



DISCOVERY 11 TEACHER'S GUIDE

1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi



Genealogies and David's Reign, Part 1

1 Chronicles 1:1—12:40

David's Reign, Part 2

1 Chronicles 13:1—17:27

David's Reign, Part 3

1 Chronicles 18:1—26:32

The Final Acts of David

1 Chronicles 27:1-29:30

Solomon's Reign

2 Chronicles 1:1-9:31

Divided Kingdom and Kings of Judah, Part 1

2 Chronicles 10:1-20:37

Kings of Judah, Part 2

2 Chronicles 21:1-32:33

Final Kings of Judah and Captivity

2 Chronicles 33:1-36:23

The Book of Ezra

Ezra 1:1 — 10:44

The Book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:1—13:31

The Book of Haggai

Haggai 1:1—2:23

The Book of Zechariah

Zechariah 1:1—14:21

The Book of Malachi

Malachi 1:1 — 4:6

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.

DISCOVERY

when the Books of Chronicles were written, David's

Teacher's Guide



Genealogies and David's Reign, Part 1

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
1 Chronicles 1:1 through 12:40	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Therefore came all the elders of Israel to the king	
to Hebron; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the LORD; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel." (1 Chronicles 11:3)	
BACKGROUND	
The purpose of Chronicles was to emphasize the Jews' heritage. The writer recounted Israel's history for the Jews who were attempting to resettle the Promised Land after seventy years in Babylonian captivity. God's people needed encouragement to reestablish their patterns of worship, and assurance that the God of their fathers had not forsaken them. The author clearly felt that the evidence of God's involvement in Israel's past would provide the current generation with a reliable basis for rebuilding. By charting both the good and evil reigns of their nation's kings, he reminded the people of the character of God, of worship that pleases Him, and of God's covenant with them. The Book of 1 Chronicles begins with a genealogy—an official record of the families of Israel and Judah prior to the captivity. In the post-exilic era, genealogical records ensured that rightful heirs could demonstrate legitimate ownership and thus repossess their inheritances in established tribal areas. In addition, the records would provide a framework for reinstating assigned roles in the Levitical worship system, thus preserving the priesthood and the structure for worship. The genealogical record also has theological significance. For Jesus to be the Messiah, He had to be a descendant of David. The record found in 1 Chronicles, along with Jesus' lineage given in the New Testament, confirms that Jesus did descend from the line of David. Thus, the genealogy of 1 Chronicles was used centuries later to substantiate that Jesus	
Christ was indeed the Promised One.	
SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS	NOTES
1. The years the Jews had spent in Babylonian exile had been some of the darkest in their nation's history.	
Their capital city had been destroyed, their Temple	
burned, and their people slain or taken into captivity. Although the people had returned to their land	

descendants no longer ruled as monarchs over Israel. The Davidic lineage preserved through the genealogical records of chapters 1 through 8 reminded the post-exilic Jews of their promised Messiah who would come from that line. Why would the promise of a coming Messiah bring hope? As believers today, what future events are we looking ahead to that bring us hope?

The promise of a coming Messiah brought hope because the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would deliver them, restore His people to Himself, rebuild their land, and establish a righteous kingdom. In response to the second question, your group should conclude that just as post-exilic Jews looked for the coming of the Messiah, we look for the return of Jesus to this earth.

Amplify this answer by pointing out that the writer of the Book of Chronicles clearly felt that hope in the future Messiah would guide the Jews' actions in the present. Have your group discuss how living in anticipation of Christ's coming will guide our actions in day-to-day life. Thoughts brought out may include the following.

- We will subject our plans to His will.
- We will hold temporal possessions with a loose hand.
- We will strive to stay close to God through regular communion with Him, obedience to His Word, and a careful Christian walk.
- We will weigh our choices and actions with eternity in view.
- 2. While chapters 1 through 8 are primarily a list of names, the record also gives fragments of information regarding some of the individuals. In chapter 4, the writer paused for a moment and focused on Jabez, a man whose name means "man of sorrow and pain." Jabez is not remembered for heroic deeds or great oratorical speeches, nor is he referenced elsewhere in Scripture. Based on 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, why did Jabez receive special mention in Scripture?

Jabez was deemed "more honorable than his brethren" simply because he "called on the God of Israel"—he prayed! Ask your group to summarize the four requests in his prayer. Verses 9-10 indicate that he prayed for the blessing of God, an enlarged territory, that God's hand would be with him, and that he would be kept from evil.

Class discussion should bring out that Jabez was not afraid to come before God with very direct petitions. As a result, we are told, "God granted him that which he requested." Point out that God always responds to a prayer of faith. Perhaps the simple prayer offered by Jabez was woven into the genealogical lists of 1 Chronicles to remind God's people of that fact.

If time allows, you could point out to your class that Jabez' request, "enlarge my coast," could apply to many areas of our lives. Although Jabez may have been referring to physical territory, discuss ways the same words could apply on a personal level. Suggestions could include a prayer to gain spiritual ground, that God would provide new opportunities for service, or for an increased effectiveness in winning souls.

3. In 1 Chronicles 5:18-20, the author described a time when men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh went into battle against an army that was much larger than theirs. These men were deemed "valiant"—they had personal courage as well as skill in military endeavors—but they did not rely on their own capabilities or military strategies. Instead, they "cried to God in the battle." What was the outcome of that battle, and what can we learn from their example?

When the valiant men of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh cried out to God for help, He heard their urgent pleas and gave them victory over their enemies. They prevailed because they looked to God. There is power in prayer when we pray in accordance with God's will. That is a constant theme throughout all of Scripture.

As a follow-up, you could point out to your group that any talents and natural aptitudes we possess were given to us by God and are meant to be used for His glory. Our personal abilities should never replace dependence upon Him. When we rely upon ourselves, we may achieve a measure of success or even win commendation from others. However, we also open the door to pride and a tendency to be self-dependent rather than God-dependent. God wants His people to look His way for help, guidance, and strength in every situation

4. Many years before the author of Chronicles compiled his record, King David had done much to bring music into the worship of Israel. In addition to composing numerous psalms and songs offering praise to God, he appointed song leaders and organized choirs and instrumentalists to perform regularly at the Temple. In 1 Chronicles 6:31-32, the people were reminded of the system of worship that David and his son, Solomon, had instituted in Israel. Why is worship an important part of the Christian life? What role does music have in worship?

You may wish to open your discussion by defining the word "worship." In the Old Testament, the word most often translated worship is shachah, which means "to prostrate oneself, especially in homage to royalty or God; to bow down." In our culture, worship shows reverence and devotion to God.

With those definitions as a basis, your group should be able to come up with several responses to the first question. Thoughts that could be brought out include the following.

In worship, we remember who God is and what He has done. • Worship is a way to acknowledge God's worthiness, affirming that He alone is deserving of all praise, honor, and glory. Worship can help us move the focus off ourselves and the circumstances of our daily lives and refocus on God. Worship honors God because it often involves the sacrifice of praise. Praise is a natural response when times are good or we have experienced a victory, but it requires a sacrifice of our own feelings and fears when we face challenges. As your group discusses the second question regarding the role of music in worship, some thoughts that could be developed are as follows. • Music in worship communicates a sense of awe and wonder, bringing those who hear it an awareness of the presence of God. • When songs are presented as unto the Lord, they lead thoughts toward God rather than toward those who are performing. • Congregational singing offers every person in attendance a way to be involved in worship, thus promoting a sense of unity. Music gives people a chance to express emotions that words alone cannot adequately **5.** Chapter 9 focuses on the post-exilic community in Jerusalem and the importance of correct worship as the nation began to rebuild. The writer of Chronicles wanted to ensure that those who had returned from captivity in Babylon reestablished the pattern for Temple worship that David had put in place. Verse 2 identifies several categories of people who served in the Temple worship. According to this verse, what three groups of individuals were responsible for religious duties? The three groups of individuals responsible for religious duties were the priests, the Levites, and the Nethinims (also referred to as porters). You may wish to review for your class the specific duties for workers in the three categories. The priests were assigned to deal with the sacred matters. During David's reign, twenty-four groups of priests served in rotation. Their primary duty was to offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people. Because sacrifices were offered for sin, worship, and thanksgiving, the priests' duties were performed repeatedly. *The Levites were appointed to help the*

priests. Their principal roles in the Temple included singing psalms during Temple services, performing construction and

- maintenance for the Temple, and caring for the implements used in worship.
- The Nethinims were to assist the Levites with tasks related to Israel's worship. Verse 17 (which refers to them as "porters") indicates they were the gatekeepers who opened, closed, and guarded the sanctuary entrances. Their responsibilities included supervision of the tithes and the "ministering vessels," which were counted before and after their use. Verses 25 and 27 indicate that the porters may have also worked in rotation, staying near the sanctuary during their time of service and then returning to their villages.

Point out that each task in the Temple was important. Your group should be able to make a parallel between those who served in the worship procedures and those who serve in the Lord's work today. Many of us will never be leaders, but we can be faithful supporters and assistants. Each of us has a role in God's service. No matter what task is assigned to us, we know that God notes every deed done for Him.

6. In chapter 10, the author of Chronicles turned to the rise of the house of David. The account of Saul's death provides a transition to a focus on David that continues for the remainder of the book. A brief overview of the battle on the slopes of Mount Gilboa is given in verses 1-3. What did Saul do after he was wounded in battle? How was the nation of Israel impacted as a result? 1 Chronicles 10:4-7

The mortally wounded Saul took his own life when his armor bearer refused to slay him. In response to the second question, when the armies of Israel learned of the death of Saul and his sons, they fled from their cities. This allowed Israel's long-standing enemy, the Philistines, to move in and assume control.

Ask your group what we can learn from this tragedy that would apply to our daily lives. They should conclude that just as Saul's wrong deeds and tragic end affected the people of his nation, our choices also will affect others.

7. Following Saul's death, David reigned over Judah for seven-and-one-half years (see 2 Samuel 2:4,11). At the beginning of chapter 11, all of Israel was looking to David for leadership, remembering his previous acts of valor. When the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, David made a covenant with them "before the LORD," and they anointed David king over all of Israel. In contrast to Saul's decline and tragic end, verse 9 states that David "waxed greater and greater." Why do you think that was so?

The end of verse 9 says, "... for the LORD of hosts was with him." Your class should conclude that David's power and fame increased as a result of his devotion to and trust in God, and because he gave God the glory for his accomplishments. He ultimately became known

as the greatest king of Israel, and an ancestor of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

8. Chapters 11–12 list people from every tribe of Israel who came to assist David during the early years of his rule. The concept of "help" is alluded to frequently in chapter 12. For example, verses 16-18 record that the tribes of Judah and Benjamin supported David even though Benjamin was the tribe to which Saul belonged. In verse 18, Amasai pronounced a Spirit-inspired blessing upon those who came to help David. Verses 23-37 provide a list of those from each of the tribes who came to make David king. How does our need for human helpers fit in with God's help?

A variety of responses to this question may be offered. Your group should conclude that while God will work powerfully for those who trust in Him, He also intends for His people to work together and support one another.

One reason it is important for believers to work together is that we have different abilities and talents. Verse 2 of this chapter indicates that some of the men who came to David were skilled in the use of weapons of offense. Verse 8 indicates that the Gadites were courageous men who were expert users of defensive weapons. Verse 32 states that the men of Issachar possessed "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do"—they had knowledge and judgment that would be helpful in making decisions for the country. All these skills and attributes were needed as David attempted to weld together a strong and successful nation.

Believers in our day also possess a diversity of talents and abilities that God designed to work as a whole. If you wish to expand on this point, you could note to your class that Paul used the human body as an example of how believers work together. In Ephesians 4, he explained that the body's various parts are unique and yet they are "fitly joined together" (verse16)—a phrase that could also be translated "bonded and knit together." Just as each part of the physical body has a specific function, there are different roles in the Body of Christ, but they are all designed to function as one in Christ. Unity is the result when each individual is following God. Wrap up your class time by emphasizing that when believers work for God in unity, blessing, and victory are the results.

CONCLUSION

The author of Chronicles reviewed the history and heritage of Israel in order to point the newly returned exiles toward the future and their hope in God's promises. He reminded the people that the two cornerstone institutions of Israel—the Davidic monarchy and the Temple—were both founded upon God's unbreakable promises, and the people could have confidence that God would keep His Word.

_	

begun so triumphantly ended with tragedy. When the

Teacher's Guide



David's Reign, Part 2

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
1 Chronicles 13:1 through 17:27	OT ENER
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"And David perceived that the LORD had confirmed him king over Israel, for his kingdom was lifted up on high, because of his people Israel." (1 Chronicles 14:2)	
BACKGROUND	
After providing a panoramic view of Israel's history through the genealogical record in the first part of 1 Chronicles, in these chapters the author turned to a focus on David—the great king of Israel who received God's plans for the construction of the Temple and organized how worship was to take place in it. The history of David as recorded in this book differs slightly from the parallel account preserved by the author of 2 Samuel. While both books cover the same period, the account in 2 Samuel stresses the political aspects of David's kingship, while the author of Chronicles focused on the religious actions David took to establish a framework for the national worship of God. The events recorded in today's text did not occur immediately after those described in chapter 12, but sometime after David captured Jerusalem and made it his capital. Chapters 13 through 17 record David's two attempts to move the Ark of the Covenant from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem, his appointment of priests and Levites to assist in worship, his desire to build a Temple for God, and God's promise to him regarding	
his descendants.	
SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Early in his reign, David determined to make Jerusalem the religious center of the nation and gathered the leaders of Israel to ask for their help and blessing. The Ark of the Covenant had been in Kirjath-jearim for about seventy years after being cap-	
tured and returned by the Philistines, and 1 Chronicles 13:3 indicates that David's first objective was to bring	
the Ark to Jerusalem. Although David's intentions	
were honorable and he consulted with the captains and leaders of Israel about moving the Ark, there is no indication that he consulted with the Lord regard-	
ing this move. What was the outcome? 1 Chronicles 13:7-10	
The procession that accompanied the Ark was initially joyous. However, the moving of the Ark that had	

oxen carrying the Ark stumbled, Uzza put out his hand to steady it. As a result, "the anger of the LORD was kindled" against him, and he died.

David's second (and successful) attempt to move the Ark will be covered in subsequent questions. However, the point should be made here that while seeking counsel from godly individuals can be helpful in the decision-making process, we should always consult with God first and foremost. If David had done so regarding the moving of the Ark, no doubt he would have been reminded of God's specific instructions regarding how this sacred symbol of God's presence was to be handled.

2. Two of David's early military encounters are described in chapter 14. When the Philistines heard that David had been crowned king, they determined to come against him and assembled their army in the Valley of Rephaim. David sought God for guidance regarding how to respond, and God gave him victory in the first battle. However, the Philistines regrouped and prepared to come against Israel once more. Again, David inquired of the Lord before going into battle. What unique method did God use to give David direction in the second encounter? What lessons can we learn from David's two battles with the Philistines? 1 Chronicles 14:13-16

According to verse 15, God instructed David to wait until he heard a "sound of going" in the tops of the mulberry trees before heading out to battle.

Your students may suggest a variety of answers in response to the second question. For example, we can learn that God does not always work in the same way that He has in the past. David was wise enough to ask the Lord for directions before engaging in the second battle, even though he had been victorious the first time. Because he looked to God for his strategy, he was able to overcome the Philistine offensive. We cannot presume that God's methods or instructions will be the same in every situation. Help your students understand that seeking guidance in each new situation will help us avoid unseen dangers. We may not understand the reasons behind what God tells us to do, but we do know that His wisdom is perfect and His judgment infallible. Obedience to Him is always the best course of action.

Another lesson to learn is that David completely depended upon the Lord. God had promised to deliver the Philistines into David's hand. David was victorious because he believed and fully trusted the promises of God. According to verse 17, the victory that resulted from David's obedience caused him to be respected and feared among neighboring nations.

Encourage your class to share examples from their personal lives or the lives of others when obedience brought blessing, even though the reason God worked in certain ways was not fully understood at the time.

3. After the death of Uzza, David had the Ark temporarily placed in the house of Obed-edom. Chapter 15 records David's transfer of the Ark of God from that location to the dwelling place prepared for it in Jerusalem. In verse 13, David acknowledged his earlier errors, saying, "the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order." Review the first attempt to move the Ark in 1 Chronicles 13:6-10. What did David do differently in this second attempt to move the Ark? 1 Chronicles 15:11-15

In his second attempt to move the Ark, David instructed the priests and Levites to "sanctify" themselves. Prior to undertaking the task, they were to purify themselves from every form of uncleanness and avoid anything that would defile; there is no mention of prior purification in the description of the first attempt. In addition, they were to carry the Ark as God had commanded. Among the Levites were the sons of Kohath, who had been given charge of the Ark of God (Numbers 3:29-31) and told to carry it on their shoulders (see Exodus 25:14; Numbers 4:15). In the first failed attempt, Uzza and Ahio were not Kohathites, and the Ark was transported on a cart. Bring out that the care David took in this second attempt to ensure that everything was done precisely as God had commanded reveals he had learned from his past mistakes.

4. According to verses 16-24 of chapter 15, David organized singers and four groups of Levites to provide instrumental accompaniment to the great procession bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. The first group of instrumentalists played the cymbals, the second used psalteries, the third had harps, and the fourth consisted of seven priests with trumpets who preceded the Ark. Why do you think David arranged for such an elaborate musical procession to accompany the Ark?

While not directly stated, no doubt David organized this musical procession to honor God and offer thanksgiving to Him. Verse 25 indicates that they transported the Ark "with joy," and music is one way of expressing joyful worship. The sound of the various instruments added a ceremonial dimension to the great occasion. Likely, the music helped imbed the event in the memories of the participants as part of their collective national heritage.

5. In 1 Chronicles 16:1, we read that King David and the people commemorated the placement of the Ark with a celebration that included burnt sacrifices and peace offerings. The burnt sacrifices represented atonement (Leviticus 1:4) and the peace offerings were associated with reconciliation and harmony with God (Leviticus 3:5). What kind of sacrifices and offerings do we bring to God?

Again, your students may have different responses to the question. The Bible speaks of the sacrifice of

praise so that could be one type of sacrifice we bring. We sacrifice to God when we consecrate to receive our deeper experiences. Offerings may be material in nature, such as financial or tangible resources, or they could be an offering of time or talents in the furtherance of God's Kingdom. Overall, the point should be made that in the New Testament dispensation, we no longer sacrifice animals to atone for our sins or to express thanksgiving to God; we can approach God directly with both petitions and praise.

Point out to your group that Leviticus 3:5 indicates that the peace offering was placed on top of (or after) the burnt offering on the altar. Make sure they understand that offerings to God do not bring salvation. We must first avail ourselves of the atonement for our offerings to be acceptable.

You may wish to refer to Romans 12:1 as a wrap up to your discussion of this question, bringing out that God wants us to offer ourselves to Him, daily laying aside our own wishes and preferences, and putting all we are and have at His disposal.

6. At the end of this spectacular day of celebration, David arranged for a musical expression of worship to be regularly presented to God. Then he delivered a psalm in which he voiced his personal gratitude. In verses 8-12 of chapter 16, what actions did David instruct the people to take to honor and thank God?

It may be helpful to make a list with your class of the actions David instructed the people to take.

Verse 8 – *They were to thank the Lord, call upon Him, and tell others what He had done.*

Verse 9 – They were to sing to Him, and talk of His wondrous works.

Verse 10 – They were to rejoice in His holy name.

Verse 11 – They were to seek the Lord continually.

Verse 12 – They were to remember both what He had done for them and His instructions to them.

You may wish to amplify this point by having your group generate ideas for ways that we can help ourselves to remember God's goodness. Some suggestions are:

- Make a personal record of what God has done by keeping a journal.
- Thank God when He answers a prayer, no matter how small the matter.
- Set apart time for daily communication with God.
- *Testify in church.*
- Incorporate mention of God and what He is doing into your conversations with others.
- Use your surroundings as reminders of the goodness of God.

