

EXPLORING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Shepherds Global Classroom exists to equip the body of Christ by providing curriculum for rising Christian leaders around the world. We aim to multiply indigenous training programs by placing a 20-course curriculum tool into the hands of spiritual trainers in every country of the world.

This course is available for free download at <https://www.shepherdsglobal.org/courses>

Lead writer: Dr. Randall D. McElwain

Copyright © 2025 Shepherds Global Classroom

Second Edition. ISBN: 978-1-943953-64-6

All rights reserved.

Third-party materials are the copyright of their respective owners and shared under various licenses.

Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptures are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Permissions notice:

This course may be printed and distributed freely in print and digital formats under the following guidelines: (1) Course content may not be altered in any way; (2) Copies may not be sold for profit; (3) Educational institutions are free to use/copy this course, even if they charge tuition fees; and (4) The course may not be translated without the permission and supervision of Shepherds Global Classroom.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Course Overview..... | 5 |
| Old Testament Book Listings..... | 8 |
| Map of the Old Testament World | 10 |
| Timelines | 11 |
| (1) Introduction to the Old Testament..... | 13 |
| (2) Genesis | 19 |
| (3) Exodus–Deuteronomy..... | 29 |
| (4) Joshua–Ruth | 45 |
| (5) Samuel–Chronicles..... | 57 |
| (6) Ezra–Esther..... | 75 |
| (7) Job and Psalms..... | 89 |
| (8) Proverbs–Song of Songs | 105 |
| (9) Isaiah..... | 119 |
| (10) Jeremiah and Lamentations..... | 129 |
| (11) Ezekiel and Daniel..... | 141 |
| (12) Hosea–Amos | 155 |
| (13) Obadiah–Zephaniah | 169 |
| (14) Haggai–Malachi..... | 187 |
| Recommended Resources..... | 199 |
| Record of Assignments | 207 |

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.

Students should read or listen to the book or books of the Bible that will be studied in each lesson prior to studying the lesson as a group. At the end of each class, please remind students of the **reading assignment** for the following lesson. This reading will ensure that students know the basic content of the book prior to the group lesson. 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. Students should be prepared to write or recite them from memory when tested over that lesson.

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 for keeping the discussion focused on 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 ►. You should ask the question and give the students time to discuss the answer. 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 **scripture** references are included in the text. Students should look at the passages in their Bibles during class.

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

Each lesson includes **test questions**, including the scripture memorization that was assigned. At the end of each class, you may review these questions with the students. The following class session should begin with a test on these questions. This can be done orally or in written form. Each student should answer the questions without help from others or from written material. A test answer key is available for download at shepherdsglobal.org.

If you are accessing this course via the **SGC mobile app**, please note that the following important resources may be found in the Appendix:

- Listing of the arrangement of books in the Hebrew Bible
- Listing of the arrangement of books in the Protestant Old Testament
- Map of the Old Testament world

- Timeline of the Old Testament
- Timeline of the kingdom falls and returns from exile

Old Testament Book Listings

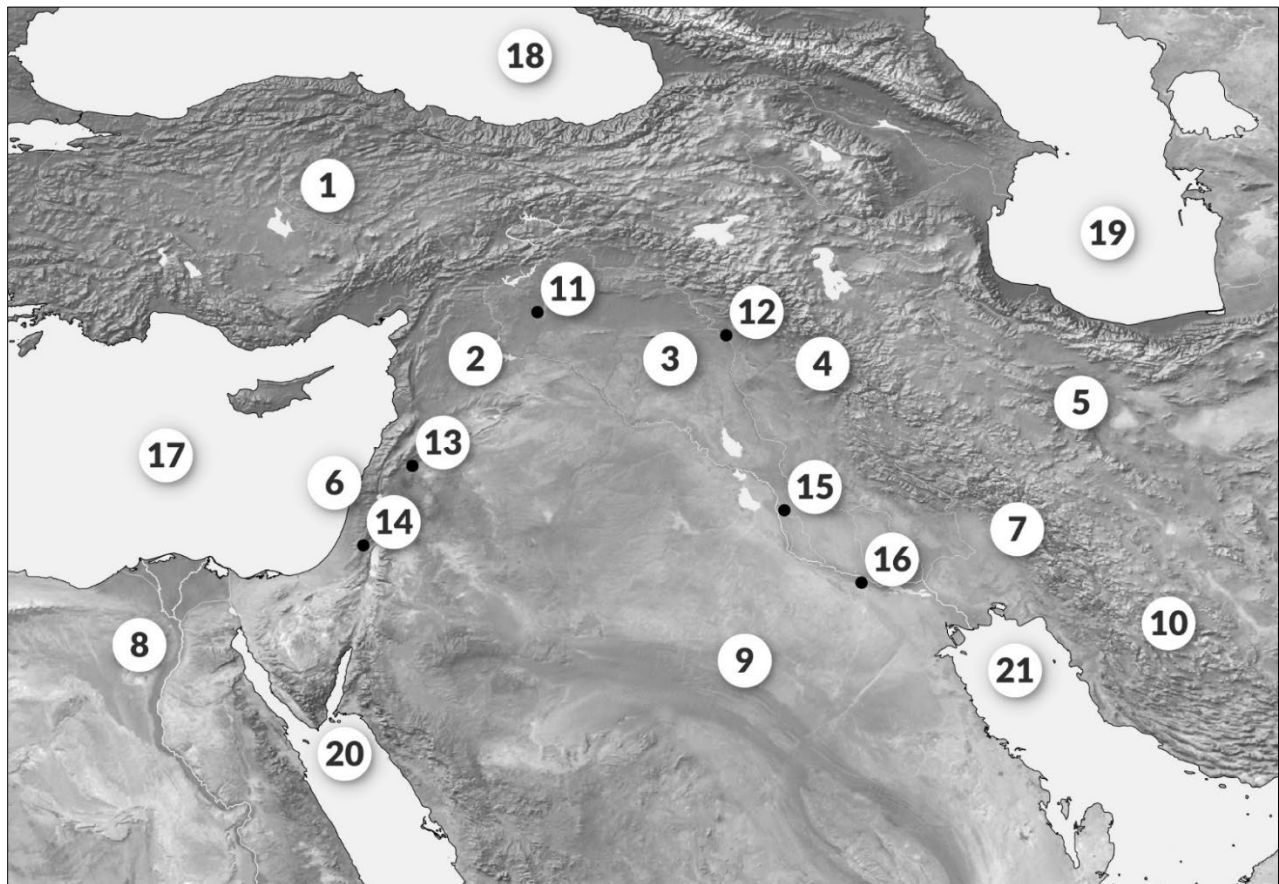
Please refer to the following two listings throughout the course. The course frequently refers to the organization and arrangement of the Hebrew Old Testament, though the course follows the sequence of the Protestant arrangement of the Old Testament.

| The Arrangement of the Hebrew Bible | | |
|---|---|---|
| (1) The Law (<i>Torah</i>) | (2) The Prophets | (3) The Writings* |
| Books of Moses: Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy | Former Prophets: Joshua Judges Samuel Kings Latter Prophets: Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel The Book of the Twelve <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosea • Joel • Amos • Obadiah • Jonah • Micah • Nahum • Habakkuk • Zephaniah • Haggai • Zechariah • Malachi | Psalms Proverbs Job Song of Songs Ruth Lamentations Esther Ecclesiastes Daniel Ezra–Nehemiah Chronicles |
| * The Writings included books associated with Jewish festivals and books that did not fall into either of the first two categories. | | |

| The Arrangement of the Protestant Old Testament | | | | |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) The Pentateuch | (2) Historical Books | (3) Poetry and Wisdom | (4) The Major Prophets | (5) The Minor Prophets |
| Genesis | Joshua | Job | Isaiah | Hosea |
| Exodus | Judges | Psalms | Jeremiah | Joel |
| Leviticus | Ruth | Proverbs | Lamentations | Amos |
| Numbers | 1 Samuel | Ecclesiastes | Ezekiel | Obadiah |
| Deuteronomy | 2 Samuel | Song of Songs | Daniel | Jonah |
| | 1 Kings | | | Micah |
| | 2 Kings | | | Nahum |
| | 1 Chronicles | | | Habakkuk |
| | 2 Chronicles | | | Zephaniah |
| | Ezra | | | Haggai |
| | Nehemiah | | | Zechariah |
| | Esther | | | Malachi |

Map of the Old Testament World

Please refer to this map throughout the course.¹



| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| (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).

Timelines

| 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 |
| 450 B.C. | Malachi |
| <p>* This timeline is a very broad outline that you should learn to gain an overview of Old Testament history. We will learn more precise dates as we go through the course. This broad overview may help you remember the big events of the Old Testament.</p> | |

| Kingdom Falls and Returns from Exile | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Date | Event |
| 722 B.C. | Destruction of Israel (Northern Kingdom) |
| 605 B.C. | First exile from Judah (Southern Kingdom) |
| 597 B.C. | Second exile from Judah |
| 586 B.C. | Third exile from Judah (final) (Temple destroyed) |
| 538 B.C. | First return of exiles (Zerubbabel) |
| 516 B.C. | Rebuilding of Temple completed |
| 458 B.C. | Second return of exiles (Ezra) |
| 444 B.C. | Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah) |

Lesson 1

Introduction to the Old Testament

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

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

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 Timothy 3:16), we should value the Old Testament just as much as we value the New Testament. We should study and preach the Old Testament as the Word of God.

Because of the differences between the world of the Old Testament and that of the 21st century, the Old Testament can be difficult for modern readers. The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to each book of the Old Testament. While it is impossible to cover 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 topics and questions related to the Old Testament:

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

Canon

The term *canon* comes from a Greek term meaning “rule” or “standard.” In reference to the Bible, we use the term *canon* for:

1. The rule or standard for determining which writings are the inspired Word of God.
2. An official list of the books that are recognized as holy scripture.

The canon of scripture is an important issue for believers. How do we know that the Old Testament books are truly God’s Word?

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 Old Testament canon met all three standards.

1. **Author.** The book was written by a person who was gifted as a prophet. These books convey 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 specific groups 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 already 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 that list, which 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 39 books of the Old Testament.

The rabbis divided the Hebrew Bible into three sections. The Protestant Old Testament we have today is divided into five sections.

► Please look at and compare the Hebrew Bible and Protestant Old Testament book listings provided. (If you are viewing this course on the SGC mobile app, these are found in the Appendix section.)

Inspiration

Paul wrote that “all scripture is breathed out by God...” (2 Timothy 3:16). This verse teaches that God is the author of all scripture. The doctrine of divine inspiration teaches 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 (Leviticus 1:1, for example). Sometimes God spoke through dreams and visions (Daniel 7 and 8, for example). 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" (2 Peter 1:21). The words of scripture are trustworthy because God himself is trustworthy.

Evangelicals believe that the doctrine of inspiration means that God spoke through the personality of the human author, but that he guided the process so that the very words they wrote 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.²

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 of knowing whether the Bible we have today is accurate.

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. (the time of Ezra's life), scribes copied the texts. Scribes counted each letter of 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, ancient scrolls were discovered near the Dead Sea.³ These scrolls contain copies of the Old Testament made between 250 B.C. and A.D. 135. They are approximately 1,000 years older than later available copies. This makes the Dead Sea Scrolls valuable for

² 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*.

³ Garry K. Brantley, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Biblical Integrity." Found at <https://web.archive.org/web/20110318092513/http://www.apologeticspress.org/article/357>

checking the accuracy of more recent copies. Part of every book of the Old Testament, except Esther, is included in these scrolls.

When comparing the Dead Sea Scrolls to later copies, scholars found remarkable accuracy. For example, the Isaiah Scroll is 1,200 years older than any later copy, yet more than 95% 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. This chapter contains 166 Hebrew words, yet only 17 Hebrew letters in the chapter are different in the later copies than they had been in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

- Ten letters are spelling differences—words that had 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..." (Isaiah 53:11).

No biblical teaching is affected by the change. The Dead Sea Scrolls show how 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

The Old Testament can be difficult to understand:

- It represents cultures much different from our world.
- It was written over a time period of more than 1,000 years.
- It involves four major empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia).
- It 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. He told skeptics that the Old Testament scriptures testified about him (John 5:39–47).

The Old Testament was seen as God's Word by the early church. Deuteronomy is quoted more than 80 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:

- It teaches of the majesty and holiness of God.

"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

- It teaches of our sin and need for a redeemer.
- It teaches of God's plan to create a holy people who are set apart as his special possession.

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

Lesson 1 Assignment

At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 1 Test

- (1) What two things 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 sections of the Hebrew Bible.
- (4) List the five sections of the Protestant Old Testament.
- (5) What does the doctrine of divine inspiration teach?
- (6) The Bible is the Word of God. How does that affect its accuracy and trustworthiness?
- (7) Why are the Dead Sea Scrolls valuable for checking the accuracy of more recent copies?
- (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

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

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

Preparation for this Lesson

- Read Genesis.
- Memorize Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:3.

The Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible are called the *Pentateuch* (a Greek word meaning "Five Scrolls" or five books). In the Hebrew Bible, these books are called the *Torah*. We usually translate *Torah* as "Law." However, the word *Torah* comes from a root that means "to teach." So, these books are much more than rules to obey; they are instructions that teach us how to live as God intended for his people to live.

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 human sin.
- In Genesis 12–50, God chooses Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the genealogical line through whom he will bring a Messiah to 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 despite their disobedience.
- In Deuteronomy, God prepares his people to live in the land of promise.

| Book | Theme | God is the... | Jesus is the... | Israel is... |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--|--------------|
| Genesis | Beginnings | Sovereign Creator | Second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45, 47) | Chosen |
| Exodus | Redemption and Relationship | Divine Warrior | Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7) | Delivered |
| Leviticus | Holiness | Holy Sanctifier | Perfect Sacrifice (1 Peter 1:18-19) | Set Apart |
| Numbers | The Consequences of Disobedience | Just Sustainer | Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14) | Disobedient |
| Deuteronomy | Renewal of the Covenant | Loving Lord | Coming Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 3:17-26) | Prepared |

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

- 1. The sovereignty of God.** In Creation, in the plagues and the 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 humanity.** Human rebellion impacts all of history. The flood, Babel, and Israel's disobedience in the desert all show the pervading sinfulness of humanity. However, beginning in Genesis 3:15, God acts to reverse the results of Adam'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 humanity. 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 human 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 a continuing relationship with a holy God.

Authorship of the Pentateuch

Until the 18th century, there was little or no debate about the authorship of the Pentateuch. All believers accepted scripture's testimony that Moses was the author. 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 15th century B.C.⁴

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 says that Moses was the meekest man on the earth. As a student asked, "If a person calls himself the most humble person on earth, is he actually humble?"
- Genesis 11:28 refers to Ur of the Chaldeans. 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 Chaldeans" to help readers distinguish between Ur of the Chaldeans 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 of Genesis: Beginnings

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).

⁴ For more information, please see the Lesson 2 listing in the "Recommended Resources" section of this course.

Overview of Genesis

Primeval History (Genesis 1–11)

Genesis 1–11 is often called “Primeval History.” These chapters cover more than 2,000 years. Modern skeptics deny the historical truth of these chapters. However, they are foundational to the rest of scripture. They show the sovereignty of God over the world and his grace in providing redemption for sinful humanity.

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 human 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. He wants us to believe that sin does not bring God’s judgment. The Flood illustrates the principle that “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20).
- **The Tower of Babel** shows humanity’s continuing rebellion and pride. In the garden, Satan tempted Eve with the promise that “you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). The builders at Babel said, “Let us make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4). In both stories, people act from pride; in both cases, they try to take God’s role; both times their 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 human life in the garden and the relationship between Adam and *Yahweh*, the covenant-making God. *Elohim* is a name that refers to God’s power and majesty. *Yahweh* is a more personal name that God used when he revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2, 14). Together, these names show God as the creator of the universe and as a personal God who seeks relationship with humanity.

Genesis 1–2 shows that all people have value because we are created in the image of God.⁵ David sang:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor (Psalm 8:3–5).

⁵ 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.

Genesis 3 shows humanity'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. Despite humanity's rebellion, this chapter shows God's gracious promise of a redeemer.⁶

Finally, Genesis 6 shows the increasing rebellion of humanity which led to the flood (Genesis 7). After the flood, humankind again rebelled at Babel (Genesis 11). This rebellion against God resulted in the confusion of languages and dispersion of the nations. These stories show the need for redemption, provided by the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3).

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 21–35)
- Jacob (Genesis 25–50)
- 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 repeatedly uses the phrase, "These are the generations of..." to show a narrowing focus: from the creation of the world (Genesis 2:4), to the creation of mankind (Genesis 5:1), through Noah, Shem, Terah, Abraham, Isaac, and finally, Jacob (Genesis 37:2).

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

- 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 the election of a people as the means of blessing all people.⁷
- 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 put himself under an oath, pledging his everlasting faithfulness to Abraham.**
- In Genesis 17, **God gave the sign of circumcision by which Abraham and his descendants would demonstrate their faith in the covenant.** Salvation in the

⁶ Theologians call Genesis 3:15 the *proto-evangelium*, the first promise of the gospel. In response to humankind's sin, God promised redemption; he did not leave us in our sin.

⁷ The concept of election is discussed more in the next section.

Old Testament, as in the New Testament, was by faith and not by works. Circumcision itself was never the basis of salvation; circumcision was a sign of faith in the promises of the covenant (Romans 4:9–12).

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

- The miraculous birth of Isaac (Genesis 21).
- God's testing of Abraham's obedience with his call to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22).
- God's provision of a substitute for Isaac (Genesis 22).
- God's blessing of Jacob's family despite Jacob's character flaws.

Genesis 37–50 moves from a focus on the messianic line (Abraham – Isaac – Jacob – Judah) to a focus on Joseph. Joseph has often been seen as a type of Christ. Both Joseph and Jesus were rejected by their families, 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 means of God's blessing for all nations. Similarly, Isaac and Jacob were not chosen for their works but as the way God would fulfill his 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 a covenant with Noah (Genesis 9). This was followed by his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 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: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." 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 the book of 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 (Romans 5:12–21). He is the promised seed of Abraham through whom all nations of the earth are blessed (Genesis 12:1–3; Galatians 3:15–29).

A Closer Look at Creation

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

In 1998, a Bible teacher 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.

The teacher was excited by this news—until he 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 accepted the arguments of naturalistic scientists who insist that scripture cannot be trusted and claim that science contradicts the

Bible. Scientific truth does not conflict with biblical truth; both science and scripture point to God as the Creator. Genesis 1–2 is a historical account of Creation. Properly understood, science provides a window through which to view the wonders of God’s creation. Many of the greatest scientists in history have been professing Christians.⁸

| Truths about Creation (Genesis 1–2) | False Teachings |
|--|---|
| God created the world out of nothing. | Ancient myths that say other gods made the world. Modern myths that say the world evolved by chance. |
| There is one sovereign God. | Polytheism of the ancient world that says there are many gods. |
| All people are created in the image of God. | Evolutionary theory that says humanity evolved by 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 humankind in his image. When the Creation week was done, God saw that everything he had made was very good.

Throughout church history, faithful believers have arrived at different interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2. Bible-believing Christians have differed on the details of when and how God created the world. However, followers of Christ must not deny the authority and truth of the Bible. Whenever or however God created our world, we agree that the sovereign God of Genesis 1 is the creator of all things.

