) of song. While the overall theme of Psalms is praise, not all psalms are songs of praise. There is a great variety of psalm styles. The Psalter includes psalms:

- For corporate praise (Psalm 136)
- For private lament (Psalm 56)
- For instruction (Psalm 1 and 119)
- To honor the king (Psalm 72)
- To celebrate a royal wedding (Psalm 45)
- For pilgrimages to Jerusalem (Psalm 120-134)

"It is easy to understand why the book of Psalms is the favorite book of all the saints. For every man on every occasion can find Psalms which fit his needs, which he feels to be as appropriate as if they had been set there just for his sake."

- Martin Luther,
Preface to the Psalms

In this overview of the Psalter, we will examine some of the major categories of psalms.

Hymns of Praise

Some of the hymns are for individual praise; some are for corporate praise. Two examples show how the psalmists praise God.

Example 1

Psalm 19 is an individual hymn of praise. The hymn moves in three stanzas.

Stanza 1 (1-6): God Revealed in Creation

Creation testifies to the power and majesty of the Creator. The heavens themselves testify to the glory of God. In these verses, David uses the name "God" (*Elohim* in Hebrew) that speaks of God's greatness and majesty.

Stanza 2 (7-10): The Lord Revealed in His Law

A more personal revelation of God is seen in his Word. Through the law, the testimony, the statutes, the commandment, the fear, and the judgments of the Lord, we see his revelation of himself. In this section, David uses the name "the Lord" (*Yahweh* in Hebrew). *Yahweh* is the personal, covenant name by which God revealed himself to Israel in Exodus 3:14. God's law is not a burden to the believer; it is sweeter than honey and more desirable than gold.

Stanza 3 (11-14): The Worshiper's Response to the Redeemer

In response to God's revelation, David prays for cleansing and deliverance from sin. He prays that his words and his thoughts will be acceptable to "my strength, and my redeemer."

Example 2

Psalm 136 is a corporate hymn of praise. It was sung as a responsive hymn. The leader sang the first half of each verse; the people responded, "for his mercy endureth forever."

Through creation (1-9) and his goodness to Israel (10-26), God's everlasting mercy is revealed.

Psalms of Thanksgiving

Psalms of thanksgiving relate to specific instances of God's deliverance. In psalms of thanksgiving, the psalmist describes a past crisis and then thanks God for his deliverance from the crisis. For an example of a psalm of thanksgiving, read Psalm 18 in which David rejoices in God's protection when Saul was pursuing David.

Psalms of Lament

About fifty psalms are psalms of lament. Laments usually contain four elements, though they are not always in the same order:

- **Description of the complaint.** Many laments mention an enemy; others describe a problem faced by the psalmist. Psalm 13:1-3 complains because God seems to have hidden his face while David's enemies are exalted.
- **Petition to God.** Here the psalmist cries for deliverance. Often there is a specific request. In Psalm 13:3, David asks God to listen and to "lighten mine eyes."
- **Statement of confidence in God.** In Psalm 13:5, after calling for God's help, David says, "I have trusted in thy mercy." With this phrase, the psalm reverses from a hopeless situation to a statement of faith.
- **Praise to God.** Most laments end with praise to God. Psalm 13:6 says, "I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." The concluding praise is an essential element of biblical lament, and provides a model for our cries to God.

When voicing our complaints and needs, we must not resist God's purposes. The statement of confidence in God and the concluding praise to God ensures that we remain submitted to God's sovereignty. In Psalm 13, nothing in David's life changes between verses 4 and 5. His outward circumstances remain the same as in verses 1-2. The change is inward; David is determined to trust in God's mercy and to sing unto the Lord. This model should guide our prayers: **complete honesty** in expressing our need coupled with **complete submission** to God's ultimate purposes in our life.

The psalms of lament assume that there is a right and wrong in the world, that God can be trusted to vindicate the right, and that the psalmist is on the side of right. Because of this, the psalmist has confidence that God will intervene on his behalf.

Penitential psalms are related to the psalms of lament. However, in these psalms, the psalmist seeks God's forgiveness for sin. The most famous penitential psalm is Psalm 51 in which David prays for God's mercy after his sin with Bathsheba. Other penitential psalms include Psalms 6, 32, 38, and 130.

A Closer Look at Psalms of Imprecation

A Prayer of Imprecation in Contrast to Jesus' Command	
"O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." (Psalm 137:8-9)	"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matthew 5:44).

The Problem

The book of Psalms includes at least thirty-five prayers of imprecation, psalms that ask God to pour judgment on the enemies of the psalmist. Christians have struggled with these prayers. How do these prayers fit Jesus' command to love your enemies?

Some commentators have said that this shows the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament. However, even the Old Testament teaches that we are to love our enemies.²¹⁶ Further, the New Testament also contains examples of imprecation on wrong-doers.²¹⁷ How do we read the psalms of imprecation as Christians?

Principles for Reading the Psalms of Imprecation

- 1. They are based on the principle of sowing and reaping.** Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Galatians teach that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."²¹⁸ This principle is illustrated in the historical books and preached in the prophetic books. Psalms of imprecation ask God to show his justice. The returning exiles ask God to pay Babylon the wages that the Babylonians justly deserve.²¹⁹
- 2. The enemies of Israel are ultimately enemies of God.** As the king, David is God's anointed representative. His enemies are opposed to God's purposes for Israel. Prayers of imprecation seek vindication of God's righteousness.
- 3. The psalmists do not take matters into their own hands.** David prayed God's vengeance on his enemies, but he refused to take personal vengeance on Saul. David left his enemies in God's hands.

²¹⁶ Exodus 23:4-5, for example

²¹⁷ 2 Timothy 4:14, for example

²¹⁸ Galatians 6:7

²¹⁹ Psalm 137:8

Can We Pray the Psalms of Imprecation Today?

Even when we recognize that the psalms of imprecation are consistent with biblical justice, we must still ask how we can use these psalms in worship today. There are two opposing reactions to the psalms of imprecation:

1. Some Christians believe that Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount forbid prayers of imprecation by a New Testament believer.
2. Some Christians make frequent use of prayers of imprecation as an element of spiritual warfare.

Both views show some aspect of the truth. These psalms reflect biblical truth, but Jesus taught us to love our enemies. Anyone seeking to pray psalms of imprecation should ask three questions to determine the motivation for the imprecation.

- 1. Am I motivated by God's righteousness or by my anger?** The psalmists were concerned for God and his kingdom. Paul wrote, "Be ye angry, and sin not."²²⁰ Righteous anger reacts to sin against God; self-centered anger reacts to personal slights. The things that should inspire my anger are sins against God's kingdom, not slights against my own "kingdom."
- 2. Am I seeking divine justice or personal revenge?** Biblical prayers of imprecation sought to promote righteousness,²²¹ to show God's sovereignty,²²² and to cause the wicked to seek God.²²³ Modern imprecations are sometimes inspired by a desire for revenge.
- 3. Which will give me more joy: repentance by my enemy or judgment on my enemy?** Jonah sought judgment without providing room for repentance and God's mercy. Biblical imprecation leaves the enemy to God's sovereignty. Because of that, we can rejoice if our enemy repents and receives God's forgiveness.

While these guidelines leave room for biblical prayers of imprecation, they greatly limit the use of these prayers in our own lives. When we are wronged, the Bible (in the psalms of imprecation, in Jesus' teaching, and in the personal model of men like David) teaches us to turn the situation to God, who is working all things together for good for his children.²²⁴

²²⁰ Ephesians 4:26

²²¹ Psalm 7:6-11

²²² Psalm 59:13

²²³ Psalm 83:16-18

²²⁴ Romans 8:28

Types of Psalms (continued)

Wisdom Psalms

Wisdom Psalms are similar to Proverbs in giving practical advice for daily life. They teach the reader how to live in a manner that pleases God. Like Proverbs, the book of Psalms teaches, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."²²⁵

Wisdom psalms often contrast two paths, the path of the wicked and the path of the righteous. Psalm 1 is an example of a wisdom psalm.

Like Ecclesiastes and Job, the writers of wisdom psalms struggle with the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. In Psalm 73, Asaph nearly lost faith because of the prosperity of the wicked. The answer for Asaph, as for Job, was to see God. As Asaph stood in the sanctuary, he realized that the end of the wicked is destruction and desolation. He ends the psalm with a statement of faith: "But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works."²²⁶

Royal Psalms

Royal psalms show Israel's king as God's anointed ruler. The ruler of Israel was not like the kings of the surrounding nations; he was God's servant representing God's rule.²²⁷

Psalm 2 may have been a coronation psalm for a new king. The kings of the earth set themselves against God and against his anointed, but God has set his king upon his holy hill of Zion. God will establish the king; he will treat the king as his son; and he will give him victory over Israel's enemies. God is the one who empowers Israel's godly kings.

Messianic Psalms

In many instances, royal psalms describe a universal rule that was never fulfilled in Israel's history. None of Israel's kings possessed the uttermost parts of the earth.²²⁸

Messianic psalms prophesy the coming of a King who will perfectly accomplish the rule that was partially fulfilled in Israel's earthly kings. Israel's king was the anointed one who ruled over Israel; Jesus came as the Anointed One (Messiah) who completely fulfilled the purpose for Israel's king.

Psalm 22 is an example of a psalm that is fulfilled in the life of Jesus. While David originally wrote this psalm out of his personal despair, Jesus fulfilled these prophetic words in his agony on the cross.²²⁹

²²⁵ Psalm 111:10

²²⁶ Psalm 73:28

²²⁷ Deuteronomy 17:14-20

²²⁸ Psalm 2:8

²²⁹ Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46

The Psalms Speak Today

The psalms provide a model for Christian worship today. In answer to many of the issues regarding worship that divide Christians, the psalms provide a balance.

The psalms show that our worship should include both praise to God (psalms of praise) and instruction of God's people (wisdom psalms). Our worship should include both individual worship and corporate worship. Our worship includes both thanksgiving for what God has done for us personally and praise for who God is to all people.

The psalms show a balance of lament and praise. They show that in our worship we can freely bring our complaints and problems to God. They also show that we must surrender those complaints to God's sovereign purposes. The psalms of lament end in praise. God calls his people to complete honesty and to complete surrender to his purposes.

Lesson 7 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Assign each member of your group to one of the characters in Job (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu). Read the speeches of your assigned character and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of that character's argument.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

As you read the assigned Psalms, make a list of attributes of God that are seen in the Psalms. For each attribute, list 8-10 verses that show the attribute.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 7 Test

- (1) Define the three types of Hebrew parallelism.
- (2) Explain acrostic poetry.
- (3) What is the primary theme of the book of Job?
- (4) What are the three main points in the argument of Job's friends?
- (5) What are the topics of Job's speeches in Job 28-31?
- (6) What are three types of information found in the titles of individual psalms?
- (7) What are the four elements contained in most psalms of lament?
- (8) List three principles for understanding the psalms of imprecation.
- (9) What is the relationship between royal and messianic psalms?
- (10) Write Psalm 119:1-8 from memory.

Lesson 8

Proverbs–Song of Songs

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the primary message of each Solomonite book.
- (2) Recognize the nature of wisdom and folly in the Bible.
- (3) Understand the imagery of two paths in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.
- (4) Appreciate the literary style of the Solomonite books.
- (5) Relate the message of the Solomonite books to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

Memorize Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.

Reading Hebrew Wisdom

Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and parts of Psalms are known both as Poetic Books and as Wisdom Literature. Wisdom literature teaches the reader how to achieve true biblical wisdom. Proverbs teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; Psalms teaches that we gain a heart of wisdom by numbering our days—by the right use of our time.²³⁰ Gaining wisdom is an important pursuit for every person. True wisdom is gained through instruction, observation, and experience.²³¹

The 16th century theologian John Calvin wrote that true wisdom consists of two things: knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves. The wisdom books reflect both aspects of wisdom. Job gains new knowledge of God. Proverbs teaches a young man to know himself and to fear God. Ecclesiastes concludes with the message, "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."²³²

"True wisdom consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves."
- Adapted from John Calvin,
Institutes of the Christian Religion

These books show that wisdom is both vertical ("the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom") and horizontal (Proverbs deals with marriage, children, and relationships with the community). By studying these books, we gain a deeper knowledge of God and of ourselves.

²³⁰ Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 90:12

²³¹ Proverbs 22:17-21; 6:6-8; and 12:1

²³² Ecclesiastes 12:13

Interpreting a Proverb

A proverb communicates differently than a command. Where the law says, "Thou shalt not...", a proverb communicates a general principle of life. A proverb is a short, memorable statement of truth. Understanding the nature of a proverb helps in interpreting the book of Proverbs. Characteristics of a proverb include:

- 1. A proverb states a general principle that applies in many different situations.**
- 2. A proverb is based on life experience.** A proverb often summarizes time-tested truth gained from life experience.
- 3. A proverb is not a promise;** it is a general observation about life. While some readers have taken verses such as Proverbs 22:6 as absolute promises, the rest of Proverbs show that a child raised in the right way may choose the path of a fool.
- 4. A proverb is not a command.** The book of Proverbs is not a set of rules to obey; it is a collection of principles that guide a person to true wisdom.

When the rabbis were discussing the canon, they debated the apparent contradiction in Proverbs 26:4-5. "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." Verse 4 tells the reader not to answer a fool according to his folly; verse 5 says to answer the fool.

The rabbis recognized that a wise person must know the nature of the fool. A **simple fool** can be taught and should be answered in a way that keeps him from becoming wise in his own conceit. However, a **mocking fool** should be avoided because he refuses to learn; a person who attempts to answer this fool will be dragged down to the fool's level. The rabbis realized that neither of these verses are absolute commands; instead, they provide a principle that will guide a wise person in dealing with those who are not wise.

A key verse of the book is Proverbs 25:11: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." The right word spoken in the right circumstances is as beautiful as a golden ornament in a silver setting. Wisdom consists in knowing the right word for the situation.

► Discuss a problem that challenges you in ministry then find truths from Proverbs that speak to the problem. Discuss the principles that apply to your situation.

The Message of Proverbs

The book of Proverbs includes five main collections. Each collection focuses on a different aspect of wisdom.

Collection 1: Discourses on Wisdom (Proverbs 1–9)

After an introduction summarizing the purpose of Proverbs,²³³ the first collection shows the difference between wisdom and folly. Much of this collection is in the form of discourse proverbs, long paragraphs on the nature of wisdom.

Proverbs 1:7 contrasts two paths: wisdom and folly. The rest of the collection advises a young man to pursue the path of wisdom and avoid the path of folly. Collection 1 introduces these two paths to the reader.

Collection 2: The Proverbs of Solomon (Proverbs 10:1–22:16)

Proverbs 10:1 introduces this collection with the title, “The proverbs of Solomon.” This collection consists primarily of two-line proverbs advising the reader in practical aspects of wisdom.²³⁴ A majority of these proverbs are antithetic parallels; they contrast the path of the wise with the path of the fool.

Topics addressed in this collection include many practical aspects of life: money, speech, discipline, and work. The apparently random structure of this section reflects the manner in which we face real-life problems. Wisdom equips a person to face situations as they arise.

Collection 3: Words of the Wise (Proverbs 22:17–24:34)

This collection begins with an introductory statement: “Have I not written for you thirty sayings of counsel and knowledge, to make you know what is right and true?”²³⁵ This statement shows the relationship between this collection and an Egyptian wisdom collection called the *Instruction of Amenemope*. This relationship shows an important principle of Proverbs: wisdom can be gained from many sources. When a Jewish person found wisdom in Egyptian sources, they read it through the lens of godly truth and applied it to daily life. They understood that “All truth is God’s truth.”

Egyptian wisdom contained some elements that are similar to the wisdom of Proverbs. However, biblical wisdom differed in one crucial aspect from all worldly wisdom; biblical wisdom is based on the fear of God. One comparison will demonstrate this difference.

Do not remove the boundary stone on the boundaries of the cultivated land nor throw down the boundary of the widow lest a dread thing carry you off (*Instruction of Amenemope*).²³⁶

Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee (Proverbs 23:10).

²³³ Proverbs 1:1-7

²³⁴ A two-line proverb is called a *distich*.

²³⁵ Proverbs 22:20-21, *English Standard Version*

²³⁶ Quoted in Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, (Ada: Baker Academic, 2015), 319.

Both texts warn against stealing property. The difference is in the motivation for obedience. In Proverbs, this principle is based not on some vague “dread thing” but on the nature of God. The redeemer of the poor is mighty; he will plead the cause of the weak. This parallels the teaching of Leviticus 19. God’s people are to live in a way that reflects God’s nature: “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.”²³⁷

Collection 4: More Proverbs of Solomon (Proverbs 25–29)

This collection contains proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.²³⁸ This section provides leadership guidelines based on practical experience.

Collection 5: Sayings of Agur (Proverbs 30) and Lemuel (Proverbs 31)

The final chapters of Proverbs include a series of numerical sayings, proverbs that start from the known and move to the unknown. This reflects the nature of true wisdom; it allows us to face the unknown using the wisdom gained from life experience.

► Read Proverbs 30:24-28. Find a principle that unites the four examples given by Agur. Discuss how this principle should guide our use of wisdom.

Appropriately for a book designed to teach young men, Proverbs ends with an acrostic poem on the blessings of a good wife. Throughout the book of Proverbs, the writer warns against relationships with foolish women. The book ends by showing how blessed a young man will be when he finds a virtuous wife.

Interpreting the Book of Proverbs

Because the book of Proverbs is written in a different style than other books of the Old Testament, you should study it in a different way than the Pentateuch or the Prophets.²³⁹ Some questions to ask when reading a proverb are:

- 1. “Does this proverb point towards wisdom or towards folly?”** The book of Proverbs contrasts these two paths.
- 2. “What does the second half of the proverb add to the first half?”**
- 3. “What is the source of wisdom in this proverb?”** Is the truth derived from biblical revelation, personal experience, ancient tradition, observation of the world, or a combination of these?
- 4. “How does this proverb apply to my situation?”** A proverb is not a promise that applies in every circumstance.

²³⁷ Leviticus 19:2

²³⁸ Proverbs 25:1

²³⁹ This section is adapted from Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

5. "Are there other verses in Proverbs that relate to the topic I am studying?"

Find multiple proverbs that apply to your situation.

6. "Do other books of the Bible address the topic I am studying?"

7. "Is there a biblical character that illustrates the proverb I am studying?"

Interpreting Proverbs: An Example

"When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2).

1. Proverbs 11:2 points in two directions: pride leads to shame; humility leads to wisdom.
2. The first half of the proverb shows the fruit of pride: shame. The second half shows the fruit of humility: wisdom.
3. This truth is seen in biblical teaching, in ancient tradition, and can be seen by observing the life of the proud. It is painful to learn this lesson from experience.
4. While their shame may not be seen immediately, this proverb will be fulfilled in the life of the proud.
5. Pride is a theme throughout Proverbs. Other proverbs that address pride include 13:10; 16:5, 18; 18:12; and 29:23.
6. Pride is addressed in many other verses, including Psalms 10:4 and 138:6; Isaiah 2:11; 1 Corinthians 13:4; and James 4:6.
7. The fall of King Saul provides a tragic illustration of the truth of Proverbs 11:2. God's blessing on King David provides an illustration of the last part of this verse.

The Book of Proverbs Speaks Today

Is it possible for a Christian to be righteous while lacking wisdom? The Bible suggests that it is possible. Lot was righteous; but he was not wise.²⁴⁰ Although Lot may have reached heaven, his folly cost the lives of his family, destroyed his influence on others, and brought him a life of heartache.

Many times, the witness of Christians has been destroyed because Christians failed to act wisely. Churches have been divided; marriages have been destroyed, and young people have abandoned their faith because of the foolish actions of church leaders. On a personal level, family problems, financial difficulties, and interpersonal difficulties are made worse by a lack of wisdom.

²⁴⁰ 2 Peter 2:7-8

The book of Proverbs can guide Christians in wise living. Proverbs shows the relationship between inner godliness and the world around us.²⁴¹ Proverbs helps us to live in such a way that the world will be blessed by the life of the Christian.

A Closer Look at the Fool

In Proverbs, the word *fool* includes four different Hebrew terms. Each term describes a different type of folly. Because of this, our response to each type of fool should differ.

Hebrew Terms for *Fool*

The Simple

In Proverbs, the young are often called “simple.”²⁴² The simple are unformed and naïve. They do foolish things and are sometimes grouped with the fool. They are irresponsible and immature. Because they are unable to see the danger of their decisions,²⁴³ they are easily led astray.²⁴⁴

The difference between the simple and the fool is summed up in one word: teachability. Fools despise wisdom and instruction,²⁴⁵ but the simple will listen. A goal of Proverbs is to move the simple towards wisdom.