7. The Tabernacle was a tent designed for portability. It was a suitable venue for worship during Israel's time in the wilderness because the people were constantly on the move. However, by this point the people were settled in the land God had given them, and David desired to build a more permanent structure for God. He shared his desire with the Prophet Nathan, who initially told him, "Do all that is in thy heart; for God is with thee." However, that night God instructed Nathan to tell David he was not to carry out his plan. Nathan was also to give David some far-reaching promises. Briefly summarize what God promised David in 1 Chronicles 17:11-14 and explain why this promise is meaningful for us.

God promised David that He would build him a "house," meaning that He would establish a dynasty—a hereditary monarchy—from the descendants of David. David's descendants did rule over Israel for more than four centuries, but eventually were removed from the throne because they turned away from God. Yet from David's descendants, Jesus Christ the Messiah was born, and one day He will reign forever and ever. This promise is meaningful for us because we can have a part in the Messiah's eternal Kingdom if we stay true to God.

If time allows, expand your discussion by pointing out to your class that this record of God's promise to David was especially significant because the author of Chronicles wrote about it after the exile, when there was no independent nation of Israel, and the throne of David seemed vacant. The writer had the faith to see that God's promise was not broken even when it seemed to be. He believed the prophets who had foretold that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David and would reign forever, and by faith grasped that in spite of Israel's circumstances at that time, God would fulfill His promise.

8. David responded to God's promises with a prayer, recorded for us in verses 16-27 of chapter 17. What attitude of heart do you detect in David's prayer?

Various appropriate answers to this question may be given. Thoughts mentioned could include the following.

- David clearly accepted God's denial of his desire to build the Temple; there was no resentment or resistance to God's decree.
- He was humble in his approach to God and grateful for God's blessings to him.
- He recognized the magnitude of God's promise to him and honored God as supreme.
- He acknowledged his unworthiness and praised God for His greatness, His promises, and His instructions.

Point out to your group that David's prayer can be an example for us when we bring our petitions

before the Lord. As we too come in humility, acceptance, and thanksgiving, we too will have God's blessing.	
CONCLUSION	
David began his reign with a desire to serve and	
honor God. His transfer of the Ark of the Covenant	
from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem, his Levitical	
appointments, and his desire to build a Temple for	
God all reflect his purpose of re-establishing and	
strengthening the worship of God in Israel.	

444

David's Reign, Part 3

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Chronicles 18:1 through 26:32

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD."

(1 Chronicles 22:18-19)

BACKGROUND

The author of 1 and 2 Chronicles clearly believed that direction for his nation could be found in the history of his people—a history about which they needed to be reminded. In his focus on King David, little mention is made of David's failures. Instead, the author highlighted David's strengths and victories, perhaps to encourage the exiles who were rebuilding Jerusalem after their seventy-year captivity in Babylon. He wanted the returning Jews to remember that obedience results in God's blessing, to make the Temple and priesthood a priority, and to believe God's unconditional promises to the descendants of David.

Since Israel was under the control of the Medo-Persian Empire when Chronicles was written, a king from David's line no longer ruled Israel; Jewish political and social power at that point resided in appointed governors and religious leaders. However, God had promised that a future King would rise from David's descendants, so the author of Chronicles retold Israel's history through a priestly and kingly lens to prepare the people for their coming Messiah.

Today's text from 1 Chronicles can be divided into three parts. Chapters 18-20 summarize the military victories of David, and the resulting enhancement of David's reputation in Israel and its neighboring nations. Chapter 21 describes David's sin in taking a census of Israel and the tragic consequences. Bible scholars suggest this event was included because the land David purchased to make an offering to halt the plague that was God's judgment eventually became the site of the new Temple. Chapters 22-26 record the arrangements David made for the building of the Temple and his organization of those who would serve there in various capacities.

K	

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS **NOTES** 1. God's covenant with David included the promise that the Israelites' enemies would be overcome (see 1 Chronicles 17:9). Chapter 18 shows how God fulfilled that promise by helping David defeat the opposing nations that surrounded Israel. The spoil and tribute from the conquered nations resulted in immense wealth for Israel. What did David do with the wealth acquired in this manner? 1 Chronicles 18:8.11 Verses 8 and 11 state that David dedicated this wealth to the Lord. The brass was used when Solomon constructed the Temple. A description of the articles made from it can be found in 2 Chronicles 4. Expand your group's response by pointing out that David could have thought the spoil was the result of his military might or prowess and kept it for his own purposes. Similarly, at times we may be tempted to assume our financial and material blessings are the result of our own skill and hard work rather than acknowledging they were given to us by a loving God. We want to remember that God is the source of all blessings in our lives, and like David, offer back to Him what He has given us. **2.** Verse 14 of chapter 18 states that David "executed judgment and justice among all his people." How would you explain that statement? What are some of the ways a leader could execute judgment and justice in our day? Verse 14 means that David administered the affairs of his kingdom in a righteous manner. It may be helpful to identify key words in the verse and explain their meanings based on the original language. Execute is a translation of the Hebrew word asah, and it means "accomplished" or "appointed." Judgment comes from the word mishpat, and it means "verdict" or "ordinance." This is a word related to governing or ruling over others. Justice comes from the word tsdaqah, meaning "rightness, moral rectitude" and implies conformity to an ethical or moral standard. In response to the second question, your students' suggestions will likely bring out that a leader who executes judgment and justice would be guided by God, would treat all individuals with impartiality, would issue fair rulings, would not accept bribes, and would be concerned about the best interests of his people. Summarize your group's ideas by pointing out that they have painted a picture of a ruler much like David, because principles of good and just leadership

will look the same in every era and culture.

3. Chapter 19 describes the rash act by the king of Ammon that led to David's battle with the Ammonites. When King Nahash of the Ammonites died, David sent messengers to extend sympathy to Hanun, Nahash's son and heir. Hanun treated David's men with contempt. His demeaning actions were equivalent to declaring war, so David sent out his "army of mighty men" to confront the Ammonite forces. Prior to the battle, Joab, the commander-in-chief of David's army, made a short but significant speech to the Israelite forces. What did he say to encourage them, and what was the outcome of the battle? 1 Chronicles 19:13, 15, 18-19

Verse 13 records Joab's short message: "Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the LORD do that which is good in his sight." In these few words, Joab made three points that can be valuable for us when we face battles.

- Joab's instruction, "Be of good courage," indicates that courage is a matter of choice. God makes His strength available to us. With His help, we can be strong in the power of His might if we so choose.
- Joab went on to say, "Let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God." He was telling his army to consider the consequences of failure; if they were overcome in battle, they would lose both their people and their cities. This is a reminder that our attitudes and actions will have an impact on others.
- Finally, Joab stated, "let the LORD do that which is good in his sight." While Joab wisely prepared for battle to the best of his ability, he knew the outcome was ultimately in God's hands. That is important for us to remember when we face trials. There is real comfort in knowing that God is always in control, no matter how difficult our situation seems.

The outcome of the battle was victory for the Israelites. The Ammonites retreated to their capital city (verse 15). The Syrian mercenaries fled before Israel, and ultimately made peace with them, becoming tributaries and providing no more help to the Ammonites (verses 18-19).

4. Chapter 21 describes David's sin in taking a census of Israel. In verse 3, Joab warned the king that doing so was both unnecessary and "a cause of trespass" (inviting trouble) for Israel. The parallel account in 2 Samuel 24:4 states that the captains of the army also warned David against taking such a step. However, David went ahead with the census, and his action had dire consequences. Since verse 1 indicates that Satan incited David into taking the census, why do you think David was held responsible?

Although Scripture does not state why taking a census was wrong, David knew that was the case and went ahead with his plan even after being warned. The numbering of the people took place after Israel's great victory over the Ammonites in chapter 20, so it is possible that David's action reflected a dependence upon the size of his military rather than in God's ability to protect His people. Whatever his reason, it is clear that David knowingly went against God's will by taking the census.

Follow up by pointing out that Satan will try to entice each one of us to do wrong. This text provides an opportunity to discuss with your class the difference between temptation and sin. The temptation itself is not a sin; to sin is to willfully and defiantly take actions contrary to divine law.

5. God was displeased with David's numbering of Israel, and punishment would come. At God's direction, Gad the seer told David to choose from three judgments. What were the three options Gad presented to David? 1 Chronicles 21:10-12

The three options given David were as follows.

- Three years of famine. Point out that while this would cause the death of some in Israel, the wealthy, including David and his household, would survive.
- Three months of defeat at the hand of Israel's foes. This loss would occur primarily among Israel's soldiers.
- Three days of pestilence at the hand of God, which would potentially touch all the inhabitants of the land, including David.

It is noteworthy that even though the first two options might have insulated the king and his family from the effects of the punishment, David knew he deserved the chastisement of God. He chose the third option, knowing it was preferable to be in the hand of God rather than his enemies, "for very great are his mercies" (verse 13). David's life was spared, though the plague that swept through Israel caused seventy thousand deaths. When David cried out to God in repentance and made the required sacrifice, God ended the plague.

6. The prophet Gad instructed David to set up an altar and sacrifice to the Lord on the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. This location had both a rich history and a significant future. According to Jewish tradition, it was the spot where Abraham offered Isaac. Soon it would become the site of the Temple (see 2 Chronicles 3:1). Chapter 22 of 1 Chronicles records David's preparations for building the Temple. What natural materials did King David gather for this purpose? 1 Chronicles 22:3-4, 14

Verses 3-4 indicate that David gathered iron, brass, and cedar wood. Verse 14 mentions gold, silver,

-	
-	

brass, iron, timber, and stone. His commitment to this effort indicates he was not distressed that his son would have the honor of building God's Temple rather than himself. He willingly prepared for Solomon to carry out this immense task.

As a follow up, point out to your students that we want to do all we can to assist others in their work for the Lord. We should not strive for positions in God's service in order to gain notice or commendation from others; we should be content and happy to offer whatever help we can, even if it is in a "behind the scenes" role.

7. Chapter 23 opens by stating that David was old and made Solomon the king. Then he called together the princes, priests, and Levites, and defined how worship was to be conducted and by whom it was to be administrated. The Levites were to care for the Temple and its grounds (verse 28) and help prepare the offerings (verse 29). They were also to participate in the musical part of the worship. In verse 30, David instructed them to "stand [be present] every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even." What do you think is implied by that instruction?

Your group should conclude that David's instruction for worship to occur every morning and evening indicates that he viewed it as very important. David decreed that coming before God was an essential duty of the Levites and the priests, and could never be neglected. Similarly, God wants us to see the importance of offering praise and thanksgiving to Him on an ongoing basis. While spontaneous prayers are certainly acceptable to God, we want to plan regular times to come before Him. The God who gives us benefits every day is certainly worthy of daily worship.

8. In chapter 24, David appointed the descendants of Aaron, the first priest of Israel, to serve as priests in the Temple. They were then separated into twenty-four groups that participated on a rotational basis, serving two-week shifts in Jerusalem and the remainder of the year in their hometowns. What phrase in verse 19 stands out to you as being especially significant, and why?

Have a volunteer read verse 19. Some of your group may zero in on "the orderings of them in their service." God is a God of order and design; we see that throughout the natural world. While participation at the Temple was structured, this did not hinder the Spirit of God but actually provided an organized context for worship. (See 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 for a New Testament teaching on worshipping in an orderly way.)

Another phrase that stands out is the final phrase, ". . . as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him." This brings out the importance of obedience to God in all things, including in how worship occurs.

Point out that the organization of a priestly rotation allowed many priests to have a part in the worship of God at Jerusalem, and no doubt, this strengthened unity in their religious practices. In much the same way, gathering at our annual camp meetings strengthens the unity between believers and branch churches in our organization.

If time allows, you could ask your group to suggest ways we can support and preserve order in our church services. Thoughts offered could include being faithful to fulfill our roles, showing proper reverence and respect for God's house, and participating with the goal of bringing glory to God.

9. Chapter 25 describes King David's organization of the Levites to provide music as part of the Temple worship. Individuals from the families of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were appointed to lead twenty-four teams of musicians who participated on a rotating basis. The order in which the various teams served was determined by casting lots (verse 8). Why do you think this method of selection was used?

Your group should see that this method ensured that choice worship assignments were not allocated to the most talented, nor were they based on seniority, family history, or prestige. God did the choosing, and this method provided both a protection against pride for the talented and a learning opportunity for those who were still novices.

The point should be made that God values whatever we have to offer. While we always want to strive for excellence in our service to God, we know that He does not evaluate as man does. He looks on the heart, and when the most humble of efforts is done with love and true devotion, it is precious to Him.

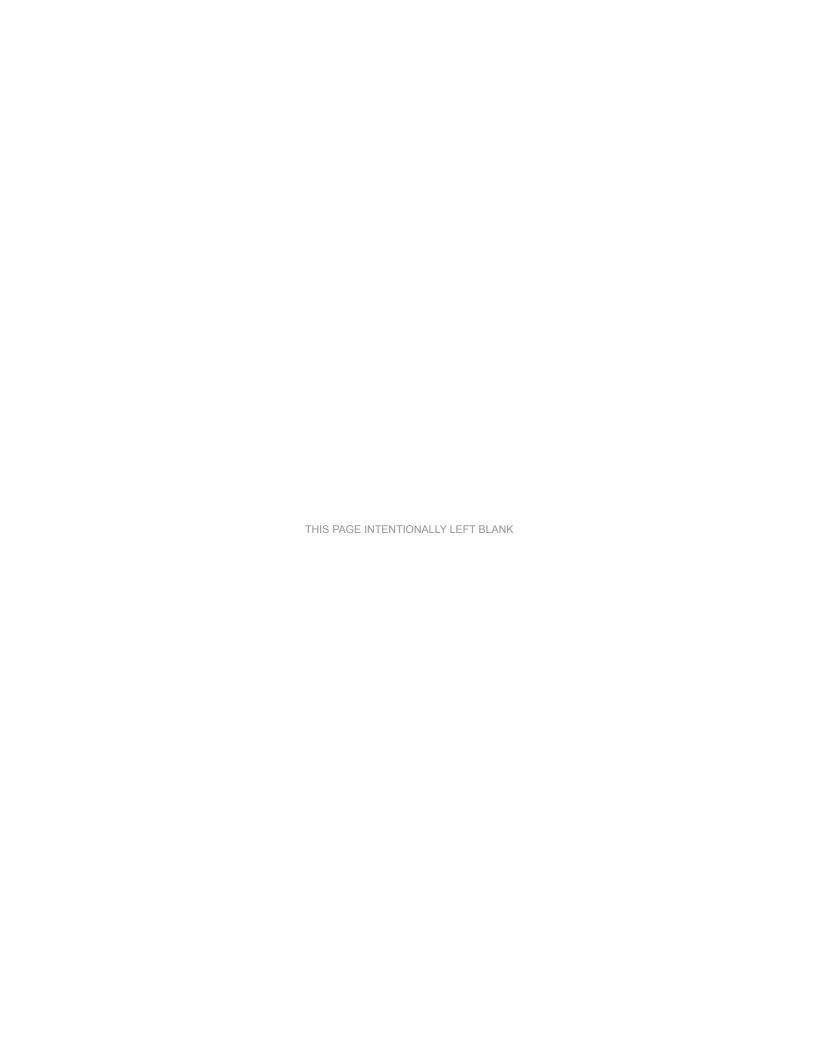
10. Verses 1-12 of chapter 26 gives a list of the porters, who also could be called gatekeepers or doorkeepers. Their duties included opening and closing the Temple doors, making sure those who entered were ceremonially clean (see 2 Chronicles 23:19), and confirming that items and equipment were not removed from the area. Other Scriptures indicate they also stored, ordered, and maintained food supplies for Temple workers, cared for the furniture in the house of God, mixed the incense that was used on a daily basis, and accounted for the gifts and sacrifices that were brought by the people. What phrase in verse 12 sums up their duties?

The phrase that sums up their duties is that they were "to minister in the house of the LORD." In the original language, the word minister (in Hebrew, sharath) means "to contribute to; to serve." This indicates that all who serve in the work of the Lord are ministers.

Discussion of this question will be a good way to wrap up your lesson. The names and duties of those

 <u> </u>

who served in David's time help us understand that God knows every individual and takes note of each task that is done for Him. The most effective servants of God will possess a deep conviction that the only way to find one's life is to lose it in service to God and	
people.	
CONCLUSION These chapters in 1 Chronicles reminded the returned exiles of the importance of making proper	
worship a priority, and encouraged them to believe that God's promises to the descendants of David would one day be fulfilled.	



Teacher's Guide



The Final Acts of David

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Chronicles 27:1 through 29:30

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever." (1 Chronicles 28:8)

BACKGROUND

Without question, King David was one of the greatest men of the Old Testament. God himself said David was a man after His own heart (see 1 Samuel 13:14). As a shepherd, giant-slayer, and military man, he was resourceful and courageous. As a poet and songwriter, he authored psalms of petition and praise that have blessed the people of God for generations. As a religious leader, he was dedicated and committed. And as king, David was without equal. The ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus said of him, "This man was of an excellent character, and was endowed with all the virtues that were desirable in a King." David's influence for good in his nation was so profound that many of the kings after him were compared to the standard he established. Although he had weaknesses and failed God on several occasions, he was humble and quick to repent.

Today's text, which records the closing days of David's life, has two parts. Chapter 27 ends the record that began in chapter 23 of David's arrangements for the nation's religious and civil affairs; this chapter outlines his organization of commanders of the army, officers of the tribes, and administrators of the kingdom. Chapters 28-29 cover events prior to David's death. At a national convocation, David presented Solomon as his successor and delivered plans for the Temple to him. He offered admonition and personal encouragement to his son, who would not only follow him in ruling the nation but would also take on the tremendous task of building a house for the Lord. The chapter ends with the passing of this revered king of Israel, who "died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour" (1 Chronicles 29:28).

By a careful choice of what to record of King David's reign, the author of 1 Chronicles emphasized the importance of remaining close to God and obedient to Him. In contrast, 2 Chronicles illustrates how quickly a nation can deteriorate spiritually and socially when it turns away from God.

OPENER	

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS **NOTES** 1. Chapter 27 describes David's organization of the military commanders, princes of the tribes, and administrators (chief stewards) who would supervise the royal properties of the kingdom. This was the final directive of the assembly David had convened to establish the roles of the nation's civil, religious, and military leaders. What do you think David's meticulous organization of kingdom affairs indicates about the nature of his reign? Answers will vary but these points could be made: David's care in his approach to governance no doubt reflected his deep love for the people and his desire to set them on a good, Godfearing path as a nation. David must have known his men well, since he evidently had insight into who would be best qualified and equipped to oversee each David's wisdom is apparent in his arrangement of the military for an equitable division of labor. The army was organized into groups of 24,000 men, with each group serving for one month of the year. This was an effective way to keep a standing army ready for action, and the inactive troops regularly trained. The fact that David appointed counsellors to advise him regarding matters of the kingdom indicates that he did not consider himself above the need for advice. 2. Chapter 28 contains David's public ceremony of succession to Solomon, and his last recorded words to the people he had led for so many years. As David addressed the convocation, he had two vital matters to communicate. In verses 3 and 5, what two directives from God did he relate to the people? In verse 3, David announced that although he had wanted to build a house for the Lord, by God's direction he was not going forward with that project. In verse 5, he announced that by God's direction, his son Solomon would succeed him on the throne, even though Solomon was not his eldest son. Expand class discussion of this question by asking your group why they think David emphasized that these determinations were based on divine instruction. Your students should conclude that David knew the Kingdom of Israel belonged to God rather than to him. He was, in essence, merely a deputy commissioned to carry out God's divine plan for the nation. He seemingly wanted both the elders of Israel and Solomon himself to have a clear understanding of that vital point. The history of Israel in Old Testament times is

proof of the blessings that come to a nation whose leaders follow God. Throughout the generations, when the

king was righteous, the nation followed his example in obedience to God. When the king was wicked, the people turned to wickedness as well.