⁸ Great scientists who were professing Christians include:

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

Galileo (is considered the “Father of Modern Science”)

Johannes Kepler (explained the movement of the planets)

Robert Boyle (is considered the first modern chemist)

Rene Descartes (was one of the most influential thinkers of the Scientific Revolution)

Michael Faraday (was an important chemist)

Louis Pasteur (invented pasteurization, a process for making milk safe to drink, and created the first vaccines for rabies and anthrax)

Max Planck (is considered the father of quantum theory)

Genesis (Continued)

Genesis Speaks Today

Genesis is an important book for the 21st-century Christian. It speaks truth to issues faced by the church today. From it we learn that:

- 1. Human life is valuable.** This is because God made us in his own image (Genesis 1:26–27). 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.
- 2. We are responsible to care for our world.** God gave people stewardship of the earth (Genesis 1:26–28). After each day of creation, God saw that what he had made was good. God appointed humanity to care for his good creation. Because of this, believers in Christ should value all aspects of the earth as God’s good creation.
- 3. The church has a mandate for evangelism and discipleship.** God promised that Abraham’s seed would be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1–3). In the New Testament, Jesus commissioned the church to fulfill this mission (Matthew 28:18–20).

Lesson 2 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 most important people in Genesis 12–50. Your sermon should show how the person provides a positive model or a negative warning for believers today.

(2) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 2 Test

- (1) *Torah* is usually translated into what word?
- (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. Include the references for the sections.
- (6) List the four major events of Genesis 1–11.
- (7) List the four most important people in Genesis 12–50.
- (8) In one sentence each, summarize the three primary aspects of the covenant with Abraham.
- (9) List three truths about creation that oppose false teachings.
- (10) List three truths Genesis teaches today's church.
- (11) Write Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:3 from memory.

Lesson 3

Exodus–Deuteronomy

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (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, and Deuteronomy 6:4–5.

Introduction to Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

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 Israel's exodus from Egypt is 1446 B.C.⁹ Deuteronomy concludes as Israel is preparing to enter Canaan in about 1405 B.C.

Exodus

Themes of Exodus: 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.

⁹ 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 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.

| Exodus | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Chapters 1–15 | Redemption from Egypt | Passover |
| Chapters 16–40 | Relationship with Yahweh | 10 Commandments |

Overview of Exodus

Redemption from Egypt (Exodus 1–15)

Exodus begins with Israel suffering oppression in Egypt. The Pharaoh had previously welcomed Joseph’s family, but 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 Israel’s redemption from Egypt:

- **The miraculous birth and call of Moses** is God’s answer to the cry of his people.
- **The 10 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 Yahweh was sovereign over all people.
- **The Passover** marks Israel as God’s chosen people. 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 with Yahweh (Exodus 16–40)

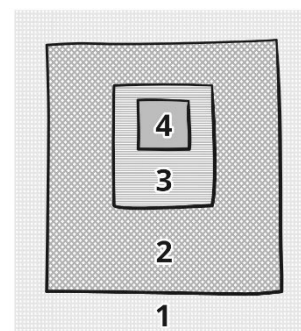
God redeemed Israel in order to build an intimate relationship with his people. The events of Exodus 16–40 take place at Mount Sinai. There God met his people and marked them as his treasured possession (Exodus 19:5).

Two symbols marked the relationship between Yahweh and Israel:

1. **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 being in relationship with Yahweh.

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 Yahweh dwelt among his chosen people.

The Tabernacle taught the concept of holiness to Israel. As Israelites moved toward the Tabernacle, they were aware that they were moving from (1) unclean space (outside the camp) to (2) clean space (inside the camp) to (3) the Tabernacle itself, which was holy and set apart for God and the priests. The Most Holy Place (4) 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 (1 Corinthians 5:7). He fulfills the promise of Passover and the Tabernacle. John uses the Greek word for *tabernacle* (verb) to describe Jesus' ministry on earth when he writes, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us" (John 1:14). As the Tabernacle had represented God's presence among his people, Jesus was God's presence among all humanity.

Leviticus

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

Theme of Leviticus: 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's 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." 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 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 people:

1. A modern scholar who says that the doctrine of sin is a superstitious myth
2. A pagan boy who sacrifices a chicken on an altar in a remote village

Professor Wood asked, “Which one 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.¹⁰

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 4:3–5, 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.” This shows that even the ability to offer a sacrifice was a gift from God. The system of sacrifices was not a means of earning salvation by good works. Instead, the sacrifices were a gift of God’s grace.
- 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 enabled the Israelites to approach a holy God.

- **Burnt offering:** the primary Old Testament offering (Leviticus 1). Before killing the animal, the worshipper placed his hand on the head of the animal, showing that it was the sinner himself who deserved the penalty of death (Leviticus 1:4–5). The animal was then burned completely on the altar.
- **Grain offering:** a gift offering that often accompanied a burnt offering or peace offering (Leviticus 2).

¹⁰ Paraphrased from Jill Carattini, “Lamb of God” at A Slice of Infinity, April 23, 2012.

- **Peace offering:** celebrated fellowship between God and the worshipper (Leviticus 3). It affirmed the covenant relationship between God and Israel. It is the only offering shared between the worshipper, the priest, and God. The part that belonged to God (the fat—the best parts) was burned up. The rest was eaten by the worshipper and the priest.
- **Sin offering:** given to atone for unintentional violations of the law or for failing to do something that was required by the law (Leviticus 4:1–5:13). Sin made the person unclean; this offering restored them to purity.
- **Trespass or guilt offering:** dealt with violations of the law, particularly those that required restitution and restoration of property (Leviticus 5:14–6:7). This offering is very similar to the sin offering, but seems to address more serious violations.

Although Israel would later treat the sacrifices as mere ritual, the sacrificial system was intended to represent true repentance. Sins committed in deliberate defiance were not covered by these offerings (Numbers 15:30–31). 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 Yahweh with worship of the golden calf of Egypt.¹¹ 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 fits 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.¹² While the reasons for the

¹¹ See Exodus 32:4 (“These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”) and Exodus 32:5 (“Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD”).

¹² 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 their classes.

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.

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

The last section of Leviticus moves from talking about rituals of sacrifice, the priesthood, and ritual purity to a focus on holy living. The purpose of the *holiness code* is to call Israel 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: "...You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).¹³ A reminder that "I am the LORD" or "I am the LORD your God" occurs 47 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 (Matthew 5:17, 1 Corinthians 9:21, Galatians 6:2). 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 (Matthew 5:48, 1 Corinthians 1:2).

A Closer Look at the Law

► If we are justified 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. Many think 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 (Galatians 2:16–21, for example), while they ignore other statements such as, "Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully" (1 Timothy 1:8). Both statements must be considered in our study of Old Testament law because "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Others think that obedience to the law is a way to earn God's favor. They pride themselves on their careful adherence to every detail of the law.

How should a believer in Christ approach the law? The law should be read as a revelation of God's character that guides God's people in all times. When we read any law, we should ask, "What does this law reveal about God's holy character and about his requirements for a holy people?" Then we should consider how the coming of Christ changed the application of the law. Finally, we should apply it to our circumstances today.

¹³ This same idea is repeated in Leviticus 20:7, 26; Leviticus 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.

Steps for Applying the Old Testament Law Today

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 based on the principle from the Old Testament law.

To apply this model, consider the law of gleaning:

► Read Leviticus 19:9–10.

1. The ancient law states: "...You shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner...."
2. The law is based on God's character: "I am the LORD your God." God cares for the poor; he loves the needy.¹⁴
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 to us 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 reflect the Ten Commandments, while others are based on the laws of sacrifice, the ideas of cleanness and uncleanness, or love toward one's neighbor. All express our obligation to be holy, as the LORD our God is holy.

Numbers

Title and Structure of Numbers

The Greek name of the fourth book of the Old Testament ("Numbers") comes from the two censuses that are part of the book: one at the beginning and one at the end. The Hebrew title ("In the Desert") refers to the 40 years of wandering in the desert after Israel left

¹⁴ 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.

Mount Sinai. Numbers shows the terrible consequence of disobeying God. As a result of Israel's disobedience, an entire generation died during 40 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.

Theme of Numbers: The Consequences of Disobedience

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" (2 Timothy 2:13).

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 (Numbers 11:1–3), their complaint about manna at Kibroth-hattaavah (Numbers 11:4–35), and the rebellion of Aaron and Miriam against Moses' leadership (Numbers 12:1–16).

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 20, 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 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 despite 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 Numbers 21, the people were plagued with fiery serpents because of rebellion. ("Fiery serpents" probably referred to poisonous snakes.) 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 (John 3:14–16).

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 40 years after the opening of the book. Because of disobedience, an 11-day journey took 40 years (Deuteronomy 1:2–3).

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.¹⁵

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 (Numbers 24:17). Despite 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 was judged with a plague that killed 24,000 Israelites (Numbers 25:1–9). 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.

| 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) |

¹⁵ Similarly, in Joshua 7, people died at Ai because of Achan's sin, not because of the strength of the town of Ai.

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 (1 Corinthians 10:1–11). These New Testament believers were in danger of the same failures. Paul warned, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Along with this warning, Paul encouraged his readers, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In Hebrews, the author warns believers 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 (Hebrews 3:7–4:11).

Deuteronomy

Theme of Deuteronomy: Renewal of the Covenant

Deuteronomy is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. It looks back to Genesis–Numbers while pointing forward to Joshua–Kings. Deuteronomy is the culmination of the Pentateuch and the foundation of the Historical Books. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the prophets will measure Israel against the principles taught in Deuteronomy.

DEUTERONOMY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT



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

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. The review shows the importance of keeping the covenant. It shows the consequences of Israel's disobedience when they refused to enter Canaan. It then shows God's protection when Israel was obedient to his 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 (Deuteronomy 4:9, 23).

A Closer Look at Deuteronomic Theology

Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 1-4 demonstrates an important principle for understanding Old Testament history. This principle is called *deuteronomic theology*, or the law of sowing and reaping. In the New Testament, Paul cited this principle in Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."

This principle is called "deuteronomic theology" because it is most clearly stated in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses promised that if Israel remained faithful to God, she would receive God's blessing. If she was disobedient to God, she would reap God's judgment. This principle is demonstrated repeatedly in the Old Testament:

- When Israel obeyed God's commands to Joshua, she won military victories in Canaan. When Achan broke God's commands, he brought defeat on Israel.
- When David was faithful to God, he defeated Goliath, rose to the kingship, and defeated Israel's enemies. When he sinned with Bathsheba, he suffered conflict within his family and civil war in the kingdom.
- All through 1 and 2 Kings, the writer shows that Israel's history was shaped by her faithfulness, or lack of faithfulness, to God. When Judah was faithful to Yahweh, she was blessed by God. When Judah turned to worship idols, God sent her into exile.
- The prophets frequently warned Israel, "God will send judgment because of your disobedience."

There are some balancing truths that we should not ignore when discussing deuteronomic theology. When we read scripture as a whole, we see that the principle of sowing and reaping is not an absolute rule in every situation. God sometimes has sovereign purposes beyond our limited perspective.

Job's friends tried to apply the principle of deuteronomic theology to his suffering, but God showed that Job was suffering despite his own innocence. He was not reaping the result of personal sin.

In John 9, Jesus' disciples tried to apply the principle to the blind man who Jesus healed. They asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus responded that this man was suffering, "...that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:2-3).

Deuteronomy (Continued)

Overview of Deuteronomy (Continued)

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 existing covenant will be applied to Israel’s new life in Canaan.¹⁶

Moses begins his review of the law with the Ten Commandments. Two principles are the foundation of the covenant:

- 1. The fear of God.** In Deuteronomy 5:29, God said, “Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!” The proper fear of God will preserve Israel.
- 2. The love of God.** Deuteronomy 6:4–5 is the heart of the covenant: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”¹⁷ Jesus will later point to this as the first and great commandment (Matthew 22:37–38).

These two principles, fear of God and love for God, are not opposed to each other. 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 way to live in a loving relationship with God.

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

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

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 22:8 is an example: “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.” 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, “...you shall love your neighbor as yourself...” (Leviticus 19:18). It also relates to Exodus 20:13, “You shall not murder.” Yet, fulfilling this command is more than an absence of murder; it is proactive protection of other human beings.

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4–5 is called the *Shema*.

Deuteronomy 27–28 contain instructions for a covenant renewal ceremony that is to take place after Israel enters Canaan. In this ceremony, Israel is to build an altar near Shechem, a city located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The tribes will be divided into two groups, with half 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 contain 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 witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

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.

Appendices (Deuteronomy 32–34)

Under God's direction, Moses made provisions to help Israel remember the covenant. Moses taught Israel a song that summarizes 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. Just as Jacob had blessed each of his 12 sons before his death (Genesis 49), Moses now blesses each of the 12 tribes before his death.

Deuteronomy 34 is a record of Moses' death that may have been written by Joshua. Because of Moses' sin at Meribah, he was not allowed to enter the land of promise (Numbers 20). However, God allowed Moses to see the land from Mount Nebo. God buried Moses in Moab, and Joshua became the new leader for 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.

| 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 30:19, Deuteronomy 31:24–32:1 |
| * Moses called “heaven and earth” as witnesses to God's covenant with Israel. Later, the prophets would call these same witnesses (“heaven and earth”) to testify that Israel had broken the covenant with Yahweh (Isaiah 1:2; Micah 6:1-2; Jeremiah 2:12). | |

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

Deuteronomy in the New Testament

Deuteronomy is cited more than 80 times in the New Testament, making it 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 (Deuteronomy 18:15–19, Deuteronomy 34:10–12; John 6:14). Jesus cited Deuteronomy many times, including in his response to Satan's temptation in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 6:13, 16, Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:1–10).

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy Speak Today

Many churches ignore most of the Pentateuch. The Creation and Flood accounts are often used in children's lessons and in 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 humankind. When rightly understood, the law reveals God's desire to establish and maintain a relationship with his people. To us, as to Israel, God says: “Do not fear, for God has come to test you,

that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin" (Exodus 20:20). 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.

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

(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) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 3 Test

- (1) What is the most likely date for Israel's exodus from Egypt?
- (2) List the theme of each of the four books discussed in this lesson.
- (3) List the two major sections of Exodus. Include the references for the sections.
- (4) List the four events in Exodus that portray Israel's redemption from Egypt.
- (5) What were the two symbols that marked the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and what did each symbol provide?
- (6) Name and summarize the five sacrifices described in Leviticus.
- (7) What is the purpose of the holiness code in Leviticus?
- (8) List the four steps for applying Old Testament law today.
- (9) List the three major sections of Numbers. Include the references for the sections.
- (10) What three kinds of speeches does Moses give in Deuteronomy, and what is the subject of each?
- (11) What two principles are the foundation of the covenant?
- (12) Write Exodus 3:14, Leviticus 20:7–8, and Deuteronomy 6:4–5 from memory.

Lesson 4

Joshua–Ruth

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.
- (2) Know the major events of the conquest of Canaan and the period of the judges.
- (3) Recognize the importance of preparation for the transfer of leadership.
- (4) Understand the concept of Yahweh War in Joshua.
- (5) Relate the messages 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 to the Historical Books

| The Historical Books | | |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Type of Kingdom | Years | Books |
| Theocracy | 1405–1043 B.C. | Joshua–Ruth |
| Monarchy | 1043–586 B.C. | Samuel–Chronicles |
| (Return from Exile) | 538–420 B.C. | Ezra–Esther |

► As you read through this section, you may want to review the Hebrew Bible and Protestant Old Testament book listings provided. (If you are viewing this course on the SGC mobile app, these are found in the Appendix section.)

In the Protestant Old Testament, 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 from exile beginning in 538 B.C.

In the Hebrew Bible, half 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. Overall, the Historical Books show God's faithfulness to his people and 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 believers today, as 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* (a government in which the people are under the direct rule of 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. As a result, a monarchy (a government in which the people are ruled by a human king) became necessary for the unity of the nation.

Joshua

Theme of Joshua: 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 the book of Joshua, God 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.

The main purpose of the book of Joshua is to show that God is faithful 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 (Joshua 7). In this way, the book of Joshua foreshadows Israel's later history.

Author and Date of Joshua

The events of the book of Joshua occurred from 1405–1380 B.C. During this period, Canaan was under nominal Egyptian control, 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 (Joshua 24:29–31).

Overview of Joshua

The Conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1–12)

Crossing into the Land (Joshua 1–5)

The book of Joshua begins with God appearing 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 the city of Jericho. The spies were protected by Rahab, a prostitute in the city. Knowing that Israel would soon conquer the city, Rahab asked the spies to protect her. 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 (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 (Joshua 3–4). This miracle, duplicating the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses (Exodus 14–15), confirmed Joshua as God's chosen leader for his people (Joshua 4:14).

After crossing the Jordan, Joshua reinstituted two covenant memorials. First, after years in the wilderness, 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. By obeying God's instructions to march around Jericho, Israel won a great victory. However, because of Achan's sin, Israel was defeated at the much smaller city of 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 (Joshua 9). The results of this foolish decision caused suffering for Israel hundreds of years later during the reign of David (2 Samuel 21:1–14).

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 threw them into a panic..."
- "...The LORD threw down large stones..."
- "...The LORD gave the Amorites over..."
- "...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 overall control of the land, there were pockets of resistance from native peoples. The individual tribes of Israel were given responsibility for completing the conquest. Unfortunately, Judges shows that the tribes did not accomplish this mission.

Joshua 13–19 records the division of the land among the 12 tribes. Of particular importance to Israel's history was the assignment of 6 cities of refuge and 48 cities for the Levites (Joshua 20). The cities of refuge provided protection for a person who had accidentally killed someone (Numbers 35:6, 9–15). 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 that life was highly valued in the Law of Moses; 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. But at the end of Joshua, there is no clear transfer from Joshua to another leader. Instead, in a phrase that hints at the problems coming in Judges, we read, "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" (Joshua 24:31). The beginning of Judges shows that the values of Joshua were not passed on to the next generation.

| Deuteronomy | Joshua |
|--|--|
| Ends with a covenant renewal (Deuteronomy 29–32) | Ends with a covenant renewal (Joshua 23–24) |
| Ends with the death of a great leader, Moses | Ends with the death of a great leader, Joshua |
| Includes provisions for a transfer of leadership | Does not include provisions for a 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.

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 Yahweh was a bloodthirsty deity who should be condemned, not worshipped. Second, the rise of Islamic *jihad*, the Holocaust, and genocide in places such as Rwanda and Bosnia have caused some followers of Christ 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 introduction to the Old Testament such as this, a few principles should be considered when studying the book of Joshua.¹⁸

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 it is not surprising that God destroyed the Canaanites, but that he spared the rest of the human race.¹⁹ All humans deserve God’s judgment.

Rahab’s testimony to the Israelite spies shows that the Canaanites had heard of God’s power (Joshua 2:8–11). However, with the exception of Rahab, no Canaanites repented and turned to God. God’s willingness to spare Rahab (and Nineveh, in a later generation) 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; it was God’s to give to whomever he chose. In the Ancient Near East, all war was

¹⁸ 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)

¹⁹ Daniel Gard in Stanley Gundry, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 140.

seen as holy war, war between the gods.²⁰ In the plagues on Egypt, Yahweh proved himself greater than Egypt's gods; in the destruction of the Canaanite cities, Yahweh 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 both Israel and the nations about God's holy nature.
- 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. 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 believers. It is not a defense for modern atrocities committed in the name of religion. The Law of Moses distinguished between battles fought outside the Promised Land and battles fought inside the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:10–18). No one today is in the same position Israel was in at the time of the conquest of Canaan. As we saw in "A Closer Look at the Law," we must consider how the coming of Christ affects our application of Joshua.

