



DISCOVERY TEACHER'S GUIDE

2 Kings, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Lamentations



Elisha's Ministry

2 Kings 1:1—8:15

Kings of Israel and Judah

2 Kings 8:16—17:41

The Reign of King Hezekiah

2 Kings 18:1—20:21

Comparison of Manasseh and Josiah

2 Kings 21:1—23:30

Final Days of Judah

2 Kings 23:31—25:30

The Prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah

Nahum 1:1—3:19 & Zephaniah 1:1—3:20

Call of the Prophet and First Pronouncements of Judgments

Jeremiah 1:1—15:21

The Continued Sermons of the Prophet

Jeremiah 16:1—25:38

The Conflicts of the Prophet

Jeremiah 26:1-29:32

The Consolations of the Prophet

Jeremiah 30:1-33:26

The Circumstances of the Prophet

Jeremiah 34:1-45:5

The Pronouncement of Judgment on the Nations

Jeremiah 46:1-52:34

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Lamentations 1:1—5:22

Discovery is a Bible study course for the high school and adult levels. Bible references are taken from the King James Version. The companion to these Sunday school lessons is Daybreak, a daily devotional and personal Bible study continuum. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Discovery is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.

Teacher's Guide

OPENER



Elisha's Ministry

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 1:1 through 8:15

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." (2 Kings 2:9)

BACKGROUND

The Book of 1 Kings closes with a brief introduction of the reign of Ahaziah, who succeeded his father Ahab as king of Israel. The Book of 2 Kings resumes the narrative of Israel as a whole, relating the histories of twelve kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and sixteen kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The events in the first eight chapters take place during the reigns of Ahaziah of Israel, and his successor, his brother Jehoram. However, rather than focusing on the kings themselves, as is typical in the rest of the two books, these chapters give special emphasis to the ministry of the Prophet Elisha.

Elisha's ministry began by divine call (1 Kings 19:16, 19-21) and he first served as an apprentice to the Prophet Elijah. His prophetic role as Elijah's successor began in approximately 848 B.C. after King Ahaziah's death and Elijah's departure to Heaven in a whirlwind. While Elijah's focus had been primarily matters of state, Elisha more typically concentrated his efforts on the common people of the land. His ministry was approximately sixty-three years in length (including his time of service as Elijah's apprentice) and touched six kings of Israel, whose reigns spanned ninety-seven years: Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash. This was one of the most wicked times in the Northern Kingdom's history, and also the worst time politically and economically. In his prophetic role, Elisha had a major impact on four nations: Israel, Judah, Moab, and Syria. The prophet died in approximately 797 B.C. (2 Kings 13).

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

1. In chapter 2 of our text, what spiritual attributes do you think were necessary for Elisha to see Elijah be taken up into Heaven, and thereby receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit?

Attributes mentioned by the students may include: faith, persistence, desire, watchfulness, patience, and confidence. After your class has developed a list, ask

NOTES
NOTES

them what role these attributes play when we are seeking something from the Lord. Class discussion should bring out that each of them will be present to some degree if we are to receive from God, for His requirements are timeless. While He knows our personal level of understanding and spiritual maturity, and deals with each of us as individuals, the principles for receiving from God do not change.

2. When Elijah ascended in a whirlwind, his mantle fell from him. What did Elisha do with that mantle, and what was the significance of his action? 2 Kings 2:13-14

Elisha took up the mantle of Elijah, which was symbolic of God's endorsement of him as Elijah's successor. He then went back to the Jordan River where he smote the water with the mantle as Elijah had done, and cried, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" This was an entreaty that God would verify His commission of Elisha by demonstrating His power in the same manner He had done when Elijah smote the waters, which He did by causing the waters to part.

Follow up this question by asking your students if we always will receive a physical manifestation of God's call and anointing upon our lives. The conclusion should be reached that most of us will not receive as dramatic a validation as Elisha did. However, while the means may vary, God's anointing and His divine call will be verified in some manner.

3. Jehoram, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, joined forces with the king of Edom in an alliance against Moab. When the water supply for their combined armies ran low and the fear of defeat intensified, the kings appealed to the Prophet Elisha concerning their plight. Why did Elisha show regard for King Jehoshaphat but not for King Jehoram? (2 Kings 3:1-3; 2 Chronicles 17:3-6). What lesson can we learn from this?

Jehoshaphat had the Lord's blessing because "he walked in his commandments" and "his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord." King Jehoram had no such testimony. The promise Elisha made to the kings of ample water and the defeat of Moab were due to Jehoshaphat's trust in God and his insistence that they "inquire of the Lord" through the prophet.

In response to the second question, your group of students should conclude that the godly influence of Jehoshaphat brought about a positive result for these other kings, who observed firsthand through this event the benefits of serving God. Some in your class may be willing to share examples from their own knowledge or experience of times when a righteous Christian life brought benefits into the lives of others.

4. The first seven verses of chapter 4 describe one of Elisha's miracles. What occurred in this passage, and what lessons can we learn from it?

The impoverished widow of one of the prophets was about to lose her two sons to slavery, as she had no means to pay back a debt. Elisha instructed her to borrow vessels from her neighbors, and oil was miraculously provided to fill all of the vessels she procured. She was then instructed to sell the oil to pay off the debt.

The lessons that can be learned from this account are many. For example, your group may note that this miracle is evidence of God's love and tender care toward those who serve Him. It could be pointed out that the woman went for help to the right source—the man of God—rather than appealing to others. It is notable that the miraculous oil only ceased when there were no more vessels to fill, teaching us that God's provision is as large as our faith and willingness to obey. The funds obtained when the oil was sold were enough to meet her needs, and God's provision for us will also always be enough.

- **5.** Chapter 4 goes on to record several other miracles performed by Elisha. List these miracles and describe what they have in common. 2 Kings 4:16-17, 34-35, 38-41, 42-44
 - 2 Kings 4:16-17 The Shunammite woman had a son
 - 2 Kings 4:34-35 Resurrection of the Shunammite's son
 - 2 Kings 4:38-41 A poisonous stew made edible
 - 2 Kings 4:42-44 Miracle of the bread

After your students identify the miracles, they should conclude that in every situation God fulfilled a need. He saved from ruin, barrenness, loss, death, and hunger. The point should be made that even when Israel was filled with idolatry, God was still reaching out to those who loved Him.

It might be interesting to bring out to your class that many of the miracles which Elisha performed—healing of the sick, raising of the dead, and providing for those in need—were similar in nature to the miracles of Jesus. For this reason, some commentators note that Elisha and his deeds foreshadow the earthly ministry of Jesus, who also reached out to those who were sick, raised the dead, and met physical needs of those around Him.

6. Chapter 5 gives the account of the healing of Naaman, a Syrian captain who was afflicted with leprosy. Give a one- or two-word description of each of the main characters who were involved in this event.

You may wish to note your students' one-word suggestions for each character on a dry erase board; their combined ideas will provide a fairly comprehensive character study for each of the individuals, as well as giving you a format to review this incident. Their thoughts could include the following:

Israelite maid – witness, courageous, caring
Naaman – leper, influential, proud, needy, grateful
King of Syria – demanding, unbelieving
King of Israel – fearful, confused
Elisha – assured, trusting, obedient
Naaman's servants – faithful, wise
Gehazi – opportunistic, greedy, dishonest

As you sum up this event, you might wish to bring out that during the time of Elisha, the nation of Syria was growing in power and was Israel's greatest enemy. God's healing of this Syrian captain was no doubt intended to reinforce to both Syria and Israel that the Lord God of Israel was far mightier than the gods of the Syrians. In addition, His power and concern extended beyond the boundaries of Israel.

7. What four miracles were involved in the capture of the Syrian army, as related in 2 Kings 6:8-23?

The four miracles were as follows:

- 1) Elisha was miraculously aware of the plans of the Syrians as they sent raiding parties into Israel (verses 8-12).
- 2) The young servants' eyes were opened to the fact that the host of Heaven surrounded and protected the prophet (verses 15-17).
- 3) God smote the Syrian soldiers with blindness at the prayer of Elisha (verse 18).
- 4) The eyesight of the Syrian soldiers was restored once Elisha had led them to Samaria and they were surrounded by the army of Israel (verses 19-20).
- **8.** How is God's wonderful timing for those who trust in Him seen in the case of the Shunammite woman whose dead son had been raised to life through Elisha? 2 Kings 8:1-6

The Shunammite woman had obeyed Elisha's advice and left her house and property to move to another land during a time of famine. Seven years later, when she returned, her property was inhabited by strangers, and it seemed all was lost. However, as she went before King Jehoram to attempt to reclaim her land, God was already working in her behalf. Providentially, just as she came into the court, Elisha's servant was telling the king about this woman's son being raised from the dead and how God had cared for her and her family. The Shunammite woman was able to tell the king of the loss of all her property. He appointed people to make sure she not only got her home and land back, but also the profit that had been gained while she was gone!

Make the point that God is never too late, and He is often working behind the scenes in ways that we cannot imagine. This would be a good time to encourage your students to share personal experiences where God's precise timing was evident in their lives.

9. As you review these eight chapters which focus on the miracles of the Prophet Elisha, what lesson from his life and ministry stands out the most to you?

This question should provide a framework for you to sum up this lesson with your class. Lessons from Elisha's life may include the following thoughts:

We must be willing to follow and learn in order to be equipped to do the work God has called us to do.

The power of God is a necessity in our lives if we are to be effective servants for Him.

We should be responsive and caring to the needs of others, and use whatever gifts or talents God has given us to minister to those needs.

God can and will lead us as we work for Him, giving us specific instructions.

CONCLUSION

portion of his master's spirit was granted, and during
Israel's darkest times, he brought help, hope, and instruction to those who were faithful to the Lord.

Teacher's Guide



Kings of Israel and Judah

by his wife's idolatrous background, for verse 18 says, "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
2 Kings 8:16 through 17:41	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall	
not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you	
out of the hand of all your enemies." (2 Kings 17:38-39)	
BACKGROUND	
These chapters in the Book of 2 Kings cover a span of about 135 years (approximately 850 B.C.	
to 715 B.C.). The nation of Israel had been divided around 931 B.C. into two kingdoms: the Northern	
Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah),	-
and the narrative moves back and forth between the history of these two fragmented nations, recording the	
kings of both.	
A total of twenty-one rulers are mentioned in these chapters: twelve kings of Israel and nine of	
Judah. Along with listing some of the exploits of the	
kings, an assessment of their devotion to God is given. They were described as righteous kings (in terms	
of religious leadership or reforms), evil kings (either	
as political or religious leaders), and kings who were overthrown or assassinated. The designation of "righ-	
teous" or "evil" was very important, for as the king	
went, so did the nation. This was a tumultuous time for the divided king-	
dom, with many political conspiracies taking place. Yet, even in a time laced with violence, chaos, and	
selfish ambitions, the Lord was faithful to His people.	
He providentially raised up individuals to accomplish His purpose, while reminding the people that His	
promises to them were still valid if they would only	
choose to follow His statutes.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. After co-reigning for a number of years with his	
father Jehoshaphat, Jehoram assumed full leadership of the nation of Judah when his father died. Who was Jehoram's wife? What affect did her background have	
upon Jehoram, and thus upon the nation? 2 Kings 8:18	
Jehoram's wife was daughter of the wicked King Ahab of Israel; her name was Athaliah. Likely King	
Jehoshaphat had negotiated this marital alliance for the sake of peace with Israel. Jehoram was affected	

the house of Ahab." It was at this time that the worship of Baal was instituted in Judah, which began the Southern Kingdom's decline into idolatry. As a supplemental resource, you may wish to direct your students to 2 Chronicles 21:4 and 13, which reveal that Jehoram murdered his brothers and some of the princes of Judah, and led the people of Judah and Jerusalem into unfaithfulness.

The point should be made that those with whom we choose to closely associate have a great influence upon our behavior.

2. In 2 Kings 9:30-37, we find the fulfillment of a prophecy that was given to Elijah twenty years earlier (1 Kings 21:17-24) when Jezebel had Naboth the Jezreelite murdered so that Ahab could acquire his vineyard for a garden. Name at least one spiritual truth that can be derived from this account.

Class discussion could bring out any number of important Biblical truths. For example, it could be noted that God's Word will always be fulfilled. The death of Jezebel occurred exactly as had been prophesied, ending with the bloody account of her being eaten by dogs.

Another spiritual truth portrayed here is that eventually sin will be judged. Though in this case it took many years for justice to be completed, it did occur, just as it had been foretold.

3. In chapter 10, Jehu was commended for his obedience to God in destroying the worship of Baal in Israel (see verses 28, 30). However, in spite of his apparent zeal to wipe out the worship of Baal, he allowed the Israelites to continue the worship of the golden calves in the cities of Bethel and Dan. How does verse 31 describe his spiritual condition?

This verse tells us that Jehu "took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart." Some commentators suggest that Jehu's allowance of the worship of the golden calves in Bethel and Dan may have been based on political expediency. If Jehu had destroyed the golden calves, the people would have traveled to the Southern Kingdom to worship God in Jerusalem. The point is, while Jehu did much of what the Lord commanded as God's instrument of justice, he did not make a wholehearted commitment of obedience and faithfulness to God.

As a follow-up question, ask your class: What evidence might we expect to see today in the lives of those who are wholeheartedly dedicated to God?

4. Jehoram's son Ahaziah succeeded his father on the throne of Judah, but he was soon killed by Jehu, king of Israel. Ahaziah's son Joash, the next true heir to the throne, was then hidden for his safety as Jehoram's wife Athaliah attempted to destroy all the royal seed so she could usurp the government and rule Judah. At

_
_
_
_
_
 _
_
_

the age of seven, Joash was brought out of hiding and placed on the throne. Given his young age, to what can we attribute his commitment to God? 2 Kings 11:4, 17-18

The fact that Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord must be largely attributed to the influence of the priest Jehoiada. Because of Joash's young age when he assumed the throne, he needed guidance in order to make wise decisions in civil matters as well as spiritual. The priest would have been the one to help the young king, and he began his positive influence by making a covenant with the people of allegiance to the king and to the Lord.

How important it is to have guidance of godly people in our lives! Discuss with your class the value of correct guidance when we are young. Perhaps some of your students could share an incident of spiritual nurturing they had in their lives. If your class consists of older adults, you may wish to point out the importance of treating those under our influence with greatest care and with thought of the future.

5. In chapter 13, the focus again is on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Lord delivered the people of Israel into the hand of the Syrians because of their wickedness. When King Jehoash (also referred to as Joash, but not to be confused with the good King Joash who ruled in Judah at the same time) sought advice from Elisha the prophet, what did Elisha tell him to do? What was Elisha's reaction to the manner in which Jehoash followed through? 2 Kings 13:14-19

Elisha instructed Joash to open a window eastward, toward the area where Syria occupied land belonging to Israel, and to shoot an arrow. It was a sign of war to shoot an arrow toward or into the enemy's country. Elisha's placing his hands upon the king's hands was an indication of direction from God.

Elisha then instructed the king to take the arrows and smite them on the ground. Verse 18 says, "And he smote thrice, and stayed." Elisha was angry because he stopped so soon, and told him that had he smitten five or six times, it would have indicated a full victory over Syria. His half-hearted response meant he would have only three victories over the Syrians. We are not told that Joash was instructed to smite a particular number of times, but it seems that he was aware of the importance of his action.

The point should be made that if we want to receive God's full blessing upon our lives, we must obey God's commands fully and wholeheartedly.

6. Chapters 14-17 of 2 Kings provide a list and an assessment of a number of kings of Israel and Judah. Some of them did right, but most of them did evil before God. It was noted in the lesson introduction that as the king went, so went the nation. How is this fact significant to us?

-	

The concept of our influence on others is a reality, even though we may not be in a position of political importance. Most of us probably assume that our impact on others is fairly insignificant. However, our actions can certainly influence others to model after our behavior. And our attitude alone can strongly impact someone else's outlook. We are ultimately responsible for our own actions, but our choices will always affect someone else.

7. Because of the sin of the Israelites, the Lord allowed them to be taken captive by the Assyrians. What specific sins are mentioned in 2 Kings 17:7-12? In what way did God show mercy to the Israelites, and what was their reaction? 2 Kings 17:13-17

The people of Israel walked in the statutes (customs or manners) of the nations they had initially cast out of Canaan (verse 8). They secretly did wrong before God "from the tower of the watchmen, to the fenced city," meaning it was universal (verse 9). They built places for idol worship that included licentious activity (verses 9-12). They rejected God's statutes, testimonies, and promises, but sought out heathen practices, worshiped images, Baal, stars, and planets (verses 15-16). They committed child sacrifice, and engaged in sorceries and witchcraft (verse 17).

In spite of this list of transgressions, the Lord repeatedly called the Israelites, warning them in every generation by prophets, and reminding them of His love and care for them (verses 12-14). "They would not hear" must be one of the most grievous statements in all Scripture. They brought tragic consequences upon themselves, because of their determination to ignore God and follow their own ways.

8. What spiritual lessons stand out to you as you review these chapters?

Class discussion may bring out several lessons that we can learn through these chapters. Some thoughts to cover are: 1) We can please God if we want to, regardless of surroundings. 2) Our lives affect others on a daily basis. 3) Sin will not go unpunished. 4) We serve a merciful God, who offers us every opportunity to come to Him in repentance. 5) It will all come down to one thing when we stand before God: did we listen and obey, or reserve admiration and worship for other things?

CONCLUSION

Although human acts may not reap immediate retribution, these chapters in 2 Kings clearly point out that whatever a man sows, he will also reap. God is merciful, but divine justice will ultimately be satisfied. As we study these Scriptures, may we learn from Israel's hard lessons!