3. Verses 9-10 of chapter 28 record David's personal charge to Solomon. In it, he related a number of godly principles that he hoped would guide his son through life—ideas that any Christian parent would do well to convey to his or her children. In your own words, what were these principles?

Your students' summary of David's instructions to Solomon should bring out the following points. David first advised Solomon to "know" God—to maintain a personal relationship with Him—and to serve Him wholeheartedly and willingly, because the Lord knows all thoughts, desires, and motives. He warned his son to be careful never to turn from God, or God would turn from him. Finally, he encouraged his son to be committed and faithful to the task God had given him to do.

As a follow-up, you may wish to point out to your group that the command to know God came before the command to serve God. That is timeless advice! No matter how wise, diligent, or committed to our task we may be, our first priority must be to stay close to God. We never want to depend solely upon our own abilities or resources in our work for the Lord.

4. In 1 Chronicles 28:10, David gave Solomon the explicit instruction, "Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it." However, God does not always reveal His plans quite so directly. How can we discern when it is God calling us to a particular task for Him, rather than just our own desires or impressions?

The following steps can help us ensure we are following God's leading rather than our own desires.

- Study the Word of God diligently, familiarizing yourself with principles about making God-guided decisions.
- Seek godly counsel from dedicated Christians who have the same Biblical doctrine.
- Consecrate to do whatever God shows you. Acknowledge the godly desires God gives you but be sure you are willing to submit to His will, rather than clinging to your own understanding.
- Pray earnestly and consistently, asking God to confirm His leading. It is important to understand that the authority to do the work of God must come from God—He does the selecting and the empowering. If God truly has called you to a particular task for Him, He will bring you to a point of personal assurance that it is His will.
- Pay attention to the leadings of divine Providence. Look for an alignment of

	—
	—
	—
	—
	_
-	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	—
	—
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_
	_

- circumstances that point clearly in a certain direction.
- Expect God's supernatural peace in your heart when you are fully aligned with His will and purpose for you.
- **5.** Verse 12 of chapter 28 records that David gave his son and successor "the pattern of all that he had by the spirit." This pattern seemingly was not merely an oral communication, but a written document or possibly even some type of model (see verse 19). Why is the phrase "by the spirit" significant?

The phrase "by the spirit" indicates that while Solomon was to be in charge of building the Temple, the design originated from God himself. Just as God had revealed to Moses the pattern of the Tabernacle, he revealed to David the pattern for this building. Even the practical details were inspired by the Holy Spirit rather than by human ingenuity.

You may wish to mention other times in Scripture when God's Spirit was bestowed on individuals to help them accomplish physical work for Him. For example, Bezaleel, the craftsman appointed to oversee the physical work of the Tabernacle construction, was filled with the Spirit of God, which gave him wisdom, understanding, and knowledge "in all manner of workmanship" (see Exodus 31:2-5; 35:30-35).

Class discussion should revolve around the fact that God is interested in every aspect of His work, and that includes material tasks as well as spiritual ones. We want God's blessing and anointing to be upon all we undertake for Him.

6. In his final instructions to Solomon, David advised, "Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD" (1 Chronicles 28:20). What are the dangers of allowing fear to come in when God calls us to do something that seems beyond our abilities? What should we do to vanquish fear when it threatens us?

Your class should conclude that fear can cause us to hesitate or make excuses rather than obeying God immediately. If we allow fear to overcome us, it can immobilize us or even cause us to refuse to obey. It is noteworthy that "Fear not" is the most repeated commandment in the Bible, and fear is mentioned more than five hundred times in the King James Version of the Bible.

In response to the second question, your group may suggest various strategies for combating fear, such as looking to God for help, discussing our fears with a godly advisor, or leaning on assurances from God's Word such as "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Ultimately, we must choose not to focus on our fears, but rather on God himself, who is the great enabler. One godly veteran of the faith put it this way: "God doesn't call the enabled. He enables the called!"

7. In the first verse of chapter 29, David spoke to the people concerning the Temple construction project, telling them, "The work is great." He went on to explain that the work was great because the house was to be for God. What four words in verse 2 indicate how David prepared in order to assist his son with this great task? What details provided in verses 2-5 attest to the truth of his statement?

The four words in verse 2 that indicate how David prepared are "with all my might." Verses 2-5 reveal that he spared no expense in the endeavor—his provision of gold and silver from his own fortune was proof of his personal commitment. From previous chapters in 1 Chronicles, we know he also assembled a huge quantity of materials, supervisory staff, workers, and an organized team to serve in the Temple upon its completion. This provides clear evidence that he performed this work of preparation with all of his might.

The work facing believers of our day is also "great." Discuss with your class that there are no small works for a great God, so we should do every task for Him to the best of our ability.

8. David told the assembled congregation, "I have set my affection to the house of my God" (1 Chronicles 29:3), and gave abundantly from his personal fortune toward the construction of the Temple. David's willingness and generosity set a good example for the people of the nation. In verse 5, he asked them, "And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?" The Hebrew word translated *service* implies giving what is needed liberally and voluntarily. Verses 6-9 reveal that in response, the people not only committed to assist in the labor of building the Temple, but they also contributed generously of their personal treasures to finance the project. What important concept about financial resources did David state in verse 14?

David stated in verse 14, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." In verse 12, he had made a similar assertion: that "both riches and honour come of thee." Point out to your class that we likely will never have the wealth of David, but we should understand that what we do have comes from God. We can also develop David's willingness to give. The point should be made that it is not what we have that matters so much to God, but our willingness to give of what we have and to yield all that we have to His control. A New Testament admonition regarding willing giving is found in 2 Corinthians 9:7.

9. At the close of 1 Chronicles, the author summarized the forty years of David's reign, and gave a short

-	

account of his death. Though David clearly had done his best to pass on his spiritual values and the lessons he had learned to his son Solomon, his real legacy was his relationship with God. What legacy or advice do you want to leave behind when you leave this world?

The responses to this question will be personal. Likely, they will center around the importance of putting God first in our lives.

Wrap up your class time by reminding your group that David was remembered and honored by the author of 1 Chronicles because he had a heart for God and did his best to lead his nation in a God-fearing way. We can learn a great deal from his devotion and commitment.

CONCLUSION

The Book of 1 Chronicles was written as an encouragement to God's people, to emphasize their spiritual heritage and remind them of doctrinal and moral truths. It reminds us of the need to maintain our spiritual foundation, the value of tracing our own godly heritage, and the importance of passing on God's truth to the next generation.

 Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, trans. William Whiston, M.A. (London: William Whiston, M.A., 1737), VII.15.2 (390).

OPENER

444

Solomon's Reign

Golomon o Roign

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Chronicles 1:1 through 9:31

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like." (2 Chronicles 1:11-12)

BACKGROUND

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were written after the Jews returned from seventy years in Babylonian captivity. The author (traditionally assumed to be Ezra) wanted to encourage God's chosen people, the Jews, to keep their spiritual heritage alive, so in these books he emphasized the record of Judah's righteous kings who had zealously sought to turn the people back to God.

Much of the material in 2 Chronicles, which spans from 970 B.C. to 538 B.C., adds to the parallel historical record found in the Books of 1 and 2 Kings. The nine chapters of today's text center on the reign of Solomon, the son of David, whose most significant accomplishment was the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Chapter 1 opens with an account of the new king gathering Israel together at Gibeon and his wise choice when given the opportunity to ask God for whatever he desired. Chapters 2 through 4 describe the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem and its furnishings, and chapters 5 through 7 cover the dedication of the house of God. Chapters 8 and 9 provide concluding commentary on the reign of Solomon, relating some of his other building activities and the visit of the Queen of Sheba. The text concludes with an account of Solomon's death and burial.

As readers of Chronicles today, we want to learn lessons from the past. When we review Judah's history, we see the blessings that accrued to the godly leaders, and the downward spiral of chaos and destruction caused by those who were wicked and idolatrous. While God hates sin, these books remind us that He also desires to forgive and restore those who will turn to Him in humility and repentance.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS **NOTES** 1. Solomon took the throne of Judah in 970 B.C. as the divinely appointed successor to his father, David. After assembling the leaders and congregation of Israel at Gibeon, he made offerings to God. That very night, the Lord appeared to Solomon and told the new king to ask whatever he desired from Him. Solomon's request is recorded in 2 Chronicles 1:8-10. What characteristics of Solomon are revealed by his response, and how can they serve as an example to us when we bring our requests to God? Your students will respond with a variety of thoughts. These may include: Thankfulness. When God asked Solomon to ask for what he wished, the king's first response was to reflect on God's great blessings to his father David and to acknowledge that it was God who had placed him on the throne. Humility. Though he had become king, Solomon saw that his own knowledge and judgment were insufficient. In the parallel account in 1 Kings, he said, "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in" (1 Kings 3:7). Awareness of his need. The enormous challenge of ruling "a people like the dust of the earth in multitude" caused Solomon to realize his need for wisdom. Selflessness. Solomon could have asked God for long life, riches, the life of his enemies, or something else that would have been of primary benefit to himself. Instead, he asked for wisdom and knowledge—something that would benefit others. Point out that when we come before God with our petitions, we want to come with these same characteristics. 2. Solomon received wisdom directly and miraculously from God. This was not just extensive knowledge or practical know-how—it was the ability to make wise decisions based on proper discernment and good judgment. What are some of the ways God gives us wisdom? How will having this help us with our responsibilities at home, school, work, and in the service of God? You may wish to begin the discussion of this question by defining wisdom as rightly applying the knowledge that we have through insight that comes from God. Then guide your group to see that true wisdom is rooted in the fear of God and a relationship with Him. Without a definite and personal connection to Him, we will never have His wisdom. When that connection

is established through a born-again experience, we can gain wisdom by studying His Word, regularly

communicating with Him, and spending time with other believers. As we ask for God's wisdom, listen to the Holy Spirit, humbly submit to His guidance, and obey His commands, we will grow in spiritual maturity and godly wisdom. James 1:5 and 3:13-18 would be good supporting passages to use in connection with this question.

You may wish to expand your discussion by asking your group to differentiate between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom. The wisdom of the world often revolves around becoming educated, or possessing a "street-smart" knowledge that enables a person to play the world's games successfully. Godly wisdom, by contrast, is not focused on self-preservation or self-promotion, but on honoring God and following His guidance. This type of wisdom empowers us to see life from an eternal perspective and act accordingly.

In response to the second question, your group may suggest a variety of ways godly wisdom will help in the specific situations mentioned. After discussing their input, the point should be made that possessing godly wisdom will impact every aspect of our lives because it will help us live in a righteous manner that honors God. It will lead us to treat others as God would treat them, and guide us to embrace Biblical values and arrange our priorities with a goal of pleasing Him.

3. God was pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom. Based on verses 11-12 of chapter 1, what additional blessings did the Lord grant Solomon?

Because Solomon chose to ask for wisdom, God gave him "riches, and wealth, and honour" in greater measure than any king before or after him. Point out to your group that when we put God first, He promises that we will receive what we really need. This is not a guarantee that we will obtain wealth and fame like that of Solomon, but God will give us richly rewarding lives, true contentment, and the assurance of a glorious eternity with Him. Spiritual riches, the blessing of God, and His approval are worth far more than any temporal gain we could ever accumulate.

4. Chapter 2 reveals that Solomon spared no effort in the construction of the Temple. He employed over 100,000 people to quarry the right stones from the mountains and bring them to the Temple site. He asked the king of Tyre to sell him the renowned cedars of Lebanon from his territory for the Temple building project. He sought out craftsmen who were "cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave" (2 Chronicles 2:7). Why do you think Solomon incorporated superior materials and the work of professional artisans as he began his God-given task? What application do you see for us as we work in the service of the Lord?

 _
 _
_
_
_

Solomon's choice of exceptional raw materials and his seeking out of skilled artisans indicated his desire to make the house of God the very best it could be, although he acknowledged in verse 6 that no one can build a house worthy of God.

Class discussion of the second question should bring out that the lesson for us is to do our best in accomplishing any task for the Lord. We never want to be guilty of half-hearted efforts in God's service. To amplify this point, you could ask your group to name specific areas in life where care and attention to detail could bring glory to God. Suggestions may include striving to improve musical talents or professional skills that could be used for God, taking care that our appearance and behavior align with our Christian testimonies, maintaining integrity and honesty in the workplace, living in a Christlike manner at home so we are good examples to our families, etc.

5. Chapter 3 indicates that the permanent house of the Lord was located on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place) in the Temple's interior is described in verses 8-14. Using these verses, briefly describe this most sacred place within the Temple in your own words.

Class input should bring out that the Holy of Holies was a perfect cube shape with each gold-overlaid side measuring twenty cubits in length. Inside were two large cherubim overlaid with gold which had wings that touched; the phrase "image work" in verse 10 likely indicates they were carved sculptures.

Make sure your group understands that this sacred place, which was separated from the rest of the worship area, visually represented the presence of God in all His power and holiness.

6. When the Temple was completed, the implements that had been prepared and the gifts King David had dedicated were brought into the Temple treasury. Then Solomon called Israel together for the ceremonial dedication and the moving of the Ark of the Covenant to its new location in the Temple. All twenty-four divisions of priests were present for this sacred occasion. They joined the "Levites which were the singers," the instrumentalists playing cymbals, psalteries, and harps, and 120 priests playing trumpets. Together, the whole group made "one sound . . . in praising and thanking the Lord" (2 Chronicles 5:12-13). According to verses 13-14, what happened as this was done?

Verses 13-14 indicate that God came down and filled the Temple with His glory to the extent that the priests could not stand to minister. What a momentous occasion this must have been! The people who gathered in this beautiful new house of God had heard of Solomon's purpose to build, offered of their own resources for the Temple's construction, and watched

the structure being built. Now it was complete. As the Ark of the Covenant was set in its place between the cherubim, the people began to worship God in song. When their voices and the sounds of the instruments blended into one chorus of praise and thanksgiving, the cloud of God's glory—the sign of His presence among them—came down and filled the Temple.

Focus your group's attention on verse 13 which states that the "trumpeters and singers were as one." Ask your students what we can learn from the fact that the people were worshipping and praising God in unity when the Temple was filled with God's presence. Resulting discussion should bring out that there is great power in both spiritual unity and united praise.

7. Solomon's prayer of dedication, recorded in 2 Chronicles 6:12–42, did not imply that God could be contained in the Temple or found only there. However, he did ask God to manifest His presence in the Temple in a special way and to be particularly attentive to the prayers offered there. In verses 22-39, Solomon made seven specific petitions to God, and each was directly associated with worship at the Temple. Name at least three of the petitions made in these verses.

You may wish to make a list of the petitions Solomon made in his prayer. They were as follows.

- That God would confirm the innocence of the just and condemn the guilty (verses 22-23).
- That God would forgive and restore the nation (verses 24-25).
- That God would forgive and send rain when Israel's sins would bring drought (verses 26-27).
- That God would forgive and heal the land of famine, pestilence, and other afflictions (verses 28-31).
- That God would hear the prayer of foreigners who would seek Him (verses 32-33).
- That God would grant His people victory in any God-directed battles (verses 34-35).
- That God would hear and forgive those who would pray for their sins while in captivity (verses 36-39).

Point out that several of these petitions involved situations when Israel would turn away from God and God would discipline them through natural disasters or enemy armies. While sin was not always the direct cause of such events, God previously had warned the Israelites that famine could be a consequence of sin (see Deuteronomy 28:15,23-24). At times in their history, He also used drought, pestilence, and the attacks of enemies to bring them to repentance.

Make sure your students understand that praying in the Temple or toward its location was not a type of good luck charm. It was simply a tangible way for the

-	
-	
· ·	

people to focus their attention on God. The king knew God would extend mercy if the people turned away from their wrongdoings, so he asked God to hear the cries of His people on such occasions, pardon their sins, and restore them in accordance with His promises.

8. After the Temple dedication, God appeared again to Solomon and assured the king that his prayer had been heard. However, the blessings promised were provisional. In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God told Solomon that when trouble came upon the people because of their sins, four conditions would need to be met to obtain forgiveness and forestall judgment: they would need to humble themselves, pray, seek after God, and turn away from their sinful behavior. When those conditions were met, God promised that He would hear from Heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land. What are some of the conditions we need to meet in order to benefit from the promises in the Bible?

Your group may offer a variety of answers. Make sure the students understand that the same four steps will need to be taken in our day by one who seeks God's forgiveness. We cannot expect to receive answers to prayer in other situations without having a personal relationship with God, applying believing faith, practicing submission and obedience, delighting in the Lord, honoring our parents and those in authority over us, etc.

9. The first twelve verses of chapter 9 describe the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon's kingdom. Since King Solomon's wisdom was widely known, she came with great and difficult questions for him. According to verse 2, "Solomon told her [answered] all her questions." At times, people may come to us with "hard questions" related to our faith. How can we be sure our responses will reflect godly wisdom?

Your students should conclude that to be prepared to respond with godly wisdom to questions about our faith, we must be walking closely to God, reading His Word, and depending upon His Spirit to guide us and give us the words to say.

You may wish to explain that we will not always feel that we responded eloquently or effectively when hard questions are asked of us. Our feelings should not be a gauge. Remind your group that God says He will use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty (see 1 Corinthians 1:27). While we may feel that our words were inadequate (or Satan may tell us that), God can anoint what we said and cause our words to be effective, though we may never see any impact. If we do our best, the results of our efforts for God are His concern, not ours.

10. While Solomon accomplished much during his reign, he drifted away from God in his later years.

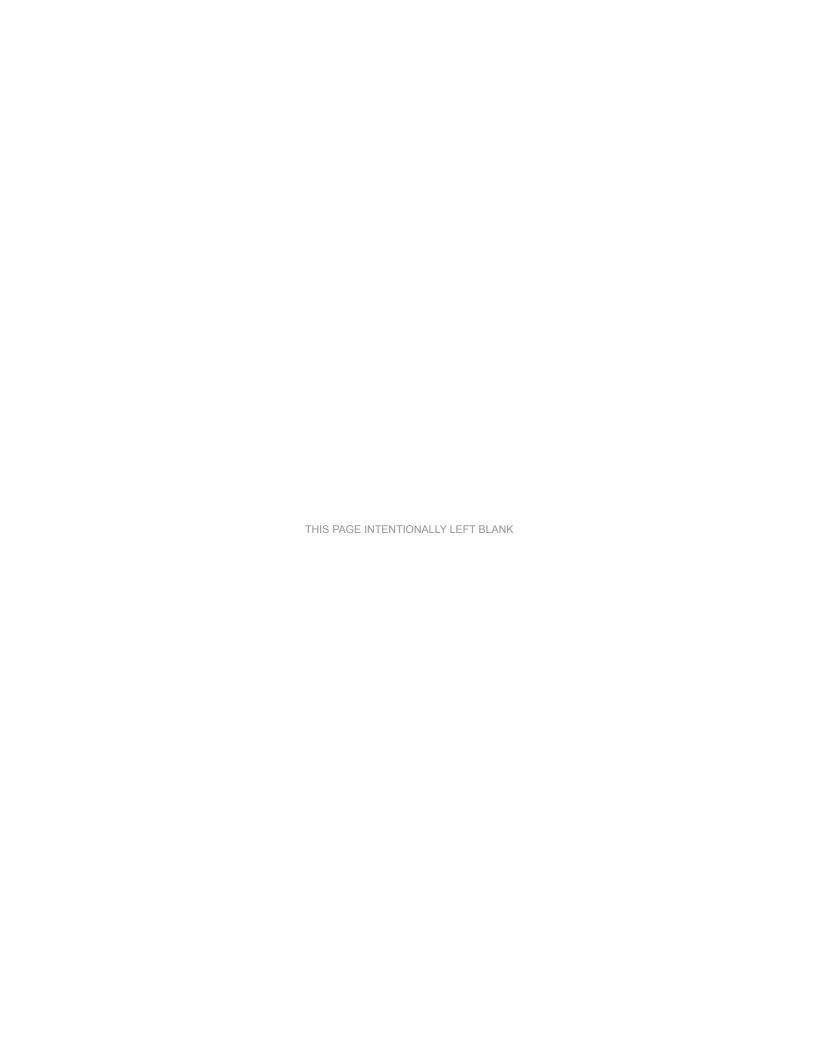
In verses 29-31 of chapter 9, the writer omitted any reference to this; he simply reported that Solomon reigned for forty years, that he died and was buried in the city of David, and that his son Rehoboam succeeded him on the throne. Considering the many advantages God had blessed Solomon with, these few closing words seem like a sad obituary. What legacy do you want to leave behind when you pass from this world?

