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THREE RELUCTANT MESSENGERS (TEACHER)

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CHAPTER ONE

MEET THE MESSENGERS

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 9:6; 1 Kings 17:18; Isaiah 42:19; 49:1; Malachi 3:1; Ezekiel 3:16-21; Jeremiah 1:17-19; 6:27

Verses in Today's Lesson: As above

Memory Verse:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35a, 38:).

Lesson Aim: To teach every student that God has a purpose for his life.

Teaching Aids: Write the lesson title on the chalk board.

Background Study

Throughout this book we will study about three prophets, Hosea, Amos and Jonah. These were messengers of God.

A messenger, like a servant, speaks his master's mind. This was the business of the three messengers mentioned. The difference in the calling and the message of these prophets did not change their goal. The reason for their calling was to turn people to God.

Some prophets, like Hosea, gave their messages through experiences, while others, like Amos, just spoke the words. Jonah, however, portrays a typical Jewish picture. He was a Jew who was not willing to share the message of love with the non-Jewish Ninevites. He was self-centered until God taught him a lesson.

A prophet today must still warn people against some evil, direct them to the Creator and feed them with spiritual truths. Hosea, Amos and Jonah did this in different ways.

A prophet is one who sees, a seer. He sees with his sharp spiritual eyes what will happen to people.

Isaiah 49:1 teaches that a prophet was chosen before his birth. This shows that God had the plan for the person's life. Prophets did not become prophets on their own. It was God's hand at work in them. This caused people to honor them. Everything they said came true. They were also feared. They revealed sin and evil in people and in nations. See 1 Samuel 9:6 and 1 Kings 17:18.

Since prophets were called by God, they listened to him even in the face of danger, threats and discouragement. Read Isaiah 42:19. They spoke for someone greater than all others, and so they had to obey him.

Prophets were compared to fortified cities, iron pillars, bronze walls. Their word was final. Kings, princes, priests and other people obeyed and trembled in fear.

Education was never a qualification or a requirement before one could be a prophet. Social standing in the community was not important. The message was the important item in prophecy. God used anyone who was fit for his service.

Only God knows the real standards he used for selecting his prophets. Some even lost their good name in obedience to the call of the prophecy. Hosea married a prostitute, which was not acceptable in society, but God gave him strength.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Have you ever felt compelled to do something of service to God and to other people? What are some of the things you considered before you accepted the task?" Some possible answers are: money, your future, how people would react toward you, what your parents would think. Say: "If you considered all these things and yet you were not sure what to do, where would you turn?" Lead someone to say they should turn to God to find his will about it.

Say: "When the prophets of old reached times of doubt and confusion, they looked to God. They did not listen to the advice of men. We often hear many voices with different suggestions, but we should listen to God and obey him."

Ask: "What happened to Jonah when he listened to himself and his wishes? He changed God's plan for him to go to Nineveh. He started going in the other direction, and God let him do it for some time. Then God gave Jonah an opportunity to change his mind."

"In Amos 7:10, Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, opposed Amos. It appears Amos doubted his ministry, but God gave him power to announce a harsher punishment to Amaziah and his family."

"The idea of marrying a temple prostitute did not sound good to Hosea, but he did it because God told him to do so."

"What God tells us may seem strange for some time, but if we obey we will find rest and assurance (Hosea 1:2)."

Examination

Ask: "What are some of the responsibilities of a prophet of old?" Allow the pupils to answer if they can. They should include: He or she spoke against the evils of the time (Amos 6:1). He spoke against immorality as stated in Amos 4:1. He warned people about the coming judgement. Have someone read Amos 6:3-6.

Ask: "Did God have the power to stop people from doing these evils?" (Yes) "Why didn't God use his power?" (God is not an oppressor, and so he sent someone to warn them before destruction came.)

Ask: "Why do you think God gave Amos the vision of the plumbline in Amos 7:8?" (He compared Israel to a wall which was crooked and had to be broken down.)

Ask: "According to Amos 7:17, could we say that God pays evil for evil?" (God punishes evil, but he always forgives when people repent and ask for his forgiveness.)