OPENED



The Reign of King Hezekiah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 18:1 through 20:21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." (2 Kings 18:5)

BACKGROUND

The importance of the account of Hezekiah's reign as king of Judah is evidenced by its nearly identical mention in three separate places: 2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32, and Isaiah 36-39. Some scholars suggest that the relationship of Hezekiah with the Prophet Isaiah is the reason for this extensive history. While the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings record the history of the rulers of Israel and Judah from its inception through the Babylonian exile, they are much more than history alone. The account conveys spiritual and moral truths to the reader through the vehicle of objective political history. Specific kings are evaluated by a simple moral code—they either did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, or they did evil in His sight.

Hezekiah began to reign in Judah as co-regent with his father Ahaz at the age of twenty-five, around 729 B.C., and he reigned for twenty-nine years. He was identified as a good king, and took steps to eliminate idolatry in his kingdom, destroying altars, idols, and pagan temples. He cleaned out and restored the Temple in Jerusalem, and reinstated observance of the Passover.

His administration was, however, vexed with the pressures of politics. The neighboring Northern Kingdom (Israel) was conquered by Assyria during his reign and Hezekiah broke the treaty his father had forged with the Assyrians. Hezekiah attempted to bribe the Assyrian King Sennacherib, possibly in an attempt to avoid what was later to become an invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem.

There is also some evidence that Hezekiah made an attempt to secure a political alliance with Egypt in order to thwart the Assyrian invasion. In "The Annals of Sennacherib," a translation of the historical record written by the Assyrian king, Sennacherib claims to have destroyed in Judah "forty-six of his [Hezekiah's] strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area which were without number." His description of Hezekiah is, "Like a caged bird shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city." While this account does

OFLINEIN	
-	
-	

not acknowledge God's miraculous deliverance, it does verify that Sennacherib was unable to conquer Jerusalem. Hezekiah agreed to pay a tribute (2 Kings 18:14), yet, Sennacherib treacherously invaded Judah again—a move which resulted in the divine destruction of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib retreated to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, and was later assassinated by his own sons.

Most Bible scholars agree that the 2 Kings 20 account of Hezekiah's sickness and his reception of Babylonian diplomats actually took place prior to the Assyrian invasion. The shift in chronology matches that found in Isaiah, and possibly was used there for literary reasons and then was followed in 2 Kings.

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

1. All the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deemed evil. Among the kings of Judah, both good and evil, only Hezekiah and Josiah gained the praise, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did" (2 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 22:2). What actions resulted in this assessment of Hezekiah's reign? 2 Kings 18:4-6

Hezekiah began by removing the high places and destroying the groves which were left from the idolatrous worship during previous administrations. Even under "good" kings, these places were only shifted in use from idol worship to the worship of God, apparently as poor substitutes of the Temple. The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 29 gives details concerning the reopening of the House of the Lord and the reinstituting of the worship of Jehovah in the Temple.

Hezekiah also recognized that the brazen serpent made by Moses nearly seven hundred years earlier (which was used by God to bring deliverance, see Numbers 21:9) had become an idol, distracting people from the true God rather than an icon drawing them closer to Him. He quickly destroyed it and named it "Nehushtan," which means simply, "a piece of brass."

Discuss with your students the importance of worship. Hezekiah was commended when he reopened the doors to the Temple and encouraged all of Judah to worship in that place. It is easy to accept less or to substitute something else for the true worship of God in the heart. We must always be on guard.

2. Scripture records that Hezekiah trusted the Lord, clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him (2 Kings 18:6). He apparently did this in the midst of extreme political, military, and economic pressure to do just the opposite. Name some ways in which we also are pressured to depart from the Lord and explain how our trust in God can help us resist.

You could address this question with your students by compiling a list of their answers regarding ways we are pressured to depart from the Lord. Suggestions

NOTES			
	NOTES		

might be fear, pride, busyness, distractions, consumerism, loss of employment, etc.

Then focus on what Hezekiah did right in terms of resisting pressure, using the specifics given in 2 Kings 8:6. Begin by considering the word trust. The dictionary defines trust as "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something." Hezekiah trusted in the character, ability and strength of God. Discuss with your students the character, ability, and strength of God. How can a focus on these attributes help us to withstand pressure to depart from Him?

Next, consider the old English word clave, which suggests staying close or near. Point out that there is One to whom we should stay near and follow if we are to resist pressure from the world. It is a simple principle: stay close. Though we may be tempted to wander, lag behind, or even depart in a different direction, focusing upon the character of God in the person of Jesus will help us stay close during difficult times.

3. What was the Assyrian King Sennacherib's perspective on Hezekiah's God? How did he try to influence the inhabitants of Jerusalem? 2 Kings 18:19-22

The Assyrian king assumed that his military strength would overcome the people of Judah and their God just as he had overcome many others, whom he readily listed for Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

After crushing their confidence in an Egyptian alliance, Sennacherib's representatives tried to influence the inhabitants of Jerusalem by brazenly questioning Hezekiah's confidence and trust in God. The Assyrians suggested that Hezekiah's removal of the groves and high places had taken the people farther away from their God instead of closer to Him, and even claimed that the Lord had sent the Assyrians to destroy the land of Judah. Finally, the brash diplomats attempted to stir up the people by broadcasting distrust and fear directly to the residents of Jerusalem who lived near the wall and could hear the proclamation of doom. The Assyrians falsely promised affluence and prosperity in exchange for surrender.

As a follow-up question, ask your class: How does the enemy of our souls use similar tactics to thwart our faith in God? Discussion should bring out that in the Garden of Eden, Satan began by questioning the truthfulness and integrity of God. He uses the same tactics today. Just because we cannot readily see God in times of difficulty and tragedy does not negate His faithfulness or the truth of His character. Some might assert that our honest attempts to draw closer to the Lord actually take us farther from Him, while others may claim to "know the will of God" for us just as Sennacherib did for Judah. Most obviously, Satan attempts to broadcast distrust and fear directly into our hearts and into the hearts of those around us.

4. How did Hezekiah respond to the threats brought first by the Assyrian diplomats and then by a letter sent directly from Sennacherib? 2 Kings 19:1

King Hezekiah responded to the threats with a truly humble spirit. We read that "he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD." He then sent his senior advisors, who had also heard the Assyrian threats, to the Prophet Isaiah requesting intercessory prayer on behalf of the remnant in Jerusalem. The response was a positive one promising the destruction of Sennacherib in his own land (see 2 Kings 19:37, which describes Sennacherib's death some twenty years later).

Upon receiving the arrogant and threatening letter from Sennacherib, King Hezekiah read it and then immediately took it to the Temple and spread it before the Lord. He prayed a simple but beautiful prayer, acknowledging God's sovereignty in the universe as Creator and then requesting that God see and hear the blasphemy of the letter. He simply asked for deliverance so that all the earth would know of God's sovereignty.

After considering Hezekiah's response to taunting and accusatory words, discuss with your students how we should respond when we are accused or mocked. Taking these situations humbly to the Lord in prayer would be a wise response. Ultimately, we represent God and want His name to be lifted up and glorified in the world around us. Taking time to humbly pray, encouraging others to do the same, asking for intercessory prayer, asking God for guidance, etc., are all great responses.

5. God sent word to Hezekiah to "set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). Since we do not know when we will step into eternity, how can we "set our houses in order"?

In Hezekiah's case, this directive no doubt meant that he was to arrange his governmental and private affairs in light of his imminent death. Tending to such details is practical for us, too, but of far greater importance is "setting our houses in order" in spiritual matters. To do that, we must first make sure we have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is obtained through repentance by faith resulting in the forgiveness of our sins. Beyond this, we can make wise choices concerning our relationships, service to God, finances, and the other affairs of life. Since we only know the surety of our death and not the time frame, it is wise to keep our "houses in order" at all times. This will also keep us ready should the Lord return prior to our death.

6. Hezekiah received from God what many have wished for—knowledge of the specific time of his death. How did Hezekiah respond to this information, and what was the end result? 2 Kings 20:2-3, 6

·	
-	
-	
•	

The news of Hezekiah's impending death caused him to turn his face to the wall, weep, and pray. He reminded God of how he had lived up until that time and the sincerity of his heart toward God. Immediately, the Prophet Isaiah was sent back to Hezekiah by God with a new message. Hezekiah was told that he would be healed and would live fifteen additional years.

Unfortunately, Hezekiah seemingly did not respond to the news of his impending death with the prayer, "Thy will be done." And it was during the additional fifteen years granted him that Hezekiah foolishly exposed the wealth and military capabilities of Judah to visiting Babylonian diplomats. Hezekiah was chastened by God with judgment to follow in later generations. It was also during this time frame that Hezekiah's son Manasseh was born. Manasseh turned out to be one of Judah's most wicked kings, rebuilding the idolatrous worship sites which his father had destroyed, sacrificing his own son, supporting witchcraft, and leading the nation down a terrible path.

There was no way for Hezekiah to know these future happenings when he wept before the Lord. Ask your students: Do you think Hezekiah's choices would have been different if he had not been given a timeline? How would we respond if we were given a timeline? Would we prepare our house or would we become lax between now and the appointed time? The point should be made that there is a definite need to be completely yielded to God's plan for our lives. He knows what is best for us, whether or not we can see or understand it.

7. An amazing miracle is recorded in 2 Kings 20:9-11. What was it and why was it given?

Hezekiah asked the Prophet Isaiah for a sign from God to assure him of his healing which was promised by God. The miracle was that the shadow went backward ten degrees. Some have supposed that this was approximately forty minutes, assuming the shadow was marked on a 360-degree Babylonian sundial. The Hebrew word translated degree simply means "step" or "stair," so some historians assume it was the steps on an astrological sundial, although that cannot be confirmed. The sign was given at Hezekiah's request and was not necessary for God's promise of healing to be fulfilled.

You could follow up this point by asking your class if God always gives signs. Do we need to have a sign in order to trust God? Why or why not? The point should be made that while God sometimes sends signs, repeats promises, etc., they are never something which can be mandated by us as the receivers, nor are they necessary to prove the trustworthiness of God. We thank God for every encouragement and faithbuilding sign which He sends our way, but our trust is in Him and not in signs which may or may not come.

-	
·	·

8. Apparently during his rejoicing over a crisis passed, Hezekiah received diplomatic letters and gifts from Babylon. He proceeded to make Judah vulnerable by exposing the nation's wealth and military assets to visiting Babylonian diplomats. As a result, God declared that all would be taken away by the enemy. What are some ways that we as Christians might make ourselves vulnerable to Satan's snares? How can we avoid them?

Sometimes the enemy attacks right after a good prayer meeting or the obtaining of a spiritual blessing. Financial or material blessing can lull us into complacency as well. Sometimes we assume we can handle whatever the enemy sends our way on our own without consulting God. Hezekiah consulted God concerning Sennacherib's threats but apparently did not bother to do so on what seemed to be a much smaller issue. It is also possible that pride factored into his response to the Babylonian emissaries, for in verse 15 he referred to "mine house" and "my treasures." (Verse 25 of the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 32 says, "... his heart was lifted up," which would also indicate a prideful attitude at this point in his life.)

Class discussion should bring out that we too can make ourselves vulnerable through neglect, pride, indifference to spiritual matters, etc. We must guard our hearts at all times, taking care to preserve that which is precious. The attack of the enemy will not always be as blatant as that of King Sennacherib; it might be subtle like that of Babylonian King Baladan.

9. In our lesson we learned that King Hezekiah faced three different crises: impending invasion/destruction, illness/impending death, and espionage by spies from Babylon. We also will face a variety of crises in our Christian walks. Identify what some of these might be and indicate some ways we can overcome them with God's help.

As Christians we may be confronted directly with personal attacks by those who are resistant to the Gospel, by problems at school or in employment, or by family and relationship problems. We could face sickness or death for ourselves or in those whom we love and care about. Finally, we may face more subtle harassment from the enemy concerning our prosperity, influence, accomplishments, etc.

If we will respond with humble prayer, God will surely be with us. We should also enlist our fellow Christians to pray with and for us. We must stay close to God and desire His will more than our own, even at the cost of our lives. We must be vigilant and on guard to protect the precious truths of the Gospel which God has entrusted to us.

CONCLUSION

There are several lessons to be learned from King Hezekiah's life history. When a crisis appears, we need to humbly "spread it before the Lord" and ask Him to undertake for us. Our lives are on God's time table and we should "set our houses in order" to be ready either for death or for the coming of the Lord.		
We are each entrusted with precious things from the Lord and we must be careful to guard them so we cannot only finish well personally, but also pass the precious things on to those who follow us.		



Comparison of Manasseh and Josiah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS OPENER 2 Kings 21:1 through 23:30 **KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION** "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." (2 Kings 23:25) **BACKGROUND** This portion of text covers three kings of Judah over a span of eighty-eight years. The first eighteen verses of chapter 21 are the account of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who was born after Hezekiah's life had been extended by God for fifteen years. Hezekiah had been responsible for a spiritual revival that swept the entire nation during his reign, and had done away with the idolatry that his father, Ahaz, had established. Manasseh came to the throne when he was twelve years old, and reigned for a total of fifty-five years. After the death of Hezekiah, he reversed the religious reforms instituted by his godly father, and reinstituted pagan worship. One of Judah's most evil kings, he practiced sorcery and witchcraft, and even sacrificed his own son in idol worship. He took idols into the Jerusalem Temple, rebuilt the high places that his father had destroyed, and erected altars for Baal. He made an image of Asherah (a female goddess of sex and fertility), and worshiped the sun, moon, planets, and stars. The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 33:11-19 indicates that late in Manasseh's reign, Assyria overthrew Jerusalem and captured the king. He was imprisoned in Babylon, and there, humiliated and powerless, he "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers" (2 Chronicles 33:12). God heard his repentant prayer and extended mercy. Manasseh was not only freed from his confinement, but was returned to his throne in Jerusalem. Back in power, Manasseh destroyed the idol shrines he had built, did away with his desecrations of the Temple, and restored the Temple worship. However, a decisive turn into idolatry had already been made by the nation. Manasseh's conversion seemed to have no lasting impact, for when Judah ultimately fell, God attributed it

Verses 19 through 26 of chapter 21 concern the reign of Manasseh's son Amon, who became king at

to the sins of Manasseh.

the age of twenty-two. Sadly, Amon apparently was not influenced by his father's repentance, for it is recorded that he "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did" (2 Kings 21:20). He served idols and forsook God. After just two years of rule, his servants conspired against him and he was assassinated in his own home.

Chapter 22 begins the account of Josiah. This ruler, commended in Scripture as a godly leader who "turned to the LORD with all his heart" (2 Kings 23:25), ascended to the throne at eight years of age, when his father, Amon, was assassinated. In contrast to his father, Josiah had an interest in the true God. The account of his life in 2 Chronicles records that he began seeking God in the eighth year of his reign, and four years later undertook reforms to stop idol worship in the nation (see 2 Chronicles 34:3-7).

At the age of twenty-six, Josiah instituted the rebuilding of the Temple, which had deteriorated and been left in a state of disrepair during the periods of idol worship in the land. While the workers were making these repairs, they found the Book of the Law. When Josiah heard the book read, he recognized with horror that his people had neglected the commandments of God, and thus stood in danger of judgment. Rending his clothes as a sign of grief and repentance, Josiah immediately set out on a campaign to obey the Lord's instructions and to lead the people of Judah in a return to the God of their fathers.

Josiah died in battle after a reign of thirty-one years in Jerusalem. In spite of his efforts toward reform, Judah reverted again to idolatry after his death.

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

1. King Manasseh was raised by a godly father, Hezekiah. However, he rejected his spiritual heritage and did "that which was evil in the sight of the LORD." What specific sins are attributed to Manasseh in 2 Kings 21:3-7?

These verses list many specific sins that Manasseh committed.

Verse 3 – He built up the high places that Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars for Baal, and worshipped the hosts of heaven.

Verse 4 and 5 – He built altars for the worship of pagan deities in the House of the Lord.

Verse 6 – He burned his son as a human sacrifice, practiced soothsaying, and sought counsel from mediums and wizards.

Verse 7 – *He defamed God by setting up a graven image in the Temple.*

2. What spiritual concept is illustrated by the fact that Hezekiah, one of the godliest kings in the history of Judah, had a son who was one of the most wicked?

Your students should conclude that each individual is personally responsible for the choices he or

•	
-	
-	
-	
NOTEO	
NOTES	

she makes. Ask your class: Is a godly heritage a guarantee for a child's spiritual well-being? Your class should conclude that while Christian parents offer a child a wonderful opportunity to understand the privileges and blessings of serving God, a godly heritage is no guarantee.

It could be noted that Manasseh followed the example of his wicked grandfather, Ahaz, more than that of his God-fearing father. If your class is comprised of senior adults, you may find it valuable to discuss ways grandparents can positively impact their grandchildren in spiritual matters.

3. In 2 Kings 21:10-15, we find a prophetic utterance announcing the coming desolation of Jerusalem and Judah because of Manasseh's sin. What word pictures are used in verse 13 to describe the judgment that would come upon Judah?

The first of three word pictures is the phrase "the line of Samaria," and it depicts the measuring line of a builder. Along with the "plummet of the house of Ahab," these building analogies refer to the judgment to come upon Judah, just as it had come upon Samaria and the evil house of Ahab. The third word picture—that of scouring a dish clean and then turning it upside down—describes the completeness of Judah's destruction.