The Fool

There are two Hebrew words that are translated “fool.” The first word suggests a person who is stubborn, impatient, and unwilling to search for wisdom. He hates knowledge²⁴⁶ and persists in folly.²⁴⁷ Because he does not value wisdom, the fool will never apply himself to gaining wisdom.²⁴⁸

The second word that describes a fool is even stronger. This fool is morally corrupt; he has rejected the fear of the Lord.²⁴⁹ He makes a mock at sin.²⁵⁰

The root of folly is moral, not intellectual. In popular conversation, a *fool* is a person who is not intelligent. In Scripture, a *fool* is a person who rejects the fear of the Lord.

²⁴¹ G.R. French. “Proverbs is based on the interface between inner godliness and the world around us.”

²⁴² Proverbs 1:4

²⁴³ “The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.” Proverbs 27:12, *English Standard Version*.

²⁴⁴ See especially Proverbs 7:6-27. This young man does not set out to find temptation; temptation finds him.

²⁴⁵ Proverbs 1:7

²⁴⁶ Proverbs 1:22

²⁴⁷ Proverbs 26:11

²⁴⁸ Proverbs 17:16

²⁴⁹ Proverbs 1:7, 29; 12:15

²⁵⁰ Proverbs 14:9

The Scorner

The most severe type of fool in Proverbs is the scorner or scoffer. This term is used seventeen times in Proverbs. The scorner not only rejects wisdom, he delights in leading others to folly. He hates those who correct him²⁵¹ and brings contention wherever he goes.²⁵² The judgment on the scorner is severe; because the scorner has rejected wisdom, wisdom rejects the scorner.²⁵³

The Cure for Folly

To find the cure for folly, we must understand the cause of folly: the fool has chosen to distrust God and to trust his own wisdom.²⁵⁴ In a key passage, these two choices are placed side by side. We can trust in the Lord with all our heart or we can lean to our own understanding; we cannot do both.²⁵⁵ Trusting in the Lord leads to wisdom; trusting in ourselves leads to folly.

The cure for the fool, then, is the fear of the Lord. The cause of folly is spiritual; the cure for folly is also spiritual. The problem for the fool is a heart that is turned against God. In order to help the fool, a parent, teacher, or pastor must deal with the heart. We cannot reform the fool; instead, his heart must be transformed by God.

Background to Ecclesiastes

Author and Date

Although Ecclesiastes does not directly identify Solomon as the author, the opening phrase points to Solomon: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." The description of the author's wealth and achievements fits what we know about Solomon. Ecclesiastes may have been composed near the end of Solomon's life, perhaps during a return from his apostasy. This places the book near 935 B.C.

Wisdom Teaching

Before attempting to discover the theme of Ecclesiastes, it is helpful to understand the nature of Hebrew wisdom teaching. Today, we expect a teacher to give lectures that provide clear answers to students' questions. Ancient Hebrew teachers used a different style of teaching. They asked questions and described situations that required the student to find answers. In the numerical sayings of Proverbs 30, a series of descriptions require the

²⁵¹ Proverbs 9:8

²⁵² Proverbs 22:10

²⁵³ Proverbs 3:34

²⁵⁴ Proverbs 1:22-25; 12:15

²⁵⁵ Proverbs 3:5-7

student to find a common principle. The responsibility of the teacher is not to give answers, but to guide the student in finding answers.²⁵⁶

God's answer to Job uses this type of teaching. God does not say to Job, "Here is a three point outline about my nature." Instead, God asks a series of questions that reveal his nature to Job. The questions are pointers which guide Job to truth.

Ecclesiastes uses this same teaching style. It reveals the tensions of life that must be faced by a wise person. Rather than giving answers, Ecclesiastes asks questions and raises problems. It then challenges the reader to find answers to life's difficulties. Like God's questions to Job, the difficulties in Ecclesiastes are intended to lead the reader to wisdom.

The Message of Ecclesiastes

The message of Ecclesiastes has long been debated. Because of the recurring term *vanity*, many interpreters see the book as a negative, almost hopeless, book. Many readers have asked, "Why is such a despairing book in the Bible?" Understanding the style of Hebrew teaching helps us to see Ecclesiastes as a guided search for wisdom. Two motifs are part of this search for wisdom.

Motif 1: Vanity

A recurring motif in Ecclesiastes is the vanity of life. The book begins with the despairing phrase, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."²⁵⁷ The term vanity will be repeated throughout the book.

Vanity suggests something **temporary**. Psalms 144:4 shows the brevity of life, "Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away." In Ecclesiastes, pleasure, wealth, even life itself are temporary.

Vanity sometimes refers to **absurdity or injustice**. "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity."²⁵⁸

Vanity sometimes implies **meaninglessness**. The writer of Ecclesiastes sought meaning in pleasure and found it was vanity; it has no lasting significance.²⁵⁹

In Hebrew literature, the form "x of x" refers to the superlative. The "Holy of holies" is the most holy place; the "Song of Songs" is the best of all songs. "Vanity of vanities" suggest

²⁵⁶ To study this topic, read Curtis, Edward M. and John J. Brugaletta. *Discovering the Way of Wisdom*. (MI: Kregel Academic, 2004).

²⁵⁷ Ecclesiastes 1:2

²⁵⁸ Ecclesiastes 8:14

²⁵⁹ Ecclesiastes 2:1-12

the emptiest, most meaningless of all empty, meaningless things. And, what is this most empty thing? “**All** is vanity.” Life itself is vanity. This shows the utter despair of this motif.

Motif 2: Joy

“Vanity” is not the only message of Ecclesiastes. While man’s achievements are vanity, Ecclesiastes also includes positive pictures of life. This is seen in a second motif that appears throughout Ecclesiastes, the motif of *joy*.

After the picture of vanity in chapters 1 and 2, the writer concludes: “There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.”²⁶⁰ The message that life is the gift of God recurs throughout the book. The message of joy is central to Ecclesiastes.²⁶¹

The Theme of Ecclesiastes: A Search for the Meaning of Life

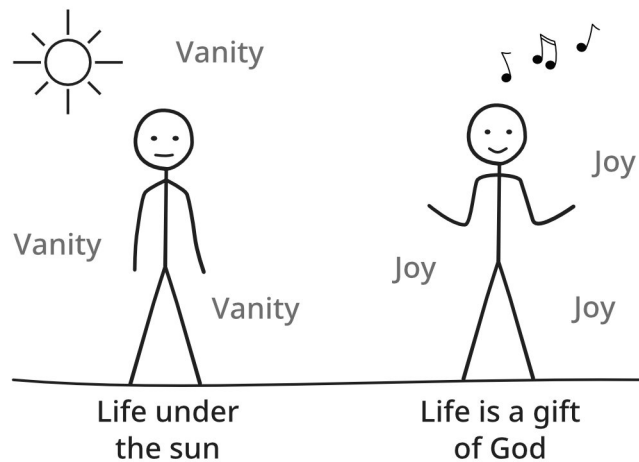
The two motifs, vanity and joy, may seem contradictory. However, there is one more pair of phrases that recur throughout the book. Twenty-nine times, Ecclesiastes refers to “life under the sun.” Life under the sun is life seen solely from an earthly perspective. Repeatedly, “life under the sun” is paired with “vanity.”

Five times, Ecclesiastes refers to the “gift of God” or life given “from the hand of God.” This is often paired with “joy” or “enjoy.”

Together, these phrases point to a theme that unites the book. Like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes offers two paths. In Proverbs, the choices are wisdom or folly. In Ecclesiastes, the choices are vanity (life under the sun) or joy (life as the gift of God.) Life viewed solely from an earthly perspective is meaningless and vain. Life lived in the fear of God is joy.

²⁶⁰ Ecclesiastes 2:24

²⁶¹ The message of joy is not a one-time exception to the theme of vanity. Exhortations to rejoice are found in Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; 3:12, 22; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7-9; and 11:9-10.



The wisdom of Ecclesiastes is this: God “has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”²⁶² God has given man an awareness of eternity and of true joy. However, we will never find this joy in our own efforts. True joy is found only in relationship with God, the fear of God.

The theme of two paths is summed up in the introduction (“Vanity of vanities”) and the conclusion (“Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”). Ecclesiastes is not a book of despair; it is a book of wisdom pointing to true joy.

Ecclesiastes in the New Testament

The message of Ecclesiastes is repeated in the New Testament. The futility of life apart from God is seen in Jesus’ warnings against the pursuit of riches.²⁶³ At the same time, Jesus promises that all things necessary for life will be provided for those who seek first his kingdom.²⁶⁴ Life lived for the things of this earth is vanity; life lived as the gift of God brings true joy.

The Song of Songs

Title

This book is called either the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon: “The song of songs, which is Solomon's.”²⁶⁵ The title “Song of Songs” means that this song is the best of all songs. The title “Song of Solomon” associates this book with King Solomon.

²⁶² Ecclesiastes 3:11, *English Standard Version*

²⁶³ Luke 12:16-21, for example

²⁶⁴ Matthew 6:33

²⁶⁵ Song of Songs 1:1

Interpreting the Song of Songs

The biggest question related to the Song of Songs is “How do we interpret this book?” There have been two major approaches to reading this book: allegorical and poetic.

Allegorical Interpretation

Readers have often asked why a book devoted to romantic love is a part of Scripture. Because of this, there is a long tradition of interpreting Song of Songs allegorically. Commentators from Origen in the third century to Hudson Taylor in the twentieth century have written allegorical commentaries on the Song of Songs.

An allegorical approach to the Song of Songs sees the poem as a picture of God’s love for his people. Jewish readers saw the book as a picture of God’s love for Israel; Christian interpreters see it as a picture of God’s love for the church.

Those who reject an allegorical approach make two arguments. First, the Song of Songs itself does not point to an allegorical interpretation. Second, an allegorical approach often lacks clear meaning. As you read commentaries on the Song of Songs, it becomes clear that each commentator interprets the poetic images differently. Allegorical interpretation can leave each reader as his own authority on God’s Word.

Poetic Interpretation

A poetic approach to the Song of Songs sees this book as a picture of human love.²⁶⁶ Whether it is seen as a drama culminating in marriage or a collection of love poems without any narrative structure, this approach sees the book as a collection of love poems.

For much of church history, a poetic approach was less popular than allegorical interpretation. In the twentieth century, literal interpretation has become more common.²⁶⁷

In this approach, the Song of Songs is seen as a poetic picture of romantic love. Using rural imagery, the Song of Songs shows the love of the lover and his beloved; it is a picture of love between a man and wife. Some writers have seen the Song of Songs as a parallel to Proverbs 31. Proverbs 31 shows the practical side of marriage; the Song of Songs shows the romance of marriage.

Since there is no indication in the text itself indicating that the book is an allegory, those who support poetic interpretation argue that the book should be interpreted literally. Those who oppose poetic interpretation question the presence of romantic poetry in Scripture. They argue that the book is more appropriate as an allegory of God’s love for his people.

²⁶⁶ This can also be called *literal interpretation*. However, even a literal approach recognizes that poetry uses metaphors that are not to be interpreted literally. For this reason, *poetic interpretation* is a better term.

²⁶⁷ There are some earlier commentators who encouraged a poetic reading of Song of Songs. These include Josephus in the 1st century and Theodore of Mopsuestia in the 4th century. Both Adam Clarke and John Calvin favored poetic interpretations, although both saw some allegorical aspects in the text.

The Message of the Song of Songs

Many readers have asked, “Why is this book in the Bible?” At least part of the reason may be to show the value of humanity. Ecclesiastes shows that the blessings of life are the gift of God, given to be enjoyed by those who fear him; in the same way, the Song of Songs shows that human love is a gift of God to be valued.

God is interested in whole people. Some early Greek philosophers, like Plato, saw the spirit as good, but the flesh as bad. At times, some Christians have adopted a similar view. This view says that the body is evil; the spirit is good. However, Genesis teaches that after God made man, he “saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”²⁶⁸ Although the fall marred creation, God still values the world that he made. To those in the early church who forbade marriage, Paul responded, “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”²⁶⁹ The Song of Songs is a biblical testimony to the value of human love. Within the bounds of marriage, physical love is to be enjoyed as the gift of God.

The Song of Songs Speaks Today

During World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who led Christian opposition to Adolf Hitler, became engaged to marry Maria von Wedemeyer. Some fellow pastors questioned his decision to marry in a time of such national turmoil. They argued that Bonhoeffer should remain focused on spiritual concerns. However, Bonhoeffer insisted that marriage was right especially in a time of turmoil. He believed, with Genesis, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, that God’s good creation was to be celebrated. Bonhoeffer would not dismiss God-given joys as unspiritual. Bonhoeffer said that our “yes to God” was a “yes” to the good things of the world God created.²⁷⁰

Today, marriage is under attack from many sides. In the secular world, marriage is treated as an outdated institution. Widespread divorce, gay marriage, and cohabitation by unmarried couples all undermine the sanctity of marriage. In many Christian homes, marriage survives – but it is not a joyful, romance-filled marriage. The Song of Songs shows romantic love as God’s gift to be enjoyed by God’s children. Christian marriages should model this joy to our world. While no marriage is free of challenges, Christians should show that a marriage lived by biblical principles can be a life-long joy to both spouses. A loving Christian marriage is a powerful testimony to our world. This is part of the legacy of the Song of Songs.

²⁶⁸ Genesis 1:31

²⁶⁹ 1 Timothy 4:4

²⁷⁰ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 468

Lesson 8 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Assign a topic to each member of your group (money, speech, marriage, etc.). As you read through Proverbs, list all the verses related to your assigned topic. At the end, give a short presentation to the group on "The Teaching of Proverbs on...."

Option 2: Individual Assignment

Choose a topic such as money, speech, marriage, etc. As you read through Proverbs, list all the verses related to your assigned topic. Write a one-page (450 word) essay titled, "The Teaching of Proverbs on...."

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 8 Test

- (1) According to John Calvin, true wisdom consists of what two things?
- (2) List two of the four characteristics of a proverb given in this lesson.
- (3) What is the most common type of proverb in Collection 1 (Proverbs 1–9)?
- (4) List four of the seven questions given in this lesson for interpreting Proverbs.
- (5) What is the primary difference between the "simple" and the "fool" in Proverbs?
- (6) What is the primary theme of Ecclesiastes?
- (7) What are the two motifs that are traced through Ecclesiastes?
- (8) What are two ways to interpret the Song of Songs?
- (9) Write Proverbs 1:7 and Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 from memory.

Lesson 9

Isaiah

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the likely date and historical setting of Isaiah.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Isaiah.
- (3) Recognize the nature of biblical prophecy.
- (4) Appreciate the messianic promises of Isaiah.
- (5) Understand the arguments for a single author for the book of Isaiah.
- (6) Relate the message of Isaiah to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Isaiah.

Memorize Isaiah 9:6-7.

Introduction to the Prophetic Books

► What was the ministry of Old Testament prophets like? How much of their message was clear to their audience, and how much was hidden until the future?

The Old Testament Prophetic Books include the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) as well as the twelve Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). Before studying the individual books, it is helpful to study the role of the prophet in Old Testament Israel.

The writing prophets ministered from roughly 800 B.C. to 450 B.C. Earlier prophets such as Elijah and Elisha did not leave a written record of their preaching. The sixteen writing prophets are remembered by the books in their names.

The Hebrew Bible used three words to refer to a prophet. These titles show the role of the prophet in Israel. The first two words (*hozeh* and *ro'eh*) come from a root that means "to see." These words tell us that a prophet was a *seer*, someone who saw the things of God. The third word (*nabi*) means "a called one." It refers to a person who has been called by God to bring God's message to other people.

The prophetic books show several characteristics of the prophets:

- 1. The prophets did not speak their own message; they brought God's message.**
Over 350 times, the prophetic books include the phrase "Thus says the Lord." The prophets were called to bring God's Word to God's people.

2. The prophets spoke God's message to their own generation. Their message was given first to their own people. When we read the prophets, we should ask, "How did the prophet's immediate audience understand his message?" Knowing how the first audience understood the prophet's message helps us better understand his message for today.

3. The prophets spoke God's message to future generations. The prophets were seers. The first words of Isaiah are similar to many of the prophets: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz."²⁷¹ Through visions and special revelation, God revealed future truths to his prophets. The prophets saw both future judgment and future restoration.

As we study the prophetic books, we will see certain themes repeated frequently. Three themes appear throughout these books:

Faithfulness to Covenant

Repeatedly, the prophets reminded their audience that Israel was called to be God's chosen people. At Sinai, Israel made a covenant with God. This covenant was more than rituals and sacrifices; it required personal holiness before God and justice towards other people. Prophets such as Micah and Amos confronted Israel with the nation's failure to live in obedience to the covenant.

The Day of the Lord

The prophets referred to the "day of the Lord" more than twenty times. The day of the Lord is used in three ways by the prophets:

- The day of the Lord will be a time of judgment on unbelievers.
- The day of the Lord will be a time of cleansing of God's people.
- The day of the Lord will be a time of salvation for those who are faithful.

The Coming of Messiah

An important message of the prophets is the promise of Messiah. Bible scholars have found as many as 300 Old Testament prophecies pointing to the coming of the Messiah.

²⁷¹ Isaiah 1:1

Background to Isaiah

Isaiah at a Glance	
Author	Isaiah
Audience	Judah
Date	740-680 B.C.
Theme	The fifth Gospel
Purpose	To warn Judah of coming judgment
	To promise Judah's coming salvation
The Gospel in Isaiah	The Messiah will be born of a virgin.
	He will minister to the Gentiles.
	He will die to redeem sinners.
	Through the Messiah, God's kingdom will be open to people of all nations.

Historical Setting

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, ministered in the royal court of Judah during the late 8th century B.C. Isaiah's name means "The Lord has saved," a name that foreshadows a central theme of Isaiah's ministry, salvation for God's people.

Isaiah's call to prophetic ministry came in the year that King Uzziah died.²⁷² He recorded the death of Sennacherib in 681 B.C.²⁷³ This dates the book of Isaiah to approximately 740-680 B.C.

Isaiah ministered during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. Jewish tradition says that Manasseh killed Isaiah by having him sawn in half.

During the early years of Isaiah's ministry, Tiglath-Pileser III expanded the Assyrian empire. Pekah, the king of the Northern Kingdom attacked Judah because Ahaz refused to join an alliance against Assyria. Over the objections of Isaiah, Ahaz appealed to Assyria. Isaiah's message gave a sign for the immediate future and a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Isaiah 6:1. King Uzziah died in approximately 740 B.C.

²⁷³ Isaiah 37:38

²⁷⁴ Isaiah 7:10-17 shows how a prophet's message spoke both to his contemporaries and to the future. In 735 B.C., Isaiah told Ahaz that before a son born in that day reached the age of choice, Syria and Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom) would be destroyed. A partial fulfillment was accomplished with the fall of Syria in 732 B.C and the fall of the Northern Kingdom in

After the death of Ahaz, his son Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria and entered an alliance with Egypt. In response, the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib attacked Judah in 701 B.C. Hezekiah was first defeated and forced to pay tribute to Assyria.²⁷⁵ Later, Hezekiah rebelled against Sennacherib. In response to Hezekiah's prayer, the angel of God attacked the Assyrian army, killing 180,000 men and driving the Assyrians out of Judah. The rest of Hezekiah's reign was a time of peace.²⁷⁶

Purpose

With the fall of the Northern Kingdom, Judah faced a test. Would she follow Israel in apostasy or would she be faithful to God? Isaiah warned of judgment for Judah's sin. He encouraged Judah with the promise of salvation if she returned to the covenant.

Overview of Isaiah

Isaiah is sometimes seen as a Bible in miniature. The first thirty-nine chapters (corresponding to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament) show God's justice in judging Judah and the surrounding nations. Because God is a holy God, he cannot overlook sin. The last twenty-seven chapters (corresponding to the twenty-seven books of the New Testament) comfort Judah with the promise of a coming Messiah.

A book that covers sixty years, four kings, two great empires (Assyria and Babylon), and that prophesies events hundreds of years in the future is difficult to summarize in a few paragraphs. As you read Isaiah, this outline will guide you through the book. The summary of themes will suggest important ideas to follow.

Outline of Isaiah

(1) Prophecies of Judgment (Isaiah 1–35)

- An emphasis on judgment
- Addressed primarily to the rebellious people of Isaiah's time
- Warns that Assyria will defeat the Northern Kingdom of Israel
- Messages of judgment on many nations, including Israel, Assyria, Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, Edom, Judah, and Tyre
- Salvation for the faithful (Isaiah 35)

722 B.C. The final fulfillment of "Immanuel" born to a virgin was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 1:20-23).