Finally, in response to skeptics, we should note that Yahweh war was not ethnic cleansing; it was a 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.²¹ 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.

²⁰ 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 Yahweh.

²¹ See Deuteronomy 28:25, Lamentations 2:5, Amos 9:7–8.

Judges

Theme of Judges: Apostasy in Israel

The book of Judges begins with the tribes cooperating in the conquest of Canaan; it 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; it 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 the renewal of the covenant at the end of Joshua, Judges shows how quickly Israel fell into apostasy. Seven times the book of Judges reports that Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.²²

What was the cause of this tragic decline? The book of Judges answers this question with two statements (Judges 17:6, Judges 21:25). First, there was no king in Israel. Judges was probably written in the early days of the monarchy; it shows the need for a king to unify the nation. Second, every person did what was right in his own eyes. Rather than being a nation united in faithful obedience to God, each person followed his own path.

The purpose of the book 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 her sin. The curses of Deuteronomy 27–28 are fulfilled in Judges.

Author and Date of Judges

The events of the book of Judges cover the years from approximately 1380–1050 B.C. 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 (Judges 1:21).

A Closer Look: What Is a Judge?

In the book of Judges, 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 led individual tribes, not the entire nation. The leadership of the judges probably overlapped, with a judge leading in one tribe or group of tribes, while another judge led a different tribe or group of tribes.

²² Judges 2:11; Judges 3:7, 12; Judges 4:1; Judges 6:1; Judges 10:6; Judges 13:1

Judges (Continued)

Overview of Judges

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

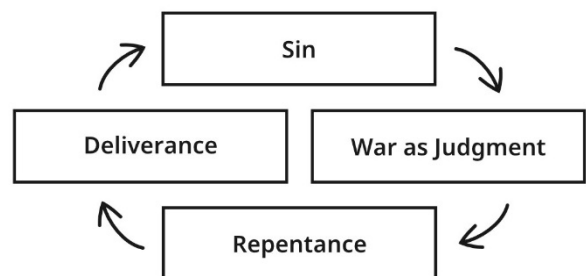
At the time of the Judges, Israel's tribes controlled the hill country, while the Canaanites were in control of the coastal regions. Israel failed to complete the conquest begun under Joshua. The book of Judges gives two reasons for the incomplete conquest. Judges 1:19 shows a human reason: Judah could 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 their sides to test Israel (Judges 2:1–3, 20–23, Judges 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 accounts of the judges (Judges 2:11–18):

1. **Sin.** The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.
2. **War as judgment.** The LORD sold them into the hands of their enemies.
3. **Repentance.** They were greatly distressed and cried out to God.
4. **Deliverance.** The LORD raised up a judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies.



The book of 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 (Judges 3:9–11). However, the succeeding judges fail to measure up to Othniel's description.

Ehud wins victory through trickery (Judges 3:12–30). **Deborah** is a faithful leader, but her song of victory reveals a nation that is divided into rival factions (Judges 4–5).

Gideon (Judges 6–8) is slow to believe God, requiring three miracles as confirmation of God's call. He later leads Israel into false worship (Judges 8:24–27).

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 (Judges 11).

The last of the judges, **Samson**, is a mere shadow of God's ideal for a leader. He breaks his Nazirite vow and is guilty of immoral unions with the Canaanites. Ultimately, Samson is more successful in his death than in his life (Judges 13–16).

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

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

The book of 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 priest shows the breakdown of religious life (Judges 17–18). Israel is now guilty of the idolatry that brought God's judgment on the Canaanites. Why was there such spiritual decay? "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

The horrible story of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine is similar to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Judges 19, Genesis 19). 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. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Ruth

Theme of Ruth: 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..." (Ruth 1:1). 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, a woman from a people who worshipped false gods. While the people of Israel were descending into chaos, one Moabitess was faithful to Yahweh.

Second, Boaz and Ruth had a son: "...They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David" (Ruth 4:17). As the great-grandmother of King David, Ruth is important in the national history of Israel.

Overview of Ruth

The account given in the book of Ruth is a drama with four acts.

Act 1: Naomi and Ruth Move 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.

An Israelite family travels to Moab to escape a famine in Judah. Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons remain there 10 years, during which time both of Elimelech's sons marry Moabite women. The three men die in Moab, and Naomi prepares to return to Bethlehem alone.

Orpah, one of the widows, remains in Moab. The other widow, Ruth, insists on moving 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 travel to Bethlehem. 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 (Leviticus 19:9, Leviticus 23:22),²³ Ruth is able to collect food for Naomi and herself. She gleans 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 (Ruth 2:20). She tells Ruth to stay in Boaz's fields 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.²⁴ 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 he. 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

²³ This law was given as an example in the section "A Closer Look at the Law" in Lesson 3.

²⁴ *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 (Deuteronomy 25:5–6). The unnamed relative in Ruth 4:6 does not want to marry Ruth because it will damage his own inheritance rights.

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.

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 own two sons; now she holds in her arms the son of Ruth and Boaz.

Like the book of Esther, which is 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.

Joshua, Judges, and Ruth in the New Testament

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua*. As Joshua led God's people into Canaan, Jesus Christ leads God's people into Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:1–11).

Despite the decline of Israel's society, some of the judges are still seen as examples of faith in Hebrews 11. Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and even Samson are honored for their faith in God (Hebrews 11:32). 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 (Matthew 1:5). 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 Moabitess 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, Judges, and Ruth Speak Today

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

On a broader scale, today's followers of Christ face the issues of faithfulness and unfaithfulness that were faced by Joshua, Ruth, and people in the time of the judges. We no longer live in a theocracy, and God's response is often not as immediate and as visible as it was 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.

Lesson 4 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) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 4 Test

(1) In the Hebrew Bible, which four Historical Books are called Former Prophets?

(2) Define *theocracy*.

(3) List the theme of each of the three books discussed in this lesson.

(4) What is the main purpose of the book of Joshua?

(5) List the two major sections of Joshua. Include the references for the sections.

(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 purpose of the book of Judges?

(9) What are the four steps of the cycles of apostasy and deliverance in Judges?

(10) Write Joshua 1:8–9 from memory.

Lesson 5

Samuel–Chronicles

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.
- (2) Know the most significant kings in Israel's history.
- (3) Understand the fulfillment of deuteronomistic theology in Israel's history.
- (4) Appreciate the message of hope found in Chronicles.
- (5) Recognize how the accounts of Kings and Chronicles complement each other.

Preparation for this Lesson

- Read 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.
- Memorize 1 Kings 9:4–7 and 2 Chronicles 7:13–14.

Introduction to Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles

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 led 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.

The book of 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 of 1 Samuel: 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 first king's potential as God's anointed. It goes on to show his tragic failure to achieve that potential.

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. Samuel was the son of a godly mother named Hannah. She dedicated Samuel to God with a lifelong Nazirite vow (1 Samuel 1:10–11, Numbers 6:1–21). As a child, he was taken to the Tabernacle 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 (1 Samuel 2:12–25). 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 appoint a king. There is a tension between Moses' earlier prediction of a king whom the LORD their God would choose (Deuteronomy 17:15) and God's statement to Samuel: "...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7).

The key seems to be the motivation for the elders' request: "...Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). 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.

The Early Reign of Saul (1 Samuel 13–15)

At first, Saul appeared to be a model king. He showed humility when he was selected, and he enjoyed military success against the Philistines. However, three events reveal deeply rooted problems in Saul's heart:

1. Saul took Samuel's priestly role. When confronted, Saul blamed Samuel (1 Samuel 13:8–14).
2. Saul made a rash oath that nearly resulted in Jonathan's death (1 Samuel 14:24–46).
3. Saul disobeyed God's command to completely destroy the Amalekites. When confronted by Samuel, Saul blamed the people (1 Samuel 15).

Each of these events shows Saul's failure to be the king God desired. As a result, Samuel brings God's message of judgment: "...Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:23).

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 (1 Samuel 9:1–2, 1 Samuel 16:7).

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 to calm his spirit (1 Samuel 16:14–23).

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 (1 Samuel 17).

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)
- 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 En-dor as he prepared for battle with the Philistines. He now participated in the occult practices that he had once sought to destroy (1 Samuel 28:8–10). 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 of 2 Samuel: The Reign of King David

At the age of 30, David became king. 2 Samuel covers the years 1011–971 B.C., 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)

The book of 2 Samuel begins with David's response to the death of Saul. Rather than rejoicing at the death of an enemy, David lamented the death of Saul 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 most 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:

1. God will provide a secure dwelling for Israel (2 Samuel 7:10–11).
2. God will raise up David's son to build the Temple (2 Samuel 7:12–13).
3. God will establish David's kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:13).

4. God will establish a father-son relationship with David's descendants (2 Samuel 7:14).
5. 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 the writing of 1 and 2 Kings will be, "Why is there no longer a Davidic king on the throne?" To Israel, it will appear that God has 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 this covenant is ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1).

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

2 Samuel 11 records a tragic event that marred David's reign. David entered an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, then attempted to conceal it by murdering Uriah. The rest of 2 Samuel shows God's judgment on David. In 2 Samuel 7:15, God had promised, "...My steadfast love will not depart..."; this blessing is part of the covenant relationship. In 2 Samuel 12:10, God promises, "...The sword shall never depart from your house..."; this judgment is also part of the covenant relationship. A 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 made an excuse for his disobedience (1 Samuel 13:11). When Nathan confronted David about his sin, David immediately confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). 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 supposedly small sin such as slander, 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.

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

When Samuel confronted Saul about offering the priestly sacrifice, Saul tried to justify his sin. He said, "...So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering" (1 Samuel 13:12).

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 he had sinned. David prayed, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (Psalm 51:4).

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 who sins shall die..." (Ezekiel 18:20). We must recognize the seriousness of our sin; sin deserves death.

(3) We must seek and 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" (Psalm 51:7). David knew that there was no provision in the sacrificial system for a premeditated sin such as he had committed (Numbers 15:30–31). However, he cast himself on God's mercy: "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:16–17). David repented with faith that a merciful God would forgive his sin.

In the New Testament, John wrote, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). 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 to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah" (Psalm 32:5).

(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 departed from David's house. Even the genealogy of Jesus includes a reminder of David's sin: "...David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah" (Matthew 1:6). David's story is a reminder of the terrible consequences of sin.

We must never take sin lightly. Paul warned, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption..." (Galatians 6:7–8). 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 of Kings: The Failure of Israel's Kings

In 2 Samuel 7, God promised three things: a secure dwelling place for Israel, a Temple in Jerusalem, and a descendant of David 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 Yahweh, 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."

| Promise in 2 Samuel | Reality when Kings is written |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 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 of Kings

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 say that the author of the book is unknown.

The book of 1 Kings records events beginning in 971 B.C. The last event in 2 Kings occurred in 561 B.C. The book does not mention Cyrus' edict of 539 B.C. allowing Judah to return from exile. It can be assumed that Kings was written sometime between these last two dates.

Overview of 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 (Solomon’s son), the nation divided into two kingdoms following the death of Solomon. The 10 northern tribes followed Jeroboam; only the two tribes of 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 |
| Worshipped at Bethel and Dan | Worshipped 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 538 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 (2 Kings 21). 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.

The book of 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, Prophets, and Events²⁵

| Northern Kingdom of Israel | | Southern Kingdom of Judah | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|
| 931–910 B.C. | King Jeroboam I (led Israel into idolatry) | 931–913 B.C. | King Rehoboam (caused the division of Israel) |
| 885–874 B.C. | King Omri (moved the capital to Samaria) | 911–870 B.C. | King Asa (a godly king) |
| 875–848 B.C. | Ministry of prophet Elijah | 872–848 B.C. | King Jehoshaphat (a good king, but he made an alliance with Ahab) |
| 874–853 B.C. | King Ahab and Queen Jezebel | | |
| 760–750 B.C. | Ministry of prophet Amos | 792–740 B.C. | King Uzziah (struck by leprosy for violating the laws for priestly functions) |
| 753–715 B.C. | Ministry of prophet Hosea | | |
| 732–722 B.C. | King Hoshea (last king of Northern Kingdom) | 740–680 B.C. | Ministry of prophet Isaiah |
| | | 716–687 B.C. | King Hezekiah |
| 722 B.C. | Destruction of Northern Kingdom by Assyria | 641–609 B.C. | King Josiah (last godly king of Judah) |
| | | 627–580 B.C. | Ministry of prophet Jeremiah |
| | | 609–598 B.C. | King Jehoiakim (rejected Jeremiah's warnings) |
| | | 597–586 B.C. | King Zedekiah (last king of Judah) |

²⁵ Dates are approximate. Based on E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

Important Themes in Kings

The Kings

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

Unlike other historical sources, the primary concern of Kings is whether a king was faithful to God. For each of the kings, the writer says either, "And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 15:3), or his heart was "...wholly true to the LORD all his days" (1 Kings 15:14).

In Kings, each king is evaluated on the basis of his faithfulness to God. This is in contrast to other historical sources that emphasized 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. What matters to the biblical writer is that "Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did more evil than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:25). From the perspective of the biblical author, Omri's sin outweighed any political significance of his rule. Kings is a covenantal history; it traces Israel's history in relationship to her faithfulness to God's covenant.²⁶



Baal, an idol called the "Lord of Rain and Thunder."

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 (1 Kings 16:33). The 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 Carmel brought Israel face to face with her apostasy, and the

²⁶ 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.

drought proclaimed by Elijah brought Israel face to face with the cost of her apostasy (1 Kings 17).²⁷

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 both 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 Yahweh. No, God has not forgotten his covenant promises. Judah and Israel are suffering the results of unfaithfulness to the covenant. The covenant promised blessing to the faithful and punishment to the unfaithful. God is doing just what he promised." (See 2 Kings 17:7–23.)

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

| Deuteronomy | Kings |
|--|--|
| Israel is commanded to worship at the place that the LORD would choose (Deuteronomy 12:5). | Jeroboam set up new places of worship in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:26–30) |
| God describes the kind of king he intended for Israel to have (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). | Israel's kings failed to live up to God's standards for a king. |
| God provided a test for a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:21–22). | The true prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha demonstrated the validity of this test. |
| God promises specific curses if Israel breaks the covenant (Deuteronomy 28). | The promises are fulfilled in tragic detail. |

²⁷ 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 Yahweh, the Creator of the world, is the only one with power over nature.

1 and 2 Chronicles

Theme of Chronicles: A Message of Hope

The books of 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 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."

Author and Date of Chronicles

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 it was one of the last Old Testament books to be written, likely 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.

A Closer Look at the Relationship Between Kings and Chronicles

The relationship between Kings and Chronicles is similar to the relationship between the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke): they look at the same material from different 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 |
| Was the king's heart wholly true to the LORD? | Was the king faithful to Temple worship? |
| God's righteous judgment | God's everlasting mercy |

1 and 2 Chronicles (Continued)

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 fifth century B.C., a genealogy of Israel's tribes seemed meaningless. The 10 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.²⁸

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 did not have a great heritage, but he called upon the God of Israel, and God granted what he asked (1 Chronicles 4:10). 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.

²⁸ The phrase "all Israel" is used more than 40 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.

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 breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD... Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse" (1 Chronicles 10:13–14).

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 of 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 (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 Solomon built 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: "...Fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house" (2 Chronicles 7:1–2).

Later in this chapter, God promises Solomon that "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:13–14).

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)

The book of 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 (2 Kings 18:4). In Chronicles, three chapters are devoted to the details of Hezekiah's reforms (2 Chronicles 29–31). Chronicles emphasizes Hezekiah's devotion to the Temple and his faithfulness to God.

Another interesting contrast between Kings and Chronicles is seen in the story of Manasseh. Kings shows Manasseh as the worst of Judah's kings, the one whose sin made exile inevitable (2 Kings 21:11–15). Chronicles tells us that while Manasseh was in captivity, he repented. Manasseh was released from Babylon and returned to Jerusalem. He did away with the idols in the Temple (2 Chronicles 33:10–20).

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.

Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles in the New Testament

The Davidic covenant provides a historical foundation for the ministry of Jesus, the Messiah. In the covenant, God promised that a descendant of David 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 same covenant, God also 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. Though 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 promises to David were 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, Kings, and Chronicles Speak Today

While believers in Christ may be involved in civil government if given the opportunity, 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.

The Old Testament Historical Books do not provide a model for the establishment of a Christian political structure. Instead, they are 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

Each member of your group should write a 1 page summary about one of Judah's kings. Explain to the group how the king 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 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) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 5 Test

- (1) List the four themes of the books discussed in this lesson.
- (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 God's covenant with David.
- (4) List four principles from David's sin that should guide a believer who falls into sin.
- (5) 1 and 2 Kings record events that happened during what years?
- (6) After the division of the kingdom of Israel, which tribes remained loyal to Rehoboam and the Davidic line?
- (7) How are the kings evaluated in 1 and 2 Kings?
- (8) Samuel and Kings answers what question about each king? Chronicles answers what question about each king?
- (9) Why is the reign of Solomon important for Chronicles?
- (10) Contrast what Kings and Chronicles record about Manasseh.
- (11) Write 1 Kings 9:4–7 and 2 Chronicles 7:13–14 from memory.

Lesson 6

Ezra–Esther

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Be able to outline the primary themes of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
- (2) Know the major events of the restoration period.
- (3) Recognize the chronological relationship between Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
- (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.

Introduction to the Books of the Restoration

The last three Historical Books are from the years following Cyrus’ decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:22–23, Ezra 1:1–4). Ezra and Nehemiah 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. The three 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 people who returned; Esther shows God’s care for those who were still in Persia.

| Events in the Restoration Books | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Date | Event |
| 538 B.C. | First return—led by Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–4) |
| 516 B.C. | Completion of the Temple (Ezra 5–6) |
| 483–473 B.C. | God spares the Jews in Persia (Esther) |
| 458 B.C. | Second return—led by Ezra (Ezra 7–10) |
| 444 B.C. | Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem |

Unity of Ezra–Nehemiah

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

- They have the same historical setting.
- Both describe returns to Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerxes I of Persia.
- Both include lists of the Jewish people.
- Both record religious and social reforms among the returned exiles.²⁹

| 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 13) |

²⁹ The Darius named in the table below was not the same ruler that Daniel served (Daniel 5, 6, 9, 11).

Ezra

Theme of Ezra: Return from Exile

The book of Ezra traces two returns. It shows the rebuilding of the Temple as well as the challenges faced by those who returned.

Author and Date of Ezra

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

The events recorded in the book of Ezra took place in the years 538–458 B.C. Ezra was a Levite, a descendant of Aaron (Ezra 7:1–5). He ministered to his fellow Jews in captivity and then led a group of exiles back 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.

Overview 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 conquered 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 the Messiah in the city of David.

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

| Policy of Empires Toward Conquered Nations | | |
|--|--|--|
| Empire | Policy | Involvement with Israel/Judah |
| 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 homelands | Allowed Judah to return to Jerusalem |

The book of Ezra begins with the return under Zerubbabel, including a census of the 49,697 people who returned. 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.