Say: "Amaziah was a priest who should have known God and followed him, but he refused. This is what led God to announce such a severe punishment on even his wife and children. Under the old covenant, this was acceptable, but under the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31) it would not be acceptable. This talks about individual responsibility for sins committed."

Application

Ask: "What are some ways Christians can be prophets like the prophets of old? How should they go about doing the task?"

Say: "Before one can prophesy on behalf of God, he must be in harmony with God morally. Prophets of old were always in communion with God. When they failed, their mission failed."

"A Christian is a prophet, because his duty according to Matthew 28:18-20 is to snatch people from the devil. He should denounce anything which erodes the morals of the people without fear."

Ask "What are some evils which prophets today can speak against?" (anything which is contrary to the law of God)

Ask: "How can one be sure he is guided by God instead of his emotional feelings?"

Say: "Before we speak against anything we should pray earnestly for power and assurance. Then we can know we are speaking for God."

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray for young people of today in your area. Pray that they will have the courage to stand for Christian beliefs.
2. Pray that they will live like Christians before problems come, so they will be ready to stand for truth.
3. Pray that love will control their lives.

CHAPTER TWO

HOSEA, A CALL TO FORGIVENESS

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Hosea 1-3

Verses in Today's Lesson: Hosea 1:4-10; 2:14-23; 3

Memory Verse:

"To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that God is always willing to forgive our sins when we repent and confess our sins to him.

Teaching Aids: A chalk board with the lesson title written on it.

Background Study

Hosea was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Because he was a native of Israel, he was able to speak as a daily observer of Israel's sins that were being committed against God and man.

Read 2 Kings 14:23 through 17:23. This will help you understand the problems Hosea faced. There we learn that the last thirty-five years in life of Israel had been a time of confusion and uprisings. Among the six rulers, one had reigned for six months, one for one month and another for two years. Although there appeared to be prosperity during much of this time, the nation lacked unity and morals. Idol worship had separated the people from God.

God used a personal tragedy in Hosea's life to lead him into a deeper understanding of forgiveness and love. Hosea had taken Gomer, a harlot, to be his wife. He loved her deeply, and soon they began a family. The first child born to them was a son whom God told Hosea to call Jezreel. (Hosea 1:4) This was the name of a city where much blood was shed and Israel was later defeated.

The second child, a daughter, was named Lo-ruhamah meaning "not pitied." (Hosea 1:6) God was showing that just as Gomer's love for Hosea was dying, so was Israel's love for God being given to the pagan god, Baal. (Hosea 2:13)

The third child, a son, was called Lo-ammi meaning "not my people." (Hosea 1:9) Perhaps at this time Hosea realized that Gomer had been faithful to him and returned to "playing the harlot." How heartbroken he was as he realized that Gomer did not love him any longer! Hosea was able to see in his own grief the sorrow God must be going through over Israel. Israel too had chosen to be unfaithful to God.

In Hosea 2:14-23, God shared with Hosea his plan to bring Israel back to him. Although Israel had been unfaithful, God had compassion on the nation. He freely offered forgiveness if they would repent of their sinful ways and become his people again.

In chapter three God told Hosea to go and buy Gomer back as his wife. Hosea obeyed and offered her his forgiveness and love. He offered her a plan of

restoring their marriage, but Gomer had to repent of her sin and accept Hosea's forgiveness. Only then could a true reunion take place between man and wife.

It is the same between God and man. God's love and forgiveness are offered freely to each of us. However, first we must be willing to repent of our sins before we can accept his forgiveness and love. It is only then that we can have a close fellowship with God.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Have you ever lost the love of a close friend? How did you feel?" Write answers on the chalk board. Some possible answers might be: hurt, rejected, lonely, angry and sad.

Say: "The message that Hosea delivered to Israel was revealed to him from God through a personal tragedy in his own life. His wife, Gomer, had left him to 'play the harlot.' In Hosea's sorrow he was able to understand how deeply God must grieve when his people turn away from him.

"In Hosea 2, God compared the sinful ways of Gomer to those of the people of Israel. The nation had turned to worshipping idols."