²⁷⁵ 2 Kings 18:14-16

²⁷⁶ Isaiah 37

(2) Historical Interlude (Isaiah 36–39)

- Sennacherib's threat and God's deliverance (Isaiah 36–37)

The story of Sennacherib finishes the Assyrian emphasis of Isaiah 1–35. It takes place in 701 B.C. and shows that faith in God brings God's blessing.

- Hezekiah's illness and miraculous recovery (Isaiah 38)
- Hezekiah's foolish visit with Merodach-baladan from Babylon (Isaiah 39)

The story of Merodach-baladan's visit in 711 B.C. begins the Babylonian emphasis of Isaiah 40–66. Judah's sins will lead to the Babylonian exile.²⁷⁷

(3) Messianic Prophecies of Comfort (Isaiah 40–66)

- An emphasis on restoration and promise
- Addressed to faithful people of all generations
- Comfort and deliverance for Judah (Isaiah 40–48)
- A coming Servant will provide redemption (Isaiah 49–55)
- God will restore all who are faithful to covenant (Isaiah 56–66)

Important Themes in Isaiah

The Remnant

God will preserve a remnant who is faithful to God in spite of the apostasy of the nation.²⁷⁸ Isaiah named one of his sons "Shear-jashub" as a prophetic message that God would bring the faithful remnant back to Jerusalem after the exile.²⁷⁹

God, the Holy One of Israel

Early in his prophetic ministry, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. God was surrounded by seraphs calling, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."²⁸⁰ This vision transformed Isaiah's life and ministry. Twenty-nine times, Isaiah used the expression "Holy One of Israel," a name that shows God's holiness.²⁸¹ An important aspect of Isaiah's message is that Israel faces judgment because they have ignored the holiness of the God they profess to worship.

The sovereignty of the Holy One of Israel is seen in his judgment on the enemies of Israel. God commanded Isaiah to name one of his sons "Maher-shalal-hash-baz," a name that

²⁷⁷ Isaiah 38:6 shows that the events of Isaiah 38–39 took place before Isaiah 36–37. The order in the book is probably intended to emphasize the topical structure of Isaiah. Isaiah 36–37 ends the Assyrian emphasis; Isaiah 38–39 begins the Babylonian emphasis. Non-chronological structure is common in the prophetic books.

²⁷⁸ Isaiah 1:9

²⁷⁹ Isaiah 7:3 and 10:20–21. *Shear-jashub* means "the remnant will return."

²⁸⁰ Isaiah 6:1–8

²⁸¹ Isaiah 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11–12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 40:25; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14–15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9

represented speedy judgment against Judah's enemies.²⁸² To the surprise of Judah, God's sovereignty is also seen in his judgment on Judah because of her apostasy.

Ultimately, the Holy One of Israel will restore his people. Isaiah foresaw a day when God's people would no longer be called "Forsaken," but would be called "My Delight is in Her." He foresaw a day when the land would no longer be called "Desolate," but would be called "Married."²⁸³ Instead of an apostate nation, Judah will be called "the holy people"; instead of exile, they will be "the redeemed of the Lord"; instead of rejected, they will be "sought out"; instead of abandoned, Jerusalem will be called "a city not forsaken."²⁸⁴

The Coming of Messiah

Because of its emphasis on the coming Messiah, Isaiah has sometimes been called the "Fifth Gospel." Isaiah prophesies that Messiah will redeem Judah and all who turn to him in faith. In his first sermon at Nazareth, Jesus read from Isaiah and proclaimed that he had come to fulfill the promises made by the prophet.²⁸⁵

In the last section of Isaiah, the prophet foretells the coming of the Messiah, God's Anointed One. He will be born of a virgin²⁸⁶; he will serve the needy²⁸⁷; he will suffer to redeem humankind²⁸⁸; he will someday reign in glory.²⁸⁹ Because of the Messiah, the future of God's people is bright – regardless of their present circumstances.

A Closer Look at the Authorship of Isaiah

Some biblical critics argue that this book was not written by Isaiah alone. They say that Isaiah 1–39 came from Isaiah himself, while chapters 40–66 were written by a second author who lived more than 100 years after Isaiah. They call these authors "Isaiah of Jerusalem" and "Second Isaiah." These critics doubt the testimony of the New Testament to Isaiah as the author. Evangelicals believe that God spoke the entire book of Isaiah to his prophet. This chart shows the argument of critical scholars and an evangelical response.

²⁸² Isaiah 8:1-3

²⁸³ Isaiah 62:4, *English Standard Version*

²⁸⁴ Isaiah 62:12

²⁸⁵ Luke 4:16-30; Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6

²⁸⁶ Isaiah 7:14

²⁸⁷ Isaiah 61:1-3

²⁸⁸ Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

²⁸⁹ Isaiah 60–66

Issue	Critics Believe	Evangelicals Believe
Isaiah ministered from 740-680 B.C. He refers to the return from exile, which began in 538 B.C. He mentions Cyrus by name in 44:28 and 45:1.	Since Cyrus lived 100 years after Isaiah's death, the prophet could not predict a future ruler.	God revealed the future to Isaiah – including the name of Cyrus, the future ruler of Persia.
Isaiah 1–39 is primarily about Assyria and judgment. Isaiah 40–66 is primarily about Babylon and salvation.	An author would not have such a drastic contrast in his writing. Isaiah 40–66 must be by a different author.	Isaiah spoke to both his immediate listeners (judgment for sin) and future readers (restoration for the faithful). This is the reason for the great contrast.
Some language used in Isaiah 40–66 (especially the language of "comfort") is not used in Isaiah 1–39.	A difference of language suggests a different author.	The different topics of 1–39 and 40–66 require different language. However, terms like "the Holy One of Israel" are used in both parts of the book.

Reasons to accept Isaiah as the author of the entire book:

- Isaiah 1:1 names Isaiah, son of Amoz, as the author.
- All early Hebrew copies of Isaiah show the book as one book. There is no evidence that Isaiah 1–39 and 40–66 were ever treated as two separate books.
- There are twenty references to Isaiah in the New Testament. These references come from both sections of Isaiah and treat Isaiah as the author of the entire book.²⁹⁰

Isaiah Speaks Today

Isaiah's message was relevant both to his day and to ours. To a nation that faced the choice of following Israel into apostasy or remaining faithful to God, Isaiah spoke of the judgment that comes to those who are unfaithful to God. He warned both Judah and other nations

²⁹⁰ Examples include Matthew 3:3, Acts 8:28, and Romans 9:27-29. John 12:38-41 is particularly important since John quotes from Isaiah 6:10 and 53:1 in consecutive verses. John treats both references as coming from Isaiah.

that the Holy One of Israel could not ignore sin. In today's permissive culture, we must remember that God judges sin.

To a nation that would soon face Babylonian exile, Isaiah spoke of God's blessing on the remnant that remains faithful to God. In the face of today's threats to Christians, we must remember that God honors those who remain faithful. He promises to hear and restore those who repent. Isaiah speaks powerfully to the needs of the 21st century.

Conclusion: Isaiah in the New Testament

Isaiah is one of the Old Testament books most frequently quoted in the New Testament. Themes from Isaiah that are used in the New Testament include:

- John the Baptist as the voice crying in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3)
- The virgin birth of Jesus (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23)
- Jesus' use of parables (Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:13-15)
- Jesus' ministry to the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1-2 and 61:1-3; Matthew 4:13-16 and Luke 4:14-21)
- The conversion of the nations (Isaiah 11:10 and 65:1; Romans 15:12 and 10:20)

Throughout Jesus' ministry, the gospel writers saw Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies. God's promises to restore and redeem his people were fulfilled partially in the return from Babylon; the promises were fulfilled more completely in the redeeming work of Jesus of Nazareth. The ultimate and final fulfillment will be seen when God's family is reunited in worship around the throne of God.

Lesson 9 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Discuss the description of Jesus in Isaiah 53. Show how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. Write a brief summary of your group's discussion.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

As you read the book of Isaiah, make a list of prophecies about the coming Messiah. List Scriptures in Isaiah that contain a messianic prophecy and then list New Testament Scriptures that show the fulfillment of the prophecy.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 9 Test

- (1) What phrase shows that the prophets were bringing God's Word, not their own message?
- (2) The use of the name _____ to describe the prophets shows that God revealed future truths to his prophets.
- (3) List three themes that appear throughout the prophetic books.
- (4) The day of the Lord includes three aspects. What are they?
- (5) Isaiah ministered during the reign of what four kings of Judah?
- (6) List two purposes for the book of Isaiah.
- (7) Who is the remnant in Isaiah?
- (8) What name of God is used in Isaiah to show God's holiness and God's sovereignty?
- (9) List three reasons to accept Isaiah as the author of the entire Book of Isaiah.
- (10) List two images from Isaiah used in the New Testament.
- (11) Write Isaiah 9:6-7 from memory.

Lesson 10

Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the likely date and historical setting of Jeremiah.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Jeremiah.
- (3) Recognize the prophetic lawsuit in the writings of the prophets.
- (4) Feel the tragedy of Jerusalem's fall.
- (5) Appreciate Jeremiah's message of comfort.
- (6) Relate the message of Jeremiah to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Jeremiah and Lamentations.

Memorize Lamentations 3:21-24.

Introduction

Jeremiah, the second longest book of the Bible, gives a picture of the last days before Jerusalem's fall. Jeremiah is known as "The Weeping Prophet" because of his laments for the sin of God's people and the destruction of God's city.

In the book of Jeremiah we see the prophet's struggle to bring God's message to the people of Judah. In the book of Lamentations, we see the prophet's sorrow as he watches his beloved city destroyed by Babylon.

Jeremiah and Lamentations at a Glance	
Author	Jeremiah
Audience	Judah
Date	627-580 B.C.
Theme	The fall of Jerusalem
Purpose	Warn Judah of coming judgment
	Record the destruction of Jerusalem
The Gospel in Jeremiah	Jesus came as the Righteous Branch who would bring salvation to Judah (Jeremiah 23:1-8).
	Like Jeremiah, Jesus was rejected by his people.
	Like Jeremiah, Paul saw God's grace in the message of the potter and the clay.

Background to Jeremiah

Historical Setting of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest from Anathoth, a Levitical city five kilometers north of Jerusalem. Instead of following his father into the priesthood, Jeremiah was called to serve as a prophet. The rest of his life was devoted to bringing God's message of impending judgment against Judah. As a sign of the trouble that was coming to Jerusalem, God commanded Jeremiah not to marry.²⁹¹

Jeremiah suffered great opposition, including attempted murder, beatings, accusations of treason, and imprisonment. After the fall of Jerusalem, a group took Jeremiah to Egypt against his will.²⁹²

Jeremiah prophesied during the forty years prior to Jerusalem's fall. He probably began his ministry during the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah. Josiah was killed while fighting the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo in 609 B.C. This began a period of decline for Judah. Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, served only three months before being taken to Egypt. Egypt put his brother, Jehoiakim, on the throne. In 605 B.C. Babylon attacked Jerusalem and took the first group of Judean captives into exile.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Jeremiah 16:1-4

²⁹² Jeremiah 11:18-23; 26:1-15; 20:2; 37:11-16; 38:1-13; and 43:1-7

²⁹³ The first group of exiles included Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:1-7).

In 598 B.C. Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon, but died during Babylon's siege of Jerusalem. His son, Jehoiachin, ruled for only three months before he was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon with the second group of exiles in 597 B.C.²⁹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, on the throne. Zedekiah ruled until 586 B.C., but this was a period of steady decline for Judah. Zedekiah refused to listen to Jeremiah's warnings, even putting the prophet in prison.

Trying to overthrow Babylonian rule, Zedekiah tried to make an alliance with other kings.²⁹⁵ In response, Nebuchadnezzar again invaded Judah in 587-586 B.C. During this third invasion, Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and appointed Gedaliah as governor.²⁹⁶ Through the rest of her national history, Judah would never again have a Davidic king.

Jeremiah's ministry can be divided into three stages:

- 627-605 B.C. He prophesied while Judah was threatened by Assyria and Egypt.
- 605-586 B.C. He prophesied during Babylon's attacks on Judah.
- 586-ca. 580 B.C. He ministered in Jerusalem and Egypt after Judah's fall.

Purpose

Jeremiah shows God's patient warnings to Judah. Since they refused to repent, God's judgment was sure. Jeremiah also brought the promise of restoration to a remnant that was faithful to God. While Jeremiah's listeners did not respond to his message, the book he left behind provides a record of God's faithfulness during the last days of Judah.

Overview of Jeremiah

Jeremiah does not follow a chronological order. It has the lack of clear structure that one might associate with the great stress of Jeremiah's lifetime.

You can gain an overview of Jeremiah's life and the fall of Jerusalem by reading the following chapters in this order:

²⁹⁴ The second group of exiles included Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1-3).

²⁹⁵ Jeremiah 27:1-15

²⁹⁶ Jeremiah 39-40

Chapter	Date (Approximate)	Topic
1	627 B.C.	Jeremiah's call
7	609-597 B.C.	The Temple Sermon
11-13	Uncertain	Opposition to Jeremiah's ministry
26	608 B.C.	Death threat on Jeremiah
25	605 B.C.	Seventy years of captivity
36	605 B.C.	Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's scroll
29	597 B.C.	Letter to exiles
20	597-586 B.C.	Opposition by Pashhur the priest
27-28	594 B.C.	Confrontation with Hananiah
32	588 B.C.	Jeremiah buys a field
37-38	588 B.C.	Jeremiah is imprisoned
39 & 52	586 B.C.	Fall of Jerusalem
40-41	586 B.C.	Gedaliah as governor
42-43	586/585 B.C.	Jeremiah is taken to Egypt

The remaining chapters record Jeremiah's messages to God's people, messages that are largely ignored by his listeners.

Outline of Jeremiah

Jeremiah's Call (Jeremiah 1)

► Describe your call to ministry. How has this call been confirmed in your ministry?

Before Jeremiah's birth, God appointed him a prophet to the nations. When God called him to be a prophet, Jeremiah responded that he was still a youth and not ready for such responsibility. God responded with three signs to confirm Jeremiah's call:

1. God touched Jeremiah's mouth to put his words in his mouth (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

2. God gave Jeremiah a vision of an almond tree and told him that God was watching the fulfillment of his Word (Jeremiah 1:11-12).²⁹⁷
3. God gave Jeremiah a vision of a boiling pot, representing judgment poured out on the land (Jeremiah 1:13-14).

Judah's Unfaithfulness to the Covenant (Jeremiah 2–10)

Through sermons, object lessons, and parables, Jeremiah portrays Judah's unfaithfulness to the covenant. Judah is like an unfaithful wife who chases other lovers. In the "Temple Sermon" of Jeremiah 7, the prophet condemns worshipers who believe they will be saved because of the temple. Just as God allowed Shiloh (Israel's earlier place of worship) to be destroyed, he will allow the temple to be destroyed.²⁹⁸ God's house has become a den of robbers and is no longer holy, because the worshipers are not holy.

Jeremiah Struggles with God and with Judah (Jeremiah 11–20)

This section, called "Jeremiah's Confessions," includes prayers in which Jeremiah complains to God about the stubbornness of his listeners. Jeremiah has been sent to preach to people who reject his message and conspire to kill the messenger.

Jeremiah despairs at preaching a message of such hopelessness. God tells Jeremiah, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people."²⁹⁹ Because Judah refuses to repent, there is nothing left but judgment. False prophets have told the people that God will bring peace; instead they will either die or go into captivity.³⁰⁰ There will be no peace for apostate Judah.

Jeremiah's Confrontations with Judah's Rulers and Prophets (Jeremiah 21–29)

Jeremiah confronts King Jehoiakim, who has not followed his father's path of obedience to God. Instead of the elaborate rituals associated with a king's funeral, Jeremiah prophesies that Jehoiakim will be dragged outside the city gates and dumped like a dead donkey.

Jeremiah confronts lying prophets who are giving false messages of hope to a people who stand condemned before God.

During a time of siege, Jeremiah stands outside the temple to confront the people with a message of judgment. He tells them that they face seventy years of captivity. The cup of God's wrath is full; Jerusalem will drink the cup along with all nations who forsake God.

²⁹⁷ The sign of the almond tree is a Hebrew word play. "Almond" is the Hebrew word *shaqed*; "watch" is the word *shoqed*. The almond tree was the first to bud in the spring, so Hebrew people said that the almond tree "watched for spring." In the same way, God tells Jeremiah that he is watching the fulfillment of the prophetic message.

²⁹⁸ Jeremiah 7:14; 1 Samuel 1:3 and 4:2-11

²⁹⁹ Jeremiah 15:1

³⁰⁰ Jeremiah 14:3-16 and 15:2-9

Jeremiah wears a yoke around his neck as a symbol of Jerusalem's future submission to Babylon. A false prophet, Hananiah, breaks the yoke, saying that God will soon free the nation from Nebuchadnezzar. In judgment, God takes Hananiah's life.

A final prophecy in this section comes in the form of a letter to the exiles in Babylon. Although Hananiah and other false prophets are predicting the defeat of Babylon, Jeremiah tells the exiles to build homes, plant gardens and pray for peace in Babylon, because they will be there for seventy years.

The Promise of Future Restoration (Jeremiah 30–33)

These chapters are often called "The Book of Comfort." Although much of Jeremiah's message is a message of judgment, he tells his listeners that God will restore Judah to the land. Although Israel has been unfaithful to the covenant, God will write a new covenant on their hearts and will remember their sin no more.³⁰¹

God tells Jeremiah to purchase a piece of land from his cousin Hanamel. This is a surprising command since Jerusalem will soon be destroyed! When Jeremiah asks for an explanation, God gives the wonderful promise that the day is coming when "fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed... for I will restore their fortunes, declares the LORD."³⁰² God has not forgotten his people. Even in judgment, he promises future restoration.

Jerusalem's Final Days (Jeremiah 34–45)

Chapters 34-45 record the last days of Jerusalem. Judah's leaders continue to reject God's Word down to the final hour. Jeremiah is treated as a traitor, and imprisoned because of his message of doom during the siege. However, God's message of judgment is fulfilled: Jerusalem falls, King Zedekiah is captured, and his sons are killed before Zedekiah is blinded. The last thing Zedekiah sees is the death of his sons.

After the Babylonian puppet governor, Gedaliah, is murdered, a group of Judeans flee to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and his secretary, Baruch. Even in Egypt, many Judeans continue to worship idols. Jeremiah prophesies further suffering as a result of their continued idolatry.

Prophecies to Other Nations (Jeremiah 46–51)

While much of Jeremiah is devoted to messages of judgment on Judah, God's sovereignty extends to other nations. In a series of prophetic oracles, Jeremiah prophesied against Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam. Finally, fifty years before it happened, Jeremiah prophesied the fall of Babylon to the Medes.³⁰³

³⁰¹ Jeremiah 31:31-34

³⁰² Jeremiah 32:44, *English Standard Version*

³⁰³ Jeremiah 51:11. In 550 B.C., the Medes were assimilated into the Persian Empire by Cyrus. This empire destroyed Babylon in 539 B.C. and allowed the people of Israel to return to Jerusalem.

This section shows that God is sovereign over all people. God used other nations to judge Israel, but he will then judge those nations and restore his people to Jerusalem. God used Assyria to punish Israel; he then allowed Nebuchadnezzar to defeat Assyria. After the exile, God will restore and pardon Judah.³⁰⁴

The Fall of Jerusalem Retold (Jeremiah 52)

Jeremiah ends with a retelling of the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 52 parallels 2 Kings 24-25 and Jeremiah 39. The book concludes on a note of hope. Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Evil-merodach, released King Jehoiachin from prison and allowed him to eat from the king's table. This reminds Jeremiah's readers that the Davidic line has been preserved. God continues to care for his people, even in exile.

A Closer Look at the Prophetic Lawsuit

In the Pentateuch, we saw the importance of the covenant to Israel's history. The Mosaic law was much more than a set of rules governing Israel. God's covenant with Israel was based on a relationship of love. Israel's disobedience violated the covenant that bound God and Israel together.

The prophets often point to the Mosaic law to show that Israel has broken the terms of her covenant with God. We call these charges the "prophetic lawsuit," a list of accusations against Judah. Jeremiah shows that Judah has violated the covenant and must suffer the curses that were part of the covenant. The chart below shows the elements of the prophetic lawsuit in Jeremiah.

