

DISCOVERY **TEACHER'S GUIDE**

Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Esther

Call and Commission of Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:1 — 3:27

Inserted Lesson:

The Role of Prophecy in Scripture

Judgment for Judah

Ezekiel 4:1 — 24:27

Inserted Lesson:

Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled in Christ

Judgment for Enemy Nations

Ezekiel 25:1 — 32:32

Inserted Lesson:

Prophecies of End Times

Israel's Restoration, Future Temple, and Worship Prophesied

Ezekiel 33:1 — 48:35

Hebrews Taken to Babylon

Daniel 1:1 — 3:30

Daniel Used by God

Daniel 4:1 — 6:28

Prophecies Given to Daniel

Daniel 7:1 — 12:13

The Book of Habakkuk

Habakkuk 1:12 — 3:19

The Book of Obadiah

Obadiah 1:1-21

The Book of Esther

Esther 1:1 — 10:3

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.

Apostolic Faith Church • 5414 SE Duke Street • Portland, Oregon 97206-6842, U.S.A. • www.apostolicfaith.org

[illegible]

[illegible]

- [illegible]

-
-
-
-

[illegible]

[illegible]

was called to confront, why do you think this encouragement was needed? Ezekiel 2:3-7

The Israelites were rebels (verses 3, 5, 6, and 7), transgressors (verse 3) and impudent and stiffhearted or stubborn (verse 4). Confronting people who had these characteristics would make Ezekiel's task difficult and potentially discouraging. Most of us would hesitate to step knowingly into a career that we knew would bring hostility and abuse from those around us. Not only would Ezekiel face the complete rejection of the message he was to deliver, but he would also endure criticism and contempt on a personal level.

You could follow up by asking your group to discuss how hostility and contempt toward our obedience to God might occur in our day, and how we can best prepare ourselves to withstand it. Lead to the point that we should depend on God's Spirit to guide us in how and when He wants us to respond.

As we will see in subsequent chapters of Ezekiel, the actions the prophet took and the words he spoke to these rebellious people were directed by God. The point should be made that in whatever hostile situations we face, God can give us wisdom, guidance, and strength to conduct ourselves in a godly manner if our determination is to follow Him in obedience.

6. In verses 8-10 of chapter 2 and the first three verses of chapter 3, Ezekiel's willingness to obey God was challenged by a difficult command from God. What unusual action did God instruct the prophet to take, and what do you think that action symbolized?

God commanded Ezekiel to eat the "roll of a book" from the hand that was outstretched to him. The eating of the scroll symbolized fully accepting and ingesting God's message. It also indicated that the prophet was willing to do whatever God commanded him to do.

Point out to your group that according to verse 10 of chapter 2, the scroll was covered front and back with written lamentations, mourning, and woe. The predictions that Ezekiel would be called to deliver to his fellow exiles were horrific. Since scrolls typically were inscribed only on one side, the fact that this one was covered both front and back with writing may have indicated the extensive nature of God's coming judgment.

Despite its bitter contents, the scroll tasted sweet to Ezekiel—perhaps because the coming judgments were righteous and deserved. Make the point to your class that there is always "sweetness"—an inward satisfaction—in doing what God commands, even when the task itself is difficult. This could be an opportunity for some in your group to share personal examples of times when God required a hard obedience that proved to be a blessing in the end.

7. God's instruction to Ezekiel to eat the roll of the book should cause us to ask ourselves if there are parts of God's Word and His calling upon our lives that we have not yet fully absorbed. What are the benefits of fully taking in every part of God's Word?

Your students will likely respond to this question by pointing out that fully taking in every part of God's Word will make us stronger in our faith. We need to feed ourselves spiritually just as we do physically—regularly, and not a diet from just one food group. We need a balanced diet for good nutrition. Fully ingesting means more than simply giving the Bible an occasional glance or reading only from one part of the Word of God. We must make balanced intake a consistent part of our lives.

8. In chapter 3 verses 16-21, Ezekiel's responsibilities were explained to him through his appointment as a watchman. What were the duties and responsibilities of a watchman in that era? Given that, how would you describe what Ezekiel was called to do?

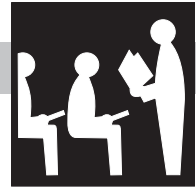
A watchman's duty was to warn of a coming enemy. This responsibility was taken so seriously that a watchman who failed to fulfill this responsibility would be judged guilty of manslaughter. The word translated "watchman" is tsaphah, and describes one who watches from a height for the purpose of warning, rather than an individual responsible for guarding or shepherding (that word is shamar). So Ezekiel's call was to warn of the coming judgment against unrighteousness, rather than to teach righteousness.

Each person's individual accountability before God was a key part of Ezekiel's message. Verse 18 explicitly states that his purpose in serving as a watchman was so that the wicked man would turn and not die in his iniquity. For many years, God had called after the nation of Judah as a whole and they had resisted; now He was calling individuals to repentance. This is explained more extensively in chapter 18, where Ezekiel expanded the thought that every person is treated as an individual before God, and is accountable for his own sins.

CONCLUSION

God called the prophet Ezekiel to declare coming judgment to his fellow captives in Babylon, in spite of the fact that his words would be rejected. The subsequent visions that the prophet experienced were a living reality that encompassed him completely, and he faithfully obeyed God's instructions.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK



Inserted Lesson:

The Role of Prophecy in Scripture

This lesson is the first of three on Biblical prophecy that are interspersed in this quarter. Please note that these three depart from the textual style format of our Discovery curriculum in that they are topic-based lessons. Most of the Scripture references in these lessons are drawn from books other than Ezekiel, as each lesson will examine the Biblical view on differing aspects of prophecy. In addition, more material is included in each question, and supplemental Scriptures are provided in footnotes. The insertion of these lessons into the unit allows the chapters of Ezekiel concerning Judah's judgment to be grouped into a single lesson.

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 40:1-2; Ezekiel 33:7-8

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Peter 1:21)

BACKGROUND

The Bible was written over a period of about fifteen centuries and is the work of more than forty authors. Its sixty-six books deal with a wide range of topics and have very different literary styles, but they all provide insight and instruction that God desired humanity to have. Prophetic declarations were one way God imparted His messages, so prophecies appear in various places throughout Scripture.

While Jewish Bibles include Joshua, Judges, and 1 and 2 Samuel in the prophetic books, much of Biblical prophecy is contained in the Old Testament books called the Major and Minor Prophets—a reference to the length of the books rather than the importance of their content. These books were recorded during the decline, exile, and return of the Children of Israel to their native land, over a period of about 350 to 400 years. Most of the messages were directed to Judah and Jerusalem: the prophets Isaiah, Joel, and Micah wrote before the fall of Jerusalem; Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah prophesied at the time of Jerusalem's fall and during the exile; and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi wrote at the time of the exiles' return and later.

Some of the prophets had names that were symbolic. Hosea means “salvation”; Nahum means “comforter”; Zephaniah means “the Lord hides”; and Zechariah means “the Lord remembers.” Whether or not the prophets’ names reflected their calling, all true prophets spoke with the authority of the Holy Spirit.

OPENER

[illegible]

The prophetic messages recorded in the Word of God are both intriguing and mysterious because many of them concern ancient kingdoms that no longer exist. However, God included them in His Word for a reason. Prophecy can teach us many lessons about God's nature, His plan for mankind, and His desire for a relationship with the people He created. When we understand the prophets' motivations and methods, we are better equipped to grasp how their words have significance for our day.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. The dictionary defines *prophecy* as “an inspired utterance of a prophet; the inspired declaration of divine will and purpose; a prediction of something to come.” While “a prediction of something to come” is probably the most common usage in contemporary society, in the Old Testament era, prophecy not only was a foretelling of future events but also a way God communicated His will to His people. According to our text, what are some other purposes of Biblical prophecy? 2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 40:1-2; Ezekiel 33:7-8

These Scriptures indicate that in addition to foretelling future events and proclaiming God's will to His people, prophecies were also given at times for the following reasons:

- 2 Kings 17:13— *To admonish and instruct*
- Isaiah 40:1-2— *To comfort*
- Ezekiel 33:7-8— *To warn*

Point out to your group that all of these purposes for prophecy are a reflection of God's love for the people He created, and His great desire for them to prosper spiritually through steadfast commitment and obedience to Him.

2. Biblical prophets were intermediaries between God and man. As emissaries commissioned to challenge His people to remembrance, repentance, and obedience, they functioned in Israel alongside other spiritual leaders such as priests and elders. Scripture also identifies the prophets as “messengers” of the Lord, “seers,” “servants” of God, and “watchmen.”¹ Each of these titles provides insight regarding the role these individuals filled.

God chose His prophets from many walks of life. They included princes and priests like Abraham and Ezekiel, but also shepherds and farmers like Amos and Elisha. Women and even children were among the prophets. Some ministered for decades, while others delivered just a single message.

Whatever the details of their personal backgrounds and messages, God's prophets were called to be a positive spiritual influence, and this frequently brought opposition by national leaders. When rulers turned away from worship of the true God, the prophets were commanded to correct them, and in some cases, to pronounce judgment. This often placed the prophets in

NOTES

life-threatening situations. What are some of the spiritual qualifications these individuals needed in order to serve as prophets of God?

Your group will likely respond to this question with a variety of suggestions, so you may wish to compile a list of the spiritual qualifications mentioned. These could include that the prophets were fully committed to God, maintained a close relationship with Him, were obedient, were courageous and able to withstand opposition, and were deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of God's people.

You may wish to point out that these qualities are important in every field of service for the Lord. While the personalities and natural abilities of the individual prophets were likely as varied as their backgrounds, God was able to use them because of their spiritual qualifications. In our day as well, while God will use our natural abilities and personalities, our relationship with and commitment to Him are of greatest importance.

3. The manner in which the prophets received God's call varied. God spoke to Daniel through a dream and to Ezekiel in a vision. Some of the prophets, like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, were chosen by God before birth. Perhaps one of the most well-known and detailed calls in the Bible is found in 1 Samuel 3. Based on verses 11-18 of that chapter, how would you summarize the message that Samuel was told to deliver to Eli the priest? How did Samuel respond to God's instruction?

