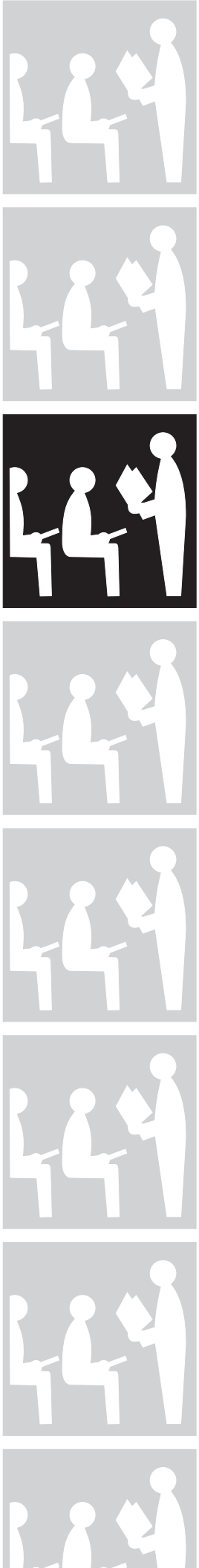

DISCOVERY TEACHER'S GUIDE

Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah

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DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Prophecy of Joel

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Joel 1:1 through 3:21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Therefore also now, saith the LORD, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning." (Joel 2:12)

BACKGROUND

Although the date of Joel's prophecy is uncertain, many Bible scholars believe that Joel was one of the earliest of the minor prophets, because both Amos and Isaiah borrowed imagery and quoted from Joel's prophecy. A further clue to Joel's era is found in his references to the enemies of Judah: Egypt, Edom, Tyre, Sidon and Palestine (which is Philistia) (Joel 3:4,19). Although Joel prophesied of the captivity of Israel, there was no mention made of the Syrians, Babylonians, or Assyrians, who were enemies at a later date.

The circumstances that prompted this prophecy included a locust plague and subsequent drought, fire, and famine. Joel began with a call to the eldest men to remember whether such a calamity had ever befallen them before. The sum of his argument was that this plague of locusts was the judgment of God. Joel drew an analogy between the natural destruction of the plague of locusts and the "day of the Lord," indicating that the former calamity would be nothing compared to the latter. The army of locusts was a graphic illustration of the invaders who would be sent in judgment. However, true to God's grace and mercy, the imminent judgment could be averted by true repentance.

Joel called the people to repentance, beginning with the old men, or elders of the land. He urged them to humble themselves in sincerity, not merely in outward form, and to lament as bitterly as a young wife would grieve at the untimely death of her husband. Next he urged them to proclaim a national day of fasting and prayer, to entreat the Lord for His mercy.

The meat and drink offerings (grain and wine, respectively) were absent from the Temple services due to the widespread destruction of crops and vineyards. Such religious rites were the people's means of sustaining a proper relationship with God. Even the cattle and sheep were affected as they searched in vain for somewhere to graze.

The heart of Joel's message was an urgent appeal to repentance, for the day of the Lord would be more terrible than the destruction of locusts. Promises of

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restoration of their land and reprieve from invading armies were given to the nation, if the Israelites would turn to the Lord with all their hearts (Joel 2:12-13).

The second chapter gave the beautiful promise of God to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh in the latter days. Peter referred to this prophecy on the day of Pentecost and indicated that the Lord had fulfilled this prophecy before their eyes (Acts 2:16-18).

Some of the promises described future events, when the day of the Lord will come in full force against the enemies of God. In the last days, God will spare those who have turned to Him wholeheartedly, and will provide the deliverance that was promised to Israel in chapter 2.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. What natural calamities did Joel describe in chapter 1 as an object lesson to warn the people of God's coming judgment?

A severe locust plague (1:4), followed by famine (1:10), and fire (1:19). Joel used the terrible destruction and loss to illustrate the condition that would accompany the day of the Lord. It is likely that the widespread destruction of vegetation caused a famine to occur, having destroyed the existing crops and the seed for the next planting. The fire mentioned in verse 19 may have been a separate calamity, or may be a reference to future events. It is not always clear when Joel was referring to happenings of his time or to apocalyptic events.

2. In chapter 1, verses 13 and 14, Joel addressed the priests, who were the leaders of the people. What did Joel instruct them to do? Why do you think he spoke to them?

The priests were instructed to humble themselves and lament over the present situation, to fast, to call a solemn assembly of the elders, and to cry to the Lord. The priests were the elders of the community and the representatives of the people before God. They were looked upon as examples, and if the priests were to humble themselves, abstain from food, and entreat the Lord for mercy, the people would presumably do the same. The priests had been guilty of backsliding and forsaking the Lord. Those who led the people into sin should have been the first ones to turn and lead them back into righteousness.

3. How did Joel describe the day of the Lord in chapter 2?

The day of the Lord was described as a day of darkness, gloominess, clouds, fire, and desolation. Joel alluded to an army that will run like horses and rumble with the noise of a wildfire, and will destroy everything in its path. Just as swarms of locusts had filled the sky and obscured the sun, marching forward in thick ranks and eating up every green thing in their path, even so a mighty army will come and destroy

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everything. The land, which had been as beautiful as the Garden of Eden, will become a scene of complete devastation.

4. How could the people avoid this terrible holocaust? What attitudes and actions was the Lord looking for?

They could avoid God's judgment by showing genuine repentance. The Lord warned them to repent earnestly and sincerely, to tear their hearts and not their garments, and to call upon the Name of the Lord for mercy. If the people would do so, praying sincerely for forgiveness and deliverance, God promised to show them mercy.

God is never fooled by an outward show, but discerns the thoughts and intents of our hearts. At one time in Jewish history, it was possible to purchase a garment specifically constructed for tearing: a mourning garment. Those who tore their garments in public sometimes did so with the intent to be admired for their apparent piety, but this did not fool God.

Discuss with your group what evidences we can expect to see when people turn to God with all their hearts. The class may suggest prayer, tears of sorrow, a desire to forsake a wrong way of living, church attendance, restitutions, etc.

Ask your class what God might do in the lives of people who truly take this action. Bring out that God will forgive, and His Spirit will bear witness to that forgiveness. The person will have God's help in living right, and often God begins to work out circumstances and situations to His glory. Your class might have some personal stories to share of how God worked for them after they were saved.

5. What physical promises did the Lord make to the people if they would turn to Him with all their hearts? Joel 2:18-27

God promised to replenish their food supplies, satisfy them, drive off the enemy, and restore their reputation among the heathen nations. In contrast to the great destruction and distress that would come upon them, God promised to restore the necessary rains and to bless them with crops so abundant that they would make up for the years that the locusts had ruined. Because the invaders had done such great things (in their eyes), God would humiliate them and drive them off into a barren land, not the way from which they had come.

Joel returned to the metaphor of locusts when he spoke of the "stink" (Joel 2:20). When a swarm of locusts was blown out to sea and then died before they were able to reach land, their bodies putrefied in the water and caused a horrible, rotting smell. At times the tide washed up heaps of dead locusts on the shore, which bred disease and death. In like manner, those insurgents who gloried in their victory over Israel would be cast out and destroyed by God.

6. What spiritual promises did the Lord make to the people if they would repent of their sins? Joel 2:28-29

God promised to pour out His Spirit upon all people regardless of age, gender, or social status. After all that He promised to do for them in the natural realm, He continued with promises of spiritual restoration and an abundance of His blessings. No longer would the Spirit of God be reserved for a select few, but all could expect and hope for His infilling. God intended for everyone to partake of His blessed Holy Spirit.

7. What judgment did God pronounce upon Israel's enemies, and why? Joel 3:8

God said He would sell their sons and daughters into captivity. He would judge them for the violence they had done to His chosen people, Israel. The nations had profaned His Temple, scattered His people abroad, and sold innocent boys and girls into slavery and prostitution. Sons and daughters of those who disobey God today might also pay a price. Ask your class how a lack of spiritual knowledge or distorted spiritual values might impact succeeding generations. Bring out that a failure to serve God could have devastating results in a family.

8. Joel told of a natural disaster to speak to the people regarding their need for true repentance. Consider some of the major tragedies which have occurred in recent years. How can you use such events to bring up the subject of Christ's second coming with your friends and co-workers?

Current events, such as crime, terrorist attacks, wars, and natural disasters bring fear and a sense of a person's mortality. This can be a springboard to discuss where true security and peace can be found.

CONCLUSION

The day of the Lord is coming when He will return to judge the wicked and will spare those who have turned to Him with all their hearts. An outward show of religious zeal or humility will not suffice, as God is able to discern true repentance from that which is insincere and fleeting. What is the condition of your heart today?

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Teacher's Guide

The Account of Jonah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jonah 1:1 through 4:11

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not." (Jonah 3:10)

BACKGROUND

Jonah's ministry took place during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). He may have been one of the young prophets of the school mentioned in 2 Kings 2:3. It was Jonah who prophesied that King Jeroboam II would be successful in expanding Israel's borders back to where they were in the days of King Solomon. (See 2 Kings 14:23-25.) Israel was prosperous and largely peaceful at this time.

Nineveh was a very large city, the largest of this era. In the last verse of the book, God asked a rhetorical question of Jonah, "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" This verse indicates the size of Nineveh. The city had 120,000 young children, which means that most likely the population of the city proper was nearly one million. It was the capitol of the Assyrian Empire, which was the most dreaded enemy of Israel at the time.

The Assyrians were feared because of their cruelty. They often impaled live victims on poles, and killed babies and small children so they would not have to be cared for. One hundred years later, the prophet Nahum said that Nineveh was guilty of "evil plots against God" (Nahum 1:9), exploitation of the helpless (Nahum 2:12), cruelty in war (Nahum 2:12-13), idolatry, prostitution, and witchcraft (Nahum 3:4).

As a prophet of Jehovah, Jonah knew that God's judgment would come upon Israel if the people followed the ungodly example of Jeroboam. He may have guessed that the Assyrians would be the vehicle for that judgment. No doubt he loved the people of his own nation as much as he was repulsed by the cruelty of the idolatrous Assyrians.

Some historians believe that the third-person style of writing used in the Book of Jonah indicated that it was recorded after Nineveh's repentance. After Jonah realized his mistake of being angry with God, perhaps he went back and recorded the account.

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Casting lots is referred to several times in the Bible. This act was much like drawing straws and was intended to ascertain the will or direction of the gods. At times, Israelites also cast lots as a method of finding God's will. The sailors Jonah traveled with cast lots to discover the offender who had caused the storm that was putting their lives in danger. God used the lot to point out Jonah's guilt.

The Book of Jonah is a great illustration of God's mercy and desire that no one perish. The response of the people of Nineveh is remarkable because members of every social stratum chose to repent.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. We know that Ninevah was the largest city of its era. What problems are inherent to evangelizing a large city?

In Jonah's case, just spreading the word was a challenge. There was no mass media to help him, although word of mouth, no doubt, worked effectively. The greater metropolitan area of Nineveh was approximately sixty miles. Jonah spent three days walking through it.

Today, many evangelistic methods are available, and dispersal of information and travel are fast. However, challenges and problems still exist when evangelizing. Ask your students to mention some of these problems. Their answers may include getting people to pay attention, touching people's hearts rather than just their minds so they will respond, etc. One-on-one witnessing continues to be one of the most effective methods of spreading the Gospel. Your students may have some witnessing experiences to share.

2. In what ways is God's mercy evidenced throughout the story of Jonah?

When Jonah refused to follow God's command and boarded a ship to Tarshish, God could have just capsized the ship and destroyed Jonah and all those on board. Instead, He gave Jonah a chance to revisit his decision.

God had mercy on the heathen sailors by allowing them to discern the guilty person and also to witness God's power to instantly calm the storm.

Mercy was granted to Jonah when he cried out from the belly of the fish.