Ask: "What finally happened to Gomer after she left Hosea?" Have someone read Hosea 3:2 to see that she had been sold into slavery.

Ask: "What will happen to Israel if they don't repent?" Have someone read Hosea 2:13. Eventually Israel would be defeated by pagan nations and be forced into slavery.

Say: "God provided a plan to bring his people back to him." Have someone read Hosea 2:16-20 and tell what God's plan was. A possible answer would be: Israel would repent and turn away from pagan gods.

Say: "Hosea 3 tells us that God instructed Hosea to find Gomer and buy her back as his wife. He was to offer her his forgiveness and love just as God has offered to Israel."

Examination

Say: "It was God's plan that Hosea's message be harsh. God's people had allowed themselves to become blinded by sin. They had lost the ability to know right from wrong.

"Many people today are guilty of the same sins as Israel. They want all the pleasures this world has to offer without having to be accountable to God."

Discuss areas of life where people tend to be blinded by sin. Possible answers might be: the misuse of sex outside of marriage, social crimes against each other, hard feelings among Christians toward one another and placing more importance on wealth than one's relationship with God.

"When we sin, we become separated from God. Because God loves us so much, he has provided a plan to bring us back to him. He offers us his forgiveness and love when we repent of our sin. We must choose whether we want to come back into fellowship with God."

Application

Ask: "What are some ways that we as Christians can avoid becoming blinded by sin?" (daily reading and studying the Bible, attending church services every Sunday to learn more about God, fellowship with other Christians and spending time in prayer every day)

Ask: "When a husband or wife has been unfaithful to the other is divorce the only answer?" (No, we should be willing to forgive and love them if they repent.)

Ask: "Is there a sin that God cannot forgive?" Yes, our refusing to accept him.)

Close with a prayer thanking God for providing a plan through his son, Jesus, to bring us back to him when we sin.

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that your students will not be blinded by sin.
2. Pray that God will show them the sin in their lives every day so they can repent and accept his forgiveness.
3. Pray these same prayers for yourself.

CHAPTER THREE

HOSEA, A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Hosea 4:6-6

Verses in Today's Lesson: Hosea 6:1-6

Memory Verse:

"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that sin cannot be removed by force. Sin can be removed only by a change of heart.

Teaching Aids: Three sheets of paper and pencils

Background Study

Hosea found himself surrounded by a depraved nation. The very thing that former Israelite leaders had feared had happened. "Take heed lest you forgot the Lord your God...lest, when you have eaten and are full...then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God..." (Deuteronomy (8:11-14).

Through the years Israel had boasted of being God's chosen people and had enjoyed his many blessings. Unfortunately, they had felt little responsibility to maintain their part of the covenant. They had forsaken him and become a nation where idol worship prevailed. Why did the people of Israel turn away from God?

Let us look at three causes for their unfaithfulness.

The first cause was the people's unwillingness to accept and obey the laws that God had given them (Hosea 4:6). To know God's truths and ignore and set them aside invites God's judgement.

A second cause of unfaithfulness was a compromising of religious beliefs with neighboring nations. Although Israel had a wonderful religious heritage, they had gradually let idolatry seep into their religion and adapted pagan practices as their own (Hosea 2:5; 4:13-19).

Hosea spoke of the pride of Israel as a cause in leading them to turn from God (Hosea 5:5). They had become a proud and shameless nation - even in the midst of their evil ways (Hosea 4:18). The people had grown to love sin and the pleasures it offered them. They had let their corrupt ways blind and lure them away from God's leadership. We read in Hosea 4:8-9; 5:1 that even their priests were practicing cultic rituals.

A combination of these causes led Israel to become unfaithful in her covenant with God. Although it grieved God, Israel had to be punished for rejecting him. Let us look at the results of Israel's sin.

First, the people were characterized by corruption. Read Hosea 4:1-10.

Second, confusion began to reign as danger of conquering countries began to threaten them and panic set in. They turned to Assyria for help instead of letting their fear lead them back to God.