God directed Samuel to tell Eli that his descendants would be judged forever because he knew of his sons' wickedness but failed to restrain them.

In response to the second question, verse 15 states that Samuel was afraid to tell Eli what God had said. However, according to verse 18, he obeyed and hid nothing of God's message from the priest. This is just one of many Biblical examples of times when individuals chose to obey God in spite of their natural apprehension or the potential negative response to their words. Samuel's obedience in performing a difficult task was a first step in his decades-long service to God as a prophet of Israel.

You may wish to follow up this question by noting that many times God asks us to do things for Him that are difficult, could subject us to unpleasant responses, or seem beyond our ability to perform. That was certainly true for Biblical prophets! Ask your group to discuss how we will benefit spiritually if we obey in spite of a natural inclination to avoid such challenges.

4. While most Biblical prophecies were delivered orally, at times prophets were instructed to communicate through actions that were highly unusual in their culture. For example, Isaiah was told to give his sons names that symbolized prophetic truths—they would

be ongoing reminders of the coming invasion by enemy forces and of the Jewish people's eventual return to their land. Hosea was commanded to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to her marriage vows, as a picture of God's commitment to Israel in spite of the nation's spiritual adultery.² Jeremiah was instructed to bury his unwashed girdle near the Euphrates River and later to recover it when it had deteriorated beyond use, as a parable portraying the spoiling of Judah.³ Ezekiel built a model representing Jerusalem's coming siege and dramatized the attempted escape of King Zedekiah through a hole in the wall.⁴ Why do you think God chose at times to have His messages delivered through actions or dramatic reenactments?

Your group should conclude that the unusual nature of these portrayals would have made them memorable and thus more likely to be passed on by those who witnessed them. Bring out that in God's great love and mercy, He used every means possible to make His message clear and unforgettable. Still today, He goes to great lengths to draw sinners to Himself.

5. All the prophetic books of the Old Testament with the exception of Hosea include messages of judgment against the nations around Israel and Judah. These judgment messages reveal some important Biblical principles. What are some of the lessons we can learn by studying God's proclamations of judgment against heathen nations?

Your students' responses may bring out such points as the following.

- *God will not tolerate sin.*
- *God's moral laws are consistent in every era and for every nation.*
- *God is just. He will not let evil go unpunished.*
- *God is universally sovereign. He works in and through the nations of the world.*
- *Repentance and turning to God may forestall judgment upon a nation.⁵*

The fulfillment of ancient prophecies demonstrates that we can trust the Bible is truly inspired by God.

6. Two key prophetic themes woven throughout Scripture are the coming of the Messiah and the events that will transpire on this earth at the end of time. These topics will be studied individually in upcoming lessons in this unit. However, there are a number of other prophetic themes in the Bible that reflect the nature of God and His requirements, including the following five.

- *God is sovereign.* The prophets understood that as Creator, God had the right to control all nations and people.
- *God is holy.* Knowing that holiness is central to His nature, the prophets taught that God requires complete separation between the holy and the unholy.

- *God will not tolerate sin.* The prophets could not compromise their stern exposure of sin because the only hope for the people they addressed was a humble turning to the Lord in genuine repentance.
- *God requires obedience.* The prophets reminded the people that God had a rich purpose for them, but they must believe and follow His commandments.
- *God will judge sin.* The prophets warned that if the princes, priests, and people arrogantly rejected God's moral and spiritual principles, they would face the consequences.

How are the principles revealed in these prophetic themes applicable in our day?

Discussion of this question should bring out that all of these prophetic themes are as true in our day as they were when they were given. God is unchanging, and the principles of His Word are unchanging as well. This is one reason why a study of prophecy can be so beneficial for us today. While sin, unbelief, and opposition to the truth of God are prevalent in our world today, they were also widespread in the era of the prophets. Just as the prophetic predictions of judgment were fulfilled centuries ago, one day judgment will fall upon all who reject God.

7. In Isaiah 30:1-2, the prophet Isaiah pronounced woe upon the people of Israel for rebelling against God and forming an alliance with Egypt. In Jonah 3:1-4, the prophet Jonah gave a message of coming doom to Nineveh, the powerful and wicked capital city of Assyria. What were the responses to these prophetic messages? Isaiah 30:8-11; Jonah 3:4-10

Isaiah 30:8-11 records that the people of Israel rejected the truth delivered by Isaiah, demanding that he preach only "smooth" things and telling him to "cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." In contrast, Jonah 3:4-10 indicates that the people of Nineveh believed the words of Jonah and repented, "from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

Responses to the Gospel message today mirror the contrasting responses to the ancient prophetic messages of Isaiah and Jonah. Some people—far too many—reject the truth, preferring lies and illusions to the necessity of humbling themselves and admitting their wrongdoing. Others believe and respond by repenting and turning to God.

Point out that the response to a message from God is not the responsibility of the one delivering it. The prophet's duty, and our duty today as men and women of God, is to be faithful in communicating the truth as God instructs us or gives us opportunity. While we pray for positive results, we must continue to be faithful and obedient whether or not that is the case.

8. Old Testament prophecies sometimes had dual or multiple fulfillments, even though the prophet spoke the prophecy as a single event. While the prophet's audience would have viewed it in the historical context of their own day, a more complete fulfillment would come later. In a sense, the prophets saw the "mountain peaks" of prophetic events, but they could not identify the "valleys" of time between the peaks. We find one example of this in God's promise of a "son" and a "house" to David in 2 Samuel 7, which was only partially fulfilled in David's son, Solomon. The second and complete fulfillment of that promise will be realized when Jesus, the "Son of Man," establishes His kingdom on earth.

Another example of this type of dual fulfillment is the "day of the LORD" referenced in Joel 2:28-32 and Amos 5:18-19. Joel and Amos viewed this as a one-time event when invading armies would bring judgment and destruction upon Israel. Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10-13, what is the secondary and future fulfillment of these verses?

Your group should understand that the secondary and future fulfillment of these verses will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. The Scriptures indicate that "the day of the Lord" will come quickly, like a thief in the night, so Christians must be watchful and ready at any moment.

This may be a good opportunity to point out to your group that Biblical prophecy is not intended to provide believers with a complete, sequential, unfolding of the future. Allusions to coming events may only be fully understood when those events come to pass. Nonetheless, Scriptural prophecies—especially those concerning the end time—provide hope and encouragement for those whose trust is in God.

9. In the Old Testament, false prophets dishonestly claimed to deliver messages from God, while in actuality, they were speaking deceitfully. At times, they also spoke on behalf of false gods or prophesied for monetary gain. Based on the following Scriptures, what are some ways we can discern whether a prophet is true or false? Deuteronomy 18:22; Jeremiah 23:32; Lamentations 2:14; Matthew 7:15; 1 Corinthians 14:32-33; 1 John 4:1-3

These Scriptures point out the following characteristics of true and false prophets.

- *Deuteronomy 18:22—The predictions of false prophets will not all come to pass.*
- *Jeremiah 23:32—False prophets often speak lies and do not encourage righteous behavior or teach things that align with God's will.*
- *Lamentations 2:14—False prophets do not condemn all sin.*
- *Matthew 7:15—False prophets disguise their true nature.*

-
-
-
-

[illegible][illegible]

-
-
-
-

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK



Judgment for Judah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ezekiel 4:1 through 24:27

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations.” (Ezekiel 7:8)

BACKGROUND

Following Ezekiel's call and commission as a prophet (described in chapters 1-3), chapters 4-24 contain the record of the prophetic messages he gave over a period of about twenty years. Most of these messages dealt with God's soon-coming judgment on the nation of Judah, with many of them alluding to the siege and destruction of the capital city of Jerusalem.

The phrase “Behold, I am against you” appears thirteen times in Ezekiel. This revealed God’s anger, and indicated that the coming judgment would exceed anything that had occurred before. Ezekiel’s messages disclosed why such severe judgment would come. Israel had always been at the center of God’s plan and work in the world. In spite of numerous evidences of God’s favor throughout her history, the people had rejected Him in both worship and governance, and adopted their pagan neighbors’ gods and practices. They repaid God’s numerous blessings and great mercy with disloyalty and rampant idolatry. For many years, the prophets had cautioned the people of Judah regarding the consequences of their disobedience, but they had refused to heed the words of warning. Now, judgment would come.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Throughout Ezekiel's ministry, God instructed the prophet to present His messages in a variety of unusual ways, including parables, symbolic demonstrations, and object lessons. For example, in chapter 4 Ezekiel was commanded to publicly lie on his side for a portion of 430 consecutive days and eat starvation rations as an illustration of God's judgment. Why do you think God chose these unique methods to communicate to the exiles in Babylon what was coming upon Jerusalem?

Your class will likely conclude that God chose methods that were unique to make a vivid impression upon the people. Lessons taught through both words and actions are very memorable. It is noteworthy that in each instance, Ezekiel did exactly as he was commanded, even though many of the required actions

OPENER

[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible]

were difficult or would subject him to the ridicule of his peers.

You may wish to ask members of your class to share a time when they saw a visual illustration of a spiritual principle. Some should be able to describe an object lesson they remember from Sunday school or youth camp. How did the visual illustration emphasize the concept or make it more memorable?

2. Chapter 5 continues God's instructions regarding actions Ezekiel was to take to depict three aspects of God's coming judgment against Jerusalem: the siege of the city, the suffering and distress of its inhabitants, and the destruction of the city and its people. In Ezekiel 5:1-4, what was Ezekiel told to do, and what did his actions symbolize (see verses 11-12)?

In these verses, Ezekiel was told to cut off his hair and beard and divide the hair into three portions to portray what would happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. One part of his hair was to be burned, another part was to be chopped up with a knife, and the third part was to be scattered in the wind. A very few hairs were to be removed and bound into Ezekiel's clothes.

The portion of hair burned “in the midst of the city” indicated that some inhabitants of Jerusalem would die during the siege from pestilence, famine, and fire. The portion of hair chopped with the knife revealed that some of the people would be slain outside the city. The portion of hair scattered into the wind illustrated that still others would be dispersed among the nations, but “a sword” would chase them, indicating that wherever those survivors fled, they would find no peace. Ezekiel was also to attach a few hairs to the hem of his clothing, and burn a few in a fire. This spoke of the small remnant left behind and the suffering they would endure.