This question is intended to encourage personal reflection. If you wish to discuss the topic in your class setting, phrase your questions in a way that will bring a general description of how those who love and serve God will want to be remembered. The point should be made that the life decisions we make today will have real and lasting consequences and will impact the legacy we leave behind. Solomon made some good choices early in his reign, but he married heathen wives and drifted away from obeying God. As we will learn in next week's lesson, Solomon's son Rehoboam, who followed him on the throne of Judah, chose to forsake the law of the Lord as well.

If time allows, you may wish to wrap up your session by recounting examples of faithful individuals who left behind a positive spiritual legacy.

CONCLUSION

Solomon began his reign of Judah with humility and dependence upon God and in response, God blessed him with wisdom, fame, and riches. He had many accomplishments during his forty-year reign, but he ultimately strayed from devotion to the true God. His deviation brought changes not only to his own life, but also to Israel.



act after this warning was to "put away the abominable idols" throughout the land (15:8). Then he gathered all

Teacher's Guide



Divided Kingdom and Kings of Judah, Part 1

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
2 Chronicles 10:1 through 20:37	<u> </u>
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed;	
to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you." (2 Chronicles 20:17)	
BACKGROUND	
After covering the reigns of David and Solomon in previous chapters of 1 and 2 Chronicles, today's text begins when Israel divided into two nations: the	
Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom	
of Judah. From chapter 10 to the end of 2 Chronicles is	
a history of the kings of Judah. There is a pattern evident throughout these chapters: when the king followed	
God, the people did as well, resulting in national peace.	
When the king turned from God, the people also often	
rebelled, and suffered the consequences.	
After Solomon's death in 930 B.C., his son Rehoboam ascended to the throne. The new ruler solic-	
ited advice from Solomon's counselors as well as his	
own peers, but he did not seek God for help. When	
he took the recommendation of his contemporaries,	
the ten northern tribes declared their independence,	
leaving only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin under	
Rehoboam's control. To strengthen Judah, Rehoboam fortified fifteen cities to the west and south of	
Jerusalem. However, he did evil and allowed the people	
of Judah to worship idols, "because he prepared not his	
heart to seek the Lord" (2 Chronicles 12:14).	
Abijah followed Rehoboam on Judah's throne, and	
reigned three years. Although Abijah was not righteous, God worked for Judah during this time because the	
people continued to worship and honor Him. Chapter	
13 describes a battle that took place between the armies	
of Abijah and those of Jeroboam, ruler of the Northern	
Kingdom of Israel. Through God's power, Judah won	
even though they were greatly outnumbered by Israel.	
The next king of Judah, Asa, ruled over the nation	
for forty-one years; his reign is summarized in chapters	
14 through 16. As a did right before God at the beginning of his reign and there was peace and prosperity in	
the land for ten years. Chapter 15 records that in the fif-	
teenth year of his reign, Asa was warned by the prophet	
Azariah to continue seeking God. His first recorded	

the people of Judah together, and they were joined by some from the northern tribes who wanted to be part of a committed return to God. The people renewed their covenant with God, pledging to seek Him with all their hearts. Sadly, after God had given Asa great victories, he stopped trusting the Lord, became resistant to God, and suffered from disease.

Chapters 17 through 20 record the reign of Jehoshaphat, who succeeded his father Asa. Because he sought God and followed the Lord's commandments. God established the kingdom in his hand, and "he had riches and honour in abundance" (2 Chronicles 17:5). God brought mighty deliverances when Jehoshaphat looked to the Lord for help. However, later in his life he made an unwise military alliance with the wicked King Ahab of Israel, and this led to Judah's involvement in a conflict with Syria in which Ahab was killed. Jehoshaphat's life was spared and he returned safely to Jerusalem, but he was rebuked by Jehu the prophet for his alliance with Ahab. The final chapter of today's text relates the invasion of Judah by the combined forces of the Moabites, Ammonites, and other allies, Jehoshaphat's prayer, and the subsequent deliverance of Judah and defeat of her enemies.

Today, God is still willing to "show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). We can learn from the example of the kings of Judah how important it is to avail ourselves of that promise.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. When Rehoboam was made king, the people of Israel (led by Jeroboam) requested that the "heavy yoke" put upon them by Solomon be reduced. What did Rehoboam's two groups of counselors suggest his response should be? Whose advice did he follow? 2 Chronicles 10:6-11

The older advisors suggested Rehoboam be kind to the people by reducing the heavy taxation and forced service. The younger counselors said he should be more harsh and demanding than Solomon had been. Rehoboam chose to listen to his peers. Point out to your group that as a result, the ten northern tribes seceded and formed the nation of Israel (see verses 16-19).

You might ask your class where we should go when we need advice. Their answers may include: to God, to those with knowledge about related matters (i.e. an auto mechanic for car trouble), and to godly people. In spiritual matters it is particularly important to consult God, His Word, and people with spiritual understanding and experience.

2. As the Northern Kingdom of Israel plunged into idolatry, some of the Levites and other true worshippers of God migrated to Judah. These people "set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel"

	-
NOTEO	
NOTES	

(2 Chronicles 11:16). What does it mean to set our hearts to seek God and what will be some of the evidences? Those who set their hearts to seek God have made a conscious decision to wholeheartedly follow God's will and instructions. Your class could generate a list of the evidences of this purpose. That list may include thoughts such as: Setting aside distractions to focus on God. Spending time in Bible study and prayer. • Watching for opportunities to tell unbelievers about the Lord. • Faithful attendance at church. • *An interest in talking about God with fellow* believers. • A purpose to do God's will, even if it means facing difficulties. **3.** Chapter 12 records that at the beginning of King Rehoboam's reign, he seemed to listen to God's prophet and to obey. However, when he was stronger and the kingdom appeared to be going well, he forsook God. As a result, God allowed the king of Egypt and his allies to capture many of Judah's fortified cities, and then come toward Jerusalem. When the prophet told Rehoboam and the princes this invasion was because they had forsaken God, what was their reaction? 2 Chronicles 12:6 The king and the princes humbled themselves before God. They said, "The LORD is righteous," which indicates they understood that God's discipline was deserved. Discuss God's response as related in 2 Chronicles 12:7-8. God honored the humility of Rehoboam and the princes and did not allow the nation to be destroyed by the Egyptians. However, the people of Judah had to serve the king of Egypt, probably by paying tribute, and the wealth of their nation was reduced. Today God also honors humility and notes when anyone comes to Him in repentance. However, even though a person is saved and looking forward to Heaven, some of the consequences of the former sins may remain. **4.** Abijah, Rehoboam's son, had war with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Israel had turned away from God and served idols. In contrast, Judah had maintained the worship and sacrifices as commanded by God. What was Abijah's warning to Jeroboam and Israel? (See 2 Chronicles 13:12.) Given the relative size of the

an encouragement to us today?

Abijah warned that God was with Judah, and that Israel would not prosper if they fought against Him.

opposing armies, how can the outcome of the battle be

It should be an encouragement to us to recognize that God helped Judah in a mighty way, even though

Israel had an army that was twice as large as Judah's. This can be an encouragement to us when we feel "outnumbered" or face problems that seem insurmountable. God has promised to be with us when we trust in Him. You may wish to ask your students if they can share a time when circumstances seemed impossible and yet God brought victory.

5. The forty-one-year rule of Asa is covered in 2 Chronicles chapters 14-16. His beginning was good. During the first part of his reign, he commanded the people of Judah to seek God, and the Lord gave them rest from their enemies for ten years. According to 2 Chronicles 14:7, Asa recognized this as an opportunity to build defenses against potential future attacks. What spiritual lesson can we learn from this?

Lead your class to conclude that if we are not currently facing a trial, we should be looking to God to help us prepare for the next trial—as it surely will come! You could ask how we can prepare. Their suggestions might include:

- Establish a pattern of daily devotions—both Bible reading and prayer.
- Make note of how God has answered prayer for others.
- *Spend time with other believers.*
- Keep a list of your past victories so you can reference them during trials and gain strength from remembering God's help in the past.
- **6.** The end of 2 Chronicles 14 tells how God gave Asa and Judah victory over the Ethiopians who came against Judah with far larger forces. In Chapter 15, God sent a prophet to warn Asa of the necessity to continue to lean on God. In response, Asa instituted reforms. He put away the idols in Judah, removed anything related to the practice of idolatry, and restored the altar of the Lord. Then he gathered the people of Judah, as well as some from the Northern Kingdom who wanted to truly serve God, and they entered into a covenant to serve God with all their hearts. What was the result? 2 Chronicles 15:15 and 19

The people rejoiced, God was "found of them," and they had rest from war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

You could follow up with the question: What will be the result if we purpose to serve God with all our hearts and keep His commandments?

Your students should recognize that God will answer prayer for us as well and prepare our hearts to live with Him eternally. This may not mean that every prayer will be answered in exactly the way we wish. However, God will do what is best for us, and He will not fail His Word.

7. In chapter 16 we read that despite the victory God gave Asa and Judah over the Ethiopians and their allies,

-	
-	
_	
-	

when Israel began to fortify a border city, Asa hired the armies of Syria to help instead of relying on God. In response, God sent Hanani the seer to rebuke Asa. According to verse 10, what was Asa's reaction? What can we learn from this exchange?

Asa was enraged and had the prophet imprisoned. Your class may have various thoughts about what we can learn from this exchange. These could include:

- Those who are not following God's ways may be angry when rebuked.
- Angry people may lash out at the innocent or persecute those who stand for truth.
- It is dangerous to rely on our own solutions instead of keeping our trust in God. According to 2 Chronicles 16:9, God wanted to show His strength on behalf of His trusting people, but Asa hindered that when he sought the help of Svria

Conclude your discussion of these questions by reinforcing that resistance to God does not pay. The final verses of this chapter indicate that the last years of Asa's life were marred by unbelief, oppression against his people, and disease. Even if people do not see the results of resistance to God in this life, they will see it in eternity.

8. When Jehoshaphat became king, he purposed to serve God. We read in 2 Chronicles 17:7-9 that one of the programs he instituted was to educate the people regarding God's Law. Teaching God's Word is vital today as well. What are some ways people can be taught the truths of the Bible?

The suggestions of your class may include the following:

- Through attendance at Sunday school, church, and Bible study sessions.
- By family and/or personal devotions. Class members may be able to share examples. Some families have Bible quizzes, sing Scripture-based songs, or have their children tell where a passage is located in the Bible, etc.
- Through observing the godly daily lives of believers.
- By reading Christian literature and accounts of faithful Christians of the past.
- Through discussion of Biblical values and a Biblical worldview.
- **9.** Chapter 20 of 2 Chronicles describes the miraculous deliverance God gave Judah when a great number of enemy forces invaded. Jehoshaphat responded to the threat of invasion in three ways: he feared, he set himself to seek God, and he called the nation to pray and fast. His prayer in verses 6-12 ends with these words, "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against

us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." What was God's response through the prophet, Jahaziel, and what strategy did Judah use? 2 Chronicles 20:14-17, 21

God's message was:

- Be not afraid or dismayed (verse 15).
- The battle is not yours, but God's (verse 15).
- The enemy's pending location was given (verse 16).
- You will not need to fight (verse 17—key verse).
- Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord (verse 17).
- *The Lord will be with you (verse 17).*

The strategy used was to place the singers in front of Judah's army. When they arrived at the battle area, they found that the enemy was already destroyed.

A follow-up question for your class could be: What can we learn from this account? Their answers may include:

- God will fight for His people.
- Our battles will be the Lord's if we trust Him.
- We need to make sure we are obeying God to the best of our knowledge in every area of our lives
- We must be seeking God's interests rather than self-oriented desires.
- When we face difficulties, we need to recognize our own insufficiency and ask God for help.
- We don't know how God will answer our prayers, but we can be sure He will answer.

CONCLUSION

The same God who worked for the people of Judah wants to work for us today. May we seek to obey His instructions and trust Him with all our hearts. As we do, He will be glorified in us, He will be with us as we face spiritual battles, and we can expect Him to be mindful of every detail of our lives.

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

444

Kings of Judah, Part 2

"walked in the way of the kings of Israel." This was a negative evaluation, because while the Southern

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
2 Chronicles 21:1 through 32:33	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes." (2 Chronicles 29:8)	
BACKGROUND	
In this portion of 2 Chronicles, the author continues his history of the kings of Judah. He traced the achievements and failures of nine rulers, beginning with King Jehoram in 848 B.C. and continuing through the reign of King Hezekiah, which ended with his death in 687 B.C. Of these rulers, only four—Joash, Amaziah, Jotham, and Hezekiah—followed God and led the people in renewing their commitment to Him. Although not perfect in every regard, those four attempted to obey God's laws, did away with the places of idol worship, refrained from alliances with ungodly nations, and generally encouraged the people in the worship of the one true God. One other king, Uzziah, had a positive beginning and accomplished much good for Judah, but pride was his downfall near the end of his rule. Today's text reveals that throughout the history of Judah, the nation fluctuated between obedience to God and apostasy. The reigning king's response to God affected the spiritual condition of the people and determined whether or not God would send judgment upon the nation. When David's descendants on Judah's throne were faithful to God, Judah experienced victory in battle, success in government, and peace with other nations. Conversely, when the rulers led the people into idolatry, the nation suffered. Just as Judah's faithfulness to God was key to her peace and survival as a nation, so our obedience to God as individuals is vital to our peace and spiritual survival today. If we forget that all our blessings and benefits come from God, we are in danger of the same spiritual and moral collapse that Judah ultimately experienced.	
• •	
SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Chapter 21 describes the reign of King Jehoram, who succeeded his father Jehoshaphat on the throne of Judah. He was married to Athaliah, the idolatrous daughter of Israel's wicked King Ahab and his wife	

Kingdom of Judah had both godly and wicked kings, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had only evil rulers. According to verses 8-10, what were some of the consequences to Jehoram and Judah because he forsook the God of his fathers?

Verses 8-10 tell of the revolt of Edom and Libnah, nations that had been under the control of Judah. Point out to your class that when the kings of Judah remained true to God, they were able to keep the surrounding nations in subjection; but seemingly as soon as they revolted from God, these nations rebelled.

Further troubles during the reign of Jehoram are recorded in verses 16-17, when the Philistines and Arabians invaded—another revolt of subjugated peoples against Judah. All Jehoram's sons were killed (see 2 Chronicles 22:1) in this invasion except for the youngest, Ahaziah (also known as Jehoahaz). Verses 18-20 describe the plague that fell upon Jehoram and his gruesome death. Point out to your group that punishment for sin is not always immediate or as dramatic as the judgment in this passage, but those who ignore God's laws will eventually suffer the consequences of sin. There is no escape from judgment unless the relationship with God is made right.

2. Chapter 22 of 2 Chronicles relates that Athalia used the death of her son Ahaziah (Jehoahaz) to assume control of the kingdom. She immediately destroyed all the royal family—her own grandchildren—to eliminate any who might resist her efforts to gain the throne. The only survivor was Ahaziah's youngest son, Joash. Ahaziah's sister, Jehoshabeath, and her husband, Jehoiada the high priest, concealed the baby Joash in the Temple and then kept him hidden for six years before establishing him on the throne of Judah. Why do you think this couple risked their own lives to preserve the life of the young prince?

Your group may respond with suggestions such as human empathy for a helpless baby, a desire to do right before God by protecting the innocent, etc. However, the point should emerge that no doubt God led them to take this action. Joash was the last rightful heir to the throne of Judah from the lineage of David. God had promised that the reign of King David's descendants would continue forever (see 2 Samuel 7:16), and Jehoiada was a godly man who was determined to restore the throne to David's rightful heir. While Jehoshabeath and Jehoiada courageously risked their lives to protect the young heir, it was ultimately God who worked in a miraculous way to preserve David's line.

It is possible that some in your class will wonder about the promise that David's kingdom would be established forever, since Judah had already fallen to the army of Babylon by the time the books of Chronicles were written. When Judah was overthrown because of her idolatry and disobedience to God, the royal line continued and was protected in captivity,

through the return of the exiles, and until Jesus was born. He was and is the rightful King—a descendant of David who will one day reign forever.

3. After establishing Joash upon the throne of Judah, Jehoiada continued to be a powerful influence for good in the kingdom. Verses 16-17 of chapter 23 record that he led the people in making a covenant of recommitment to God and then in destroying the temple of Baal at Jerusalem. In verse 18-21, Jehoiada reinstituted worship practices based on what God had revealed to Moses and David. What significance do you see in the statement in 2 Chronicles 24:2 that Joash did what was right in God's sight "all the days of Jehoiada the priest"?

Your group should conclude that Joash clearly was guided and encouraged in his walk with God by Jehoiada. However, he evidently lacked the spiritual fortitude to resist evil once the influence of Jehoiada was gone. He listened to counsel that led him into evil, and after a short time, even ordered the death of Zechariah, Jehoiada's son.

As a follow up, ask your group what men and women of God have been an influence and encouragement to them, and how. You will want to come prepared with a personal example to share with your class to start the discussion. Likely some of your students will be able to point to parents, grandparents, teachers, or other godly men and women. This question can also encourage some healthy self-evaluation. What kind of example are we setting? Is our behavior influencing people toward godliness? It is important that the impact we have on others be a positive one!

4. Chapter 25 is a record of the twenty-nine-year reign of Amaziah, who ascended the throne of Judah following the death of his father, Joash. While Amaziah began his reign doing what was right in the sight of the Lord, verse 2 indicates that he did not serve God with a perfect heart. What do you think "a perfect heart" means in this context? What actions of Amaziah as described in verse 14 support your evaluation?

Your students will explain the phrase "perfect heart" in a variety of ways, but the conclusion should be reached that it is a heart that desires above all else to live in a manner pleasing to God. Amaziah's obedience and commitment to God was half-hearted at best. God does not expect absolute perfection from us in the same sense that God is perfect. Even when we are wholeheartedly following God, we will still have the limitations and frailties that are a part of being human. A perfect heart is one that is perfect in motive and in subjection to God, but not mentally, physically, or emotionally perfect.

In response to the second question, verse 14 indicates that after winning a decisive victory over the Edomites, Amaziah reverted to idolatry and began to burn incense to the idols of the very nation over which God had given him victory.

Discuss as a group how important it is to maintain a wholehearted commitment to God. Grudging compliance, a casual attitude toward God's blessings, or a neglect of God's requirements will quickly become a downward spiral into outright rejection of God. **5.** The fifty-two-year reign of King Uzziah, described in chapter 26, was the second longest in Judah's history. Uzziah had a positive beginning and accomplished much good for Judah. Read verses 6-15 and summarize what material changes Uzziah made for the nation. A summary of these verses should bring out that: Uzziah expanded the territory of Judah to nearly the size it had been during its glory days of David and Solomon. This brought prosperity, as tribute was paid to him and he controlled areas of commerce—trade routes along the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea to Arabia (verses 6-8). He built up Jerusalem, which had been dam-

aged during a war in his father's reign and

- perhaps from the earthquake that occurred during his reign (see Amos 1:1). He built up a large farming operation with
- great herds, large tracts of land, and many farmers and vineyard workers.
- He "built towers in the wilderness"—fortresses and outposts (verses 9-10).
- *He maintained a large, well-equipped army,* with over 300,000 soldiers. He distributed newly invented equipment to defend the towns of Judah, and as a result, there was prosperity and peace in the kingdom (verses 11-15).
- **6.** After accomplishing so much for the Kingdom of Judah, what led to Uzziah's downfall? 2 Chronicles 26:16

The pride of Uzziah, referenced in verse 16 by the phrase "his heart was lifted up," was what led to his downfall. To follow up, ask your group to specify what action Uzziah did that showed pride. They should note that though warned by Azariah and eighty valiant priests, Uzziah took upon himself a function that belonged to the priesthood alone and burned incense in the Temple. As a result, God smote him with leprosy—a disease that lasted for the remainder of his life.