Although God had every intention of destroying the city of Nineveh, His mercy was extended when the Ninevites repented of their sins. Chapter 3 ends with this statement, "God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

3. In Jonah 2:9, Jonah refers to a vow he made. What do you think that vow may have been?

We are not told what specific vow Jonah made. As a prophet of God, he should have been dedicated

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to doing God's bidding. In essence, that could have been the vow between him and God, an unequivocal commitment to do what God wanted. By boarding the ship to Tarshish, Jonah was running from God and the work God had for him to do.

This could be an opportunity to discuss caution regarding vows. God is watching to see if we will follow through on what we vow; therefore, we should exercise extreme care when considering a vow. Consecration is different than a vow because it is a willingness to do whatever God asks without making a commitment to do a certain action.

4. How did the king of Nineveh and his people respond to Jonah's message?

When the king and the inhabitants of Nineveh heard of God's plan for judgment, they immediately removed their cloaks and put on sackcloth, sat in ashes, fasted, and wept before God, repenting of their evil ways. It is interesting to note that this was a heathen nation, but there seemed to be no question in the Ninevites' minds that judgment was coming. Even though they worshiped other gods, they immediately embraced Jonah's message and repented.

Ask your class what the signs of true repentance might be today. Those signs will probably not include sackcloth or sitting in ashes. Your students' answers may include an abhorrence for sins committed, tears of sorrow, a crying out to God for forgiveness, etc.

5. What six circumstances did God orchestrate in the Book of Jonah?

1) *A mighty storm jostled Jonah's ship on the way to Tarshish.*
2) *A great fish swallowed Jonah just as he was thrown over the side of the ship.*
3) *At the appointed time, the fish spewed Jonah out onto dry land.*
4) *A vine covered Jonah and shaded him.*
5) *A worm ate the vine.*
6) *A scorching wind blew on Jonah.*

Ask your students to describe times in their lives when God orchestrated special circumstances in order to show mercy or direct them.

6. Why was Jonah angry about the forgiveness God showed to the Ninevites?

Jonah had lost sight of his purpose. The Jews were not interested in sharing God's message with the Gentiles. Nineveh was a heathen and foreign city, located in Assyria—a nation that had been the Children of Israel's enemy for many years. Jonah did not feel that the Ninevites were worthy of God's salvation.

Ask your students what this indicates about Jonah's spirit. (He was angry inside.) Can Christians harbor resentment instead of granting forgiveness?

(We will not receive God's forgiveness unless we forgive others.)

7. God's charge to Jonah was also directed to the Children of Israel, and is directed to us today. What is that charge?

The Children of Israel were charged to be God's messengers to those who were lost and dying and did not know about Him. This is exactly what we, as Christians, are expected to do today. We are to spread the Gospel to those around us.

In Jonah's time, there may have been some prejudice and hatred toward the Assyrians. Today, also, people can hold hatred and prejudices. Discuss with your class the importance of reaching out to those of other nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, classes, etc. You might ask them to suggest ways to overcome these hindrances or to give personal examples.

8. How can we avoid being a "Jonah" today?

When God bids us to do something for Him, we must do it without murmuring or complaining. If we choose to go our own way, God, in His mercy, may choose to stop us, but the circumstances will not be pleasant. It is so much better to be willing to follow His leading from the start.

CONCLUSION

God's mercy is displayed throughout the Book of Jonah. He wants both Jews and Gentiles to know of His grace and redemption. Let us determine to follow His leading in our lives!

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Prophecy of Amos

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Amos 1:1 through 9:15

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:11)

BACKGROUND

Amos, whose name means "burden" or "burden-bearer," was a shepherd and fig grower from Tekoa, which was located ten miles south of Jerusalem. He prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, having been given a message from God condemning the nations who had sinned against Him and harmed His people. He started by condemning Syria, then Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and, finally, Amos' homeland of Judah. Amos then confronted the northern Israelites regarding their sins and warned them of impending judgment.

Israel had become politically and spiritually corrupt due to prosperity and idol worship. Wealth caused the people to become complacent in their religious practices and oppressive to the poor, even to the point of selling them into slavery. Their economic prosperity was due in part to military successes during the early part of the reign of King Jeroboam II. Idolatry was practiced throughout the land, including Bethel, which was supposed to be the nation's religious center.

The worship of the Canaanite god Baal had been incorporated into Israel's worship of God. Baal, which means "lord" or "husband," was the name commonly given to the Canaanite storm god, Hadad. This god was often represented as a bull, the symbol of fertility. The images of bulls built by Jeroboam I at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-33) most likely provided occasion for mixing the worship of Baal with the worship of God.

Amos is thought to have prophesied and written this book from about 793 B.C. to 740 B.C., during the reigns of King Jeroboam II of Israel and King Uzziah of Judah.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Read Amos 7:14-15. How was Amos qualified to be a prophet? How are people qualified to serve the Lord today?

The Lord called Amos to the office of prophet and gave him the message to give to the people. Amos was

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not trained to be a prophet, nor did he come from a family of prophets. He was a farmer by trade.

A true servant of the Lord is qualified the same way Amos was. God calls us to particular areas of service, and we then qualify ourselves by obedience to His Word.

Class discussion should bring out that no amount of religious training can qualify a person who has not been called by God. Once we are called, we must receive and maintain all that God has for us.

2. The statement, "For three transgressions . . . and for four," is mentioned each time a nation is condemned in the Book of Amos. What does this reveal about the nature of God?

The statement reveals the patience and longsuffering of God toward sinners. It was not for one transgression that God pronounced judgment on these nations; it was for a repeated history of sin and a failure to repent when given the opportunity. Class discussion should also bring out that, while God is patient, all sin—even if it is only one—will be judged if it is not repented of.

3. Amos 3:10-15 indicates that Israel had become very prosperous prior to and during the years that Amos prophesied. What effect did prosperity have on the Israelites? Amos 8:4-6

The people had become complacent and were oppressing the poor, even selling them into slavery. They turned from serving God and began idol worship in a perverse effort to increase their prosperity. Ask your students to give examples of ways that prosperity may have a negative impact on Christians today.

4. Did God expect more of Israel than of the other nations? Explain your answer. Amos 2:9-11

Yes. God had performed wondrous miracles on their behalf. The prophets challenged the people continually to remember His mighty works. It is amazing to read a list like this and see their forgetfulness. God's faithfulness should have caused them to serve Him obediently. The other nations did not have the direct benefits that Israel enjoyed.

Ask your students if God expects more from those who are brought up in the Gospel. If so, why?

5. What device did God show Amos in chapter 7 to illustrate Israel's spiritual condition? Describe God's message to Israel using this device.

God showed Amos a plumbline, a device used to determine whether or not a wall is perpendicular. A wall that is not built straight (out-of-plumb) causes everything aligned to it to be off, and the structure may eventually collapse. God wanted the people to be right with Him. His Word is the plumbline which helps us stay straight and true. Lead your students to understand that God's Word exposes sin as crooked.

6. A basket of ripe fruit was normally associated with the joys of summer harvest. However, in this instance, it was a picture of judgment (Amos 8:1-2). How did Amos describe the lifestyle of the Israelites? What did this lifestyle indicate about their desire to serve God? Amos 8:4-6

The people could not wait for the religious holidays and Sabbaths to be over so they could get back to making money. Their interest was in enriching themselves and taking advantage of the poor. They had no real desire to serve God.

Lead your class in a discussion of the difference between a life built around the world and a life built around serving God. Ask them if the two are compatible. You may want to follow up with a discussion of how we can correctly manage our jobs and/or outside activities in conjunction with our Christian service.

7. The Book of Amos concludes on a positive note (Amos 9:11-15). What hope was given to the people? What hope do we look for as we see God's judgment today?

The people of Israel were given a promise that they would be brought out of captivity, their wasted cities would be re-built, and they would be placed back in their land, never to be removed again. Ask your students if they can see the fulfillment of any of these promises in the country of Israel today. Have them explain their answers.

As was prophesied, we live in perilous times. However, we know that soon the Lord will return to take those who are ready to forever be with Him—what a tremendous hope!

CONCLUSION

May God help us to be willing to leave our comfort zones and share His message with the unsaved before His judgment falls on them. We may feel unqualified to spread God's Word, yet we can be assured that He will be with us, just as He was with Amos.

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Teacher's Guide

The Message of Hosea

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Hosea 1:1 through 7:16

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." (Hosea 4:6)

BACKGROUND

Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel from around 760 to 715 B.C. While his contemporaries, Micah and Isaiah, carried their messages to the nation of Judah, Hosea (whose name means "salvation") prophesied the judgment that was to come upon Israel for its idolatry.

Israel's last six kings had been especially corrupt, and under the reign of Jeroboam II, the country had prospered materially but decayed morally. Jeroboam II was followed by a series of kings, and the political and social condition of the nation continued to plummet. Hosea saw Israel fall to Assyria in 722 B.C.

Hosea's assignment was to show the idolatrous people of Israel how they had been unfaithful to God, and he was to accomplish this task by marrying Gomer, a woman who would be unfaithful to him (chapter 1). Later, he would redeem his wife out of prostitution and slavery and accept her back into his household (chapter 3). This "living parable" was incorporated into his prophecies in order to show that although judgment was coming upon Israel, God wanted to restore his people to a right relationship with Him.

Through the history of the Children of Israel, God has demonstrated to all mankind the great lengths He will go to in order to maintain or restore His covenant with His chosen people. Time after time, the Israelites violated their covenant vows, yet God continually wooed them back to His side through the voice of His prophets and by allowing painful circumstances to come their way.

The message of Hosea is still applicable today, because it shows God's love for all people. His love includes those who have committed spiritual adultery, and He calls them back to Himself. He has paid the price for their freedom. Even though the actions of sin are so repulsive and sickening that one could hardly imagine why God would want the backslider to return, yet His love and forgiveness are extended.

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SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. The Book of Hosea begins with God asking the prophet Hosea to do a very difficult thing: he was to marry a woman that he knew would be unfaithful. It is hard to imagine Hosea's thoughts and feelings when given such a command, but he was obedient to the Lord and married Gomer (Hosea 1:3). What are some ways people respond when God requires them to do something difficult or very painful in order to benefit others?

Ask your students to generate a list of possible responses. Ideas could include: agree, make excuses, run, suggest an alternative, give reasons why you can't, ask for confirmation.

The point should be made that God's ways are higher than our ways, and His plans sometimes involve personal pain in order to accomplish a greater good. We cannot easily undergo a painful situation, but like Jesus at Gethsemane, we can learn to pray, "Not my will, but thine be done."

2. Gomer bore three children, and, under God's direction, Hosea named these children Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi (Hosea 1:4-9). What was the significance of these prophetic names?

Through the names of Gomer's children, God was indicating that judgment was going to fall on the nation of Israel. King Jehu had massacred King Ahab and his family in the valley of Jezreel (2 Kings 10:1-11), so Hosea was announcing God's judgment upon Jehu's dynasty. His kingdom would come to an end in the valley of Jezreel, the very place where Ahab's family was massacred. "Lo" is a negative prefix, so Lo-ruhamah means "no mercy" and Lo-ammi means "not my people."

3. In Hosea 2:5-8, God indicated that the nation of Israel had mistakenly thought that their material blessings (food, shelter, clothing) came from false gods (specifically Baal, the god of nature). They were ignorant of the fact that the God of Heaven was the true Author of these gifts. People are no different today. To whom or what do people give credit today for their prosperity?

Without acknowledging God, some people credit their prosperity to their hard work, their education, luck, good money management, or the right financial advisors. Discuss how the focus must be on God as the Giver of all blessings and abilities. What can be the end result of failing to properly acknowledge God for blessings and abilities?

4. God is a God of both judgment and mercy. Chapters 1 and 2 of Hosea begin with pronouncements of God's judgment upon Israel, but both end with a promise of restoration and God's mercy (Hosea 1:10-11; 2:14-23). What judgment will come upon people today who do

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not heed God's instructions? Give an example of how God's mercy is demonstrated in our time.