You may wish to point out to your group how meticulously Ezekiel was to measure and divide his hair, even using a scale to portion it accurately. God's judgment against Jerusalem would be carried out deliberately and thoroughly. Ask your group what they think this suggests about the nature of God's judgment. They should conclude that God keeps accurate records, and He will precisely mete out His judgment of sinners according to their deeds.

3. Time after time, God reiterated to Ezekiel how completely the people of Judah had embraced idolatry. In chapter 8, God revealed the depth of their spiritual and moral failure by showing Ezekiel the abominations that were taking place in the Temple in Jerusalem—abominations that included the worship of ceremonially unclean animals. Given this flagrant violation of God’s commands, why do you think the elders said “The LORD seeth us not” (Ezekiel 8:12)? How does this parallel the mindset of many people today?

Discussion of the first question could bring out that perhaps the elders excused their sin because they did not think God would notice their thoughts or their actions. They may have believed God had forsaken their nation, so what they did would not matter. Or perhaps they had gone so far from God that they simply had no regard for Him and never gave a thought to the consequences. In whatever manner they rationalized their sinful actions, they seemingly felt free to engage in the most corrupt of practices without any fear or compunction.

In response to the second question, your group should conclude that the same attitudes exist today among unbelievers. Even some who have been taught the truths of God's Word and know what He requires of them continue in flagrant disobedience.

4. In Ezekiel 11:14-21, God had Ezekiel tell the exiles in Babylon that the coming judgment would not be the end of Israel. In a restatement of a promise previously made in Deuteronomy 30:3, God said He would sustain the exiles during their absence from their land and Temple, and would regather the people to their land in the future. God said that when they did return, they would no longer pursue idolatry. What does verse 19 mean, and what evidence can you give that such a complete transformation is possible?

Verse 19 says, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh." This was not referring to the physical heart; it was a promise that God would completely transform His people. While this assurance of cleansing and restoration was directed to Judah, it also pointed ahead to the redemption and restoration made available for all through Christ's sacrificial death at Calvary.

Your group should conclude that testimonies of conversion are evidence of God's power to completely transform a life that has been bound by sin. You may wish to refer to 2 Corinthians 5:17 as a supporting Scripture.

5. In chapter 14, the elders of the exiles in Babylon came to hear from Ezekiel. Some Bible scholars view Ezekiel 14:12-21 as a reply to a question in these elders' minds: Wouldn't God spare Jerusalem because of the righteous people who remained there? At God's direction, Ezekiel responded by pointing to three of the most righteous men in Israel's history: Noah, Daniel, and Job. What Biblical principle is found in God's declaration in verse 14?

The principle revealed is that the prayers of godly people cannot prevent judgment if a nation or individual persists in rebellion against God. Amplify this by pointing out that even though Noah was a preacher of righteousness, he could not spare the ungodly around him from being drowned. Job was

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

doctrine of eternal security, which holds that once an individual is saved, he is always saved and there is no possibility of backsliding. The Bible teaches, both in this verse and others, that the relationship with God can be severed. Individuals who have been born again can choose to go back into sin, just as Adam and Eve, in their righteous state, chose to commit sin. The believers' assurance and security is rooted in continued obedience and faithfulness to God.

8. In chapter 19, Ezekiel mourned for Judah's pending ruin. Ezekiel 19:10 states that Israel had been "planted by the waters." This is a reference to Israel's privileged and fruitful state in the past, particularly during the reigns of David and Solomon. In what ways have you been "planted by the waters," and what responsibility does that entail?

Your class should be able to point to many blessings God has given them that others in our world do not enjoy. These could include freedom of worship, access to the Word of God, the privilege of attending church where the fullness of God's Word is taught, and supportive Christian friends and fellow believers. Some may mention a godly heritage and the privilege of being raised in a Christian home. The point should be made that we ought to always be appreciative for our blessings—and recognize that with great privilege comes great responsibility. We will be responsible for the light we have received and the privileges we have been blessed with.

9. In chapter 20, God likened Judah and Jerusalem to a forest ready to be burned. Ezekiel was to tell the people that the coming "fire" of judgment would be kindled by God himself. What characteristics of a forest fire make it such a vivid representation of Judah's coming judgment?

Your group will likely be able to suggest a number of parallels. The point should be made that a forest fire burns quickly and indiscriminately, destroying everything in its path. According to verse 47, both the green tree and the dry tree—everyone in the land of Judah—would suffer from the devastation of Jerusalem caused by the Chaldean invaders.

Wrap up your lesson by reinforcing the fact that God's judgment upon unrighteousness is sure. We can learn from what befell Judah that though God may withhold judgment for a time because of His great mercy, it will come upon the ungodly someday.

CONCLUSION

God is longsuffering, but there is a limit to His patience. Someday, God will send divine judgment upon the world for peoples' continued rejection of Him. We need to be sure our names are written in Heaven.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

1. The beauty of the Creation account in the first two chapters of Genesis was marred when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. As a result, the relationship they had previously enjoyed with Him was severed, and the righteous nature with which they had been created was changed to a sinful one. In addition, the serpent who had tempted Eve to sin was cursed. God's pronouncement to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 is the first Old Testament Messianic prophecy. How would you explain this prophecy?

God's announcement that Satan would wound the Messiah ("thou shalt bruise his heel") refers to the fact that Jesus, in taking on humanity, brought Himself into Satan's domain so Satan could strike him. Not only did Jesus experience the humbling aspects of being human, but He willingly endured suffering and death on the cross to provide the atonement for our sins (see Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus crushed the head of the serpent (He would "bruise thy head") and triumphed over Satan when He destroyed his work by defeating death through His glorious Resurrection. The ultimate fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 will occur when Satan is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, to be tormented day and night for ever and ever (see Revelation 20:10).

It is important for your group to understand that God's plan was not adjusted when Adam and Eve sinned. Long before the world was created, this plan was set in motion by our all-knowing, eternal God. We read in 1 Peter 1:20 that Christ's death for mankind was "foreordained before the foundation of the world." In 1 John 3:8, we are assured that "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

NOTES

[illegible]

These verses prophesy the following regarding the birth of the Messiah.

- *Genesis 12:3—The Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham.*
- *2 Samuel 7:12-14—The Messiah would be an heir to King David's throne and would reign for eternity.*
- *Isaiah 7:14—The Messiah would be born of a virgin.*
- *Micah 5:2—The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.*
- *Hosea 11:1—The Messiah would be in Egypt for a time.*

Follow up by pointing out to your group that we find the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies in the following New Testament verses.

- *Genesis 12:3 is fulfilled in Matthew 1:1.*
- *2 Samuel 7:12-14 is fulfilled in Matthew 1:6-16.*
- *Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled in Luke 1:26-35.*
- *Micah 5:2 is fulfilled in Luke 2:4-6.*
- *Hosea 11:1 is fulfilled in Matthew 2:14-15.*

3. Long before Christ's birth, a number of Old Testament prophets described His mission on this earth. Isaiah was one of them. Though he lived about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, he gave us much insight about how and what the Messiah would preach. What details about the Messiah's ministry do the following prophecies by Isaiah give? Isaiah 11:1-5; 42:1-4; 61:1-2

Isaiah foretold that the Spirit of the Lord would rest upon the Messiah, and He would have wisdom and understanding. He would judge in righteousness and reprove with equity (Isaiah 11:1-5). In addition, He would be a gentle Redeemer who would uphold justice and heal the broken (Isaiah 42:1-4; 61:1-2).

You may wish to expand your discussion by pointing out that Jesus validated Isaiah's words by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2 in reference to Himself. In Luke 4:17-21, we read that early in His ministry on earth, He stood up and read these verses in the synagogue at Nazareth, and then told those present, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

In this prophecy, Jesus announced that He came to undo five types of damage that result from sin.

- *"To preach the gospel to the poor." Sin impoverishes, but the Messiah brought good news to the poor.*
- *"To heal the brokenhearted." Sin breaks hearts, but the Messiah brought inner healing for the brokenhearted.*
- *"To preach deliverance to the captives." Sin enslaves people, but the Messiah came to set them free from that bondage.*

- *“Recovering of sight to the blind.” Sin spiritually blinds people, but the Messiah came to heal and restore those with spiritual blindness.*
- *“To set at liberty them that are bruised.” Sin binds and harms its victims, but the Messiah comes to bring liberty and healing.*

Only the Son of God himself could bring this kind of deliverance and healing.

4. Perhaps one of the most beautiful and familiar prophecies regarding the coming Messiah is found in our key verses, Isaiah 9:6-7. Four descriptive names are given for the Messiah in these verses. The words “Wonderful” and “Counsellor” could be linked together in translation as being “The Wonderful Counselor.” The other names ascribed to Him are “The mighty God,” “The everlasting Father,” and “The Prince of Peace.” What do these names suggest to you regarding the character and nature of the Messiah?

Your group may come up with a number of thoughts about the Messiah’s character and nature based on the names, including the following.

“Wonderful” is indicative of that which is miraculously accomplished by God Himself, while “Counsellor” indicates that He will be the Authority and the people will gladly listen to Him and accept His guidance, for He will have the wisdom to rule justly. The term “mighty God” is the strongest of titles with reference to deity. This Child was to be God Himself! “The everlasting Father” alludes to the fact that though the Messiah would come as an infant, He is eternally one with the Father. “The Prince of Peace” indicates that His rule will manifest peace because He is the embodiment of peace itself.

5. Despite the Messiah’s peaceful and healing ministry, the prophets foretold that He would be rejected by His own people and that the rulers would plot to kill Him. The prophets warned that someone who had broken bread (eaten) with the Messiah would betray Him¹ for thirty pieces of silver that would later be used to buy a potter’s field.² Upon His betrayal, the Messiah’s closest friends would desert Him.³ How were these prophecies fulfilled at the close of Jesus’ earthly ministry? Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50; 27:3-10; Mark 14:50

As the prophets foretold, Jesus was betrayed by one of His twelve chosen disciples, Judas Iscariot, for thirty pieces of silver. Later, when Judas returned the money to the priests, it was used to buy a potter’s field. Also, after Judas’s betrayal, Jesus’ other disciples “deserted him and fled.” Point out to your class that betrayal and desertion by one’s friends is a very painful experience, but Jesus endured that for us.