Discuss with your group the difference between the satisfaction that results from a job well done, and the type of pride that God hates. You may also ask your students to identify ways we can guard against the incursion of pride in our lives.

7. Verses 9-15 of chapter 28 tell of a remarkable act of courage: the intervention of the prophet Oded, who reproved Israel's military leaders as they were returning home from battle. What did he tell them and what was the result?

-	
-	

Oded told Israel's military leaders that judgment had come upon Judah because God was angry with them, but that judgment would fall upon Israel as well if they took captives of their brethren. Remarkably, the leaders responded favorably to his words, and the captives were fed, clothed, and escorted back to Judah.

8. If we face circumstances in our lives that require courage, what can we learn from the prophet Oded that might help us?

You may want to begin your discussion of this question by explaining that the dictionary defines courage as "the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, or withstand danger, fear, or difficulty." At times, people are applauded by the world for some "courageous" departure from what the Word of God teaches, but they are not really courageous at all.

Oded displayed moral courage—he did what was right despite potential opposition or retaliation. One lesson we can learn from him is that he was "a prophet of the LORD" (verse 9) and spoke on His behalf. When we have a relationship with God and are obedient to Him, we can have confidence no matter how adverse our circumstances may be.

It is noteworthy that Oded was not championing a personal cause or calling for action that would benefit himself. Rather, he was pointing out that these leaders would incur the wrath of God if they continued their wrong actions.

Your group should conclude that in a world where fear of repercussions often seems to immobilize people, we must not be afraid to do what is right. Remind your class that the most repeated admonition in Scripture is "Be not afraid"! Facing challenges courageously will not always be easy but when we do so in the strength of the Lord, we can be assured of victory in the end.

9. Chapters 29 through 32 of 2 Chronicles are a record of the twenty-nine-year reign of King Hezekiah, who is considered by many Bible scholars to be the greatest of the reformer kings of the nation. Verse 2 of chapter 29 states that "he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done." The people of Judah had turned from God to idols, but Hezekiah attempted to completely wipe out all vestiges of idolatrous worship—he destroyed or removed pagan altars, idols, and temples. Based on the following verses, what other actions did Hezekiah take toward reform in Judah? 2 Chronicles 29:3-5, 10, 20-21; 30:1; 31:2

Class review of these verses will bring out that Hezekiah took the following actions.

- 2 Chronicles 29:3-5—He ordered that the house of the Lord be cleansed and the doors repaired.
- 2 Chronicles 29:10—He renewed the covenant with the Lord God of Israel.

-	

- 2 Chronicles 29:20-21—He re-established the Temple sacrifices.
- 2 Chronicles 30:1—He re-instituted the Passover observance.
- 2 Chronicles 31:2—He organized the priests and resumed the work of the Temple according to the plan originally set up by David.

You may wish to follow up by asking your group how Hezekiah's actions can serve as a model for us, particularly when we are seeking for spiritual renewal or revival.

10. In Hezekiah's time, the Assyrian Empire was the superpower that controlled most of the Middle East. Chapter 32 records how Sennacherib tried to overthrow Judah in order to force the people to pay tribute. Hezekiah made diligent efforts to fortify Jerusalem against the expected assault: he strengthened the city walls, added another wall around the city, and prepared armament. He also diverted the spring outside the city that provided Jerusalem with water, channeling the water through an underground tunnel to provide a water supply in event of a siege. Based on 2 Chronicles 32:6-8 and 20, what other and even more important actions did Hezekiah take to prepare for the assault?

Verses 6-8 record that Hezekiah encouraged the people by reminding them that the Lord would help them and fight their battle. Hezekiah understood that the defense of Judah did not depend only on walls, towers, shields, and water but on the courage and determination of the soldiers fortified by confidence in God.

Verse 20 indicates that he prayed. (The words of his prayer are recorded in 2 Kings 19:15-19.) Point out to your group that when Hezekiah became aware of the threat against Judah, he did not lose hope or give up. While he knew how serious their predicament was, he also knew that God could save them and he trusted God to do so. The number of their opponents was immaterial with God on their side.

Discussion should bring out that at times we may face battles in life in which no solution is apparent. However, we serve a God who is unlimited in resources and power. He can work for us in ways we cannot even imagine. An amazing example of this is found in our text: verse 21 of chapter 32 records that the Lord sent an angel, which "cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria." The parallel text in 2 Kings 19 records that the angel smote 185,000 men in the camp of Assyria that night, and Sennacherib departed.

CONCLUSION

The history recorded for us by the author of Chronicles teaches that a nation that does not follow God and abide by His instructions will never be successful.

-	
	

Zedekiah (originally Mattaniah). The final, chaotic years of Judah are covered in verses 17-21, which describe the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of

the people to Babylon.

Teacher's Guide



Final Kings of Judah and Captivity

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS **OPENER** 2 Chronicles 33:1 through 36:23 **KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION** "Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book." (2 Chronicles 34:21) **BACKGROUND** Today's text describes the reigns of the last six kings of Judah and concludes the books of Chronicles. From his vantage point in the post-exilic period, the author reviewed the Israelite monarchy in order to encourage God's people to keep their faith and traditions of worship alive. Second Chronicles summarizes the reigns of twenty kings of Judah, spanning from 970 B.C. to 586 B.C., when Judah was conquered by the forces of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and ceased to exist as an independent nation. The Northern Kingdom of Israel preceded Judah into captivity in 722 B.C. when the nation fell to Assyria. As in 1 Chronicles, the author's focus in 2 Chronicles was on moral lessons from the reigns of Judah's rulers, rather than a complete record of historical facts. For example, he devoted two entire chapters to the rule of righteous King Josiah, while the reigns of the final four evil kings of Judah are summarized in just sixteen verses. In today's text, chapter 33 describes the reign of Manasseh, who followed his father Hezekiah in ruling Judah. Manasseh was a desperately evil king, but when he faced the bitter consequences of his sins, he humbly repented. God restored him to the throne of Judah, and he went on to institute spiritual reform in the nation. However, that reform was short-lived; Manasseh's son and successor, Amon, was also evil and was killed by his servants after just two years on the throne. Chapters 34-35 are a record of the reign of King Josiah, who ruled for thirty-one years—a time of peace, prosperity, and reform in the nation. The concluding chapter of 2 Chronicles summarizes the reigns of the nation's last four kings: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim (originally Eliakim), Jehoiachin, and

The last two verses of 2 Chronicles record the decree of King Cyrus of Persia in 538 B.C., which allowed the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple. In orchestrating their return, God reassured the people of His presence and reaffirmed that His promises would never fail.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In any ranking of corrupt kings, Manasseh would be near the top. Several of the heinous sins of this fourteenth ruler of Judah are mentioned in chapter 33. Verse 2 states that he "did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen . ." Manasseh's apostasy and evil actions influenced the people of Judah to turn away from the reforms of his father, Hezekiah. However, when Manasseh was carried away captive to Babylon, he "besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly" (verse 12), crying out to God for deliverance. What details provided in the text prove that Manasseh's repentance was genuine? How did God respond? 2 Chronicles 33:13-16

The fact that Manasseh's repentance was genuine is illustrated in verses 14-16 by the actions he took following his restoration: he removed the idols from the Temple, took down the altars he had built to false gods, sacrificed to God, and commanded the people to serve the Lord God of Israel. Verse 13 indicates that God was entreated by Manasseh's prayer and supplication—He listened and forgave, and the repentant Manasseh was restored to his kingdom. Make the point that if God would forgive Manasseh, He surely will forgive anyone who turns honestly turns to Him.

This could be an opportunity to discuss that genuine repentance is a godly sorrow for sin that goes beyond mere regret or even sincere remorse. There is a vast difference between the person who is sorry because his sin was discovered, and the one who is sincerely penitent before God even when his sins are not known publicly. In the Old Testament, the word translated repent means "to turn back; to change one's mind." The Greek word translated repentance in the New Testament means "compunction for guilt," and by implication, "reversal." Thus, Biblical repentance indicates a change of mind that results in a reversal of action or direction.

Wrap up your discussion of this question by noting that even after repentance, some consequences of sinful actions may still remain. According to 2 Kings 21:11-13, the consequences of Manasseh's wicked reign included the destruction of Jerusalem, and Judah's ultimate captivity. Even though Manasseh repented, the effect his wicked behavior had on his people and nation were long lasting.

2. Even the brief description in chapter 33 of Manasseh's actions before he repented is horrifying.

NOTES		

He worshiped pagan gods, rebuilt the high places destroyed by his father Hezekiah, and offered his own sons as burnt sacrifices. His blatant sin could make one wonder how God could ever forgive such an individual. What does God's response to Manasseh tell us about His nature?

Your group may offer a variety of thoughts in response to this question. These may include that God hates sin and will not tolerate idolatry, and that He showed Himself to be a God of justice by punishing the king for his wickedness. However, God also showed His merciful nature through His response to Manasseh's repentance; He not only forgave the king, but He also restored his kingdom to him.

You may wish to follow up with the concept that all sin is abhorrent to God. Lying carries the same wages and punishment as murder. Secret sins and blatant sins are still both sin—though there may be different earthly consequences, both will be judged by God.

3. Amon, who followed Manasseh on the throne of Judah, was twenty-two years of age when he began to rule. The author of Chronicles described Amon's reign only briefly, and characterized this king as being "evil in the sight of the Lord." When Amon was assassinated by his servants, the people appointed his son Josiah as his successor. Although Josiah's father and grandfather had set an example of wickedness, Josiah chose to follow God. What actions early in Josiah's reign indicated his purpose to lead Judah in seeking the God of David? 2 Chronicles 34:3-7

Verses 3-7 indicate that Josiah took the following actions:

- *He sought God.*
- He purged the high places and groves places of idolatrous worship—removing the idols the people had been worshipping.
- He broke down the altars of Baal and made dust of the images.
- He burned the faithless priests' bones upon their altars.
- He expanded his reform into outlying areas around Jerusalem.

Point out that the phrases "in his presence" in verse 4 and "he returned to Jerusalem" in verse 7 indicate that Josiah personally went throughout his kingdom to ensure that the removal of all aspects of idolatry was accomplished. It was not just a commandment he made, but he himself attacked idolatry as an enemy of his kingdom.

Expand your discussion of this question by pointing out that a sincere desire to follow God will always be tested—God will require actions that prove the commitment. For example, when a person is born

again, God will bring to mind wrongdoings in the past that must be made right. As newly saved individuals continue to walk with God, there will be ongoing steps of obedience in matters both small and large. Make the point that while our obedience likely will not impact others to the extent Josiah's actions did, we will face situations that challenge our commitment. If we truly desire to progress in our relationship with God, we will do whatever He shows us.

4. After Josiah's energetic campaign to rid Judah of idolatry, he began cleansing the neglected Temple in Jerusalem, much as his predecessor Hezekiah had done (see 2 Chronicles 29). In the process, God's Word was rediscovered. When it was read to Josiah, he was shocked and distressed to see how far his nation had departed from God's commandments. What did Josiah do in response to what he heard from God's Word? 2 Chronicles 34:19-22, 29-33

The text indicates that in response to God's Word, Josiah did the following.

- He rent his clothes as a sign of his grief (verse 19).
- He sought counsel from the prophetess Huldah (verses 20-22).
- Based on the prophetess' words, he convened the elders, priests, and people of Jerusalem for a public reading of the Law (verses 29-30).
- He made a personal covenant with God, promising to follow Him and keep His commandments (verse 31), and then caused the people to do likewise (verse 32).
- Finally, he took away all the paraphernalia of idolatry from the lands that pertained to Israel (verse 33).

Ask your class to describe ways people respond when confronted with the truth of God's Word today. They may mention that some will ignore, procrastinate, reject, mock, or argue. However, others like Josiah will respond in a positive manner and turn toward God.

5. Chapter 35 focuses on the celebration of the Passover called for by Josiah as part of the reforms he instituted in Judah. The last Passover of note had taken place in the days of Hezekiah (see 2 Chronicles 30:1-3) and Josiah knew that after so many years had elapsed, it would take an enormous amount of preparation to properly conduct this one. Verse 2 indicates that he "set the priests in their charges [duties], and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD." The priests needed to be both "set" (appointed) and "encouraged" to accomplish the needed work. In verses 4 and 6, Josiah commanded the Levites to "prepare yourselves" and to "sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren." In

_

what ways can we prepare ourselves to serve God effectively and offer spiritual encouragement to others?

Class discussion should bring out that the starting point for serving God and encouraging others is to have a personal relationship with Him. Other thoughts may include the following.

- Be a student of God's Word.
- Be faithful in every task in God's service, great or small.
- Ask God to help you develop empathy and genuine care for others.
- Practice small acts of service without expecting any notice or commendation.
- Pray for wisdom, courage, and opportunities in reaching out to others on the Lord's behalf.
- **6.** The battle described in verses 20-24 of chapter 35 took place in 609 B.C. Three years earlier, forces of the growing Babylonian Empire had overthrown the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, and Pharoah Necho of Egypt had allied himself with the remaining Assyrians in an attempt to halt Babylon's further expansion. Necho's armies marched through Judah on their way to join the Assyrians. Verse 21 indicates that Josiah was warned not to interfere by a pagan king. Although this king was momentarily used as a messenger for God, this was an unusual source for counsel. As Christians, where do we go for counsel and instruction?

Your students should conclude that we most often receive instruction through the Word of God, the counsel of the ministry, or advice from godly individuals. However, at times God may speak to us in an unexpected manner. For example, God may use personal circumstances or world events to get our attention. Perhaps the words of a song, a testimony, or a remark in a Sunday school class will provide an answer we need. While we must be certain that any advice or counsel we accept aligns with Scripture, it is clear that God is not limited in the ways He will make Himself known. We want to be careful to stay tuned to the Spirit in order not to discount or ignore God's messages to us.

7. Chapter 36 covers the final years of Judah by summarizing the reigns of the nation's last four kings—all of whom were evil. Verses 14-16 indicate that the people "transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen." They polluted the Temple, mocked God's messengers, and despised His words. What judgment did God send upon them as a result? 2 Chronicles 36:17-20

God sent judgment through the Chaldeans—the Babylonian forces under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar—who slaughtered old and young without mercy, stole the treasures of the Temple,

444

The Book of Ezra

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Ezra 1:1 through 10:44	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." (Ezra 6:21-22)	
BACKGROUND	
The Book of Ezra provides a vital link in the historical record of the Jewish people. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. When the Southern Kingdom of Judah was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar's armies in 586 B.C. and the people were carried away to Babylon, Israel ceased to exist as an independent nation. Ezra records how the Jews returned to their homeland, their struggle to survive, and their efforts to rebuild what had been destroyed. Restoration is a main theme of the book: not only restoration of the exiles to their homeland, but also restoration of the proper worship of God after years of captivity. Ezra reminded the people that despite their failure to obey God and abide by their covenant with Him, He had not forgotten them. The Book of Ezra can be divided into two sections. Chapters 1-6 document the first return of exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the people's rebuilding of the Temple despite opposition to their efforts, and the eventual completion and dedication of the Temple. Chapters 7-10 record Ezra's journey to Jerusalem about fifty-eight years later with a second group of returnees, and his efforts to bring about spiritual reformation. Both sections offer hope for every generation. Those who are serving God can be encouraged by how He enables His people to overcome challenges and accomplish His will. Those who are bound by sin can learn that God offers deliverance and will accept and restore those who seek Him in true repentance.	
SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS	NOTES
1. The prophet Jeremiah had foretold that Babylon would be punished for their iniquity. He also prophesied that after the people of Judah spent seventy years of captivity in Babylon, God would bring them back to their homeland (see Jeremiah 25:12 and 29:10). Isaiah	

foretold that a Gentile ruler named Cyrus would rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (see Isaiah 44:28). In 539 B.C., just prior to the events in the Book of Ezra, the armies of King Cyrus of Persia overthrew Babylon. What events are described in Ezra 1:1-3, and what characteristic of God is demonstrated by these events?

Ezra 1:1-3 indicates that God stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus, who issued a proclamation throughout his kingdom stating that the Lord God of Heaven had charged him to build God a house at Jerusalem. He encouraged the Jewish people to return to their homeland to build the Temple.

In response to the second question, your group may offer various thoughts. However, when these events are viewed in conjunction with the Scriptures in Jeremiah and Isaiah, they should conclude that the prophecies were precisely fulfilled, thus demonstrating God's faithfulness and the complete accuracy of His Word.

2. Verse 5 of chapter 1 indicates that "all them whose spirit God had raised" decided to return to Jerusalem after King Cyrus' proclamation. What do you think is meant by that phrase, and why is it important?

Your students should see that God motivated those who responded to the opportunity to return. While they were a minority (many more of the Jewish people stayed behind in Babylon), they were a God-stirred minority.

Having God's direction and blessing was important because the returnees would face many obstacles as they went back to their homeland. They would be leaving the security of Babylon for a land most of them had never seen. The journey would be long and dangerous, and they would be taking up residence in a ruined city with no proper homes, roads, or government. However, the returning exiles had a God-given vision and purpose that sustained them.

You may wish to follow up by pointing out that we too may be called to undertake tasks for God that seem difficult or even impossible. However, when God moves upon our spirits and places an open door before us, we can be sure He will go with us and provide what we need, just as he did for the Jewish exiles (see verses 6-8).

3. Chapter 2 lists the people who joined Zerubbabel for this journey. In so doing, the returnees indicated their faith in God's promise to restore them to their land. How did some of the "chief of the fathers" further demonstrate their trust and commitment to God? Ezra 2:68-69

Verses 68-69 record that some of the chief of the fathers "offered freely for the house of God," giving what they could out of their own resources for the rebuilding. Ask your group why they think these verses are part of the Biblical record. The point should be made that materially supporting God's work is

encouraged and commended throughout Scripture. The fact that these individuals offered "after their ability"—as much as they could—was of more importance than the monetary value of their gifts.

4. The Jews had not been able to offer sacrifices to God during their exile, as this could only be done in the place God ordained (see Deuteronomy 12:11-14). Ezra 3:2 records that one of the first official acts of the returning exiles was to build the altar of God. Why do you think the people built the altar before rebuilding the Temple or the city wall?

While no reason is directly stated, restoring the spiritual "life" of the nation clearly was a priority for those who returned. City walls could only offer limited physical protection, but the favor and protection of God was vital if they were to overcome the challenges facing them.

To amplify the discussion, ask your group to parallel the building of the altar to a new convert building a relationship with God. Points mentioned could include the following.

- The builders were motivated when God's Spirit moved on their hearts, and those who turn to God do so in response to His call to repentance.
- The builders recognized that establishing regular communication and sacrifice to God was vital, and the one who desires a relationship with God must also recognize the vital necessity of regular communication with Him and obedience to His instructions.
- The construction of the altar took time, effort, and commitment. While the experience of salvation occurs in a moment, developing a consistent walk with God also requires time, effort, and commitment.
- The builders faced opposition from the people of the land, and the individual who turns to God will face opposition from the spiritual enemy.

Bring out that spiritual "building" for a new convert will include making restitution and turning away from all ungodliness. However, the reward for taking these steps will extend into eternity.