³⁰⁴ Jeremiah 50:17-20

The Prophetic Lawsuit	Jeremiah
Summons to the offending party	"Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel" (Jeremiah 2:4).
Reminder of God's goodness to Judah	"I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof" (Jeremiah 2:5-7).
Accusations against Israel	"Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead.... My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.... For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:9-13).
Call to witnesses against Judah	"Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 2:12).
Lament for Judah's unfaithfulness	"Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:31-32).
Promise of restoration if Judah repents	"Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD.... At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it" (Jeremiah 3:13-17).

Lamentations

Background and Structure of Lamentations

Although the book of Lamentations does not identify an author, Jewish and Christian tradition attributes the book to Jeremiah. It was composed soon after the fall of Jerusalem, the main theme of the book. It is likely that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations before he was taken captive to Egypt.

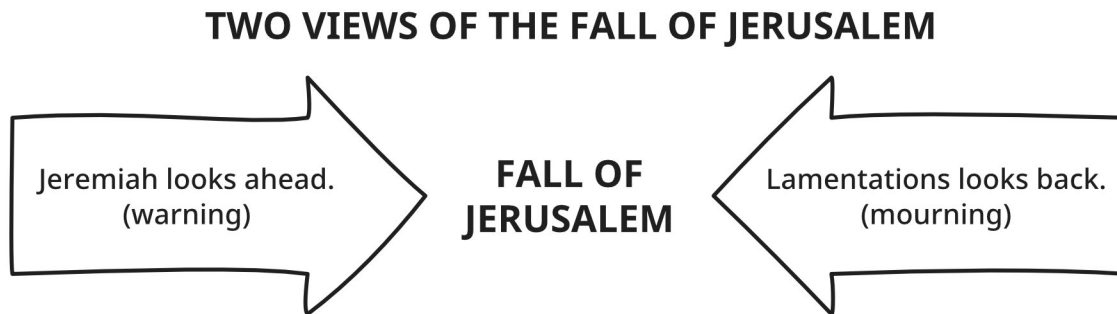
Lamentations consists of five poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. These poems express the poet's personal grief.

Each chapter except Lamentations 5 is in a special form called acrostic. The Hebrew alphabet contains 22 letters. In Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 each letter begins a verse. Lamentations 1:1 begins with *aleph*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Lamentations 1:2 begins with *beth* and the pattern continues through the chapter. Lamentations 3 contains sixty-six

verses, twenty-two groups of three verses each. The use of this poetic form gives structure to Jeremiah's outpouring of grief.

Purpose of Lamentations

These poems record the author's great sorrow at Jerusalem's fall. They make clear that Jerusalem's suffering was the result of Judah's sin, not God's failure. The book of Jeremiah looks ahead to the coming fall of Jerusalem; Lamentations looks back on the city's fall.



Message of Lamentations

Lamentations moves from sorrow to prayer. It begins with a lament describing the tragic end of Jerusalem. This once great city has become a widow. She was unfaithful to God, and now he has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.³⁰⁵ The theology of Lamentations is consistent with Kings and Jeremiah. These books show that Jerusalem fell:

- Because of the people's sins (Lamentations 1:18)
- Because of false prophets and sinful priests (Lamentations 4:13)

Lamentations 3 continues to mourn for Jerusalem, but introduces the theme of God's mercy. Lamentations 3:19-39 is a reflection on God's goodness and steadfast love.

After another lament describing conditions during the siege of Jerusalem (Lamentations 4), the poet concludes with a prayer for restoration. Lamentations recognizes that Judah's only hope is God's mercy: "Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!"³⁰⁶

Jeremiah Speaks Today

Part of the contemporary church has been taken captive by a teaching that promises health and wealth to Christians, particularly ministers. In some countries, preachers of the prosperity gospel are among the wealthiest people in the nation; the poor give sacrificially to support the lavish lifestyle of these leaders. This approach is far from the biblical model.

³⁰⁵ Lamentations 1:5

³⁰⁶ Lamentations 5:21, *English Standard Version*

Jeremiah shows that faithfulness to God's message is costly. Jeremiah suffered for his commitment to God's call; Jesus suffered for his obedience to the Father's mission; ministers today are called to faithfulness in the face of opposition.

The promise of Jeremiah 29:11 must be read in the context of the imminent Babylonian exile. Jeremiah promised the people, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." However, God's people would soon face great suffering. God's plan for his people is good; that does not guarantee a life free of suffering. Because of sin and its effects on our world, even God's people suffer.

However, as Lamentations shows, even in suffering God is faithful to his people. Even in trouble, we can trust God's goodness. "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."³⁰⁷

Conclusion: Jeremiah in the New Testament

Jeremiah was frequently quoted by the New Testament writers. The book of Revelation quotes from Jeremiah to portray the coming destruction of Babylon, the enemy of God's people.³⁰⁸

There are many parallels between Jeremiah's ministry and the earthly ministry of Jesus. Just as Jeremiah wept over the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus wept over the city and predicted the destruction of the temple.³⁰⁹ At the cleansing of the temple, Jesus used the language of Jeremiah to describe the perversion of God's house into a den of robbers.³¹⁰ Both Jeremiah and Jesus were rejected by the people they came to serve.

Paul used the language of Jeremiah in writing of God's sovereignty in calling Gentiles to salvation. The potter has power over the clay and has made known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy.³¹¹

Most significantly, the gospel is seen in Jeremiah's promises of future restoration for God's people. This restoration was never completely fulfilled in Israel's history. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, this restoration is accomplished in and through the church.

³⁰⁷ Lamentations 3:22-23

³⁰⁸ Examples include Revelation 18:4, 8, and 24.

³⁰⁹ Luke 19:41-44 and Matthew 24:1-2

³¹⁰ Jeremiah 7:11 and Matthew 21:13

³¹¹ Romans 9:20-24

Lesson 10 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Discuss Jeremiah's confessions in Jeremiah 11-20. Make a list of Jeremiah's complaints and God's answers. Compare Jeremiah's complaints with the difficulties that you face in ministry. What lessons can your group draw from the example of Jeremiah? Write a one page summary of your discussion.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

- Write a detailed outline for a sermon on God's faithful mercy based on Jeremiah and Lamentations.
- Write a detailed outline for a sermon on God's judgments based on Jeremiah and Lamentations.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 10 Test

- (1) Why is Jeremiah called "The Weeping Prophet"?
- (2) What was Jeremiah's family background?
- (3) List the dates for the three groups of captives taken into exile. For the first two groups, name one prophet carried into exile.
- (4) What are the primary purposes of Jeremiah and Lamentations?
- (5) What is a prophetic lawsuit?
- (6) What are Jeremiah's confessions?
- (7) What is "The Book of Comfort" in Jeremiah?
- (8) What poetic form is used in four of the five chapters of Lamentations?
- (9) Write Lamentations 3:21-24 from memory.

Lesson 11

Ezekiel and Daniel

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the likely date and historical setting of Ezekiel and Daniel.
- (2) Outline the primary themes and purposes of Ezekiel and Daniel.
- (3) Understand the issues involved in interpreting apocalyptic prophecy.
- (4) Respect God's sovereignty over human history.
- (5) Relate the message of Ezekiel and Daniel to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Ezekiel and Daniel.

Memorize Ezekiel 36:25-27.

Introduction

Ezekiel and Daniel have much in common with Jeremiah. All three books come from years surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. Daniel and Ezekiel are in Babylon while Jeremiah is in Jerusalem. While Jeremiah watched the destruction of Jerusalem firsthand, Ezekiel saw visions of the destruction from his home in Babylon. Daniel, younger than Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was carried to Babylon during the first siege of Jerusalem.

While each of these books contain messages of hope and restoration, future restoration is a larger focus in Ezekiel and Daniel than in Jeremiah. Jeremiah's primary message was the judgment on Jerusalem; Ezekiel saw an inspiring vision of the restoration; Daniel foresaw the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes in the distant future.

Timeline of Ezekiel and Daniel	
Date	Event
605 B.C.	Daniel taken to Babylon
597 B.C.	Ezekiel taken to Babylon
586 B.C.	Fall of Jerusalem
571 B.C.	End of Ezekiel's ministry
539 B.C.	Persia conquers Babylon
538 B.C.	First return from exile
536 B.C.	End of Daniel's ministry

Background to Ezekiel

Ezekiel at a Glance	
Author	Ezekiel
Audience	Exiles in Babylon
Date	c. 593-571 B.C.
Theme	Judgment and restoration
Purpose	To warn of coming judgment
	To promise future restoration
The Gospel in Ezekiel	Ezekiel saw a day when God's presence would again be with His people. This was fulfilled in Jesus (John 1:14).
	Ezekiel saw a river that brought life wherever it flowed. Jesus identified himself as the source of this life-giving water (John 4:10-14).

Historical Setting of Ezekiel

Ezekiel's name means "God has strengthened." He was born shortly before Josiah's discovery of the Law in 621 B.C. As the son of a priest, Ezekiel witnessed the revival that accompanied Josiah's reforms and probably heard the preaching of Jeremiah.

Ezekiel was taken to Babylon as part of the deportation of 597 B.C. following Jehoiakim's revolt. He settled in a community of exiles on the Chebar canal near the city of Nippur. Ezekiel was married, but no mention is made of any children.

Instead of ministering as a priest in Jerusalem, Ezekiel served as a prophet among the exiles.³¹² A priest's ministry began at the age of thirty and ended at fifty.³¹³ Ezekiel's first vision came near the age of thirty and the vision that ends the book came when Ezekiel was fifty years old.³¹⁴ Like Jeremiah, the messages in Ezekiel are not always chronological. Ezekiel's prophecy that Nebuchadnezzar will defeat Egypt³¹⁵ was given in 571 B.C., two years after the vision that ends the book.

Jeremiah's primary audience was the people of Jerusalem, but he wrote letters to the exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel's primary audience was Jews in Babylon, but he wrote letters to the people of Jerusalem.

Purpose

Exiles in Babylon had many questions:

- "How long will the exile last?"
- "What will happen to our city?"
- "Is there hope for the future?"

Ezekiel responded that the captivity would last many years. He wrote to warn the people of Jerusalem that they would soon join the exiles in Babylon. Following the destruction of the city, Ezekiel brought God's promise of restoration. Ultimately, the book of Ezekiel is a message of hope; God has not given up on His people.

The Exiles' Question	Ezekiel's Answer
Will Babylon soon be defeated?	No. Babylon will win more victories over Judah. Many of those still in Jerusalem will be deported (Ezekiel 12).
What will happen to Jerusalem?	Jerusalem will be destroyed (Ezekiel 5).
Why are we punished for what our fathers did?	Everyone is responsible for their own sin. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18).
Is there hope for God's people?	Yes! God promises a glorious future (Ezekiel 40-48).

³¹² Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1

³¹³ Numbers 4:3

³¹⁴ Ezekiel's vision at the end of the book (40:1) occurred twenty years after his first vision in Ezekiel 1:2.

³¹⁵ Ezekiel 29:17-21

Overview of Ezekiel

Outline of Ezekiel

Ezekiel's Call (Ezekiel 1–3)

Ezekiel's call, like many of his messages, came as a vision from God. The vision consisted of five episodes:

- The setting (1:1-3)
 - Approach to God's throne (1:4-28)
 - The call (2:1-3:11)
 - Departure from God's throne (3:12-13)
- The setting (3:14-15)

Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel was called to preach to a people who would not listen. God told Ezekiel that it would be easier to speak to people of another language than to the rebellious people of Judah. They have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. However, God assured Ezekiel, "I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads."³¹⁶ God strengthened Ezekiel for his difficult mission.

Judgment on Judah (Ezekiel 4–24)

Through a series of visions and symbolic actions, Ezekiel brought a message of judgment to the exiles in Babylon. Central to the message of the book is Ezekiel's vision in chapters 8–11. Ezekiel saw a vision of abominations in the temple itself; the elders were practicing idolatry in the temple. In response, God commanded six executioners to destroy the people and to fill the courts with the slain.³¹⁷ Ezekiel watched as God's glory left the temple. This section (Ezekiel 10–11) parallels Jeremiah's Temple Sermon (Jeremiah 7) with its message of judgment on the temple.

Ezekiel gave a series of sermons and parables predicting the fall of Jerusalem. The messages of judgment climaxed with the death of Ezekiel's wife. God commanded Ezekiel to show no outward display of mourning. When the people asked why he did not mourn the death of his wife, Ezekiel told them that Jerusalem would suffer such horror that the survivors could not even observe mourning rituals for their loved ones.³¹⁸

Judgment on Foreign Nations (Ezekiel 25–32)

An important theme in the prophetic books is God's sovereignty over all nations. Unlike the false gods of Israel's neighbors, Jehovah is not a local deity. Demonstrating God's

³¹⁶ Ezekiel 3:7-8, *English Standard Version*

³¹⁷ Ezekiel 9:7

³¹⁸ Ezekiel 24:15-27

sovereignty over all people, Ezekiel brought oracles of judgment against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. The enemies of Israel “shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her.”³¹⁹

Restoration of Israel (Ezekiel 33–39)

After the fall of Jerusalem, the message of Ezekiel turns from judgment to restoration. For the sake of God’s name, he will restore the people.³²⁰ In physical restoration, God will bring them back to the land; in spiritual restoration, God will renew their hearts. God promises to cleanse Israel with water (making them outwardly pure) and to give them a new heart and new spirit (making them inwardly pure).³²¹ Israel’s new life is portrayed in Ezekiel’s vision of a valley of dry bones restored by the breath of God’s Spirit.

Israel’s New Temple (Ezekiel 40–48)

Ezekiel concludes with a vision that is inspiring to read, but difficult to interpret. God took Ezekiel to a high mountain and showed him a vision of a new temple. Ezekiel saw a new temple, the altar and offerings, a river flowing from the temple to bring healing to the nations, the tribal boundaries of the restored nation, and the twelve gates of Jerusalem. Most importantly, Ezekiel saw God’s glory return to Jerusalem.³²²

Bible interpreters disagree regarding the precise meaning of this vision. Because godly Christians who are committed to the truth of Scripture disagree about details of the vision, we should be charitable towards believers who may differ with us about the meaning of this vision. Some options for interpreting the vision include:

1. Some see this vision as a promise that the temple will be rebuilt after Judah returned to Jerusalem. In this view, a lack of faith prevented the people from achieving all that God showed to Ezekiel.
2. Some see this vision as a picture of the earthly millennium. In this view, during a thousand year reign of Christ on earth, the temple will be rebuilt and the sacrifices restored as reminders of Christ’s atoning death.
3. Some see this vision as a picture of God’s work through the church today. In this view, God is fulfilling his promise through the church.
4. Some see this vision as a metaphor for God’s presence among his people in the new heavens and new earth. In this view, the temple and sacrifices are a picture of worship in heaven; they will not be restored in a literal manner.

³¹⁹ Ezekiel 28:22

³²⁰ Ezekiel 36:16-23

³²¹ Ezekiel 36:24-25. Cleansing by water for outward purity points back to Numbers 19:19-21. In John 3:5, Jesus uses this language in his conversation with Nicodemus.

³²² God’s glory departs in Ezekiel 11; it returns in Ezekiel 43

5. Finally, some see the vision as containing both literal and symbolic elements. In this view, Ezekiel 40–48 was fulfilled partially in the return to Jerusalem and will be fulfilled completely in the last days.

Ezekiel's Prophetic Style

One of the most fascinating aspects of Ezekiel is the prophet's way of communicating God's message to his listeners. Two aspects of Ezekiel's prophecies are important for understanding the book: Ezekiel's use of drama and his visions.

Ezekiel is commanded to act out some of his messages. He writes the name "Jerusalem" on a clay brick and lays siege to the brick to prophesy Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem.³²³ He lies on his left side for 390 days to represent the iniquity of Israel; he lies on his right side for forty days to represent the iniquity of Judah.³²⁴

Ezekiel shaves his head and divides the hair into portions. 1/3 is burned, representing fire in Jerusalem; 1/3 is cut into pieces with a sword, representing death in battle; 1/3 is thrown into the wind, representing the scattering of the Jews in exile. God tells Ezekiel to keep a few pieces of hair and tie them in his belt; this is the remnant that will remain in Jerusalem.³²⁵

Ezekiel's visions can be difficult to interpret. Some readers become so fascinated by details of the visions that they miss the overall message. Ezekiel uses language that shows he is not attempting an exact representation of what he saw; 15 times he refers to "the likeness" of something and 3 times he describes something "as it were." He is using human language to describe something beyond human description.

Although we may not understand every detail of Ezekiel's visions, the overall message is clear: God will judge his people for their sin. Then, after judgment is accomplished, God will restore his people. His glory will again dwell among his people.

Background to Daniel

Historical Setting of Daniel

Daniel was taken to Babylon in 605 B.C. with the first group of Jewish exiles. Probably a teenager at the time, he spent the rest of his long life as a prophet in Babylon. The book of Daniel records events until 536 B.C., the third year of King Cyrus' rule over Persia.³²⁶ Daniel saw firsthand the fall of Judah, the fall of the Babylonian empire, and the rise of the Persian empire.

³²³ Ezekiel 4:1-3

³²⁴ Ezekiel 4:4-8

³²⁵ Ezekiel 5:1-12

³²⁶ Daniel 10:1

Daniel at a Glance	
Author	Daniel
Audience	God's people in all times
Date	c. 605-536 B.C.
Theme	The kingdom of God
Purpose	Demonstrate faithfulness to God (Daniel 1-6)
	Show God's sovereignty in history (Daniel 7-12)
The Gospel in Daniel	The promise of God's victory is fulfilled partially in the death and resurrection of Christ.
	This promise will be fulfilled completely at the Second Coming of Christ.

The name Daniel means "God is my judge," an appropriate name for a prophet who preached a message of God's sovereignty over all the world. Daniel shows that God is the judge of the world. God will accomplish his purpose in history.

Purpose

Writing in a time of oppression and turmoil, Daniel communicates two important truths: the importance of faithfulness to God and the reality of God's sovereignty over human history. In spite of present circumstances, God will ultimately vindicate his people. Daniel shows that all world history, not just the history of Israel, fulfills God's purposes.

Overview of Daniel

Structure of Daniel

Faithfulness at the Babylonian Court (Daniel 1–6)

Stories of Daniel and his three friends provide models of faithfulness during the exile. They show that it is possible to remain faithful even in a pagan world.

The opening sentences of Daniel establish the theme of God's sovereignty:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God.³²⁷

³²⁷ Daniel 1:1-2, *English Standard Version*

Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem; but it was the Lord who “gave the king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand.” God is the one who gave victory to Babylon.

Since God is sovereign, God’s people must be faithful to him even in times when God’s enemies seem to be in control. The book of Daniel demonstrates faithfulness to God with a series of illustrations:

- Daniel and his friends refuse to defile themselves with Babylonian practices. God honors their faithfulness by giving them favor with a pagan king (Daniel 1).
- God gives Daniel the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. God raises Daniel and his friends to positions of influence in Babylon (Daniel 2).
- Daniel’s friends refuse to bow to a pagan idol.³²⁸ God honors their faithfulness by sparing their lives in the fiery furnace. The king is astonished to see the three men joined by a fourth man like the Son of God (Daniel 3).
- God shows his sovereignty by humbling Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4).
- God shows his sovereignty by taking the kingdom from Belshazzar and giving it to Darius the Mede (Daniel 5).
- When Daniel is thrown into the lion’s den for his faithfulness to God, God delivers him from certain death (Daniel 6).

These are more than mere children’s stories; they provide powerful illustrations of faithfulness in all situations. When Daniel and his friends remained faithful to God, God was faithful to them.

Visions of God’s Sovereignty (Daniel 7–12)

This section is carefully linked to the first half of the book. The two sections are linked by language (chapters 2–7 are in Aramaic, not Hebrew). The two sections are also linked by a thematic focus on God’s sovereignty.

Daniel sees visions that testify to God’s sovereignty over human history. God is not simply the God of the Jews; he is God of the entire earth.

The visions in Daniel 7–12 are not chronological. Instead, they cover the same material multiple times. One writer suggests that chapters 7–12 are like a spiral staircase; each chapter brings us to a higher point, giving an increasingly clear view of God’s work in human history.³²⁹

³²⁸ It can be assumed that Daniel was not present when the command to bow to the image was given.

³²⁹ D.A. Carson and Donald Guthrie. *New Bible Commentary*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

A Vision of Four Beasts (Daniel 7)

Four great beasts rising out of the sea are contrasted with the glory of the Ancient of Days on his throne. The most terrifying was the fourth beast; it had ten horns and iron teeth and it devoured anything left from the other beasts. After the beasts were defeated, the Son of Man was given glory and power by the Ancient of Days.