[illegible]

1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8

1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8

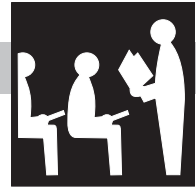
1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8

1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8

1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8

1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8

1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8



Judgment for Enemy Nations

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ezekiel 25:1 through 32:32

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.” (Ezekiel 25:17)

BACKGROUND

After relaying God’s messages of judgment to the Jewish people in previous chapters, the focus shifts in Ezekiel 25-32 as God directed the prophet to proclaim judgment upon surrounding nations. Oracles were given to seven places—Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. Brief mention is also made of several additional areas.

Most of these nations bordered Judah, and they exemplified hostility toward her. God would judge them for their attitudes and aggression against His people, along with their own sins of pride and materialism. Judah's disobedience had resulted in God's stern rebuke and the people's eventual captivity, and God indicated that the punishment of these other nations would be just as severe.

These neighboring countries may not have realized that the recent overthrow of Judah by Babylon was not merely a judgment upon the Jews; it was also a warning to their own countries. Although God had focused first on the sins of His people, He would not ignore the pagan nations around them that had also sinned.

Babylon was not included among the nations addressed in these chapters. While the reason for this is not given, perhaps it was because God was using the Babylonians to execute His judgment. In Ezekiel's time, Babylon had already or would soon conquer all of these countries.

These chapters contain several important lessons:

- God is sovereign over all people and nations.
- God is just. He takes note of evil and punishes it in His own time and way.
- God sometimes uses unrighteous nations or people as His instruments of judgment.
- God's moral law is universal and all will be judged by His standards.

A recurring theme in these messages is “they shall know that I am the Lord GOD.” Still today, God wants every person to understand that He is over all and is worthy of obedience, worship, and praise. Every

OPENER

[illegible]

NOTES

-
-
-
-

[illegible]

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible][illegible]

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible][illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible][illegible]

CONCLUSION

The Bible says that all nations and people will one day be humbled before God, and only the righteous will enjoy His eternal blessings. The judgments that fell upon the nations in today’s text should both warn and encourage all those who honor God.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible][illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Isaiah 2:4 – There will be peace, with no wars between nations.

Isaiah 11:6-9 – Animal nature will be changed.

Isaiah 35:6 – Sickness and disease will be eliminated.

Isaiah 55:12-13 – Vegetation will be luxuriant.

Isaiah 65:20 – Mankind will enjoy longevity.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 – God will renew His covenant with Israel.

Wrap up your lesson by pointing out what a glorious privilege it will be to have a part in that Millennial Kingdom. We want to do whatever is necessary to be ready for it and for all of eternity.

CONCLUSION

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day because they did not understand the meaning of their times. We want to consider the indicators that Christ's return is imminent and be certain that we are ready.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

with a message from the Lord asserting that spiritual life could be gained through turning from wickedness to righteousness. What key Bible doctrines are alluded to in Ezekiel 33:13-16?

Verses 13-16 allude to the doctrines of repentance, salvation, and restitution. You may wish to discuss these verses one at a time to make sure each point is clearly understood.

Verse 13 brings out that one who trusts “his own righteousness” (depends upon good deeds) will not receive salvation through those actions. Those who “commit iniquity” (who sin) “shall die for it”—a reference to spiritual death. This verse also refutes the doctrine of eternal security, as it clearly states that previous righteous acts of an individual “shall not be remembered” if that one turns back and commits sin.

The phrase “if he turn from his sin” in verse 14 alludes to repentance. In verse 15, “restore the pledge” is a reference to making restitution. The statement in verse 16 that the one whose sins are not mentioned and who has done what is lawful and right “shall surely live,” is a promise of spiritual life, or salvation.

2. Chapter 34 presents a contrast between the behavior of Israel's unfaithful shepherds—the civil and religious leaders of Israel—and the behavior of a good shepherd. Verses 2-7 outline the offences of the shepherds of Israel, which included exploiting the common people to feed and clothe themselves. In addition, they had neglected the sick and infirm, failed to search for the lost, and ruled with force and cruelty. As a result, the sheep—the people of Israel—were “scattered upon all the face of the earth” and had become prey. In contrast, what did God promise in verses 11-16 that the true Shepherd would do for the people?

Verses 11-16 indicate that out of love for His sheep, the true Shepherd would do what the unfaithful shepherds had not done. The true Shepherd would search for His sheep and deliver them out of the places where they had been scattered. He would bring them to their own land and feed them there in a “good pasture.” He would cause His sheep to lie down “in a good fold,” and would bind up the broken and heal the sick.

The prophetic implications in these verses were wonderfully fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ. The idea of the Lord as the Good Shepherd of God's people goes back to Genesis 49:24, and is also reflected in passages such as Psalm 23.

3. Military invaders of Ezekiel’s era typically employed a “scorched earth” policy designed to wipe out any future resistance by the conquered nation. Nebuchadnezzar’s lengthy siege of Jerusalem had taken a devastating toll on Judah, and the land was left ravaged and uncultivated. In chapter 36, God indicated through Ezekiel that this severe judgment was because

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 28 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a template for handwriting practice or general note-taking. The margins are consistent on all sides.

[illegible]

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 30 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines on a white background, typical of standard notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 30 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines on a white background, typical of standard notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

[illegible][illegible]

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

[illegible]

CONCLUSION

Although many of us are not Jewish by birth, Jesus Christ made it possible for each of us to have an eternal possession in a place where God will dwell. What a hope! This homeland will be blessed beyond anything we can imagine, and it will be worth any effort necessary to be there.

CONCLUSION

Although many of us are not Jewish by birth, Jesus Christ made it possible for each of us to have an eternal possession in a place where God will dwell. What a hope! This homeland will be blessed beyond anything we can imagine, and it will be worth any effort necessary to be there.

Although many of us are not Jewish by birth, Jesus Christ made it possible for each of us to have an eternal possession in a place where God will dwell. What a hope! This homeland will be blessed beyond anything we can imagine, and it will be worth any effort necessary to be there.

Although many of us are not Jewish by birth, Jesus Christ made it possible for each of us to have an eternal possession in a place where God will dwell. What a hope! This homeland will be blessed beyond anything we can imagine, and it will be worth any effort necessary to be there.

1. Chapter 1 begins the account of Daniel and his three companions who were among the captives taken to Babylon. As part of their indoctrination, the young men were given a specialized diet that included a daily provision of “the king’s meat.” However, Daniel and the others named did not want to defile themselves by eating of this meat, likely because it had been offered to idols and so was unlawful for a Jew to eat. What did Daniel request of the person in charge of their care, and what was the outcome? Daniel 1:8-15

2. Daniel and his companions in exile held strongly to their principles. Verse 8 indicates that Daniel “purposed in his heart” not to defile himself by eating the specific foods provided for them by the command of the king. What can we learn from this account regarding the importance of establishing and staying true to our religious convictions?

- *It is best to establish godly convictions before a confrontation or crisis arises. Taking a stand for righteousness is not an impulsive whim; it requires making a purposeful decision to turn away from sinful or questionable behavior in whatever form it presents itself, and then relying on God to help us maintain that commitment.*
- *Seemingly insignificant decisions can have great impact. The choice made by these young men only concerned what food they would eat, but it was pivotal. Had they not made the determination to please God, their account would not be in Scripture. Daniel might never have written his prophecies, become an example of righteousness, or been in a position to influence kings.*
- *There is value and strength in surrounding ourselves with spiritually like-minded individuals.*

[illegible]

No doubt, Daniel and his friends drew support from each other.

- *God blesses those who do not compromise their faith. In the end, the dietary modifications were permitted throughout the remainder of the three-year program. God honored the purpose of the Hebrew youths to remain undefiled and gave them knowledge, skill, and wisdom far exceeding their counterparts in the program (see verse 20).*

3. Like Daniel, we live in an environment where ungodliness and immorality are pervasive. What are some aspects of society that could destabilize your Christian values or potentially “defile” your conscience? What are some steps you can take to avoid being contaminated?

The age of your students will influence their responses to this question, and there probably will be a variety of answers. These could include: ungodly content on the internet, unbiblical worldviews presented in an academic setting, music with inappropriate lyrics, sensual advertisements, pornography, actions or activities that are prohibited in God’s Word or that would reflect poorly on one’s Christian testimony, etc.

In response to the second question, your group should mention methods of avoidance such as:

- *Making a choice to stay away from situations or things that could present a temptation.*
- *Guarding our minds and hearts by resisting ungodly input.*
- *Choosing our close friends from among those who will encourage godly living.*
- *Using the Word of God as a defense against unrighteous perspectives and beliefs.*
- *Leaning on the Holy Spirit for guidance.*

The second question could also provide an opportunity to point out that maintaining our integrity in an ungodly environment is much easier once we have received the experience of sanctification. When we have devoted ourselves to God and set ourselves apart for His purpose and glory, we have a deep desire to please Him in every aspect of life. We are not merely conforming to a set of rules, but we behave with integrity through the transforming power of God. We have a desire to receive instruction, a readiness to obey God’s Word, and a motivation to please Him.

4. Chapter 2 recounts King Nebuchadnezzar’s troubling dream and the impossible demand he made of his wise men regarding its interpretation. Daniel and his companions were not among the wise men initially summoned before the king, but according to verse 13, they were among those to be slain. In what ways was the providential care of God apparent in this incident? Daniel 2:14-19

[illegible]

offered them a chance to reverse their position (see verse 15). However, he made clear that if they refused again, they would immediately be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. What are some of the rationalizations the Hebrews could have come up with in order to obey the king and avoid this terrible fate had their trust in God not been so strong?