5. Ezra 4:1 mentions "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin." These adversaries were Samaritans—descendants of Assyrians who had intermarried with Jews when Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. The Samaritans claimed to worship the true God, but they combined rituals from the Law with superstition and idolatrous practices. Any partnership with them would have been spiritually dangerous, so when they offered to help with the rebuilding, the leaders of Judah refused. Based on verses 4-5, how did the Samaritans then attempt to hinder the rebuilders?

_			
_			
-			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
-			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
_			
-			
_			
_	 	 	
_			

- Verse 4: They tried to "weaken the hands" of the rebuilders, probably through mockery and intimidation.
- Verse 5: They hired counsellors to devise ways to frustrate the purpose of the builders.

Ask your group how we should respond when we are faced with opposition to our faith, mockery, intimidation, or false accusations. What measures can we take to ensure we are not swayed in our commitment to God?

6. Ezra 4:24 records that the Jews abandoned the Temple rebuilding project, and this pause lasted for about ten years. However, in Ezra 5:1-2, we read that construction resumed due to the influence of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Think back to those who have encouraged you to serve God and fulfill His plan for your life. What are some specific ways they helped you spiritually?

Encourage your group to share specific examples of times and ways that others have encouraged them spiritually. Responses to this question should highlight the importance of godly examples, spiritual mentoring, Biblical instruction, and personal encouragement.

7. When building resumed, so did challenges. Chapter 5 records a letter sent by Tatnai to King Darius, suggesting that he research whether the previous king, Cyrus, had actually given permission for the house of God in Jerusalem to be built. A search was made, and a scroll that recorded Cyrus' proclamation was found. What did King Darius command in his subsequent response to Tatnai's letter? Ezra 6:7-10

King Darius prohibited any interference with the Jews or hindering of their work. In addition, Tatnai was instructed to provide the builders with whatever they needed, to be funded by taxes collected from the province itself. The Jews were also to be given any animals they needed for sacrifices.

In verses 11-12, Darius went on to threaten severe punishments for those who violated his commands. What a wonderful victory this was for the Jewish people—opposition to the work was ended by the finding of a lost document in a pagan kingdom! The point should be made that God's purpose will be fulfilled despite any opposition. God can deliver in ways we cannot imagine if we put our trust in Him.

8. About fifty-eight years after the dedication of the Temple, Ezra and another group of exiles traveled to Jerusalem from Babylon. Details of their journey are given in Ezra 7:6-10, including that the "good hand of his God" was upon Ezra in this undertaking. Verse 10 explains why this was so. What threefold purpose did Ezra express in that verse?

According to verse 10, Ezra purposed to seek to know the Law of the Lord, to obey that Law, and to teach the people God's statutes and judgments.

-

Discussion should revolve around the fact that Ezra's threefold intention is essential for anyone who wants to make an impact on others for God.

9. The returning exiles led by Ezra assembled at "the river that runneth to Ahava" (Ezra 8:15). While encamped there, Ezra proclaimed a fast and led the people in prayer, seeking God's protection as they traveled. Since the journey had been authorized by King Artaxerxes, Ezra could have asked for a military presence to accompany them. Why was Ezra reluctant to request this? Ezra 8:22

Ezra had told the king of his confidence in the power of the God of Israel. If he had then asked for an armed escort to protect the caravan, the implication would have been that God was unable to care for those who followed Him.

Point out to your class that verse 23 states that God listened to the petition of the people. The eventual success of the journey shows that God not only heard, but He granted their request.

10. Chapters 9-10 record that after Ezra's arrival in Judah, he found that many of the Jewish people had intermarried with people of the region in violation of God's commandment. In response, he fell before God in prayer. What can we learn about sin and God's response to it from Ezra's heartfelt petition, recorded in Ezra 9:6-9?

Thoughts offered could include the following.

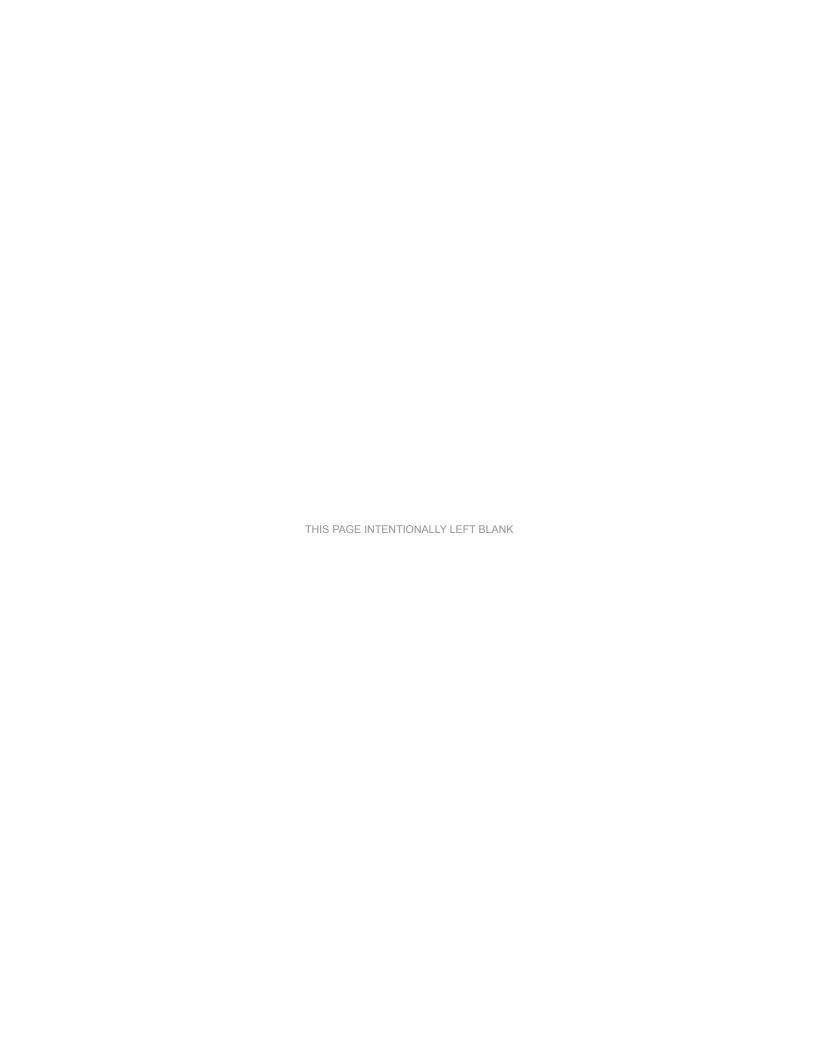
- *Verse* 6: *Sin is very serious and causes shame.*
- Verse 7: Sin has consequences and deserves judgment.
- Verse 8: God extends grace to sinners, giving them time to repent. Everyone has an opportunity; some have many opportunities.
- Verse 9: God is merciful.

Point out that the world increasingly seems to view sin as inconsequential, but we should regard it as seriously as Ezra did. In verses 13-14, Ezra stated that if God had punished the people as they deserved, they would have been consumed by His anger. He did not offer an excuse for the people's wrongdoing, but simply asked God to extend mercy.

Conclude your class time by noting that chapter 10 describes the people's repentant confession and their renewed commitment to obey God's Law. An assembly was called in Jerusalem, the guilty individuals agreed to turn away from the sins they had committed, and a plan to rectify the situation was enacted.

CONCLUSION

Ezra's commitment, dedication, and spiritual leadership reveals how a godly man can help lead a nation toward God. Times may be dark in our culture today, but some are still willing to stand for God and the truth. We want to be among that number!



444

The Book of Nehemiah

gates of Jerusalem were broken down and burned with

Nehemiah 1:1 through 13:31	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God." (Nehemiah 6:15-16)	
BACKGROUND	
When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem after their seventy-year captivity in Babylon, they found their city in ruins and its protective wall reduced to rubble, leaving the people vulnerable to attacks by their enemies. In 445 B.C., messengers carried distressing news about conditions in Jerusalem to Nehemiah, a cupbearer of the Persian King Artaxerxes. In response, Nehemiah fasted and prayed for some days, and then requested permission to go back to his homeland to rebuild the city wall. The Book of Nehemiah records how God equipped and enabled this courageous leader to deal with monumental challenges and crisis after crisis as he proceeded with this endeavor. Nehemiah led by personal example. He prayed frequently, organized carefully, and successfully rallied the people to participate in the mammoth job of rebuilding. He persevered despite opposition and the threat of death, and under his leadership, the wall was completed in just fifty-two days. Along with rebuilding walls of stone around the nation's capital city, Nehemiah recognized the vital necessity of rebuilding the Law of God in the hearts of the people. After the completed wall was dedicated, he served as governor in Jerusalem two times and instituted many important religious reforms. Over the centuries, Nehemiah's resourceful leadership has been an inspiration to countless Christians who have been called to major tasks for the glory of God. The Book of Nehemiah teaches us that every assignment from God, whether large or small, should be undertaken with prayer and completed with faithfulness.	
SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS	NOTES
1. The Book of Nehemiah opens with a description of when and how Nehemiah heard that the city walls and	NOTES

fire. What words in verse 4 of chapter 1 describe how he reacted? What can we learn about Nehemiah from his response?

Verse 4 states that when Nehemiah received the report, he "wept," "mourned certain days," "fasted," and "prayed."

Your group may respond with a variety of answers to the second question, but here are some points that could be discussed.

- He was prayerful and dependent on God for guidance. There is no indication that Nehemiah consulted with Hanani or anyone else to develop a plan, nor did he rely on his own wisdom. Instead, he sought God and the wisdom that comes from Him, and accompanied his prayers with fasting.
- He was empathetic. Nehemiah lived about nine hundred miles from Jerusalem, so he was not personally experiencing any of the difficulties taking place there. However, he clearly had sympathy and a sense of responsibility toward his suffering countrymen, though likely they were people he had never met.
- He was willing to sacrifice for others.

 Nehemiah's role as the king's cupbearer was prestigious. He would have been a trusted royal favorite, and probably was quite wealthy. Nehemiah could have continued in his comfortable lifestyle without concern for Jerusalem, but instead, he grieved when he heard about the struggles of the people there.
- He was patient and persistent. Nehemiah did not immediately approach the king for help; in fact, based on Nehemiah 2:1, it appears that he prayed for some months before he took any further steps.
- **2.** Verse 1 of chapter 2 indicates that Nehemiah spent months praying and seeking God before asking King Artaxerxes for permission to travel to Jerusalem to rebuild the city wall. The king willingly agreed to this plan and even provided letters of authorization for Nehemiah to acquire the supplies needed at the king's expense. According to verses 12-16, what did Nehemiah do after arriving in Jerusalem?

Verses 12-16 describe Nehemiah's nighttime inspection of the wall around Jerusalem. Point out to your group that while "some few men" accompanied him, he did not tell anyone at that point what God had put in his heart to do.

Ask your group how Nehemiah's actions model a good approach to problem solving. They should note that he spent time carefully assessing the situation—in essence, gathering firsthand knowledge. Then, verse 17 indicates that he defined the problem to the nobles and rulers of the people and challenged them to join him

-	
-	
-	
-	

in solving it. Finally, in verse 18, he encouraged and inspired potential participants by telling them of God's blessing on the project and of the support of the king of Persia. The result was that the leaders were motivated to "rise up and build" and "strengthened their hands for this good work."

3. It appears from chapter 3 that all the citizens of Jerusalem were involved in the rebuilding project. While no expert carpenters were identified in Nehemiah's list of builders, we read of priests and nobles, goldsmiths and perfume makers, and sons and daughters who engaged in the effort. The names of those who "repaired" on their assigned portion of the wall include Baruch, the son of Zabbai (Nehemiah 3:20). What is unique about Nehemiah's description of Baruch that might serve as an example for us?

While Nehemiah identified each worker and described the portions of the wall where they labored, he recorded that Baruch "earnestly" repaired his assigned section. Clearly Baruch's zeal and diligence made an impression upon Nehemiah. We can learn from his example that whatever task God gives us, we should do it zealously. Repairing a wall could hardly be considered exciting, but Baruch's efforts received notice. We are not told the specifics, but obviously he was an exceptional worker who was fully committed to the task at hand.

You may wish to personalize this for your class by asking: If an account were to be written about our work for the Lord, what would it say? Would it suggest we cared more for our comfort and convenience than for finishing the job? Or would it say we worked industriously and enthusiastically, giving the job our best?

4. Work for God will often meet with opposition. In chapter 4, Nehemiah described the antagonism directed toward himself and the builders of the wall, instigated by the Samaritan official Sanballat and an Ammonite officer named Tobiah. In what ways did these men attempt to hinder the rebuilders of Jerusalem's wall? Nehemiah 4:1-3, 7-8, 11

According to these verses, opposition toward the rebuilding efforts came through ridicule (verses 1-3), anger (verses 7-8), and threats (verse 11).

Follow up by discussing with your group the types of opposition we may face as we walk with the Lord. Ridicule, threats, and oppression may be expressed openly or through subtle harassment. Opposition may also come as an inward attack of the enemy of our souls, who suggests that we look foolish, old-fashioned, or bigoted to others. Whatever the specifics, the enemy will oppose us in any way he can to destabilize and discourage us and, ultimately, overthrow our faith.

5. Nehemiah did not debate with his opponents, devise a counterattack, or even deal with his antagonists directly other than with brief verbal replies. Instead,

-	

according to Nehemiah 4:4-5, he took the situation to God in prayer. Verse 9 indicates that he then prepared a defense by setting a watch. Verse 14 reveals that he spoke words of encouragement to the people. Based on these verses, what can we learn from Nehemiah about how to withstand opposition?

Points brought up may include the following.

- We should take the situation to God in prayer.
- We must watch for attacks of the enemy and prepare to defend ourselves through study of God's Word and maintaining our relationship with the Lord.
- We can encourage ourselves and others involved in the situation by retelling how God has worked for us in the past.
- **6.** Chapter 5 records that in addition to external opposition to the rebuilding of the wall, Nehemiah had to deal with internal contentions among the people. Verses 1-5 reveal that the people of Jerusalem were facing a dearth (food shortage) that was likely caused by crop failure or famine. To obtain food that was necessary for survival and to pay the required "king's tribute" (taxes), the poor of the community had mortgaged their homes and property. In some cases, children had even been enslaved to pay off debts. What were the wealthy Jews doing that added to the problem? Why do you think Nehemiah responded so vehemently? Verses 6-13

Verse 7 indicates that some of the wealthier Jews were charging "usury" (interest rates) for loans given to the poor of the community.

Nehemiah responded vehemently because he recognized that this was a transgression of God's law (see Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36). Point out that although Nehemiah was angry, he took time to ponder carefully before taking his next step. Then he called an assembly in which he rebuked the nobles and rulers for their unlawful actions toward their brethren. He commanded the Jewish nobles to stop this forbidden practice (verse 10) and to restore what they had taken from their brethren. The nobles responded by pledging to do as Nehemiah instructed.

A key lesson here is that we should never seek to profit from other people's troubles. In contrast to the self-centered, gain-oriented values that predominate in the world today, God's Word teaches that we should care for and support one another.

7. Having failed in their earlier attempts to halt the project, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian devised another plot (see Nehemiah 6:1-4). They tried to persuade Nehemiah to join them for a conference in the plain of Ono, which was about twenty miles from Jerusalem. Their exact purpose is not revealed, but Nehemiah was aware that their intent was to do him mischief. Four times he rejected their proposals, refusing to give in to distractions that would sidetrack him

-	
-	
-	

from his purpose. What type of distractions might we face that could potentially hinder our efforts for God?

Your students may offer a variety of answers to this question. The point should be made that if Satan cannot derail us with direct assaults, he will try some other strategy, and distractions may be an effective method unless we stay on guard. At every stage of life, there is a danger of losing focus on the importance of maintaining a close walk with the Lord.

8. In chapter 8, we read that the people gathered in front of the Water Gate to hear Ezra read the book of the Law of Moses. According to verses 9-12, the people wept openly at what they heard. Why do you think they responded in this manner?

Seemingly, hearing the Law caused the people to recognize how far they had strayed from obeying God. In essence, they experienced conviction for their sins.

You may wish to follow up with a discussion about conviction: what it is, ways it may be manifested, methods God uses to bring conviction, and potential responses to it. The dictionary defines conviction as "the state of being convinced of error or compelled to admit the truth; a strong admonition of the conscience." In this passage, the people of Judah clearly were feeling a strong admonition of the conscience.

9. After confessing their rebellion and disobedience, in chapter 10 the people of Judah signed a written covenant and recommitted themselves to God. From verses 30-39, choose one of the six commitments the people of Judah made, and explain it in your own words.

Allow your students to give input. Then summarize the commitments the people made in the renewed covenant, which are as follows.

- *Verse 30: They would not allow their children to marry individuals from heathen nations.*
- Verse 31: They would not make purchases on the Sabbath or on a holy day; in other words, they would honor the Sabbath.
- Verse 31: They would not demand payment for debts in the seventh year, but would observe it as a Sabbath year.
- *Verses 32-33: They would pay an annual assessment for support of the Temple.*
- Verse 34: They would participate in bringing wood to the Temple to ensure that a perpetual flame would burn on the altar. (see Leviticus 6:12-13)
- Verses 35-37: They would bring their firstfruits to the Temple and a tithe of the ground to the Levites, who in turn would take "the tithe of the tithes" to the Temple storehouse.
- Verse 39: They would not forsake the house of God. This meant they would continue to participate in worship and also provide whatever was necessary for the Temple service.

-	
-	
-	

Conclude the discussion of this question by pointing out that the Jews' renewed commitment to God required sacrifice, self-denial, and ongoing purpose. The same is required of us when we make a commitment to follow God.

10. Chapters 11 and 12 tell how Nehemiah once again focused on the logistical and civic aspects of restoring Jerusalem. The city had only been sparsely repopulated after King Cyrus granted permission for the Hebrew exiles to return to Judah. Jerusalem still needed more people, so Nehemiah cast lots to select one-tenth of the people from outlying areas to move within the city walls. Nehemiah 11:2 indicates that a few people "willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem." What can we learn from their example?

Class discussion should revolve around the word "willing." Moving into the confines of the city would have meant making sacrifices. The people who volunteered would have to leave their homes, farms, and livelihood, to settle in a totally different environment.

In our day as well, serving God and others may require sacrifice. While talent, training, and material resources can be of great benefit in the work of the Lord, willingness to spend and be spent for God is a necessity. Reluctant service or grudging giving will not reap an eternal reward.

11. The final chapter of the Book of Nehemiah describes three reforms that Nehemiah instituted during his second stay in Jerusalem. He restored support for the Levites, renewed the Sabbath observance, and denounced mixed marriages. In each of these situations, the people had failed to honor their previous commitments. What can we do to safeguard against going back on commitments that we have made to God?

Student responses should include actions such as maintaining a close relationship with God through private devotions, being faithful in church attendance, staying on guard against the wiles of the devil, being careful about what we watch and listen to, choosing friends who will encourage spirituality, and minding the checks of the Spirit.