Eternal death is the ultimate judgment for those who refuse God's plan of salvation. At times, God may permit difficulties such as financial reverses, sicknesses, natural disasters. These are actually God's mercy in action, because His purpose is to prod people toward repentance.

Ask your class to share their examples of how God has demonstrated mercy, and be prepared to share an example of your own.

5. God commanded Hosea to do something extraordinary—instead of divorcing Gomer, he was to buy back his unrepentant, adulterous wife and bring her home. God's love was illustrated in Hosea's troubled marriage. What great lengths has God gone to in order to show us His amazing love?

Through the death of His Son on the Cross, God demonstrated a remarkable, amazing, sacrificial love. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. . ." (1 John 3:16). Even though He was persecuted and reviled, Jesus Christ willingly offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. When we focus our minds and hearts on Calvary, God's great love should melt our hearts.

6. After spelling out the sins of the nation of Israel (Hosea 4:1-3), the Lord counseled the people not to look for someone else to blame (Hosea 4:4). Why do you think people often blame others when confronted with their own faults or sins?

Sometimes people blame others because they wish to avoid punishment for their own wrongdoing. Sometimes they blame others because they wish to avoid thinking about and dealing with their own faults or sins.

What are some of the benefits of "owning up" to one's faults or sins? Class discussion should zero in on having a conscience void of offense, the respect of peers, a good testimony before others, and an assurance of eternity.

7. Because Ephraim was the most powerful of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, Hosea used the name Ephraim as a synonym for Israel. Hosea prophesied that Ephraim, or Israel, would refuse to repent and would fall due to pride (Hosea 5:3-5). Why does pride make repentance difficult?

In order to repent, we must first admit that we are guilty of wrongdoing. Pride, however, keeps us from acknowledging our sin and our need for God's help and forgiveness. Pride causes us to harden our hearts and sear our conscience to the point that we no longer feel the need for repentance.

8. What three visual images does God use to describe the nation of Israel? (Hosea 2:2, 5:13, 7:16) What

images or metaphors might describe people's relationships with God today?

Israel is compared to an unfaithful wife (Hosea 2:2), a sick person (Hosea 5:13), and a crooked bow (Hosea 7:16).

Here are some possible metaphors you can mention in response to the second question, if your students need help getting started: a tree, a yo-yo, a baby, a traveler, a leaky bucket, or a candle.

9. Hosea used several visual metaphors to describe God: a husband and father (Hosea 2:1-5); a moth (Hosea 5:12); and rain (Hosea 6:3). What image would you use to describe God? Why?

Possible images or metaphors for God are: water, fire, a rock, wind, light, the sun, a bridegroom, a potter, or a king. Explain to your students that these images are only tools for us to use in order to begin to comprehend the glory and majesty of God.

CONCLUSION

Through the prophet Hosea, God used everyday objects and life events to communicate to the nation of Israel and to all people that would hear or read Hosea's prophecy. As we live our "ordinary" lives and keep our hearts open before the Lord, He will reveal himself to us. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD. . ." (Hosea 6:3).

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Retribution Upon Israel

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Hosea 8:1 through 14:9

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hosea 10:12)

BACKGROUND

Hosea 8, and the remainder of the book, demonstrate the anger of God upon a constantly backsliding people. Through the prophet, God began to describe the terror of judgment that would befall Israel because of sinful living. Even though the people were rejoicing because of their great harvest, and nominally recognizing Jehovah, it appeared that much of their celebration was really in honor of Balaam. The warning was loud and clear that their rejoicing would soon cease.

The more the people of Israel prospered, the more flagrant their moral and religious corruption became. Their hearts were divided, and they served idols rather than the one true God. They were instructed in the first commandment to worship only Him, and to have no other gods before Him. They had ignored this commandment, and because of that, retribution would come.

In chapter 11, the prophet referred to the early history of Israel. Even though God was full of wrath and judgment, His heart was still the heart of a father.

Although the book was written to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was equally guilty. Therefore, all of Israel's glory would be turned to shame.

The thirteenth chapter begins a discourse on the rebellious attitude of Israel, and the people's persistence in shameless idolatry. It opens with a reference to the tribe of Ephraim, which originally had occupied a position of prominence in the nation. Because of Ephraim's apostasy and evil influence on all of Israel, God condemned it to total destruction.

In chapter 14, the people of Israel were called to repent and turn to God, the only One that could help them. Even though judgment was coming, God was giving hope, if only they would turn to Him. The prophet looked ahead to the day when Israel would return to the God of their fathers and love His laws. The result of obedience would be the bountiful blessings of a loving God.

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SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Why did the Lord refuse to respond when Israel cried out to Him in a time of trouble? Hosea 8:3,4

The people of Israel called on God when they were in trouble and claimed to serve Him, but their profession was false. Their religion was corrupt and their worldly and sinful lives were evidence that they had turned from God. They were praising God with their mouths and their rituals, but at the same time they were refusing to follow His righteous ways.

Discuss with the class that verbal repentance or just being present in the midst of those who worship God is not enough. Repentance requires a change of heart and conduct. Tragically, those who professed that they knew God rejected Hosea's message. They did not repent, so divine retribution was sure.

Israel had also set up leaders who were not qualified by God's standards. Discuss the qualifications that should exist in leaders of the church today (1 Timothy 3:1-10). Hosea proclaimed that when godly leaders are not chosen, the result will be the destruction of the purpose of religion, a return to the worship of idols, and a seeking of selfish ends.

2. What doctrinal teaching is reinforced by God's declaration that He would love the people of Israel no more? Hosea 9:15

The doctrinal teaching is that God's grace is not unconditional. People who repeatedly reject the mercy of God will one day experience His judgment. Many falsely teach that God's grace is extended forever, regardless of what evil a person does, but this is contrary to Biblical warnings. This teaching gives a false sense of security to those who take the warnings of God lightly and continue to disobey.

Discussion could lead to various ways this false teaching is proclaimed today (predestination, eternal security, no victory over sin, etc).

3. What type of ground did God condemn? (Hosea 10:12) How would following God's instructions change the condition of the ground?

Hosea spoke of fallow ground. This is ground that has been so neglected and hardened that seed will not penetrate it. Ground of this sort has caused famines even though rain has fallen. Tell your class that if they take a shovel and dig up the hard soil under a puddle after a rain, they will probably find that the moisture is no more than an eighth of an inch deep. Under that thin layer of moisture is dry, hardened earth. The fact is, rain does little good when the ground is too hard. The water just evaporates when the sun comes out. The ground must be broken up and cultivated in order to benefit from the rain.

According to verse 13, the hearts of the people of Israel had become spiritually hardened. It was time

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to break up their hard hearts by repenting of their sins. True repentance for sin would open them to the will of God. They needed to sow seeds of righteousness through earnestly seeking God, until they once again would experience His mercy and love.

Discussion could go into the condition of our hearts today. Revival is the result of preparing our spiritual ground so it can absorb the showers of blessing the Lord desires to send.

4. What do verses 1 and 4 of chapter 11 tell us about God's love for Israel? What clue is God giving that would change judgment to mercy and blessing?

Chapter 11 opens with an opportunity for the reader to look into the heart of God. The first and fourth verses show God reminiscing with a longing to see His people return to the day when their hearts were tender and they realized they were a needy people before God.

God called them and they rebelled. In verse 3, God spoke of taking His children in His arms and binding up their hurts, but they didn't even know that He had healed them. They so soon forgot.

All Christian parents feel pangs of pain if they have wayward children. Discuss what joy it is to parents when they see their children return home with a repentant heart. God is giving a promise that He would respond like a father if the people would see that they were needy and cry out to Him that they could not continue without His presence. Then He would return and love them.

5. Hosea repeated one of the most important commandments ever given by God. What was it, and how does that command apply to us today? Hosea 13:4

The command was that the people were to know no other god but Him. There is only one God, and He is the only One mankind should serve. Those in Israel were trying hard to find happiness and contentment, but those could only be found through God.

In our day the thought is prevalent that we can do anything we set our minds to do. There is such a push to be something or somebody, and to set our sights high in earthly ambitions. It could be very easy to put material goals first, but God says that He is the only One who can give us peace, happiness, and contentment.

6. Amid all the judgment and anger God felt toward Israel, what hope did He give for those who had ruined their lives in sin? Hosea 13:9

He told them that there was help in Him. The people of Israel had made a total wreck of their nation. Sin and rebellion against God had caused them to reach the end of themselves. But even though sin had destroyed all the good that God had intended for them, God offered this ray of light in the darkness.

There are times when people have made such a mess of their lives that they may feel there is no hope. Yet if they would only look to God, they would hear Him say, "In me is thine help."

7. When God reached out in mercy and called Israel to repent, what did He promise? Hosea 14:4-7

After the people of Israel had gone through their punishment, God would heal them, restore them, and love them freely as a father cares for his children. Their lifestyle would be godly and pure. They would be strong and highly prized, and deeply grounded in God's Word. All the figures of speech in these verses show how precious His restored people would be to Him.

8. Who does the God of Israel say is wise? Hosea 14:9

The just. Bring out that the wisdom God is talking about involves understanding God and His ways, and it is demonstrated through a life lived in accordance to His standards of right. Wisdom in the Bible is not merely having great knowledge. It is having the right attitude of heart and a right relationship with the Lord.

The ninth verse summoned the people to respond from their hearts to the message given them by the prophet Hosea. This is very similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 11:15: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." A wise person is one who listens and does what is right.

Discuss with the class the importance of striving to know the will of God and living in it. In this area of life we cannot afford to follow what others may do, but we must personally search our hearts and find the will of God.

CONCLUSION

The judgments of God are sure for those who choose not to listen to His warnings. The mercy of God is also sure, and it reaches out to all mankind, but it will not be extended forever. The wise person will let God take charge of every part of his or her life.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Prophecy of Micah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Micah 1:1 through 7:20

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8)

BACKGROUND

Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah (about 740—687 B.C.). He was a native of Moresheth near Gath, a village in southwest Judah located about twenty to twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Micah's name means, "Who is like Jehovah?" He was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, with whose ministry and prophecies he had many points of contact. In contrast to Isaiah, who was a prophet of the court and came from a prominent family, Micah was a country prophet who came from a poor family.

Although stern in tone, Micah's prophecy has a poetic style similar to Isaiah's words. Some commentators refer to Micah as a "sister book" to Isaiah or "Isaiah in shorthand."

Micah denounced Samaria and Jerusalem as centers of evil that infected the two kingdoms of which they were capitals. One could find in these wicked cities examples of all the evils of that time. Micah's list included fraud, theft, greed, debauchery, oppression, hypocrisy, heresy, injustice, extortion, lying, murder, and other offenses.

In chapters 1 through 3, Micah prophesied against Samaria and Jerusalem. He first denounced Samaria and prophesied her overthrow. He saw with sorrow of heart the judgment that was about to sweep over Judah, and that his own people of southwest Judah would feel the weight of the invasion. Covetousness and robbery demand punishment, but a glimpse is given of God's mercy to the remnant of Israel.

Chapter 3 gives one of the most stinging denunciations against selfish rulers and false prophets in the prophetic literature, closing with the prophecy that the Temple and Zion would be destroyed.

Chapters 4 and 5 are filled with promises. After Jerusalem's destruction and restoration, it was to become the spiritual capital of the world, and to her, God would bring His exiles from Babylon, in spite of all opposition from the heathen nations. The most noted of Micah's prophesies is chapter 5, verse 2, which

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predicted the location of Bethlehem Ephratah as our Lord's birthplace.