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

After arriving in Jerusalem, the people began work on the Temple in 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).³⁰

There is a gap of about 15 years between Ezra 4 and 5. Ezra 4 ends in about 536 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)

Ezra led 1,758 people back to Jerusalem 80 years after Zerubbabel's return. "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). He led a spiritual revival among God's people.

³⁰ 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.)

The Work: Social Reforms (Ezra 9–10)

The first group of returnees faced opposition as they worked to rebuild 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. There were two reasons intermarriage was a snare to the restoration community:

1. **Jerusalem was surrounded by unbelievers.** Idolatry was a constant temptation.
2. There were many different religions within the vast Persian Empire. ***Syncretism*** (the blending of different religious beliefs into one system) **was common**. The same philosophy that made it easy for Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to their homeland also made it easy for those in the empire 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. In the Pentateuch God had forbidden mixed marriages (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). God knew that if the Israelites married people from the pagan tribes, they would soon begin to worship the gods of the pagans. Ezra's prayer of confession showed the seriousness of this issue and caused the people to be willing to confront the problem. Ezra 10 ends the book with Ezra's plan for dissolving the mixed marriages.

Nehemiah

Theme of Nehemiah: Rebuilding the Walls

Like Daniel, Nehemiah was a Jewish exile who rose to a high position in the Persian Empire. The job of cupbearer was a trusted position. The cupbearer was responsible for protecting the king from being poisoned. Because of his constant access to the king, the cupbearer often had great influence on political decisions.

Date of Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah records events that took place from 444 B.C. to around 432 B.C. In 444 B.C., Nehemiah left Susa for Jerusalem. He spent much of the next 20 years there. 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, Nehemiah 4:4–5, and Nehemiah 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?

Overview 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 of Jerusalem 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 52 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 for days, fasting and praying. (Nehemiah 1:4). Before bringing his request to the king, Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven (Nehemiah 2:4). When Sanballat and his associates opposed the rebuilding of the walls, Nehemiah prayed for God's protection (Nehemiah 4:4–5, 9; Nehemiah 6:9). In times of pressure, Nehemiah repeatedly turned to prayer.

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 (Deuteronomy 31:10–11). The people confessed their national guilt and pledged faithfulness to the covenant. Nehemiah 11 and 12 give 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 (Nehemiah 13:18), an issue addressed by the prophet Malachi around the same time. In addition, some of the people had married women from the surrounding (unbelieving) peoples (Nehemiah 13:23), 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.³¹ Leadership principles from Nehemiah include:

(1) Spiritual leaders must be people of vision.

Nehemiah had the ability to see a goal and identify the steps necessary to accomplish it. After riding through Jerusalem at night, he said to the leaders, "...Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem..." (Nehemiah 2:17). 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 Cabinet Room and said, "Gentlemen, I find this rather inspiring."³² 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 what Nehemiah wanted, Nehemiah gave specific requests: time away from his palace duties, materials for the walls, and letters of authority for the journey (Nehemiah 2:4–8). 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 among the people. He appointed workers to areas that were most meaningful to them, an important motivational strategy.³³ Spiritual leaders seek God's vision, and then they seek his guidance in planning the project.

(3) Spiritual leaders must be people of courage.

³¹ 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).

See also the *Ministry Leadership* course from Shepherds Global Classroom which includes a sermon on leadership based on the life of Nehemiah.

³² Quoted in J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 112

³³ For example, the priests worked at the sheep gate, the gate nearest the Temple (Nehemiah 3:1). Jedaiah made repairs near his house (Nehemiah 3:10). Nehemiah gave assignments that were important to the workers; this gave them ownership of their job.

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?" (Nehemiah 6:3). 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 must 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..." (Nehemiah 5:15-16). 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."³⁴ Spiritual leaders look for opportunities for service, not for self-promotion. They use their position for the good of the people they lead.

(5) Spiritual leaders must know the importance of prayer.

Prayer was central to Nehemiah's leadership. He always prayed before making major decisions. We remember how Joshua made a treaty without seeking God's guidance, resulting in trouble for Israel in years to come (Joshua 9, 2 Samuel 21:1-14). 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. "In these days [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (Luke 6:12-13). 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 making 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. Likewise, 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

³⁴ Quoted in J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 63

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.”³⁵

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 have respected Nehemiah’s suggestions; he would not have accepted Nehemiah’s commands.

When rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to take a different approach. There, his leadership was based on his ability to organize and inspire. He could not make quiet suggestions; he had to 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 gave orders”; “I confronted the officials”; I “set them in their stations.” 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.

Esther

Theme of Esther: God Is in Control

► 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.

Author and Date of Esther

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

The events of Esther probably took place around 483–473 B.C. during the reign of Ahasuerus.³⁶ 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 Yahweh while living in Israel; Esther is a Jewess who is faithful to Yahweh 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.

³⁵ Al Long, *Leadership Tripod*, (Indianapolis: Power Publishing, 2005), 33

³⁶ Ahasuerus is usually known by his Greek name, Xerxes I. He ruled Persia from 486–465 B.C.

Important Themes in 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*.³⁷ 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, it 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
- The importance of faithfulness
- The folly of wickedness

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 (Esther 2:1–18).
- 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 (Esther 2:19–23).
- Ahasuerus happens to suffer from insomnia the night before Esther plans to reveal Haman's plot to the king (Esther 6:1).
- Of all the records that could have been read to help Ahasuerus fall asleep, the reader happens to open to the record of Mordecai's service to the king (Esther 6:1–3).
- Haman happens to enter the king's room just as Ahasuerus is considering how he can reward Mordecai (Esther 6:6).

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: "...And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

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 are used by God to preserve his people in a time of danger.

³⁷ Purim is still celebrated today in the month of March. *Purim* 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.

Esther's faithfulness to God is seen throughout the story. Her statement, "...If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16), is a commitment to faithfully pursue her responsibility regardless of the outcome.

The book of Esther also shows the faithfulness of Mordecai. Like Joseph and Daniel, Mordecai is raised to a position of influence, a position that allows him to achieve God's purposes (Esther 10:3).

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.

Haman finds his wicked plots turned against himself. Haman tries to honor himself but is appointed to honor Mordecai, his enemy (Esther 6:1–11). Haman tries to destroy the Jews but ends up destroying himself and his family (Esther 7:7–10, Esther 9:5, 10). As Proverbs teaches, God is scornful toward scorners (Proverbs 3:34).

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther in the New Testament

The book of 2 Kings ended with the Jews in exile, the Temple destroyed, and no king on the throne. Furthermore, the promised Messiah had not yet come. 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 the Messiah. Esther is important because, like Joseph's story 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 the 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 half of the Historical Books. This shows their purpose: to bring 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 the covenant, they experienced God's blessing; when they broke the 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 follower of Christ 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?" (Esther 4:14). 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."

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" (Esther 4:16).

Finally, the Historical Books bring a message of hope. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles show that even during 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 essay on “Revival” based on Ezra and his revival in Jerusalem.
- Write a 1–2 page 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 essay on “God’s Providence” based on Esther.

(2) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 6 Test

- (1) List the dates for the primary events of the restoration period.
 - First return—led by Zerubbabel
 - Completion of the Temple
 - God spares the Jews in Persia
 - Second return—led by Ezra
 - Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem
- (2) List two similarities between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.
- (3) List the theme of each of the three books discussed in this lesson.
- (4) Which empire allowed conquered nations to remain in their homelands?
- (5) Which two prophets persuaded the people to resume the Temple rebuilding project?
- (6) For what two reasons was intermarriage a snare to the restoration community?
- (7) Which prophet addresses some of the same issues as Nehemiah?
- (8) List three leadership principles from Nehemiah.
- (9) What Jewish holiday is based on the events in the book of Esther?
- (10) List three important themes in the book of Esther.
- (11) Write Nehemiah 2:17 and Esther 4:14 from memory.

Lesson 7

Job and Psalms

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Recognize characteristics of Hebrew poetry.
- (2) Know the primary theme and message of Job.
- (3) Understand God's self-revelation to Job.
- (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, Psalms 51–92, and Psalms 119–150. (Review the Lesson 7 assignments before reading the assigned Psalms).
- Memorize Psalm 119:1–8.

Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

The Old Testament poetic books include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and 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

The most important element of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. In parallelism, two lines of text (two statements) are used together to express an idea. Parallelism is used three ways in Hebrew poetry:

1. To present a single idea in two different ways (synonymous parallelism)
2. To show the difference between two things (antithetic parallelism)
3. To express one idea, then add more detail (synthetic parallelism)

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

Psalms 25:4:

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

Proverbs 12:28:

In the path of righteousness is life,
and in its pathway there is no death.

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.

Proverbs 10:1:

A wise son makes a glad father,
but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.

Proverbs 10:7:

The memory of the righteous is a blessing,
but the name of the wicked will rot.

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

Psalms 23:1

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

Figures of Speech

While all biblical books contain figures of speech, this imagery is particularly important in the poetic books. Biblical poetry includes these types of figures of speech:

- **Metaphor:** Comparison of two things that are similar in some way. "The LORD is my shepherd..." (Psalm 23:1) is much more memorable and expressive than "God takes good care of me."
- **Hyperbole:** Deliberate use of exaggeration to emphasize a point. In a psalm of lament, David describes his grief, "...every night I flood my bed with tears..." (Psalm 6:6).

- **Personification:** Describing something as if it were human. “The mountains skipped like rams, and the hills like lambs” (Psalm 114:4).
- **Anthropomorphism:** Describing something about God’s nature using human characteristics. “His eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man” (Psalm 11:4).

Acrostic Poetry

In acrostic poetry, each stanza or verse begins with a succeeding letter of the alphabet. This form expresses completeness. Two of the most famous Hebrew acrostics are Psalm 119, about God’s law, and Proverbs 31:10-31, about the virtuous woman. In Psalm 119, each stanza includes eight verses that all begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (For instance, stanza 1 is Psalm 119:1-8. Each verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the next stanza, each verse begins with the second letter of the alphabet.) In Proverbs 31:10-31, each verse begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

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 deal with their suffering?”

Author and Date of Job

There is no indication of the authorship of Job within the book. Suggested authors include Job, Elihu, Moses, Solomon, and someone from the time of Isaiah.

The book of Job does not give a date, but there are several indications that the events probably took place in the time of the patriarchs: The father offers sacrifices for his family, wealth is measured in livestock, and Job has a long lifespan.

Theme of Job: A Search for God

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. Dialogue through much of the book revolves around the question of Job’s suffering. Similar works, also originating in the Ancient Near East, examine the question of suffering.³⁸

The book of Job, however, does not portray suffering as its central theme. Job does not ask about the cause of his own 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.

³⁸ Two Ancient Near East texts 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.

Part of the message of the book is integrity in the midst of suffering. Job testifies to his integrity (Job 27:5, Job 31:6). God witnesses to Job's integrity in his statements to Satan (Job 1:8, Job 2:3). 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!" (Job 23:3). 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 had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). When he sees God, Job is satisfied. The answer to Job is not an explanation of suffering; the answer to Job is God himself.

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 three things:

1. 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. Despite 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 (Job 1:22).
2. 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.
3. 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 led to his 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 him. 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.³⁹

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 core, 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 makes the case in a different manner, their basic argument is this:

1. Suffering comes as punishment or correction for sin.
2. God is a just God.
3. 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 traditionally accepted belief 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 "babble" (Job 11:3). He is certain that 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 wrongdoing; Job continues to assert his innocence.

Job's Speeches (Job 28–31)

At chapter 28, the style of the book changes. Job 28–31 consists of Job's four speeches on these topics:

1. **Wisdom (Job 28).** Job praises the value of wisdom, shows that human 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.
2. **Job's past (Job 29).** Job had been blessed in every way and was respected in his community.
3. **Job's suffering (Job 30).** Those who respected him in the past now mock him.

³⁹ A *theodicy* is an attempt to vindicate the justice or goodness of God despite the existence of evil and suffering 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.

4. **Job's integrity (Job 31).** 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!)" (Job 31:35). When reading Job 31, we should remember that God himself has testified to Job's innocence in Job 1:8 and Job 2:3. 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 also 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. Elihu believes that our role is 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 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" (Job 42:5). 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. Job is, indeed, a person who serves God out of love alone.

Job in the New Testament

There are several connections between the themes of Job and the New Testament:

1. James encourages believers to patiently endure affliction. One of the ways he does this is by reminding them of Job's example of perseverance through suffering and of the Lord's compassion and mercy that Job experienced (James 5:11).
2. Just as Job's friends believed that his suffering was the result of sin, people in Jesus' day sometimes assumed that physical problems were the result of sin. The disciples asked Jesus whether a man's lifelong blindness is punishment for someone's sin (John 9:2). Jesus explained to them, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).
3. Just as God permitted the suffering of righteous Job, Apostle Paul struggles with an affliction that God chooses not to heal (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). The book of Job shows that Satan was the cause of Job's suffering. Paul likewise considers his affliction, "a messenger of Satan to harass me." While still afflicted, both Job and Paul find God's grace to be sufficient for them.

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 the book of Job often focus on the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" The book does not answer this question. A more important question is, "Why do the righteous serve God?" Satan had told the LORD, "Job serves you because of the blessings he receives. Take the blessings away, and he will deny you." Job's friends think that people should serve God to avoid trouble. They assume that faithful obedience to God will prevent suffering.

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 of true love for God.

Daniel's friends will later testify, "...Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods..." (Daniel 3:17-18). 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: "Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated" (Hebrews 11:36-37). These people were faithful to God even though they were not delivered from trouble.

These scriptures press us to consider, “Why do I serve God?” Do I serve him because of blessings he gives? Do I serve him to avoid suffering? Or do I serve him out of love alone? Job, Daniel’s friends, and those described in Hebrews 11 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.

Psalms

Theme of Psalms: Praise

The Greek title of this book of the Bible means “song.” The Hebrew title, which means “praises,” 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 titles that provide information about the psalms. 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 the author**. There are 73 psalms titled “A Psalm of David.” Psalm 50 and Psalms 73–83 are attributed to Asaph, the chief musician for public worship under King David. It appears that the sons of Korah, referenced in the title of 10 psalms, were members of a guild of Temple singers. Solomon is credited with two psalms. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses.

Other titles provide information about the **historical setting** of the psalm. Psalm 3, for example, was written as David fled from his son Absalom. When many were supporting Absalom’s revolt, David remembered: “But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head” (Psalm 3:3). David wrote Psalms 52, 54, 56, 57, and 59 during the years when he fled from Saul (1 Samuel 19–23). 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 “The Sheminith,” (Psalm 6 and Psalm 12), “Alamoth,” (Psalm 46), and “Muth-labben” (Psalm 9) were musical instructions. Some titles specify the instruments to be used. Other titles refer to the tune to which the psalm was sung: “The Gittith,” (Psalm 8, Psalm 81, and Psalm 84), “Do Not Destroy,” (Psalms 57–59 and Psalm 75), and “The Doe of the Dawn” (Psalm 22).

Structure of Psalms

In many ways, the book of Psalms is similar to a modern hymnbook. 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, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen” (Psalm 41:13).

Book 2 (Psalms 42–72) ends, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended” (Psalm 72:18-20).

Book 3 (Psalms 73–89) ends, “Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen” (Psalm 89:52).

Book 4 (Psalms 90–106) ends, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 106:48).

Book 5 (Psalms 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. Books 1 and 2 were very early collections and are primarily composed of psalms written by David. Book 5 refers to the exile and was probably collected much later. (See Psalm 137.) Together, these collections allow us to join ancient Israel in praising God, crying out to him in times of trouble, and worshipping him as our Creator and redeemer.

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 Psalm 119)
- To honor the king (Psalm 72)
- To celebrate a royal wedding (Psalm 45)
- For pilgrimages to Jerusalem (Psalms 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.

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

1. Stanza 1 (Psalm 19:1–6): 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), which speaks of God’s greatness and majesty.

2. Stanza 2 (Psalm 19:7–11): 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 commandments, 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.

3. Stanza 3 (Psalm 19:12–14): The Worshipper’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 God, his rock and redeemer.

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 steadfast love endures forever.” Through creation (Psalm 136:1–9) and his goodness to Israel (Psalm 136:10–26), 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 50 psalms are psalms of lament. Laments usually include 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 light up David’s eyes.

- **Statement of confidence in God.** In Psalm 13:5, after calling for God's help, David says, "But I have trusted in your steadfast love...." 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 to the LORD, because he has 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 ensure 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: we should be both completely honest in expressing our need and completely submissive to God's ultimate purposes in our life.

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

Penitential Psalms

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 Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalm 38, and Psalm 130.

A Closer Look at Psalms of Imprecation

| An Imprecation in Psalms | Jesus' Command |
|--|--|
| "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" (Psalm 137:8–9). | "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). |

The Problem

The book of Psalms includes at least 35 prayers of imprecation, psalms that ask God to pour judgment on the enemies of the psalmist. Believers 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 (Exodus 23:4–5, for example). Furthermore, the New Testament includes imprecations on wrongdoers (2 Timothy 4:14, for example). How, then, should believers read the psalms of imprecation?

Foundational Principles of the Psalms of Imprecation

- 1. They are based on the principle of sowing and reaping.** Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Galatians teach that "...whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). 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 she justly deserves (Psalm 137:8).
- 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 (1 Samuel 24:6). David left his enemies in God's hands.

Can We Pray the Psalms of Imprecation Today?

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

1. Some followers of Christ believe that his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount forbids us from praying prayers of imprecation.
2. Other believers 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. Those seeking to pray psalms of imprecation should ask three questions to determine their motives:

- 1. Am I motivated by God's righteousness or by my anger?** The psalmists were concerned for God and his kingdom. Paul wrote, "Be angry and do not sin..." (Ephesians 4:26). 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 (Psalm 7:6–11), to show God's sovereignty (Psalm 59:13), and to cause the wicked to seek God (Psalm 83:16–18). Modern

imprecations are sometimes inspired by a desire for revenge. Repeatedly in scripture, God forbids personal vengeance (for example, Romans 12:19).

- 3. Which would give me more joy: my enemy's repentance or God's judgment on my enemy?** Jonah sought judgment without providing room for repentance and God's mercy (Jonah 3:4). Biblical imprecation leaves the enemy to God's sovereignty. Because of that, we can rejoice if our enemy repents and receives God's forgiveness.

These guidelines allow us to pray biblical prayers of imprecation when appropriate but greatly limit the use of them for personal situations. How should we pray when we have been wronged?

The Bible consistently teaches us to purposefully trust the situation to God (Romans 12:19, 1 Peter 4:19), who is working all things together for good for his children (Romans 8:28-29). This is seen in the psalms of imprecation, in Jesus' teaching, and in the personal examples of men like David.

Psalms (Continued)

Types of Psalms (Continued)

Wisdom Psalms

Wisdom psalms are similar to proverbs, 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..." (Psalm 111:10).

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 wisdom psalms express frustration 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 of God, he realized that the end of the wicked is destruction and desolation. He ends the psalm with a statement of faith: "But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works" (Psalm 73:28).

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 (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

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

Messianic psalms point ahead to the person and life of the Messiah. These psalms were partially fulfilled at the time of their original writing, but they are ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

Psalms 22 and 136 are examples of messianic psalms. David originally wrote Psalm 22 out of his personal despair, but Jesus fulfilled these prophetic words in his agony on the cross (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46).