Wrap up your class time by reiterating that we can learn valuable lessons about restoring and maintaining a relationship with God from the life of Nehemiah. He was a man who led by example, and whose life stands as a testament to prayerfulness, perseverance, and steadfast commitment to godliness.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Nehemiah shows us the kind of significant impact one individual can have on a nation. Nehemiah served in secular roles, but he used his positions to restore order, stability, and a right focus on God among the people of Judah.

short chapters that make up this Old Testament book

444

The Book of Haggai

SOURCE FOR OUTSTIONS	ODENED
SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS Haggai 1:1 through 2:23	OPENER
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in	
the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD. And the LORD stirred up the	
spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (Haggai 1:13-14).	
BACKGROUND	
The Persian King Cyrus' decree in 538 B.C. gave	
permission for the captive Jewish exiles in Babylon	
to return to Judah and restore their Temple. However,	
it appears that many of the Jews were so rooted in Babylon after seventy years of captivity that they did	
not want to relocate. Bible scholars estimate that the	
first group of returnees, led by Zerubbabel, numbered	
only about fifty thousand, including women and children—a fraction of the over one million who had	
been exiled.	
When the returning exiles arrived in Jerusalem,	
they were confronted with the devastation left by the	
armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. The city was in ruins and the glorious structure that once was Solomon's	
Temple had been demolished. The people began	
rebuilding the Temple soon after their arrival in 536	
B.C., but when they faced opposition from hostile	
neighbors, they discontinued the work (see Ezra 4:4-5, 24). Because they neglected the rebuilding of God's	
house, His blessing upon them was withdrawn and the	
people suffered.	
While the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah give	
accounts of the Jewish nation after the restoration	
from the Babylonian exile, the Book of Haggai describes a series of four messages. These were deliv-	
ered by Haggai to the returned exiles in 520 B.C.,	
about ten years after they had stopped building. With	
simple and direct words, he rebuked the people for	
their failure to finish the Temple, challenged them regarding their priorities, and called for them to obey	
God by renewing their efforts and completing the task.	
SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Each of Haggai's four brief but powerful messages	
from God was precisely dated, and all were delivered within a period of four months. A review of the two	

reveal that the prophet used the phrases "the word of the LORD," "thus saith the LORD," and other similar statements more than twenty times. Why do you think Haggai repeated this so often? What might be the significance of this repetition for us?

Class discussion should bring out that the frequency of use likely indicates Haggai felt it was important for the people to know the messages came from God himself and were not based on his own reasoning or perspectives. No doubt he also was attempting to communicate God's messages clearly, not obscuring or modifying them by using his own words.

The significance for us is that while prophecies in the Old Testament were directed to a particular people and often concerned specific events that would occur during their era, we must pay careful attention to whatever God says. The principles in the Bible are timeless, whenever and however they were initially delivered. For example, Haggai's messages teach the necessity of obedience to God, the importance of establishing correct priorities, and the fact that putting God first brings His blessing.

2. According to Haggai 1:2, what reason did the people give for not building the Lord's house? Why do you think they offered this excuse?

The people's reason was, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." They basically were saying that it was not a suitable time to undertake the rebuilding of the Temple.

Your group may respond to the second question with a variety of explanations.

- Possibly the people had delayed from fear of their hostile neighbors, thinking that if they postponed the work, the animosity might fade. (Ezra chapter 4 describes the opposition the rebuilders faced.)
- Perhaps the people were discouraged because they could not restore the Temple to its former splendor.
- Some may have thought that the seventy years of captivity foretold by the prophet Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 25:11-13 and 29:10) had not yet been fulfilled. Since there were three "waves" of deportations from Judah, the beginning point of the exile could have been debated.
- Maybe they decided they should take care of their own homes and fields to ensure their safety and food supply themselves.
- Perhaps they reasoned that because their harvests had been poor, they could not afford the materials—they would wait to purchase supplies after a few good harvests.

The list of possible reasons to wait could go on and on. Amplify your class discussion by asking your group to cite excuses people offer today for

procrastinating or not obeying God. The point should be made that Satan will always attempt to delay and eventually derail obedience. If we wait until we feel that all circumstances are favorable, we may never accomplish anything for the Lord.

3. In verse 4, God addressed the fact that in the interval since work had ceased on the Temple, the people had taken time to build themselves "ceiled" houses (decoratively paneled homes that were costly), while His house lay waste. What did God want the people to recognize when He told them in verse 5 to "consider your ways"?

God wanted them to recognize that they were putting their personal desires before what God wanted them to do. They had failed to rebuild the house of God and yet had found the time and resources to build nice houses for themselves. The prophet correctly diagnosed their problem as one of inverted priorities.

Lead your class in a discussion of the importance of establishing right priorities. Bring out that at times God may want us to step back from our busy lives to evaluate both the direction of our lives and the consequences of the decisions we are making.

4. The returned exiles had allowed the house of the Lord to be neglected for ten years while they focused on their personal lives and comfort. How had God responded to the people's failure to build the Temple? Haggai 1:6, 9-11

God sent judgment upon the people. Verse 6 indicates that their harvests had been poor, they were experiencing a lack of necessities, and their wages were insufficient to cover their needs. Verses 9-11 describe the troubles they had brought on themselves by their disobedience. What they did have did not satisfy. In addition, God had sent a drought upon the land. Grain, grapes, and olives, alluded to in verse 11, were Judah's principal crops, so their livelihood had been significantly impacted by the drought that God sent as judgment.

Ask your class: What lessons can we learn from the struggles of the post-exilic community? Lead them to the conclusion that if we put God first, He will provide for our deepest needs. We may or may not prosper materially, but God will be with us, bless us, and satisfy our hearts. Conversely, if we fail to give God first place in our lives, we will never be truly satisfied.

5. According to verse 12 of chapter 1, how did the people react to Haggai's message? What is the significance of the date given in verse 15 when compared with the first verse of this chapter?

Verse 12 indicates that following the example of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the people obeyed God, heeding the words delivered by Haggai.

The date in verse 15 is noteworthy because it indicates that the people went back to work on the Temple

-	

just twenty-three days after Haggai delivered his message! Bible scholars agree that those twenty-three days likely were spent procuring the needed building supplies and preparing the building site for the resumed efforts. Their actions proved the genuineness of their repentance and renewed commitment.

6. In Haggai 1:13, God gave the people an encouraging message through the prophet, promising, "I am with you, saith the LORD." When the people were failing to obey the Lord, He had withdrawn His blessing from them, and they experienced troubles. Their obedience brought the assurance of His presence. What a great comfort! They did not need to worry about their fields, their crops, and their animals. God would see to it that these were taken care of. In what ways has the Lord been with you?

Encourage your class to share personal accounts in response to this question. You may want to be prepared to relate an example from your own life to get the discussion started. The point should emerge that God always strengthens, encourages, and guides those who are committed to following Him.

7. In chapter 2, Haggai encouraged the people to continue the work despite the opposition and challenges they faced. In verse 3, he asked, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?" The older people in the community had memories of the original Temple built by Solomon, and they could clearly see that the rebuilt Temple, when completed, would not compare to it (see Ezra 3:12-13). However, this was not to be a cause for despair. In Haggai 2:4-5, what three things did Haggai exhort Zerubbabel (the civic leader of the people), Joshua (the high priest), and all the people to do?

Haggai exhorted Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people of the land to be strong, to work, and not to fear. Point out to your group that each of these three were necessary for the rebuilders to accomplish the task before them. Great things are not accomplished without action!

God also reminded the people in verse 5 that just as He had been with them in the past when He brought them out of bondage in Egypt, He would remain with them in this endeavor. Discuss with your group that when doubts and uncertainty threaten our commitment to the work of the Lord, it is always helpful to reflect on occasions when God has helped us in the past.

8. About two months after the second message, Haggai delivered his third exhortation from God. In verses 12-13 of chapter 2, the prophet instructed the people to go to the priests with two questions to be answered from God's Law. The word "holy" is repeated in verse 12, and "unclean" is repeated in verse 13. Based on these two contrasting words and

verse 14, what point do you think God was making through the questions that were to be asked of the priests?

The questions the people were to ask pointed out the differences between the two words. They established that while holiness could not be transferred, uncleanness could be.

The point God was making in verse 14 was that in the past, the people's religious observances and offerings had been unacceptable to Him because they were not obeying Him, and their uncleanness had polluted their offerings. Verses 17-19 indicate that as a result, God had sent judgment in the form of "blasting" (wind), mildew, and hail. However, now that the people were obeying God and were rebuilding the Temple, they could expect His blessing even before they harvested their grain, grapes, figs, pomegranates, and olives.

9. The Book of Haggai concludes with the prophet's fourth prophecy, recorded in verses 20-23 of chapter 2, which was delivered to Zerubbabel on the same day that the preceding message was given to the people. In this message, Haggai spoke of a coming upheaval, in which God would overthrow kingdoms and would shake the heavens and the earth. He promised that Zerubbabel's leadership would bear the mark of divine authority and confirmed to this leader that "I have chosen thee." Why do you think this affirmation would have been an encouragement to Zerubbabel?

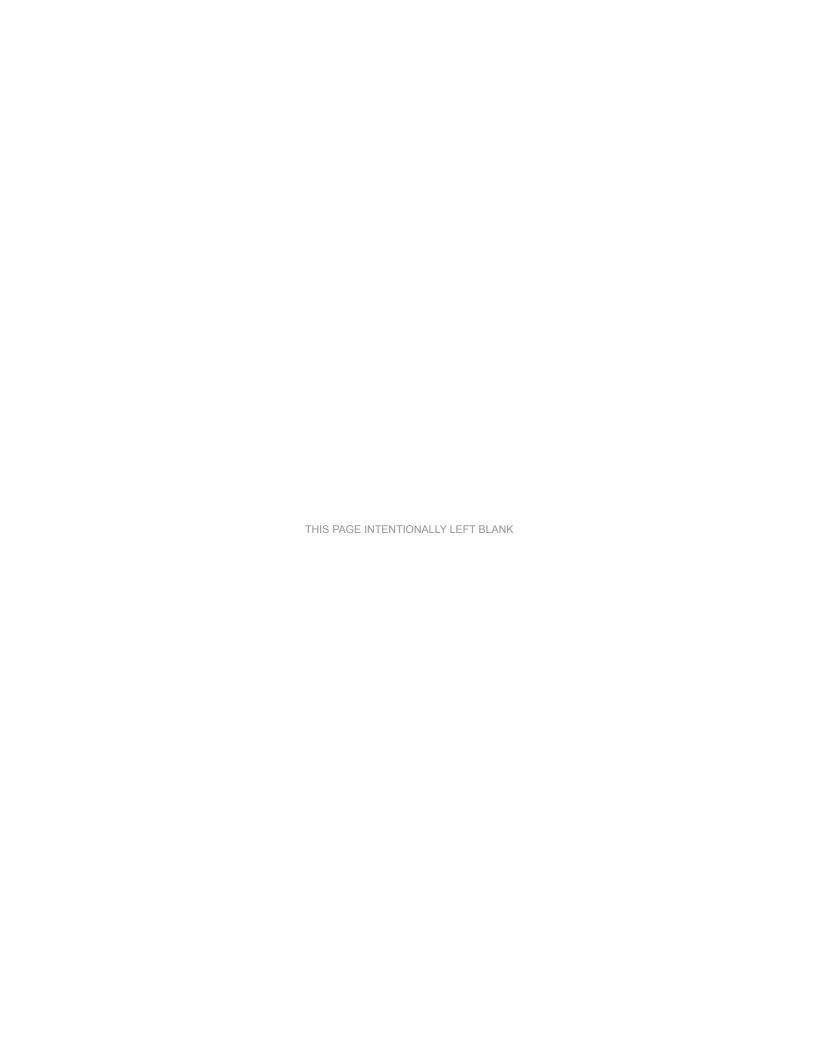
Class discussion should bring out that Zerubbabel and the rebuilders of the Temple were still facing challenges, as the work was not yet completed. However, Zerubbabel could hold onto God's promises—to the people, and to himself.

As you conclude your class session, point out to your group that like Zerubbabel, we have been chosen by God (see Ephesians 1:4). We too will face challenges in our walks with the Lord, as our work is not yet completed. However, we learn from this short Old Testament book that God will be with us and help us as long as we make serving Him our priority and remain obedient to His instructions.

CONCLUSION

Though Haggai is one of the shortest books in the Old Testament, the messages contained in it are profound even for today. As we obey God's commands and keep our priorities straight, we will reap the blessing of the Lord every day of our lives.

-	
-	



444

The Book of Zechariah

had been stalled for about ten years. What were the

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Zechariah 1:1 through 14:21	OI LINEIX
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts,	
and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts."	
(Zechariah 1:3)	
BACKGROUND	
The Book of Zechariah contains messages deliv-	
ered by the prophet Zechariah to the people of Judah.	
Beginning in 520 B.C., Zechariah joined the prophet	
Haggai in urging the post-exilic Jerusalem commu-	
nity to continue their task of rebuilding the Temple.	
However, the prophet's messages went far beyond the	
importance of physical rebuilding. He reminded the	
people of their previous spiritual failures and called	
them to repentance, and also affirmed God's continued	
commitment to them.	
Several Messianic prophecies are found in the Book of Zechariah. Zechariah's inspired messages	
included that God would deliver and bless His people	
in a future kingdom in which the Messiah would reign	
throughout the world. Like many of his fellow proph-	
ets, Zechariah saw isolated glimpses of the future, so	
some events that were revealed to him in close succes-	
sion (particularly those related to the Messiah) would	
actually occur thousands of years apart.	
The book's fourteen chapters divide naturally	
into two sections. Chapters 1-8 describe eight visions	
that came to the prophet by night, followed by mes-	
sages about the crowning of Joshua the high priest and answers to various questions; this portion was written	
while the rebuilding of the Temple was taking place.	
The second section, chapters 9-14, are messages deliv-	
ered much later, after the Temple rebuilding was com-	
plete. These chapters contain multiple references to	
events beyond Zechariah's day, including the first and	
second comings of Christ and His Messianic reign. The Book of Zechariah reminds us that while trou-	
bling circumstances exist in the world around us, God	
knows and controls the future. We cannot see even a	
moment ahead, but we can be sure that God keeps His	
promises, and He will never forsake His own.	
SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Zechariah delivered his first pronouncement to	
the apathetic and spiritually discouraged people of	
Jerusalem whose initial attempts to rebuild the Temple	

main points that Zechariah first conveyed at God's direction? Zechariah 1:1-6 Your group's summary of verses 1-6 should include that God was "sore displeased" with the Jews' forefathers who had not listened to the prophets in times past. The people of Zechariah's day were exhorted to learn from their forefathers' failure and not repeat the same errors. If the people of Judah would return to God, He promised to turn back to them. Your group's summary will give you an opportunity to briefly explain the background for the Book of Zechariah. (You may wish to list the following dates on a poster or whiteboard.) • In 586 B.C., judgment had come upon God's people in Judah because of their rebellion against God. The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem, and when it fell, they burned the Temple, destroyed the city, and carried most of the remaining people into captivity. • In 539 B.C., the Babylonian Empire fell to forces of the Medes and Persians the night that Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall of Belshazzar's palace. *In 538 B.C., the Lord stirred the new Persian* King Cyrus to allow the Jewish people to go back to their homeland and rebuild God's Temple in Jerusalem. The first group of returnees, led by Zerubbabel, came back to their native land in 537 B.C. The people had begun the rebuilding in 536 B.C., but had grown discouraged when they faced opposition. In 520 B.C., nearly ten years after work on the Temple had ceased, Zechariah joined the prophet Haggai in encouraging the people in Jerusalem to finish the work of rebuilding. That is where today's lesson begins. **2.** In chapter 1, Zechariah described the first two of a series of eight visions. These were vivid, God-given allegories that symbolized divine truths that Zechariah was to impart to the people. What did Zechariah see in these first two visions? Zechariah 1:7-11, 18-21 The first vision, verses 7-11, depicted a man on horseback in a grove of myrtle trees who was leading other horses and their riders. The second vision, verses 18-21, was of four horns and four carpenters. You will need to explain the imagery and significance of the visions to your class. In the first vision, the interpreting angel near Zechariah explained that

18-21, was of four horns and four carpenters.

You will need to explain the imagery and significance of the visions to your class. In the first vision, the interpreting angel near Zechariah explained that the horsemen had been surveying the earth and had brought back a report that the world was at peace.

According to verses 12-17, this indicated that it was time for God to fulfill His promises to Israel. Although God had used Assyria and Babylon as tools to judge His people by taking them into captivity, He was angry with these nations for their oppression of Israel and was ready to judge them.

In the second vision, horns symbolize the threatening power of a nation. Thus, the prophesy indicated that God would judge the nations that had victimized God's people. The four "carpenters" in verse 20 referred to craftsmen who used different tools to force material into submission, signifying those God would use to conquer the nations that had overthrown Israel.

3. Verses 16-17 of chapter 1 indicate that God had turned back to Israel with mercy. The scope of His commitment is seen in Zechariah's description of future events: God's house would be rebuilt, Jerusalem would be restored, the nation would be rebuilt and prosperous, and "the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." The third vision, described in chapter 2, was of a man with a measuring line (verses 1-2) and towns without walls (verses 4-5). Seemingly, the future Jerusalem was measured to ensure that it would be large enough for the multitudes God would bring to it. What is the key message of both verse 5 and the final phrase of verse 8? How does that message apply to believers of our day?

The key message behind these verses is that God will protect His people. In verse 5, the "wall of fire" that God will be to those in Jerusalem indicates His protection of them. In verse 8, the phrase "apple of his eye" refers to the pupil of the eye, thus denoting something precious, easily injured, and carefully preserved.

In response to the second question, your group should conclude that God still promises to protect believers. Physical protection is not guaranteed: we know the righteous also suffer affliction. However, believers are guaranteed spiritual protection. Though we face an enemy who is constantly attempting to destroy us, God encompasses, covers, and shields us, making us able to withstand any assault against us.

4. Beginning in chapter 3, Zechariah's visions began to deal with Judah's moral condition. In the fourth vision, Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest (representing all of Israel) standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan at his right hand to accuse him. What took place in this vision, as described in verses 1-7?

A summary should include the following.

- Verse 2 The Lord rebuked Satan before he could make an accusation.
- Verse 4 The angel of the Lord commanded that Joshua's filthy garments, representing Israel's iniquity, be taken away and Joshua reclothed with a change of raiment.
- Verse 5 Zechariah asked that a "fair mitre"—the headpiece of the high priest—be put on Joshua's head. This was done and Joshua was reclothed.
- Verses 6 and 7 The Lord of hosts commissioned Joshua and defined his duties as high priest.

You may wish to amplify verses 6-7. The Lord of hosts promised that if Joshua would "walk in my ways" (follow God in obedience), and "keep my charge" (perform his duties as instructed), then he would be allowed to "judge my house" and would have unhindered access to God like "these that stand by" (the angelic beings in the presence of God).

Ask your class to parallel this summary of Zechariah's vision to how we obtain God's mercy. Discussion should bring out that we stand before God clothed in the "filthy garments" of sin. God reveals His mercy by taking away our sins and clothing us with new, clean garments of righteousness. When God saves us, we must purpose to walk in His ways and obey the instructions given to us. When we do so, we too will have unhindered access to God.

5. Zechariah's fifth vision, described in chapter 4, was of a seven-branched golden candlestick—a menorah. This symbolized the Divine Presence in Jerusalem. On either side of the candlestick were two olive trees, representing Joshua (the high priest and religious leader) and Zerubbabel (the civil leader of the Judean exiles). Encouragement was offered in verses 6-10 to Zerubbabel, who had been given the responsibility of rebuilding the Temple. How do God's words to Zerubbabel in verses 6-7 offer encouragement for us?

Begin discussion of this question by reading verses 6-7 aloud. Verse 6 makes clear that Zerubbabel's task would not be accomplished by "might" (denoting effort by a collective force such as an army) nor by "power" (indicating individual strength), but by God's Spirit. Verse 7 indicates that the task of rebuilding seemed to be a mountain, but through the Spirit of God, all obstacles would be leveled like a plain.

Verses 6-7 offer encouragement for us when we face spiritual challenges that seem impossible. For example, we may be acutely aware of our own inability to break through the spiritual darkness around us. We may feel ill-equipped to accomplish a particular task that has been given to us in God's service. However, we can be assured that any assignment from God will be accompanied by His enabling grace.