The last two chapters outline God's controversy with Israel. What fault could Israel find with Him? Israel responded by wanting to know God's requirements, and received the answer that He demanded nothing but justice, mercy, and a humble fellowship with God. Israel's sins were pictured in all their vileness, and the nation, through the prophet, confessed the truth of the indictment, placing itself entirely in the Lord's hands for mercy and protection. The Book of Micah closes by prophesying of the return to the land of Israel, followed by an outburst of praise for a God that is forgiving and kind.

It is possible that Micah's denunciations were a reflection of the wicked reign of King Ahaz, and that the closing prophesies of mercy and forgiveness represented the good reign of King Hezekiah. Jeremiah 26:17-19 indicates that Micah died in peace during King Hezekiah's reign.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. When did the "word of the Lord" come to Micah? (Micah 1:1) How does the Lord's word come to us today?

The "word of the Lord" came during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The Lord's word comes to us today through reading the Bible, hearing the Word preached, testimonies of those who have been born again, Gospel literature and music, and through prayer.

Illustrate the different ways that God's word comes to us by having your students recall the first time they can remember the Lord speaking to them, and asking them to share the circumstances.

2. What was the cause of God's judgment against Israel? Micah 1:5-7; 2:1-2

The cause was sin. The people had sinned against God by practicing idolatry. Their lives were full of wicked covetousness, oppression, and violence. The point should be made that God will ultimately judge all sin.

3. How was Micah's message received? (Micah 2:6-11) How is God's message received today?

The people did not like Micah's message. During his ministry, they only wanted prophets who would say what they wanted to hear. The prophets that Micah spoke against had encouraged people to become comfortable with their sins.

The students should conclude that God's message is received in the same manner today. Class discussion should bring out that only a desire for the truth will cause us to be affected by God's message. Also bring out that truth will always be in harmony with the Bible.

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4. Use the following verses to identify at least ten charges of injustice that Micah made against his people. Micah 2:1, 2, 8-9; 3:2, 9, 10-11.

These verses mention a total of thirteen charges:

1. *Plotting wickedness*
2. *Fraud*
3. *Threats*
4. *Violence*
5. *Stealing*
6. *Dishonesty*
7. *Mistreating widows*
8. *Hating good*
9. *Loving evil*
10. *Hating justice*
11. *Loving unfairness*
12. *Murder*
13. *Accepting bribes*

Ask your students if the people initially set out to commit such a long list of evils. The Word of God likens sin to leaven, which grows rapidly. Discussion should bring out that it may only start with a little sin, but soon it becomes a long list.

5. Micah 5:2 speaks of the "ruler in Israel." To whom is this verse referring? What is the significance of this verse?

The "ruler in Israel" refers to Jesus Christ the Messiah. Micah prophesied of His birth about 700 years before it took place. He even named the city where Christ would be born, Bethlehem Ephratah. Micah could have just used the generic "Bethlehem" and increased his chances of being correct. However, he was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and identified the town of Bethlehem Ephratah located six miles southwest of Jerusalem rather than the other Bethlehem that was located six miles southeast of Mount Carmel.

Class discussion of the second question should lead the students to understand that God's Word is always true. As a visual example, bring a bag of beans or pennies. Mark one bean and ask a blindfolded student to pull out the marked bean. Explain that the chance of eight prophecies all being fulfilled in one person is equal to putting silver dollars two feet deep over the whole state of Texas, marking one silver dollar, and having a blindfolded man pick that one.[1]

6. Why did the Lord call on the mountains to hear His controversy with His people? Micah 6:1-2

The mountains were an excellent witness to the people's idolatry. It was on these "high places" that the Children of Israel built pagan altars and made sacrifices to false gods.

Ask your students if God only notices the outward sins. The discussion should bring out that no sin escapes God's notice.

7. According to the key verse, how do we please God?

The key verse, Micah 6:8, mentions three things that God requires of us. First discuss with your students that God's requirements cause movement in three dimensions: outward, inward, and upward.

- *Outward: "to do justly" requires us to deal righteously with our fellowman.*
- *Inward: "to love mercy" requires a personal commitment to God's plan, and manifests itself in a right relationship toward God and our fellowman.*
- *Upward: "to walk humbly with thy God" requires a right attitude toward God and a determination to walk in continuous fellowship with Him.*

Class discussion should bring out that outward, inward, and upward areas of our service are each connected to the others.

8. The Book of Micah closes with promises of mercy and restoration. Give an example of how God extends the same promises to individuals today.

Your students may offer their personal testimonies, or a well-known testimony in response. Remind the students that mercy was extended to all, but only those who have been born again have received God's promise of restoration.

CONCLUSION

God is still calling sinners today. May we be faithful like Micah to declare His Word, demonstrate His love and mercy, and walk humbly before both God and man.

1. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p.175.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Prophecies Regarding Judah and Israel

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 1:1 through 12:6

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

BACKGROUND

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was reared in aristocratic surroundings in the land of Judah, and ministered during the reigns of: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. Isaiah was called to be a prophet about 740 B.C., the year Uzziah died. His last dated ministry was in 701 B.C., although most of Isaiah 40-66 must have been written during the reign of Manasseh before Isaiah's martyrdom around 680 B.C.

Isaiah is considered the most literary of the writing prophets, and he incorporated vivid word pictures in his prophecies. His writings contain both prose and poetry, and the beauty of his words has been an inspiration down through the ages. Isaiah's primary message was to Judah, although he also wrote to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was taken into captivity during his ministry. Isaiah also directed a portion of his prophecy to nations that surrounded Israel and Judah at the time.

The main point of Isaiah's writing in chapters 1-12 was to warn of judgment and to call the people of Judah and Israel back to God. In chapter 6, he described his personal call. Then, in chapters 7-11, he foretold of the Messiah and entreated the people to return to salvation and holiness. Isaiah promised a time of restoration for the Jewish people and also a time of peace for the world in the distant future.

King Ahaz of Judah (7th chapter) was informed that Rezin, King of Syria had joined with Israel to attack Judah in about 734 B.C. Isaiah was instructed by God to go with Shearjashub (his son whose name meant "a remnant will return"—a reminder of God's mercy) to meet with King Ahaz. They were to meet the King "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field." The conduit of the upper pool refers to the Gihon Spring, which was east of Jerusalem and was the city's main water source. The fuller's field was used to lay fresh woven cloth or other clothing to dry and whiten in the sun.

When Isaiah and his son met with King Ahaz, the prophet told Ahaz that God would not allow Judah to

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be taken over at that time. Although Judah was at other times attacked during Isaiah's ministry, the land did not fall into captivity during Isaiah's lifetime.

As often happens, the people resented Isaiah's message of admonition and judgment, and tradition tells us Isaiah suffered a martyr's death at the hands of Manasseh, King of Judah around 680 B.C.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Isaiah's ministry was largely warning of judgment for the sins of Judah and Israel, and pleading for the people to repent. How does this setting parallel today?

Our society is similar to the society in Isaiah's time. God had given the nations of Judah and Israel prosperity, and the people had become complacent and had forgotten the source of their blessings. They had fallen into sin and were ignoring Isaiah's plea to repent. Today, our world has largely forgotten God, sin is rampant, and there seems to be little concern for the warnings in the Bible.

Discuss with your class ways we, as Christians, could let our material blessings come between us and God. Although we may not immediately fall into the gross sins and the heathen practices of Judah and Israel at the time of Isaiah, we could let God's love leak out by becoming comfortable, and neglecting things such as church attendance, daily devotions, and the Lord's work. We could let pleasures, entertainment, or careers occupy too much of our time and attention. Follow up with ways we can guard against this happening.

2. One of the sins in Judah which displeased God was the people's lack of mercy toward the poor, fatherless, and widows (Isaiah 1:23; 10:2). In what ways can we show kindness to those in need?

We should have a generous spirit. We should keep our eyes open for those who may be in need, especially of the body of Christ. Wisdom and prayer should accompany any monetary gift, but our generosity may not always include money. A bag of food, or clothes our children have outgrown, may be the appropriate thing. Also, a helping hand around the house or in the yard may answer the need for an older person or one who is sick. Your class may have some good suggestions on how to show kindness. Some may be able to relate an example from their own experience when someone's generosity met a pressing need.

3. God was angry over the sin of idolatry in both Israel and Judah, and he led Isaiah to expound about the King of Assyria who trusted in his own power (Isaiah 10:10-15). Why is God so displeased when people put anything in their lives ahead of Him?

God wants to be first, and placing anything before Him is, in effect, having an idol in our lives. There is no difference between making an idol out of wood or metal, or trusting in one's own abilities to be

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successful. We are all given form, life, and breath by the Lord, and any talent we have came from Him. To worship ourselves, which is the humanistic tendency in today's world, is idolatry in God's eyes. You may discuss with your class other forms of idolatry by which one could be tempted.

4. The people of Judah made a show of religion, but their hearts were far from wanting to please and obey the Lord (Isaiah 1:11-18). God pled for them to come and repent. How could we get absorbed in activities and works for the Lord but lack the full blessing of God on our lives?

We could be so busy, even in good works that we forget to take time to be holy. Neglect in reading God's Word, spending less time in meaningful prayer, and failing to mind the checks of the Holy Spirit can result in our hearts growing cold, but people may feel justified by their good works. You may want the class to discuss how to avoid this.

5. What joy rings in verses that speak of God being a God of salvation! How may we draw water out of the wells of salvation?

When we are saved, we are given Living Water. We will never thirst again. That well is ever flowing; it is ever available, and the Source will never run dry. God provides strength and victory for each trial, and when we are feeling a little dry or sad, there is an abundant supply of refreshment from which we may draw. Discuss some of these sources of refreshment, such as promises in the Word, touching God in prayer, inspiration from a Gospel song, or encouragement from fellow Christians.

6. As a result of his vision of God's glory, Isaiah was inspired to declare the holiness of the Most High (Isaiah 6:3-8). Because of God's holiness, Isaiah felt awe, humility, and a need for deeper holiness himself. What did the seraphim do to Isaiah? What was the significance of this?

The seraphim took a live coal from the altar and placed it on Isaiah's lips, saying, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." This typified an experience of sanctification. It was an act of making completely holy. Isaiah was now ready to be sent out by the Lord. God asked, "Who will go. . . ?" Isaiah answered, "Here am I; send me."

It is good for us to search our hearts. Are we ready for service? Is there anything in our lives that is hindering us spiritually? Are we holy before the Lord? Isaiah saw his need and acted on it. Let us recognize and revere our holy God, and let us be partakers of that holiness.

7. Among the writings of Isaiah are wonderful prophecies of the coming Messiah (Isaiah 7:14; 9:2; 9:6-7; 11:1-5). List four of these prophecies.

- *"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).*

  Fulfilled: Matthew 1:23.
- *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2).*

  Fulfilled: John 1:4-9.
- *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isaiah 9:6, 7).*

  Fulfilled: Luke 2:11, and other places.
- *"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1-5).*

  Fulfilled: Revelation 5:5 and other places.

8. God promised restoration in Isaiah's writings. There would be a return from bondage and restoration in the near future (Isaiah 1:26-27; 10:20-25, 27; 11:11-16). There was also a foretelling of the millennium of peace that will occur at the end times (Isaiah 11:6-10). Some of these verses undoubtedly refer to more than one time frame. God is a God of restoration. He promises to mend broken lives, broken spirits, broken hearts and broken families. What are some "broken" things in your life that the Lord has restored and made whole?

This would be a good time for students to share examples of restoration in their own lives.

CONCLUSION

God used Isaiah to expound upon judgment for sin; of salvation to the repentant; sanctification, a cleansing work; the promised Messiah; and restoration to the outcast.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Prophecies Regarding Foreign Nations and the World

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 13:1 through 27:13

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible." (Isaiah 13:11)

BACKGROUND

In chapters 13 through 23 of the Book of Isaiah, the focus shifts from Judah and Jerusalem to God's pronouncement of judgment on ten Gentile nations (see chart below). These prophesies are called "burdens," which in the original language meant "to lift up." Divine judgment was going to be lifted up, and the prophet's solemn messages were a heavy weight as he lifted up his voice in warning. He knew that cities would be destroyed and thousands of people would be killed.