Your class will likely come up with some of the following:

- *We will go ahead and bow down, but we will not really worship—we'll just close our eyes and look like we are.*
- *God will understand why it is necessary for us to obey the king in this matter. He would not expect us to put our lives at risk.*
- *We are appointees of King Nebuchadnezzar, so we must obey him.*
- *We would not hurt anyone by bowing, so it should be all right just this once.*
- *If we are killed, we won't be able to help the rest of our companions here in Babylon.*
- *We are foreigners in another culture, so we need to align ourselves with their customs as a matter of respect.*

The point of generating these potential excuses is to help your group see that the enemy of our souls will always provide multiple reasons, excuses, or justifications for wrong actions. However, explaining wrong behavior does not make it acceptable in the sight of God. No matter how reasonable the justifications may sound, compromising our spiritual principles will always bring disastrous results in the end.

Class discussion could be amplified by asking for examples of situations from daily life where one could be pressured to compromise, and the types of justifications that could be offered as an excuse for doing so.

8. The threatened punishment for not bowing before Nebuchadnezzar's image was immediately enacted. The fact that the three Hebrews were "bound in their coats" and the furnace was heated "exceeding hot" (verses 21-22) shows that everything was done to ensure the three men would be quickly and completely consumed. What details found in Daniel 3:20-27 prove the supernatural nature of the three Hebrews' deliverance?

The supernatural nature of their deliverance is indicated by the following details:

- *Verse 22 – The three Hebrews survived inside the furnace, while those who cast them in perished from the heat.*
- *Verse 25 – Though the ropes binding them were consumed, the Hebrews were unhurt by the flames and walked about in the midst of the fire.*

- Verse 25 – Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth Man in the furnace with the three Hebrews.
- Verse 27 – When the three men were called to come out of the flames, their hair was not singed, their clothing was intact, and there was no smell of smoke upon them.

Wrap up discussion of this question by pointing out that Nebuchadnezzar was moved to great respect for the God of the Hebrews by what he witnessed that day. This was evidenced by his edict that anyone who spoke negatively of their God would be executed, “Because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort” (verse 29). This extreme turnaround by Nebuchadnezzar was a result of God allowing the three Hebrews to go through an extreme trial. In the aftermath, the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to positions of higher importance in the realm than they had previously held.

9. While the deliverance of the three Hebrews from Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace was a mighty miracle, not every believer throughout the ages of history has been delivered. Many have suffered intense persecution and have given their lives for their faith. Why do you think God miraculously intervenes for some of His followers, but not for others?

Class discussion should lead to the understanding that God has a perfect, unique purpose for each life. He sees the big picture, operates in accordance with His divine plan, and knows precisely the timing for each piece of His plan to fit together. We will not always understand why God allows what He allows. We may not always understand why some have to suffer while others seem to go through life without any significant opposition for their faith. However, we can and must trust that every circumstance works together for eternal good. Some good supplemental verses to use in conjunction with this discussion are Romans 8:18, 28, 35-39.

10. How might the experiences and example of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in today’s text help you deal with the challenges in your life?

Discussion of this question should revolve around the fact that, like the young Hebrews, we can thrive in our walk with God in spite of circumstances if we maintain a purpose to live to please God, and faithfully adhere to that commitment no matter what takes place around us.

CONCLUSION

Do we hold so strongly to our faith in God that whatever happens, we will do what He says? Such conviction helps us overcome temptation and gives us wisdom and stability in changing circumstances. Let’s purpose to prayerfully live out our convictions in everyday life and trust God for the results!



Daniel Used by God

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Daniel 4:1 through 6:28

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” (Daniel 6:5)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Daniel can be divided into two nearly equal parts. The first six chapters are historical in nature and concern Daniel's life in Babylon under several foreign kings. The remainder of the book is primarily a record of Daniel's revelations concerning Israel and various world empires. This week's text continues the historical narrative begun in chapters 1 through 3.

Chapter 4 covers the judgment of King Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned over the Babylonian Empire from 605-562 B.C. During that time, he led his armies in conquering numerous kingdoms and expanding and fortifying the city of Babylon. This portion of text describes the king's troubling dream and Daniel's interpretation, the king's mental failure and dethronement due to pride, and his ultimate restoration. Although the precise dates of these events are unknown, scholars believe they took place near the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

The events of chapter 5 occurred sixty-six years after Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem and the deportation of Daniel and other exiles to Babylon. During this period, Belshazzar was co-ruler of the Babylonian Empire with his father, Nabonidus. While Nabonidus was away attempting to reopen trade routes captured by Cyrus and his Persian armies, Belshazzar held a profane feast for a thousand of his lords. During the feast, a hand appeared and wrote upon the wall of the banquet chamber, and Daniel was called upon to interpret the meaning of the words. That very night, as the writing foretold, Belshazzar was slain and the Chaldean Empire fell to the combined military forces of the Medes and the Persians.

Chapter 6 records events that occurred during the reign of Darius the Mede. Daniel, by then an elderly man, was one of Darius' three presidents set over the princes of the kingdom. This chapter describes the plot the other presidents devised against Daniel because he was preferred over them, the king's distress over the punishment that could not be rescinded, and Daniel's miraculous deliverance from the den of lions.

OPENER

[illegible]

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

NOTES

1. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest of the Babylonian kings. He had been victorious in battle and was the successful builder of a flourishing realm. However, chapter 4 describes a troubling dream that destroyed his peace. When the pagan “wise men” of Babylon could not interpret the dream’s meaning, Daniel (referred to by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar) was called upon to explain it. What did Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream? Daniel 4:10-16

In his dream, the king saw a tree that was large, strong, and beautiful, and provided shade, shelter, and food. Then a “watcher”—a divine being—declared that the tree must be cut down, its branches cut off, its fruit scattered, and a band of iron and brass placed around the stump.

Ask your group what the dream portended. They should understand that the tree was symbolic of Nebuchadnezzar, and the dream clearly indicated that judgment was coming upon him. In the midst of this revelation of coming judgment, however, there were indicators of God's mercy. The fact that God gave the vision was in itself an act of mercy. And although the tree in the vision was hewn down, the stump remained, indicating there was potential for it to revive and grow again. The band of iron and brass may have symbolized the surety of God's promise of survival and restoration.

This could lead to a discussion of ways our long-suffering God still extends mercy to people in our day. Encourage your class to share examples from their own knowledge or experience of situations where God extended mercy. You may wish to share the testimony of someone who initially resisted God's call but eventually yielded. (The Gospel Pioneer booklets on our church website offer many such accounts.)

2. In verse 27, Daniel advised the king to humble himself, hoping that would forestall the pending judgment. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not do so. A year later, as he was walking in his palace, he boasted, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built . . . ?” When and how was God’s judgment poured out? Daniel 4:30-33

God's response to Nebuchadnezzar's boastful expression of pride was immediate. The king's reason departed and for seven years, he lived as an animal in the fields. Some scholars suggest his affliction was lycanthropy, a type of mental disturbance in which the person thinks he/she has been transformed into an animal, with corresponding altered behavior. Ancient historians alluded to this, noting that for a period of time, Nebuchadnezzar was ill or weak and did not reign. The fact that the exact circumstances were not recorded is not unusual; defeats, wickedness, and weaknesses of monarchs often were omitted from national records.

Conclude your discussion of this chapter by noting that when Nebuchadnezzar recognized God, blessed

[illegible]

“the most High,” and gave Him praise and honor; God restored his sanity. In addition, as Daniel had foretold, his kingdom was restored (see verses 34-37). Nebuchadnezzar’s praise to God indicated that he knew pride had caused his downfall. What he had gone through proved to him beyond doubt that God was well able to abase anyone who walks in pride.

3. The events of chapter 5 took place in 539 B.C. during the reign of King Belshazzar. The territories surrounding Babylon had fallen into the hands of the Medes and Persians, and the city of Babylon itself was under siege. However, Belshazzar seemingly felt the city was sufficiently fortified and had provisions enough to withstand any assault. In spite of the military threat, he hosted a great feast for a thousand of his lords. What profane action did Belshazzar take while the feast was underway? Daniel 5:1-4

During the feast, Belshazzar ordered that the sacred vessels of the Jewish Temple (plundered by Nebuchadnezzar fifty years earlier) be brought for use at his banquet. This sacrilegious act was accompanied by drunkenness, debauchery, and idolatry, as the guests at the feast “praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” (verse 4).

This could be an opportunity to discuss with your group the importance of showing proper respect for holy things. While most people with a religious background will not be tempted to be flagrantly profane or purposefully dishonor the things of God, it is possible to drift into casual behaviors that fail to show proper reverence. Ask your students to cite specific examples of behaviors that show proper respect. These might include such actions as handling the Bible with care, maintaining a reverent attitude in the sanctuary, not using euphemisms or slang related to God’s name, refraining from discussion of business or monetary matters in the Lord’s house, honoring the Lord’s Day, and taking care to speak in a respectful manner about the ministry.

4. Daniel reminded Belshazzar that his ancestor, King Nebuchadnezzar, had a “heart [that] was lifted up” and a “mind hardened in pride,” and God had humbled him. Although Belshazzar knew this, he ignored that warning in his family history, to his own detriment. According to Daniel 5:22-23, Belshazzar was condemned because he had not humbled his heart but had lifted up himself against the Lord of Heaven, and used sanctified vessels in a profane way. What are some indicators of a prideful spirit? What steps can we take to avoid allowing a spirit of pride to creep into our lives?

In response to the first question, your group may bring up some of the following indicators of a prideful spirit:

- *Frequent self-promotion and bragging.*

- *Lack of empathy regarding the challenges others face.*
- *Harboring of resentment or self-pity when not praised or appreciated.*
- *A focus on what others think of them.*
- *Insistence upon their own way or personal perspective.*
- *Avoidance of people who are better at something than they are.*
- *Frequent pointing out of flaws or missteps by others.*

In response to the second question, suggestions regarding steps we can take to avoid pride in our lives could include the following:

- *Honor and revere God properly and consistently.*
- *Meditate on God's Word, and stay in close communion with Him.*
- *Put others first, considering others more important than yourself.*
- *Receive commendation gracefully, but do not focus on it. Make sure glory for achievements goes to God.*
- *Remember and strive to follow Christ's example of humility.*
- *Avoid listening to Satan's attempts to flatter or exalt, and to put down or discourage.*

5. During Belshazzar's feast at the royal palace, an astonishing and disquieting event took place: a man's hand appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the banquet chamber. The message consisted of only three words, with the first repeated for emphasis. However, the wise men of the realm were unable to explain the meaning, and ultimately, Daniel was brought before the king to interpret it. How would you summarize Daniel's explanation of the words on the wall, and when was the prophetic message fulfilled?