6. Chapters 5 and 6 describe Zechariah's final three visions, which disclosed details of God's intent for Israel's future. After these visions, God directed Zechariah to crown Joshua the high priest in a fore-shadowing of the triumphant Messiah, Priest, and King who will one day reign. God concluded His directions by giving Zechariah a conditional promise. What was required of the people in order to see its fulfillment? Zechariah 6:15

The requirement was to "diligently obey" God's instructions. Remind your students that many of God's promises are conditional. Just as the successful rebuilding of the Temple required careful obedience, we too must consistently obey God to receive His promises.

7. Two years after Zechariah's night visions, while the Temple was yet incomplete, the prophet received another message from the Lord. In it, God explained what He required of His people and why it had been necessary to punish them with exile. The people had become discouraged because of their situation, but in chapter 8 God described future changes that would take place in Israel. What specific hope did God offer the people in Zechariah 8:11-15?

In verses 11-15, God promised that the coming days would be different. The people and the land would be prosperous. While Israel had been despised by her neighbors, their nation would become a blessing to nations around them, because God's purpose for Judah was to "do well" toward His restored people.

Point out that the Temple rebuilding had begun many years earlier. During that time, the people had struggled in the land, and become disheartened by the hardships and the opposition of their hostile neighbors. But once more, God encouraged them with visions of future blessings. When we feel discouraged, we can ask God to give us a renewed focus on the blessed future that awaits us if we remain faithful to Him.

8. Two groupings of prophecies (chapters 9-11 and 12-14) make up the remainder of the Book of Zechariah. Both are designated as "burdens"—messages that relate to a heavy judgment of God or a prophecy of a disastrous nature. These messages were given much later than those in the first section, and they include many references to the Messiah. What event does Zechariah 9:9 foretell? What does the fact that this prophecy was fulfilled tell us about prophecies of Christ's Second Coming?

Zechariah 9:9 prophesies Christ's Triumphal Entry when He rode into Jerusalem not long before His crucifixion (see Matthew 21:1-11). Remind your group that this prophecy was given about five hundred years before it happened.

In response to the second question, your students should conclude that just as this prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus came to earth the first time, so the prophecies of His Second Coming and Messianic Kingdom are certain to be fulfilled in exact detail.

9. In Zechariah 11, Zechariah obeyed God's instruction and enacted the role of a shepherd, foreshadowing the Good Shepherd who was to come. In verses 12-14, Zechariah requested compensation for the care he had bestowed upon the flock, leaving it to the recipients of that care to determine his value. In response they offered just thirty pieces of silver, which was the minimum price of a slave, or the required payment for the injury or death of a slave. This meager sum indicated their contempt for the shepherd's favor and care. What did this enactment foreshadow?

This foreshadowed the Jews' rejection of the Greatest Shepherd, Christ the Messiah, who would

come to earth, be despised and rejected by those He cared for, and be sold for the price of a slave. Expand the discussion by pointing out that in verse 13, the Lord himself commanded the silver to be cast "unto the potter." Zechariah obeyed, casting it to the potter "in the house of the LORD." This was a prophetic action that was fulfilled when Judas attempted to return to the chief priests the money he had received as payment for his betrayal of Christ. When they refused it, he "cast down the pieces of silver in the temple," and the chief priests then used the silver to purchase a potter's field (see Matthew 27:5,7). **10.** Chapter 12 describes a time still in the future when adversarial forces will gather around Jerusalem, expecting to overthrow the city and divide up its resources. However, God will protect Jerusalem. He will enable the Jewish people to overpower their enemies quickly and supernaturally, in an indisputably divine deliverance. According to verse 10, how will the Jewish people respond after this amazing victory? Verse 10 records that the people will recognize that Jesus, the One they pierced and killed, is indeed their Messiah. This realization will cause them to mourn over their rebellion and ingratitude toward Him. Their grief will be so heartfelt and intense that it is likened to one who mourns over the death of an only son. **11.** Chapter 14 completes the prophecies of the Book of Zechariah. Verses 8-11 and 16-21 focus on the establishment of the Messiah's Kingdom and the role Jerusalem will have during the Millennial Reign. As you review these verses, what aspects of Christ's reign as described here do you look forward to and why? Answers to this question will likely vary, but they will give you an opportunity to summarize the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom that are described by Zechariah. These could include the following: *Verse* 8 – *The availability of "living water" for* refreshment. *Verse* 9 – *The Lord will reign over the entire Verse 11 – People will dwell in safety. Verse 16 – All nations will worship Christ in* Jerusalem. • *Verse* 20 – *All things, even common objects,* will be holy.

CONCLUSION

Zechariah, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people of their day did not live to see the fulfillment of all the glorious events promised in Zechariah's prophecies. However, those prophecies teach the importance of faithfulness to God's instructions and offer a glimpse into the glorious future for Israel and all of God's children.

of the Temple, their false and profane worship, and their willful disobedience of God's commandments. However, his messages also conveyed the love of



The Book of Malachi

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Malachi 1:1 through 4:6	OFENER
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to	
another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for	
them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts,	
in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." (Malachi 3:16-17)	
BACKGROUND	
Decades before the prophet Malachi came on	
the scene, the Jewish people had returned from their	
seventy-year captivity in Babylon. Initially, they were	
committed to rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple	
and restoring their system of worship. Many believed	
that their Messiah would soon come and that their	
nation would once again experience the prosperity and	
blessing it had enjoyed in the time of David. However, as the years went by, the exiles who	
chose to return had become disillusioned. As their	
bright hopes failed to materialize, depression and	
discouragement settled upon the community. They	
wondered about God's love for them as His chosen	
people. More and more of them drifted away from	
their covenant commitment to God. And year by year,	
the prosperity and blessing they hoped for failed to	
materialize. Instead, their crops were stunted and their	
harvests disappointing.	
The pure worship God had commanded was	
compromised as the priests became careless in the performance of their duties and neglected their	
responsibility to instruct the people, who openly	
questioned the authority and ways of God. Imperfect	
animals were offered as sacrifices and the people	
ceased paying their tithes and offerings. Social	
injustice became common, and the Sabbath was	
desecrated by greedy merchants. Intermarriage	
between Jewish men and heathen women became	
widespread, often preceded by divorcing their Jewish	
wives. The people were in dire peril of being absorbed	-
by the ungodly cultures around them.	
It was to this dark situation that Malachi	
was called by God. In bold and severe words of	
condemnation, he rebuked the people for their neglect	

God, who was willing to offer mercy and forgiveness to His disillusioned and discouraged people. SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS NOTES **1.** The Book of Malachi is characterized as a "burden" in the first verse of chapter 1. In the original Hebrew, that word is *massa*, and it refers to a prophetic utterance describing a heavy judgment of great weight or importance against a nation or people. In Malachi 1:2, what was God's first statement to His people? How do you think that statement fits together with the characterization of Malachi's message as a burden? God's first statement to the people was "I have loved you." Discussion of the second question should bring out that true love must include correction and discipline when that is necessary. In today's vernacular, this might be referred to as "tough love." The people of Judah were doubting God's love because their economy was poor, and their civil and religious leaders had failed them. They needed to understand that these distressing circumstances were God's judgment upon their disobedience, but that He still loved them. You may wish to use Revelation 3:19 as a supporting Scripture. **2.** The people responded to God's assertion of His love for them with a question: "Wherein hast thou loved us?" In essence, they were demanding proof. What two Bible characters did God inspire Malachi to use as an example of God's love and care? *The two Bible characters were Jacob—ancestor* of the Jewish people to whom Malachi was speaking—and Jacob's older brother, Esau—ancestor of the Edomites. Point out to your class that in verse 3, the Hebrew word translated as "hated" has a range of meanings from "less favored" to "vehement opposition." The use of it in context with verse 4 illustrates God's irreparable judgment upon Edom. He "laid his [Edom's] mountains and his heritage waste" (verse 3), causing Malachi to refer to the Edomites as "the people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever" (verse 4). In contrast, God cared for and preserved the Israelites in a special way, rescuing them from exile and restoring them to their own land. Verse 5 states, "your eyes shall see," indicating that the evidence was right before them.

3. In Malachi 1:6-8, Malachi stated that the priests had despised God by not giving Him the honor due to a father or master. The priests disputed that charge, asking, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" Malachi responded by pointing out that they had offered imperfect sacrifices to God—animals that were blind, lame, or sick—although the Law clearly prohibited offering blemished sacrifices. We do not offer animal sacrifices as part of worship now, so what

might constitute an imperfect offering to God in our day? Your group may give a variety of responses to this question. Imperfect offerings could include worship rituals performed for show or to impress others; promises or commitments to God made casually or insincerely; offering God only sparing amounts of our leftover time and energy; or engaging in a hypocritical pretense of worship while harboring sin in the heart. Amplify your class discussion by reminding your students of the New Testament teaching that our lives are to be living sacrifices for God (see Romans 12:1). No matter how impressive our worship or efforts in His work may appear to others, if our hearts are not fully yielded to Him or we are failing to obey Him, our pretense of worship is an imperfect offering. **4.** God chose the Jewish people to be a light to the nations and to communicate His message throughout the world. They had failed in this, and as a result, God declared, "Neither will I accept an offering at your hand" (Malachi 1:10). Despite the Jews' failure, God inspired Malachi to state a great Biblical truth in Malachi 1:11. How would you explain this promise in your own words? Ask a volunteer to read Malachi 1:11, or have your group read it together. This is a glorious promise that the true worship of God will one day extend over all the earth. The geographic, political, and ethnic scope of this promise is immense! Since it clearly did not describe the situation in Malachi's day, many Bible scholars conclude that Malachi was speaking prophetically of a truth that will be fully realized in the Millennial Reign of Christ, when Jesus the Messiah will receive pure worship from all parts of the world. **5.** Chapter 2 continues God's condemnation of the priests. Malachi warned that if the priests did not take God's instructions to heart, they would bring punishment upon themselves. In verses 4-6, the prophet pointed to the covenant God had made with Levi and his descendants, who had been appointed to serve God in the Temple worship. (In this passage, Levi is a personification of the priestly order, rather than the son of Jacob and Leah.) Based on verses 5-6, what godly characteristics of the priests in the past made them a righteous example for the corrupted priests of Malachi's day? Class discussion will likely bring out the following characteristics. They "feared" God, regarding Him with appropriate reverence and awe.

tions to the people."Iniquity was not found" in their lips—they

spoke the truth.

• The "law of truth" was in their mouths—they faithfully taught and explained God's instruc-

- They walked with God "in peace and equity"—they had an intimate relationship with God.
- They turned many "away from iniquity"—
 unlike the priests of Malachi's day, they
 exhorted the people to forsake their sins and
 turn to God.

Class discussion should bring out that this description of the tribe of Levi also gives us a wonderful example of how to live in a manner pleasing to God.

Wrap up discussion of this question by pointing your group to verses 7-9 of chapter 2, which rehearses the priests' role as God's messengers. Sadly, the priesthood of Malachi's day had "departed out of the way," and their failure had caused many to "stumble," so they needed this rebuke and reminder.

6. In verses 10-17 of chapter 2, Malachi addressed the people of Judah. Although they were not openly declaring that they had rejected God, they were completely disregarding His instructions in a very important matter. This brought a stern rebuke by the prophet, recorded in verse 11: "Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem." What sin had the people committed? Why do you think Malachi used such strong words to condemn their actions?

Verse 11 indicates that the men were marrying heathen women who worshipped idols. (The same problem was addressed by the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah in Ezra 9:2 and Nehemiah 13:23).

Discussion of the second question should focus on the fact that God had strictly prohibited marriage between the people of Israel and foreigners (see Exodus 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4), so He was deeply disturbed by their willful disobedience. This was not a matter of racial prejudice. Marrying individuals who did not worship the true God could lead to spiritual pollution through the infiltration of pagan practices into Jewish worship.

You may wish to use this question as the lead-in to a discussion of the high value God places on marriage. According to God's Word, marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman that is binding before God for life. Neither person has a right to marry again while their first companion lives (see Mark 10:6-12 and Romans 7:1-3). Tragically, the people of Judah were in flagrant violation of God's commands and were suffering because of their disobedience.

7. In the final verse of chapter 2, Malachi asserted that the people had "wearied" God with their words. They had complained that the wicked prospered and had it better than the godly. They thought it was unjust of God to bless others and not them, and asked, "Where is the God of judgment?" God responded in chapter 3.

-	
-	

Verse 1 indicates that one would be sent by God to "prepare the way" for another Messenger. Jesus said this was John the Baptist. The "messenger of the covenant" was Jesus Christ. According to Malachi 3:3, what would this second Messenger do?

Verse 3 indicates that Jesus would come to refine, purge, and purify—God's ultimate remedy for all corruption, including that of the "sons of Levi" in Malachi's day—the priests who had failed in their responsibilities toward God's people.

If time allows, you may want to describe the refining process to your class to make the symbolism clear. The process of refining metal involves heating the raw metal until it melts. The impurities in the molten material rise to the surface, and then are skimmed off. This process is repeated until the reflection of the refiner is seen in the pure, smooth surface. Similarly, God wants to save and sanctify us, and then work with us until our lives reflect Him more and more.

8. In verses 7-12 of chapter 3, the next question posed by the people was, "Wherein [how] shall we return [to God]?" Malachi responded by urging the people to stop neglecting to pay their tithes, comparing this to robbing God. What promise was associated with the instruction to "bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" in verse 10? What significance does this promise have for us?

Malachi promised that if the people would do so, God would open the windows of Heaven and pour out a blessing so abundant that they would not have room to receive it. You may wish to read verses 11-12 as well, which contain further promises for obedience in this matter.

In response to the second question, your group should understand that Malachi's words were not just for the people of his day; they apply to us as well. Review with your class that the principle of honoring God first by tithing is found throughout Scripture. Both Abraham and Jacob set an example for their descendants long before tithing was instituted by God during the time of Moses. So, Malachi's instruction to the people in today's text was not new to them. By Malachi's day, the refusal to tithe had made it necessary for the Levites to work to earn their living (see Nehemiah 13:10-11). As a result, they had neglected their responsibilities regarding the care of the Temple and the teaching of proper worship.

Remind your group that everything we have is given us by God, so when we neglect tithing—returning to Him a tenth of what He has given—we rob Him. When we tithe as commanded, we have the double blessing of pleasing God and helping to further His work.

9. Malachi 3:16-17 records that there were a few faithful ones in Judah who feared the Lord and "spake often one to another" despite the arrogant doubters

around them. They received God's commendation: a "book of remembrance" was written about them and those who "thought upon his name." In verse 17, God promised that He would claim them for His own, "in that day when I make up my jewels." In every generation, God has those who trust in Him—His "jewels." What are some ways that Christians are like jewels?

Your class will likely be able to list several characteristics of jewels that are also true of Christians. These could include the following.

- *Jewels are prized for their rarity and are highly valued.*
- They are made by God.
- Some are hidden and undiscovered.
- They must be shaped and polished to achieve their full beauty.
- They are of different types and sizes and are located in different places.
- *They are associated with royalty.*
- Because of their great value, they are carefully protected.

You may wish to wrap up this question by expanding on the last bullet point. Bring out that the word translated "jewels" in verse 17 is also translated as "peculiar treasure" in Exodus 19:5. The root of the Hebrew word means "to keep or preserve." If we want to be kept, God will keep us.

9. The final chapter of the Book of Malachi begins with the prophet's warning of coming judgment upon "all that do wickedly." However, a beautiful promise is given in verses 2-3. What is that promise?

Have a volunteer read the verses aloud, as they offer an encouraging way to wrap up your class session and your study of the Book of Malachi. You may want to explain the figurative language of these two verses. The "Sun of righteousness" is a reference to Jesus Christ. The picture presented is that those who experience His healing will enjoy a blessed existence. They "shall go forth"—they will have freedom and liberty. They will "grow up as calves of the stall"—they will enjoy growth and increase in a secure environment. Finally, they will "tread down the wicked"—they will experience victory over their enemies. What a wonderful hope for those who obey and trust God!

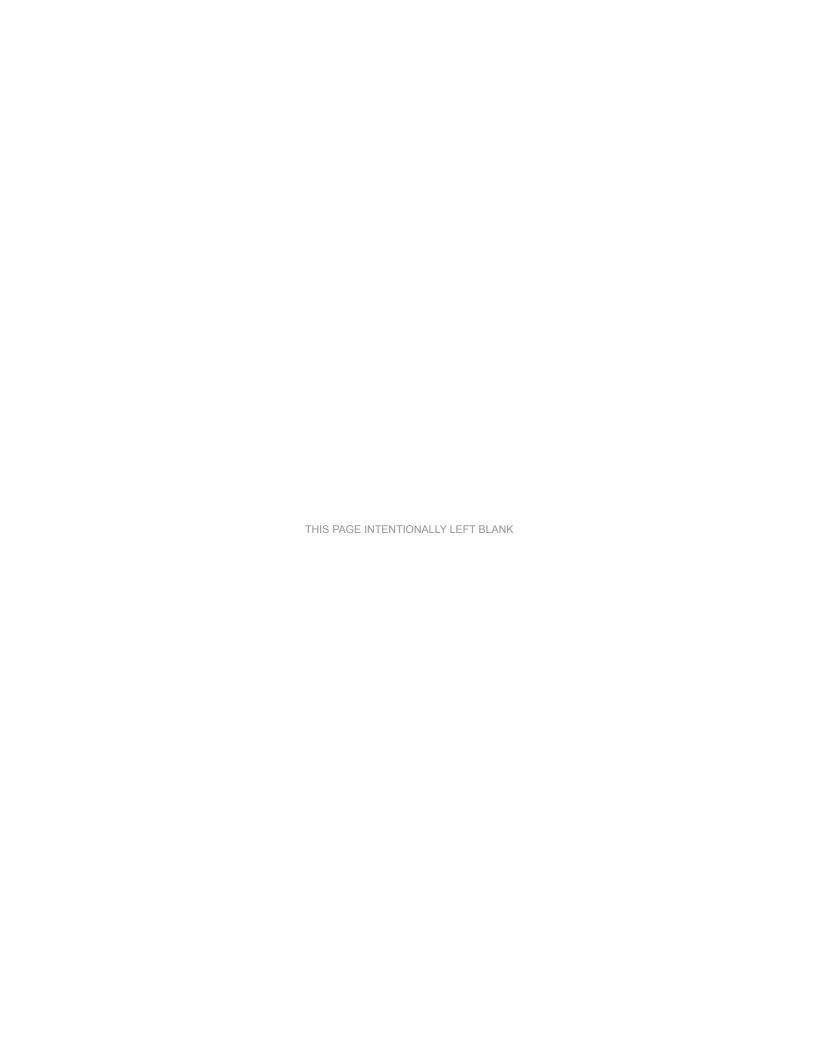
CONCLUSION

The Book of Malachi is the final prophecy of the Old Testament. The two concluding verses foretell the coming of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. After it was written, a period of about four hundred years passed before the advent of Christ and the ushering in of the New Covenant.

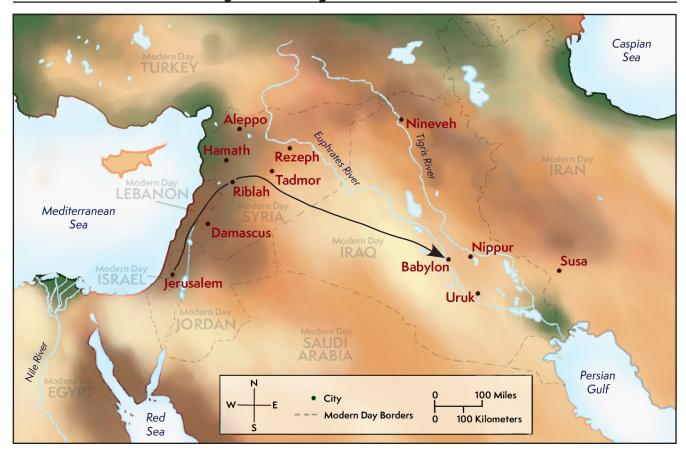
·	

Key Locations in 1 & 2 Chronicles





The Exiles' Journey to Babylon



The Exiles' Journey Home