Knowing of these coming judgments on the Gentile nations should have impacted Israel for several reasons:

- When Gentile nations oppressed them, the people should not have despaired because God had stated that He would eventually punish those nations.
- The people should have seen the futility of forming alliances with these nations.
- Israel and also the Gentiles should have recognized that God has authority over all earthly powers.
- This knowledge should have strengthened the faith of the people.

Babylon was listed first in Isaiah's condemnation. In 586 B.C., the Babylonian empire would destroy Jerusalem and the people of Judah would become their captives. From Genesis (the tower of Babel) through Revelation, Babylon typifies those who are defiant toward God, while Jerusalem often symbolizes the chosen of God.

In chapters 24 through 27, the prophecy broadens to include judgment to the whole world in the end times. God revealed to Isaiah, as to other Biblical writers, details regarding the Tribulation, causing these chapters to sometimes be referred to as "Isaiah's Apocalypse." The word "Behold" (Isaiah 24:1) indicated a future event. Individuals as well as nations would be judged. However, these chapters also hold out hope. God would provide deliverance, blessing,

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and protection for His people. After Israel was purged, they would be gathered and restored.

Isaiah's prophecies were received with scorn and unbelief by many of the people of his time. But God's Word has proved itself unfailingly. Fulfilled predictions regarding former nations reinforce Isaiah's prophetic statements about events which have not yet transpired.

Country	Reference
Babylon	Isaiah 13:1
Assyria	Isaiah 14:25
Palestina	Isaiah 14:28-29
Moab	Isaiah 15
Syria	Isaiah 17:1
Ethiopia	Isaiah 18:1
Egypt	Isaiah 19:1
Edom	Isaiah 21:11
Arabia	Isaiah 21:13
Tyre/Phoenicia	Isaiah 23:1

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 13 of Isaiah speaks of the fall of the great city Babylon. What verses foretold not only the fall of this city but also gave the identity of the conquerors?

The destruction and doom of Babylon was predicted in verses 19 and 20. These two verses indicated total annihilation of this city. Verse 17 prophesied that the city would be overthrown by the Medes. Point out to your students that this prophecy came to pass when Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall during Belshazzar's feast (about 539 B.C.) nearly 200 years after Isaiah spoke these words. Your class should conclude that prophecies yet to be fulfilled will come to pass just as surely.

2. What did God say would happen to Moab? (Isaiah 15:1-3). Why? Isaiah 16:6

Isaiah speaks of the destruction and downfall of the Moabite nation. Looking back from a present-day vantage point, we can see that this came to pass. The Moabite nation was conquered several times before finally succumbing to Arab control. This judgment came upon Moab because of its pride. Moab, the father of the Moabite nation, was conceived by Lot and his eldest daughter after they fled from Sodom and Gomorrah. Through the years, the Moabites, as a country, despised the Children of Israel and caused them great trouble.

Discussion should bring out that the sinful may appear to flourish for a time, but God will eventually judge their evil deeds if they do not repent.

3. Early in the history of the Children of Israel, the Egyptians had enslaved them, and God brought about a miraculous deliverance through Moses. Yet years later in Isaiah's time, some of the people of Judah wanted to form an alliance with Egypt as protection

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from Assyria. What should they have thought when they heard Isaiah's prophecies about Egypt? Isaiah 19:1-4

Judah should have realized the futility of seeking help from Egypt. Ask your class where people turn today when they have problems. Where can the most effective help be found? Why do people look elsewhere? The point should be made that God is most able to help us, but many people are not willing to humble themselves and submit to His will. We want to be among those who are willing and obedient.

4. The city of Tyre was part of the Phoenician nation that was located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in the area of Lebanon today. The Phoenicians had built up a vast network of trade with surrounding countries, and they had a fleet of ships that were used to export goods. Yet Isaiah saw a time when this prosperous nation would fall, and their economic collapse would affect many of the nations around them. Who planned Tyre's destruction and why? Isaiah 23:8-9

God planned the fall of Tyre. Discuss with your class why, directing the discussion to bring out that it was not because they were prosperous, but because they were proud and no doubt trusted in their own abilities and prosperity. Many people today have possessions and prosperity, and these are not inherently sinful. Have your class discuss what our attitudes should be if we are prosperous. We need to remember who blessed us, to keep our possessions consecrated to the Lord, and to be good stewards of what He has given us.

5. Isaiah 24 details many happenings that will come to pass in the earth in what will be a universal desolation. List three of the happenings described in this chapter.

It could be interesting to make a list on the board. The point should be made that while we cannot say exactly what the events described will be, the picture is clearly one of universal desolation. Class discussion could bring out how we see what could be similar disasters today—earthquakes, massive storms, and epidemic diseases—that could make us think of these events. What we have seen so far in history will pale in comparison to what will come at the end of the world. Verse 18 foretells of people fleeing from one danger only to face another. We understand that God will send judgment upon the earth, but we have a way of escape if we trust wholly in the Savior. How can we be ready to escape?

6. Those who are delivered from God's judgment will certainly rejoice, and in chapter 25, Isaiah prophesied of this praise. What are some of the future deliverances that God promises in Isaiah 25:6-12?

God promises a feast and celebration. He will "swallow up death in victory," and tears will be

wiped away. Those who rebel (symbolized by Moab) will be destroyed. Ask your class why these verses should give us hope today. We can anticipate the time when Christ sets up His Millennial Kingdom and rules the world in righteousness.

7. When Christ establishes His Millennial Kingdom, the nation of Israel will be the center of it, and the Jews will be restored to the land of Israel. How does Isaiah say the people will be gathered? Isaiah 27:12

"Ye shall be gathered one by one." As this section of the Book of Isaiah ends, we can see foretold the time when the Jewish people will realize their redemption. They will recognize Jesus as their Messiah and will worship Him in Jerusalem. Not only the people of their nation will worship Him, but people of all nations will go to Jerusalem to "worship the LORD *in the holy mount."*

8. The fifteen chapters of our text detail God's revelation to Isaiah of the future of numerous nations. Additionally, Isaiah prophesied of the end time. What are some of the benefits of knowing, through prophecy, the future of the world?

When we are forewarned of coming trouble, it gives us time to prepare for it. We are living in a day when technology can predict a storm days before it arrives. Ask your class how people react when they hear that a storm is coming. Discussion will bring out that some people flee, while others stay and try to ride it out.

A coming "storm" has been prophesied, and it will be more cataclysmic than any the world has seen yet. Discuss with the class God's plan for escape. Ask how people react to these "storm warnings." How should we react?

CONCLUSION

No doubt some of Isaiah's prophecies sounded harsh to the people of that day, but Isaiah made the people aware that it was their own doings that would bring about their destruction (see key verse).

When we accept Christ as our personal Savior and live for Him, we will escape the wrath that is coming.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Prophecies Against Ungodly People

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 28:1 through 35:10

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isaiah 28:16)

BACKGROUND

Isaiah was a master of words, and a prophet who was used by God to reveal many of the mysteries of God's plan, as well to warn of the judgments to come. Chapters 28 through 35 contain prophecies of woe, intermixed with prophecies of hope and salvation.

Of the eight chapters covered in this lesson, five of them begin with the words: "Woe to…" Chapter 28 says, "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim…" Ephraim refers to the country of Israel. This was a warning to Judah and Israel that God was disgusted with their sin, and He likened them to drunken men, stumbling about in the midst of their uncleanness and vomit. He declared that their pride and beauty would be beaten down, and would be as a fading flower.

Chapter 29 begins with, "Woe to Ariel…" *Ariel* means "lion of God," and was referring to Jerusalem. Although the people had a form of godliness and were observing religious festivals and talking about the Lord, they continued in their sin. God promised judgment upon them.

"Woe to the rebellious children. . ." begins the 30th chapter. Judah had rejected God's counsel and His promise to protect them, seeking an alliance with Egypt to protect them from the Assyrians. In doing this, Judah was refusing to trust in the Lord and to obey Him. Chapter 31 continues with the same theme, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help. . ." God wants His people to put their trust in Him, and to allow Him to fight their battles. It is only through Him that victory can be obtained.

Chapter 33 begins, "Woe to thee that spoilest…" This was directed to the Assyrians who were a distress to Judah at the time. God promises judgment to those who oppose His chosen people. This includes those that are His, whether they are Jew or Gentile. The righteous will go through a refiner's fire, but a remnant shall be saved.

In contrast to those that open with "Woe. . ." Chapter 32 begins, "Behold, a king shall reign in

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righteousness. . .” speaking of Jesus who will set up His worldwide reign. Chapter 34 starts, “Come near, ye nations, to hear. . .” and goes on to tell the people of judgment to come. Chapter 35 begins, “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad. . .” and describes the redemption and beauty and glory that will come to God’s people.

God is just. His judgment is tempered by His mercy. That is the message Isaiah was bringing to the people.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. God said He would lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and that He would sweep away the refuge of lies (Isaiah 28:17). What do you think is meant by this statement?

The plummet or plumb line is used by builders to establish a perpendicular point of reference so the building is true and square. (A suggestion would be to bring a plumb line to class and demonstrate how it is used.) Not only will the plumb line show that the wall is vertically straight, but it will also show whether the wall has bulges or not. God’s Word is our plumb line. If we measure every thought and action by His Word, we will have a spiritual temple that is true. We will not be deceived by lies from the enemy of our souls.

2. God said that though the people approached Him with their mouths and honored Him with their lips, their hearts were far from Him (Isaiah 29:13). How is this verse applicable today?

There are many people who talk about God and who may pray or sing His praises on Sunday, but for the rest of the week, they live for their own pleasure without regard to the commands or will of the Lord. They say they love God, but it does not come from their hearts. True love from the heart can only occur after we have been redeemed through Jesus’ Blood. Then it is a daily walk of grace as we endeavor to please and obey the Lord. The praises will come from our hearts and the Lord will love to hear them.

3. The Lord spoke of rebellious people who wanted to hear only “smooth things” (Isaiah 30:9-10). How could we be in danger of feeling the same way?

Most people do not like to hear criticism. Yet the Bible tells us that a true friend may at times correct us. Or, it may be a word spoken from the pulpit that fits our situation. Let us be open to suggestions for improvement. Let us not be easily offended, but thankful if we can learn something which will make us a better person. We need a full, spiritual “diet.” If we hear only about the love of God, and never about His judgment, or ways in which we can improve, we will have an unbalanced perspective of who God is, and we may not have the incentive to endeavor to grow spiritually.

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4. Judah did not trust in God, but looked to Egypt for protection (Isaiah 31:1). Why do you think this displeased the Lord so much? How can this apply to us?

God had promised that He would take care of Judah and protect her from her enemies if they would do what was right. Judah disregarded God's promise and attempted to find help on her own.

There are many wonderful promises in the Word of God for us. We have the choice to ignore them and try to work out our lives using our own resources, or we may claim God's promises for our own. Often, we must seek for these promises. If we are unwilling or too indifferent to seek, we will not find, and that is what displeases the Lord.

5. In Isaiah 32:2, the prophet gives a promise of a hiding place and "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." To whom is this promise given and how can we apply it?

The promise is to those who are righteous before the Lord. How many times we feel that we are in a "weary land"! How often do we feel we need a hiding place? In today's ungodly society, God's people can relate to these promises on a daily basis. When we need a helper, a friend, a refuge, a feeling of peace, the everlasting arms of love—whatever our need—we just "go to the Rock" as the song says. You may discuss with your class ways they "go to the Rock" in times of trial.

6. God described those who are righteous—who have come through the fire and have stood true—and their reward (Isaiah 33:14-16). In your own words, describe a righteous person as portrayed in verse 15.