Many of the royal psalms are also messianic psalms. These psalms prophesy about God's Anointed One being enthroned as king. Israel's king was the anointed one who ruled over Israel, but Jesus would come as the Anointed One (Messiah) to completely fulfill God's purpose for Israel's king.

Many royal psalms describe a universal rule that was never fulfilled in Israel's history. For example, none of Israel's kings possessed the uttermost parts of the earth (Psalm 2:8). These psalms are perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. For this reason, we can classify them as messianic.

Psalms Speaks Today

The psalms provide a model for Christian worship today. Opinions about issues of worship often divide believers. The psalms answer these questions, providing 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

(1) Choose one of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Assign each member of your group one of these people from the book of Job: Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, or Elihu. Read the man's speeches and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of his 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) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 7 Test

- (1) List the three ways parallelism is used in Hebrew poetry.
- (2) Explain acrostic poetry in one sentence.
- (3) What is the theme 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? List the chapter beside each topic.
- (6) What are three types of information found in the titles of individual psalms?
- (7) What four elements are included in most psalms of lament?
- (8) List three foundational principles of the psalms of imprecation.
- (9) What is the purpose of messianic psalms?
- (10) Write Psalm 119:1–8 from memory.

Lesson 8

Proverbs–Song of Songs

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Know the primary themes of each of Solomon’s books.
- (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 books of Solomon.
- (5) Relate the message of Solomon’s books to the needs of today’s world.

Preparation for this Lesson

- Read Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. (Review the Lesson 8 assignments before reading the book of Proverbs).
- Memorize Proverbs 1:7 and Ecclesiastes 12:13–14.

Introduction to 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 9:10 teaches that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; Psalm 90:12 teaches that we gain a heart of wisdom by numbering our days—when we realize the brevity of life we can make right use of our time. Gaining wisdom is an important pursuit for every person. True wisdom is gained through instruction (Proverbs 22:17–21), observation (Proverbs 6:6–8), and experience (Proverbs 12:1).

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 enables a young man to recognize himself for who he truly is while it teaches him to fear God. Ecclesiastes concludes with the message, “...Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

“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 and horizontal: Wisdom involves our relationship with God (Proverbs 9:10) and our relationships with others. (Proverbs deals with marriage, children, and relationships with the community.) By studying these books, we gain a deeper knowledge of God and of ourselves.

Interpreting a Proverb

A proverb communicates differently than a command. Where the law says, "You shall 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. When reading proverbs, remember that:

1. **A proverb states a general principle that has many applications.**
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 shows 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 you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." 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 discern 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 is an absolute command; instead, they each 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 a setting of silver." The right word, spoken in the right circumstances, is as beautiful as a golden ornament in a silver setting. Wisdom consists of 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.

Proverbs

Theme of Proverbs: Wisdom

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

Overview of Proverbs

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

After an introduction summarizing the purpose of Proverbs (Proverbs 1:1–7), the first collection shows the difference between wisdom and folly. The most common form of proverb in Collection 1 is the discourse proverb, which consists of 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. A majority of these proverbs are *antithetic parallels*;⁴⁰ they contrast the path of the wise with the path of the fool.

Proverbs in this collection address 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, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you?” (Proverbs 22:20–21). “Thirty sayings” indicates a similarity between this collection and an Egyptian wisdom collection called the *Instruction of Amenemope*. The relationship between the two collections 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 differs from all worldly wisdom in one crucial aspect: 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*).⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Antithetic parallelism* is explained at the beginning of Lesson 7.

⁴¹ Quoted in Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, (Ada: Baker Academic, 2015), 298.

Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you (Proverbs 23:10–11).

Both texts warn against stealing property. The difference is in the motivation for obedience. In Proverbs, this principle is not based on some vague “dread thing” but on the nature of God. The redeemer of the poor is strong; 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: “...You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

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

This collection contains proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied (Proverbs 25:1). 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. These proverbs start with 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.

As a book designed to teach young men, Proverbs appropriately ends with an acrostic poem on the blessings of a good wife.⁴² 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.⁴³ Some questions to ask when reading a proverb:

- 1. Does this proverb point toward wisdom or toward 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?

⁴² *Acrostic poetry* is explained at the beginning of Lesson 7.

⁴³ This section is adapted from Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

- 4. How does this proverb apply to my situation?** The application of a proverb will be different in each circumstance. Consider how the proverb relates to your situation.
- 5. What other verses in Proverbs relate to the topic I am studying?** Find multiple proverbs that apply to your situation.
- 6. What other books of the Bible address the same topic?**
- 7. Was someone in the Bible an illustration of this proverb?**

An Example

Here is an example of how these questions can be used when reading a proverb.

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

Possible answers to the study questions:

1. Proverbs 11:2 points in two directions: It points to folly when it says that pride leads to disgrace. It points to wisdom when it says that humility leads to wisdom.
2. The first half of the proverb shows the fruit of pride: disgrace. The second half adds a contrasting truth. It shows the fruit of humility: wisdom.
3. This truth is seen in biblical teaching and in ancient tradition. It can also be seen by observing the life of the proud. It is painful to learn this lesson from experience.
4. While their disgrace may not be seen immediately, this proverb will be fulfilled in the life of the proud.
5. Other proverbs that address pride include Proverbs 13:10, Proverbs 16:5, 18, Proverbs 18:12, and Proverbs 29:23.
6. Pride is also addressed in many other verses, including Psalm 10:4, Psalm 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 the first part of Proverbs 11:2. God’s blessing on King David provides an illustration of the last part of this verse.

Proverbs Speaks Today

Is it possible for someone to be righteous while lacking wisdom? The Bible suggests that it is possible. Lot was righteous; but he was not wise (2 Peter 2:7–8). 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 believers has been discredited because they 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.

The book of Proverbs can guide believers in wise living. Proverbs shows the relationship between inner godliness and the world around us.⁴⁴ Proverbs helps us to live in such a way that the world will be blessed by our lives.

A Closer Look at the Fool

In Proverbs, there are four different Hebrew terms that are used when discussing fools. 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 four terms are listed in order from the least negative to the most negative.

Term 1

Peti (פֶּתִי) (H6612)⁴⁵ This term is used 15 times in Proverbs.

Young people are often called “simple” (Proverbs 1:4).

Characteristics:

- They are unformed and naïve.
- They are gullible (Proverbs 14:15).
- They do foolish things.
- They are irresponsible and immature.
- They are unable to see the danger of their decisions (Proverbs 27:12).
- They are easily led astray (Proverbs 7:6-27).

The primary difference between this kind of person and the fools described by the following three terms can be summarized in one word: teachability. Fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7), but the simple will listen (Proverbs 21:11). A goal of Proverbs is to move the simple towards wisdom.

Term 2

Kesil (כֶּסֶל) (H3684) This term is used 49 times in Proverbs.

Characteristics:

- They are impatient and stubborn.

⁴⁴ This idea is adapted from G.R. French.

⁴⁵ The *Strong's Concordance* numbers for the Hebrew words are listed for each of these four Hebrew terms.

- They hate knowledge (Proverbs 1:22).
- They persist in folly (Proverbs 26:11).
- They take pleasure in doing wrong (Proverbs 10:23) and hate to miss an opportunity to do evil (Proverbs 13:19).
- They do not value wisdom, so they will never apply themselves to gaining wisdom (Proverbs 17:16).

Term 3

Evil (רָעָה) (H191) This term is used 19 times in Proverbs.

Characteristics:

- They are morally corrupt.
- They have rejected the fear of the LORD and hate wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).
- They are sure they are right and refuse to receive correction (Proverbs 12:15, Proverbs 15:5).
- They mock sin, guilt, and the need for atonement (Proverbs 14:9).

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.

Term 4

Luts (לֹאֵץ) (H3887) This term is used 17 times in Proverbs.

This is the most severe type of fool discussed in Proverbs.

Characteristics:

- They are proud, haughty, and contentious (Proverbs 21:24, Proverbs 22:10).
- They not only reject wisdom, but also delight in leading others to folly.
- They hate those who correct them (Proverbs 9:8).
- They bring contention wherever they go (Proverbs 22:10).
- They receive severe judgment (Proverbs 19:29).
- Because they have rejected wisdom, wisdom rejects them (Proverbs 3:34)

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 (Proverbs 1:22–25, Proverbs 12:15). 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 (Proverbs 3:5–7). 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.

Ecclesiastes

Author and Date of Ecclesiastes

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” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). 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 (around 935 B.C.). Though there is no biblical record of him repenting of his apostasy, it is possible that he did repent.

A Closer Look at Wisdom Teaching

Before attempting to discover the theme of Ecclesiastes, it is helpful to understand the nature of Hebrew wisdom teaching. People in some cultures 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 30:15–31, series of descriptions require the student to find a common principle. The responsibility of the teacher is not to give answers, but to guide the student in finding answers.⁴⁶

God’s answer to Job uses this type of teaching. God does not say to Job, “Here is a three-point sermon 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.

Ecclesiastes (Continued)

Overview 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

⁴⁶ To study this topic, read Curtis, Edward M. and John J. Brugaletta. *Discovering the Way of Wisdom*. (MI: Kregel Academic, 2004).

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, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The term *vanity* is repeated throughout the book.

Vanity suggests something **temporary**. Psalms 144:4, which uses the same Hebrew word, shows the brevity of life, “Man is like a breath [vanity]; his days are like a passing shadow.” Ecclesiastes shows us that pleasure, wealth, and even life itself, are temporary.

Vanity sometimes refers to **absurdity or injustice**. “There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 8:14).

Vanity sometimes implies **meaninglessness**. The writer of Ecclesiastes sought meaning in pleasure and found that it was vanity; it has no lasting significance (Ecclesiastes 2:1–12).

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” suggests the emptiest, most meaningless thing 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 human 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.

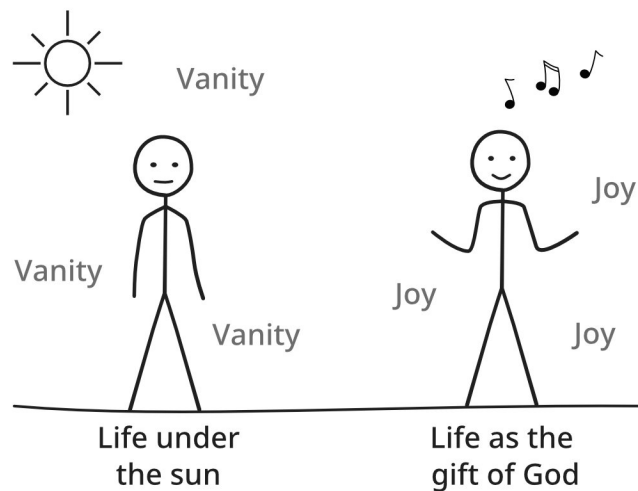
After the picture of vanity in chapters 1 and 2, the writer concludes: “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God” (Ecclesiastes 2:24). The message that life is the gift of God recurs throughout the book. The message of joy is central to Ecclesiastes. Exhortations to rejoice are found in Ecclesiastes 2:24–26; Ecclesiastes 3:12, 22; Ecclesiastes 5:18; Ecclesiastes 8:15; Ecclesiastes 9:7–9; and Ecclesiastes 11:9–10.

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. Ecclesiastes refers to life “under the sun” over 20 times. Life under the sun is life seen solely from an earthly perspective. Repeatedly, life “under the sun” is paired with “vanity.”

Three times, Ecclesiastes refers to the “gift of God” or life given “from the hand of God.”⁴⁷ This is 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.



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” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). God has given all people 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,” Ecclesiastes 1:2) and the conclusion (“...Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man,” Ecclesiastes 12:13). 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 (Luke 12:15–21, for example). At the same time, Jesus promises that all things necessary for life will be provided for those who seek first his kingdom (Matthew 6:31–33). Life lived for the things of this earth is vanity; life lived as the gift of God brings true joy.

⁴⁷ Ecclesiastes 2:24, Ecclesiastes 3:13, Ecclesiastes 5:19

Song of Songs

Title of Song of Songs

This book is called either Song of Songs or Song of Solomon: “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s” (Song of Songs 1:1). 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.

Interpreting Song of Songs

The biggest question related to 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 3rd century to Hudson Taylor in the 20th century, have written allegorical commentaries on Song of Songs.

An allegorical approach to 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 Christ’s love for the church.

Those who reject an allegorical approach make two arguments. First, Song of Songs itself does not point to an allegorical interpretation. Second, an allegorical approach often lacks clear meaning. As you read commentaries on 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 Song of Songs sees this book as a collection of poems that present a picture of human love.⁴⁸ Some people view the poems as describing a single drama culminating in marriage, while others believe the poems do not relate to one another in a narrative structure.

For much of church history, a poetic approach was less popular than allegorical interpretation. In the 20th century, poetic interpretation has become more common.⁴⁹

In this approach, Song of Songs is seen as a poetic picture of romantic love. Using rural imagery, Song of Songs shows the love of the lover and his beloved; it is a picture of love

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ There are some earlier commentators who encouraged a poetic reading of Song of Songs. These include Josephus in the first century and Theodore of Mopsuestia in the fourth century. Both Adam Clarke and John Calvin favored poetic interpretations, although both saw some allegorical aspects in the text.

between a man and his wife. Some writers have seen Song of Songs as a parallel to Proverbs 31. Proverbs 31 shows the practical side of marriage; Song of Songs shows the romance of marriage.

Since nothing in the text itself indicates 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.

Theme of Song of Songs: Human Love in Marriage

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, 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..." (Genesis 1:31). Although the Fall marred creation, God still values the world 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" (1 Timothy 4:4). 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.

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 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.⁵⁰

Today, marriage is under attack on 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. 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, believers should show

⁵⁰ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 468

that a marriage lived by biblical principles can be a lifelong joy to both spouses. A loving Christian marriage is a powerful testimony to our world. This is part of the legacy of Song of Songs.

Lesson 8 Assignments

(1) Choose one of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Each member of your group should choose a different topic (for example: money, speech, or marriage). As you read through Proverbs, list all the verses related to your assigned topic. When you meet with your group, give a short presentation on what Proverbs teaches about your topic.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

Choose a topic such as money, speech, or marriage. As you read through Proverbs, list all the verses related to your assigned topic. Write a 1 page essay about what Proverbs teaches about your topic.

(2) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 8 Test

- (1) According to John Calvin, true wisdom consists of which two things?
- (2) What four things should you remember when you read proverbs?
- (3) What is the most common form of proverb in Collection 1 (Proverbs 1–9)?
- (4) List four questions one should ask when reading a proverb.
- (5) What is the primary difference between the simple and the fool?
- (6) What are the two motifs that are traced through Ecclesiastes?
- (7) What is the theme of Ecclesiastes?
- (8) What are two types of interpretation for the Song of Songs?
- (9) Write Proverbs 1:7 and Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 from memory.

Lesson 9

Isaiah

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Recognize the nature of biblical prophecy.
- (2) Know the likely date and historical setting of Isaiah.
- (3) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Isaiah.
- (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. (Review the Lesson 9 assignments before reading the book of 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, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel) as well as the 12 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 16 writing prophets are remembered by the books bearing 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 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 saw the things of God. The first words of the book of Isaiah are similar to many of the prophets: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz..." (Isaiah 1:1). 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 the 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" nearly 20 times. The prophets show three aspects of the day of the LORD. It will be a time of:

- Judgment on unbelievers.
- Cleansing of God's people.
- Salvation for those who are faithful.

The Coming of the Messiah

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

Isaiah

| Isaiah at a Glance | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Author | Isaiah |
| Audience | Judah |
| Date | 740–680 B.C. |
| Themes | The Remnant |
| | God, the Holy One of Israel |
| | The Coming of the Messiah |
| Purposes | 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 of Isaiah

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, ministered in the royal court of Judah during the late eighth 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 (Isaiah 6:1), approximately 740 B.C. He recorded the death of Sennacherib in 681 B.C. (Isaiah 37:38). This dates the book of Isaiah to approximately 740–680 B.C.

Isaiah ministered during the reigns of four kings of Judah: 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 (Isaiah 7:1, 2 Kings 16:5). Refusing to heed Isaiah's objections,

Ahaz appealed to Assyria (Isaiah 7:3–9, 2 Kings 16:7–9). Isaiah’s message gave a sign for the immediate future and a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah (Isaiah 7:10–17).⁵¹

After the death of Ahaz, his son Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria (2 Kings 18:1, 7) and entered an alliance with Egypt (Isaiah 30:1–2). In response, the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib attacked Judah in 701 B.C. Hezekiah was first defeated and forced to pay tribute to Assyria (2 Kings 18:14–16). Later, Hezekiah rebelled against Sennacherib. This time, Sennacherib sent messengers to threaten the city. Hezekiah took the letter and laid it in front of the Lord in the Temple. He asked God to rescue Judah: “So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone” (2 Kings 19:19). In response to Hezekiah’s prayer, the angel of God attacked the Assyrian army, killing 185,000 men and driving the Assyrians out of Judah (2 Kings 19, Isaiah 37). The rest of Hezekiah’s reign was a time of peace.

Purpose of Isaiah

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 39 chapters (corresponding to the 39 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 27 chapters (corresponding to the 27 books of the New Testament) comfort Judah with the promise of a coming Messiah.

A book that covers 60 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

⁵¹ 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 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).

- 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)

(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.⁵²

(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 the covenant (Isaiah 56–66)

Important Themes in Isaiah

The Remnant

God will preserve a remnant: those who are faithful to God in spite of the apostasy of the nation as a whole (Isaiah 1:9). Isaiah named one of his sons "Shear-jashub" ("the remnant shall return") as a prophetic message that God would bring the faithful remnant back to Jerusalem after the exile (Isaiah 7:3, Isaiah 10:20–21).

God, the Holy One of Israel

Early in his prophetic ministry, Isaiah saw the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1). God was surrounded by seraphim calling, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). This vision transformed Isaiah's life and ministry. Over 20 times, Isaiah referred to the LORD as "the Holy One of Israel," a name

⁵² 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.

that shows God's holiness and sovereignty.⁵³ 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 represented speedy judgment against Judah's enemies (Isaiah 8:1–3). 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" (Isaiah 62:4). Instead of an apostate nation, Judah will be called "The Holy People"; instead of exiles, they will be "The Redeemed of the LORD"; instead of being rejected, they will be "Sought Out"; instead of being abandoned, Jerusalem will be called "A City Not Forsaken" (Isaiah 62:12).

The Coming of the Messiah

Because of its emphasis on the coming Messiah, Isaiah has sometimes been called the "Fifth Gospel." Isaiah prophesies that the 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 (Luke 4:16–30, Isaiah 61:1–2, and Isaiah 58:6).

In the last section of Isaiah, the prophet foretells the coming of the Messiah, God's Anointed One. He will be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14); he will serve the needy (Isaiah 61:1–3); he will suffer to redeem humankind (Isaiah 52:13–53:12); he will someday reign in glory (Isaiah 60–66). 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.