It might be interesting to point out to your students that while God pictured the wiping clean of the bowl, the dish was not broken into pieces. Thus, the possibility of God's using Judah once again was left open by this illustration. How might this give us hope today?

4. Amon succeeded his father Manasseh as ruler in Judah. What descriptive phrases indicate the kind of man Amon was? 2 Kings 21:20-22

These few short verses about Amon record several descriptive phrases, and all of them are negative. He did evil in the sight of the Lord (verse 20). He walked in the way that his father walked, and served and worshiped the idols his father served (verse 21). He forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the Lord (verse 22).

This may be a good time to focus on the fact that our actions and choices do impact others. What difference might it have made in the history of Judah if Manasseh had chosen to follow in the footsteps of his godly father, Hezekiah? How might he have raised Amon differently? What might have been the outcome if the people of Judah had enjoyed a succession of godly leaders, instead of only one here and there in their history? Our lives might not have great political significance, but our actions may still affect the generations to follow us, if the Lord tarries.

This may be an appropriate time to mention that the parallel account of King Manasseh's reign, found

-	

in 2 Chronicles 33:11-19, presents the astounding fact that after being captured and imprisoned in Babylon, Manasseh actually repented of his evil ways and turned to God. Evidence that his repentance was genuine comes from the fact that he was not only released from imprisonment, but was restored to his throne in Jerusalem. However, his change of heart seemingly came too late to make an impact on his son.

5. Josiah's father, King Amon, was very wicked, as was his grandfather, King Manasseh. In spite of being raised in an ungodly home, what did Josiah choose to do? 2 Kings 22:2

Josiah obeyed God completely, even though he was very young. As we read the Biblical accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah, we find that it is very unusual to find one who obeyed God wholeheartedly. However, Josiah was one who did. Seemingly, he had a tender heart from his youth. Due to his young age, he probably was under the tutelage of elders or priests during the early years of his reign. According to 2 Chronicles 34:3-7, he began seeking God in the eighth year of his reign, and four years later began spiritual reforms to stop idol worship in the nation.

This would be a good opportunity to bring out to your students that no one is ever too young to take God seriously and obey Him. Josiah's decisions and good choices in his early years were the basis for the spiritual reforms he later undertook for God. You also could point out that Josiah's background was not conducive to making good choices and living a godly life, yet God helped him do just that. If we have a purpose to serve God, we can be sure that He will be there to direct and help us every step of the way. Your students may be able to share some examples from their personal experiences or knowledge of times when God encouraged and directed young people who came into the Gospel without a Christian background.

6. During his eighteenth year as king, Josiah instructed that the Temple in Jerusalem be repaired, after many years of neglect. While those repairs were being carried out, the Book of the Law was found in the Temple. How did Josiah respond when the Word of God was read to him? What was the significance of his reaction? 2 Kings 22:11

When the Word was read to Josiah, he "rent his clothes." Josiah realized how corrupt his nation had become and was alarmed as he realized that the judgment of God was impending. Tearing his clothes was an indicator of his sincere repentance and grief.

Ask your class what Josiah's action teaches us about how we should respond to the Word of God. The point should be made that however long we have served God, our hearts should be kept tender and responsive to what we read in the Bible. It should cause us, as it did Josiah, to desire to immediately

align our lives and bring them into harmony with God's will.

7. Josiah sent emissaries to Huldah, a prophetess of Jerusalem, to "inquire of the LORD" concerning the fate of himself, his people, and his nation in light of the transgressions of their fathers. Briefly summarize in your own words the answer the prophetess gave. 2 Kings 22:15-20

The prophetess' answer was in two parts. First, she announced that God would bring evil upon Judah as described in the words of the Book of the Law (see the curses described in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26). Second, she foretold that because Josiah had humbled himself before God, he would not experience the desolation, but would die in peace with God.

8. What did Josiah do after hearing the response of the prophetess? 2 Kings 23:1-8

Josiah's first act was to call together the elders of Judah, the priests, the prophets, and all the people for a public reading of the words of the Book of the Law. He then made a covenant with the Lord to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments, and the people stood to indicate their commitment to join with Josiah in this covenant.

He followed this with actions designed to remove the stain of idolatry from the land. He "put down" (caused to cease) the idolatrous priests and those who burned incense to Baal and the sun, moon, and planets. He broke down the places of ritual prostitution, and defiled the high places—the centers of heathen worship.

When Josiah's actions have been identified, class discussion could revolve around the necessity of following repentance with action. It is not enough to say we are sorry; our deeds must prove our words. Josiah not only humbled himself before God, but also took steps to change the behaviors that had incurred God's wrath. As He did for Josiah, God will guide us in what we must do, and we must follow Him in obedience.

9. Josiah took steps to remove all idols from the nation. What idols could be in a person's life in our day?

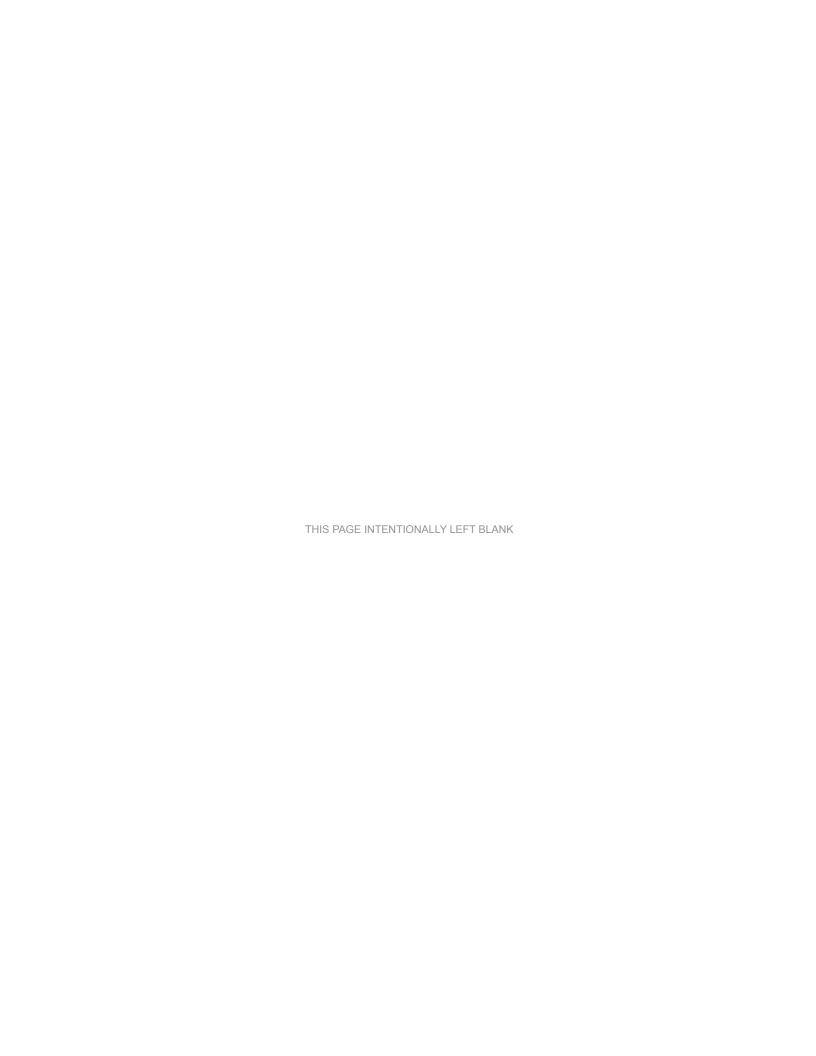
Your class members may offer a variety of specific suggestions. These could include: material possessions, education, another person, position, hobbies. The conclusion should be that anything we put ahead of God is an idol. By giving these things their rightful place in our lives, we remove the hindrances and are open to listen and obey Him.

CONCLUSION

It is important to learn from the Biblical examples given to us. The lives of these three kings illustrate that God will have mercy upon the wicked when there is sincere repentance, that He will ultimately judge the wicked, and that He always responds to repentant

Finally, we recognize that even sweeping national reforms are of no lasting value unless there is genuine repentance and ongoing obedience to God.			

and humble hearts. We learn that our actions impact



of people, including the prophet Ezekiel, craftsmen and artisans, strong men of war, and royal personnel were taken captive. Many of the Temple treasures



Final Days of Judah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	ODENER
2 Kings 23:31 through 25:30	OPENER
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon." (2 Kings 24:3-4)	
BACKGROUND	
These chapters review the events during the reigns of the final four kings of Judah and its last, chaotic years as an independent nation. The text begins with Jehoahaz's ascent to the throne of Judah, following the death of his father, righteous King Josiah, who was killed in battle. In spite of having a godly father, Jehoahaz immediately reverted to the evil practices of Manasseh, Amon, and other wicked	
kings of Judah. After just three months, he was forcibly removed from the throne by Pharaoh-necho of Egypt, who had gained control of Judah when he defeated King Josiah.	
Pharaoh-necho replaced Jehoahaz with another son of King Josiah, Eliakim, who Pharaoh-necho renamed Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned in Judah for eleven years, and was also ungodly. During his reign,	
Babylon became the new world power after over- throwing Assyria in 612 B.C. and Egypt in 605 B.C. Today's lesson describes the captivity of Judah,	
which took place in three stages. The first invasion (2 Kings 24:1) took place in 605 B.C. Many people were taken captive to Babylon at this time, including	
Daniel and the three Hebrew children. Three years later, King Jehoiakim rebelled against	
Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonian control. Judah was	
left vulnerable to bands of soldiers from the Chaldees, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, who attacked the	
weakened nation as a judgment from God for the sins of Manasseh. Jehoiakim died, and was succeeded by	
his son Jehoiachin. In just three months, Nebuchadnezzar again laid siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, being young and in-	
experienced, responded to the Babylonian assault by surrendering. This second invasion of Judah (2 Kings	
24:10) took place in 597 B.C. At this time thousands	

were also confiscated and taken to Babylon, and King Jehoiachin was bound and taken to Babylon as well.

Nebuchadnezzar established Mattaniah, an uncle of Jehoiachin, as king of Judah, and changed his name to Zedekiah. This final king of Judah reigned for eleven years, and continued the evil of his direct predecessors. During his ninth year, the third invasion of Judah took place (2 Kings 25:1-3). Beginning in 588 B.C., the city of Jerusalem was under siege for eighteen months and a severe famine devastated the land. One third of the people died from hunger and plague, and one third died by the sword. In 586 B.C., the city was invaded and all but the very poor were taken captive. King Zedekiah was captured, and he witnessed the slaying of his sons before his eyes were gouged out and he was taken to Babylon in chains. Jerusalem and the Temple were broken down and burned. "The anger of the LORD" (2 Kings 24:20), evoked by the terrible sins of the people, was poured out upon the people of Judah. Their continued refusal to humble themselves before God resulted in their ultimate destruction as a nation.

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

1. God sent enemy troops to defeat Judah because He wanted the inhabitants of Judah removed from His sight. According to our key verse, why was the Lord so angry with Judah? 2 Kings 24:3-4

The Lord remembered the sins of Manasseh and the innocent blood that he had shed. God is a just God, and He has a special place in His heart for the poor, downtrodden, and helpless. The blood of the innocent victims of Manasseh had to be atoned for. In addition, after the death of Josiah, the nation as a whole rapidly returned to its wicked ways. (Jeremiah, chapters 5 through 10, describe many of their sinful and idolatrous practices.)

Ask your class, If Judah had turned wholeheartedly from her wickedness, how might things have turned out differently for the nation? Your group should conclude that God is merciful, and genuine repentance and turning away from evil will bring His forgiveness and restoration in the case of an individual. Perhaps if Judah had turned back to God, His divine favor would have rested on the nation once more, and the people could have been spared the terrible devastation that resulted from their continued rebellion against Him.

2. For many years the people of Judah had been warned to turn from their sinful ways. Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah had pled with them, warning them of impending destruction. Yet the people ignored the warnings and continued to live as they pleased. What spiritual warnings are people ignoring today?

Many people have heard that the Lord is coming. They know that there is judgment awaiting those who

-	
-	
NOTES	
-	
-	

do not repent. They see warnings such as turmoil in the Middle East, wars, earthquakes, and other signs of the times. Yet they choose their sin rather than turning to a merciful God.

As a follow-up to this discussion, ask your students what we can do to make sure our hearts stay in a state of spiritual alertness to the warnings, correction, and instruction of God. Thoughts brought out may include: not ignoring the checks of the Spirit; eliminating things from our lives that distract or hinder us from serving God; and making an effort to feed our souls on the Word of God through church attendance, private devotions, etc.

3. What common phrase is used to describe each of the four kings in our lesson text? What spiritual truth can we derive from this phrase? 2 Kings 23:32, 37; 24:9, 19

The phrase used to describe all four kings is, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done." Class discussion should be directed to the second phrase in these verses, making the point that we do not live only to ourselves. Our behavior and choices greatly impact our children and those who come after us.

Discussion can be generated with examples of how habits, reactions, goals, and many other aspects of life often will follow a pattern in a family or society. The important lesson here is that we do influence others, so we must be very careful to set the right example. This would be an opportunity to ask your students to tell of some good examples who have had a positive influence on their lives.

4. King Jehoiachin was treated well at the end of his life. Evil-merodach, Nebuchadnezzar's son, liberated him from prison and was kind to him, giving him clothing, food to eat, and a daily allowance. On the other hand, King Zedekiah was made to witness the slaughter of his sons before he lost his eyes, and then was taken to Babylon in chains. There was a difference in the way each of these kings reacted to the takeover of the Babylonians, which may account for why they were treated differently. How did they respond to the Babylonian assaults? 2 Kings 24:12, 20

When the king of Babylon came against Jerusalem, Jehoiachin surrendered. In contrast, King Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. God had ordained that Judah would serve Babylon and Jeremiah had prophesied this. Yet, Zedekiah tried to thwart God's plan by resisting, thereby causing much suffering and bloodshed to his people through the prolonged siege.

You may bring out that from a rational standpoint, surrendering to the enemy might have seemed counter-intuitive to King Zedekiah, even though the prophet had indicated that Judah's subjection to

Babylon was ordained by God. The conclusion should be reached that when we submit to God's will in our lives even though we do not understand the "why" of His leading, we will save ourselves a lot of trouble.

5. What happened to Jerusalem when the Babylonian forces entered it for the third and final invasion of Judah? 2 Kings 25:8-13

The Babylonians burned the House of the Lord and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem. They broke down the walls of the city. They carried away the people, leaving only the very poor to tend to the land. They broke in pieces the brass pillars of the House of the Lord and the emblems of worship, and carried away the brass to Babylon.

It seems that at this point, Nebuchadnezzar brought the full fury and force of his armies against Jerusalem. God had appointed this Babylonian leader to be the instrument that would judge His rebellious people. Moses had warned the Children of Israel that if they forgot God, they would be driven from their land (see Deuteronomy 28:36-46), and at this point divine judgment was being fulfilled.

6. After Jerusalem's fall, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah to govern Judah. Gedaliah was from a prominent and seemingly God-fearing family. His father had influenced Jehoiachin to save Jeremiah from death (Jeremiah 26:24), and his grandfather Shaphan had been secretary to King Josiah and participated in the king's efforts to turn Judah back to God (2 Kings 22). Gedaliah was the one who returned Jeremiah back to his home after the fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39:14). What message did Gedaliah give to the remnant left in Jerusalem? 2 Kings 25:24

He offered a message of encouragement to the remnant left in Judah, promising them support and protection if they would simply "dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon." In essence, Gedaliah was telling the people of Judah, "You have no reason to fear further trouble. If you continue peaceably in the land, no harm will befall you." The earthly kingdom of Judah had been demolished, but God was still willing to keep His spiritual Kingdom alive in the hearts of the exiles if they would look His way for strength and comfort in their time of need.

Class discussion should bring out that no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, we can always be assured that God sees and cares about what is happening in our lives. As we accept difficult circumstances—things we cannot control in our lives—and keep trusting Him, He will watch over us and bring us strength, comfort, and encouragement in our hour of great need.

You may wish to follow up your discussion by asking for some in your class to share times when someone encouraged them personally.

7. What lessons can we learn from the final years of the nation of Judah?

Thoughts suggested by your class may include:

- Those who resist and rebel against God will eventually be judged and punished.
- Although the people of Israel and Judah had God's Law, priests, and prophets to guide them, they chose to worship false gods.
 Knowledge of God is not enough; we must purpose to obey His commandments and follow Him with our whole hearts.
- Even in the midst of terrible circumstances, God has a faithful minority who stand true to Him. Faithfulness and devotion will ultimately be rewarded.
- The people of Judah could have learned from the fate of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but they failed to amend their ways in spite of that example. We must be watchful and keep our minds and hearts attuned to the examples and lessons God allows to come our way.

As you consider this question with your class, you will be able to use their answers to summarize this lesson and our study of the Book of 2 Kings.