God describes a righteous person as one who walks according to God's law, one who speaks truth and kindness, one who hates the getting of personal gain unjustly and at the expense of others, one who will not get involved with criminal violence, and one who will not look at wickedness with pleasure. Discuss with your class examples of each of these actions that are to be embraced or avoided.

7. Chapter 34 speaks of a culmination of judgment at the end time. It predicts fearsome things to come and is a wrapping up of the section of "woes" from the last several chapters. What do you think God is trying to tell us in this chapter?

God is again warning of judgment for sin. He wants people to know that the price is never too large to pay to avoid the terrible things that will face those who are not right with God. He calls all men everywhere to repent of their sins and to find His great salvation. He warns us that we must stay close to Him and obey His commands. There will be no surprises at the judgment. Mankind has been properly warned, and those who ignore the warning will be speechless when they face God.

8. Chapter 35 is the antithesis of chapter 34. It tells of the great redemption for the righteous, and it begins the consolation section of Isaiah which will continue, after a brief historical section, in the next four chapters. Verse 8 of chapter 35 tells who will partake of the glories of that great redemption day. Who are they?

Those who walk the highway of holiness will be partakers of the great heavenly rewards in the last day. All who walk that highway will be clean and blood-washed. There will be no sin or evil.

Just as we were warned to avoid judgment in the last chapter, we are beckoned to strive to walk the highway of holiness in this chapter. There is something to reach for. It will be worth every effort and every trial. We shall obtain everlasting joy forever and ever!

CONCLUSION

God promised judgment to those who rejected Him. Yet, in mercy He reached out with the promise of salvation for those who would take it. There are two clear choices: judgment or mercy. Let us choose mercy and we shall rejoice in the glories that await us!

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Account of Hezekiah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 36:1 through 39:8

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth." (Isaiah 37:16)

BACKGROUND

Hezekiah, King of Judah, is given much attention in Scripture. A total of eleven chapters are devoted to his story: 2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32, and Isaiah 36-39. They are similar in content, but a study of these texts will give a richer texture and broader understanding of the reign of King Hezekiah and the lessons we can learn from his story.

Although he was quite human, 2 Kings 18:5 states, "He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." At the age of twenty-five, about 715 B.C. and possibly as early as 729 B.C., he began to rule as co-regent with his father. One of his first acts was the cleansing and reopening of the Temple in Jerusalem, which his father had left closed and desecrated. He was instrumental in restoring worship at the Temple, while destroying hills and groves that encouraged false worship. His reign continued for 29 years.

In Isaiah 36-39, we read of the developing political crisis in the area, which finally came to a climax. After the military fall of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), Judah struggled with Assyria. Hezekiah first tried to bribe Assyrian King Sennacherib. Sennacherib accepted of the treasures but then soon invaded Judah. There is also indication that Hezekiah had previously attempted to secure Judah by an alliance with Egypt, the other major military power of the day. When the mighty Assyrian army stood outside the gates of Jerusalem demanding surrender, Hezekiah's confidence in God was greatly tested by blasphemous accusations made by envoys of Sennacherib.

Bible scholars generally agree that the account of Hezekiah's sickness (Isaiah 38) and reception of envoys from Babylon (Isaiah 39) actually took place before the Assyrian invasion (Isaiah 36-37). It appears that this change of chronology was intended by the prophet as a bridge between the two parts of Isaiah. Chapters 36-37 end the first part with emphasis on Assyria, while chapters 38-39 introduce the second part with emphasis on Babylon.

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SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In our text, King Hezekiah faced three major crises. What were they? Isaiah 36:1; 38:1; 39:1

Hezekiah's first crisis was the impending invasion of the Assyrian army. This was an open attack on the kingdom of Judah and a direct attempt to undermine his leadership at a time when Hezekiah had led a great reformation in worship and the people's trust in Jehovah had been renewed.

The second crisis was his illness and impending death as prophesied by Isaiah. This crisis was personal in nature and drove the king to prayer. The third crisis was the reception of Babylonian political envoys. This crisis was more subtle than the first two, and Hezekiah gave intimate knowledge of the kingdom to foreigners, and apparently took credit for the treasures of the kingdom.

Discuss the three different ways Hezekiah responded to each crisis. What can we learn from his responses?

2. In Isaiah 36:4, Rabshakeh, the Assyrian field commander or representative, began a blasphemous discourse with King Hezekiah's representatives concerning confidence and trust. How did he try to tear down the trust and confidence of the people of Judah? How is this similar to Satan's attacks upon our confidence in God?

First, there was an assault on the leadership of King Hezekiah, decrying his ability to prepare for such a crisis. This was specifically noted in reference to his previous alliance with Egypt. (Isaiah also rebuked this alliance in chapters 30:1-7 and 31:1-3)

Second, Rabshakeh asserted that if the people claimed trust in the Lord, Hezekiah had made worship more difficult for them (traveling to Jerusalem).

Third, he claimed that the Assyrian army was operating at God's instruction so the people of Judah should surrender.

Finally, he shouted to those who could hear on the surrounding walls to disregard Hezekiah's charge to trust in God's deliverance from the Assyrian army. He claimed that the Hebrew God Jehovah would be no different than the gods of the surrounding countries in His inability to deliver them.

In times of crisis, Satan may attempt to get us to question the authority and trustworthiness of our leaders. He points out their human frailties and shortcomings without mentioning the way God has used them profitably for His kingdom. The devil also tries to devalue true worship and fellowship, offering something more appealing to our human desire for ease and pleasure. Often the enemy of our souls tries to claim that he is operating as an emissary of God. (See 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.) Finally, Satan shouts

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into the ears and hearts of believers that God cannot be trusted to deliver.

3. What was Hezekiah's response to the blasphemous accusations which were made to his representatives and then again directly to him in a letter from the Assyrian King Sennacherib? (Isaiah 37:1) How did God honor this response?

After hearing the accusations, Hezekiah humbled himself (tore his clothes and put on sackcloth) and went immediately to the house of the Lord. He also sent word to the prophet Isaiah that a crisis was upon them. Isaiah quickly offered a three-part encouragement from the Lord: 1) Don't be afraid of hollow words, 2) The King of Assyria will depart for his own land, and, 3) He will die violently in his own land.

When the accusations were repeated in a letter, Hezekiah again went to the house of the Lord and then he spread the letter before God and prayed. Again, God promised deliverance for Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:22, 31-35), departure of the Assyrians (Isaiah 37:23-29), and that God would provide food for His people (Isaiah 37:30) following the crisis.

Ultimately God showed the Assyrians that He was different than the gods of the surrounding countries when He slew 185,000 soldiers in one night, defending Jerusalem and the people of Judah as He promised.

4. What did Hezekiah's prayer in chapter 37:15-20 encompass? How can we apply this in our own prayers?

Hezekiah's prayer was amazingly similar to the prayer of the Early Church in Acts 4:24-31. He acknowledged first that God is the "Lord of hosts," which means Lord of the armies. He is the personal God of Israel who dwelt with them "between the cherubim" in the Holy of Holies within the Temple. He acknowledged that God is not one of many but the only God and the Creator of the universe. Then the King went on to ask for God's direct intervention: "hear," "open thine eyes," etc. He reminded God that the reproach was not so much of Israel but rather of God. He affirmed the reality of the crisis, telling God that Sennacherib had destroyed other nations and their gods, but he was mindful that their "gods" were only human constructions and not divine. Finally, he asked for God to save Judah from the crisis. His intent was not only for deliverance, but also that the nations might know the sovereignty of God and that God's name would be glorified.

Our prayers in times of crises (other times also) should begin with an acknowledgement of the deity, authority, and personal nature of God to us. Our hearts must be focused on Him alone and not on any other options for deliverance, understanding that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all. We should then follow with our requests, laying before God the crisis

as we understand it. Of course, God already knows but He directs us to "ask." Finally we must guard our own motives from selfishness. We can and should ask for deliverance from the crisis, but ultimately we want God's perfect will for our lives and the direction that will give God the greatest glory.

5. What was King Hezekiah's response to the news from the prophet Isaiah of his impending death? (Isaiah 38:2-3) What followed Hezekiah's response?

Hezekiah turned away from those tending to him and began to pray. Although some might say his prayer was selfish, it seems a natural response to such a crisis. He did not seem to be sulking like Ahab in 1 Kings 21:4. His prayer reminded God of Hezekiah's faithfulness, obedience, and motives. It seems that his motives were not only for his own life but also for the future of his throne and nation.

God immediately answered Hezekiah's prayer and made several promises to him. The first granted an additional fifteen years to his life. This was an unusual privilege for a human to know the time of his departure. (It can be argued that Hezekiah did not use this knowledge wisely.) The second promise was deliverance from the Assyrian siege. The third promise was evidence to prove the surety of the first two promises—God promised to move the sun backwards ten degrees (twenty minutes) as a sign of His faithfulness to fulfill the other promises.

6. Isaiah 38:10-22 records Hezekiah's reflections after recovery from his near fatal sickness. How does the king describe life and the purpose for living?

In verses 10-14, the king used colorful metaphors to describe the temporary nature of earthly life. It is like a nomadic shepherd's tent, which is never in one place for long but always moving on to "greener pastures." It is like a piece of hand-woven cloth, which is cut from the loom by the weaver, rolled up, and taken away. It is like the prey of a lion whose end is sooner than planned or expected. It is like a crane, swallow, or dove that is helplessly awaiting his own destruction.

The king remembered God's deliverance from sin and bitterness and noted that the purpose of living is twofold. First, we are alive to praise and give glory to God. Every part of our short and temporary lives here on earth should be lived to that end. He also remembered the responsibility of every generation to the next generation. Beyond giving glory to God directly, we have no greater responsibility in this life than to pass truth on to our children and others on whom we have influence.

7. Following his recovery, Hezekiah entertained diplomatic guests from Babylon (Isaiah 39:1-2). Was there anything wrong with doing this? Why or why not?

A seemingly innocent act of receiving diplomats who congratulated Hezekiah on his recovery turned to disaster. In his gladness over being given additional years of life, the king apparently became lax in his protection of the security of his kingdom. A diplomat who reveals the financial and military assets along with the geographical advantages and disadvantages of a country certainly makes that country, government, and its inhabitants vulnerable.

While there was nothing technically wrong with fulfilling his diplomatic responsibilities, Hezekiah apparently took more credit for the blessing of God than was warranted. The combination of lax attitude and pride was unpleasing to God and brought judgment to the entire nation in the forthcoming Babylonian captivity.

As Christians we must be always on our guard. The enemy of our souls does not always come with an obvious attack like that of the Assyrian army or even with a personal attack like that of Hezekiah's sickness. Sometimes Satan's attacks are subtler, yet they can have a long-term impact on us and those whom we influence. They may come in areas that are not specifically sinful but simply distract us or expose us to the influence of ungodly people and ideas.

8. Why did Hezekiah say it was good that the judgment for his misdeeds would fall on the next generation? Was this arrogance on his part? Why or why not?

It does not seem that Hezekiah was arrogant in his answer but simply resigned to God's pronouncement of judgment and its terms. None of us want judgment to fall on us or on those who follow us. Poor decisions always have consequences, and although repentance delivers us from the eternal power and penalty of sin, it does not always bring deliverance from the consequences of sin in our lives here on earth. We must resolve to patiently and continually follow the will of God even in the face of consequences for past actions.

9. What types of crises are we likely to face as Christians today? How can we respond in ways that will be pleasing to God and profitable for our eternal destiny?

Students will likely respond with issues much like those in Hezekiah's life story: attacks by enemies, problems at school or in employment, family problems, sickness, or subtle attacks of pride for our prosperity, influence, or accomplishments. Our response should be like that of Hezekiah when he refused to listen to ungodly discouragement and prayerfully submitted all of the crises to God and His perfect will. We must proceed with great care so as not to allow the enemy of our souls to stage a "sneak attack" while our spiritual guard has been let down. God has promised deliverance for His glory, so we must keep focused on His perfect will and purpose for our lives.