Daniel 5:25-30

Daniel gave a two-part explanation for each word. Mene meant "numbered" and referred to the fact that God had numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom and finished it. Tekel meant "weighed" and indicated that in God's divine balance, the kingdom was found wanting. Pharsin meant "broken fragments" (the U at the beginning of the word is a prefix meaning "and") revealing the final doom—the kingdom would be divided into pieces and given to the Medes and Persians.

The judgment announced by the handwriting on the wall occurred almost immediately. That very night, the united forces of the Medes and Persians overwhelmed and conquered Babylon. Some historians state the armies diverted the waters of the river that ran through the city, and then entered by walking along the dry

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

reported to King Darius that Daniel had disobeyed his edict, the king had no choice but to follow through with the stated punishment. What details in verses 14 and 18-20 are indicators of Darius' mental and emotional state when he became aware of the fate that awaited Daniel because of his decree?

Your students will likely point to the following details, which indicate that Darius was distraught at the result of his decree:

- Verse 14 – The king was “sore displeased with himself.” He attempted to find a way to spare Daniel until the going down of the sun.
- Verse 18 – He was sleepless after Daniel was cast into the den, and spent the night fasting.
- Verse 19 – As early as possible in the morning, he hurried to the den.
- Verse 20 – His anguish was evident in the fact that he cried to Daniel with a “lamentable voice.”

All of these details offer clear evidence of the king's respect for Daniel and his conscientious stand.

8. King Darius arose very early the next morning and went to the den of lions. He cried out, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” The law had been kept; Daniel had received the prescribed punishment for disobedience to the king's decree. However, the outcome was not what Daniel's opponents expected. Daniel's voice sounded forth from the den, “O King, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.” In verses 23 and 25-27, what evidences do we see of the esteem in which the king held Daniel?

Verse 23 states that the king was “exceeding glad” for Daniel, an indicator of the esteem he had for this godly and courageous man. Darius then made a second decree, commanding reverence for Daniel's God throughout his realm (verses 25-27). He was convinced of God's power because of Daniel's clearly miraculous deliverance.

Wrap up this lesson by pointing out that the only truly safe place is in the will of God. Daniel's integrity during three successive empires made it clear that he would rather die than dishonor God by forsaking his deeply held convictions. And ultimately, his upright behavior won the respect and honor of three heathen kings.

CONCLUSION

When we are secure in our relationship with God and are doing our best to live in obedience to Him, God will help us face challenges with composure and grace. He will not fail His own!



Prophecies Given to Daniel

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Daniel 7:1 through 12:13

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” (Daniel 7:27)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Daniel can be divided into two nearly equal parts. The first six chapters are historical in nature and concern Daniel's life in Babylon under several kings. The remainder of the book, our text for this week, is primarily a record of Daniel's revelations concerning Israel and various world empires.

Bible scholars consider the Book of Daniel to be the major apocalyptic book of the Old Testament, as chapters 7 through 12 relate to the end times. (Apocalyptic literature is usually symbolic, visionary, and prophetic in nature, and typically was written under oppressive conditions with the intent of encouraging the people of God.) These chapters offer not only information regarding the near future of Israel in Daniel's time but also a view of end-time events with worldwide implications. The key message conveyed is that in the last days, the great nations of the world will rise up against the Lord, but God will protect His people, and the Kingdom He establishes will prevail and endure forever.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In the vision described in chapter 7, Daniel saw a number of troubling images that included violent conflict between powerful animal-like creatures, symbolizing the four successive world empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. In verse 9, the vision shifts to a prophecy of the end times that is considered one of the pinnacles of Old Testament revelation. In it, Daniel saw the “Ancient of days” upon a throne, meting out judgment to the four beasts. Following the divine judgment, who came before the Ancient of days, and what was given Him?

Daniel 7:13-14

Verses 13-14 record that “one like the Son of man” came before the Ancient of days. Make sure your group understands that this is a reference to Jesus Christ, who is distinct from God the Father, the Ancient of days. The designation “Son of man” is one

OPENER

[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible]

[illegible][illegible]

[illegible]

requested God's mercy, rather than His intervention in their desperate situation. He knew the people did not deserve help. Point out to your group that although judgment will ultimately come to individuals who persist in rebellion toward God, He still extends mercy to those who repent, even though it is not deserved. If God refused to help sinners because of their past rejection of Him, it would only be their due. So when God responds with mercy instead of judgment, what praise should be offered Him!

4. Following Daniel's earnest prayer to God, once again the angel Gabriel came to him, this time with a message of hope. Beginning at verse 22 of chapter 9, Gabriel informed Daniel that God had put in place a timetable of seventy weeks of years, which would start when an edict would be proclaimed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Why do you think Gabriel gave Daniel this message? In verse 24, what six purposes did he give for the seventy weeks?

In verse 23, Gabriel told Daniel that he was "greatly beloved." While Daniel had remained true to the Lord God all the days of his exile in Babylon, no doubt what commended him to God the most was his heart for the people of Israel and his desire to intercede for them, which resulted in his impassioned prayer to the Lord on their behalf.

Following Daniel's prayer for his people, who had suffered so greatly as a result of their egregious sins against God, he was given hope. Gabriel said that in the days ahead there would be a remedy given that would bring them back to God and restore righteous order to all people whose lives had been destroyed by sin.

The six purposes outlined in verse 24 were as follows:

- "To finish the transgression." Taken literally, this means that sin will finally be restrained, ending its dominion that began with Adam and Eve's first transgression against God in the Garden.*
- "To make an end of sins." This means that sins will be "seal[ed] up" or "stopped." The power of sin will be broken both by changing a person's desires and purging the heart.*
- "To make reconciliation for iniquity." This third purpose is accomplished through the atoning Blood of Jesus.*
- "To bring in everlasting righteousness." While righteous individuals have existed throughout history, only in the new Kingdom brought in by the Messiah will righteousness be "everlasting," indicating that it will finally be permanent as sin is bound up forever.*
- "To seal up the vision and prophecy." This references both the conclusion and fulfillment*

-
-
-
-
-
-

[illegible]

[illegible]

foretold events taking place as predicted, they would recognize that God was shaping man's actions in conformity with His will. What does the knowledge that God has planned and ordained the events occurring on the world stage today mean to you?

Class discussion should bring out that the knowledge that God is in control offers tremendous comfort and encouragement to believers. It helps us understand that the events occurring around us are not terrifying or even just random happenings without meaning, but rather, they are all part of God's plan for the end times. While we may undergo difficult and challenging circumstances before Jesus returns to take us out of this world, He will be with us and help us triumph as we keep our trust in Him.

Focus your group's attention on Daniel 11:32, which foretold the time when Antiochus IV Epiphanes would turn on Jerusalem and the Jewish people. While some of the Jews would forsake their covenant with God and embrace Greek culture and customs at that time, those who knew their God would be "strong" and "do exploits" in the face of incredible pressure and opposition. In like manner, when we face challenging circumstances, we can cling to God with the assurance that He will strengthen, uphold, and encourage us. While our "exploits" for Him may be different from those of the Jews of Daniel's time, like them we will be enabled to live in a godly manner and stay true to our commitment to God.

7. In chapter 11, verse 36, Daniel's narrative appears to transition from a historical figure to a person who will exalt himself above all gods, including the God of gods. In the New Testament, this individual is referred to as the Antichrist. The remainder of the chapter describes some of the wars the Antichrist will engage in and the establishment of his headquarters in Jerusalem. The Antichrist will prosper until he sets himself up as god in the Temple in the middle of his seven-year rule. Daniel 12:1 indicates that after the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel, there will be "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." What is this "time of trouble" a reference to, and who will be protected?

This is a reference to the Great Tribulation—a period during which people on earth will experience unparalleled trouble, darkness, and torment. During that time, the Archangel will protect the remnant of Jews whose names are written in the Book of Life. This is an indication that a remnant of Jews will believe on Jesus Christ as their Savior during the second half of the Tribulation. (For further discussion of the Tribulation period, you may wish to refer to Zachariah 13:8-9, Revelation 7:4-8, and Revelation 14:1.)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



The Book of Habakkuk

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Habakkuk 1:1 through 3:19

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

BACKGROUND

Habakkuk wrote during a turbulent period of Judah's history, likely during the reign of Jehoiakim, and shortly before the Babylonians' siege and capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Little is known of the personal details of Habakkuk's life; we are merely told in Habakkuk 1:1 that he was recognized as a prophet. The probable time frame of his ministry would make him a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and possibly Zephaniah and Obadiah.

Verse 1 of our text describes Habakkuk's prophetic vision as a "burden," indicating that it was a message of destruction. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was deep in sin, and the prophet was troubled about why evil seemed to go unpunished. His perplexity and distress intensified when God revealed that judgment would come to Judah at the hand of the wicked Chaldeans (Babylonians). Habakkuk complained that the Chaldeans were worse than the people of Judah, with a reputation of aggression, cruelty, and horrible atrocities. He struggled with why God would use such an evil nation as His tool of judgment.

In chapter 2, Habakkuk determined to watch and wait for God's answer to his questions. God gave him a vision (a prophecy or revelation) of events that would come upon Judah. He then pronounced five "woes" of judgment upon the Chaldeans, assuring Habakkuk that justice against that nation would be accomplished in God's time and according to His plan.

Habakkuk responded in chapter 3. In his prayer, written in the form of a psalm, he sought revival, recalled various historic deliverances of Israel, recognized God's power over creation and the nations, and rehearsed how God had previously delivered Israel through anointed leaders. Although the stress of the current situation remained, Habakkuk concluded with a declaration of trust in God and a proclamation of God as his strength.