God's great desire was for the people of Judah to

return to Him, but they persisted in their idolatry and

CONCLUSION

rebellion against Him. Because of that, God's judgment was ultimately poured out and they were overthrown as a nation.
thrown as a nation.

city was Nineveh), and the nation of Judah, which had



The Prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Nahum 1:1 through 3:19 Zephaniah 1:1 through 3:20	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger." (Zephaniah 2:3)	
BACKGROUND	
The Book of Nahum deals with God's punishment of the enemies of Judah, and the consequent good news for the people of God. The prophecy is fairly narrow in scope, focusing on the destruction of Nineveh that would occur in the year 612 B.C. The exact date is difficult to determine, but the prophecy was given sometime after the year 663 B.C., when the Egyptian city of Thebes fell to the Assyrians. Nahum compared Nineveh to Thebes (the city of No mentioned in Nahum 3:8-10). He recounted the seeming invincibility and sad destruction of that city and then predicted that a similar fate awaited Nineveh. The first chapter describes the holy character of God the Judge; the second chapter describes Nineveh's fall; and the third chapter explains why the city would fall. Zephaniah prophesied sometime during the reign of a good king of Judah, Josiah, probably between 640 and 621 B.C. (Zephaniah 1:1). However, Josiah followed two of the most wicked kings of Judah (Manasseh and Amon), so the nation of Judah was in a low moral state when Zephaniah prophesied. His prophecy may have played a crucial role in the moral reforms that King Josiah implemented, although after Josiah was killed in battle, Judah lapsed once more into sinful behavior. In chapter 1, the prophet declared that judgment would come to Judah and, in chapter 2, to the Gentile nations surrounding it. Chapter 3 brings out that God will extend mercy and restoration in the last days, and there will be a time of rejoicing. The destruction of Nineveh that both Nahum and Zephaniah predicted was so complete that many modern people doubted the existence of the city until archeologists discovered its ruins, with great difficulty, in the 19th century.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. The two original primary audiences for Nahum's	
prophecy were the nation of Assyria (whose capital	

been oppressed by the Assyrians. Nahum prophesied the destruction of the great city of Nineveh, which was utterly destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Read chapter 1 of Nahum's prophecy. How would you feel if you were an Assyrian hearing this prophecy? How would you feel if you were a person from the land of Judah?

Since the Assyrian audience received a message of judgment and condemnation, we might suppose that those receiving that message would be alarmed and fearful, and perhaps motivated to repentance. In reality, they appeared to think it was ludicrous or foolish, for they ignored the warning. However, the people of Judah no doubt felt relief and hope when they heard Nahum's message.

Follow up your discussion of these questions by pointing out that although the people of Nineveh had repented some one hundred years earlier at the preaching of Jonah, this time they failed to turn from their evil ways and seek God, in spite of the horrendous nature of the prophesied destruction. Ask your class: How do people today respond to the warning that Christ's coming is near, and that a time of terrible trouble awaits those who have failed to make their peace with Him? Why do you think people are so heedless of the warning?

2. Nahum began his prophecy with a description of God in Nahum 1:2-7. What can we learn about God's nature and attributes from these verses? How should knowing these attributes impact our behavior and attitude toward Him?

Class discussion may bring out the following:

Nahum 1:2—God is a jealous God who takes revenge on His enemies.

Nahum 1:3—God is slow to anger. God is great in power. God will not acquit the wicked.

Nahum 1:3-5—God's power is shown in and through nature.

Nahum 1:6—God's anger is like a fiery volcano.

Nahum 1:7—God is good. God is a stronghold in the day of trouble. God knows those who trust in Him.

Being aware of the attributes of God should cause us to view Him and His requirements with awe, utmost respect, and unquestioning obedience.

It might be interesting to discuss with your class some current-day examples of these timeless truths about the nature of God.

3. What were God's intentions for Assyria, and why? Nahum 1:9,14; 2:13; 3:19

These verses bring out that God was going to utterly destroy Assyria because the people were so vile and wicked.

Discuss with your class what this indicates about God's love and mercy. The point should be made that

-	
-	

those who reject God can eventually go beyond mercy. A just and holy God cannot see evil people flouting His law unendingly, and do nothing about it. His righteousness and justice require that evil be recompensed.

4. In chapter 3, Nahum spelled out a number of the specific sins of the Ninevites that were the reason for the judgment pronounced upon them. What were these sins? (Nahum 3:1, 4, 19) In what ways are the sins of the Ninevites evident in our society today?

Nahum 3:1—The verse implies that the people of Nineveh were violent, dishonest, and thieves, evidently making gain by exploiting and robbing others.

Nahum 3:4—The Assyrians worshiped idols and practiced witchcraft. Nineveh was like a harlot because her people served many gods instead of the one true God.

Nahum 3:19—The Assyrian nation had cruelly oppressed and exploited many of the weaker nations.

Class discussion of the second question should provide many current-day examples of violence, dishonesty, witchcraft, serving things other than the one true God, exploitation, etc.

5. Unlike Nahum's prophecy, which focused almost exclusively on the destruction of Nineveh, the prophecy of Zephaniah foretold the destruction of Judah (Zephaniah 1) and the Gentile nations surrounding Judah (Zephaniah 2). What Gentile nations were named? (Zepheniah 2:4-15) What do you think is indicated by the fact that nations to the west, east, south, and north of Judah were all mentioned?

A map of these areas at the time could be helpful in class.

Zephaniah 2:4-7 refers to the nation of Philistia. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron were four of the five major cities of Philistia. The Cherethites were a Philistine tribe that dwelt in the south of Canaan, the lowland along the coast of Philistia.

Zephaniah 2:8-10 refers to the nations of Moab and Ammon. These nations had historically maintained an adversarial relationship with Judah, often encroaching on the land of Judah.

Zephaniah 2:12 refers to the nation of Ethiopia. Ethiopia ruled Egypt from 720 to 654 B.C., shortly before the time of Zephaniah's prophecy.

Zephaniah 2:13-15 refers to the nation of Assyria. Thus, both Nahum and Zephaniah prophesied the destruction of Nineveh.

In response to the second question, it should be brought out that Zephaniah was indicating the universality of God's judgment throughout the world. You could follow up this thought by asking your class: How is God concerned with the actions of entire nations today?

-

6. In Zephaniah 1:12-13 the prophet said that God would punish those who were "settled on their lees," a phrase which meant they were at ease, or apathetic. Why was this attitude worthy of God's punishment?

The people condemned by the prophet in this verse were not concerned about the sinful condition of Judah, nor were they concerned about the coming judgment of God. They seemed to be concerned with, and trusting solely in, their own wealth and material possessions. Such a complacent attitude was worthy of punishment because it indicated that they had stopped trusting in God and believing His prophets.

What parallel might we see to this behavior in our society? What warning is there for us as we ponder God's anger at such an attitude of indifference?

7. Although Zephaniah's prophecy of destruction was much broader than Nahum's prophecy, it also held out more hope for the redemption of the Gentile nations. What does God promise in Zephaniah 2:3, 3:9, and 3:13?

In Zephaniah 2:3, God promised to spare all the meek and righteous in the earth. In Zephaniah 3:9, God promised to purify the nations through His time of judgment so that all may call upon the Name of the Lord and serve Him in unity. In Zephaniah 3:13, God promised that He will cleanse the remnant of Israel from all vestiges of sinful pride, and will cause them to dwell in perfect peace and security.

You may wish to broaden out the concept of God's promises by asking your students to name some promises God has made to us. Ask them: How do we know God's promises to us are true, and will be fulfilled?

8. Zephaniah 3:14 commands, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem." Why would the prophet ask the people of Judah to rejoice after pronouncing the coming wrath of God upon Judah and all the nations? (Zephaniah 3:15)

The people were to rejoice because although Zephaniah foretold the great and terrible Day of the Lord when God's wrath would be poured out to punish sin, he also foretold that God's punishment will purify a remnant of Israel who will serve God in righteousness. (Read Zephaniah 3:11-13.) God will then be in the midst of His people, and the land of Judah will be restored. (Read Zephaniah 3:15-20.)

Ask your class: Though we know a time of great and terrible trouble is coming upon this world, what reason do we have to rejoice?

9. What do the prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah teach us about the way we should live our lives?

Answers to this question may vary, but they should offer a springboard to wrapping up this lesson. The point should emerge that Nahum and Zephaniah's

prophecies reveal that God is displeased with dishonesty, violence, robbery, moral apathy, idol worship, self-complacency, and pride. God is pleased with those who trust in Him, who seek meekness and righteousness, and who are honest and upright. To escape God's judgment, we must purpose to listen to Him, accept His correction, obey Him, trust Him, and seek His guidance for our lives. As we do these things, we can be assured of a glorious future with Him, in spite of the calamities that will come upon this earth.

CONCLUSION

The prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah fulfilled in part when Nineveh was ransacked in year 612 B.C. and when Judah fell to Babylon year 586 B.C. However, the ominous world-w "day of the LORD" prophesied by Zephaniah, a	in the in the ide and the
universal worship of the Lord which is to follotime of trouble, has not yet come to pass.	ow this

DISCOVERY

inheritance by breaking their covenant with God.

Teacher's Guide



Call of the Prophet and First Pronouncements of Judgments

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Jeremiah 1:1 through 15:21	<u> </u>
9	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my	
mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put	
my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee	
over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down,	
to build, and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:9-10)	
BACKGROUND	
Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest who	
lived in Anathoth, which was a city of priests located three miles northeast of Jerusalem. At the time of	
his birth, Judah was ruled by its most wicked king,	
Manasseh. When Manasseh died, his son Amon con-	
tinued his idolatrous practices. Thus, Jeremiah grew	
to adulthood at a time when idolatry flourished in the	
land.	
In 640 B.C., Amon's own servants assassinated	
him. Josiah, Amon's son, became king and through	
godly counsel sought the Lord, purged the land of	
idolatry, repaired the Temple, and called his nation to repentance. Josiah led the nation into revival. It was	
during the thirteenth year of Josiah's good reign that	
Jeremiah was called to be a prophet.	
Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet included the time	
between the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise	
of Babylon. Judah's geographical position placed the	
country in the middle of traffic between the three great	
powers of that time: Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. The	
hostilities between these nations were used to magnify	
God's call to repentance and bring judgment on Judah for her sins.	
The Book of Jeremiah opens with his call from	
God to be a prophet, and a prophecy of destruction	
that would come on the nation of Judah from the north	
(Babylon). The first chapter closes with God's prom-	
ise to be with Jeremiah and to deliver him.	
Chapter 2 begins a series of discourses directed	
to Judah. Chapters 2 through 8 are an appraisal of	
Judah's apostasy, depravity, and rebellion, combined	
with prophesies of judgment—destruction and deso- lation for the people and land because of their failure	
to repent and return to serving God.	
Chapters 9 through 15 begin with Jeremiah deeply	
sorrowing in vain for a people who had totally aban-	
doned themselves to everything vile. God lamented	
for His chosen people who had utterly rejected their	

The Lord often commanded Jeremiah to use objects as symbols to graphically illustrate His message to the people. In chapter 13, the prophet was instructed to wear a linen girdle (like those worn by the priests to secure their outer clothing). Later, he was told to hide the girdle in a hole. When God told Jeremiah to retrieve it, it was marred and "profitable for nothing." God used this to demonstrate how good it was when Judah walked with Him. However, when the people turned to other gods, they became defiled and worse than the marred girdle.

All the pleadings of the Lord and intercession for the people by Jeremiah did not cause Judah to cry out to God for mercy. Chapter 15 ends with another promise from God that if they would return to Him, He would deliver them from their enemies.

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

1. How did Jeremiah respond to God calling him to be a prophet, and why? Jeremiah 1:4-6

He was reluctant, saying, "I cannot speak: for I am a child." Jeremiah did not feel qualified because of his age and inexperience. He was one year younger than King Josiah, who was twenty-one and had reigned for thirteen years.

Class discussion should bring out that since most people are saved when they are young, God's call into areas of service may also occur when they are quite young. God has a task for each of us, no matter what our age, although obviously the nature of our assigned responsibilities will evolve as we grow older and mature spiritually.

You may want to ask the class to share how old they were when they first experienced the call of God to some specific task for Him. Brother George Hughes used to testify that his first task was picking up the songbooks after services in the Portland tabernacle! Like Jeremiah and Josiah, God can lead us and help us accomplish His purpose in our lives as we seek His counsel and will, no matter what our age.

2. Seven verses in the first two chapters of the Book of Jeremiah contain the phrase "the word of the LORD." What is the significance of this statement in these Scriptures?

The seven verses where this phrase is repeated are Jeremiah 1:2,4,11,13 and Jeremiah 2:1,4,31.

Discussion should bring out that the words spoken and recorded were not Jeremiah's private views or his personal Scriptural interpretations. They were divinely inspired and sent to him, the person God chose to deliver them. Jeremiah was faithful in speaking what he had been commanded by God.

You may want to ask your class how they can know what "the word of the LORD" is and how it is received. Lead them to understand that the Bible is divinely inspired and we can be assured of what it says.

-
NOTES
NOTES

3. What two "evils" had the people of Judah committed, as recorded in Jeremiah 2:13? In your own words, explain the examples used in this verse. First, the people of Judah had "forsaken me the fountain of living waters." And secondly, they had "hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." The people of Judah had forsaken the living God to worship idols. The fountains of living water represent God's goodness, ever pure and available. Cisterns are empty wells dug to catch runoff water from rain. A broken cistern, especially in the arid Middle East, would not hold water for any length of time. This illustration describes the total lack of help, substance, and value in serving idols. As a follow-up, ask your class how people today turn to "broken cisterns" instead of the "fountain of living water." Some examples may include the use of alcohol or drugs. They might also bring out that, like broken cisterns, worldly pleasures and pursuits are vain attempts to bring contentment and a sense of fulfillment. Those who accept a Calvinistic approach (the teaching that living above sin is impossible) are certainly trusting in a broken cistern. Ultimately, anything that is substituted for the true worship of God would fall in that category. **4.** Why did God consider Judah's sin to be greater than the sin of Israel? Jeremiah 3:6-8 Judah had watched God's judgment executed against the Northern Kingdom, Israel, when it fell to the Assyrians and the people were taken into captivity. Through Jeremiah, God compared Israel's backsliding to a woman who had left her husband and become a prostitute. Israel continued this wicked lifestyle despite the repeated calls of her husband, God, to return. Israel's sister, Judah, was even more treacherous because she saw the depravity and final outcome of her sister, yet still rejected God's call to return to Him. *Ask the class to consider the responsibility they* have because of the Gospel they have received. Lead your class to understand that we are accountable for what has been entrusted to us. **5.** During Jeremiah's ministry, other prophets prophesied falsely, and the priests ruled over the people by following the directions of these false prophets. According to Jeremiah 5:31, why did the people tolerate this? *Jeremiah 5:31 reveals that the people of Judah* not only accepted the false teachings, but they loved them. The people had been in a backslidden condition

Jeremiah 5:31 reveals that the people of Judah not only accepted the false teachings, but they loved them. The people had been in a backslidden condition for so long that they became accustomed to the practice of worshiping idols and performing outward rituals rather than serving God from their hearts. In time, they no longer recognized the fact that God's blessing and favor had been removed from them.

Ask your class why they think some people today become satisfied with less than the truth. Discussion may bring out a variety of reasons. Your class may note that some people are satisfied with a form of religion because it is easier; rituals of worship make them feel good about themselves without requiring any personal sacrifice or commitment. Others may not want to relinquish control of their own lives to God, or are resistant to the concept of being accountable to their Creator. The point should emerge that when self is enthroned instead of God, there will be resistance to the truth.

6. During Josiah's reign, God told the people of Judah, through the Prophet Jeremiah, that He would allow them to continue to inhabit their country if they would "amend" their ways and their "doings." (See Jeremiah 7:1-3.) Define the word *amend*. What is meant by "amend your ways and your doings?"

Webster's defines amend as: "To correct; to rectify by expunging a mistake; as, to amend a law. To reform, by quitting bad habits; to make better in a moral sense; as, to amend our ways or our conduct." The Hebrew term means "make well; make them good." Amend differs from the word improve because it implies correcting something that was previously wrong; improve does not.

God was not calling Judah simply to improve and make some spiritual adjustments; the people needed to repent, and their repentance needed to be evidenced by their deeds. God wanted them to amend their ways in order to honor His law both outwardly and inwardly. They could no longer be hypocritical in their spiritual walk.

This message, recorded by Jeremiah, may have been given at the time when the Temple repairs were completed. The people thought that the Temple's presence in their city and their ritual practices would save them from their enemies. However, Jeremiah confronted both the people and the religious leaders, emphatically letting them know that although they worshiped God by rituals at the Temple, they were still sinful in their daily lives.

Ask your class for ways that we can maintain a sincere worship of God rather than allowing it to become just a routine or a ritual. Examples might include considering the sacredness of our location, and remembering that the motive is not to be seen, but to worship.

7. Jeremiah 9:23-24 indicates that the Jewish people trusted in their own wisdom, might, and riches. In our day, too, people tend to trust in human wisdom, power, and wealth. If we are sincerely trusting God, how will that trust be evidenced in our lives?

Class responses to this question will likely bring out that a true trust in God will be evidenced by the

fact that we commit our lives into His Hands. We strive to obey Him in all areas of life. We look to Him for guidance in decisions, and appeal to Him for comfort and help in time of need. We have an assurance that He is in control, and even in times of adversity or trial, we have a deep settled peace that keeps us going forward. **8.** Why did God lament over forsaking His house and

His heritage? Jeremiah 12:7-13

God lamented because the Southern Kingdom had broken the covenant and had refused His call to repentance. Thus, God had determined to send judgment on the people. He inspired the prophet to use several different word pictures to describe the plight of Israel: a lion viciously turned against its Maker, a bird about to be attacked, and a vineyard that had been trampled and left in ruins. Judah's rebellious response to God's pleadings to return to Him caused God to ultimately allow other countries—instruments of His divine judgment—to brutally take away the remaining land that had been given to the Children of Israel for an inheritance.

Remind your class that in this passage it was God lamenting, not the Prophet Jeremiah. Ask your class to give examples of what causes God to grieve today as He looks on His creation.