CONCLUSION

Two great lessons can be learned from Hezekiah and his life story. The first is that our confidence must be in God alone. He is bigger than any circumstances or crisis that may confront us along life's way. The second is that mankind is quick to forget the blessings and deliverances that God provides and tend to put confidence in ourselves. We must be vigilant to keep our confidence in God alone if we are to make our calling and election sure.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Prophetic Consolation

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 40:1 through 48:22

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." (Isaiah 41:10)

BACKGROUND

Moving from chapter 39 to chapter 40 of this book, the theme changes from that of judgment to one of salvation. The prophet Isaiah saw beyond Israel's current distress and Judah's prospect of captivity to a future day of salvation.

God was to spare Judah from Assyria's threat of destruction and later deliver His people from the Babylonian captivity. Along with warning the people of impending judgment, Isaiah offered them hope and comfort. He foretold the time when Babylon—a future evil world system—would be destroyed.

This section of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 40:1—48:22) is often called the Book of Consolation. The first words of the 40th chapter, *comfort ye* meant both "repent" and "console," which indicated that comfort comes after true repentance. The words *my people* referred to the people of God who had a covenant relationship with Him. These chapters also introduce God's chosen Servant, who would be Israel's means of redemption.

Some refer to this section of Isaiah as the New Testament in miniature, since it opens with the words used by John the Baptist (Isaiah 40:3), and contains many references to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and King.

Within these chapters, Isaiah also emphasized the greatness of God in contrast to the vanity of heathen idols. Note how often God said to His people, Israel, "Fear not" and how often He assured them of His pardon and His presence.

God's message of comfort in this section was not merely a strengthening of the people of Israel in their outward deliverance. It was a deep and inner work of God in their hearts.

It is no surprise that for centuries God's people have turned to these chapters to find encouragement and assurance when encountering difficult days in their lives. God says to all of His people, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee." He encourages us to take comfort in Him.

OPENER

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. What is your concept of God as you take into consideration Isaiah 40:12, 15, and 22?

These verses proclaim that God is almighty and all-powerful. Bring out to your class that even so, He cares for each of us personally (see verses 29-31). The songwriter wrote, "He's big enough to rule the mighty universe, yet small enough to live within my heart."[1]

No person or thing can be compared to God. We can only do our best to describe God with our limited knowledge and language. Ask your class: How might we limit God's work in our lives by underestimating Him? One example could be, we might avoid taking "inconsequential" details to Him because we underestimate the depth of His concern for the details of our lives. Have your class offer other examples.

2. Judah was facing the threat of destruction by Assyria, which was one of many reasons to fear. What was one reason *not* to be afraid? (Isaiah 41:10-14) How does this promise apply to us?

The Lord told the people of Judah that He would be with them and would strengthen them to face whatever came. He assured them that He would go before them and work on their behalf.

When God makes a promise, He keeps it. We need not fear the world as we represent Him, because God's presence is with us. He has established a relationship with us and we have God's assurance of strength, help, and victory over sin and the devil. What are some promises that God has proven true to you personally?

3. Isaiah 42:1-4 makes reference to Christ, and is quoted and confirmed in Matthew 12:18-21. Part of Christ's mission on earth was to demonstrate God's righteousness and to be a Light to all nations (Isaiah 42:6). What is righteousness, and who is supposed to be righteous?

Righteousness is right actions, right attitudes, and right relationships, all based on a right standing with God. When we repent of our sins, He forgives us and takes away our sins; He restores us as His children. He not only gives us His righteousness, but He also empowers us to demonstrate it to others.

All those who have been called of God to be servants of His need to be demonstrating God's righteousness and bringing His Light to the world. Using the above definition of righteousness, ask your class: What are some specific ways we can demonstrate this righteousness?

4. In spite of Israel's deliberate sin against God and their rejection of Him as their rightful King, what did He say He was to them? (Isaiah 43:3, 14) What did Israel fail to do? Isaiah 43:22

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God said that He was their Savior and Redeemer. Israel failed to call upon God.

Ask your students to give examples of how that failure is repeated today. Bring out that when the message of salvation has been proclaimed, people often seem to ignore and refuse to accept Christ as their Redeemer and Friend.

5. The people of Israel were witnesses to the fact that there was no God beside the God of Heaven (Isaiah 44:6). How did the prophet reveal the utter foolishness of pagan idolatry, of which Israel was a part? Isaiah 44:9-20

In a powerful exposé of idolatry, the graven image (carved idol) is called "vanity" (nothing). The "delectable things" refers to the adornment of idols with gold, silver, and precious stones. The prophet announced that the idols themselves were their own witnesses. They testified against themselves that they could not see or know. Therefore, these inanimate objects were profitable for nothing. Isaiah berated the workmen for designing and constructing these idols. He exposed the failure of idolatry and criticized those who worshiped idols.

6. What did the prophet emphasize in verses 20-22 of chapter 45?

His emphasis was on salvation. The idols could not save them, plus they needed more than victory over the enemy countries. God is the Savior (verse 21) and He offers salvation to the whole world (verse 22).

Many have been brought to the Light of salvation from these verses, including the great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, when he was a youth seeking the Lord.

7. Isaiah predicted that Babylon would show no mercy to the Jews, and would be judged accordingly. She would boast of the fact that she was the queen and would continue forever. But in a moment, the judgment for her sins would catch up with her. To whom would the people of Babylon look for advice to prepare for her destruction? Isaiah 47:12-15

The people of Babylon would seek advice and help from astrologers, stargazers, and fortunetellers. However, like idols of wood and gold, they could not deliver. Why rely on the powerless and helpless? Bring out to your class that because of the pagan origin of astrology, it should be obvious that its concepts and practices have no place in the lives of Christians. It is imperative to come to personal faith in the God of Heaven, who has proven His power in creation and in history.

Where do people go for counsel today? Where should Christians go? The point should be made that we need to be diligent in seeking God's direction and counsel. Perhaps you could ask your class members

to share accounts of how they have obtained God's direction in the past.

8. The people of Judah and Israel had become comfortable and complacent in their state of obstinacy. Chapter 48 is a plea for them to consider their destiny in view of God's past dealings on their behalf. God had put them into the furnace to refine them and prepare them for their future work (Isaiah 48:10). What are the symptoms today of complacency in a person's spiritual walk?

It might be interesting to make a list of "symptoms" on a board. Your students' suggestions may include: sporadic attendance at church, little if any time in prayer, discontentment, increase of non-church or non-spiritual activities, a critical spirit. After you have made the list, ask your students what we can do to combat or correct complacency in our spiritual lives.

Some people today feel secure because they go to church, live in a Christian home, or reside in a Christian country. These things cannot give us a relationship with God. We have to trust Him personally with all of our hearts.

CONCLUSION

These chapters detail the futility of wickedness and idol worship, and also explain the peace God gives to those who follow Him. Today, like the people of Isaiah's day, we must make the choice whether or not to follow God and have His peace.

1. "How Big Is God" by Stuart Hamblen. Copyright 1959 by Hamblen Music Company.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Prophecy of the Redeemer

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 49:1 through 59:21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

BACKGROUND

This portion of the Book of Isaiah is filled with consolation and hope as the prophet unveils God's promise of redemption through the Messiah. Isaiah spoke more about the Messiah than any other Old Testament prophet, describing the Redeemer of Israel as both a suffering Servant and a sovereign Lord.

In chapters 49-59, the prophet presented a sequence of portraits of the Servant and His mission as the agent of salvation to the Jews and the Gentiles. He foretold that the Prince of Peace would come to pardon Israel's sins, redeem the people from their wickedness, and institute peace in their midst. As the suffering Servant of His people and a Light to the surrounding nations, He would humbly offer Himself as a sacrifice for many—calling those with "ears to hear" to hearken to God's voice and turn back to Him.

Israel had not been forgotten; the Messiah would bring the nation back from captivity and would restore His people to the Promised Land. The prophet also foretold that the Messiah would set up His own Millennial Kingdom where He would rule with righteousness, and would bring comfort, deliverance, and renewal to His people.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. How is God's purpose toward the Gentile nations described in Isaiah 49:6? What impact does this purpose have on us?

The Gentile nations were in a state of darkness before the coming of Christ. Christ would be a "light" to them, bringing salvation to "the end of the earth"—to the extremity, border, or outermost coast. Isaiah also stated that the Messiah's ministry would bring liberty to the captives (verses 8-13) and love and hope to the discouraged (Isaiah 49:14-50:3).

In response to the second question, bring out that, as Gentiles, this declaration means we too can be recipients of this wonderful "light" and enjoy the blessings that come from trusting in God's Servant and our Redeemer for salvation. As a follow-up to this

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question, you could engage your class in a discussion of the properties and benefits of physical light, and then compare this to the spiritual light brought by the Messiah.

2. In Isaiah 49:1-7 the prophet referred to opposition to the Messiah's ministry, and in Isaiah 50:5-6, we read specific details of His suffering. What characteristics of the Servant are revealed in these verses?

Your students may suggest such words as submissive, obedient, purposeful, or faithful. All of these are correct: the point is to develop a picture of the nature of the Messiah. Even when His people rejected Him, reviled Him, and scourged and spit on Him, He was an obedient, submissive Servant. He purposed to fulfill His mission (verse 7) and He knew God would uphold and vindicate Him (verses 8-9).

3. The prophet began chapter 51 with a reminder of God's past help (verses 1-3) and a reassurance regarding Israel's future (verses 4-8). Verses 9-10 record either the prophet's words or the prayer of the righteous remnant to God. What petition was made of Him in these verses? How did God respond (verses 12-16)?

The cry is for God to intervene for His people as He did when He defeated Pharaoh and redeemed His people from Egyptian bondage. God responded by reminding the nation of His greatness. He pointed out that men will die and be as the grass that will burn up, but the all-powerful God who created Heaven and earth would not fail them.

Ask your class what application these verses have for us. Bring out that when we forget the Lord's greatness and look at circumstances, we become fearful. We must remember that God is greater than any trials or challenges we might face. The God who created the universe has all power to act on our behalf.

4. Isaiah 52:7 says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" Explain this verse and note how it relates to the Redeemer.

The "good tidings" is the message of salvation, which comes through Jesus Christ. As your class offers thoughts or paraphrases of this verse, lead your group to focus on the joy that the message of salvation through Christ brings to the lost and dying. As a follow-up, ask your class for specific ways the "glad tidings" can be delivered to the unsaved.

5. Chapter 53 describes the substitutionary death of the Servant on behalf of Israel and all people. In verse 6, what is meant by the phrase, "the chastisement of our peace was upon Him"?

This phrase sums up the theme of chapter 53: that the innocent Servant died in the place of the guilty. Christ did not die to become a martyr, to become an

example of bravery, or solely to demonstrate His love. Rather, He died because we were guilty. The punishment for our sins was inflicted on Christ, and He paid the price for our peace and reconciliation with God.

Point out that the word "chastisement" here is not the chastisement of a loving father, such as the Lord administers to His people, but an act of retributive justice and wrath, one that takes vengeance on sin. Through this chastisement, divine wrath is appeased, justice is satisfied, and peace is made.

6. Through the years, Jerusalem has been battered and destroyed by foreign nations. What will happen to it in the Messiah's Millennial Kingdom? Isaiah 54:11-17

The Lord will restore the city and rebuild the New Jerusalem on a foundation of sapphires with towers of rubies and walls of precious stones (verses 11-12; see also Revelation 21:10-27). The Israelites will live in faith, gladly receiving the Lord's instruction (verse 13). Also, because they will turn to the Lord, no terror will befall them (verse 14). Those who attempt to harm them will be destroyed (verses 15-17).