When Daniel asked for an interpretation, he was told that the four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise out of the earth. The fourth kingdom will devour the others. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this fourth kingdom. The smallest will subdue three kings and speak against the Most High. He will oppose the saints for three and one-half times, after which the saints will live in an everlasting kingdom.

A Vision of a Ram and a Male Goat (Daniel 8)

In this vision, a ram with two horns (one larger than the other) was all-powerful. A goat with one central horn overcame the ram, but his horn was broken off and replaced with four smaller horns. Out of one of these grew a large horn that reached to the heavens. It threw some of the starry hosts to the earth, trampled them, and set itself up as a Prince. Gabriel explained to Daniel that the two-horned ram represented the kings of Media and Persia. The goat was Greece; the large horn was its king; the smaller horns were lesser kingdoms arising from Greece; the horn that grew to the heavens was an evil king who would destroy the holy people. This king would be destroyed, but not by human power.

A Vision of Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9)

As Daniel was interceding for the suffering Jews, Gabriel told him that Israel must suffer for seventy sevens for their sins. They would then rebuild Jerusalem and wait sixty-nine sevens until the Anointed One appeared. Another ruler will destroy Jerusalem, make a one-week covenant with Israel, and set up an abomination of desolation until the end is poured out on him.

Visions of Israel's Future (Daniel 10–11)

Daniel saw a man dressed in linen with a gold belt, a face like lightning, eyes like flaming torches, and arms and legs like bronze. A messenger told Daniel that three kings will appear in Persia and a fourth will lead the fight against Greece. After the appearance of a mighty king, his kingdom will be divided into four parcels. War between the kings of the South and North will end with the king of the North gaining power. He will persecute believers and set up the abomination of desolation.

Conclusion of Daniel's Visions (Daniel 12)

Ultimately, the archangel Michael will arise during a time of great distress to deliver everyone whose name is written in the Book. This will happen after a time, times, and half a time.³³⁰ The angel told him that this will be 1,290 days from the abomination of desolation.

Empires in Daniel's Visions

A common understanding of the empires in Daniel's visions is seen in the table below.

Empires in Daniel's Visions			
Kingdom	Image in Daniel 2	Beast in Daniel 7	Beasts in Daniel 8
Babylon	Head of fine gold	Like a lion with eagle's wings	
Medo-Persia	Chest and arms of silver	Like a bear	Ram with two horns
Greece	Belly and thighs of bronze	Like a leopard with four wings and four heads	Male goat with one great horn, four horns and little horn
Rome	Legs of iron, feet of iron and clay	Incomparable beast with ten horns and little horn	
Kingdom of God	Stone that becomes a great mountain	Messiah and saints receive the kingdom	

Themes in Daniel

While scholars disagree about the details of Daniel's visions, three themes are seen throughout the book.

The Sovereignty of God

Through stories of God's protection in chapters 1–6 and the visions of chapters 7–12, Daniel showed that God is sovereign, not just over Jerusalem but over the whole world. For exiles living in foreign lands, this was a powerful message. From the opening testimony to God's sovereignty in giving Judah to Nebuchadnezzar through the prophetic images of the Ancient of Days who establishes an eternal kingdom for his people, Daniel shows that God is in charge of human history.

³³⁰ Daniel 12:7

The Pride of Humankind

Daniel teaches that God rescues the faithful and judges the proud. In chapters 1–6, the rulers of Babylon place themselves against God and his people. The stories of Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliation (Daniel 4) and God’s judgment on Belshazzar (Daniel 5) show that God humbles the proud.³³¹

In Daniel 7–12, a series of world leaders oppose God’s purposes. Each of these are eventually defeated. The Ancient of Days and the Son of Man replace these earthly rulers. In the final chapters of Daniel, the forces of heaven crush the enemies of God.

The Ultimate Victory of God’s People

Regardless of how one interprets the kingdoms in Daniel’s visions, the ultimate victory of the people of God is clear. Daniel describes a delay in the arrival of God’s eternal kingdom, a delay during which God’s people will suffer testing and persecution. However, those who are faithful will enjoy final victory.

Daniel’s primary message is a challenge to faithfulness today. Because of the eventual victory of God and his people, believers should live faithfully today.

Ezekiel and Daniel Speak Today

The church has sometimes been tempted to withdraw from the world into a ghetto of spiritual concerns while leaving other parts of life alone. Abraham Kuyper said, **“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”** This 19th century Dutch scholar, politician, and Christian understood that God is sovereign over all.

The final chapters of Ezekiel and the last half of Daniel proclaim God’s sovereignty over all human history. God is working his purposes. This is important for two reasons:

- 1. It gives confidence in the face of this world’s opposition.** As exiles in a foreign land, Daniel and Ezekiel trusted God to accomplish his purposes. Daniel lived to see some of those purposes accomplished; Ezekiel probably did not live long enough to see the return from exile. However, they both knew that God would accomplish his purposes. As 21st century Christians, we live in confidence that God is in control of our world. Nothing can defeat his purposes.
- 2. It reminds us of our responsibility to live faithfully in everyday life.** Christians must not cede the political process, the educational system, cultural endeavors, or any other sphere of influence to Satan. Wherever God places us, we are to live as representatives of a sovereign God. For Ezekiel, this meant faithfulness as a prophet

³³¹ Note how Daniel relates Belshazzar’s pride in refusing to submit to the God who had humbled his father, Nebuchadnezzar, in such a dramatic fashion (Daniel 5:17-28).

while in exile. For Daniel, it meant faithfulness as an influential member of government. Where does God want to use you in his kingdom?

Conclusion: Ezekiel and Daniel in the New Testament

There are at least 65 allusions to Ezekiel in the New Testament. Nearly 50 of these are in the book of Revelation.

Daniel promises that God will defeat evil and rule the world; yet the return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. did not bring the defeat of evil. The New Testament shows the fulfillment of this promise. Paul shows that on the cross Jesus defeated the powers of evil.³³²

The promise of Daniel is ultimately fulfilled in Revelation. The book of Revelation shows God's ultimate victory over Satan. In Daniel 7, four beasts arise out of the sea; in Revelation 13, a beast arises out of the sea. In Revelation 19:11-21, Jesus is the Divine Warrior who defeats the powers of evil.

A Closer Look at Apocalyptic Literature

Daniel, Revelation and parts of Ezekiel and Zechariah are called apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic writing was well known in the Jewish world; there are many non-biblical examples of this form. Apocalyptic literature is different from other styles of biblical writing and requires careful interpretation.

Apocalyptic writing reveals truth that has been hidden. Biblical apocalyptic literature looks at the events of world history in light of God's purposes. It is particularly focused on the fulfillment of God's ultimate purposes at the end of time. Where most Old Testament prophets focus on Israel and the covenant, Daniel looks at secular world empires in light of God's ultimate purposes.

Apocalyptic literature portrays prophetic truth through visions. Daniel uses the term *vision* more than 30 times. The visions are often overlapping, so it is difficult to create an exact chronological sequence. Multiple visions may present overlapping views of the same event in order to present alternate perspectives on an event. Through these visions, Daniel (and later John the Revelator) open a window into the spiritual world. Apocalyptic writing shows that the spiritual world is as real as the physical world.

Apocalyptic literature uses dramatic symbols to communicate truth. Daniel and Revelation share many symbols. In both Daniel and Revelation, grotesque beasts represent evil kingdoms. The beasts are often hybrids of different species, making them abominations to Israel.³³³

Apocalyptic writing is especially important in times of oppression. Daniel encouraged the Jewish people during persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes. Revelation was written during

³³² Colossians 1:13-15

³³³ For example, the first beast of Daniel 7 was like a lion, and had eagles' wings.

the Roman persecution of the church. In these times, apocalyptic literature showed that God is the Divine Warrior who fights on behalf of his people. A primary purpose for biblical apocalyptic writing is to encourage faithfulness today because of our confidence in God's plan for the future.

A reader of apocalyptic literature should focus on the major themes without becoming overwhelmed by details. In Daniel, the large theme is God's sovereignty over human history. Although many empires oppose God, his ultimate victory is sure. Daniel inspires his readers to faithfulness by assuring them that God will bring final victory.

Lesson 11 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Choose **one** of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Read Ezekiel's vision of the new temple in Ezekiel 40–48. Assign one of the interpretation choices discussed in this lesson to each member of your group. Each member must study Ezekiel 40–48 and explain how Ezekiel's vision is interpreted with their assigned approach.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

- Write a one page (450-word) essay on Ezekiel's vision of the new temple. Choose one of the interpretation choices discussed in this lesson and explain the vision in light of that interpretation.
- Write a one page (450-word) detailed outline for a sermon on God's plan for human history based on Daniel 7–12.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 11 Test

- (1) What is the meaning of the name "Ezekiel"?
- (2) What is the purpose of the Book of Ezekiel?
- (3) What is Ezekiel's parallel to Jeremiah's Temple Sermon?
- (4) List five options for interpreting Ezekiel's vision of a new temple.
- (5) Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in _____ B.C. Daniel was taken to Babylon in _____ B.C.
- (6) What three themes are central to the Book of Daniel?
- (7) What two languages are used in the Book of Daniel?
- (8) In traditional interpretation, which empire is represented by each of these images?
 - A lion with eagle's wings: _____
 - A bear: _____
 - A male goat with one great horn: _____
 - Legs of iron, feet of iron and clay: _____
 - A stone that becomes a great mountain: _____
- (9) Which biblical books are primarily or partly composed of apocalyptic writing?
- (10) Which New Testament book quotes Ezekiel and Daniel most frequently?
- (11) Write Ezekiel 36:25-27 from memory.

Lesson 12

Hosea, Joel, and Amos

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the likely date and historical setting of Hosea, Joel, and Amos.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Hosea, Joel, and Amos.
- (3) Understand the theme of righteousness in the Minor Prophets.
- (4) Feel the heart of God as he saw the unfaithfulness of his people.
- (5) Relate the message of Hosea, Joel, and Amos to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Hosea, Joel, and Amos.

Memorize Hosea 10:12; Joel 2:13; Amos 5:24.

Introduction

The last twelve books of the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. In the Hebrew Bible, these books are contained on one scroll called "The Book of the Twelve."

Because the Minor Prophets are smaller than the Major Prophets, some readers assume these books are unimportant. However, these prophets were not minor in terms of their message or influence. "Minor" refers to the size of the books, not the size of the message. The message of these prophets had a major influence on the world of ancient Israel and Judah and continues to speak to the church today.

Approximate Dates of the Minor Prophets	
8th Century B.C.	Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah
7th Century B.C.	Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk
6th Century B.C.	Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah
5th Century B.C.	Malachi, Joel (likely)

Hosea: God's Heartache

Hosea at a Glance	
Author	Hosea
Audience	The Northern Kingdom
Date	Last half of the 8 th century
Theme	God's heartache
Purpose	To confront Israel with her spiritual adultery
The Gospel in Hosea	The answer to Israel's spiritual adultery is a return to God and to the Davidic king (Hosea 3:5). This will happen in the time of Messiah as the eternal King, Jesus, reunites all the faithful under his rule.

Historical Setting of Hosea

Hosea and Amos were 8th century prophets to the Northern Kingdom.³³⁴ They were contemporaries of Isaiah in Judah.

In the early 8th century B.C., Jeroboam II was king of the Northern Kingdom. This was a time of prosperity in Israel. Assyria's power was temporarily reduced by conflicts at home. Israel expanded its borders and benefited from trade with its neighbors. Israel and Judah now controlled as much territory as Israel during the days of King David.

Unfortunately, although Israel prospered economically, it did not prosper spiritually. Spiritually, Israel was apostate; the people of the Northern Kingdom worshiped Baal alongside Jehovah.³³⁵

Hosea probably began his ministry late in the reign of Jeroboam II. Assyria was regaining power and would soon become the dominant world empire under Tiglath-Pileser III. Within a few years, Assyria would conquer Samaria and destroy the Northern Kingdom.

Purpose of Hosea

Hosea preached against Israel's spiritual adultery. He warned that her worship of Baal would bring God's judgment. He showed the pain that Israel's unfaithfulness caused God.

³³⁴ Hosea refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel as "Ephraim" thirty-five times.

³³⁵ The term for combining the worship of Jehovah and other gods is *syncretism*. This was a repeated problem for Israel, including worship of the golden calf in Exodus 32 and again when Solomon began to worship the gods of his foreign wives.

► The Bible frequently uses the metaphor of marriage to describe the relationship between God and his people. If human marriage is modeled on God's relationship with his people, what does that teach us about marriage?

Themes in Hosea

Spiritual Adultery

Throughout Scripture, marriage is a picture of God's relationship with his people. Marriage is a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. In the same way, God established an everlasting covenant with Israel. Marriage and covenant with God are exclusive relationships. Just as a husband or wife must never be unfaithful to their spouse, God's people must never be unfaithful to God. In Hosea, God showed that Israel was guilty of spiritual adultery with other gods in the same sense that a wife who turned to other lovers was guilty of adultery.

The graphic language of Hosea is well suited to the nature of Israel's idolatry. Baal was the weather god of Syria-Palestine. He was supposed to control rainfall, agriculture, and fertility. At pagan shrines, people worshiped Baal with ritual prostitution. They believed that their sexual behavior caused Baal to respond with fertile seed and rain for the land. Hosea's imagery shows that Israel's sin with cult prostitutes is a reflection of their spiritual prostitution.

God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer, a wife of whoredoms.³³⁶ Some commentators believe that Gomer was already a harlot before the marriage. Because of the difficulty of accepting that God would command such an act, others believe that God commanded Hosea to marry a woman who later became unfaithful. Finally, some believe that Gomer was an idol-worshiper who represented the spiritual adultery of the nation. Regardless of the specific interpretation of the phrase, Gomer's unfaithfulness to Hosea is a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to Jehovah.

The names of Hosea's children were prophetic. Jezreel was named after the valley where Assyria would soon win a major victory over Israel. Lo-Ruhamah meant "No Mercy," because God would show no mercy on the rebellious nation. Lo-Ammi meant "Not My People," because God would reject the nation that turned to other gods.

³³⁶ Hosea 1:2. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, this phrase points to present or past unfaithfulness; it never points to future unfaithfulness. This provides some support for the first interpretation of God's command.

Hosea's Family	
Gomer	Shows Israel's spiritual adultery
Jezreel	The valley where Assyria will defeat Israel
Lo-Ruhamah	"No Mercy"
Lo-Ammi	"Not My People"

After her unfaithfulness led to Gomer's disgraceful sale as a slave, God told Hosea to buy her back. In the same way, after Israel had been abandoned by her false gods, God would bring her home.

God's Lawsuit Against Israel

In Lesson 10, we looked at the prophetic lawsuit in which God brought accusations against Israel for her unfaithfulness to the covenant. The same language is used in Hosea 4-5 when God brings charges against Israel.

Hosea warns that Israel no longer truly knows God. In Hebrew, *knowledge* is more than intellectual awareness; it is a term of relationship. To know someone means to have an experiential relationship with him or her. Israel no longer knew God; they rejected God's law and prophets; they were destroyed for lack of knowledge.³³⁷ They traded their knowledge of God for the knowledge of Baal.

The Hope of Restoration

Like other prophets, Hosea ended with the promise of restoration if Israel would leave their spiritual adultery and return to Jehovah. God loved Israel and brought her out of Egypt. Now, he sought to restore her to himself.

Hosea 14 includes a call to repentance and the promise of healing. Although Israel hoped that Assyria would become her ally, Assyria would become her enemy, not her friend. However, if Israel repented, God promised, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."³³⁸ God must judge Israel for her sin, but he also held out the hope of restoration.

Hosea in the New Testament

Hosea is cited repeatedly in the New Testament. Matthew showed that Jesus' return from Egypt was a fulfillment of Hosea.³³⁹ Using the words of Hosea, Jesus reminded his enemies that mercy is more important than sacrifice.³⁴⁰ Paul pointed to Hosea when teaching that

³³⁷ Hosea 4:6

³³⁸ Hosea 14:4

³³⁹ Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1

³⁴⁰ Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6

God is creating a people that includes both Jews and Gentiles.³⁴¹ The knowledge of God (knowledge that Israel had forsaken) would soon come to the Gentiles.

Joel: The Day of the Lord

Joel at a Glance	
Author	Joel
Audience	Judah
Date	Probably 500-450 B.C.
Theme	The day of the Lord
Purpose	Predict a coming day of judgment
	Predict a coming day of restoration
The Gospel in Joel	Joel's promise is fulfilled at Pentecost.

Historical Setting of Joel

Joel ministered soon after a terrible locust plague. Joel used this natural disaster as a metaphor for a future day of judgment, the day of the Lord.

Little is known about the prophet Joel other than his name (it means "Jehovah is God") and his father (he was the son of Pethuel).

Even the date of the book is uncertain; there are no events that confirm a date. Because Joel does not mention either the Northern Kingdom or a king of Judah, it is likely that Joel preached after the return from Exile. However, there is much disagreement about this among biblical scholars.

Purpose of Joel

Joel called Judah to return to God. The locust plague served as a symbol of coming judgment on the disobedient. However, Joel also prophesied a coming day of restoration for the faithful.

Themes in Joel

A Locust Plague and the Day of the Lord (Joel 1:1–2:17)

Joel 1:2–2:17 is a lament about a locust plague. This plague was worse than anyone had seen; it was like an army that destroyed the land.

³⁴¹ Romans 9:25-26; Hosea 1:10-11 and 2:23

The locust plague was a sign of worse things to come. Instead of a time of restoration, the day of the Lord would be a time of judgment on God's people if they did not repent. It was not enough to "rend your garments" in external signs; true repentance must come from the heart. God required that Judah "rend your hearts." If the people turned to God, they would find that "he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."³⁴²

A Prophetic Message for the Future (Joel 2:18–3:21)

Along with judgment, God promised restoration. First, God would restore the land. He would restore the years that the locust hath eaten.³⁴³ Then, God promised spiritual restoration.

Just as the physical locust plague was a symbol of spiritual disaster, the restoration of the land was a symbol of a coming spiritual awakening. God would pour out his Spirit on people from all levels of society.

During that time, all the earth would know of God's sovereignty. The enemies of God's people would be punished while Judah would enjoy God's special blessing.

Joel in the New Testament

Joel promised that God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. This was more than the revivals that had occurred periodically in Israel's history. These revivals delayed Israel's steady decline from God's plan, but they proved to be temporary rather than permanent changes. In addition, they were limited to Israel.

Joel looked forward to a time when God's Spirit would be poured on all flesh. At Pentecost, Peter declared that Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled.³⁴⁴ Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the upper room, the apostles took the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

This was not a temporary revival. Instead, the promise of the day of the Lord is still being fulfilled through the ministry of the church. As we evangelize and make disciples, we do so in the assurance that God's Spirit is working through us to accomplish God's purpose for mankind. His Spirit is still being poured out on all flesh through the work of the church.

³⁴² Joel 2:13

³⁴³ Joel 2:25

³⁴⁴ Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21

Amos: A Shepherd for True Righteousness

Amos at a Glance	
Author	Amos
Audience	The Northern Kingdom
Date	Mid-8 th century B.C.
Theme	A Shepherd for true righteousness
Purpose	To prophesy God's judgment on Israel because of her unrighteous behavior – both towards God and towards her fellow man.
The Gospel in Amos	Like Amos, Jesus shows that love for God (the first great commandment) must be seen in love for our fellow man (the second great commandment). The Epistle of James shares many themes with Amos.

Historical Setting of Amos

Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa, a small town south of Jerusalem. In the summer, shepherds moved their flocks to lower elevations. During these months, Amos tended fig-bearing sycamore trees.

God commissioned Amos to travel to the Northern Kingdom. As a shepherd, Amos lacked the credentials of a prophet. Worse, as a prophet from Judah, Amos did not have the trust of the people in the Northern Kingdom.³⁴⁵

Adding to the opposition to his message, Amos preached a message of judgment during a time when the Northern Kingdom was experiencing unprecedented economic and political success. Many Israelites assumed that prosperity was a sign of God's blessing. In their eyes, Amos' message of judgment was invalidated by Israel's visible prosperity. However, Amos was faithful to God's call, bringing a message of judgment.

Purpose of Amos

To a nation experiencing prosperity, Amos prophesied judgment. Instead of a new day of wealth, Israel was facing a day of judgment. God's judgment was caused by Israel's refusal to act with justice towards the lowest members of society. Amos preached that righteousness is more than observing temple rituals; righteousness requires right behavior toward our fellowman.