OPENER

[illegible]

NOTES

It might be helpful to give your group some historical perspective. The phrase “in your days” in verse 5 indicated that the prophecy would be fulfilled during the lifetime of the hearers. History records that the Babylonians began a rapid rise to power around 630 B.C. Egypt, a former world power for centuries, was crushed almost overnight. By 605 B.C. the Babylonians had conquered Assyria, the previous

[illegible]

dominant power, and had destroyed Assyria's capital of Nineveh, ransacking it completely.

Though the prophesied events regarding Judah's invasion were astounding, like all God-inspired prophecy they came to pass exactly.

3. The prophet questioned why a holy God would use an evil nation as an instrument of judgment on His own people. However, in Habakkuk 2:1, he determined to station himself like a watchman on the wall and wait to see how God would respond. What attitude do you think was indicated by Habakkuk's portraying himself as a watchman?

Your students' responses may vary, but discussion should bring out that Habakkuk's portrayal of himself as a watchman suggested an attitude of expectancy, alertness, and waiting. While his determination to "set me upon the tower" was probably a figurative reference to a place of prayer rather than a physical location on the city wall, the prophet had a purpose to wait and watch for God's response. You may wish to point out that the words "I am reproved" in verse 1 do not indicate that Habakkuk was anticipating rebuke from God because of his question; in the original language, the words mean "counters my argument."

Amplify your class discussion about watchmen by bringing out that a watchman had a view and perspective which was greater than what could be obtained from the ground. Clearly, Habakkuk wanted to be in the best possible position to receive the message from God that he knew would come in time. Bring out that when we pray and the answer does not come immediately, we should follow Habakkuk's example. Circumstances, either personal or larger in scope, can sometimes obscure our spiritual vision. Purposing to watchfully focus on God instead of the troubling circumstances will help us be alert to His moving.

4. God's response to Habakkuk's questions is recorded in Habakkuk 2:2-3. In what form did the answer come, and what assurance did it offer the prophet?

The answer came through a vision (a prophecy or revelation). It assured Habakkuk that judgment would occur in the future, and that God had an appointed time when what He had revealed would be accomplished. Point out that the word translated tarry in verse 3 means “be behind” and the implication was that fulfillment would come in God’s time.

There likely will come times when, like Habakkuk, we are called to wait for the Lord's hand to move. During those times, we may gain a clearer perspective of what the Lord is trying to accomplish. However, even if we continue to be perplexed, we are called to trust the One who is above all we see and know, with the assurance that He is good and just.

You could amplify the class discussion by asking your students to suggest some strategies to employ

[illegible]

-
-
-
-
-
-

[illegible]

- *The format of the prayer indicates an attitude of worship, and it is always beneficial to approach God in a worshipful manner.*
- *Habakkuk acknowledged God's power and glory with reverential fear; and those who come to God seeking revival in our day should have a similar awe.*
- *The prophet referenced God's working on behalf of His people in former days. When we pray, it is good to recall past blessings from God's hand.*
- *Habakkuk stated that it was God's work he was seeking and not anything else. Personal revival will only come when God is the sole focus of our prayers.*
- *The prophet expressed urgency in regard to timing. It was "in the midst of years"—the time period he was living in—that he needed God to work. Successful prayers in our day will also involve a sense of urgency.*
- *The prophet came in humility, acknowledging God's wrath as the rightful response to the sins of Judah, but imploring God to remember mercy. Repentance was needed because sin was rampant in Habakkuk's nation. In our day too, obstacles to receiving from God must be cleared out of the way before revival can occur.*

8. Habakkuk ended his prophecy with a dynamically personal declaration. Summarize his conclusion, given in Habakkuk 3:17-18. What do his words in these verses teach us?

A summary of these verses should bring out that the prophet's words were an affirmation of faith. He was determined that even if devastation wiped out everything, his trust in God would remain unchanged, and he would continue to rejoice in Him.

Habakkuk's words teach us that as Christians, our joy is not dependent upon our situation or circumstances because it flows from our relationship with God. His plan encompasses even our current situation and challenges.

9. In the final verse of the book of Habakkuk, the prophet declared, "The LORD God is my strength . . ." and then went on to allude to the agility and balance of a deer in treacherous high places. What point do you think he was making with this illustration?

The agility and balance of a deer in high places is an illustration of the fact that God will give His followers surefooted confidence, even in difficult times and "dangerous terrain." An all-powerful Creator, an interceding Savior, and the Holy Spirit as our Teacher provide the stability and agility we need in every challenging circumstance.

Conclude your class time by pointing out that in the first chapter of Habakkuk, the prophet had asked God why evil individuals seem to prosper while godly individuals suffer. At the conclusion of the prophecy, he seems to understand that in reality, this is not the case. He saw that God is in control of all events, and ultimately, His justice will prevail.

CONCLUSION

While we cannot see all that God is doing or will do in the future, we can rest assured that He is God and He will do what is right.



The Book of Obadiah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Obadiah 1:1-21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen:
as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward
shall return upon thine own head.” (Obadiah 1:15)

BACKGROUND

Obadiah's prophecy, recorded in the brief book bearing his name, is unique in that the prophet had little to say to the nations of Israel or Judah. Instead, his focus was on the sins of Edom, Judah's southern neighbor, and the judgment God would send upon that nation.

The age-old, smoldering animosity between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau had flared up once again, as it had many times in prior centuries. The first and largest portion of Obadiah's prophecy is the condemnation of Edom. Fearlessly, the prophet delivered God's message: disaster was coming. Despite the Edomites' arrogant pride and the supposed security provided by their natural defenses, the nation would be destroyed because of their treachery toward their "brothers" in Judah.

After delivering his scathing denunciation, Obadiah's concluding words contain a foreshadowing of end times in a reference to the Day of the Lord, a prominent Old Testament theme. In that great day, Edom will be among the godless nations to be judged. By contrast, Mount Zion will be a scene of holiness and deliverance. The house of Jacob (Israel and Judah) will possess the territories God gave their forefathers, and "the kingdom shall be the LORD's" (Obadiah 1:21).

While we do not know if Obadiah's prophecy stirred a reaction in the streets or palaces of Edom, it has unquestionably provided a somber reminder for the children of God through the ages. His message tells all Christians everywhere that God's perfect justice will one day prevail over those who ignore the needs of others, rejoice at their problems, or take advantage of their crises.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Obadiah's prophecy was inspired by a "vision" or divine revelation. As an ambassador (or messenger), he had been sent among the people of Judah with a "rumour [report or tidings] from the LORD" (verse 1). According to verse 2, what was the rumor, and how would you explain what this message meant?

OPENER

[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible][illegible]

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

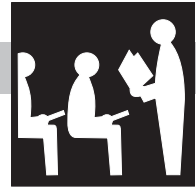
This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CONCLUSION

Through the prophet Obadiah, God told Edom that the people of Judah whom they had viewed with disdain, plundered, and killed, would one day be restored and enriched. Let us learn from this book not only how certainly God will judge the wicked, but also how much He values His own!



The Book of Esther

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Esther 1:1 through 10:3

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Esther is a compelling illustration of God's providential hand at work. Although no direct mention of God occurs in the book, detail after detail reveals His sovereignty. Even though the Jewish people had been exiled from their homeland because of their disobedience to God, they were still the objects of His divine mercy while living in Persia.

The events in this book occurred over an approximate twelve-year span, beginning around 483 B.C. During this period, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had ever known. Shushan, the capital city, was the location of King Ahasuerus' winter palace where most of the happenings in the book took place. Ahasuerus' regime enjoyed an abundance of wealth, which he flaunted before the world to portray the empire's strength and power.

Chapters 1-2 record that when the king's first wife was banished for refusing to make an appearance at the king's banquet, Esther was chosen to be the new queen. Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah, meaning "myrtle." Her Persian name, Esther, meant "star," and likely was a reference to her beauty.

Esther's relative and guardian, Mordecai, was a Benjamite living in Shushan. Although the events of the book took place some eighty to ninety years after his great-grandparents had been brought there in captivity, he had not lost sight of his heritage or his identity as a Jew. In chapters 3-4, Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman, the king's prime minister. Infuriated, Haman devised a plot to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom. Mordecai heard of this plan, and in the well-known words of this week's focus verse, he challenged Esther to go before the king on behalf of her people.

Chapters 5-10 relate how Esther courageously made her petition to the king and pled for the protection of her people from Haman's wicked devices. As a result, Haman was executed and Mordecai promoted

OPENER

[illegible]

to a position of honor. The king then issued a new decree allowing the Jewish people to defend themselves, thus preserving them from extinction and maintaining the Davidic lineage from which the Messiah would one day come.

The Jewish people celebrate this deliverance on their annual holiday of Purim. The name is the plural form of the Hebrew word *pur*, meaning “lot.” This two-day feast takes place on the fourteenth and fifteenth days in the Jewish month Adar, which typically occurs in February or March. It is a celebration of joy, in which special food is eaten, children dress in costumes, and the participants react loudly at the mention of Haman’s name as the entire Book of Esther is read.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In chapter 1, an angry King Ahasuerus asked his advisors what he should do when his queen, Vashti, refused to appear at his banquet. Memucan, one of those advisors, suggested that the queen’s refusal would incite kingdom-wide insubordination among the women, and that they would rise up against their husbands. What did Memucan recommend the king do, and what did he suggest would be the outcome? Esther 1:19-20

Memucan recommended that the king depose Vashti and put another woman in her royal position. He assumed this step would cause all women of the land to honor their husbands.

Point out to your group that neither Ahasuerus nor his advisor could have imagined that heeding this advice would ultimately save a people from extermination. However, that is exactly what happened. Vashti’s banishment set the stage for the selection of Esther as queen and the subsequent events recorded in the Book of Esther.

2. Mordecai apparently had a role in the Persian legal system, as we are told in chapter 2 that he “sat in the king’s gate.” That was where civil trials took place; individuals who sat in the gate were judges or other government officials. Verses 21-23 of chapter 2 describe an assassination plot against the king, which Moredecai overheard and reported to Esther. Esther, in turn, “made known this plot to the king,” and the assassination attempt was foiled. What can we conclude about Moredecai’s character based on his civic role and his actions after learning of the plot against the king’s life?