7. In chapter 55, the millennial blessings promised to Israel expand beyond its borders to the Gentile nations. The invitation from God's Servant in this chapter is to come (verses 1-5) and to seek (verses 6-13), and concludes in the subsequent chapter, where the invitation is to worship (verses 1-8). What specific imagery is used in verses 1-2 of chapter 55, and what is the message being given?

The imagery is that of a person who has an opportunity to go to the marketplace to buy whatever he wants without money. The prophet's message is that the people should not spend their efforts for something that is not spiritually satisfying—it is pointless to invest time and energy in things that ultimately are not beneficial to the soul. Bring out that even today it is possible to get so caught up in the material and physical aspects of life that we miss its whole purpose.

8. Chapter 56 ends with an indictment of the spiritual watchmen of Israel. The prophet condemns them with biting sarcasm as "blind" and "ignorant," and refers to them as "dumb dogs" because they were negligent and consumed by self-indulgence. According to Isaiah 56: 12, what false assumption was held by the watchmen, as well as the people in general? What warning does this give for our day?

The spiritual watchmen and the people themselves falsely assumed that all things would continue as they were, and were unheeding of the prophetical warnings given them. In our day, too, some fail to consider the coming judgment of God, and neglect His offer of salvation. Instead, they continue on in their daily lives, assuming that the next day will be just as the one before. The fact is, no one can be sure of tomorrow. Every person should be ready to meet God today.

9. Chapter 57 continued the prophet's lament over the idolatry of the people, which he described as spiritual adultery and prostitution. The people had adopted aspects of the pagan cultures around them, and were practicing sorcery, magic, and sexual abominations. They also had made alliances with pagan nations, and trusted them for protection instead of looking to God. According to verse 13, what would be the outcome of this misplaced trust?

When the storms came, their idols would be blown away like chaff. They were "vanity," which means "nothingness." They were incapable of offering deliverance of any kind.

Class discussion could focus on the fact that idols are anything that steals the devotion that belongs to God. Ask what things can become idols in our day. Suggestions may include money, prestige, friends, education, position, etc. In the time of trouble, these will not offer any lasting protection or deliverance. However, if we make the Lord our hope and our refuge, we have nothing to fear.

10. After condemning the wicked idolaters, encouragement was offered to the godly remnant. In Isaiah 57:15, who did the "high and lofty One" promise to revive? What great lesson of the spiritual life does this reveal?

Those who approach the Lord in contrition and humility will enjoy His blessing. The lesson is that revival comes only to those who are humble and broken before God. It is poured out upon those who set aside anything that takes precedence over God, and find a renewed and total dependence upon the Lord Himself.

11. In chapter 58, the prophet rebuked those who practiced false or hypocritical worship and pointed out the blessings of true worship. In our Christian walk, we must take care that our worship of God at church does not become a formality or a mechanical exercise. What are some ways we can keep our worship authentic and fresh?

Allow your class to offer specific suggestions. These could include: making sure there is nothing hindering the connection between ourselves and God, purposefully shutting out distractions, coming with a sincere heart not just to be seen, spending time in prayer before and after a worship service, asking for God's help to stay focused, etc. The point should be made that true worship is a matter of the heart, so we must make sure that our hearts are prepared for worship.

CONCLUSION

God's judgment of Israel foreshadows what will occur on the final Day of the Lord when all the nations will be judged. Then "the Redeemer shall come to Zion" (Isaiah 59:20), and His glorious kingdom will be established. God's "chosen" people will also be God's "cleansed" people, and the glory of their Messiah and Lord will radiate from Mount Zion.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Messianic Kingdom

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 60:1 through 66:24

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." (Isaiah 60:19)

BACKGROUND

The final chapters of Isaiah are filled with consolation and hope as Isaiah unfolds God's promise of future blessings through His Messiah. There are many beautiful descriptions of a new creation in which God will rule as King, judging the wicked and establishing eternal peace.

Our text proclaims the prophecy of the glory of Jerusalem in the last days. It begins by saying that the Messiah will come to Jerusalem. This light that shined is not just for Jerusalem alone but for all mankind. God will send the Messiah, as a Servant, who would die to take away sins. Later, God will set up His own kingdom as the faithful Prince of Peace who rules with righteousness. He will then come as sovereign Lord.

Isaiah proclaimed that God promises comfort, deliverance, and restoration in His future kingdom. The Messiah will rule over those who have faithfully followed Him. What a bright future for those who are faithful!

These last seven chapters are like windows that allow a glimpse into a future time. The Hebrew writers often did not cover events in a chronological manner. Many people today are used to thinking sequentially, so it is important to realize that prophecies that are together in Scripture may cover different time periods. Some of the events in Isaiah happen at Christ's first coming to earth as Redeemer; others pertain to Israel returning to its homeland to become a nation (1948); some of the events occur during the Millennial Reign; and some deal with the New Heaven and New Earth. We understand the order of these events by looking at the whole of God's Word.

Isaiah predicted many events right down to the finest detail. He prophesied that Jerusalem would fall more than 100 years before it happened (586 B.C.), and that the Temple would be rebuilt about 200 years before it occurred. In more recent times Israel has, as promised, become a nation again after 2000 years. This very small country (slightly smaller than the state of New Jersey) is featured in the daily news of the

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world. Israel has received billions of dollars in aid and assets from all over the world as prophesied throughout today's text. Surrounded by enemies, Israel has one of the most-feared military forces in the world. This tiny country is blossoming and has become an object of international attention to the superpowers of the earth.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Consider for a moment a time when you have had to cope with a circumstance that left you feeling like you were in total darkness. Perhaps you could see no way out. Why is it appropriate to portray God in terms of light?

Discuss the feeling and consequences of being in darkness. Darkness absorbs color and becomes only confusing shades of grey, then black. You might bring up how a path can be seen clearly when there is light, but when the sun goes down and dusk sets in, the shadows cause the path to disappear. That is why it is so dangerous to hike in the mountains when it gets late in the day. When we cannot see our way, unease or even panic can set in. When this happens in the spiritual realm, we may feel panic and helplessness for a time, but peace comes when we remember that Jesus is the Light. As we turn to Him, He will lead us in a clear path, and the confusion and fear will go away. The path may lead through the valley of the shadow, but His Light within will comfort us.

As a follow-up question, you could ask: In what way could you serve as a light to the darkened world around you? Bring out that we can be a reflection of Jesus. When we live to honor Him, our lives will be a testimony of truth. If we reach out in love to those who are in spiritual darkness, they will often be attracted to the Light we reflect. You may discuss with your class practical ways to do this.

2. According to Isaiah's prophecy, what are some of the things in store for those who remain faithful?

Some day, God will set up His kingdom upon this earth, and we will reign with Christ. Those who persecuted or despised us will then serve us. We will spend all eternity with the One who loves us so much. It truly will be worth it all when we see Jesus! You may take some time to discuss with your class more of the wonderful glories of Heaven that await those who are faithful.

3. God has given us many beautiful promises (Isaiah 61:1-3). There are those who have nothing but ashes to show for their lives. Some suffer from depression or a "heavy spirit." Some are broken-hearted. What are some of the promises God offers these people? How can you apply these promises to your own life?

God has promised to bind up the brokenhearted, to give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

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These promises are for us today. As we seek the Lord, He will be faithful to His Word. When a soul is brokenhearted because of sin, the Lord offers salvation and healing. The life that is in ashes will find restoration and beauty. Those that feel heavy-hearted may use this very Scripture to seek the Lord and claim His promise. As we look in faith to God, His Light will shine more and more. There will be a deep peace, and a spring of joy will begin to well up. Any time that seems dark or dry, we can go back and reclaim the promise.

4. Isaiah predicted that a change of name would reflect a change of status for Israel (Isaiah 62:4). What name changes did God pronounce for His people? Why are they significant?

God promised to change Israel's name from Forsaken and Desolate to Hephzibah*, meaning, "my delight is in her," and* Beulah*, which means, "to be married." The names were significant because God loved her as a bridegroom loves his bride.*

Discuss with your class that a name can help shape a person's character and therefore his future. We may give our children a name to live up to. On the other hand, our actions may influence how people perceive a name. We may tell our children not to bring dishonor to the family name.

When we are saved, we are changed from the inside out. Our character is changed, our actions are changed, and we become brand-new people. We are no longer forsaken, but we are the Bride of Christ. We need to keep that name without reproach. When we are saved, our destiny is also changed. In Heaven we shall each receive a new name!

5. The prophet calls for the people to prepare the way (Isaiah 62:10). He entreats them to make a highway, gathering out the stones, and to lift up a standard. What is he calling the people to do? In what tangible way can you "prepare the way," and "lift up a standard" for the Lord?

God is calling His people to be witnesses to the world. To make a highway, they needed to smooth it out, getting rid of all the stones. We as witnesses need to let the Lord perfect us, so that we have no stumbling blocks that could hurt the cause of Christ. We are to lift up the banner for all to see. As we show love to those around us, we are preparing hearts to receive the message that Jesus saves!

With your class, make a list of hindrances that could be considered "stones" in our lives. Examples: an unforgiving spirit, lack of respect for things holy, bitterness, etc.

6. Isaiah described a figure approaching Jerusalem who was glorious in apparel, traveling in greatness of strength. The source of the red stain on His garments depicts the blood of His enemies after He had trodden

them down in the winepress (Isaiah 63:1-3). How does this prophecy of Christ have significance today? How can we be encouraged by this victory?

This prophecy depicts Christ's overcoming victory at Calvary. Because of Jesus' victory over Satan, we who are saved can be overcomers in every spiritual battle we face. Satan may attack us over and over, but each time we are promised victory. We are assured of this because of the single battle Christ waged and won at Calvary. You may discuss with your class ways to access this overcoming power in our lives.

7. God tells us that all our righteousness is like filthy rags (64:6). Does this mean there will be no good works in our lives? Explain. List some good works that God would have us do.

God wants us to be aware that there is nothing inherently good in mankind. Man is born in sin, and his motives are selfish, even when good works are performed. The only "good" that is pure is the goodness of God. When we are saved, His righteousness enters our lives. Then the good that we do is motivated by pure motives. It is then not our righteousness, but His righteousness.

God tells us that we must show the fruits of His righteousness in our Christian walk. Then we are to labor for the Kingdom of God. We are to look to the harvest fields that are ripe and ready for reaping. You may discuss with your class practical "work" they can do to please God.

8. God says that He does not care much for great feats or sacrifices that one may make for Him (Isaiah 66:1-2). He promises to look to the one who has a poor and contrite spirit. What does it mean to be poor and contrite in spirit?

To be poor in spirit is to be humble. A contrite spirit is a penitent spirit. God puts great value on humility, and He hates pride in any manner. A person must have a repentant or penitent heart to be saved. From that point on he must remain humble before the Lord. A humble spirit is closely akin to a submissive spirit, and God can use one who is fully submitted to him. A consecrated spirit will follow, as one continues to be submissive to God. A humble person who is seeking for more of God will find it natural to receive the experience of sanctification.

9. According to Isaiah 66:7-13, why does God know how to comfort us?

In this passage, God indicated His purpose to restore Israel and make Jerusalem the center of the world's spiritual sustenance. This will take place during the Millennial Reign. Just as the birth process is unstoppable, so God will fulfill His promises. As a mother feeds her baby and cares for it, so God will satisfy those who come to Him. Discuss with your class that although the prophecies of this passage

have not yet been completely fulfilled, God is our Father and has a strong parental love for us. He will nurture us as a mother does a child. When Jesus came to earth, He experienced the difficult things that we go through, and therefore has an understanding love.

Ask your class how we should react to those around us who are hurting. Bring out that we should be quick to identify someone who is suffering, and be ready to give hope to the troubled heart. We may need to help with a physical need for someone in want. Or we may have opportunity to give emotional comfort and empathy to one who is suffering grief or despair.

CONCLUSION

Isaiah concluded his prophecy in these final chapters. His message was one of denunciation of sin, and hope for people who seek the Lord. How relevant His message is today!