³⁴⁵ Amos 7:10-13

Themes in Amos

Judgment (Amos 1:1–9:10)

Most of the book of Amos is a message of judgment. Amos answers three questions:

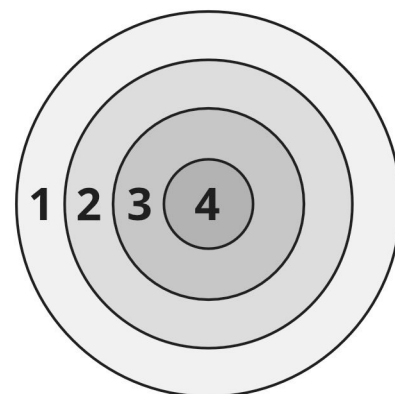
- 1. Who is sending judgment?** Assyria is not mentioned in the book; Amos shows that the coming judgment is from God. Repeatedly, he drives home this message: "The Lord will roar... Thus saith the Lord... I will not turn away the punishment... I will send a fire... I will break also the bar of Damascus."³⁴⁶
- 2. How will the judgment come?** Famine, drought, plague, and pestilence will be instruments of God's judgment.³⁴⁷ Assyria will invade the land and destroy the land as thoroughly as a lion destroys a sheep, leaving only a leg or piece of an ear.³⁴⁸ The leaders of the nation will be carried away³⁴⁹ and the land will be occupied.³⁵⁰
- 3. Why is God sending judgment?** God's judgment is the result of Israel's sin. Of all nations, only Israel and Judah were known by God. Israel enjoyed the privileges of the covenant; she forgot the responsibilities of the covenant. Because she is known by God, Israel faces God's punishment.³⁵¹ The covenant brought both privilege and responsibility.

The proclamation of judgment is given through a series of prophetic messages. Each section of Amos brings this message in a different manner. The message of Amos includes:

Judgment Oracles Against the Nations (Amos 1–2)

Amos began with judgment speeches against other nations: Damascus, Philistia, and Tyre. He then moved to nations that were blood relatives of Israel: Edom, Ammon, and Moab. These nations had committed brutal crimes against Israel. Amos then speaks to the spiritual sins of Judah – forsaking the law and following false gods.

After speaking to the nations that surrounded Israel, Amos addressed the sins of the Northern Kingdom. To this point, Amos's listeners would have agreed with his message. However, in an unexpected twist, Amos says that the day of the Lord will be a day of judgment on Israel as well. Israel will



³⁴⁶ Amos 1:2-8

³⁴⁷ Amos 4:6-11

³⁴⁸ Amos 3:11-12

³⁴⁹ Amos 4:2-3 and 5:27

³⁵⁰ Amos 6:14

³⁵¹ Amos 3:1-2. Recall from Hosea that the term *know* refers to relationship, not mere mental knowledge.

be judged because of her sins: oppressing the weak (they sell the poor for a pair of shoes³⁵²), sexual sins, and pagan celebrations.

Prophecies Against Israel (Amos 3–6)

Amos asked a series of questions to show the justice of God's judgment on Israel.³⁵³ He compared Israel's sin to the Philistines and Egyptians.³⁵⁴ He addressed the sins of specific groups of Israelites: the indulgent women of Samaria, those who brought sacrifices while living in sin, and leaders who were arrogant in their wealth and apparent security.³⁵⁵

Amos sang a funeral lament over Israel, a song to mourn the dead.³⁵⁶ Regardless of the warnings, Israel refused to repent. They expected God to judge other nations; they did not realize that God would judge Israel for her sin.

Visions of Judgment (Amos 7:1 – 9:10)

God gave Amos a series of five visions portraying coming judgment. Amos saw:

1. A locust plague that threatened to destroy the land. This showed God's judgment on Israel. Amos interceded for Israel and God relented.
2. A fire so hot that it consumed the Mediterranean Sea. Again, Amos interceded for Israel and God again relented.
3. A plumb line to test the straightness of a wall. When measured against God's standard of righteousness, Israel was crooked. Because of this, God would tear down the wall.
4. A basket of ripe fruit. This illustrated Israel's condition; she was ripe for immediate judgment. People observed the Sabbath; but after the Sabbath ended, they treated other people dishonestly. True righteousness includes right behavior; religious rituals are not enough.
5. God standing beside the altar announcing the certainty of judgment. There was no escape. In a frightening paraphrase of his earlier promises to watch his people, God said, "I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good."³⁵⁷

Restoration (Amos 9:11-15)

Amos, like Hosea, ended with a message of hope. God has not forgotten his people. The book ends with a message of future restoration.

³⁵² Amos 2:6

³⁵³ Amos 3:3-6

³⁵⁴ Amos 3:9-15

³⁵⁵ Amos 4:1-11 and 6:1-14

³⁵⁶ Amos 5:1-3

³⁵⁷ Amos 9:4

The Great Reversal	
Judgment (1:1-9:10)	Restoration (9:11-15)
Falling: The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise (5:2).	Rising: I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen (9:11).
Broken Walls: And ye shall go out at the breaches (4:3).	Repaired Walls: I will close up the breaches thereof (9:11).
Destruction: And I will smite the winter house and the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end (3:15).	Rebuilding: I will raise up his ruins (9:11).
Famine: Ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them (5:11).	Feasting: They shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them (9:14).
Exile: Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus (5:27).	Return: And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them (9:15).

Amos in the New Testament

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preaches a message similar to that of Amos: righteousness must be seen in our actions toward our fellowman. This same message is seen in the book of James. Professions of faith are not enough; that faith must be lived out in daily life.

► At times the church has ignored the sins of society while pursuing evangelism. At other times, the church has ignored the message of the gospel while preaching against social ills.³⁵⁸ In your society, how can the church effectively speak to the sins of society while also maintaining a biblical emphasis on evangelism?

³⁵⁸ This is often called the “social gospel.”

A Closer Look at “Righteousness” in the Prophets

One of the key verses of Amos is 5:24: “But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.” This verse has been a theme for many social justice movements, some of which have forgotten the gospel in their concern for social action.

However, the message of Amos is far from a social gospel that replaces the saving message of Jesus Christ with social action. Instead, Amos shows that true righteousness is based on the character of God. True righteousness before God will result in right behavior toward our neighbor. This message is repeated throughout Scripture:

- God said, “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.” This is followed by a series of commands addressing Israel’s treatment of the poor, of employees, of the handicapped, and of fellow Israelites.³⁵⁹
- Job declared his innocence before God. As part of his defense, he testified to his righteous treatment of his fellowman.³⁶⁰
- The Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. In response, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6: “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”³⁶¹
- James confronted Christians who showed partiality towards the rich, who failed to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and who were guilty of evil speaking. James summed up the meaning of pure religion: “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”³⁶²

Righteousness describes the character of God; to treat our neighbor with justice is to reflect the character of God. As Christians in the 21st century, we are to display God’s character to an unbelieving world. Right relationship with God will change our relationship with our fellowman. That was the meaning of righteousness in Amos; it is the meaning of righteousness in today’s world.

Conclusion

Few Christians have modeled more effectively a commitment to both the spread of the gospel and the principle of Christian justice than William Wilberforce, an English politician who lived from 1759–1833.

Wilberforce was elected to the House of Commons at the age of 21. Four years later, he became a Christian. This young aristocrat’s entire life was transformed by his conversion.

³⁵⁹ Leviticus 19:2 and following

³⁶⁰ Job 31

³⁶¹ Matthew 9:13

³⁶² James 1:27

This was not simply a private profession of faith. His view of his political career, his self-centered lifestyle, and his use of his wealth were all changed by his conversion.

William Wilberforce believed that Christians must be concerned both for evangelism of the lost and for the physical needs of the suffering. As a result, he worked with numerous organizations to help the poor and to spread the gospel. He sponsored missionaries to India and Africa. He worked for better hospitals, asylums, schools, and prisons. He supported Sunday schools, refugees, single mothers, and the working poor. For much of his life, Wilberforce gave one quarter of his annual income to the poor.

Wilberforce's most lasting contribution as a political leader was his fight against slavery. Convinced that slavery was incompatible with Christian love for our fellowman, Wilberforce devoted much of his career to fighting this evil. At first, few people thought that he had any chance to defeat the powerful lobby that protected slavery. English traders carried nearly 50,000 slaves a year from Africa across the Atlantic. The trade was protected by politicians as a British right, defended by businessmen as an economic necessity, and accepted by many Christians as a sad but necessary evil.

Wilberforce could not accept this evil. He had been placed by God in a position of influence. He saw this position as an opportunity to serve God. He was determined to "let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Learning of the evils of slavery, Wilberforce became committed to the abolition of this shameful sin. He wrote, "Let the consequences be what they would: I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition."

Beginning in 1789, Wilberforce introduced bills each year against the slave trade. Twelve anti-slavery bills were defeated between 1789 and 1805. Finally, in 1807, Parliament abolished the slave trade in the British Empire.

Wilberforce then began a fight to abolish slavery itself (not just the trade of new slaves) throughout the Empire. Wilberforce worked another twenty-five years to see slavery abolished. Three days before he died, the House of Commons passed a law freeing all slaves in the British Empire.

Lesson 12 Assignments

Demonstrate your understanding of this lesson with the following assignments:

(1) Complete **one** of the following assignments.

Option 1: Group Assignment

Discuss an area of injustice in your society to which the church should speak. Using the model of Amos, show how the church should address this situation. Write a one page summary of your discussion.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

Prepare a detailed sermon outline for a sermon on "God's Judgment and Love for an Unfaithful Nation." Show how the message of Hosea speaks to our world today.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 12 Test

- (1) What are the Minor Prophets called in the Hebrew Bible?
- (2) What is the difference between the Major Prophets and Minor Prophets?
- (3) Describe the economic and spiritual conditions of the Northern Kingdom during 8th century B.C.
- (4) What is the primary purpose for Hosea?
- (5) What do the names of each of Hosea's children prophesy to Israel?
- (6) In the Old Testament, what is the meaning of the word *know*?
- (7) What is the primary theme of Joel?
- (8) In Joel, what natural disaster is a prophecy of coming judgment?
- (9) According to the New Testament, when is Joel's prophecy of a coming spiritual awakening fulfilled?
- (10) What is the purpose of the Book of Amos?
- (11) List the five visions of judgment in Amos and give their meaning.
- (12) Write Hosea 10:12; Joel 2:13; Amos 5:24 from memory.

Lesson 13

Obadiah–Zephaniah

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the likely date and historical setting of Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
- (3) Understand basic principles for interpreting Old Testament prophecy.
- (4) Appreciate God's sovereignty over all nations.
- (5) Relate the message of Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

Memorize Micah 6:8; Nahum 1:7-8; Habakkuk 3:2.

Introduction

Unlike the false gods of the ancient world, Jehovah was not a local god. Jehovah was, and is, sovereign of the entire world. This is seen in the message of the Minor Prophets to nations beyond Israel. In the books studied in this lesson, God spoke through his prophets to Edom, Nineveh, Israel, Judah, and in Zephaniah, to all the world. In this chapter, we see God's sovereignty over people who do not even recognize his authority. God is sovereign over all the world.

Obadiah: A Message to Edom

Obadiah at a Glance	
Author	Obadiah
Audience	Edom
Date	Between 587 and 553 B.C.
Theme	The fall of Edom
Purpose	To prophesy the destruction of Edom because of her cruelty to Judah during the Babylonian siege.
The Gospel in Obadiah	After the exile, Judah will be restored. Through her, the gospel will come to the Gentiles.

Historical Setting of Obadiah

The book of Obadiah should be read in the context of the longstanding conflict between Edom, descendants of Esau, and Israel, descendants of Jacob. During the exodus, Edom denied passage to Israel.³⁶³ During the Babylonian siege, Edomites cheered the destruction of Jerusalem. Their cruelty to Judah in 587 B.C. inspired the imprecations of Psalm 137:7-9 as well as the prophetic message of Obadiah.

We know nothing about the prophet Obadiah except his name. His name means "one who serves Yahweh" and is a common name in the Old Testament.³⁶⁴

Message of Obadiah

Obadiah's prophecy is both a message of judgment on Edom and a message of consolation for Judah. First, Obadiah brings a message of judgment against Edom. Edom arrogantly believes that the location of her capital, Sela, on a high, easily defended rock will protect her from her enemies.³⁶⁵ However, because of her violence against Judah, God will destroy Edom. A just God will not allow Edom's sin to go unpunished. Obadiah's prophecy was fulfilled when Edom was conquered in 553 B.C.

Obadiah also brings a message of consolation. He reminds Judah of God's covenant love for his people. Even after the destruction of Jerusalem, God promises hope for his people. The

³⁶³ Numbers 20:14-21

³⁶⁴ The minor prophet is not the Obadiah who was an official in Ahab's household in 1 Kings 18.

³⁶⁵ Obadiah 1:3

pivotal verse of Obadiah (Obadiah 1:15) promises that the day of the Lord is near for all nations.

Jonah: A Reluctant Prophet to Nineveh

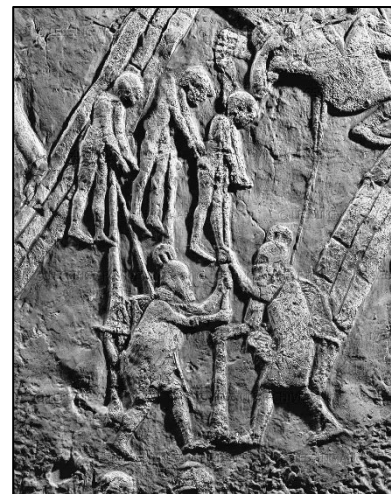
Jonah at a Glance	
Author	Jonah
Audience	Ninevah
Date	Between 793 and 753 B.C.
Theme	God's grace to all people
Purpose	To show God's desire to redeem all people, even the enemies of Israel
The Gospel in Jonah	Jesus pointed to Jonah as a sign of the resurrection.
	Through the ministry of the apostles and the early church, the gospel is preached to all nations.

Historical Setting of Jonah

Jonah prophesied during a period of weakness in the Assyrian Empire. He prophesied the expansion of the Northern Kingdom during the days of Jeroboam II.³⁶⁶

An aggressive empire, the Assyrians were the greatest threat to Israel's independence. Surviving artwork shows that the Assyrians delighted in cruelty to their enemies.³⁶⁷ When Jonah received God's call to preach to Nineveh, he fled to Tarshish.

He did not want to preach a message that might bring Nineveh to repentance. He knew that if Nineveh repented, God would spare the city.³⁶⁸ From Jonah's perspective as a loyal Israelite, the destruction of Nineveh would be a blessing for Israel.



Artwork showing Assyrian cruelty

³⁶⁶ 2 Kings 14:25

³⁶⁷ Image: "KCE Lachish impale" taken by kevincellis36109, retrieved from

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/36339698@N00/17005960457/> licensed under CC BY 2.0, desaturated from the original.

³⁶⁸ Jonah 4:2

Purpose of Jonah

The book of Jonah shows God's mercy, even on Israel's enemies. Jonah shows that God's compassion is not just for us (Israel); God's compassion is also for them (Nineveh).

In contrast to God, the prophet Jonah feels no compassion for Nineveh. The book of Jonah presses us to consider, "Am I like Jonah or like God?"

Is Jonah a True Story?

Some writers have argued that the story of Jonah is not a true story, but is a parable intended to teach a lesson about Israel's failure to fulfill God's mission to the nations. However, there is nothing in the book of Jonah to suggest that it is intended as a parable. The story is presented as a true story and contains historical and geographical details that we expect of a true narrative.

One of the messages of Jonah is God's sovereignty. God sent out a great wind; he prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; he prepared a gourd to provide shelter for Jonah, and he prepared a worm to destroy the gourd. The message of God's sovereignty over his creation is lost if the story is not true.

Jesus treated the story of Jonah as history. He warned that, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."³⁶⁹

For these reasons, we know that Jonah is a true story.

The Message of Jonah

Part One: A Lesson in Obedience (Jonah 1-2)

Chapters 1 and 2 teach a lesson in obedience. When God calls Jonah to Nineveh, Jonah's first response is to run in the opposite direction. "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish."³⁷⁰ He boards a ship to run from the presence of the Lord. The prophet of the Lord believes he can escape the presence of the omnipotent God. However, God is sovereign. The Lord sent out a great wind which threatened to destroy the ship.

When the sailors cast lots to determine the cause of the storm, they find that Jonah is at fault. Unlike Jonah (who does not care about Nineveh), the sailors care enough for their fellowman to attempt to save Jonah's life. Pagan sailors show more compassion than God's prophet. When the sailors finally throw Jonah into the sea, the storm immediately calms. Jonah's life is spared because the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

³⁶⁹ Matthew 12:41

³⁷⁰ Jonah 1:3

This first section ends with Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy. Jonah promises to "pay that that I have vowed"; he has learned a lesson in obedience.

Part Two: A Lesson in Compassion (Jonah 3-4)

Like chapter 1, Jonah 3 begins with God's call. This time, Jonah obeys; "so Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh." Jonah has learned the lesson in obedience; now God teaches him a lesson in compassion.

Jonah preaches a message of judgment in Nineveh. As in chapter 1, the pagans have more sense of God's compassion than Jonah. In chapter 1, the pagan sailors tried to save Jonah's life. In chapter 3, it is the pagan king of Nineveh who suggests that God might have mercy on the city. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" God's prophet preaches only judgment; a pagan king preaches God's mercy.

Like chapter 2, Jonah 4 contains a prayer. Jonah 2 is a prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy on Jonah; Jonah 4 contains a prayer of complaint for God's mercy on Nineveh. Jonah complains because God has spared the city of Nineveh. The chapter ends with God's lesson to Jonah, a lesson about God's great compassion for the lost.

Jonah in the New Testament

The book of Jonah is reflected in at least two ways in the New Testament. First, Jesus pointed to Jonah's rescue from the belly of the fish as an analogy for his own resurrection from the grave.³⁷¹

Second, Jonah illustrates Israel's failure to fulfill her mission to the nations. From the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:2-3, it is clear that Israel was blessed in order to be a vehicle of blessing to others. The book of Jonah shows Israel's failure to fulfill that mission. Through the coming of Christ, this mission is renewed when the disciples are commissioned to: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations."³⁷²

Jonah in the 21st Century

It is easy to mock Jonah, the reluctant prophet who did not want God to spare Nineveh; however, Jonah forces us to look at our world through God's eyes. When I read Jonah, I should ask myself:

- Which brings me joy: the destruction of my enemy or the repentance of my enemy?
- Do I preach God's mercy with as much passion as I preach God's judgment?
- Am I reluctant to go to those who are the enemies of God's people?
- Do I have the character of Jonah or the character of God?

³⁷¹ Matthew 12:39-40

³⁷² Matthew 28:19

Micah: A Message to Judah and Israel

Micah at a Glance	
Author	Micah
Audience	Judah
Date	740-700 B.C.
Theme	True covenant living
Purpose	To show that God will judge Judah for breaking the covenant
The Gospel in Micah	Micah foreshadows Jesus' message of religion from the heart. True religion is more than ritual; true religion is summed up in Micah 6:8: "To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

Historical Setting of Micah

Shortly before the fall of the Northern Kingdom, Micah, a prophet from Moresheth, preached in Judah. His message led to a revival during Hezekiah's reign.

Purpose of Micah

Using the form of a covenant lawsuit, Micah showed that Judah was unfaithful to the covenant.³⁷³ Micah preached judgment for those who break covenant, and hope for those who repent. Micah showed that righteousness is more than the observance of rituals; true righteousness is "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."³⁷⁴

Message of Micah

Micah brought a series of three prophecies. Each section begins with the word *hear*. Each message begins with judgment and then moves to the promise of restoration.

Message 1 (Micah 1–2)

Micah's first oracle prophesies judgment on Samaria and Jerusalem, the capital cities of Israel and Judah. God will make Samaria a heap of ruins and destroy her idols. To Jerusalem, God promises the shame of baldness when Judah is taken into exile.

³⁷³ For the structure of the covenant lawsuit, see Lesson 10 of this course.

³⁷⁴ Micah 6:8

In Micah 1:10-15, the prophet traces the route that Sennacherib later followed as he traveled towards Jerusalem in 701 B.C. In his assault on Judah, Sennacherib conquered the cities of Gath, Aphrah, Saphir, Zaanan, Beth-ezel, Maroth, Lachish, Moresheth-gath, and Achzib. Micah's prophecy is specific in his prediction of God's judgment.

This judgment oracle ends with a promise of restoration to the remnant. The Lord will lead his people into battle.

Message 2 (Micah 3-5)

Micah's second message begins with a denunciation of Judah's corrupt leaders. The civic leaders are described as cannibals who consume their followers (3:1-4). The prophets are "messengers for hire" who prophesy blessings on those who pay well and condemnation on those who can pay nothing (3:5-8). Rulers, priests, and prophets all stand condemned.