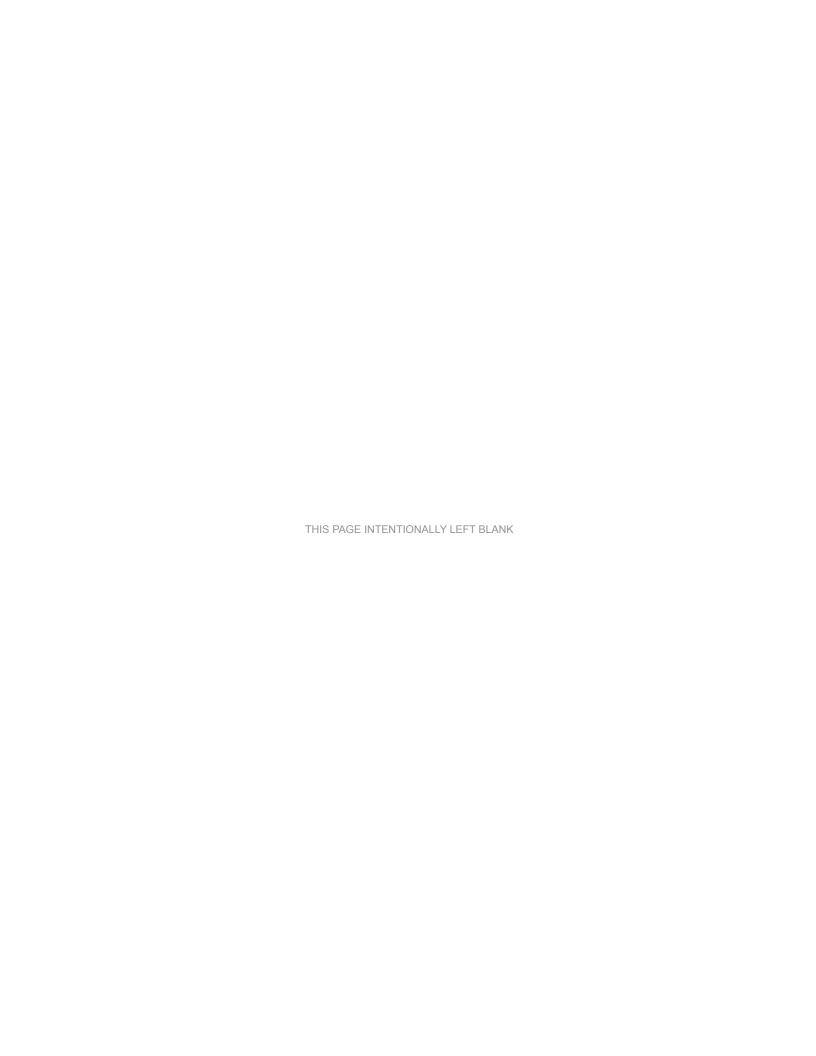
9. The prophet lived through an evil and difficult time in his country's history, and in Jeremiah 15:10, he cried out in bitter anguish of soul, feeling himself pitted against the whole world. What promise was given to him in Jeremiah 15:11? What promises give us encouragement as we face difficulties in our lives?

The promise was, "It shall be well with thy remnant." The Lord was promising the prophet that the enemy (Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar) would treat him well at the time when the rest of the nation would be taken into captivity. (This promise was fulfilled in Jeremiah 39:11.) As you discuss this question, you may wish to refer to God's promise to Jeremiah when He called him to be a prophet (see Jeremiah 1:17-19).

The Lord has promised us that He will never leave us or forsake us. Remind your class that Jeremiah's account gives us assurance of the validity of God's promises. Lead the class to understand that even if we never have another day without difficulty in this life, as Christians, we have the hope and promise of eternal life.

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah was given the enormous task of calling an idolatrous nation back to God, knowing the people would not respond favorably. He witnessed firsthand God's longsuffering and love for His people as He pled with them to repent. We can draw comfort in knowing that we, like Jeremiah, serve a loving and merciful God.



Temple, was so enraged at Jeremiah's words that he had the prophet beaten and put in stocks until the next day. That night God met with Jeremiah and gave him



The Continued Sermons of the Prophet

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Jeremiah 16:1 through 25:38	V. EITEIT
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:6)	
BACKGROUND	
As Jeremiah gave the six discourses recorded in these ten chapters, he faced many challenges. Not only were the messages delivered to an unresponsive and rebellious people, but he also dealt with personal agony, pain, and discouragement. The domestic lives of the prophets were often	
used by God as examples to the people. Chapter 16 opens with several of God's commandments to the	
prophet regarding aspects of his personal life. Obedience brought loneliness, and Jeremiah became a social	
In chapter 17, the prophet described Judah's sins, and presented a series of meditations built around the theme of the heart. After appealing to God as his place of refuge, the prophet warned the people that disregard for the Sabbath was a sign of their rebellious and	
idolatrous spirit. Chapter 18 begins a three-chapter discourse centered on the sovereignty of God. Jeremiah was com-	
manded to go to the potter's house for a spiritual	
lesson. God's message was that if the people would repent, He would deliver them. However, the rejec-	
tion of the prophet's message was immediate, and the people formed a conspiracy against Jeremiah. Their hostility drove the prophet to the Lord, where	
he poured out his soul in what some writers describe as the bitterest prayer for vengeance recorded in the	
whole book. In chapter 19, Jeremiah was commanded to shatter	
an earthen bottle to demonstrate the coming judgment	
and destruction. This was a sign that Jerusalem and its people would be broken because they had forsaken	
God, worshiped idols, desecrated the Temple, murdered the innocent, and offered their children to altar	
fires dedicated to Baal. The reaction to Jeremiah's pronouncement is re-	
corded in chapter 20. Pashur, chief governor of the	

a special message and a new name for Pashur— Magormissabib, which meant "terror on every side." This was descriptive of the fear that would ultimately overtake Judah.

In chapters 21 and 22, the prophet gave a discourse directed against Judah's rulers, addressing one king after another with dire pronouncements. In chapter 23, he denounced the false prophets whom he likened to shepherds that scattered the sheep. In verses 5 through 8 of this chapter, he contrasted the corrupt leaders of that day with the coming Messiah, giving one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

The prophet was commanded to offer another visual sign through the two baskets of figs, a vision described in chapter 24. The exiles in Babylon, who would receive God's blessing, were represented by the good figs, while the rotten figs portrayed those who would remain with Zedekiah in Jerusalem.

The message contained in chapter 25 was a prediction of the Babylonian invasion and the captivity of the people of Judah.

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

1. What three otherwise acceptable activities did God forbid Jeremiah from participating in? (Jeremiah 16:2,5,8) What was the spiritual message portrayed by each restriction?

The prophet was instructed not to marry and have a family, not to mourn for the dead, and not to attend the ceremonial feasts.

By not marrying and having a family, Jeremiah was to be a living symbol of the coming judgment. His single and childless state provided a solemn warning to rebellious Judah that the children born into homes of that day would suffer terribly and die gruesome deaths.

He was not to mourn for the dead, as a sign that God had withdrawn His mercy and comfort from Judah. The coming judgment would be so terrible that the people would be unable to express their grief.

He was instructed not to attend the feasts of the people, portraying that there was no longer any cause for rejoicing. His absence also pictured the fact that God had long been unwelcome in the midst of the people, so His representative would also be absent from any time of festivity or gladness.

2. Jeremiah used the metaphors of fishing and hunting (Jeremiah 16:16-18) to describe how God would violently punish the iniquity of His people. However, in the same pronouncement, the prophet gave a ray of hope. What was Jeremiah's message of condolence? Jeremiah 16:14-15

Jeremiah's message of comfort was that even though the people had been so stubborn and rebellious, God would still show mercy. The exiles would

-		
NOTES	 	
NOTES		
-		
-		

one day return to their land, and this return would be compared to the Exodus from Egypt. Perhaps some in your class would be willing to share personal experiences of times when God gave them a message of comfort in a time of deep distress. In conclusion, you could point out that all of us have been recipients of a message of consolation—the knowledge of our opportunity to receive salvation through the Blood of Jesus Christ. **3.** Jeremiah faithfully and courageously delivered his messages about Judah's sins, yet the people only hardened their hearts and stubbornly resisted God's truth. Name at least three sins that the prophet pointed out to the people in Jeremiah 17. *The sins of the people were:* • *Idolatry (verses 1-4). Even though God's holy* law should have been written on their hearts, they turned to other gods. • Lack of trust (verses 5-10). The leaders of Judah trusted their political allies and leaned on the arm of flesh. Consequently, they made unwise decisions and plunged the nation into • Greed (verse 11). The rich exploited the poor and became richer. • Forsaking the Lord (verses 12-13). God had not forsaken His people but they had forsaken Him. • Rejecting God's servant (verses 14-18). The people called Jeremiah a false prophet and continually asked when his predictions would come true. • Profaning the Sabbath (verses 19-27). This was the day God had given to the Israelites as a special token of their relationship with Him. It was to be a day of rest for the people, and a time when they were to worship Him. Breaking the Sabbath revealed a rebellious spirit. You might wish to follow up this question by pointing out that although the people did not accept Jeremiah or his message. God still honored him. Ask your class: How should we measure success? From a human standpoint, Jeremiah's ministry was a failure, but from God's perspective he was an outstanding success. We need more Jeremiahs in the world today who will denounce sin! For those who do, there is a price to pay but a crown to win. **4.** God had a special message for Jeremiah as he viewed the potter molding the clay. What two sce-

The first scenario presented was that if God threatened to judge a nation and the people repented, then He would not send the judgment. The second scenario was the opposite: If God promised to bless a

narios did the Lord present in Jeremiah 18:7-10? How

could we apply these lessons today?

nation, and the people did evil, then He would withhold the blessing and send judgment instead. The point made at the potter's house was that just as the potter had power over the clay, God has sovereign freedom in His actions.

As your class discusses the second question, the point should be made that every nation is made up of individuals, and every individual has the choice to receive God's Word or reject it. Unlike the clay on the potter's wheel, we have the ability to resist. Discuss with the class the different "hands" God uses to mold us: godly parents, siblings, teachers, ministers, writers, etc. We can receive their messages or resist them. If we surrender, we surrender to His sovereignty, which is a blessing; if we resist, then we are fighting against God.

5. In Jeremiah 19:10, the prophet was instructed to go once again to the potter's house, this time to acquire an earthen bottle. What was he told to do with the bottle and what did his action illustrate? Jeremiah 19:10-13

Jeremiah took the bottle and broke it in the presence of the elders of the people and the priests. His action illustrated the impending disaster. As the bottle was smashed and could not be repaired, the idolatry-ridden nation would be utterly destroyed.

6. The assistant to the high priest, Pashur, was angered by Jeremiah's words, so he had Jeremiah arrested, beaten, and put into stocks until the next day. How would you summarize Jeremiah's lament, as recorded in Jeremiah 20:7-16? When difficult circumstances come our way, how should we respond?

After facing such extreme persecution for his obedience to God, Jeremiah initially resolved to quit being a prophet and not even mention the Lord's name again. However, the message of the Lord burned within him as a fire in his bones, and he could not hold it back. In verse 11, the focus of Jeremiah's thoughts shifted to the greatness of God. His spirits rose and his faith took hold of God as he remembered that God sees the heart. Then he seemed to revert to despair and cursed the day of his birth.

Class discussion should bring out that when we face difficult circumstances, there is a natural ebb and flow of our human emotions. We can learn from Jeremiah that it is all right to pour out these emotions before the Lord. It will also be helpful to note that the direction Jeremiah looked made all the difference in his attitude. When he praised God and focused on the coming deliverance, his heart was uplifted. Your class should be able to enumerate other ways in which we can best respond when we face discouraging circumstances. These may include: meditate on God's promises, sing a hymn, quote Scripture, reflect on past victories, pray for God's help and strength, make a

-	

written list of the results of being discouraged and encouraged, do something for someone else.

7. When King Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah to inquire whether God would grant deliverance from the king of Babylon, one could assume that a return to God was imminent. Instead of offering hope, however, the prophet made three pronouncements—one to King Zedekiah (chapter 21 verses 3-7), one to the people (verses 8-10), and another to the house of David (verses 11-14). What were these pronouncements?

The message to King Zedekiah—The Lord was angry, furious, and of great wrath toward His own

The message to King Zedekiah—The Lord was angry, furious, and of great wrath toward His own people. Not only would He refuse to deliver the city from the enemy, but He would side with the enemy and bring Jerusalem to defeat. The king and the people would be given over into the hands of their enemies, who would show them no mercy.

The message to the people—A choice was set before them. Those who remained in the city would die by sword, famine, and pestilence. However, those who surrendered to the king of Babylon would be spared.

The message to the house of David—God reminded the kings of David's dynasty of their responsibility to execute judgment and to uphold the rights of the weak and helpless. He warned them that His fury would be unleashed upon them if they failed to reign with righteousness and justice.

Follow-up discussion could focus on the great mercy of God. Repeatedly, He offered the rebellious people of Judah opportunities to amend their ways and turn back to Him. Ask your class how God extends mercy to people today. What are some parallels between the response of the people of Judah and the response of many in our society? Answers will likely include the thought that just as Judah refused to heed the warnings of the prophet, many today turn a deaf ear to God's warnings of eventual judgment. Today, as in Jeremiah's day, the response may come in the form of rejection of the messenger, persecution, defamatory remarks, ridicule of the message, etc.

8. Chapter 22 relates the fate of four wicked kings: Zedekiah (verses 1-9); Jehoahaz, referred to here as Shallum (verses 10-12); Jehoiakim (verses 13-23); and Jehoiachin (verses 24-28). After Jeremiah had denounced all the leaders for the ruthless way they treated the helpless people, he introduced a King who would save Judah (see Jeremiah 23:5-8). Who was this King, and how would He reign?

The King (Jesus Christ) will be righteous and will rule justly, in contrast to the rulers of Jeremiah's day who were exceedingly corrupt. The Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel will be reunited into one nation, and the people will live in peace and prosperity. This promise must have helped sustain the people during their difficult days of captivity.

		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_
		_

Point out to your group of students that this passage is considered by Bible scholars to be one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. The word translated branch in this passage has the meaning of "shoot" or "sprout." The imagery is that of the stump of a tree suddenly bursting forth with new life, depicting the fact that the Davidic monarchy will ultimately live again when Christ, the seed of David, takes His place as the Messianic King.

9. In chapter 24, God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket contained very good figs and the other "naughty," or rotten figs. What was the meaning of this vision?

The two baskets represented two different results from the same event. The people of Judah were to be sent into Babylonian exile. The good figs represented the exiles taken to Babylon. God promised to care for them, work in their hearts, and one day bring them back to their land. He would use the captivity to refine the exiles.

The bad figs represented those who remained in the land or fled to Egypt. These people would not profit from the exile, but instead would become bitter and rotten from the same event.

You might point out to your students that there were just two baskets—all the figs were either good figs or rotten figs. There was no middle ground. Times of trial and difficult circumstances will come to all. Do we let those sufferings refine us, making us good and usable to God? Or do we resist the trials that come our way, becoming bitter and resentful, and thus unusable to God? What steps can we take to make sure we respond as "good figs" in our times of trial?

10. After hearing Jeremiah's message for twenty-three years, the leaders and common people of Judah had the same response: resistance and rebellion. What did Jeremiah say would be the result? Jeremiah 25:11-14

Judah would be taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and this captivity would last for seventy years. At the conclusion of the seventy years, God would punish Nebuchadnezzar by allowing him to be defeated by his enemies. (The fulfillment of this prophecy is described in Daniel 5, when Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and slew the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar.)

CONCLUSION

Through the words of Jeremiah and other prophets, God had given His people repeated opportunities to admit their guilt and repent, but they refused. At this point in Judah's history, it was too late.

-	
-	
-	



The Conflicts of the Prophet

after seventy years of captivity. This event took place shortly after Daniel was delivered from the lion's den

in 537 B.C.

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Jeremiah 26:1 through 29:32	OI EIVEN
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." (Jeremiah 29:11)	
BACKGROUND	
It was common for Hebrew writers of this era to arrange the record of historical events under a theme, rather than in chronological sequence. These chapters are a collection of incidents and oracles from different periods of Jeremiah's life, and show the reactions of the false prophets, the people, and leaders during Jeremiah's ministry. The leaders of Judah resisted the prophesies of Jeremiah because he brought bad news to them. His bitterest foes were the religious leaders of the nation. God reminded Jeremiah that he must preach the entire message from God, and to "diminish not a word" (Jeremiah 26:2). It would have been much easier for Jeremiah to soften his pronouncements. The pure message from God made Jeremiah sound like a traitor to Judah, for God had told the prophet to warn the people to submit to King Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon. God had ordained that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Judah as judgment for sin. False prophets were telling the leaders of Judah to resist captivity, and to join with other nations to	
fight against Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 26 records	
how Jeremiah's warning made the leaders of Judah so angry that they apprehended the prophet with the intent of killing him. However, certain of the elders	
intent of killing him. However, certain of the elders intervened, and after the rehearsal of two historical	
examples, Jeremiah was spared. In chapter 27, the prophet continued to urge the	
people to submit to Babylon. At God's instruction, he	
used a yoke to portray the God-ordained captivity of	
Judah and her allies by Nebuchadnezzar. In chapter	
28, the false prophet Hananiah contradicted Jeremiah's words. However, God led Jeremiah to tell Hananiah that because he had taught rebellion against the Lord, he would die. Two months later, this prophecy was	
fulfilled—another demonstration of God's judgment.	
In the last chapter of our lesson, Jeremiah prophesied that God would bring the exiles back to Jerusalem	

Jeremiah was a faithful prophet. Instead of preaching what the people wanted to hear, he preached the truth, offering the only hope for Judah. The false prophets offered temporary comfort, with the consequence of long-term punishment. Jeremiah offered temporary correction but long-term benefit. Tragically, the people failed to heed Jeremiah's warning.

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

1. The first six verses of our text begin a message the

1. The first six verses of our text begin a message the Prophet Jeremiah was instructed to deliver to King Jehoiakim of Judah. What was the response to this message? (Jeremiah 26:7-9) What are some ways people today respond to warnings from God's Word?

The people of Judah were angry with Jeremiah for preaching the truth to them, and they seized the prophet, intending to put him to death.

People today respond in various ways to the warnings of God's Word. Your class may bring out that some respond by ignoring the message. Others fight actively against it by trying to mock or discredit it. They may even persecute the messenger, as happened in Jeremiah's day. However, some respond by coming under conviction, and at times that conviction will lead to repentance.

As Christians who have responded to the call of God to repentance, there will be times when the Word of God will reveal spiritual ground we need to cover. When we read God's Word, listen to the preacher or Sunday school teacher, or converse with our parents or others in spiritual authority over us, it is important that we have hearts that are open to the whole truth, even if it is painful or challenging. Ask your class: What will be the indicators if our hearts truly are teachable and open to correction and instruction from the Word of God? Discussion will bring out such thoughts as a lack of resistance, a willingness to hear, and most importantly, obedient follow-through.

2. In Jeremiah 26:18-24, the elders relayed historical accounts of two prophets of God. A number of years before, Micah had prophesied a similar message of destruction. Instead of harming Micah, King Hezekiah had called upon God for help and judgment was withheld. However, God's Prophet Urijah prophesied destruction and he was put to death. What can we learn from these two accounts?

Class response should bring out that we may not always obtain earthly deliverance from our persecution or trouble. In some cases God chooses to deliver. In other cases, His people will obtain a martyr's crown. We don't understand God's ways, but we do know that He works all things for good to His chosen people. We can have peace, because the Lord will be with us in trouble or in prosperity, and whether we live or die. All that matters is that we are in His Hands.

NOTES		

3. In Jeremiah 27:2-3, what did God tell Jeremiah to do as an object lesson for the people? What did his actions signify? Jeremiah 27:8,11 God told Jeremiah to make yokes, which were wooden frames used to hitch teams of animals to plows. He was to place a yoke upon his own neck, and to send one to each of the kings God named. The yokes signified the bondage that Judah and the other kingdoms, allies of Judah, would be under from Babylon. They were warned that they should submit to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. The nations that resisted would be punished by the sword, famine, and pestilence until they were consumed. The nations that submitted were promised life. You could amplify this point by asking your class for examples of object lessons God has used in their own lives or in the lives of others. You should be able to conclude that God is endlessly creative in the means by which He teaches us the lessons we need to learn. **4.** God alone sets up and brings down those in authority. In Jeremiah 27:5-7, He made it plain that He had ordained for Nebuchadnezzar to rule over Judah, and instructed the people to submit to his authority. In what ways should we submit to those God has placed in authority over us? God expects us to honor those who have authority over us. That is not to say we cannot disagree or oppose evil practices of governmental leaders in a respectful manner. However, we should show respect for the office, even if we do not agree with those who hold that office. Honor should also be given to parents, teachers, pastors, and other non-political leaders. Ask your class to mention specific ways that respect and honor should be shown. Some possibilities would be: speak about them in a respectful manner, pray for them, be mannerly, avoid criticism, be attentive, and be fair. **5.** The false prophet Hananiah resisted Jeremiah's proclamation regarding Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon. He deceitfully told the priests and the people that the yoke of the king of Babylon would be broken, and that the exiles would return within just two years. What did Jeremiah say would happen to Hananiah as a result and why? Jeremiah 28:16-17 Jeremiah told Hananiah that because he had taught rebellion against the Lord, and had made the people to trust in a lie, he would die within that year. This prophecy came to pass two months later. Ask your students how we can be sure a message is truly from God. Class discussion should bring out

several guidelines. These may include the following:
We need to compare the message to Scripture.
A message from God will always align with His

Word.

- We must consider the credibility of the messenger. Does his or her life bear witness to a connection with God?
- Other godly people, especially those in authority over us, will concur.
- Providential circumstances will confirm the message. Ultimately, there will be open doors rather than closed doors.
- If we have any doubt, we can ask God for additional confirmation. He will be faithful to make Himself plain to us, if our hearts are open and honest.
- **6.** What specific commands did God tell Jeremiah to put in his letter to those in exile? (Jeremiah 29:4-6) How would these commands apply to us?

The exiles were commanded to build houses and live in them, to plant crops and eat from them, to marry and have children, and to pray for the peace of their new country.

God tells us to occupy until He comes. Just as the people of Judah were in a strange country, we are also pilgrims. We are to live, work, marry, have children, and pray for the peace of our land. However, just as the Jews kept their identity, we recognize that we are citizens of God's Kingdom, and we want to maintain our identity as Christians in an ungodly world.

7. In Jeremiah 29:11, God offered a message of hope, directing the prophet to announce that He had good plans for Israel and Judah, who would one day seek Him. What were God's good plans for Judah? How can we apply that promise in our lives? Jeremiah 29:10-14

God said that after seventy years, Judah's captivity would be ended and the exiles would be restored to their homeland. You may wish to point out that this is one of those prophecies which has both a short-term and long-term fulfillment. In the end times, God will gather the Jewish people "from all the nations" (verse 14). At that time, not only will they return to their home in Jerusalem, but they will return home to the Lord, who will rule and reign over them and all the world in righteousness.

God's love and mercy toward Judah help us to understand that He also longs to bless us. He has a plan for each of our lives, and it is a very good plan. There is a wonderful future for us as we follow it. Class discussion should bring out that this does not mean that we will never experience pain, sorrow, or trials. Those are a part of life, but we have the hope of Heaven beyond this life. As we follow God to the best of our ability, and obey Him, we can be assured that God will see us through to a glorious eternity with Him.

8. There is a key for answered prayer in Jeremiah 29:13. How do we search for the Lord with all of our hearts? What will happen as a result?

Responses may include: Pray earnestly, study God's Word, seek His will in our lives, do His will, mind the checks of the Holy Spirit, gather often in His House, keep a consecrated life.

When we search for the Lord with all our hearts, He will be found of us, and all His promises will be ours.

As God instructed Jeremiah to not deviate from

CONCLUSION

His words in spite of the opposition he faced, we also must never diminish or ignore what God has instructed us to do. It may not be easy or popular, but if we are
faithful, we will receive God's richest blessing.
-

suffering?



The Consolations of the Prophet

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS
Jeremiah 30:1 through 33:26
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION
"For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it." (Jeremiah 30:3)
BACKGROUND
In this lesson's text, the sequence of messages telling of impending destruction is interrupted. These four chapters, a message of comfort and future hope, are frequently called "The Book of Consolation" by Bible scholars. Although Jeremiah typically announced judgment and punishment for the sins of the Jewish people, in these chapters he proclaimed God's promise of restoration. God revealed through the prophet that the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah would one day return to their land and be reunited. Although chapters 30 and 31 are not dated, it is probable that Jeremiah wrote some of this prophecy of restoration either while Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians or shortly thereafter. Chapters 32 and 33 took place during the siege—the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, while Jeremiah was imprisoned in the court of the guard. Although the Jews would shortly be led into captivity by the Chaldeans, God wanted the people of Judah to know that He still loved them and cared for them. In a merciful revelation of events to come, the Lord foretold a future time of peace and prosperity. Most commentators agree that the prophecies of Jeremiah 30-33 refer not only to the restoration of Jerusalem after the seventy years of captivity, but also to the regathering of the Jews from all the nations in the end times. Therefore, besides bringing hope to the Jews of Jeremiah's time, these chapters should encourage all those who are looking for the coming of the Lord. In this "Book of Consolation," Christians can find promises of the coming of their King and Priest, Jesus Christ.
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS
1. According to Jeremiah 30:14-15 and Jeremiah 32:28-35, why was God allowing His people to be taken into captivity and to experience such pain and

God was allowing the Jews to experience the consequences of their sins. They had refused to listen to His instruction, and had worshiped idols and committed abominations. This would be an appropriate time to point out to your students that God is a just God, and sin has consequences. However, God is also merciful. Your group may be able to offer examples of times when suffering the consequences of sin led people to repent and turn back to God.

2. Even as the people of Judah were being punished for their sins by God through the Chaldeans, God sent Jeremiah to encourage their hearts. Name at least four aspects of Jeremiah's prophetical utterance in chapter 30 that would have brought encouragement to the people.

Your group should have no difficulty in generating a lengthy list of the specific encouragements listed in this chapter. They will include:

- Verses 3, 10, and 18—The people will be released from captivity and return to their land.
- Verse 8—Their yoke and bonds will be broken.
- Verse 9—They will serve the Lord once more.
- Verse10—They will enjoy rest, quietness, and freedom from fear.
- Versell—A remnant will be spared.
- Verse 17—Israel's incurable wounds will be healed.
- Verse 18—Jerusalem will be rebuilt.
- Verse 19—The people will rejoice. They will be multiplied, and given honor.
- Verse 20—Those who oppress them will be punished.
- Verses 21—They will be governed by One of their own, their Messiah.
- Verse 22—They will be acknowledged as God's people.

Point out to your class that this series of prophetical promises, like many others recorded in Scripture, had both a near and a far-reaching meaning. Some commentators liken these dual prophecies to looking at a range of mountain peaks. From a distance, the ridges look as if they are adjacent, but actually, they may be many miles apart. In this chapter, the prophet described both near and far events as if they would all happen soon.

As we consider these prophecies in the light of the current upheaval in the Middle East, we can get a sense of the hope that must have sprung up in the hearts of the Jewish people as they heard the prophet's words. It is yet unclear how the references to end time events will evolve, but we know that they will! To emphasize this point, it might be interesting to collect a few recent headlines from that region of the world

from your daily newspaper or the internet, and discuss what a contrast those headlines present to the beautiful promises listed in these verses.

3. In chapter 31, God continued the theme of the glorious days ahead for Israel and Judah by describing a future time of dancing (verses 4 and 13), planting (verses 5 and 28), and singing (verses 7 and 12). However, in Jeremiah 31:2, God reminded them of an incident from their past. Why would the historical reference in this verse be of encouragement to the Jews?

This verse seems to be a reference to the forty years of wandering in the wilderness after the Children of Israel refused to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. Because of their unbelief and disobedience, God ordained that all those who were twenty years of age and older would bleach their bones in the wilderness. However, He still loved His people with an "everlasting love" (verse 3). Their children found grace in the eyes of the Lord and were allowed entry into the Promised Land. Similarly, although the people of Judah would fall to the Chaldeans, their descendants would be allowed to return to their homeland in the future. That message was one of encouragement in the dark days of the moment.

Ask your class: How does God use past trials and victories to encourage us? The point should emerge that as we reflect on God's presence with us in days gone by (even in times of discipline and correction), it reassures us that He will continue to be with us in our present circumstances and into the future.

4. Jeremiah was careful to repudiate the proverb, "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29-30). What is the meaning of this proverb, and why does God reject it?

The proverb means that children suffer for the actions of their fathers. The Jews used this proverb, which is also alluded to in Ezekiel 18:2-3, to avoid taking responsibility for their own sins. While we realize that evil parents can give their children scars and issues to deal with, these people claimed that they were being punished for the sins of their predecessors. They asserted that they had done nothing to deserve God's wrath. God rejected this proverb because He does not want us to blame others for our own sins.

You may wish to follow up this question by asking your class how people today fail to take responsibility for their sins. They may bring up such thoughts as: refusing to acknowledge that a particular behavior is sinful, adopting a "victim mentality," justifying or making excuses for their sins, ignoring and/or rejecting any responsibility toward God, etc.

5. In Jeremiah 31:31, God announced through the prophet that the day would come when He would institute a new covenant with His people. What is the

<u> </u>

core difference between the old Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant? Jeremiah 31:32-34

The core difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that the new one is a personal relationship with God himself, in which His

The core difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that the new one is a personal relationship with God himself, in which His law is in the inward parts and written in the hearts of His people. Thus, the covenant between God and His people would move from external (written on tablets) to internal (a change of will, heart, and conscience). The law would no longer be one of prescribed observances and requirements, but would instead become an intrinsic part of the nature of God's chosen people.

Ask your class: How does this covenant promise relate to us today? Discussion should bring out that we have the privilege of entering into this covenant with God Himself. We have the opportunity to repent, turn our backs on sin, and receive forgiveness through the shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

6. In Jeremiah 32:6-15, God told Jeremiah that his cousin Hanameel would come and ask him to buy land in Anathoth, an area that had already been seized by the Chaldeans. Given that Jeremiah was in prison and that he knew the captivity would last for seventy years, the command on the surface would seem illogical. How did Jeremiah receive assurance that he was supposed to do as Hanameel suggested?

God revealed ahead of time to Jeremiah that Hanameel would come with this unusual request. The day Hanameel came and spoke the words just as God had said he would, Jeremiah had the assurance he needed that this was indeed an assignment from God. Jeremiah's obedience concretely demonstrated his faith that God would restore the land and rebuild Jerusalem.

It might be interesting to note to your class that Jeremiah had been serving God in a prophetic ministry for almost forty years at this point, and yet he seemingly needed confirmation of this assignment. Ask your class: How do you feel when God asks you to take a step of faith? In what ways has God reassured you in those times? Perhaps some of your students would tell examples of times when they stepped out in faith, and describe the thoughts and feelings they experienced then. The point should be made that God understands we are human. If our hearts are open and honest toward Him, however, He will not fail to provide the reassurance and strength that we need to follow Him in obedience.

7. Jeremiah stepped out in obedience to God and purchased the occupied field. However, he still recognized how illogical the purchase was, so he prayed to God (Jeremiah 32:16-25) and received an assurance (Jeremiah 32:27-44). Review this prayer communication between Jeremiah and God. What did Jeremiah do right in his prayer? How did God's answer encourage Jeremiah?

-	
-	
-	

Jeremiah began his prayer affirming his confidence in God's power (verse 17). He continued with a rehearsal of God's mighty deeds, interwoven with praise and thanksgiving. He did not charge God foolishly. He did not demand an explanation. Instead, he laid out the facts as he understood them before the Lord and waited for God's reply.

God replied by focusing on the point Jeremiah had started with—that He was the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth. He then asked Jeremiah the question, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" He went on to describe the destruction and the reason for it (verses 28-36). He verified in verse 42 that reconstruction would occur. Finally, He gave Jeremiah the understanding that he had prayed for, explaining that the transactions of real estate exchange would once more be established in Israel.

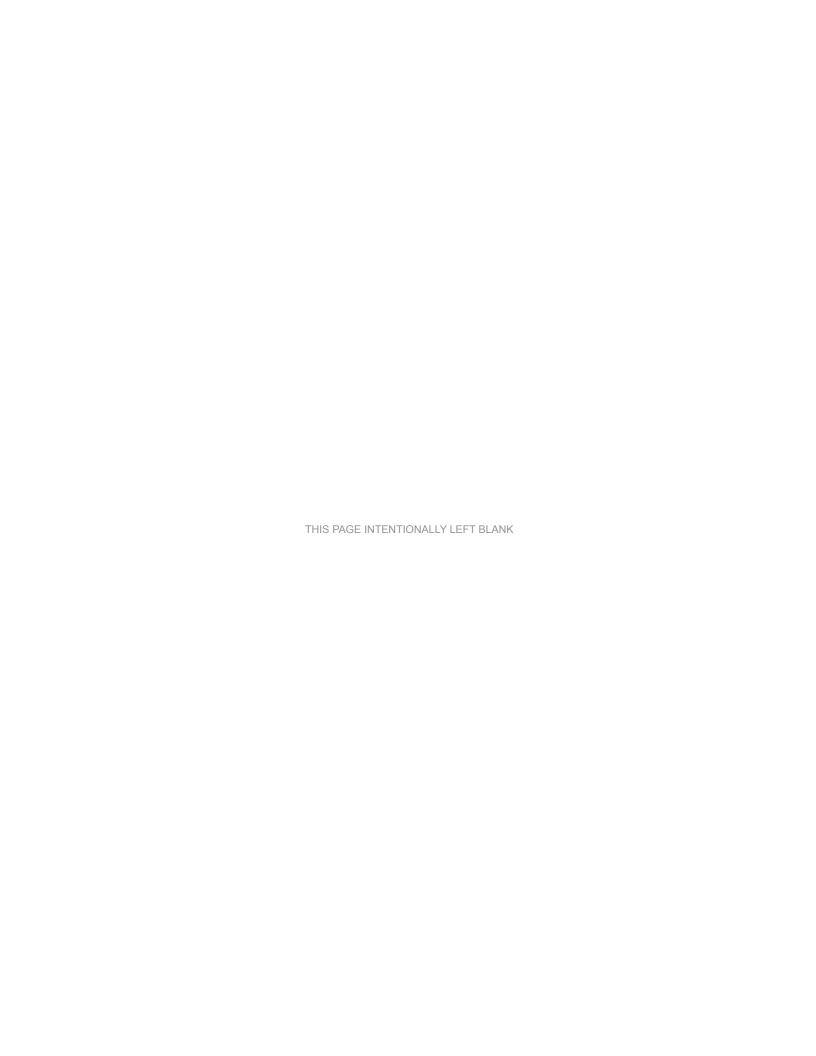
8. In Jeremiah 33, God promised to make Jesus Christ the King and Priest of Israel (verses 15-18). In verses 20-21, what assurance did He offer of this covenant?

God said that His promise was as sure as the covenant of day and night. In other words, if we believe the sun will rise tomorrow morning and set tomorrow night, then we can believe that God will place his Son upon the throne of David.

Wrap up your lesson by focusing on the assurance we have when we build our spiritual lives upon the promises of the Word of God. Class members can no doubt offer many inspiring examples of promises God has made real in their personal lives.

CONCLUSION

Even as God fulfilled His promise of punishment, He consoled His people with a promise of restoration and prosperity. We, too, can be assured that God will do what He says He will do. He is the Lord, the God of all flesh—is there any thing too hard for Him?



Teacher's Guide



The Circumstances of the Prophet

their forefather with the unfaithfulness of Judah to the

Lord.

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Jeremiah 34:1 through 45:5	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." (Jeremiah 36:3)	
BACKGROUND	
Following the message of consolation contained in chapters 30-33, the Book of Jeremiah resumes the biographical narrative of the prophet. Proclamations are woven around the circumstances of the prophet during a span of time from approximately 607 B.C. to 586 B.C. This text covers Jeremiah's experiences just prior to the fall of Jerusalem (chapters 34-36), during the fall (chapters 37-39), and after the fall (chapters 40-45), although events are not presented in a strictly chronological order. Judah had continued in a state of rebellion against God, with idolatry and heathen practices taking place in the land in spite of repeated warnings from God's prophets. God had been faithful and patient with His people, but the time for mercy had expired. The city of Jerusalem had twice been invaded by the Chaldean army, and a majority of the people had been taken captive to Babylon, along with many of the Temple treasures. As these chapters begin, the final collapse of the nation of Judah was imminent. The last two fortified cities of Judah, Lachish and Azekah, were about to fall (Jeremiah 34:7). The terrible penalty for sin that the prophet Jeremiah had foretold was coming	
upon the people.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Chapter 35 gives an account of the Rechabites, a nomadic people related to the Kenites and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. More than two hundred years earlier, their ancestor Jonadab had commanded his sons to stay away from any type of wine. How did	
God tell Jeremiah to test the Rechabites's resolve to keep that instruction? How did they respond to this test? Jeremiah 35:2, 5-6	
God told Jeremiah to test the Rechabites by of- fering them strong drink. They refused to partake, citing Jonadab's commandment. God contrasted the Rechabites' steadfastness toward the commandment of	

As a class, you might wish to compile a list of contrasts between the Rechabites and disobedient Judah. Following are some points that could be noted.

- The Rechabites were given a commandment once, and faithfully obeyed it. The people of Judah were repeatedly reminded of God's commands, and repeatedly disobeyed.
- The Rechabites were given instruction by their earthly father. The people of Judah were commanded by the God of all creation.
- Jonadab's instruction was given two hundred years earlier. God's pleading with Judah was current.
- The Rechabites may not have suffered many repercussions if they had neglected their fore-father's wishes. To neglect God's command has eternal consequences.

Point out to your class that the commandment given to the Rechabites could have been considered a small thing, but God was aware of it and took note of their faithfulness. We can be sure that God is just as keenly aware of the "small" areas in our lives where we have purposed to be faithful to Him.

2. In Chapter 36, God commanded Jeremiah to write down all the prophetic messages he had given, thus providing Judah with a written document that would reinforce his spoken words. In obedience, he dictated his pronouncements, and these were transcribed by Baruch, his faithful scribe. When King Jehoiakim heard the words of the book, he cut up the scroll and burned it. Yet he could not destroy God's Word and God commanded Jeremiah to rewrite his words (see Jeremiah 36:27-28). What are some ways people may try to nullify or destroy God's Word today?

Some people ignore the Word of God. Others try to twist the Scriptures to fit their own philosophies. They may declare it to be a good book, but deny its divine inspiration. They may regard it as just another book about a religion. However they frame their rejection, likely the greatest way people try to do away with God's Word is to deny its truth or validity. If God's Word is not true, they can live any way they want, with no consequences. Yet God's Word will stand forever, and it will be the standard of judgment in the final day.

Ask your class to suggest ways in which we can respond to the arguments of those who would deny the validity of God's Word. Some thoughts might include sharing our testimony, being armed with knowledge of archaeological confirmations, and tying events in the world today to end-time prophecies.

3. King Zedekiah sent word to Jeremiah asking the prophet to pray to the Lord for the land. What information contained in Jeremiah 37:1-3 reveals the reason why God would not bestow His blessing upon the

-	
-	
	_
-	
	_
	_
	_
	_

people, even though it was requested? What spiritual truth can we derive from this? Verse 2 indicates that neither the king, nor his servants, nor the people of the land hearkened unto the words of the Lord, as spoken to them by the Prophet Jeremiah. While several spiritual truths could be brought out based on this passage, focus on the fact that if we want God's blessing, we must live in obedience to Him. Ask your class what it means to "hearken" to God. Discussion should bring out that it is more than focusing on an audible sound; attentive listening must also be accompanied by responding obediently to what is heard. God's promises of blessing are conditional. King Zedekiah wanted God's blessing, but was not willing to pay the price to obtain it. People today may call on God's name and desire prosperity and blessing, yet not be willing to make a full commitment to Him. When we pay the price, God's promises of blessing will never fail. **4.** Jeremiah's message of coming destruction angered the princes of Judah, and he was put into a dungeon—likely a narrow cistern designed to catch rain water. He would have died except for the intervention of Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian. This man was willing to risk his life by asking for Jeremiah's removal from the dungeon. (See Jeremiah 38:7-13.) What are ways we may have to take a stand that will not be popular or may cause us damage to some degree? What will be the results of taking that stand? Discussion should bring up a variety of possibilities. Those in school may find it difficult to bow their heads in prayer over their lunches. Someone working in an office may have to refuse to lie for the boss. Direct your class discussion toward the types of situations that may come up for the age group you teach. The one uniting factor for all types of persecution is the end result of blessing and victory for those who suffer for God. Ebed-Melech received God's special blessing for his courageous act (see Jeremiah 39:15-18), and we will be rewarded too. We may pay a price in this world—some will suffer persecution, reproach, and estrangement from loved ones. Others have even paid the price of their lives. However, for those who suffer, there will be wonderful rewards in the end. **5.** God had not forgotten His promise to the prophet (see Jeremiah 1:8), and Jeremiah was freed from his

(see Jeremiah 1:8), and Jeremiah was freed from his bonds when the Babylonians overthrew Jerusalem. He was allowed to choose to go to Babylon with the exiles, or to stay in Jerusalem to care for the remnant there. What did Jeremiah choose, and why do you think he made that choice? Jeremiah 40:2-6

Jeremiah chose to join Gedaliah, who had been appointed governor of Jerusalem, and to dwell in Jerusalem with the remnant of Judah.

As your group discusses the second question, they should recognize that in Judah, the prophet would continue to face poverty and hardship, while if he had opted to live in Babylon, he would apparently have been well-treated. Scripture does not record the reason Jeremiah made the choice to stay, but we know he loved his homeland and had deep compassion for his people. Most importantly, we can be assured that he would have consulted God and received divine direction before making his decision. You might wish to note to your students that Ezekiel and Daniel were both in Babylon to minister to the exiles there, so it may be the need for a prophet of God was greater in Judah.

You could follow up this portion of text by noting that Jeremiah faced difficult choices throughout his prophetic ministry. We, too, will face challenging choices in the course of our lifetimes. What might some of those decisions be? How should we approach those decisions and be sure that we have the Lord's direction at such critical times? Class discussion should bring out that we need to approach major decisions with a great deal of prayer. We can ask godly friends to pray with us about the matter, seek the counsel of those in spiritual authority over us, and ask God to providentially open or close doors in order to guide us.

6. Johanan was leading the remnant after the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor in Judah. He, the captains, and the people came to Jeremiah and begged for the prophet to find the will of the Lord concerning their plans for the future. (See Jeremiah 42:1-3.) Yet God knew they were asking with deceitful hearts and had no intention of following His way. After Jeremiah told them God's will, they went ahead and fled to Egypt against the Word of the Lord. What were the consequences of their action? Jeremiah 44:7-12

The people's hearts were drawn even farther away from the Lord and toward additional heathen practices. The Lord had promised safety if they would stay in Judah, but at this point, He pronounced death and destruction to those who remained in Egypt.

Ask your students to explain the danger of following our own way instead of God's way. The point should be made that God alone knows the future and what is good for us. We will meet adversity when we step out of His will, but we will always be blessed if we let Him lead each step we take. The point could be made that if we are in the habit of staying in close communion with God at all times, not just when we face major decisions, we will be tuned in to His Voice and in a good position to get clear direction when the major issues come along.

7. In chapter 44, Jeremiah made a final plea to the Jews in Egypt, but the people responded by saying

_	

they would do as they pleased (Jeremiah 44:17). They went so far as to say it was the heathen goddess they were serving who had blessed their lives with good in the past. These people were not ignorant of the God of Israel and His words to them. Based on this passage, do you think spiritual light can become darkness? If so, what causes that to happen?

Class discussion should bring out that light certainly can become darkness. (You may wish to refer to Matthew 6:23 for a New Testament confirmation of this assertion.)

As your class discusses the second question, they will no doubt bring out that one disobedience often leads to another. By disobeying and migrating to Egypt, immersing themselves in a heathen culture, the refugees' minds became confused to what truth was. They began to believe it was not the God of Heaven who had been their Benefactor, but a heathen goddess. The point should be made that it is a risky thing to turn away from God's truth in any way. Those who disobey and justify their actions can become confused as to what truth is. You also may wish to point your class to 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, which states that God Himself will send a strong delusion upon those who do not believe the truth.

A natural follow-up to this question would be to discuss how we guard our hearts against any deceitful influences. We cannot emphasize too often the importance of doing the things we know from experience will keep us strong in faith, such as reading the Word, praying often, and being in God's house.

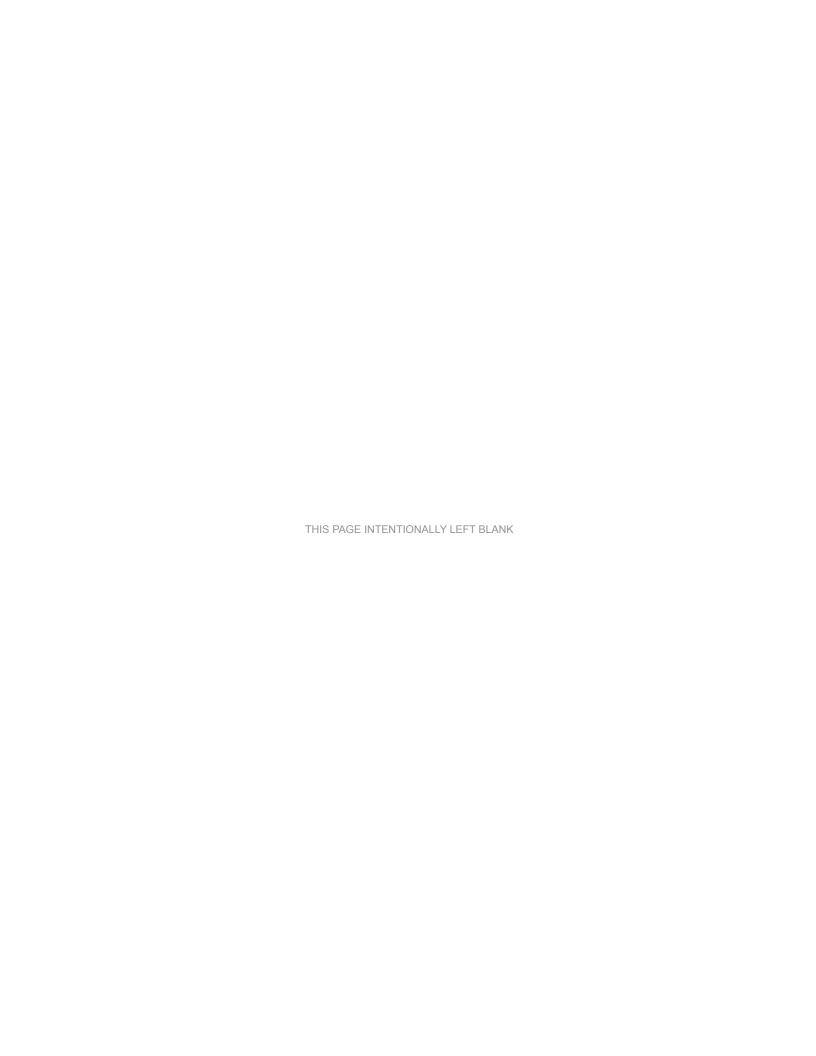
8. Jeremiah is referred to as the weeping prophet because of his sorrow over the people's rejection of God and the punishment that was coming upon the land. In the course of his prophetic ministry, he was beaten, ridiculed, starved, imprisoned, and forced to leave his homeland. Yet he was faithful to proclaim the word of the Lord. The people refused to listen or heed, yet Jeremiah kept on with his mission. What lesson can we learn from his life?

While no doubt many lessons from the life of Jeremiah could be mentioned, lead your group into a discussion of how we can stay faithful and encouraged in our work for the Lord. There may be times when we feel weary from the responsibilities God has given us. Maybe we do not see the results we would like. Perhaps people reject us or ignore our attempts to reach out to them. Jeremiah's life can be an encouragement to keep holding on and doing what we are called to do. Our job is to proclaim; the results belong to God. In Heaven we may be surprised by those who made it because of something we said or did in our faithful service to Him. One day it will be worth all of the heartache, sweat, and tears, for then we shall reap with joy.

CONCLUSION

sults to Him. That is all He asks from us.			

Jeremiah faithfully warned the people to turn to



had a confrontational relationship with the Children of Israel; however, Judah formed an alliance with Moab

Teacher's Guide



The Pronouncement of Judgment on the Nations

Jeremiah 46:1 through 52:34 KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION "Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria." (Jeremiah 50:18) BACKGROUND God had called Jeremiah to be a "prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor,	SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
"Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria." (Jeremiah 50:18) BACKGROUND God had called Jeremiah to be a "prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,		
Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria." (Jeremiah 50:18) BACKGROUND God had called Jeremiah to be a "prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,	KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria." (Jeremiah 50:18) BACKGROUND God had called Jeremiah to be a "prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,	"Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of	
BACKGROUND God had called Jeremiah to be a "prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,		
God had called Jeremiah to be a "prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,		
nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,	BACKGROUND	
had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,	God had called Jeremiah to be a "prophet unto the	
chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,	nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he	
judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia,		
Elam, and Babylon.		
In chapter 46, Jeremiah declared God's judgment		
on Egypt. The text begins with a graphic description		
of Pharaoh-necho's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar in the	•	
Battle of Carchemish. Pharaoh-necho was the second		
ruler of the twenty-sixth dynasty in Egypt. He was		
considered one of their greatest kings, and had killed		
Judah's King Josiah at Megiddo in 608 B.C. Jeremiah		
described the army of Pharaoh-necho as very large and confident (verse 8). However, just as God had re-		
vealed, they were utterly defeated.	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
Philistia was the next nation to receive a pro-		
nouncement. Chapter 47 employs very descriptive		
imagery to declare the judgments that would come		
to this long-time contender with God's people. Many		
scholars believe the Philistines originally came from		
Crete (called Caphtor in verse 4). They were primarily		
sea merchants, with most of their major cities located on the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.		
Jeremiah described Babylon's army as an "overflow-		
ing flood" that would overtake their land (verse 2).	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	
The noise of the advancing army would be so ter-		
rifying that the "fathers shall not look back to their	rifying that the "fathers shall not look back to their	
children," indicating that in their attempt to flee, they		
would leave their children behind (verse 3). The word	` '	
"baldness" used in verse 5 indicates a funeral-like		
mourning for the judgment and destruction of their		
Cod's judgment of the nations continues in chan		
God's judgment of the nations continues in chapter 48, and is directed in this passage against Moab.		
The Moabites were descendants of Lot through his		
incestuous relationship with his eldest daughter. Moab	·	

and Ammon in an ill-conceived attempt to defeat Nebuchadnezzar's army. This nation was condemned for pride (verse 29). Moab had been famous for vine-yards and wine production. Jeremiah's prophecy gives imagery of the nation as a winemaker sitting on a stock of wine, allowing it to sit and age without being poured from vessel to vessel, which would cause it to lose value. Because of their pride and contentment in their own accomplishments, destruction would come to the Moabites by way of Babylon and their wine would be emptied from vessel to vessel. Then the vessels would be broken.

Chapter 49 records the judgments against Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam. The Ammonites descended from Benammi, a son of Lot conceived through incest with his youngest daughter. The Ammonites inhabited an area east of the Jordan River, having moved into the Northern Kingdom of Israel after Assyria took Israel away captive in 722 B.C. The Ammonites had placed their trust in their god, Molech, and the natural protection of the surrounding mountains. Jeremiah prophesied that their trust would turn to fear and they would be driven out.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau. During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem they supported Nebuchadnezzar and rejoiced when the city eventually fell. Teman and Dedan (verses 7 and 8) were at opposite ends of the country, so these verses show the completeness of the promised destruction.

The final four judgments in chapter 49 were against Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam. Syria's capital was the city of Damascus. Kedar and Selam were two nomadic Arabian tribes. Elam was a neighbor east of Babylon that bordered Assyria and Media.

Chapters 50 and 51 contain the judgments against Babylon. God had used Babylon as an instrument to chasten His people, Judah, and to execute His judgment on other nations. However, the Babylonians had celebrated the destruction of God's people and His Temple (Jeremiah 50:11), and Jeremiah prophesied that the destruction of Babylon would be complete and final. Not even one stone from Babylon's buildings would be taken and used to build somewhere else, but the city would remain desolate forever. Jeremiah underscored the finality of this judgment by instructing Seraiah, the son of Neriah, to read the judgments against Babylon when he arrived there. When the reading was complete, Seraiah was told to "bind a stone" to the book and cast it into the Euphrates River as an object lesson to the people, symbolizing that Babylon, too, would sink.

The last chapter of this book corresponds with Jeremiah 39, 2 Kings 25, and 2 Chronicles 36. These chapters record the fall of Jerusalem, its destruction, the captivity of the people of Judah, and the deportation to Babylon.

SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS **NOTES** 1. Why do you think God had Jeremiah prophesy judgment against Judah's neighboring countries? Your class should conclude that the countries that God pronounced judgment on had all aligned themselves against Him. They had performed evil acts, and had influenced His people toward idolatry. As a follow-up question, ask your class for examples of how those surrounding countries had been influenced by Israel and were therefore responsible for the knowledge of God. All of these countries had been given the knowledge of the God of Israel: Egypt through the Exodus, the Philistines by the Judges and David, Moab by Naomi and Ruth, and Babylon by Jeremiah and the prophets. 2. In Jeremiah 46:25, whom did God direct the prophet to say would be punished? Why do you think God identified each entity separately rather than simply grouping them as a nation? God specified that He would punish the multitude of No, Pharaoh (mentioned twice), Egypt, Egypt's gods, Egypt's kings, and all that trusted in Pharaoh. Several possibilities may be mentioned in answer to the second question. Lead your class to the conclusion that God's judgment was complete: no one was exempt from the punishment that was determined against them. In reference to the phrase "and all them that trust in him," you may wish to explain that many smaller nations had sought to ally themselves with Egypt, including rebellious Judah. Others, including families from Judah, had fled to Egypt for safety, trusting in that nation's gods and military might. Rather than finding protection and safety, they suffered God's judgment against Egypt. Ask your class to identify places that people run to rather than God in our day when they have prob*lems. What is the danger in doing so?* 3. Philistia was located in a portion of the Promised Land west of Judah, along the southeastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. Chapter 47 prophesies of its final destruction at the time when Judah would go into captivity. What lesson can we learn from the fact that Israel never removed that nation from the Promised Land after their conquest of it? The class should identify several ways that the Philistines caused the Israelites serious problems during the entire time they possessed the Promised Land. The Philistines had ruled over the Jewish people at times, fought costly battles with them, and introduced them to idols and heathen and idolatrous practices. Their presence was an ongoing trial that could have been avoided if the Children of Israel had followed God's instructions. Lead the class to understand that we must follow God's instructions completely if we are

to enjoy His unhindered blessings on our lives.

4. Although judgment was proclaimed against both Moab and Ammon, they, like Israel, were told that someday there would be a return to their lands (see Jeremiah 48:47 and 49:6). These prophecies may relate in part to an end-time restoration. However, some of the Moabites and Ammonites were allowed to return to their lands under the edict of Cyrus. What does this indicate to us about God's use of judgment?

God is merciful and not only uses His judgment in punishment, but also as an instrument to encourage and draw those who have resisted Him to Himself.

You may wish to expand the discussion of this question to consider some of the ways that God draws people to Himself in our day. The point could be made that sometimes troubling circumstances can actually be the merciful Hand of God drawing an unbeliever to Himself. Perhaps there would be some in your class who could share a personal example from their knowledge or experience of a hard situation that resulted in someone coming to the Lord.

5. Read Jeremiah 49:7 and 13-17. What was to be the final state of the country of Edom? How did this differ from Moab and Ammon?

It was to become desolate, a reproach, a waste, a curse, and all of its cities a perpetual waste. This nation had originally been a part of Judah's rebellion against Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar came to besiege Jerusalem, Edom joined forces with Babylon and took part in sacking the city and killing its inhabitants, the people of Judah. Their treacherous actions caused God to determine their overthrow to be like that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jeremiah 49:18).

Unlike Moab and Ammon, God's judgment provided no hope of restoration for Edom. As your class considers this, the question may arise why God determined this on the Edomites, when a glimmer of hope seemingly was offered to some of the other heathen nations alluded to in this chapter. Lead your class to understand that the people of Edom exhibited a total lack of loyalty, along with deceit. Their treachery led to the total desolation of their land.

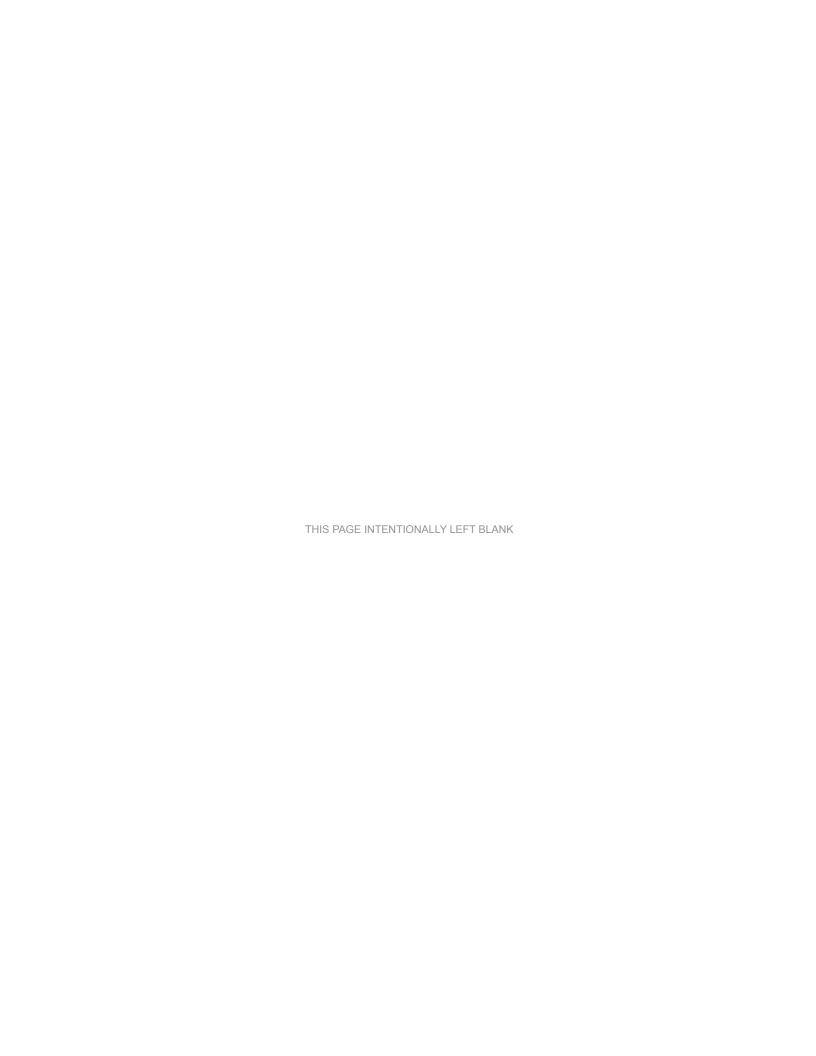
Ask your class to make a list of ways that we can remain loyal as we serve God in the church. Their answers may include faithful attendance, supporting leadership, prayerfully seeking God's will in our daily lives, and being active in Sunday school and other areas of the work as needed.

6. God had used Babylon as an instrument of justice in pouring out divine retribution upon Judah and the nations identified in this lesson. However, chapters 50 and 51 describe in detail the pronouncement of doom upon this once-mighty nation. Bel and Merodach, mentioned in Jeremiah 50:2, are names referring to a single deity, the chief god of Babylon. What did the Prophet Jeremiah say would happen to this god, and

-	

to the other idols of Babylon? What spiritual truth is revealed by this pronouncement? Jeremiah foretold that the god of the Babylonians, which they regarded as creator and king, was to be "taken," "confounded [humiliated]," and "broken in pieces." In other words, Babylon's great god was about to be shamefully defeated by the decree of the mighty God of Israel. Class discussion of the second question should bring out the thought that God alone is all-powerful. No matter what deities man may invent and worship, He alone is sovereign. God will have the last word! 7. Jeremiah 52:2 says that Zedekiah, Judah's last king, "did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD." His leadership resulted in the siege of Jerusalem, the spoiling of the city and Temple, and the killing and enslavement of the people of Judah. What was God's punishment upon Zedekiah? Jeremiah 52:10-11 King Zedekiah witnessed the slaving of his sons (Jeremiah 39:6), had his eyes put out, and was carried away to Babylon in chains, where he was kept in prison until his death. Regardless of whether or not we are leaders, there is always someone looking to us as an example. What are some ways that we can provide a good spiritual example to those around us? Class responses to this *follow-up question will bring out such thoughts as:* demonstrate faithfulness; be prayerful, loving, kind, and encouraging; honor God in all things, etc. 8. What qualities in the life and ministry of Jeremiah might help us as we attempt to live for God in a spiritually challenging society? This question should provide you with a good framework for summarizing this lesson and our study of the Book of Jeremiah. Class responses will likely bring out some of the following thoughts: • We must be faithful in spite of adversity. • Sometimes obedience to God takes courage, but He will give grace and strength. • Success in the eyes of God is of far more value than success in the eyes of man. • *The opinion of the majority is not necessarily* the way to go. • Serving God does not guarantee personal ease or security. CONCLUSION God judged the nations along with His own

God judged the nations along with His own people for rebelling against Him and not heeding His Word. As we purpose to live righteously and obediently before God, we can avoid facing the judgment of God that will certainly fall upon those who persist in refusing His mercy and rebelling against Him.



444

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

• Verse 6 – Her leaders were like malnourished deer (harts) unable to escape their hunters.

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Lamentations 1:1 through 5:22	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)	
BACKGROUND	
Lamentations is the anguished outpouring of a prophet mourning the degradation of a once great nation. This book, a collection of five poems, was written by Jeremiah shortly after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, about 586 B.C. The Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to the city for eighteen long months and when the city was finally taken, it was a heartbreaking time for the Jewish people. This set of poems, the first four composed in the form of ancient funeral songs or dirges, and the final one, a prayer, describe the terrifying calamity that had befallen the land. They acknowledge that the people were being punished severely for disobeying God. At one time the people of Judah had obeyed and loved their God. Now they were physically, emotionally, and spiritually broken. Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple had been destroyed, and the people put to shame before their oppressors. But the greatest loss was the knowledge that God had turned away from them because of their rejection of Him. In spite of the excruciating pain of the situation they were in, Jeremiah voiced his hope that God would turn His anger away if only the people would repent. Lamentations concludes with a prayer designed to be the penitent outpouring of a broken nation—a nation that had finally realized the cost of angering God. With desperate longing, the prophet verbalized a plea intended to guide the people to a position of humility and repentance, asking God to remember them and turn away the fierceness of His	
great wrath.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. What circumstances caused his anguish? Lamentations 1:3,6,8,15-17 A review should bring out the following thoughts.	
• Verse 3 – Judah had heen taken into cantivity	

- Verse 8 Those who had once honored the city of Jerusalem now despised her.
- Verses 15-17 The God who had once been their comforter had become their judge and source of punishment.

As a follow-up, ask your class if any of them have ever felt similarly burdened. Encourage them to describe how God brought them through.

2. Lamentations 2:6-10 describes the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem. What significance did this destruction have to the people of Judah?

The destruction of the Temple signified the departure of God's presence from a nation that had refused to follow Him. Point out to your class that this was the original Temple built by King Solomon. According to historians, it was a building of great beauty. However, more than that, this landmark was the center and hub of the Jewish faith. God had made it His holy dwelling place, a place where anointed priests could offer atonement for man's sin. People would come yearly to the Temple to bring sacrifices and pay homage to God. Tragically, the people of Judah had rejected in their daily lives what they proclaimed by their rituals of worship, and thus, their worship had become a mockery.

Follow up this question by discussing with your class some ways we can make sure that our worship is sincere and focused on God. Thoughts could include: asking God to prepare our hearts before we come to His sanctuary to worship, making sure the glory and honor goes to God and not to individuals, having hearts that are open to God's checks and prodding, making His house a place of prayer and not just a place of social interaction, etc.

3. In spite of all the pain and sorrow inflicted upon Israel by God, what was Jeremiah's hope? Lamentations 3:31-32

Verses 31 and 32 indicate Jeremiah's confidence that God would not stay angry forever. Even though the nation would never return to its previous condition, Jeremiah believed that God one day would again show mercy upon His children.

Ask your class: Why is hope so important? Discussion should bring out that, without hope, a person falls into despair and may feel that life is not worth living. As Christians, the Gospel presents the hope that no matter what trials and afflictions we face in this life, we will someday enjoy eternal life with God. Perhaps one of your students would share a time when hope sustained him/her.

4. Lamentations 4:17-20 alludes to the fact that Judah had asked Egypt for help in fighting the Babylonian army. What one word is used to describe the nature of that help? What lesson can we derive from this?

The descriptive word is "vain." Ask your class for their definitions of the word. The point should be made that Egypt's help was worthless and unsatisfactory. The Egyptians offered Judah false hope—they started to help but then retreated (Jeremiah 37:5-7).

Various thoughts may be suggested in terms of lessons we can derive from this. Your group will likely conclude that we can have no real assurance of help from any source other than God—He alone is totally reliable. He is also perfectly able to help, while other helpers, however well-intentioned, may not be able to carry through. Your group may also note that it is dangerous to put our faith in the wrong power.

5. What was the condition of the sacred grounds on the Temple mount? Lamentations 5:18

Foxes walked upon the mountain of Zion, indicating complete destruction. It must have been heart-breaking for Jeremiah to witness such desolation. Solomon had asked God to hear the people when they prayed toward this Temple (2 Chronicles 6:34-39). We can only imagine the pain felt when the people realized that the holiest place on earth was now just a pile of rubble.

6. What miseries, as recited in chapter 5, had been sent by God to bring the people to a position of humility and repentance?

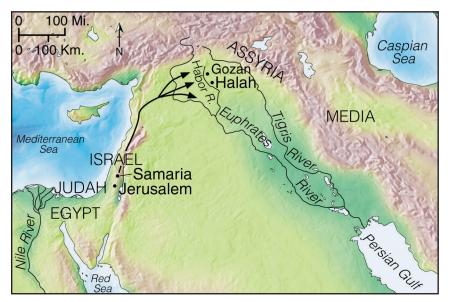
You may wish to make a list with your class of the miseries described in this chapter.

- Lamentations 5:3 Men had been slain, leaving widows and orphans.
- Lamentations 5:4 The people were made to pay for wood, water, etc.
- Lamentations 5:6 The people were forced to beg their enemies for food.
- Lamentations 5:11 Women were raped and abused.
- Lamentations 5:12 National leaders were dishonored.
- Lamentations 5:13 Children were forced to labor.
- Lamentations 5:14-15 Hearts were no longer joyful.
- Lamentations 5:18 The Temple had been destroyed.

Bring out that these circumstances were just a small portion of what this great nation suffered by disobeying God. Ask your class: What lesson is there for us in the tremendous punishment that was meted out to this nation for rejecting God? The point should be made that even though we live in a dispensation of mercy and grace, God still demands obedience. Discuss the outcome of disobeying God today.

-			
_	 	 	
_			
_			
_			

7. What attitude or condition was the prophet encouraging in the people, as indicated by his prayer at the end of chapter 5?	
The prophet's prayer was designed to point the people toward humility and repentance. This chapter	
verbalizes the penitent prayer that a broken nation should pray—a nation that has finally realized the cost of angering God.	
You might wish to discuss with your class the role that humility and repentance play when a penitent sinner comes to God for forgiveness of sin.	
8. How would you describe the Prophet Jeremiah after reading the Book of Lamentations?	
You may wish to list on a dry erase board the character traits identified by your students. Class dis-	
cussion will likely bring out that Jeremiah had a tre- mendous desire to serve and please God. He also had	
an unconditional love for God's chosen people. This man of God was willing to stay and share the pain of	
the Jewish nation. Jeremiah possessed excellent leadership qualities. He spoke the truth. Talking with God	
was a priority with Jeremiah. We see a man who was loving and compassionate even though he knew this	
time of trouble could have been avoided. Jeremiah was a man God could depend upon.	
We live in a different era and society than the Prophet Jeremiah. However, we would do well to	
emulate the characteristics of this man of God. What	
are some ways we can model his heart of compassion in our day?	
CONCLUSION	
We live in an age when people and nations are	
forgetting and forsaking God. We also know that	
there is a time of tribulation coming soon upon this earth—a time of trouble of a magnitude that has	
never been seen before. Let us learn a lesson from the	
failure of the people of Judah, and stay true to God, that we might escape that terrible time!	



2 Kings 17:1-23

Finally the sins of Israel's people caught up with them. God allowed Assyria to defeat and disperse the people. They were led into captivity, swallowed up by the mighty, evil Assyrian Empire. Sin always brings discipline, and the consequences of that sin are sometimes irreversible.

Judah Exiled

Copyright © 2001 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission.



2 Kings 25:1-30

Evil permeated Judah, and God's anger flared against his rebellious people. Babylon conquered Assyria and became the new world power. The Babylonian army marched into Jerusalem, burned the Temple, tore down the city's massive walls, and carried off the people into captivity.