⁵³ Isaiah 1:4; Isaiah 5:19, 24; Isaiah 10:20; Isaiah 12:6; Isaiah 17:7; Isaiah 29:19; Isaiah 30:11–12, 15; Isaiah 31:1; Isaiah 37:23; Isaiah 41:14, 16, 20; Isaiah 43:3, 14; Isaiah 45:11; Isaiah 47:4; Isaiah 48:17; Isaiah 49:7; Isaiah 54:5; Isaiah 55:5; Isaiah 60:9; Isaiah 60:14

| Authorship of Isaiah | | |
|--|--|---|
| 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 Isaiah 44:28 and Isaiah 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:

- 1. Isaiah 1:1 names Isaiah, son of Amoz, as the author.**
- 2. 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.
- 3. The New Testament writers refer to Isaiah as the author of the entire book.** The New Testament includes a total of 20 references to the two sections of Isaiah. John 12:38–41 is a particularly important example because John quotes from Isaiah 6:10 and Isaiah 53:1 in consecutive verses, attributing both verses to Isaiah. Other examples include Matthew 3:3, Acts 8:28–33, and Romans 9:27–29.

Isaiah (Continued)

Isaiah in the New Testament

Isaiah is one of the Old Testament books most frequently quoted in the New Testament. Examples of Isaiah's prophecies and their stated fulfillments in the New Testament:

| Isaiah's Prophecy | New Testament Fulfillment |
|--|--|
| A voice crying, preparing the way for the LORD (Isaiah 40:3) | John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord (Matthew 3:3). |
| A virgin will conceive and bear a son named Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14) | Jesus, Immanuel, was born of a virgin (Matthew 1:20-25). |
| The people see and hear but do not understand (Isaiah 6:9-10) | Jesus used parables because of the people's lack of understanding (Matthew 13:13-15). |
| The Gentiles will receive the gospel (Isaiah 9:1-2, Isaiah 61:1-3) | Jesus ministered to the Gentiles (Matthew 4:13-16, Luke 4:14-21). |
| The nations will find God (Isaiah 11:10, Isaiah 65:1) | The nations who were not seeking God find him and praise him with his people (Romans 10:20, Romans 15:12). |

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 partially fulfilled in the return from Babylon; the promises were more completely fulfilled 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.

Isaiah Speaks Today

Isaiah's message was relevant both to Judah in his day and to us in 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 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 followers of Christ, we must remember that God honors those who remain faithful to him. He promises to hear and restore those who repent. Isaiah speaks powerfully to the needs of the 21st century.

Lesson 9 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 messianic prophecies and then list New Testament scriptures that show the fulfillment of the prophecies.

(2) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 9 Test

- (1) What phrase shows that the prophets were bringing God's Word, not their own message?
- (2) List three themes that appear throughout the prophetic books.
- (3) The day of the LORD will be a time of what three things?
- (4) List two purposes for the book of Isaiah.
- (5) Isaiah ministered during the reign of which four kings of Judah?
- (6) Who is the remnant in the book of Isaiah?
- (7) What name of God is used in Isaiah to show God's holiness and sovereignty?
- (8) List three reasons to accept Isaiah as the author of the entire book of Isaiah.
- (9) Name two fulfillments of Isaiah's prophecies that are named in the New Testament.
- (10) Write Isaiah 9:6–7 from memory.

Lesson 10

Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Know the likely date and historical setting of Jeremiah.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary theme and purposes of Jeremiah.
- (3) Appreciate Jeremiah's message of comfort.
- (4) Feel the tragedy of Jerusalem's fall.
- (5) Recognize the prophetic lawsuit in the writings of the prophets.
- (6) Relate the message of Jeremiah to the needs of today's world.

Preparation for this Lesson

- Read Jeremiah and Lamentations. (Review the Lesson 10 assignments before reading the book of Jeremiah).
- Memorize Lamentations 3:21–24.

Introduction to Jeremiah and Lamentations

Jeremiah, the second-longest book in the Bible, gives a picture of the last days before Jerusalem's fall. Jeremiah is known as "The Weeping Prophet" because he laments 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 |
| Purposes | To warn Judah of coming judgment |
| | To record the destruction of Jerusalem |
| The gospel in Jeremiah | Jesus came as the righteous Branch who would bring salvation to Judah (Jeremiah 23:5–6). |
| | Like Jeremiah, Jesus was rejected by his people. |
| | Like Jeremiah, Paul saw God’s grace in the message of the potter and the clay (Jeremiah 18:1–11, Romans 9:20–24). |

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 proclaiming 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 (Jeremiah 16:1–4).

Jeremiah suffered great opposition, including attempted murder, beatings, accusations of treason, and imprisonment.⁵⁴ After the fall of Jerusalem, a group took Jeremiah to Egypt against his will.

Jeremiah prophesied during the 40 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. (2 Kings 23:29). 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., Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked Jerusalem and took the first group of Judean captives

⁵⁴ Passages describing the way Jeremiah was persecuted: Jeremiah 11:18–23; Jeremiah 26:1–15; Jeremiah 20:2; Jeremiah 37:11–16; Jeremiah 38:1–13; and Jeremiah 43:1–7

into exile. This first group of exiles included the prophet 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. The second group of exiles also included the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1–3).

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 (Jeremiah 27:1–15). In response, Nebuchadnezzar once again invaded Judah in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1). During this third invasion and capture of exiles, Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and appointed Gedaliah as governor (Jeremiah 39–40). 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.
- c. 586–580 B.C. He ministered in Jerusalem and Egypt after Judah's fall.

Jeremiah

Purpose of Jeremiah

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 the destruction of Jerusalem and 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.

| Jeremiah's Ministry | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Chapter | Date (Approximate) | Event |
| 1 | 627 B.C. | Jeremiah's call |
| 7 | 609–597 B.C. | Jeremiah's Temple Sermon |
| 11–12 | Uncertain | Opposition to Jeremiah's ministry |
| 26 | 608 B.C. | Death threat on Jeremiah |
| 25 | 605 B.C. | Jeremiah's prophecy that Judah would be in captivity for 70 years |
| 36 | 605 B.C. | Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's scroll |
| 29 | 597 B.C. | Jeremiah's letter to exiles |
| 20 | 597–586 B.C. | Pashhur the priest opposes Jeremiah |
| 28 | 594 B.C. | Jeremiah's 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.

Jeremiah's Call (Jeremiah 1)

► Describe your call to ministry. How has this call been confirmed during your ministry?

Before Jeremiah's birth, God appointed him as 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).⁵⁵
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 worshippers 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 (Jeremiah 7:9–14, 1 Samuel 1:3, and 1 Samuel 4:2–11). God's house has become a den of robbers and is no longer holy because the worshippers 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..." (Jeremiah 15:1). 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 (Jeremiah 14:13–16 and Jeremiah 15:2). 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. Jeremiah prophesies that Jehoiakim's life will not be mourned with the elaborate rituals typical of a king's funeral. Instead, Jehoiakim will be dragged outside the city gates and dumped like a dead donkey (Jeremiah 22:18–19).

Jeremiah also 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 will face 70 years of captivity (Jeremiah

⁵⁵ The sign of the almond tree is a Hebrew word play. "Almond" is the Hebrew word *shaged*; "watch" is the word *shoged*. 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.

25:11-12). The cup of God's wrath is full; Jerusalem will drink the cup along with all nations who forsake God.

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 70 years (Jeremiah 29).

The Promise of Future Restoration (Jeremiah 30–33)

These chapters are often called "The Book of Comfort." Although much of his message is one of judgment, in these chapters Jeremiah 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 (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

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" (Jeremiah 32:44). 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 Babylon-appointed governor, Gedaliah, is murdered, a group of Judeans flees 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 messages, Jeremiah prophesied the word of the LORD against Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam.

Lastly, 50 years before it happened, Jeremiah prophesied the fall of Babylon to the Medes (Jeremiah 51:11).⁵⁶

This section shows that God is sovereign over all people. God was using other nations to judge Israel, but he would later 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 would restore and pardon Judah (Jeremiah 50:17–20).

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 with 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 Law of Moses 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 Law of Moses to show that Israel has broken the terms of her covenant with God. This presentation is called "the prophetic lawsuit." 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 the book of Jeremiah.

⁵⁶ 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.

| The Prophetic Lawsuit | Jeremiah |
|--|--|
| Summons to the offending party | "Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel" (Jeremiah 2:4). |
| Reminder of God's goodness to Judah | "...I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things..." (Jeremiah 2:7). |
| Accusations against Israel | "Therefore I still contend with you, declares the LORD, and with your children's children I will contend.... But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.... For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:9-13). |
| Call to witnesses against Judah | "Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 2:12). |
| Lament for Judah's unfaithfulness | "Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32). |
| 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 3:14-17). |

Lamentations

Author and Date of Lamentations

Although the book of Lamentations does not identify an author, Jewish and Christian traditions attribute the book to Jeremiah. It was composed soon after the fall of Jerusalem, which is the main theme of the book. It is likely that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations before he was taken captive to Egypt.

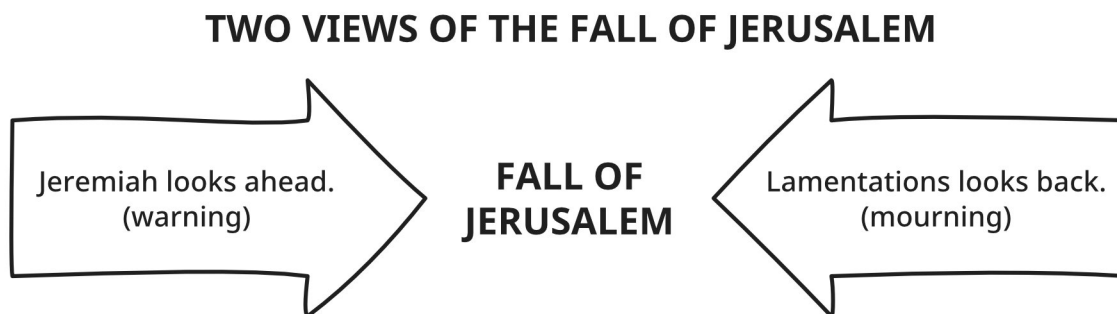
Structure of Lamentations

Lamentations consists of five poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. These poems express the poet's personal grief.

Each chapter, except Lamentations 5, is arranged in a poetic form called an *acrostic*.⁵⁷ The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters. Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 each contain 22 verses. Within each chapter, each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For example, Lamentations 1:1 begins with *aleph*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and Lamentations 1:2 begins with *beth*, the second letter. Lamentations 3 contains 66 verses, 22 groups of three verses each. The three verses in each group all begin with the same letter of the alphabet. 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.



Overview 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 (Lamentations 1:5). The theology of Lamentations is consistent with that of 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

⁵⁷ *Acrostic poetry* is explained at the beginning of Lesson 7.

hope is God's mercy: "Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!..." (Lamentations 5:21).

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 (Jeremiah 50–51, Revelation 18).

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 (Luke 19:41–44 and Matthew 24:1–2). 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 (Jeremiah 7:11 and Matthew 21:13). 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 (Romans 9:20–24).

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.

Jeremiah and Lamentations Speak Today

Part of the church today 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.

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 plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." 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" (Lamentations 3:22–23).

Lesson 10 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 1 page summary of your discussion.

Option 2: Individual Assignment

Write a detailed outline for a sermon based on Jeremiah and Lamentations. The sermon should be on one of these two subjects:

- God's faithful mercy
- God's judgments

(2) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 10 Test

- (1) What two things did "The Weeping Prophet" lament?
- (2) What are the primary purposes of Jeremiah and Lamentations?
- (3) What was Jeremiah's family background?
- (4) List the dates for the three groups of captives taken into exile. For the first two groups, name one prophet carried into exile.
- (5) Why is Jeremiah 11–20 called "Jeremiah's Confessions"?
- (6) Why is Jeremiah 30–33 called "The Book of Comfort"?
- (7) The prophets often point to the Law of Moses to show that Israel has broken the terms of her covenant with God. What is this presentation called?
- (8) Chapters 1–4 of Lamentations are each arranged in what poetic form?
- (9) Write Lamentations 3:21–24 from memory.

Lesson 11

Ezekiel and Daniel

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Know the likely dates and historical setting of Ezekiel and Daniel.
- (2) Outline the primary themes and purposes of Ezekiel and Daniel.
- (3) Respect God's sovereignty over human history.
- (4) Relate the message of Ezekiel and Daniel to the needs of today's world.
- (5) Understand the issues involved in interpreting apocalyptic prophecy.

Preparation for this Lesson

- Read Ezekiel and Daniel.
- Memorize Ezekiel 36:25–27.

Introduction to Ezekiel and Daniel

Ezekiel and Daniel have much in common with Jeremiah. All three books come from the years surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. Daniel and Ezekiel write from Babylon, while Jeremiah writes from Jerusalem. While Jeremiah watched the destruction of Jerusalem firsthand, Ezekiel saw visions of the destruction from his home in Babylon. Daniel, younger than both Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was carried to Babylon during the first siege of Jerusalem. The second group of exiles included Ezekiel.

While each of these books contains messages of hope and restoration, the 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.

| Events Related to the Ministries 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 |

Ezekiel

| Ezekiel at a Glance | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Author | Ezekiel |
| Audience | Exiles in Babylon (primarily) |
| Date | c. 593–571 B.C. |
| Themes | Judgment and Restoration |
| Purposes | 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 (Ezekiel 8:1, Ezekiel 14:1, and Ezekiel 20:1). A priest’s ministry began at the age of 30 and ended at 50 (Numbers 4:3). Ezekiel’s first vision came near the age of 30, and the vision that ends the book came when Ezekiel was 50 years old.⁵⁸ Like Jeremiah, the messages in Ezekiel are not always chronological. Ezekiel’s prophecy that Nebuchadnezzar will defeat Egypt (Ezekiel 29:17–20) was given in 571 B.C., two years after the vision that ends the book.

⁵⁸ Ezekiel’s vision at the end of the book (Ezekiel 40:1) occurred twenty years after his first vision in Ezekiel 1:2.

Jeremiah's primary audience was the people of Jerusalem, but he wrote letters to the exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel's primary audience was the Jews in Babylon, but he also wrote letters to the people of Jerusalem.

Purpose of Ezekiel

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 who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18). |
| Is there hope for God's people? | Yes! God promises a glorious future (Ezekiel 40-48). |

Overview 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 (Ezekiel 1:1-3)
 - Approach to God's throne (Ezekiel 1:4-28)
 - The call (Ezekiel 2:1-3:11)
 - Departure from God's throne (Ezekiel 3:12-13)
- The setting (Ezekiel 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, "Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads" (Ezekiel 3:8). 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 (Ezekiel 9:7). 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 (Ezekiel 24:15–27).

God's judgments were intended to reveal God as a sovereign and righteous God. Over 50 times, God said, "Then (they) shall know that I am the LORD." Sometimes it was Judah who would see God through his judgments (Ezekiel 6:10). Other times, it was the nations around Israel (Ezekiel 25:5, 7, 11). In each case, God's judgment revealed his righteous character.

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, Yahweh is not a local deity. Demonstrating God's sovereignty over all people, Ezekiel brought the word of the LORD in messages of judgment against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. God says of the enemies of Israel, "...And they shall know that I am the LORD when I execute judgments in her and manifest my holiness in her" (Ezekiel 28:22).

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 (Ezekiel 36:16–23). In physical restoration, God will bring them back to the land (Ezekiel 36:24); in spiritual restoration, God will renew their hearts (Ezekiel 36:26–27). God promises to cleanse Israel with water

(Ezekiel 36:25) (making them outwardly pure)⁵⁹ and to give them a new heart and a new spirit (making them inwardly pure). 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)

The book of 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 12 gates of Jerusalem. Most importantly, Ezekiel saw God's glory return to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 43).

Bible interpreters disagree regarding the precise meaning of this vision. Because godly people who are committed to the truth of scripture disagree about details of the vision, we should be charitable toward believers who may differ with us about the meaning of this vision. Some people understand this vision to be:

1. **A promise that the Temple would be rebuilt after the exiles returned to Jerusalem.** In this view, a lack of faith prevented the people from achieving all that God showed Ezekiel.
2. **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 will be restored as reminders of Christ's atoning death.
3. **A picture of God's work through the church today.** In this view, God is fulfilling his promise through the church.
4. **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.
5. **A prophecy containing both literal and symbolic elements.** In this view, Ezekiel 40–48 was partially fulfilled in the return to Jerusalem and will be completely fulfilled 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

⁵⁹ 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.

(Ezekiel 4:1–3). He lies on his left side for 390 days to represent the iniquity of Israel; he lies on his right side for 40 days to represent the iniquity of Judah (Ezekiel 4:4–8).

Ezekiel shaves his head and divides the hair into portions: one-third is burned, representing fire in Jerusalem; one-third is cut into pieces with a sword, representing death in battle; one-third 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 represents the remnant that will remain in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 5:1–12).

Ezekiel's visions can be difficult to interpret. Some readers become so fascinated by the 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; he repeatedly refers to the "likeness" of something, and he describes something "as it were" (see Ezekiel 1 for examples). 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.

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 Persian King Cyrus' rule over Babylon (Daniel 10:1). Daniel saw firsthand the initial fall of Judah, the fall of the Babylonian empire, and the rise of the Persian empire.

| Daniel at a Glance | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Author | Daniel |
| Audience | God's people in all times |
| Date | c. 605–536 B.C. |
| Themes | The Sovereignty of God |
| | The Pride of Humankind |
| | The Ultimate Victory of God's People |
| Purposes | To demonstrate faithfulness to God (Daniel 1–6) |
| | To 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. It 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 of Daniel

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. Despite present circumstances, God will ultimately vindicate his people. Daniel shows that all of world history, not just the history of Israel, fulfills God's purposes.

Overview of Daniel

Faithfulness in 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... (Daniel 1:1–2).

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 first 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.⁶⁰ 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 gives Daniel the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. God shows his sovereignty by humbling Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4).
- God gives Daniel the interpretation of God's handwritten message. God shows his sovereignty by taking the kingdom from Belshazzar the Babylonian 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; Daniel 2–7 was written in Aramaic, while Daniel 1, 8–12 were written in Hebrew. The two sections are also linked by a thematic focus on God's sovereignty.

In Daniel 7–12, 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 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.⁶¹

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 10 horns and iron teeth, and

⁶⁰ It can be assumed that Daniel was not present when the command to bow to the image was given.

⁶¹ D.A. Carson and Donald Guthrie. *New Bible Commentary*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

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 10 horns represent 10 kings who will come from this fourth kingdom. Another small king 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 the 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 70 Weeks (Daniel 9)

As Daniel was interceding for the suffering Jews, Gabriel told him that Israel must suffer for 70 weeks for their sins. They would then rebuild Jerusalem and wait 69 weeks 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 (Daniel 12:7). 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 | Beasts 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 central horn which was replaced with four smaller horns and, finally, a large horn reaching to the heavens |
| Rome | Legs of iron, feet of iron and clay | Incomparable beast with 10 horns and a little horn | |
| The Kingdom of God | A stone that becomes a great mountain | Messiah and saints receive the kingdom | |

Important 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 the stories of God's protection in Daniel 1–6 and the visions in Daniel 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 of God's sovereignty in giving Judah to Nebuchadnezzar, to the prophetic images of the Ancient of Days who establishes an eternal kingdom for his people, the book of Daniel shows that God is in charge of human history.

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.⁶²

In Daniel 7–12, a series of world leaders oppose God’s purposes. Each of these is 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 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 (Colossians 2:13–15).

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.

Ezekiel and Daniel Speak Today

At times, the church has been tempted to withdraw from the world, focusing only on spiritual matters and neglecting other areas of life. 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 follower of Christ understood that God is sovereign over all.

⁶² 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).