Your group will likely conclude that Mordecai must have been an honorable man of good character. He was also loyal and faithful, both to his Jewish heritage and to the king he served, even though that king represented a nation that had held his people in captivity.

As a follow-up question, ask your group why it is important for us to behave honorably even when

NOTES

[illegible]

[illegible]

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 28 horizontal blue or grey lines spaced evenly apart, typical of notebook paper. The lines extend across the entire width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical lines, text, or other markings on the page.

[illegible][illegible]

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 28 horizontal blue or grey lines spaced evenly apart, typical of notebook paper. The lines extend across the entire width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical lines, text, or other markings on the page.

[illegible]

- [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across the entire width of the page, providing a guide for writing. The background is a solid light blue-grey color. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

-
- This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

Exile in Babylon

From *Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts and Maps* by Linda K. Taylor, Livingstone, and Neil Wilson.
Copyright ©2001. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.



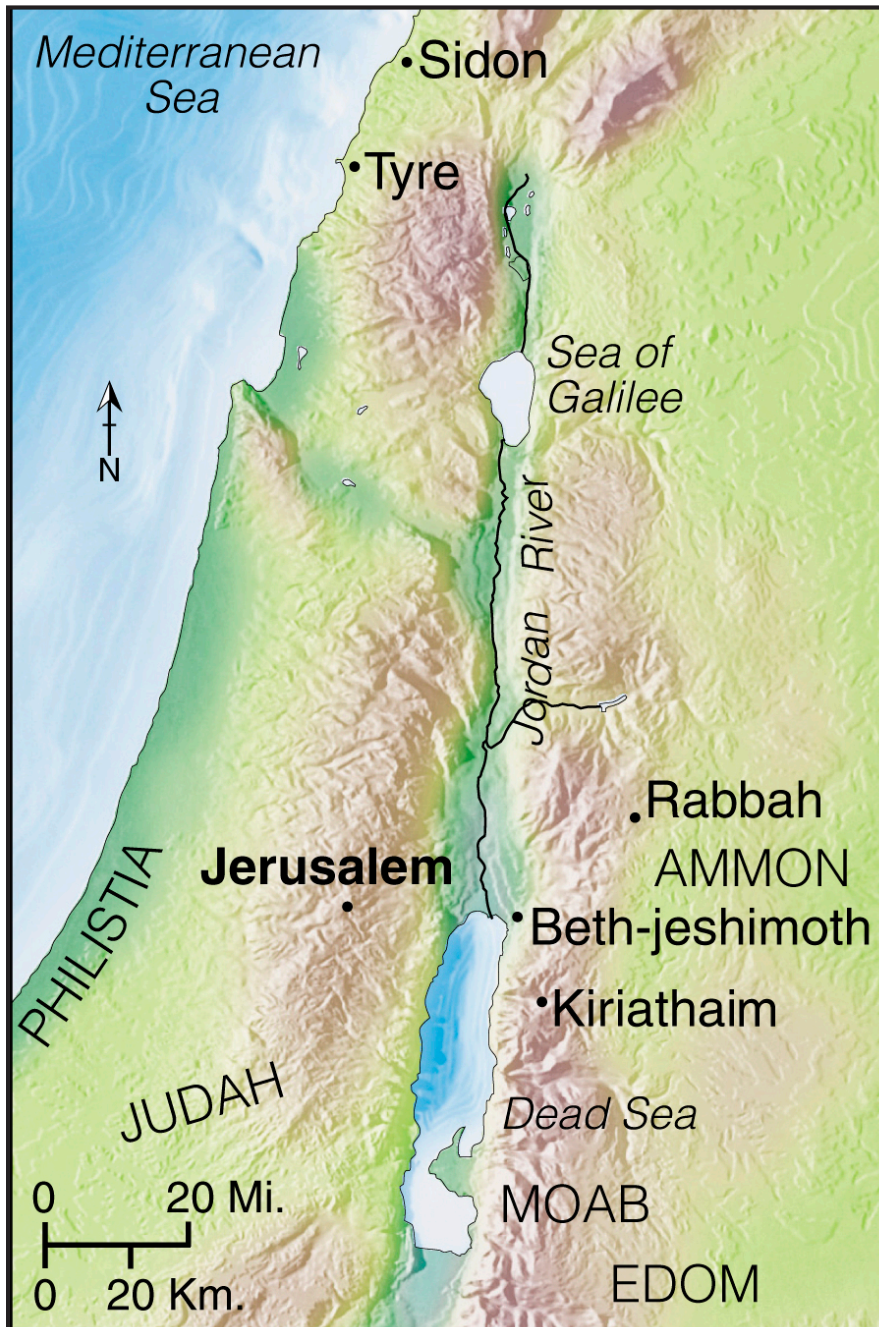
Ezekiel 1:1-3

Ezekiel worked for God right where he was—among the exiles in various colonies near the Kebar* River in Babylonia. Jerusalem and its Temple lay over 500 miles away, but Ezekiel helped the people understand that, although they were far from home, they did not need to be far from God.

*or Chebar

Judah's Enemies

From *Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts and Maps* by Linda K. Taylor, Livingstone, and Neil Wilson.
Copyright ©2001. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

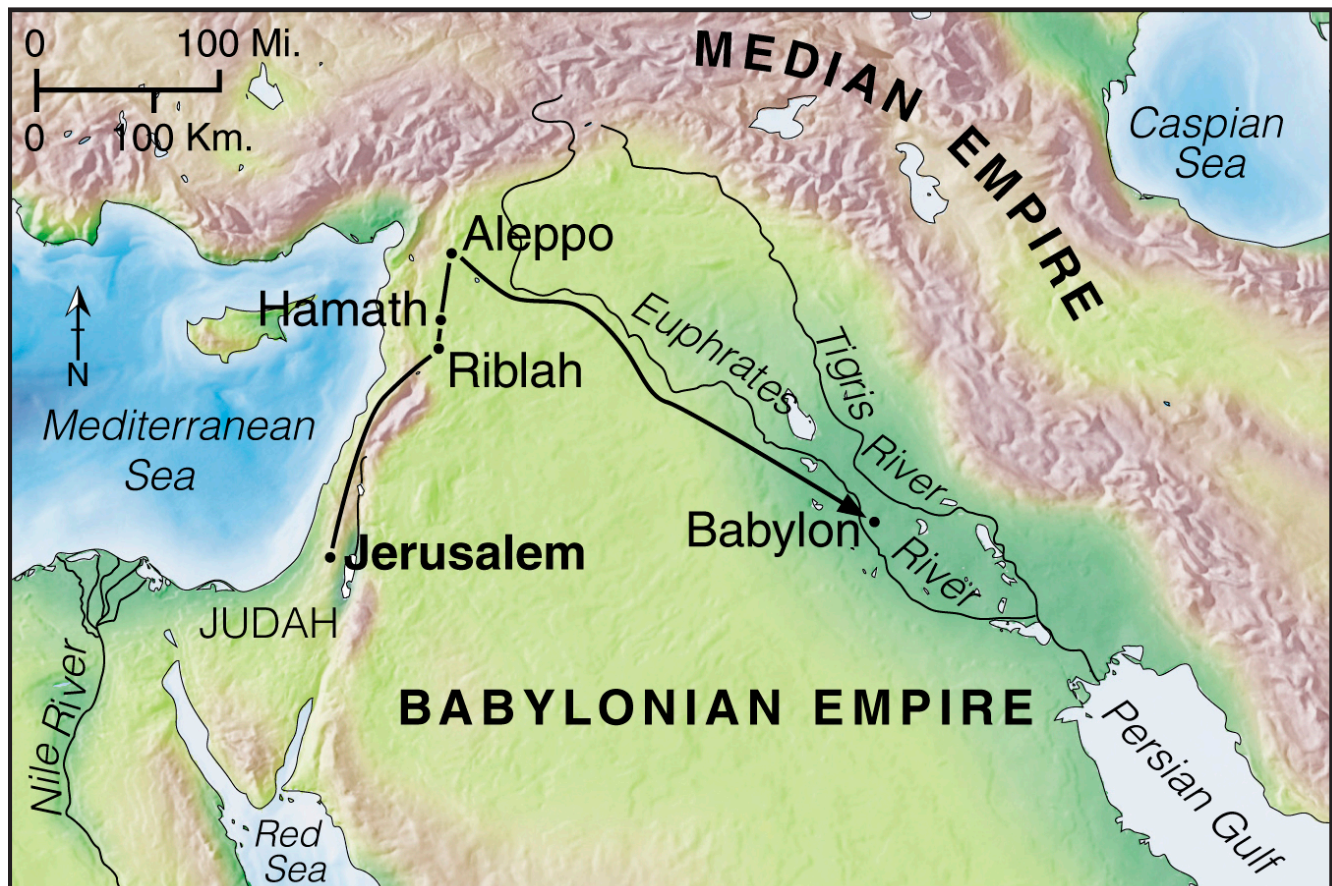


Ezekiel 25:1-17

Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia, although once united with Judah against Babylon, had abandoned Judah and rejoiced to see her ruin. But these nations were as sinful as Judah and would also feel the sting of God's judgment.

Taken to Babylon

From *Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts and Maps* by Linda K. Taylor, Livingstone, and Neil Wilson.
Copyright ©2001. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.



Daniel 1:1-7

Daniel, as a captive of Babylonian soldiers, faced a long and difficult march to a new land. The 500-mile trek, under harsh conditions, certainly tested his faith in God.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

The World of Esther's Day

From *Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts and Maps* by Linda K. Taylor, Livingstone, and Neil Wilson.
Copyright ©2001. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.



Esther 1:1-4; 10:1-3

Esther lived in the capital of the vast Medo-Persian Empire, which incorporated the provinces of Media and Persia, as well as the previous empires of Assyria and Babylon. Esther, a Jewess, was chosen by King Xerxes* to be his queen. The story of how she saved her people takes place in the palace in Susa.

*or Ahasuerus

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK