

God's Plan For His People

Charles Bellenger

BAPTIST PUBLISHING HOUSE OF ZAMBIA
P. O. BOX 1995
LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

3. Why should a person be baptized?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday Luke 1:26-35
Tuesday Luke 1:46-55
Wednesday Luke 2:1-7
Thursday Luke 2:8-20
Friday Matthew 2:1-12
Saturday John 1:-12
Sunday John 1:15-28

God's Plan For His People

Charles Bellenger

baptized. John baptized those who repented or asked for forgiveness of their sins.

What did John tell the Jewish religious leaders? (Verses 7-10) The religious leaders made fun of John's baptism. They wanted to be baptized without repenting of their sinful lives. John told them they must show by their lives that they had repented.

The religious leaders thought they were righteous because they were descendants of Abraham. But they were not like Abraham. Our parents can never make us right with God. We must repent and trust in Jesus for ourselves. This is the only way we are made right with God.

JOHN TELLS ABOUT JESUS

What did John say about Jesus? (Verses 11-12) John's baptism was in water. This baptism could not change people or take away their sins. It was a sign that a change had come in their hearts. Jesus would come and baptize people with the Holy Spirit. This would bring about a change on the inside. This is the only way that people could really be changed.

Jesus would ask people to believe in him. He would gather people to him as a farmer gathers his crops. Those who believe in him would be as good grain. Those who did not believe in him would be cast away and be punished.

John was God's herald. He prepared the way for people to accept Jesus and receive the kingdom of God. You, too, can be God's herald.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What did John preach?
2. Did John try to please the people?

GOD'S PLAN FOR HIS PEOPLE

by Dr. Charles Bellenger
First Published in Zambia
October 1, 1973 by

The Baptist Publishing House of
the Baptist Mission of Zambia
P. O. Box 1995
LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

Copyright 2005,
International Publications Services
All Rights Reserved
This Manuscript and Computer File are under copyright by
International Publications Services
P.O. Box 1759
Edenvale 1610
Republic of South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Chapter		Page
1	WHY ISRAEL DIVIDED	1
2	THE LORD GOD OR BAAL	4
3	GOD'S JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL	8
4	REFORMS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE	12
5	GOD'S JUDGMENT OF JUDAH	16
6	THE FAITH OF GOD'S REMNANT	21
7	THE PROMISE OF RETURN	25
8	GOD'S REMNANT REBUILDS	28
9	GOD'S LAW REAFFIRMED	33
10	THE PROMISE OF THE MESSIAH	37
11	BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS	41
12	GOD WITH US	45
13	GOD'S HERALD	49

region about the Jordan, 6 And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit that befits repentance, 9 and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

John was a man who spent most of his time outside. He wore plain clothes, and ate food that he found. He led a very simple life.

Verses 2 and 3 tell us what John preached. John asked the people to repent. To repent means to turn from sin, and stop listening to the devil. It means to start following God and listen to him.

John said the Kingdom of God is about to begin on earth. This would happen when the people repented, and let the Lord live in their hearts. John said the Old Testament told of one who would announce Jesus' coming. He claimed to be this person. (Read Isaiah 40:3)

How did the people answer John? (Verses 5 & 6). People from Judea and other places came to hear John. They were eager to hear from God. They listened to John, and they believed his message. Many asked to be

INTRODUCTION

In the thirteen chapters for this quarter we will be discovering God's redemptive purpose and how he worked through the Hebrew people to achieve it. As Christians we should learn all we can about the redemptive plan of God. Then we should discover how we can become involved, personally, in achieving God's purpose today.

The scripture references used for these studies will be taken mainly from the Old Testament.

The aim of these lessons is to help you to understand how God works through people or a nation to accomplish his divine purpose. Also it is hopeful that you come to realize how God has a place for you in accomplishing his purpose. Why not make yourself available to God? Read John 17:18.

CHAPTER 13

GOD'S HERALD

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Malachi 3:1-4; Matthew 3:1-12; 11:7-10

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 3:1-12

MEMORY VERSE: *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."*

Matthew 3:3

A herald is one who comes to announce what is to follow. John the Baptist was God's herald. John the Baptist was a preacher. He came before Jesus and announced that Jesus was coming to preach.

In our last lesson we studied about the birth of Jesus. Jesus showed us God. He did God's work. John the Baptist did God's work. We, too, can do God's work. We can be heralds for God, like John the Baptist was.

Let's read about John and what he preached as God's herald.

Matthew 3:1-12

¹ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." ⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the

Do you like to receive gifts? God offers you the greatest gift that you can ever receive. God offers you Himself through his Son, Jesus Christ. God will be in your heart when you accept Jesus as ruler of your life.

Do you like to give gifts? You can give someone the greatest gift in the world. You can show another person how he can have God in his life when he accepts Jesus as ruler of his heart.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How did the prophet Isaiah say the Messiah would be born?
2. Why was Joseph willing to have Mary as his wife?
3. Why did God send Jesus into the world?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday Isaiah 53:1-12
Tuesday Isaiah 54:1-10
Wednesday Isaiah 55:1-13
Thursday Isaiah 58:1-14
Friday Isaiah 61:1-11
Saturday Isaiah 64:1-12
Sunday Matthew 1:18-25

CHAPTER 1

WHY ISRAEL DIVIDED

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: I Kings 11:28 - 16

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: I Kings 12:12-20; 26-28

MEMORY VERSE: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

Proverbs 14:34

Jeroboam was a young man when Solomon was king. Solomon recognized that Jeroboam was a leader. He put Jeroboam over many labourers from the tribe of Joseph.

God has a plan for Jeroboam and he sent the prophet, Ahijah, to tell Jeroboam his plan. When the prophet found Jeroboam, he took off his coat and tore it into twelve pieces. The prophet told Jeroboam to pick up ten pieces. God had said Jeroboam was to become king over the ten tribes. Solomon heard of this plan, and he did not like it. He tried to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam had to run away to Egypt to save his life.

A NEW KING

Solomon's rich and politically successful reign ended. Solomon died, and his son, Rehoboam, expected to become king. The people traveled to the city of Shechem to crown a new king. Jeroboam came back from Egypt.

The people had become very restless and displeased during the reign of Solomon. The people had the right to be displeased. Solomon had taxed the people heavily to support his rich kingdom. The people came to Jeroboam and said, "Let's talk to Rehoboam and ask him to take away some of the high taxes."

Rehoboam listened to what the people asked. He told the people to come back in three days, and he would give them his answer. Rehoboam went to the old men and asked them what he must tell the people. The old men advised him to do as the people asked, and to give them a favourable answer.

Rehoboam then went to the young men, the ones who were his own age. He asked the young men what he must tell the people. They advised him to speak hard words to them, telling them that he would be harder on them than his father.

The answer that Rehoboam gave to the people was a turning point in the history of the Hebrew nation.

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED

When the people heard Rehoboam tell them that their taxes would be higher, they became very angry. They said, "Let us go to our homes. We will go our way and Rehoboam can go his way." The ten tribes of Israel made Jeroboam their king. The two remaining tribes made Rehoboam their king, and took the name of Judah for their kingdom.

Rehoboam wanted to bring the ten tribes of Israel back. He sent Adoram to the people. Adoram had worked for David and Solomon. The people rejected Adoram and killed him. Rehoboam then sent an army to fight against Israel. He sent the army to bring Israel back.

But God sent a prophet to Rehoboam. The prophet said, "God has said, 'Do not fight against your brothers. Go home. This break in the kingdom is of God' ". The kingdom became divided into the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah.

The angel told Joseph not to be afraid to marry Mary. He said Mary would have a child because of the Holy Spirit.

Read again Matthew 1:21, which is our memory verse. This verse is the heart of the gospel. Joseph was told by the angel to call Mary's baby Jesus. The name Jesus means, "Salvation is from the Lord." Anyone who believes and trusts Jesus as Saviour will be saved. (John 3:16)

GOD'S PROMISE FULFILLED

Verses 22 and 23 of Matthew chapter 1 tell us that the coming of Jesus fulfilled prophecy. God told the prophet Isaiah to tell the people about the coming of Jesus. Read Isaiah 7:14. God fulfilled his promise by sending the Saviour into the world.

Another name given to God's Son is Emmanuel, which means "God with us." God came to be with us as a human in the form of Jesus Christ. If we want to know more about God, we must learn more about Jesus. Jesus shows God to us.

JESUS IS BORN

Joseph believed the words of the angel, and was not ashamed to marry Mary. He remembered God's promises through the prophet Isaiah. In the time of Mary and Joseph, it was the custom for the father to name the children. When Jesus was born, Joseph did as the angel commanded, and named the child Jesus.

Most everyone thinks about the birth of Jesus at Christmas time. Christmas should not be the only time we think of Jesus' birth. Jesus came to forgive those who have sin in their lives. Anytime we ask God to forgive our sins we should think about the birth of Jesus. We should thank God for his great gift of Jesus to all the world.

resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

Almost six months ago our lesson was about Abraham. God promised to bless Abraham. Later we studied about David, and that God told David that his kingdom would last forever. God was saying that Jesus would come from the tribe of David. We can trace Jesus' human family back to Adam, the first man. Read Luke 3:38. Jesus' diary goes all the way to God. Read John 1:1, 14.

In the scripture in Matthew chapter 1, we find that Mary and Joseph were betrothed, which is like an engagement. It was during this time, before the two were married, that Mary became pregnant. Upon learning her condition, Joseph became upset. A good Jewish woman was always faithful to the man she was engaged to marry.

A divorce was needed to end an engagement, but Joseph did not want to hurt Mary. He did not want a public divorce. If Mary was guilty of adultery, she would be stoned to death, according to Jewish law.

God settled this problem for Joseph, for we read in Matthew 1:20 that he sent an angel to speak to Joseph, and tell him the truth.

JEROBOAM'S SIN

Earlier we learned how God had told Jeroboam that he would become king over ten tribes. God's words had become true. Jeroboam failed to trust God. He became afraid. He was afraid that his people would return to Rehoboam and his kingdom. This fear, or failure to trust God, caused Jeroboam to sin. In I Kings 12:28 we read that Jeroboam made two golden calves for the people to worship. Jeroboam's failure to trust God led him to sin.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why was the kingdom split?
2. Why did Jeroboam sin? What was his sin?
3. Why should we have faith in God? (Read Hebrews 11:6)

TO READ EACH DAY:

Monday I John 5:1-11
Tuesday I John 5:12-21
Wednesday Jeremiah 17:1-8
Thursday Jeremiah 31:27-37
Friday Jeremiah 33:1-26
Saturday Lamentations 3:22-41
Sunday Ezekiel 11:13-21

THE LORD GOD OR BAAL

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: I Kings 17-18

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: I Kings 18: 20-40

MEMORY VERSE: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God
is one Lord; and you shall love
the Lord your God with all your
heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your might."

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

In our lesson for this week we study about Elijah, the prophet, and King Ahab. They lived in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Ahab married Jezebel, a woman from another country. She worshipped a god named Baal. When she came to Israel, she brought many Baal priests with her. Jezebel led Ahab to worship Baal. She had many of God's priests killed. Soon the people in Israel began to worship Baal.

NO RAIN

One day Elijah, the prophet, met Ahab. Elijah said, "God lives. Because God lives, you will see no rain or dew. You will see no rain until I say so."

God then led Elijah away into another part of the country. He lived by a small river. The birds brought him food. No rain fell. Soon the little river had no water.

God then sent Elijah to another country. He told Elijah that a widow would feed him. Elijah did as God commanded him. When he came to the city, he saw the widow. He said to her,

GOD WITH US

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Matthew 1

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 1:1, 18-25

MEMORY VERSE: "She will bear a son, and you
shall call his name Jesus, for
he will save his people from
their sins."

Matthew 1:21

Two weeks ago our lesson was from the book of Isaiah. We learned that God promised to send the Messiah. When God made David king of Israel, God promised him that his kingdom would last forever. God fulfilled his promise by sending his Son, Jesus Christ. The mother of Jesus, the virgin Mary, was a direct descendant of King David.

GOD CAME THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

We have been studying in the Old Testament about how God promised to send the Messiah. Now we begin a study in the New Testament. This lesson is about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. We find that the coming of Jesus happened just as Isaiah said it would.

Matthew 1:1, 18-25

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; 19 and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame,

person must go back to his own home town or village. So Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, their home town. Jesus, the Messiah, was coming to the world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Read the memory verse again.

1. Are you happy?
2. Are you obeying God's law?
3. Are you still looking for the Messiah?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday Isaiah 41:10-20
Tuesday Isaiah 42:5-16
Wednesday Isaiah 43:1-13
Thursday Isaiah 44:1-8
Friday Isaiah 45:1-13
Saturday Isaiah 51:1-8
Sunday Isaiah 52:1-15

"Give me some bread. Give me some water." The widow said, "I have only enough for me and my son. When we eat this we will die."

Elijah said, "Feed me first. Then feed yourself and your son. You will have flour and oil until God sends rain again."

The widow did as Elijah said. The widow and her son had bread as long as Elijah stayed with them.

BACK TO ISRAEL

Three years passed with no rain. Then God told Elijah to go back again to Israel, and that he should tell Ahab that God will send rain.

The horses and mules that belonged to Ahab needed grass and water. Ahab and the prophet, Obidah, began to look for water. Ahab was also looking for Elijah. Now Elijah saw Obidah and sent word for Ahab to come meet him.

Ahab came to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw Elijah he said, "Are you the man who troubles Israel?"

Elijah answered, "No. You are the man. You are following Baal, and not God. Bring the people of Israel and the priests of Baal to the mountain."

IS BAAL GOD?

Ahab and the people of Israel came to the mountain. The priests of Baal also came to the mountain.

Elijah stood up and said, "How long will you limp between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. If Baal is God, follow him."

Then Elijah told the priests of Baal, "Build an altar. Kill a bull. Put the bull on the altar. Then pray to your god Baal. If your god lights the fire on the altar, he is God.

The priests of Baal did as Elijah said. They built the altar. They killed the bull and placed it on the altar. Then they began to pray. They asked their god Baal to light the fire. They prayed for many hours. There was no fire for the sacrifice. The priests prayed louder. They took knives and cut themselves. No fire came to consume the sacrifice.

THE LORD IS GOD

Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord. He put the bull on the altar. He poured water over the sacrifice and the altar. Elijah wanted the people to know who is God. Elijah prayed to the Lord. He asked the Lord to show the people who is the real God. As Elijah was praying to the Lord, the fire fell and consumed the sacrifice. The fire consumed the altar and even the water that had been poured over the sacrifice. The people saw the power of the Lord. They fell on their faces and said, "The Lord he is God; the Lord he is God."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are you trying to stand between two opinions?
2. Who is your God?
3. Are you willing to stand alone to serve God?

TO READ EACH DAY:

Monday Ezekiel 36:26-38
Tuesday Daniel 1:8-21
Wednesday Daniel 3:13-28
Thursday Daniel 6:10-23

Read these verses and see if you can find what makes a person happy. The word blessed means happy.

Psalms 119:1-8

1 Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! 2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, 3 who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! 4 Thou hast commanded thy precepts to be kept diligently. 5 O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping thy statutes! 6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all the commandments. 7 I will praise thee with an upright heart, when I learn thy righteous ordinances. 8 I will observe thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly!

Did you find out what makes a person happy? Verse 1 tells us that happy people keep the laws of God. Verse 2 tells us a happy person listens to God. A happy person seeks God through prayer and Bible reading. Verse 5 tells us that when a person understands how to be happy, he prays to God and says, "O that I could live as you direct me!" In verse 8 the writer says, "Do not forsake me forever; I will obey your laws."

THE WORLD IS READY FOR JESUS

Luke 2:1-3

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. 2 This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city.

Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman world. He sent out an order that all the people must be counted. Caesar Augustus wanted the names of the people so that they could be taxed. Every

of the countries. Egypt and Syria fought many wars, and after a time Egypt won Jerusalem from Syria.

Friday Hosea 6:1-11
Saturday Joel 2:21-32
Sunday John 2:1-11

Life for the Jews was not bad when they were under the control of Egypt. The Egyptian people treated the Jews very good. They had the Jews print their Bible in Greek. More people could not read about God and the promised Messiah. God was preparing the world for the coming of Jesus.

SYRIA

Life for the Jews was not easy under the Syrians. The leaders of Syria tried to make the Jews worship Greek gods. Syria used the Temple of God in their own worship of other gods. This was not God's way. The Jews became angry.

THE JEWS FOUGHT BACK

A Jewish priest and his sons led the Jews in battle against Syria. They were able to take Jerusalem from Syria. The sons of this priest ruled Jerusalem. The cleansed the Temple. They brought the worship of God back for the Jews.

THE ROMANS

The Romans began to take the countries around Jerusalem. Soon they took the country of the Jews as well. The life of the Jews was hard under the rule of the Romans. The Romans had mean rulers who made the Jews pay heavy taxes. But through all this God was preparing the world for the coming of Jesus.

THE LAW

Under the rule of the Romans, the Jews looked for the Messiah. They studied the Law of God, and learned much about it. In God's Law they found what makes a person happy.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL

GREATHER BIBLE LESSON: Hosea 4:1-5:14 ; Amos
7-8; 2 Kings 17

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: 2 Kings 17:9-18

MEMORY VERSE: *"Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants, the prophets."*

2 Kings 17:13

In the last lesson we learned how Elijah pointed the people of Israel back to God. God did a miracle for the people to see. God showed the people that he is God. He answered Elijah's prayer.

The people saw the miracle that God did. But the people did not change. They continued to worship strange gods. Some kings made changes. Most of the kings did not follow God. Israel did not turn back to God. Let us see what was Israel's sin.

2 Kings 17:9-12

9 And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city; 10 they set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree; 11 and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

GREATHER BIBLE LESSON: Psalm 1; 119:1-16; Luke
1:57 to 2:3

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: Psalm 119:1-8;
Luke 2:1-3

MEMORY VERSE: *"I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."*

Psalm 119:11

What happened to the Jews between the time of the Old Testament and the New Testament? Did they have an easy life while they waited for Jesus, the Messiah, to come?

Our Bible does not tell us what happened to the Jews in these years. We can look in history books to find out about this time of Jewish life.

We have already learned how God brought the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. They began to worship God. God promised again to send the Messiah.

THE GREEKS

First the Greeks took Jerusalem. They also took many other countries. The people who lived in these countries learned to speak the Greek language. God was preparing the people for the New Testament.

EGYPT

The countries under Greek rule divided. Syria controlled some of these countries, including Jerusalem. Egypt took control of some

of his own sin. They would not understand that it was their sin that caused Jesus to suffer. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to bring us peace. This peace is having God in our hearts.

The prophet Isaiah says in verse 6 that we are like sheep. We want to go our own way. We do not always follow our shepherd. We must suffer for our careless ways. But God sent the Messiah to be our Shepherd. He gave his life on the cross that we might find our way to the fold, or heaven. Jesus arose from the grave and is alive today. He has the power to forgive our sins and give us eternal life.

Are you lost in the wilderness today? Jesus offers you a way safely into heaven. He gave his life on the cross so that you can have eternal life. What must you do to have this eternal life? You must believe that Jesus is able to save you from your sins. Then you must ask him to forgive your sins and become the Lord of your life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Would the people recognize the promised Messiah?
2. Why would the Messiah suffer?
3. Have you sinned?
4. Do you know the Messiah, Jesus Christ?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday	Isaiah 2:1-20
Tuesday	Isaiah 6:1-13
Wednesday	Isaiah 11:1-10
Thursday	Isaiah 26:1-9
Friday	Isaiah 32:1-8
Saturday	Isaiah 35:1-10
Sunday	Isaiah 40:1-11

the Lord to anger, 12 and they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this."

The people of Israel thought they could hide their evil ways. They knew that God had told them not to do these things. But they said, "We will cover them over. God will never know we do them."

The people built high places of worship in all of the cities. Israel did not worship God in these high places. People who worshiped many gods had lived in the land of Israel. Israel began to worship the strange gods of these people.

The people of Israel made idols. They made idols of wood, metal or stone. Some of the idols looked like people. Some of the idols looked like animals. These idols were made by the people. The people set up these idols on every high hill. They set them under every green tree.

These things made God angry. God had told Israel not to worship idols. Israel did these things and God was angry with them.

ANOTHER CHANCE

God would not judge Israel yet. Perhaps the people would listen to God. They might change. Read what Israel did.

2 Kings 17:13-17

13 Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets." 14 But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe

in the Lord their God. 15 They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he had made with their fathers, and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and followed the nations that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do like them. 16 And they forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves molten images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshipped all the host of heaven and served Baal. 17 And they burned their sons and daughters as offerings and used divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.

God gave Israel another chance. He sent prophets and wise men to Israel. God said to Israel, "Turn from your evil ways. Keep my commandments. Keep my laws. Do as the prophets have told you."

But Israel would not listen to God. They would not follow him. They became hardened in their hearts. They acted as if God had not spoken to them. They acted as if God was not God. The people of Israel followed their neighbours. They worshipped idols and strange gods. The people worshipped fire. They made their children run through fire. This was part of their worship.

The people used magic. They used spells and charms. God said, "These things are evil. Do not use them." The people of Israel sold themselves to evil. Even today some people trust in charms rather than putting their trust in God.

GOD JUDGES

2 Kings 17:18

18 Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only.

Read in Isaiah 53:2 how Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would grow. Write the proper words in the blank spaces. "For he grew up before him like a _____, and like a _____ out of _____."

The Messiah would not be beautiful. A plant in the desert is not beautiful. Not many people look at them. The Messiah would not cause the people to look at him.

The New Testament tells us nothing about how Jesus, the Messiah, looked. We do not know the color of his hair. We do not know the color of his eyes, nor do we know how tall he was.

The scriptures tell us that people would hate Jesus. He would suffer sorrow and pain. He would suffer because of other people. They would not see him as the Messiah.

JESUS AS GOD SAW HIM

Isaiah 53:4-6

4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The prophet said that everyone has sinned. Because of our sin, we should suffer. But the Messiah would not sin, so he should not suffer. But Jesus, the Messiah, would take our sin as his own. He would suffer for us. Read Romans 3:23 and 6:23.

The people would not understand the Messiah. The people would think that he suffered because

God said to the people, "Listen! I have something new to say. This is about the Messiah, my servant. He will be a servant, but he will be lifted up. He will be great." (Verse 13)

The Messiah would not look the way people expected. He would suffer, and this suffering would make him look different. He would not look like other men. (Verse 14)

The Messiah would surprise kings and nations. Kings would stand in wonder as they looked on him. They would think, "This is the Messiah, but this is not the way we were told he would look." (Verse 15)

JESUS AS MEN SAW HIM

Isaiah 53:1-3

1 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Read verse 1 again. Now read these words from John 12:37-38.

37 Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him; 38 it was that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

In Romans 10:16, the apostle Paul writes about the same scripture.

God warned the people of Israel to change, but they would not listen. God gave the people many chances to change. They refused to obey God. God took Israel out of his sight. They became lost among other people of another country. Israel was no more a kingdom.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

You hear the preachers. You listen to the teachers. You read the Bible. You learn about what God tells us to do. Do you keep on doing the same wrong things? Do you try to cover up the wrong things you do? Do you believe God can help you to change? Have you asked Jesus to live in your heart? He will help you to change.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Was Israel wise in not obeying God? Why?
2. Did God treat Israel with justice?
3. Have you obeyed God?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday	John 4:1-15
Tuesday	John 4:19-30
Wednesday	John 4:31-42
Thursday	John 6:5-14
Friday	John 6:22-35
Saturday	John 6:53-68
Sunday	John 7:31-37

REFORMS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: 2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Kings 22-23; Jeremiah 25:1-7

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: 2 Kings 18:1-16; 2 Kings 23:21-25

MEMORY VERSE: *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."*

Isaiah 55:7

A reform is something done to correct a wrong. In our last lesson we saw how the people of Israel sold themselves to evil. They continued to disobey God. God took the people of Israel out of his sight.

Did the people of Judah learn from Israel? Two kings tried to change Judah. They tried to bring Judah to God. Read about what they did.

KING HEZEKIAH

2 Kings 18:1-6

1 In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 He was twenty five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. 3 And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. 4 He removed the high places, and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that

THE PROMISE OF THE MESSIAH

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Isaiah 9:2-7; 11:1-10; 52:13 to 53:12; 61:1-3; Micah 5:2-4

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:1-3; John 12:37-38

MEMORY VERSE: *"For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Isaiah 9:6

For hundreds of years God had promised the people that he would send the Messiah. The word messiah means deliverer. The prophets kept telling the people, "God will send the Messiah." As God spoke to the prophets, he told these things to the people. They were looking for the arrival of the Messiah.

THE MESSIAH, A SERVANT

Isaiah 52:13-15

13 Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. 14 As many were astonished at his appearance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men - 15 so shall be startled many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they shall understand.

him for his love. The people gave themselves again to God. Again they said that God's law was right and good. They reaffirmed God's law. Now God could go on with his plan for them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did the Jews profit from the reading of God's Law?
2. Do you need help to understand God's Word?
3. Is God's Word reaffirmed by you?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday Psalm 119:105-112
Tuesday Psalm 121
Wednesday Psalm 126
Thursday Psalm 138
Friday Psalm 145
Saturday Psalm 148
Sunday Isaiah 1:10-20

Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had burned incense to it; it was called Nehushtan. 5 He trusted in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. 6 For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses.

King Hezekiah trusted in God. He tried to live like God said. Hezekiah tore down the places of idol worship. He broke all the idols to pieces.

Once Moses made a snake of brass. (see Numbers 21:4-9). The people had kept this snake and had put it in the Temple. They had been worshipping the snake instead of God. Hezekiah broke the snake into pieces.

Hezekiah obeyed God. He tried to turn the people to God. He took away the things that the people worshipped. But the people did not change their ways.

FINDING GOD'S BOOK

King Hezekiah died. Other kings ruled Judah. The people kept on worshipping other gods. In the book of 2 Kings, chapter 22, we find the story of King Josiah, who followed God. He wanted to turn the people back to God.

Josiah began to have workmen repair the Temple. He had the workmen to clean the Temple. The other kings had let the Temple become dirty and damaged.

While the priest was working in the Temple, he found a book. He said, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." The priest sent the book to the king. When Josiah heard the words of God's book, he was very sad. He knew that Judah had not obeyed God's laws. God would judge Judah as he had judges Israel.

READING GOD'S BOOK

King Josiah called the people to the Temple. Josiah read to them from the book. He read God's laws to them. Josiah made a promise to God. He promised to obey the laws of God. All the people also made this promise.

Josiah cleaned the temple of everything used in the worship of Baal. He burned all the things used to worship other gods. Josiah tried to remove from the people's sight the worship of things. He tried to lead the people to worship God.

JOSIAH'S COMMAND

2 Kings 23:21-25

21 And the king commanded all the people, "Keep the passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of the covenant." 22 For no such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah; 23 but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah the passover was kept to the Lord in Jerusalem. 24 Moreover Josiah put away the mediums and the wizards and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkhiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. 25 Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

God commanded the people to keep the Passover every year. The Passover helped the people to remember about Egypt and Moses. This helped the people remember how God had led them out of Egypt and slavery.

wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 11 So the Levites stilled all the people saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Ezra and the Levites read from the book. They read clearly. Everyone could hear. Then they helped them to understand what they had read. Ezra and the Levites helped the people know the meaning of the words.

The people understood the words they heard Ezra read. They began to cry, for they realized that God had a plan for them; but they had not followed God's plan. They knew they had sinned against God and they were sad.

Ezra said, "Stop crying, this is a day of joy. Eat your food, and give to those who have no food. This is a holy day." The people did as Ezra said. They had great joy because they heard the Word of God. They now understood the meaning of the words.

THE MEETING WENT ON

The meeting continued many days. Each day Ezra and the Levites read from the Book of Law to the people. Then they explained the meaning of the words. In the beginning the people ate. They had much joy. But the more they understood of the law, the more they knew about their sins. They quit eating, put dirt on their heads and wore sackcloth. They did this to show their sorrow for their sins. They wanted to turn from their sins.

The people stood together and worshipped God. Ezra prayed, praising God and thanking

1 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel.

2 And Ezra, the priest, brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from an early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

There was a meeting of the people in the street because the Jews wanted very much to hear God's law. Everyone who could understand was there, men, women and children. They all came together to hear God's law. Ezra stood before the people. He read from the law of Moses. He read from early morning until noon. The people stayed and listened.

READING THE BOOK

Ezra stood above the people and read from the law of Moses. A place had been built for this purpose. Some men stood with him. They helped him. Read these verses and find out more about the meeting.

Nehemiah 8:8-12

8 And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. 9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet

The people had not kept the Passover for a long time. Many of the people forgot God. Josiah commanded the people, "Keep the Passover as God has told you to do."

Josiah turned to God with all his heart. He tried to obey the laws of God. He tried to lead the people to obey and worship God. But Josiah could not change the hearts of the people.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Do you think of God often? Do you obey the commands of God? Read the memory verse again.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Could the kings make the people worship God?
2. What happens to a person when they worship God?
3. Whom do you worship?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday	John 8:12-19
Tuesday	John 8:28-40
Wednesday	John 9:1-9
Thursday	John 9:24-38
Friday	John 10:24-38
Saturday	John 11:41-52
Sunday	John 12:20-32

GOD'S JUDGMENT OF JUDAH

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Jeremiah 7; 26; 52.

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: Jeremiah 26:1-16;
52:12-16

MEMORY VERSE: *"Now therefore amend your ways and your doing, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent of the evil which he has pronounced against you."*

Jeremiah 26:13.

In our last study we learned about two kings of Judah. These were good kings who tried to lead the people to follow God. The names of these kings were Hezekiah and Josiah. Josiah was the last good king of Judah. When he died Jehoiakim, his son, became king.

Jehoiakim was not a good king. He brought back idol worship. Jehoiakim brought back all the bad things that Josiah had tried to do away with.

God still loved the people of Judah. God kept sending prophets to Judah. He wanted the people to turn from idol worship. God wanted the people to worship him. Jeremiah was one of these prophets which God sent to Judah. God sent Jeremiah to the Temple. God said, "Speak to the people. Tell them everything I say."

JEREMIAH SPEAKS

Jeremiah 26:1-16

1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah,

GOD'S LAW REAFFIRMED

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Nehemiah 8 and 9

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: Nehemiah 8:1-2;
8:8-12

MEMORY VERSE: *"Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law and observe it with my whole heart."*

Psalms 119:34

To affirm means to stand for something. It also means to say something is right or good. If we reaffirm a thing, we say again that the thing is right or good. We are standing for something we have already said was right.

In this lesson the people of God said again they believed that God's law was right and good.

EZRA

Ezra was a priest who lived in Babylon. He studied and wrote about the laws of Moses.

The Jews in Jerusalem had finished building the temple and the walls. For a time they worshipped God. Then they stopped their worship. They began to leave off reading the law of God. Some of the men married women who did not believe in God. Even the church leaders did these things.

Ezra heard about these things. He went to the king, and asked, "May I take some other Jews and go to Jerusalem?" The king agreed, so Ezra and the other Jews went to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, Ezra brought the people together for a meeting. Read these verses and see what happened at the meeting.

2. What is the best way to overcome problems?
3. Does God have a special work for you?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday Psalm 104:24-35
 Tuesday Psalm 107:1-9
 Wednesday Psalm 107:21-31
 Thursday Psalm 111:1-10
 Friday Psalm 116:1-15
 Saturday Psalm 118:1-14
 Sunday Psalm 119:97-104

this word came from the Lord, 2 "Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah which come to worship in the house of the Lord all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. 3 It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the evil which I intend to do to them because of their evil doings. 4 You shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law which I have set before you, 5 and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not heeded, 6 then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.' " 7 The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. 8 And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die! 9 Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?'" And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. 10 When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the Lord. 11 Then the priests and the prophets said to the princes and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears." 12 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people, saying, "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. 13 Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent of the evil which he pronounced against you. 14 But as for me, behold,

I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. 15 Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears." 16 Then the princes and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."

As you read these verses, did you find out why God had Jeremiah to speak? What did you find in verse 3? Did you find that God was giving the people another chance? God did not want to punish the people. He wanted them to turn from their sin. If the people would turn to God, punishment would not have come to them. God would forgive them if they would turn to him.

Instead of worshipping God, the people were worshipping the Temple. They were not putting their trust in God. God said to the people, "If you will not listen, if you will not obey my laws, if you will not listen to my prophets, I will destroy this Temple. The Temple will be like Shiloh. Jerusalem will be destroyed, too."

Before the Temple had been built at Jerusalem, Shiloh was the place of worship. It was the place where the Ten Commandments were kept.

In Jeremiah's life, Shiloh was not even a city. The people had forgotten this place of worship. They had come to worship the Temple at Jerusalem. God told the people, "Jerusalem and the Temple can become like Shiloh. They can be forgotten."

house of Judah, 17 who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were laden in such a way that each with one hand laboured on the work and with the other held his weapon. 18 And each of the builders had his sword girded at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 19 And I said to the nobles and to the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. 20 In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

All of the workmen were prepared to fight the enemy. Each man worked with one hand and carried a sword in the other. One man with a trumpet stood by Nehemiah. The builders worked far apart on the wall. Nehemiah said, "If you hear the trumpet, come at once. God will fight for us."

FAITH WINS

Nehemiah 6:15-16

15 So the wall was finished on the twentieth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations round about us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

In Fifty-two days, the people built the wall. Nehemiah and the people trusted in God. They did not give up because of problems. They finished the work. Their enemies felt bad. They were afraid. They knew that God had helped the Jews.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can God use people who do not know him?

other things. No time was left to work on the temple.

Years went by. King Cyrus died. A new king was in Babylon. He found the words written by King Cyrus. These were the words telling the Jews to rebuild the temple. He sent building material and more Jews to Jerusalem. Soon the people finished the temple.

Still Jerusalem had no walls. The people had not finished their work on the walls.

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah lived in Babylon. He worked for the king. The king trusted Nehemiah. Nehemiah heard about the walls of Jerusalem. He knew the work was not finished. The king sent Nehemiah and other men to Jerusalem. They were to help build the walls.

Nehemiah faced many problems. There were enemies who made fun of the Jews. They said, "The walls are weak. Even a fox cannot walk on them." Nehemiah prayed and the people kept on working. The enemies got up an army. They planned to fight the Jews in Jerusalem. Nehemiah prayed. He gave the workmen swords and spears. They kept on working.

NEHEMIAH'S FAITH

Read these verses. Find out what else Nehemiah used to keep the enemy away.

Nehemiah 4:15-20

15 When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. 16 From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half of my servants held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail; and the leaders stood behind all the

THE PEOPLE

What did the people do? They did not want to hear Jeremiah's words. They told Jeremiah he would die for saying those things. The leaders said Jeremiah was talking against Jerusalem. They said he must die.

Jeremiah said, "I am speaking God's words. He wants you to turn from your evil ways. If you kill me, you will kill a man who has done no wrong."

Then some of the leaders said, "This man should not die. He is speaking God's words." The leaders remembered King Hezekiah. A prophet had said Jerusalem would be destroyed. The king turned to the Lord. Jerusalem was not destroyed. The leaders remembered this and let Jeremiah live.

THE JUDGMENT

Jeremiah 52:12-15

12 In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month - which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon - Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. 13 And he burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. 14 And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls round about Jerusalem. 15 And Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive some of the poorest of the people and the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the artisans.

The people of Judah refused to turn to God. They continued in their evil ways. Babylon was a very strong country. Babylon defeated Egypt

in battle. Then Babylon tried to take Judah. The people of Judah would not give up. The two countries fought for more than a year. Babylon defeated Judah. The people of Babylon burned the Temple, the king's house and other houses. The army of Babylon broke down the walls of Jerusalem. Most of the people of Judah were taken away to Babylon. The country of Judah was taken captive. God's judgment had come to Judah.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Was God fair to Judah?
2. Does God speak to nations today? How?
3. Does God still send his judgment upon those who refuse to repent of their sins?
4. Has God spoken to you?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday	John 13:31-38
Tuesday	John 14:1-14
Wednesday	John 14:15-24
Thursday	John 15:12-27
Friday	John 16:1-14
Saturday	John 17:1-15
Sunday	John 18:1-14

stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put in writing; 2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia; The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Who- ever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel he is the God who is in Jerusalem; 4 and let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem."

King Cyrus did take Babylon. Did he do things that the Jews feared? When the Jews were carried to Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah said, "One day you will return to Jerusalem." The day had now come for the return. God used King Cyrus to bring about the return.

King Cyrus did not worship God. But God stirred up King Cyrus' heart. The king did those things that God put into his heart. Read verse 2 and find out what God put in King Cyrus' heart.

Who was to build the temple? Read verse 3. King Cyrus said any Jew could return to Jerusalem. Any Jew could help to rebuild the temple.

Not all of the Jews returned to Jerusalem. Some liked Babylon and stayed there. The Jews who stayed in Babylon gave gold and silver to those who went to Jerusalem. King Cyrus sent gold and silver vessels back to Jerusalem. The people built an altar, and they began to worship. But they were slow in building the temple.

The people had to build homes. They had to plant crops. Their time was spent doing

GOD'S REMNANT REBUILDS

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Ezra 1; 6; Nehemiah 2:
11-20; 4; 6:15-16

SCRIPTURE IN TODAY'S LESSON: Ezra 1:1-4;
Nehemiah 6:15-16

MEMORY VERSE: *"So we built the wall; and all
the wall was joined together to
half its height. For the people
had a mind to work."*

Nehemiah 4:6

Has your house ever been destroyed by fire or flood? Do you know of a house destroyed by fire or flood? You know how hard it was to rebuild that house. The people of Judah faced many problems in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. This lesson will tell you about their problems.

The last lesson told us that while the people of Judah were in Babylon they had a fear. They feared a new king would take Babylon. They feared what this king might do with them. Many problems stood in the way for them to return to Jerusalem. God promised to make a way for them.

KING CYRUS

Cyrus, the king of Persia, was the king the people of Judah feared. These verses tell us what King Cyrus did to the Jews (another name for the people of Judah).