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.** Although Satan has much power in our fallen world, believers must not surrender any domain of life (family life, politics, education, or culture) to Satan. We must live as representatives of a sovereign God in our fallen world. For Ezekiel, this meant faithfulness as a prophet while in exile. For Daniel, it meant faithfulness as an influential member of government. Where does God want to use you in his kingdom?

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 truths that have 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 25 times.⁶³ 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 for the purpose of giving alternate perspectives. Through these visions, Daniel (and later John the Revelator) opens 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.⁶⁴

⁶³ For example, Daniel 2:19; Daniel 7:2; Daniel 8:15

⁶⁴ For example, the first beast of Daniel 7 was like a lion and had eagles' wings.

Apocalyptic writing is especially important in times of oppression. The book of Daniel encouraged the Jewish people during persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes. Revelation was written during 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 the book of 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

(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 1 page essay on Ezekiel's vision of the new Temple. Choose one of the interpretation choices discussed in this lesson and explain the vision based on that interpretation.
- Write a 1 page detailed outline for a sermon on God's plan for human history based on Daniel 7–12.

(2) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 11 Test

- (1) What years were Daniel and Ezekiel taken to Babylon?
- (2) What is the meaning of the name *Ezekiel*?
- (3) What is the message of hope in the book of Ezekiel?
- (4) Ezekiel watched as God's glory left the Temple (Ezekiel 10–11). To what is this parallel?
- (5) List five interpretations for Ezekiel's vision of a new Temple.
- (6) What two languages are used in the book of Daniel?
- (7) In traditional interpretation of the image in Daniel 2, which empire is represented by each of these?
- (8) What three themes are central to the book of Daniel?
- (9) Which New Testament book alludes to Ezekiel most frequently?
- (10) Which biblical books are primarily or partly composed of apocalyptic writing?
- (11) Write Ezekiel 36:25–27 from memory.

Lesson 12

Hosea–Amos

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Know the likely dates and historical settings of Hosea, Joel, and Amos.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Hosea, Joel, and Amos.
- (3) Feel the heart of God as he saw the unfaithfulness of his people.
- (4) Relate the messages of the Minor Prophets to the needs of today's world.
- (5) Understand the theme of righteousness in the Minor Prophets.

Preparation for this Lesson

- Read Hosea, Joel, and Amos.
- Memorize Hosea 10:12, Joel 2:13, and Amos 5:24.

Introduction to the Minor Prophets

The last 12 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 books 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 | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Eighth century B.C. | Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah |
| Seventh century B.C. | Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk |
| Sixth century B.C. | Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah |
| Fifth century B.C. | Malachi, Joel (likely) |

Hosea

| Hosea at a Glance | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Author | Hosea |
| Audience | Israel (The Northern Kingdom) |
| Date | Last half of the eighth century |
| Themes | Spiritual Adultery |
| | God's Lawsuit Against Israel |
| | The Hope of Restoration |
| 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 the Messiah, as the eternal King, Jesus, reunites all the faithful under his rule. |

Historical Setting of Hosea

Hosea and Amos were eighth-century prophets to the Northern Kingdom.⁶⁵ They were contemporaries of Isaiah in Judah.

In the early eighth 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 had during the days of King David.

Unfortunately, although Israel prospered economically, it did not prosper spiritually. Israel was apostate; the people of the Northern Kingdom worshipped Baal alongside Yahweh.⁶⁶

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.

⁶⁵ Hosea refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel as "Ephraim" 35 times.

⁶⁶ Throughout the Old Testament, Israel repeatedly sinned by combining the worship of Yahweh with the worship of other gods. This is called *syncretism*. Other examples include Israel's worship of the golden calf in Exodus 32 and Solomon's worship of the gods of his foreign wives.

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.

► 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?

Important 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. Similarly, God established an everlasting covenant with Israel. Marriage and the covenant with God are both 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 committing spiritual adultery with other gods, in the same sense that a wife who turns to other lovers is 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 worshipped 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 whoredom" (Hosea 1:2).⁶⁷ There are at least three different interpretations of this phrase. 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-worshipper 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 Yahweh.

The names of Hosea's children were prophetic. Jezreel was named after the valley where Assyria would soon win a major victory over Israel (Hosea 1:4–5). *Loruhamah* meant "No Mercy," because God would show no mercy to the rebellious nation (Hosea 1:6). *Loammi* meant "Not My People," because God would reject the nation that turned to other gods (Hosea 1:9).

⁶⁷ Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the term *whoredom* 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 |
| Loruhamah | "No Mercy" |
| Loammi | "Not My People" |

After Gomer's unfaithfulness led to her 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 the Hebrew Old Testament *knowledge* is more than intellectual awareness. 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" (Hosea 4:6). 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 her spiritual adultery and return to Yahweh. 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 apostasy; I will love them freely..." (Hosea 14:4). God must judge Israel for her sin, but he also offered 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 (Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1). Using the words of Hosea, Jesus reminded his enemies that mercy is more important than sacrifice (Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6). Paul pointed to Hosea when teaching that God is creating a people that includes both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 9:25–26; Hosea 1:10 and Hosea 2:23). The knowledge of God (knowledge that Israel had forsaken) would soon come to the Gentiles.

| Joel at a Glance | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Author | Joel |
| Audience | Judah |
| Date | Probably 500–450 B.C. |
| Theme | The Day of the LORD |
| Purposes | To predict a coming day of judgment |
| | To predict a coming day of restoration |
| The gospel in Joel | God’s promise to pour out his Spirit on all flesh 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 (which means “Yahweh 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.

Overview of 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.

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 for them to rend their garments (an external sign); true repentance must come from the heart. God required Judah to rend their hearts (Joel 2:13). If the people turned to

God, they would find that "...he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster" (Joel 2:13).

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 had eaten (Joel 2:25). 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 out on all flesh. At Pentecost, Peter declared that Joel's prophecy of a coming spiritual awakening was being fulfilled (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:14–21). 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 all people. His Spirit is still being poured out on all flesh through the work of the church.

Amos

| Amos at a Glance | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Author | Amos |
| Audience | Israel (The Northern Kingdom) |
| Date | Mid-eighth century B.C. |
| Theme | A Shepherd for True Righteousness |
| Purpose | To prophesy God's judgment on Israel because of her unrighteous behavior towards God and others |
| The gospel in Amos | Like Amos, Jesus shows that love for God (the first great commandment) must be seen in love for others (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 (Amos 7:10–13).

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's 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 the result of Israel's refusal to act with justice toward the lowest members of society. Amos preached that righteousness is more than observing Temple rituals; righteousness requires right behavior toward others.

Overview of Amos

Most of the book of Amos is a message of judgment (Amos 1:1–9:10). 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 emphasizes this message: “The LORD roars... Thus says the LORD... I will not revoke the punishment... I will send a fire... I will break the gate-bar of Damascus...” (Amos 1:2–5).
- 2. How will the judgment come?** Famine, drought, plague, and pestilence will be instruments of God’s judgment (Amos 4:6–11). Assyria will invade the land and destroy the land as thoroughly as a lion destroys a sheep, leaving only a leg or a piece of an ear (Amos 3:11–12). The people of the nation will be carried away (Amos 4:2–3, Amos 5:27) and the land will be occupied by enemy invaders (Amos 6:14).
- 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 (Amos 3:1–2).⁶⁸ 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:

- Prophecies against the nations
- Prophecies against Israel
- Visions of judgment
- A promise of restoration

Prophecies Against the Nations (Amos 1–2)

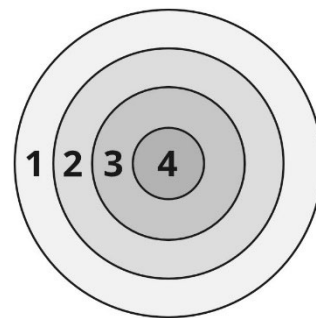
Amos began with judgment speeches against other nations: Damascus, Philistia, and Tyre. He then moved to nations that were blood relatives of Israel: Edom (descendants of Esau, Jacob’s brother) and Ammon and Moab (descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew). These nations had committed brutal crimes against Israel. Amos then spoke 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. Up to this point, Amos’s listeners would have agreed with his message.

⁶⁸ Recall from Hosea that the term *know* refers to relationship, not mere mental knowledge.

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 be judged because of her sins: oppressing the weak (they sell the poor for a pair of shoes, see Amos 2:6), sexual sins, and pagan celebrations.

- 1 = Other nations: Damascus, Philistia, Tyre
- 2 = Blood relatives of Israel: Edom, Ammon, Moab
- 3 = Judah (Southern Kingdom)
- 4 = Israel (Northern Kingdom)



Prophecies Against Israel (Amos 3–6)

Amos asked a series of questions to show the justice of God's judgment on Israel (Amos 3:3–6). He compared Israel's sin to the sin of the Philistines and Egyptians (Amos 3:9–15). 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 (Amos 4:1–11 and Amos 6:1–14). Amos sang a funeral lament over Israel, a song to mourn the dead (Amos 5:1–3).

Regardless of the warnings, Israel refused to repent. She expected God to judge other nations; she did not realize that God would judge her for her own 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. This signified destruction for Israel. Again, Amos interceded for Israel, and again God 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 and showed that 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. This meant there was no escape. In a frightening paraphrase of his earlier promises to watch his people, God said, "...I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good" (Amos 9:4).

| Amos's Visions of Judgment | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Vision | Meaning |
| A locust plague | God's judgment on Israel |
| A fire | Destruction for Israel |
| A plumb line | Israel was crooked. |
| A basket of ripe fruit | Israel was ripe for immediate judgment. |
| God standing beside the altar | Judgment was certain. |

A Promise of Restoration (Amos 9:11–15)

Amos, like Hosea, ends with a message of hope. God has not forgotten his people. The book ends with a message of future restoration.

| The Great Reversal | |
|---|---|
| Judgment (Amos 1:1–9:10) | Restoration (Amos 9:11–15) |
| Falling: "Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel..." (Amos 5:2). | Rising: "...I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen..." (Amos 9:11). |
| Broken Walls: "And you shall go out through the breaches..." (Amos 4:3). | Repaired Walls: "...I will... repair its breaches..." (Amos 9:11). |
| Destruction: "I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end..." (Amos 3:15). | Rebuilding: "...I will... raise up its ruins..." (Amos 9:11). |
| Famine: "...You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine" (Amos 5:11). | Feasting: "...They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit" (Amos 9:14). |
| Exile: "...I will send you into exile beyond Damascus..." (Amos 5:27). | Return: "I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them..." (Amos 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 behavior towards others. 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.⁶⁹ In your society, how can the church effectively speak to the sins of society while also maintaining a biblical emphasis on evangelism?

A Closer Look at Righteousness in the Prophets

Amos 5:24 is one of the key verses of the book: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing 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, social justice must not be separated from the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. 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, “...You 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 (Leviticus 19:2 and following).
- Job declared his innocence before God. As part of his defense, he testified to his righteous treatment of others (Job 31).
- The Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. In response, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6: “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:13).
- James confronted believers who showed partiality toward 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” (James 1:27).

Righteousness describes the character of God; to treat our neighbor with justice is to reflect the character of God. As followers of Christ in the 21st century, we are to display God’s character to an unbelieving world. Right relationship with God will change our relationship

⁶⁹ This is often called the “social gospel.”

with others. That was the meaning of righteousness in Amos; it is the meaning of righteousness in today's world.

Conclusion

William Wilberforce, an English politician who lived from 1759–1833, effectively modeled commitment to both the spread of the gospel and the principle of Christian justice.

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. 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 followers of Christ must be concerned both with evangelism of the lost and with 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 others, Wilberforce devoted much of his career to fighting this evil. At first, most people thought he would not be able 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 justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). Learning of the evils of slavery, Wilberforce became committed to the abolition of this shameful sin. He wrote of his determination to never rest until he had ended the slave trade, no matter what the consequences would be.

Beginning in 1789, Wilberforce introduced bills each year against the slave trade. Twelve of his 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 25 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

(1) Choose 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 1 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) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 12 Test

- (1) What are the Minor Prophets called in the Hebrew Bible?
- (2) Why are the last 12 books of the Old Testament called Minor Prophets?
- (3) What is the purpose of the book of Hosea?
- (4) What was the spiritual condition of the Northern Kingdom during the economically prosperous reign of King Jeroboam II?
- (5) List the names of each of Hosea's children and what their names mean.
- (6) In the Hebrew Old Testament, what does it mean to know someone?
- (7) What is the theme of Joel?
- (8) In Joel, what natural disaster is a metaphor for a future day of judgment?
- (9) According to the New Testament, when was 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, and Amos 5:24 from memory.

Lesson 13

Obadiah–Zephaniah

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (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) Appreciate God’s sovereignty over all nations.
- (4) Relate the messages of the Minor Prophets to the needs of today’s world.
- (5) Understand basic principles for interpreting Old Testament prophecy.

Preparation for this Lesson

- Read Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
- Memorize Micah 6:8, Nahum 1:7–8, and Habakkuk 3:2.

Introduction to Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah

Unlike the false gods of the ancient world, Yahweh was not a local god. Yahweh was, and is, sovereign over 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 lesson, we see God’s sovereignty over people who do not even recognize his authority. God is sovereign over all the world.

Obadiah

| Obadiah at a Glance | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Author | Obadiah |
| Audience | Edom |
| Date | 587–553 B.C. |
| Theme | The Fall of Edom |
| Purpose | To prophesy the destruction of Edom because of her cruelty to Judah during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem |
| 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 (Numbers 20:14–21). During the Babylonian siege, the Edomites cheered the destruction of Jerusalem. Their cruelty toward 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”; it is a common name in the Old Testament.⁷⁰

Overview 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 (Obadiah 1:3). 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

⁷⁰ The minor prophet is not the Obadiah who was an official in Ahab’s household in 1 Kings 18.

pivotal verse of Obadiah (Obadiah 1:15) promises that the day of the LORD is near for all nations.

Jonah

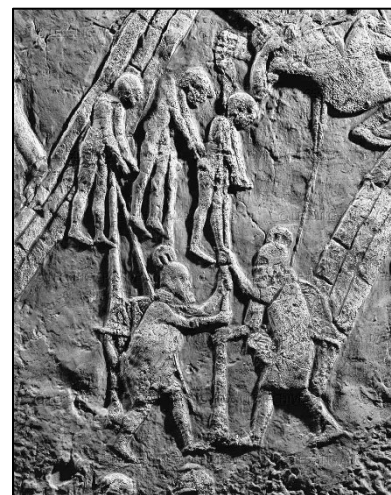
| Jonah at a Glance | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Author | Jonah |
| Audience | The city of Nineveh in Assyria |
| Date | 793–753 B.C. |
| Theme | God’s Mercy to All People |
| Purpose | To show God’s desire to redeem all people, even the enemies of Israel |
| The gospel in Jonah | Jesus pointed 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 that happened during the days of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23, 25).

An aggressive empire, Assyria was the greatest threat to Israel’s independence. Surviving artwork shows that the Assyrians delighted in cruelty toward their enemies.⁷¹ When Jonah received God’s call to preach to Nineveh, he fled to Tarshish.

Jonah did not want to preach a message that might bring Nineveh to repentance. He knew that if Nineveh repented, God would spare the city (Jonah 4:2). From Jonah’s perspective as a loyal Israelite, the destruction of Nineveh would be a blessing for Israel.



Artwork showing Assyrian cruelty

⁷¹ 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.

Purpose of Jonah

The book of Jonah shows God's mercy, even towards 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 am I like God?"

A Closer Look: 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 in 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 Jonah; he prepared a plant to provide shelter for Jonah; and he prepared a worm to destroy the plant. 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 will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41).

For these reasons, we know that Jonah is a true story.

Jonah (Continued)

Overview of Jonah

Part 1: 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 to flee to Tarshish..." (Jonah 1:3). 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 that 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 the people of Nineveh), the sailors value human life enough to attempt to save Jonah. Pagan sailors show more compassion than God's prophet shows. 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 Jonah.

This first section ends with Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy. Jonah promises to pay what he has vowed; he has learned a lesson in obedience.

Part 2: 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 to Nineveh..." (Jonah 3:3). Jonah has learned the lesson in obedience; now God teaches him a lesson in compassion.

Jonah preaches a message of judgment in Nineveh. As was true in chapter 1, the pagans have more understanding of God's compassion than Jonah has. 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 knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish" (Jonah 3:9). 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 (Matthew 12:39–40).

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 blessing to others. The book of Jonah shows Israel's failure to fulfill that mission. However, through the coming of Christ, this mission is renewed when the disciples are commissioned: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19).

Jonah Speaks Today

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?

Micah

| 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 justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your 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 prophetic lawsuit, Micah showed that Judah was unfaithful to the covenant.⁷² Micah preached judgment for those who broke the covenant, and hope for those who repented. Micah showed that righteousness is more than the observance of rituals; true righteousness is "...to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Overview 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.

⁷² To review the structure of the prophetic lawsuit, see Lesson 10.

Message 1 (Micah 1–2)

Micah's first message is a prophecy of judgment for 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.

In Micah 1:10–14, the prophet traces the route that Sennacherib later followed as he traveled toward Jerusalem in 701 B.C. In his assault on Judah, Sennacherib conquered the cities of Gath, Beth-le-aphrah, Shaphir, Zaanan, Beth-ezel, Maroth, Lachish, Moresheth-gath, and Achzib. Micah's prophecy is specific in his prediction of God's judgment.

This message ends with a promise to restore the remnant. The LORD will lead his people into battle.

Message 2 (Micah 3–5)

Micah's second message begins with condemnation of Judah's corrupt leaders. The civic leaders are described as cannibals who consume their followers (Micah 3:1–3). These prophets prophesy blessings on those who pay well and prophesy condemnation on those who can pay nothing (Micah 3:5). 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.

Ultimate redemption of Judah will be accomplished with the arrival of a ruler in Israel who will come from Bethlehem Ephrathah (Micah 5:2). The Gospel of Matthew points to Micah 5:2 as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:4–6).

Message 3 (Micah 6–7)

| God's Charges Against Judah (Micah 6:1–8) | |
|--|---|
| Micah 6:1–2 | A call to witnesses (the mountains and hills are witnesses to Judah's unfaithfulness) |
| Micah 6:3 | An opportunity for Judah to respond |
| Micah 6:4–5 | A reminder of God's favor to Judah in the past |
| Micah 6:6–7 | The mocking response of the people |
| Micah 6:8 | God's answer—a summary of the demands of the law: justice, kindness, and a humble walk with God |

Micah's final message takes the form of a prophetic lawsuit. God charges his people with unfaithfulness to the covenant. Rather than confessing their wrong, the people respond with a series of sarcastic questions:

- Does God want burnt offerings of yearling calves?
- Does God want thousands of rams and 10,000 rivers of oil?
- Does God want us to bring child sacrifices?

God responds by restating the three unchanging requirements of the law: justice, kindness, and a humble walk with God.

Following the accusations, God announces judgment on Jerusalem (Micah 6:9–7:6). Because Judah has followed in the apostasy of Ahab (king of Israel), God will make the nation a desolation.

Micah again moves from judgment to hope. After searching unsuccessfully for godly people in Judah (Micah 7:1–6), Micah concludes with a prayer that God will shepherd his people with his staff (Micah 7:14) and restore them in the eyes of the nations. Micah ends with confidence: God is a God who pardons iniquity and who delights in mercy.