Like the first message, this message moves from judgment to hope. A day is coming when the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established; people from many nations will come to learn the ways of the Lord of hosts. God will rescue the faithful remnant and reign over them. He will redeem Zion from Babylon and will shepherd his flock.

The ultimate redemption for Judah will come when a ruler in Israel whose goings forth have been from of old comes out of Bethlehem Ephratah. The gospel of Matthew points to Micah as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus Christ.³⁷⁵

Message 3 (Micah 6-7)

God's Charges Against Judah (Micah 6:1-8)	
6:1-2	A call to witnesses (the mountains and hills are witnesses to Judah's unfaithfulness)
6:3	An opportunity for Judah to respond
6:4-5	A reminder of God's favor to Judah in the past
6:6-7	The mocking response of the people
6:8	God's answer – a summary of the demands of the law: justice, mercy, and humility

Micah's final message takes the form of a covenant lawsuit. God charges his people with unfaithfulness to covenant. Rather than confessing their wrong, the people respond with a series of sarcastic questions:

³⁷⁵ Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:4-6

- Does God want burnt offerings of yearling calves?
- Does God want thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil?
- Does God want us to bring child sacrifices?

God responds by restating the unchanging requirements of the law: justice, mercy, and a humble walk with God.

Following the accusations, God announces judgment on Jerusalem (6:9–7:7). Because Judah has followed in the apostasy of Ahab, God will make the nation a desolation.

Micah again moves from judgment to hope. After searching unsuccessfully for godly people in Judah (7:1-7), Micah concludes with a prayer that God will “shepherd your people with your staff” and restore them in the eyes of the nations. He ends with confidence: God is a God who pardons iniquity and who delights in mercy.

Micah’s Message to the 21st Century

Jeremiah 26:17-19 shows that Micah’s message brought revival. As a result, Judah was spared God’s judgment for more than 100 years. This should encourage us as we bring God’s message to our day. Although many reject God’s Word, a remnant will respond; God’s Word will not return void. This should encourage us to faithful proclamation in our day.

Nahum: A Message to Nineveh

Nahum at a Glance	
Author	Nahum
Audience	Ninevah
Date	Between 663 and 612 B.C.
Theme	The destruction of Ninevah
Purpose	To prophesy God’s judgment on the wicked city of Ninevah and the Assyrian Empire.
The Gospel in Nahum	Nahum 1:15 calls Judah to faithfulness. He brings good tidings of peace; Messiah will come!

Historical Setting of Nahum

Nahum preached the sermon that Jonah wanted to preach: the destruction of Nineveh. The book of Jonah shows the mercy of God in response to Nineveh's repentance; the book of Nahum shows the judgment of God in response to Nineveh's rebellion.

The revival inspired by Jonah's visit to Nineveh was short-lived. Jonah preached sometime between 793 and 753 B.C. By 745 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III had come to power and established the Assyrian Empire as one of the cruelest empires in human history. In 722 B.C, Assyria destroyed the Northern Kingdom.

Sennacherib, who ruled the Assyrian Empire from 704-681 B.C., made Nineveh the capital city. He conquered much of Judah, although God spared Jerusalem and later freed Judah from Assyrian control. Sometime after 663 B.C., Nahum prophesied God's judgment on Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire.³⁷⁶ This prophecy was fulfilled in 612 B.C. when Nineveh was destroyed. By 609 B.C., the final remnants of the Assyrian Empire were conquered and this empire disappeared from history. God's judgments are sure.

Purpose of Nahum

Obadiah preached the complete and certain destruction of Edom; Nahum preached the complete and certain destruction of Nineveh. This time, there would be no repentance; "there is no healing of thy bruise."³⁷⁷ The book of Nahum announces the destruction of Nineveh and gives hope to the people of Judah by assuring them that God will judge their enemy.

The Message of Nahum

The entire book of Nahum is about God's judgment on Nineveh. Chapter 1 gives a picture of God as the Divine Warrior who fights on behalf of his people. God is a righteous judge; he will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.³⁷⁸

Although God earlier showed his mercy by sparing repentant Nineveh, he is also great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.³⁷⁹ Nineveh has rejected God, and he will now take vengeance on them.

The central contrast of the book is seen in Nahum 1:7-8. For the righteous, the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.³⁸⁰ For the wicked, With an overrunning flood he will make an utter end.³⁸¹

³⁷⁶ Nahum 3:8 refers to the destruction of Thebes in Egypt (KJV uses the older name "No" for the city). This occurred in 663 B.C. Nahum preached between the fall of Thebes (663 B.C.) and the fall of Ninevah (612 B.C.).

³⁷⁷ Nahum 3:19

³⁷⁸ Nahum 1:2

³⁷⁹ Nahum 1:3

³⁸⁰ Nahum 1:7

³⁸¹ Nahum 1:8

Chapter 2 describes the destruction of Nineveh with images of battles in the streets and with the metaphor of a lion who tears his prey in pieces.

Chapter 3 concludes Nahum’s message with a woe oracle in which he announces the guilt of the bloody city that is full of lies and robbery. Nahum lists the offences of Nineveh and then announces God’s final judgment: “I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle.”³⁸² The world will rejoice at the news of Assyria’s fall. “All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?”³⁸³

Nahum teaches that a holy God will not leave sin unpunished. Although God used Assyria to judge Israel and Judah for their sin, he did not ignore the sins of Assyria. Ultimately, he preserved the faithful remnant in Judah and defeated her enemies. God’s faithfulness to his people has not changed.

Habakkuk: A Dialogue between God and His Prophet

Habakkuk at a Glance	
Author	Habakkuk
Audience	The Southern Kingdom
Date	Probably between 608 and 605 B.C.
Theme	Understanding God’s ways
Purpose	To reveal God’s purposes to Habakkuk
The Gospel in Habakkuk	Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament. The just shall live by his faith is God’s plan for his people in all times.

Historical Setting of Habakkuk

Habakkuk is unique among the prophetic books; it does not address any specific audience. Instead, the book consists of a dialogue between God and the prophet.

Habakkuk ministered in the years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. Most scholars believe that Habakkuk’s dialogue occurred sometime before Nebuchadnezzar’s rise to power in 605 B.C. Within twenty years of Habakkuk’s revelation from God, the prophecy would be fulfilled.

³⁸² Nahum 3:5-6, *English Standard Version*
³⁸³ Nahum 3:19, *English Standard Version*

Purpose of Habakkuk

The book of Habakkuk reveals God's purposes to the prophet. Through Habakkuk's questions and God's responses, the prophet learned to trust God's sovereign plan.

Message of Habakkuk

Question 1: Why does wicked Judah prosper? (Habakkuk 1:1-11)

As Habakkuk watched Judah's spiritual and moral decline, he was troubled by God's apparent lack of response. Habakkuk asked, "Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?"³⁸⁴ To Habakkuk, it appears that justice is being perverted.

God's response stuns the prophet. God tells Habakkuk that he is raising up the Chaldeans to judge Judah.³⁸⁵ Their horses will travel faster than leopards; they will be like eagles hungry for conquest.

Question 2: How can God use Babylon to judge Judah? (Habakkuk 1:12-2:20)

While the first answer showed that God was not ignoring evil, it raised an even greater question. How could God judge Judah through an even more wicked nation? While it was true that Judah deserved judgment, Babylon was even more wicked than Judah. Habakkuk asked God, "[How can you] remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?"³⁸⁶

In response, God told Habakkuk to write down a vision. Judgment was certain and would happen just as God promised. Habakkuk must decide between two responses. He can respond with arrogance or he can yield in faith to God's purposes.

This message is followed by a revelation of God's plan to judge Babylon. Through a series of five woe oracles, Habakkuk shows that Babylon will be forced to drink the cup of the Lord's wrath. They rely on idols, but their trust in idols will be futile. In contrast to worthless idols, the Lord is in his holy temple.³⁸⁷ The only proper response is silence before his sovereignty.

Habakkuk's Prayer of Submission (Habakkuk 3)

In response to God's revelation, Habakkuk submitted to God's purposes. He prayed that God would show mercy along with his judgment; he described God's power and sovereignty; and he submitted himself to God's purposes. The prophet concluded with a statement of confidence: "The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."³⁸⁸

³⁸⁴ Habakkuk 1:3, *English Standard Version*

³⁸⁵ Chaldeans is another name for the Babylonians.

³⁸⁶ Habakkuk 1:13, *English Standard Version*

³⁸⁷ Habakkuk 2:20

³⁸⁸ Habakkuk 3:19

Habakkuk in the New Testament

Habakkuk's statement, "The righteous shall live by their faith," is quoted three times in the New Testament. In Romans 1:17, Paul quotes Habakkuk to show that it is through faith that we are made right with God. In Galatians 3:11, the phrase is contrasted with the attempts of the Judaizers to gain justification by works of the law. Instead of righteousness gained through obedience to the law, Paul teaches that the just shall live by faith. In Hebrews 10:38, this phrase emphasizes the continuing aspect of faith. Instead of shrinking back, the righteous continues to live by faith. In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, it is faith and trust in God's purposes that enables us to please him.

Zephaniah: A Message to All the Earth

Zephaniah at a Glance	
Author	Zephaniah
Audience	Judah and all nations
Date	Between 640 and 612 B.C.
Theme	The day of the Lord
Purpose	To warn Judah and all nations of the coming day of the Lord
The Gospel in Zephaniah	Zephaniah looks to a day when all nations will worship the God of Israel. This is fulfilled in a church made up of Jew and Gentile alike (Ephesians 3:1-6).

Historical Setting of Zephaniah

Zephaniah's name means "Jehovah has hidden," a name that shows that his parents were probably faithful to God even during the days of Judah's apostasy under King Ahaz. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah. He was a contemporary of Habakkuk and Jeremiah. Since Zephaniah refers to Nineveh's fall as a future event, his ministry apparently ended before 612 B.C.³⁸⁹

The beginning of Zephaniah traces his ancestry back four generations to King Hezekiah.³⁹⁰ He was part of the royal family and may have been a relative of King Josiah.

³⁸⁹ Zephaniah 2:13

³⁹⁰ Zephaniah 1:1

Purpose of Zephaniah

More than any other prophet, Zephaniah proclaimed the day of the Lord. Six times in this small book, the prophet refers to the day of the Lord. Like Joel, Ezekiel, and Amos, Zephaniah showed that this day would bring both judgment on the disobedient and blessing on the faithful. Zephaniah showed that the day of the Lord would affect all people, not just Judah and the people of covenant.

Message of Zephaniah

Zephaniah spoke first of God's judgment on Judah. Because Judah had turned to the worship of Baal, the host of heaven, and other gods, God will punish the nation. The houses of Jerusalem will become desolate. The day of the Lord will be revealed as "a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers."³⁹¹

Zephaniah then spoke to the nations. The Philistines will suffer God's judgment; Moab and Ammon will be spoiled; Ethiopia (Cush) will be slain; and Assyria will be destroyed. The day of the Lord will be a day of judgment on all these peoples.

Zephaniah's Jewish listeners may have rejoiced to hear their enemies condemned. However, Zephaniah soon returned to the theme of judgment on Judah. "Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!"³⁹² Sadly, this polluted and defiled city was Jerusalem. Her political leaders, judges, prophets, and priests all stand condemned because they refuse to accept God's correction. As a result, the judgment that is poured on "the nations" will also come to Judah.

The day of the Lord is a day of judgment. But if the people will repent, it can be a day of restoration. God promises that there will be a remnant left in Judah who shall trust in the name of the Lord. They shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies.³⁹³ To this group, God promises protection against their enemies.

In the last verses of Zephaniah, God promises final restoration of Jerusalem. He will restore his people and make them a name and a praise among all people of the earth.

► The Minor Prophets brought God's message to all nations. The message is often very specific to the prophet's audience. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, all Scripture is useful for all Christians in all times. How does the message of the Minor Prophets speak to our world?

³⁹¹ Zephaniah 1:15-16

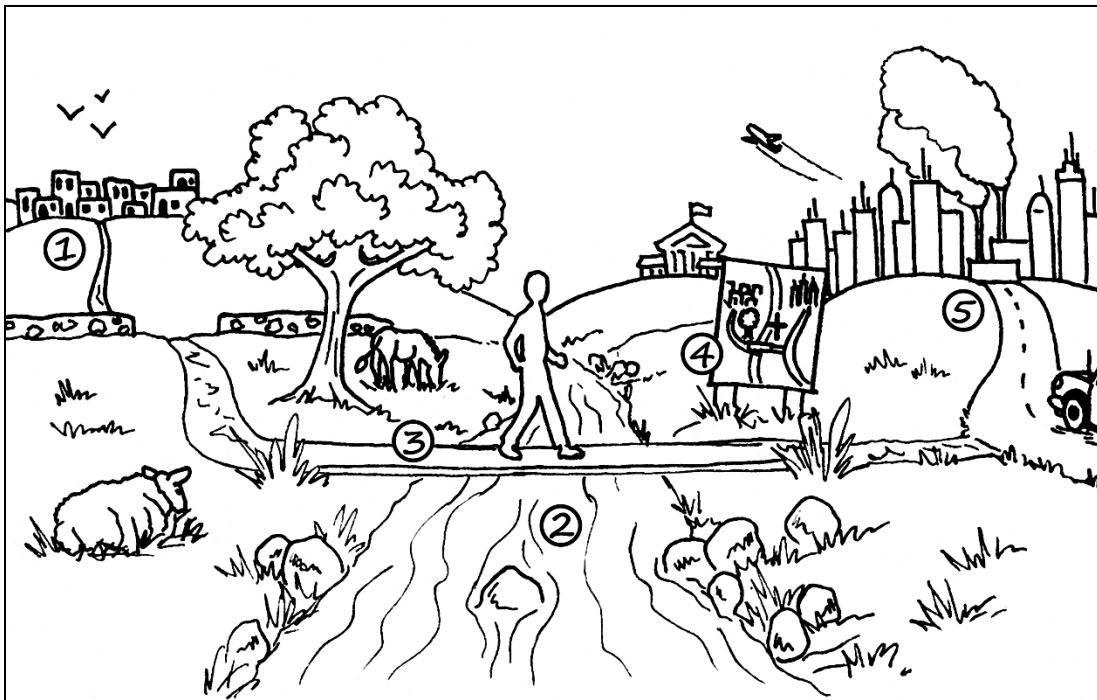
³⁹² Zephaniah 3:1

³⁹³ Zephaniah 3:12-13

A Closer Look at Old Testament Interpretation

For many readers, the Old Testament prophetic books are some of the most difficult books of the Bible. Some readers assume that these ancient books of prophecy have no message for us today. Other interpreters look for hidden messages in these books. Both of these approaches miss the central truths of the Old Testament prophets.

How does Old Testament prophecy speak to Christians today? Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays suggest the following model for interpreting and applying the Bible in our world.³⁹⁴ It is a model that works very well for interpreting the prophetic books. This model asks five questions of a biblical text.³⁹⁵



(1) Their Town: What was the original message of the prophet?

This question asks how the original listeners heard the prophet. What was the prophet's message to his day? This helps connect our interpretation to the original message. It is dangerous to read into Scripture a message that the original listeners would not have recognized.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Image: "Interpreting the Bible" drawing by Anna Boggs, available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52377290578>, licensed under CC BY 2.0.

³⁹⁵ Adapted from J. Scott Duvall and John Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

³⁹⁶ The technical term for interpreting scripture is *exegesis* – to interpret or to “lead from” the text to the meaning. The contrast to *exegesis* is *eisegesis*. *Eisegesis* starts from my own ideas and reads those ideas into the text. As students of Scripture, we should start from the original meaning, not from our own ideas.

For example, Nahum preached a message of condemnation for Nineveh. His listeners heard an announcement that Nineveh would be destroyed because of her ruthlessness, her sexual immorality, and her worship of other gods. This was the original message of the prophet.

(2) The River: What separates the original listeners from today?

This question studies how today's culture, language, time, and situation differs from the biblical setting. It also looks at the difference between the old and new covenants.

Nahum is addressed to a particular city in a particular time. As we read Nahum, we know that the city of Nineveh no longer exists. Most readers today do not live in a nation that is ruthlessly trampling on the rest of the world. Further, we live in the new covenant where God's immediate judgment on the nations is not always seen as clearly as in the old covenant.

(3) The Bridge: What is the principle behind the original message of the prophet?

This question asks the reader to go beyond the immediate setting of the prophet to find the principle that is taught. This principle carries across all ages and all cultures. It is not limited to the immediate audience of the prophet.

Although there are many differences between our world and the world of Nahum, the principle of God's justice is universal. A holy and just God could not ignore the sins of Assyria. God's justice is seen throughout Scripture and throughout human history; the message is not limited to ancient Nineveh.

(4) The Map: How is the principle seen in the rest of Scripture?

This question considers the passage that is being studied in light of all biblical revelation. It helps to ensure that we do not take a verse out of its biblical context and find a principle that contradicts the rest of Scripture. For Old Testament texts, this step gives special attention to what the coming of Jesus Christ reveals about the principle.

If we examine the principle of God's justice in the rest of Scripture, we see that Nahum fits with other biblical teaching on God's nature. The Pentateuch teaches that God must punish sin. The historical books show his justice in action – even against his own people of Israel. The prophets repeatedly testify to God's justice. In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of God's loving mercy but he also speaks of God's judgment.³⁹⁷ Paul reminds us that "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."³⁹⁸

(5) Our Town: How is the principle applied in today's world?

This is the point at which a reader moves from interpretation to application. This step asks how we should live out the principle in a practical way today.

³⁹⁷ Matthew 11:20-24 is one of many examples of Jesus' messages of coming judgment.

³⁹⁸ Galatians 6:7

When we read Nahum, we ask, “How will God’s justice be seen in the world today?” and “How should we live in light of God’s justice?” God’s justice may not be seen in such an immediate and dramatic way as it was seen in the Old Testament. However, God’s justice is still the same, and his judgment is sure. As we bring God’s Word to our world, we must speak not only of his mercy, but of his judgment. Though this message is no more popular today than in the days of the Old Testament prophets, it is a central truth and must be preached by those who are faithful to the whole Word of God.

Self-Study Guide for the Minor Prophets

- (1) Read an entire book in one sitting to get an overview of the prophet’s message.³⁹⁹
- (2) Study the author. From the information in the opening of the prophetic book, answer as many of these questions as possible about the prophet:
 - Where was he from?
 - What do we know about his parents?
 - What was his occupation?
 - What do we know about his family?
 - When and how long did he minister?
- (3) Study the historical setting. Find this information:
 - To whom did he prophesy?
 - What kings ruled during his ministry?
 - What were the spiritual and social conditions of his time?
 - What other prophets ministered at the same time?
- (4) Read through the book a second time and write a title for each chapter that summarizes its contents. As you read, underline or highlight words that occur frequently. When you are done, determine the important themes in the book.
- (5) List the major sins found in the book.
- (6) List major predictions of the future found in the book.
- (7) Write a one-page summary of the book based on the answers to the questions above.

³⁹⁹ This whole section is adapted from Danny McCain, *Notes on Old Testament Introduction*. (Jos, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2002), 347-348.

Lesson 13 Assignments

(1) Complete **one** of the following assignments.

Option 1: Group Assignment

Analyze one of the Minor Prophets using the model suggested in "A Closer Look at Old Testament Prophecy." Discuss the original message of the prophet, the differences between the world of the prophet and our world, and the principle that is taught by the prophet. Find 2-3 ways in which the message of the prophet should be applied in today's world.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

Analyze one of the Minor Prophets using the "Self-Study Guide for the Minor Prophets."

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the Scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 13 Test

- (1) What is the purpose for the Book of Obadiah?
- (2) What is the theme of the Book of Jonah?
- (3) List two ways in which the Book of Jonah shows God's sovereignty.
- (4) What are the two lessons taught in Jonah?
- (5) According to Micah, what three characteristics sum up the demands of the law?
- (6) What prophecy of the birth of Jesus is given in Micah?
- (7) Who was the audience for the Book of Nahum?
- (8) List Habakkuk's two questions and God's responses.
- (9) What is the primary theme of Zephaniah?
- (10) What are the five steps suggested for interpreting Old Testament prophecy?
- (11) Write Micah 6:8, Nahum 1:7-8, and Habakkuk 3:2 from memory.

Lesson 14

Haggai–Malachi

Lesson Objectives

- (1) Know the likely date and historical setting of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- (3) Recognize the importance of continuing faithfulness to God's law.
- (4) Appreciate the messianic promises of the Old Testament.
- (5) Relate the message of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi to today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

Read Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Memorize Haggai 2:7-9 and Malachi 3:1.