Ezra 1:1-4

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord

THE FAITH OF GOD'S REMNANT

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Lamentations 3:19-40;
Ezekiel 18

SCRIPTURE FOR TODAY'S LESSON: Lamentations 3:
19-33

MEMORY VERSE: *"The steadfast love of the Lord
never ceases, his mercies never
come to an end; they are new
every morning; great is thy faith-
fulness."*

Lamentations 3:22-23

A SAD PEOPLE

Many people of Judah lived in a strange land. They had turned away from worshipping God. They were now prisoners to a strange king.

This made the people of Judah very sad. They thought there was no way of escape. Some of the people said, "What is the use to try? God is angry at us. He has surely forgotten us. God does not hear us anymore."

A WAY OUT

Jeremiah, God's prophet, was sad too. Jeremiah also was of the tribe of Judah. He saw his people suffering. Jeremiah saw how sad the people were. But Jeremiah did not remain sad. Hope came to Jeremiah and to some of the people. These verses will tell us what happened.

Lamentations 3:19-33

*19 Remember my affliction and my bitterness,
the workwood and the gall: 20 My soul contin-
ually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.*

21 But this I call to mind, and therefore have hope; 22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. 24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." 25 The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. 26 It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. 27 It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. 28 Let him sit alone in the silence when he has laid it on him; 29 let him put his mouth in the dust - there may yet be hope; 30 let him give his cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults. 31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever, 32 but, though he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; 33 for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men.

OTHER LESSONS

Jeremiah thought about God. Then he prayed. As Jeremiah prayed, he learned other things that gave him hope. Look again at verses 25-27. Write the words that belong in the blanks. "The Lord is good to those who _____ for him, to the soul that _____ him." What does it mean to wait for God? If suffering comes to you, are you to sit with a sad face? No! A man waits for God. He knows better days are ahead.

In verse 27, "Yoke in his youth" means the teaching and training one gets as a youth. We can learn a lot from parents and teachers. We can also learn from pain and suffering. If we learn from these teachings, we can learn to have hope in God.

Jeremiah learned that God does not want people to suffer. Some people bring suffering on themselves. They do not wait on God. If suffering comes, God will not let it last forever.

Judah, "Behold your God!" 10 Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

God had forgiven the people of Judah for their sins. He promised to return them to their country. They were to see the glory of the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah said, "God has given you his message. Go. Tell the good news to all people. Tell them, 'Look, your God is with you. He loves you. He forgives. He lives forever!'"

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Has God forgotten our country? Has God forgotten you?
2. Was the way back to Jerusalem hard? Or did it seem hard?
3. How does God help his people today?

TO READ EACH DAY

Monday	I Corinthians	12:47-58
Tuesday	I Corinthians	16:1-14
Wednesday	2 Corinthians	5:11-21
Thursday	2 Corinthians	6:1-10
Friday	2 Corinthians	8:1-12
Saturday	2 Corinthians	11:16-30
Sunday	Psalms	103:1-11

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

God spoke kindly and gently to sad people. His people had been hurt and he wanted to show them his love. In verse 2 God tells the people their sin has been forgiven. He said, "You have paid for your sin, now you are to be free."

THE WORD OF OUR GOD

Isaiah 40:6-8

6 A voice says "Cry". And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people is grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

God told the prophet to cry out to the people. He wanted the people to hear. The prophet said that man is like grass. The things he does are like the flowers. These things can be great and beautiful. They can also be killed with a strong hot wind. Man and what he does can dry up. Even nations can die like this. But God's word lasts forever. No power can take away God's word.

JUDAH'S MISSION

Isaiah 40:9-11

9 Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of

Jeremiah wanted the people to have a new hope. He wrote down what he had learned. This gave hope to some of the people. Some of the people turned to God. They waited on the Lord.

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was also a prophet of God. He lived with some of the people of Israel. These people of Israel lived in a strange land.

God called Ezekiel to speak hope to the people who were prisoners. The people were saying, "We are paying for our fathers' sins. God is not fair to us." They were ready to give up. This is what Ezekiel told them.

Ezekiel 18:30-32

30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God; so turn, and live."

Ezekiel said, "No one is guilty for another's sins. Each person answers to God for what he does. You must answer for yourself." Ezekiel told the people that God does not want anyone to die because of his sins. God wants everyone to turn from his sins. God wants everyone to turn to him and live.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you do when sadness or suffering come to you?
2. Do you remember God's love for you?

THE PROMISE OF RETURN

GREATER BIBLE LESSON: Psalm 126; 137:1-6;
Isaiah 40; 44; 51:1-16
Jeremiah 31

SCRIPTURE FOR TODAY'S LESSON: Isaiah 40:1-11

MEMORY VERSE: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Isaiah 51:11

The people of Judah had lived in Babylon for fifty years. Some of these people were born in Babylon. They had lived as prisoners all their lives.

These people of Judah often asked, "Has God forgotten his people?" They knew they were in the strange land of Babylon because of their sins. They asked "How long will we pay for our sins? Will our children also suffer because of our sins?"

Something happened that caused the people of Judah more worry. The world of Babylon could fall. A king of another country was conquering nations around Babylon. What would happen to the people of Judah if this strong king took Babylon? The people of Judah worried.

GOD SPOKE

God gave his prophet some words for his people. Here are the words:

- 3. Do you thank him for blessings?
- 4. Do you find a new hope in God?
- 5. What are some things you have which you should be thankful for?

TO READ EACH DAY

- Monday John 18:28-40
- Tuesday John 19:1-11
- Wednesday John 19:13-22
- Thursday John 19:28-42
- Friday John 20:19-31
- Saturday John 21:9-17
- Sunday I Corinthians 15:20-28