Micah Speaks Today

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 empty (Isaiah 55:11). This should encourage us to faithful proclamation in our day.

Nahum

| Nahum at a Glance | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Author | Nahum |
| Audience | Nineveh (capital city of Assyria) |
| Date | 663–612 B.C. |
| Theme | The Destruction of Nineveh |
| Purpose | To prophesy God's judgment on the wicked city of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. |
| The gospel in Nahum | Nahum 1:15 calls Judah to faithfulness. Nahum 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.⁷³ 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 easing your hurt..." (Nahum 3:19). 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.

Overview 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; "...The LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies" (Nahum 1:2).

Although God earlier showed his mercy by sparing the repentant Nineveh, he is also great in power and will by no means clear the guilty (Nahum 1:3). 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..." (Nahum 1:7). However, "...he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness" (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.

⁷³ 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 Nineveh (612 B.C.).

Chapter 3 concludes Nahum's message with a prophecy of woe in which he announces the guilt of the bloody city that is full of lies and robbery. Nahum lists the offenses 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" (Nahum 3:5–6). 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?" (Nahum 3:19).

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

| Habakkuk at a Glance | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Author | Habakkuk |
| Audience | Judah |
| Date | Probably 608–605 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 righteous 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 20 years of Habakkuk's revelation from God, the prophecy would be fulfilled.

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.

Overview 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?" (Habakkuk 1:3). To Habakkuk, it appeared that justice was being perverted.

God's response shocks the prophet. God tells Habakkuk that he is raising up the Chaldeans (another name for the Babylonians) to judge Judah (Habakkuk 1:6). 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, "...Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?" (Habakkuk 1:13).

In response, God gives Habakkuk a vision which shows that judgment is certain and will happen just as he has promised. Habakkuk had to decide between two responses: he could respond with arrogance, or in faith, he could yield to God's purposes.

This message is followed by a revelation of God's plan to judge Babylon. Through a series of five pronouncements of woe, Habakkuk shows that Babylon will be forced to drink the cup of the LORD's wrath. Babylon relies on idols, but her trust in idols will be futile. In contrast to worthless idols, the LORD is in his holy Temple (Habakkuk 2:20). 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: "God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places..." (Habakkuk 3:19).

Habakkuk in the New Testament

Habakkuk's statement, "...The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4), 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, Paul explains that it is impossible for anyone to be made righteous by their obedience to the law. In Galatians 3:11, he quotes from Habakkuk 2:4 to show that we are only made righteous by faith, not by works of the law.
- In Hebrews 10:38, this phrase emphasizes the continuing aspect of faith. Instead of shrinking back, the righteous continue to live by faith.

In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, it is faith and trust in God's purposes that enable us to please him.

Zephaniah

| Zephaniah at a Glance | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Author | Zephaniah |
| Audience | Judah and all nations |
| Date | 640–612 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 "Yahweh has hidden." His name suggests that his parents were 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. (Zephaniah 2:13).

The beginning of the book of Zephaniah traces his ancestry back four generations to King Hezekiah (Zephaniah 1:1). He was part of the royal family and may have been a relative of King Josiah.

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

blessings on the faithful. Zephaniah also showed that the day of the LORD would affect all people, not just Judah and the people of the covenant.

Overview 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. This is what God says about the day of the LORD:

A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements (Zephaniah 1:15–16).

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 who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city!" (Zephaniah 3:1). 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 out on the nations will also come to Judah.

The day of the LORD is a day of judgment. But if the people 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 (Zephaniah 3:12). "...They shall do no injustice and speak no lies..." (Zephaniah 3:13). To this group, God promises protection against their enemies.

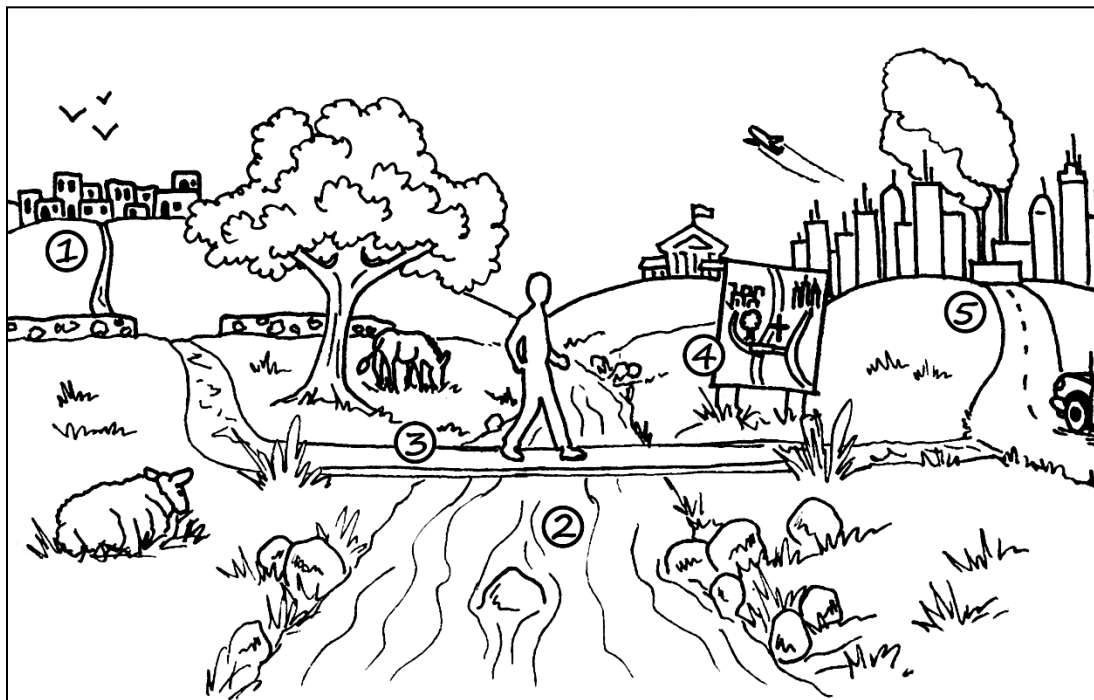
In the last verses of Zephaniah, God promises the final restoration of Jerusalem. He will restore his people and make them famous and praised among all people of the earth.

► 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 3:16-17, all scripture is useful for all believers in all times. How does the message of the Minor Prophets speak to our world?

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 believers today? Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays suggest the following model for interpreting and applying the Bible in our world.⁷⁴ It is a model that works very well for interpreting the prophetic books. This model asks five questions of a biblical text.⁷⁵



(1) Their Town: What was the original message?

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.⁷⁶

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.

⁷⁴ Image: "Interpreting the Bible" drawing by Anna Boggs, available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52377290578>, licensed under CC BY 2.0.

⁷⁵ Adapted from J. Scott Duvall and John Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

⁷⁶ 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*. If a person is performing *eisegesis*, he is starting with his own ideas and reading those ideas into the text. As students of scripture, we should start from the original meaning, not from our own ideas.

(2) The River: What differences separate our world from the world of the original audience?

This question studies how today's culture, language, time, and situation differ from those of 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. Many readers today do not live in a nation that is ruthlessly trampling on the rest of the world. Furthermore, we live under the new covenant, where God's immediate judgment on the nations is not always seen as clearly as it was under the old covenant.

(3) The Bridge: What is the principle behind the original message?

This question asks the reader to go beyond the immediate setting of the prophet to find the principle that is taught. This principle reaches 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 in light of all biblical revelation. It helps to ensure that we do not take a verse out of its biblical context or derive 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, 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.⁷⁷ Paul reminds us that "...God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

(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.

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

⁷⁷ Matthew 11:20–24 is one of many examples of Jesus' messages of coming judgment.

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 also of his judgment. Though this message is no more popular today than it was 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.

Study Guide for the Minor Prophets

(1) Read an entire book in one sitting to get an overview of the prophet's message.⁷⁸

(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 the major predictions of the future found in the book.

(7) Write a 1 page summary of the book based on the answers to the questions above.

⁷⁸ 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) Choose 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 Interpretation." 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 "Study Guide for the Minor Prophets."

(2) At the beginning of the next lesson, take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 13 Test

- (1) What is the purpose of the book of Obadiah?
- (2) What is the theme 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) Micah prophesied that a ruler in Israel would come from what town?
- (6) According to Micah, what three characteristics sum up the demands of the law?
- (7) Who was the audience for the book of Nahum?
- (8) List Habakkuk's two questions and God's responses.
- (9) What is the theme of Zephaniah?
- (10) What is the five part model for interpretation of biblical text?
- (11) Write Micah 6:8, Nahum 1:7–8, and Habakkuk 3:2 from memory.

Lesson 14

Haggai–Malachi

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Know the likely dates and historical settings of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- (2) Be able to outline the primary themes and purposes of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- (3) Appreciate the messianic promises of the Old Testament.
- (4) Recognize the importance of continuing faithfulness to God’s law.
- (5) Relate the messages 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 (the blending of religions), and many Jews failed to observe the Sabbath.
- **Social problems:** There was tension between the Jews who had remained in Jerusalem during the exile and those returning from exile, 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 was 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 at about the same time, spoke to many of these issues.

Haggai

| 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.

Overview 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?" (Haggai 1:4).

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 feared the LORD,... and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (Haggai 1:12, 14).

A Closer Look: Does Spiritual Prosperity Guarantee Material Prosperity?

The message of Haggai 1 is paralleled in 3 John 1:2: "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul." It is also seen in Deuteronomy 27–28, with the promise of material blessings for the obedient and material curses for 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 receiving temporal blessings. Haggai spoke to a specific situation; he did not state a universal principle guaranteeing prosperity to every faithful child of God.

Haggai (Continued)

Overview 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 who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?" (Haggai 2:3). Some of the elders who remembered the glory of Solomon's Temple wept when they saw the reduced size and inferior construction of this new Temple (Ezra 3:12).

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 your salvation that you have prepared... for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:28–32).

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 were corrupting 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 on I will bless you" (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 the work on the Temple (Ezra 4). 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 for fear.

Zechariah

| 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 promises 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 (Nehemiah 12:1, 4, 12, 16). 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.

Overview 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.

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
- Sin in the community

The visions:

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. 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)

The book of 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 responds to a question from a delegation of people from Bethel. During the exile, the people fasted in 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 seasons of joy and gladness... Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD" (Zechariah 8:19, 22).

Zechariah 9–14 looks to the coming of the 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 (Zechariah 9:5–7).⁷⁹ Zechariah foretells the day when Israel's true King will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and will save his people (Zechariah 9:9). 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 67 New Testament citations from Zechariah.⁸⁰ In the Gospel accounts of Passion Week (from Palm Sunday through Resurrection Sunday), Zechariah 9–14 is the most frequently cited section of the Old Testament. Zechariah is second only to Ezekiel in quantity of citations in the book of Revelation. Messianic prophecies in Zechariah include:

- The righteous Branch (Zechariah 3:8, Zechariah 6:12–13)
- The humble king riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9–10)
- The shepherd who was rejected and sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:4–13, Zechariah 13:7)

⁷⁹ This remnant from Gentile nations will become part of God's people.

⁸⁰ *English Standard Version Study Bible*

- The one who is pierced (Zechariah 12:10)
- The coming judge (Zechariah 14)

Malachi

| Malachi at a Glance | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Author | Malachi |
| Audience | Post-exilic Judah |
| Date | Probably 475–425 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 confronted 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 Yahweh were not accompanied by changed lives. Malachi wrote to announce God’s accusations against Judah.

Malachi also answered Judah’s complaints against Yahweh. 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 from drought, economic struggles, and political weakness. The people blamed Yahweh 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 believers today could be dishonoring God.

Overview of Malachi

The book of Malachi consists of a series of six 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.

Argument 1: God's Love for His People (Malachi 1:2–5)

1. Introduction: "I have loved you."
2. Question: "How have you loved us?"
3. Answer: God honored Israel (Jacob) while punishing Edom (Esau).⁸¹

Argument 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 polluted food upon my altar." Instead of honoring the altar of the LORD, the priests sacrificed lame and sick animals.

Argument 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 worshippers and by breaking the marriage covenant through divorce.

Argument 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 approving of 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.

Argument 5: Stealing God's Tithe (Malachi 3:6–12)

1. Introduction: "I the LORD do not change. 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.

⁸¹ See Obadiah for God's judgment on Edom.

Argument 6: Harsh Words Against the LORD (Malachi 3:13–4:3)

1. Introduction: "Your words have been hard against me."
2. Question: "How have we spoken against you?"
3. Answer: You have said, "It is vain to serve God." The people accuse God of failing to bless the obedient and judge the disobedient.

God promises that the day of the LORD is coming. In that day, God will judge evildoers and will preserve the faithful.

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 testifies 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 30 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 the 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 completely fulfilled in the rebuilt Temple. The Most Holy Place 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 (2 Chronicles 5:13–14).

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 (John 1:14). In the ministry of the early church, God's glory was seen throughout the Roman Empire. Today, as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16), we continue to reveal God's glory to the world.

A Closer Look: Clean or Unclean?

Part of Haggai's message is based on the Old Testament laws of ritual purity. In the Law of Moses, 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. Followers of Jesus 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 twisted generation, we must shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:15). 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.

Lesson 14 Assignments

(1) Choose one of the following assignments:

Option 1: Group Assignment

Using the interpretation model presented in Lesson 13, apply one of the arguments of Malachi to the church today. (See "A Closer Look at Old Testament Interpretation" in Lesson 13 for more information.) Discuss the original message to Judah, the differences between Judah and the church today, the principle taught in Malachi, how the principle is seen in other passages of scripture, and the application of the principle for 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 arguments to show how God might speak to the church today.

(2) Take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

Lesson 14 Test

- (1) What three spiritual challenges were addressed by the post-exilic prophets?
- (2) What is the date for Haggai and Zechariah?
- (3) List the topics for each of Haggai's four 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 the arguments in Malachi.
- (8) Write Haggai 2:7-9 and Malachi 3:1 from memory.

Recommended Resources

Sources Used Throughout This Course

Arnold, Bill T. and Bryan E. Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament*. Ada: Baker Books, 1999.

ESV Study Bible. Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008.

Jensen, Irving. *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1978.

McCain, Danny. *Notes on Old Testament Introduction*. Jos, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2002.

Wilkinson, Bruce and Kenneth Boa. *Walk Thru the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002.

Lesson 1

To learn more about the reliability of the Old Testament, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

God's Bible School and College Bible Faculty. *I Believe: Fundamentals of the Christian Faith*. Cincinnati: Revivalist Press, 2006.

McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

Online Sources

Apologetics Press. <https://apologeticspress.org/>

"Do We Really Need the Old Testament?" Online video from Seedbed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCPyyOKwrUg>

McDowell, Josh. *Bible: Fact or Fiction?* Online video playlist. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL16ABDCF6DB496225>

Orr-Ewing, Amy. *Reliability of the Manuscripts*. Online video from RZIM HQ at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLI7W4bnVpA>

Lesson 2

To learn more about Genesis, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Hamilton, Victor P. *Handbook on the Pentateuch*. Ada: Baker Books, 1982.

Kidman, Derek. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Genesis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008.

Morris, Henry M. *The Genesis Record*. Ada: Baker Books, 1976.

Online Sources

Answers in Genesis: <https://answersingenesis.org>

"Christians and the Environment" online video from Seedbed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s91vvdcytAU>

"Science and the Christian Worldview" online video from Seedbed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHSQfjFSE2U>

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*. <https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 3

To learn more about the Pentateuch, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Fuller, Lois. *The Pentateuch*. Jos, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 1995.

Hamilton, Victor P. *Handbook on the Pentateuch*. Ada: Baker Books, 1982.

Kitchen, Kenneth A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Walton, John H. and Victor H. Matthews. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis – Deuteronomy*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Online Sources

Associates for Biblical Research: <https://biblearchaeology.org/>

Lecture. "Did the Exodus Happen?" Online video from Seedbed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdSyrqwwwBE>

Lecture. "Dr James Hoffmeier – Egyptologist." Online video from the Lanier Library at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBWWO8dCeY0>

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*. <https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 4

To learn more about Joshua–Ruth, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

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.

Hess, Richard S. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Joshua*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

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.” Online video series from Seedbed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hotJ7p0f9I> (This is a link for Part 1.)

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.

Printed Sources

Howard, David M., Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1993.

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.

Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Chronicles: One Church, One Faith, One Lord*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987.

Online Sources

Wesley, John. *Wesley’s Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

"What Was Israel's Government Like?" Online video from Seedbed at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqzKs7rKpOQ>

Lesson 6

To learn more about the return from exile, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Howard, David M., Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1993.

Jobes, Karen. *New International Version Application Commentary: Esther*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Kidner, Derek. *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979.

Provan, Iain, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Online Sources

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 7

To learn more about Job and Psalms, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Bullock, C. Hassell. *Encountering the Book of Psalms*. Ada: Baker, 2001.

Longman, Tremper, III. *How to Read the Psalms*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1988.

Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When It Hurts?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.

Online Sources

"Laments in the Psalms." Online video from Seedbed at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQJnnxL8C6k>

"The Problem of Evil." Online video from Seedbed at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1AwDQBvRQQ>

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.

Printed Sources

Curtis, Edward M. and John J. Brugaletta. *Discovering the Way of Wisdom*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2004.

Estes, Daniel J. *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*. Ada: Baker Books, 2005.

Gaebelein, Frank. *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms – Song of Songs*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.

Kaiser, Walter C. *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.

Longman, Tremper, III. *How to Read Proverbs*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Longman, Tremper III. *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Song of Songs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. (Longman interprets Song of Songs poetically.)

Taylor, J. Hudson. *Union and Communion*. Chicago: Moody Press, n.d. (Taylor interprets Song of Songs allegorically.)

Lesson 9

To learn more about Isaiah, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Motyer, J. Alec. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Isaiah*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999.

Oswalt, John N. *Isaiah. NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Online Sources

"Yahweh and the Ancient Gods" Online video from Seedbed at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xp5nwFefWj0>

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 10

To learn more about Jeremiah, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Fretheim, Terence E. *Jeremiah*. Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002.

Lallman, Hetty. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2013.

Thompson, J.A. *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Jeremiah*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980.

Varughese, Alex. *New Beacon Bible Commentary: Jeremiah* (2 vols.). Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 2008–2010.

Online Sources

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 11

To learn more about Ezekiel and Daniel, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Craigie, Peter. *Daily Study Bible: Ezekiel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983.

Duguid, Iain. *NIV Application Commentary: Ezekiel*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Longman, Tremper. *NIV Application Commentary: Daniel*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Online Sources

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 12

To learn more about the Minor Prophets, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

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.

Online Sources

Dew, Diane. "The Backslider in Heart." <http://www.dianedew.com/backslidg.htm>

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 13

To learn more about the Minor Prophets, please see the following resources.

Printed Sources

Baker, David W., T. Desmond Alexander, and Bruce K. Waltke. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Baker, David W. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

McCain, Danny. *Notes on Old Testament Introduction*. Jos, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2002.

Online Sources

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

Lesson 14

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.

McCain, Danny. *Notes on Old Testament Introduction*. Jos, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2002.

Merrill, Eugene H. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

Online Sources

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.
<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen.html>

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 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |
| 9 | | |
| 10 | | |
| 11 | | |
| 12 | | |
| 13 | | |
| 14 | | |

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).