Historical Setting of the Post-Exilic Prophets

The post-exilic prophets spoke to issues Judah faced following the return from exile:

- **Political difficulties:** Judah was governed by Persia, there was no Davidic king, and Jerusalem's neighbors opposed efforts to rebuild the city.
- **Spiritual challenges:** the temple had not been rebuilt, marriage to unbelieving Gentiles led to religious syncretism, and many Jews failed to observe Sabbath.
- **Social problems:** there was tension between the returnees and those who had remained in Jerusalem, the rich mistreated the poor, and divorce was rampant.

In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to Persia. The Persian ruler, Cyrus, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Judah. The next year, Zerubbabel led 50,000 people from Babylon to Jerusalem. Soon after they arrived, they began rebuilding the temple. However, enemies opposed the project and work on the temple soon halted.

In 520 B.C., Haggai and Zechariah inspired the people to resume work on the temple. Because of this, they are known as the "temple prophets." Work on the temple resumed in 520 B.C. and the temple completed by 516 B.C.

In 458 B.C., Ezra led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem. With his emphasis on the covenant, Ezra led a revival of worship and social reform.

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in 444 B.C. and led the efforts to rebuild the city's walls. He addressed many of the same problems faced by Ezra: marriage issues, failure to observe the Sabbath, and a lack of faithfulness to the covenant. Malachi, ministering about the same period of time, spoke to many of these issues.

Haggai: Rebuilding the Temple

Haggai at a Glance	
Author	Haggai
Audience	Post-exilic Judah
Date	520 B.C.
Theme	Rebuilding the temple
Purpose	To inspire God's people to rebuild God's house
The Gospel in Haggai	The promise of Haggai 2:9 is fulfilled in Luke 2:28-32.

Purpose of Haggai

Haggai began preaching in the fall of 520 B.C. He brought a series of four messages related to the temple. Because of the challenges of life in Jerusalem, the people had lost their zeal for the temple. Nearly two decades after Zerubbabel's return, the temple was still in ruins. Haggai was God's messenger on behalf of God's house.

Message of Haggai

A Message about Priorities (Haggai 1)

The people had rebuilt their homes, but they had not rebuilt God's temple. God asked, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"⁴⁰⁰

The people placed a greater priority on their own needs than on God's house. God warned that they were suffering poor harvests, lack of food, inadequate clothing, and wages that disappeared – all because they did not put him first.

God called on the people to put his priorities above their own interests. In response, the people did fear before the Lord and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.⁴⁰¹

Does Spiritual Prosperity Guarantee Material Prosperity?

The message of Haggai 1 is paralleled in 3 John 1:2. "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." It is also seen in

⁴⁰⁰ Haggai 1:4, *English Standard Version*

⁴⁰¹ Haggai 1:12, 14

Deuteronomy 27-28, with the promise of material blessings on the obedient and material curses on the disobedient.

While this is an important teaching, it is not the entire message of the Bible. Some preachers have taken Scriptures such as Haggai 1 to teach that every faithful believer will experience financial prosperity and physical health. We must read Haggai 1 and 3 John 1 in light of Scriptures such as the book of Job and Hebrews 11:37, as well as the experiences of men like Jeremiah who served God faithfully with no material blessings. Indeed, many people have suffered material loss because of their obedience to God. It is possible to prosper spiritually without seeing temporal blessings. Haggai spoke to a specific situation; he did not state a universal principle guaranteeing prosperity to every faithful child of God.

Haggai: Rebuilding the Temple (continued)

Message of Haggai (continued)

A Message about Discouragement (Haggai 2:1-9)

Six weeks after his first message, Haggai returned with another message from God. He asked, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" Some of the elders who remembered the glories of Solomon's temple wept when they saw the reduced size and inferior construction of this new temple.⁴⁰²

In response, God promised that the glory of the new temple would be greater than that of the first temple. This promise was fulfilled when the infant Jesus was brought to the temple. Simeon prayed, "For my eyes have seen thy salvation... and the glory of thy people Israel."⁴⁰³

A Message about Disobedience (Haggai 2:10-19)

Two months later, Haggai returned with another message from God. He reminded the priests of the laws of cleanness and uncleanness. Under the law, a sacrificial item became unclean if it came into contact with anything that was impure. Impurity was contagious.

Haggai then pointed to the lives of the people of Jerusalem. They were working on the temple, but their impure lives corrupted the work. Haggai reminded his listeners of a message that is of great importance for Christian workers today; **your walk with God is more important than your work for God.**

Haggai challenged the people to obedience. He concluded his message with God's promise, "From this day will I bless you."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Ezra 3:12 shows that while some people shouted for joy at the rebuilding of the temple, others wept.

⁴⁰³ Luke 2:28-32

⁴⁰⁴ Haggai 2:19

A Message about Fear (Haggai 2:20-23)

As we read Haggai, we should remember that Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies. These enemies had already succeeded once in stopping work on the temple.⁴⁰⁵ God promised to overthrow those who opposed Judah. Although Judah was insignificant in comparison to the surrounding nations, she had been chosen by God and belonged to him. He would protect his people from harm. They had no cause to fear.

Zechariah: God is Restoring His Kingdom

Zechariah at a Glance	
Author	Zechariah
Audience	Post-exilic Judah
Date	520 B.C.
Theme	The restoration of God's kingdom
Purpose	To prophesy the coming restoration of God's kingdom. A day is coming when all nations will worship in Jerusalem.
The Gospel in Zechariah	Jesus fulfills the promise of a lowly King, a faithful Shepherd, and a righteous Branch.

Purpose of Zechariah

Zechariah was a member of a priestly family that returned to Judah with Zerubbabel.⁴⁰⁶ Like Haggai, Zechariah was a temple prophet. His first message was given about two months after Haggai's first message. Along with an emphasis on the temple, Zechariah showed that God is restoring his kingdom, both today and in the future.

Message of Zechariah

Eight Night Visions (Zechariah 1:1–6:8)

Zechariah begins by calling Judah to return to God. Since their ancestors rejected the prophets, God sent them into exile. Now they have returned, and Zechariah calls them to renewed faithfulness.

⁴⁰⁵ Ezra 4

⁴⁰⁶ Nehemiah 12:4

This introduction is followed by a series of eight night visions. Eight times, Zechariah sees a vision, asks a heavenly messenger for an interpretation, and receives an interpretation of the vision. These visions address concerns related to the post-exilic community: judgment on the nations that had oppressed Judah, protection from their enemies, the temple, and sin in the community.

1. **Horsemen patrol the earth (Zechariah 1:7-17).** God is preparing to restore His people and judge their oppressors.
2. **Four horns and four craftsmen (Zechariah 1:8-21).** God will judge Judah's enemies. They will be scattered in the same way they scattered God's people.
3. **Surveyor with a measuring line (Zechariah 2:1-13).** God has marked Jerusalem as his own. He is the wall defending the city.
4. **Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3:1-10)** — restoration of the priesthood. In Jeremiah 13:1-11, the linen garments of the priesthood were soiled. Although Satan stood at the right hand of Joshua the high priest to accuse him, God removed the filthy garments and gave him clean clothes. God was restoring the priesthood and would send a coming Branch who would usher in a new day of peace in Israel.
5. **A lampstand and two olive trees (Zechariah 4:1-14)** — rebuilding of the temple. The rebuilding of the temple is God's work and will be sustained by him.
6. **A flying scroll (Zechariah 5:1-4)** — judgment on sin. A large scroll measuring 9 meters by 4½ meters contained the covenant curses on those who broke God's law. Sin in the post-exilic community will be judged just as it was before the exile.
7. **A woman in a basket (Zechariah 5:5-11)** — sin in the post-exilic community. A woman representing sin was put in a basket and sealed with a lead cover. Winged messengers flew the basket to Babylon, removing sin from Jerusalem.
8. **Four chariots (Zechariah 6:1-8)** — judgment on Judah's enemies. This vision parallels the first vision. Four chariots, representing God's Spirit at work in the world, show His sovereignty over the world. God has judged Judah's enemies and will continue to restore His people.

Prophetic Oracles (Zechariah 6:9-14:21)

Zechariah includes a series of prophetic oracles. God sends Zechariah to place a crown on the head of Joshua, the high priest. This represented the coming Branch who would rule as priest and king. This messianic message points to the coming of Jesus Christ.

In Zechariah 7-8, the prophet responded to a question from a delegation of people from Bethel. During the exile, the people fasted during the fifth month of the year to mourn the destruction of the temple. This delegation asked if this fast was necessary now that the rebuilding of the temple was almost complete.

Zechariah's answer was much broader than the initial question. God asked, "Were your fasts a sign of true repentance, or were they mere rituals?" If the fasts were a sign of true repentance, and if Judah had learned the lessons of the exile, the fasts were no longer necessary. If, however, the fasts had been nothing more than ritual, they were meaningless then and now.

God then promised a time when he would turn Judah's fasts into feasts. The day would come when the Jewish people would be honored above all peoples of the earth. "The fast of the fourth month... shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts... Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD."⁴⁰⁷

Zechariah 9-14 looks to the coming of Messiah. The enemies of Israel (Syria and Philistia) will be removed from the land. In a startling image, God promises to save a remnant from among the Gentiles.⁴⁰⁸ Zechariah foretells the day when Israel's true King will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and will save his people. Unlike the proud rulers who led Judah into trouble, this ruler will be humble and righteous. He will act as a good shepherd who protects the flock. When the sheep reject this shepherd, they will be scattered. However, God will ultimately redeem his flock and rescue Jerusalem. Judah will be restored and all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship.

Zechariah in the New Testament

Zechariah is frequently quoted in the New Testament. Commentators have noted sixty-seven New Testament citations from Zechariah.⁴⁰⁹ In the Gospel accounts of passion week, Zechariah 9-14 is the most frequently cited section of the Old Testament. Zechariah is second only to Ezekiel in citations in the book of Revelation. Messianic prophecies in Zechariah include:

- The righteous Branch (Zechariah 3:8; Zechariah 6:12-13)
- The King lowly and riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9-10)
- The Shepherd rejected and sold for thirty shekels of silver (Zechariah 11:4-13; Zechariah 13:7)
- The One who is pierced (Zechariah 12:10)
- The coming Judge (Zechariah 14)

⁴⁰⁷ Zechariah 8:19, 22

⁴⁰⁸ Zechariah 9:5-7. This remnant from Gentile nations will become part of God's people.

⁴⁰⁹ *English Standard Version Study Bible*.

Malachi: God Requires Faithfulness

Malachi at a Glance	
Author	Malachi
Audience	Post-exilic Judah
Date	Probably between 475 and 425 B.C.
Theme	God requires faithfulness.
Purpose	To challenge Judah to faithfulness to God
The Gospel in Malachi	Malachi ends with the promise of a messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord; Matthew and Mark begin with John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah.

Purpose of Malachi

The name Malachi means “my messenger.” Because he addressed many of the sins addressed in Ezra and Nehemiah, it is likely that Malachi was a contemporary of these two leaders. Malachi probably preached sometime between 475 and 425 B.C.

Although Judah had not returned to idolatry, their religious observance was empty. Professions of loyalty to Jehovah were not accompanied by changed lives. Malachi wrote to announce God’s accusations against Judah.

Malachi also answered Judah’s complaints against Jehovah. Haggai and Zechariah promised that the rebuilding of the temple would bring peace, prosperity, and the return of God’s presence. Instead, Judah was suffering drought, economic struggles, and political weakness. The people blamed Jehovah for failing to keep His promises. Malachi wrote to bring God’s response to these complaints.

► Malachi confronted Judah for failing to meet God’s demands. Although they brought sacrifices to the temple and observed the rituals of the law, they did not honor God. Before reading Malachi’s accusations, discuss ways in which Christians today may dishonor God.

The Message of Malachi

The book of Malachi consists of a series of six disputations or arguments. Each argument is stated in three parts:

1. God makes a statement regarding Judah’s behavior.
2. The people respond with a question.
3. God replies to the question.

Disputation 1: God's love for his people (Malachi 1:2-5)

1. Introduction: "I have loved you," saith the Lord.
2. Question: "How have you loved us?"
3. Answer: God honored Israel (Jacob) while punishing Edom (Esau).⁴¹⁰

Disputation 2: The priests' contempt for God (Malachi 1:6-2:9)

1. Introduction: "A son honors his father. If I am your father, where is my honor? Why do the priests despise my name?"
2. Question: "How have we despised your name?"
3. Answer: "By offering defiled food on my altar. Instead of honoring the altar of the Lord, the priests sacrificed lame and sick animals."

Disputation 3: Failure to respect the marriage covenant (Malachi 2:10-16)

1. Introduction: Judah has been faithless and has profaned the covenant.
2. Question: "How have we profaned the covenant?"
3. Answer: By marrying idol worshipers and by breaking the marriage covenant through divorce.

Disputation 4: God's justice (Malachi 2:17-3:5)

1. Introduction: "You have wearied the Lord with your words."
2. Question: "How have we wearied him?"
3. Answer: By accusing God of ignoring evil.

God assures Judah that He will send a messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord Himself to come to His temple. He will judge sin wherever He finds it.

Disputation 5: Stealing God's tithe (Malachi 3:6-12)

1. Introduction: "I am the Lord, I change not. Return to me, and I will return to you."
2. Question: "How shall we return?"
3. Answer: By demonstrating faithfulness through paying God's tithe.

Disputation 6: Harsh words against the Lord (Malachi 3:13-4:3)

1. Introduction: "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD."
2. Question: "How have we spoken against you?"
3. Answer: You have said, "It is futile to serve God." The people accuse God of failing to bless the obedient and judge the disobedient. In response, God promises that the day of the Lord is coming. In that day, God will judge evildoers and will preserve the faithful.

⁴¹⁰ See Obadiah for God's judgment on Edom.

Conclusion (Malachi 4:4-6)

In his conclusion, Malachi restates the message of the entire book. He calls on Judah to look back ("Remember the law of Moses") and to look forward ("Behold I will send you Elijah" to prepare for the great and dreadful day of the Lord).

A Closer Look at Christ in the Old Testament

As we finish our survey of the Old Testament, take time to look up a few of the many prophecies that are fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, God revealed precise details of his life. The fulfillment of these prophecies testify to Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Prophecy	Old Testament Prophecy	New Testament Fulfillment
Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 2:1-20
Messiah will travel from Egypt.	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:12-15
Infants will be killed as a result of Messiah's birth.	Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18
Messiah will minister in Galilee. (This prophecy was important because the Jewish people would have expected Messiah to center his ministry in Jerusalem.)	Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:12-16
Messiah will enter Jerusalem in triumph.	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-16
Messiah will be rejected by his own.	Isaiah 53:1-3	Matthew 26:3-4
Messiah will be sold for thirty pieces of silver.	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:14-15
Messiah will be forsaken by his followers.	Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:56
Messiah will be silent before his accusers.	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 27:12-14; Luke 23:8-10
Messiah will be struck and spit upon.	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 27:30
Messiah will die by crucifixion.	Psalms 22:14-17	Matthew 27:31
Messiah will feel forsaken by God.	Psalms 22:1	Matthew 27:46
Messiah will be given vinegar to drink.	Psalms 69:21	John 19:28-30
Messiah's bones will not be broken.	Psalms 34:20; Exodus 12:46	John 19:31-36
Messiah will suffer with criminals and will pray for his persecutors.	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38; Luke 23:32-34
Messiah will be buried in a rich man's tomb.	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60
Messiah will be raised from dead.	Psalms 16:8-10	Matthew 28:1-10

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi Speak to the Church Today

Haggai reminds us that we are God's people and that he is accomplishing his purpose through the church. The promise of Haggai 2:9 was never fulfilled completely in the rebuilt temple. The Holy of Holies never again contained the Ark of the Covenant and God's glory was never seen in the degree that accompanied the dedication of the first Temple.⁴¹¹

However, beginning with the visit of the infant Jesus to the temple and continuing to the ministry of the church today, this promise is being fulfilled. In the earthly ministry of Jesus, we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.⁴¹² In the ministry of the early church, God's glory was seen throughout the Roman Empire. Today, as the temple of God,⁴¹³ we continue to reveal God's glory to the world.

Clean or Unclean?

Part of Haggai's message is based on the Old Testament laws of ritual purity. In the Mosaic law, a ritually pure item that came into contact with an impure item became unclean. However, through the coming of Jesus, this is turned around. Jesus (clean) touches lepers (unclean) and makes them clean. Christians are called to be the salt of the earth, bringing purity into an impure world. In Philippians, Paul reminds his readers that though we live in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, we must shine as lights in the world.⁴¹⁴ We do not need to fear contact with an impure world. Instead, we are called to bring the holiness of God into our world and to transform those with whom we make contact.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi Speak to the Church Today (continued)

Zechariah and Malachi show God's demand for continued faithfulness. Writing after the return from exile, these prophets show that we cannot rest on yesterday's blessings. One might have expected that the lessons of the exile would have prevented Israel from ever returning to her pattern of unfaithfulness. However, Zechariah in 520 B.C. and Malachi two generations later show how quickly we can forget the lessons that God teaches us. We must constantly return to the authority of God's Word.

⁴¹¹ 2 Chronicles 5:13-14

⁴¹² John 1:14

⁴¹³ 1 Corinthians 3:16

⁴¹⁴ Philippians 2:15

Lesson 14 Assignments

(1) Complete **one** of the following assignments.

Option 1: Group Assignment

Using the model presented in Lesson 13 (moving from the original message of “their town” to the application in “our town”), apply one of the disputations of Malachi to the church today. Discuss the original message to Judah, the differences between Judah and the church today, the principle taught in Malachi, and the application to today’s church.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

Prepare a detailed sermon or Bible study outline from Malachi on “Faithfulness to God.” Use the structure of the disputations to show how God might speak to the church today.

(2) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the scriptures assigned for memory.

Lesson 14 Test

- (1) What three spiritual problems were addressed by the post-exilic prophets?
- (2) What is the date for Haggai and Zechariah?
- (3) Haggai brought four messages. List the topic for each of the messages.
- (4) What is the theme of Zechariah?
- (5) List two messianic prophecies found in Zechariah.
- (6) Why do we believe that Malachi preached between 475 and 425 B.C.?
- (7) List the three parts of each of God’s disputations in Malachi.
- (8) Write Haggai 2:7-9 and Malachi 3:1 from memory.

Recommended Resources

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Lesson 1

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Lesson 2

To learn more about Genesis, please see the following resources.

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Kidman, Derek. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Genesis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008.

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Associates for Biblical Research: <http://www.biblearchaeology.org>

Lecture. "Dr James Hoffmeier – Egyptologist." Search at <http://www.youtube.com>

Lecture. "Did the Exodus Happen?" www.seedbed.com

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Lesson 4

To learn more about Joshua – Ruth, please see the following resources.

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Carpenter, Eugene E. and Wayne McCown. *Asbury Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Copan, Paul. *Is God a Moral Monster: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. Ada: Baker Books, 2011.

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Howard, David M., Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1993.

Howard, David M., Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti. *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003.

Online Sources

"Violence in the Old Testament" at <http://www.seedbed.com/seven-minute-seminary/>

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*. <https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 5

To learn more about Israel's monarchy, please see the following resources.

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Leston, Stephen. *The Bible in World History*. Uhrichsville: Barbour Publishing, 2011.

Provan, Iain, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

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Lesson 6

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Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 8

To learn more about the books of Solomon, please see the following resources.

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To learn more about Isaiah, please see the following resources.

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Motyer, J. Alec. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Isaiah*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999.

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Online Sources

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Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
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To learn more about Jeremiah, please see the following resources.

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Fretheim, Terence E. *Jeremiah*. Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002.

Lallman, Hetty. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2013.

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To learn more about Ezekiel and Daniel, please see the following resources.

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Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
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Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Hubbard, David Allan. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Hosea, Joel, and Amos*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989.

McCain, Danny. *Notes on Old Testament Introduction*. Jos, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2002.

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To learn more about the Minor Prophets, please see the following resources.

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To learn more about the post-exilic prophets, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Baldwin, Joyce G. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972.

Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

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Merrill, Eugene H. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

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Record of Assignments

Student Name _____

Initial when each assignment has been completed. The tests are considered "complete" when the student achieves a score of 70% or higher. All assignments must be successfully completed to receive a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom.

Lesson	Assignment	Test
1		
2		
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Application for a Certificate of Completion from Shepherds Global Classroom may be completed on our webpage at www.shepherdsglobal.org. Certificates will be digitally transmitted from the president of SGC to instructors and facilitators who complete the application on behalf of their student(s).