Third, in total desperation they decided to return to God (Hosea 6:1-3). God knew their hearts were not sincere. He compared their love with the morning dew (Hosea 6:4). This knowledge of Israel's actions saddened and angered God. His response to them through Hosea was harsh and straight forward (Hosea 6:6). Their burnt offerings were not acceptable as long as they chose to remain unfaithful to him. God desired their steadfast love and loyalty. He would not bless them as a nation until they truly repented of their sin and returned to him.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask a member to define the word, covenant. (A covenant is a written or unwritten agreement between two people.)

Ask: "What binds a covenant between two people?" (loyalty and love)

Ask: "If one individual breaks his part of the covenant, is the other person bound legally to uphold his part?" (no)

Ask: "In today's lesson who was the covenant between?" (God and Israel)

Say: "Let us look at some of the causes for Israel's unfaithfulness." Have a member read Hosea 4:6 and give the first cause. (refusing to follow and obey God's commandments.)

Say: "A second cause of unfaithfulness is found in Hosea 4:13-19." Ask a student to read these verses aloud and tell in his own words the second cause. (turning to other gods, compromising of religious beliefs and practices)

Say: "A third cause for rejecting God is found in Hosea 4:18 and 5:5." Ask a member to read these verses and respond. (love of sin, pride and poor leadership)

Say: "Let us examine the results of Israel's unfaithfulness to God."

Examination

Have the class members divide into three groups. Assign the first group Hosea 4:2-6. Ask them to find results of Israel's unfaithfulness and have one member from the group write them down. (degrading of character, corruption, ungodly leadership and God rejecting his people.)

Assign the second group Hosea 5:11:15. Again they are to look for results of unfaithfulness to God. (confusion, panic, unhappiness, turning to outside help for security instead of seeking God.)

Assign the third group Hosea 6:1-6. Ask them to find what finally drove the people of Israel to seek God. (depression) What was God's response to them? (He knew their repentance was not sincere, and therefore he did not bless them.)

Application

As members gather back into one group discuss their questions and answers.

Ask: "Do we struggle with these same causes of unfaithfulness like the people of Israel did?" Say: "Some questions to ask ourselves are:

1. Do we strive daily to keep God's commandments?
2. Does our pride keep us from becoming more Christ like?
3. Are we faithful daily to him or do we let outside interests become our gods?
4. Where do we place our security?"

Close by reading Hosea 6:6. God calls us to be faithful and loyal. He will not tolerate empty words and actions. He desires our love and commitment.

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that God will convict you of those areas in your life where you are unfaithful to him.
2. Pray that as you daily read the Bible you will become more Christ like.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOSEA, A CALL TO LOVE

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Hosea 6:7-11:11

Verses in Today's Lesson: Hosea 11:1-4

Memory Verse:

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that God desires our steadfast love.

Teaching Aids: Write the topic on a chalk board or large piece of paper.

Background Study

In today's lesson we look at the central theme of Hosea's message which is God's love and forgiveness. Hosea had learnt through his own heartaches with Gomer that God's love for his children is endless. He proved this over and over as he continually tried to woo Israel back to him.

Hosea described God's relationships with his people in three ways: first, that of husband and wife (Hosea 2:16); second, the relationship of father and son (Hosea 11:1); third, that of king and subjects (Hosea 13:10).

In lesson two we compared the first relationship of husband and wife and saw how Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea, as Israel was unfaithful to God. She had turned from the arms of her God to the arms of a foreign god, Baal (Hosea 2). God grieved over Israel's betrayal, and Hosea wept over Gomer. While in the midst of grief, God's love for the Israelites remained steadfast. Hosea too found he could not stop loving Gomer. How beautifully Hosea demonstrated this relationship!

We read in Hosea 6:7-11 that again God was reminding Israel of times past when they had forsaken him and rejected his love. In the midst of God's wrath, he was still capable of loving his wayward children (Hosea 11:8-9). This did not mean that God would not discipline his children when they disobeyed him. Hosea used the comparison of God's relationship to the Israelites as one of father and son (Hosea 11:1-4). Let us look closely at these verses.

We read that God called his children out of the bondage of Egypt and loved them as a father would love his son. He taught them how to walk with him. He held them in his arms when they stumbled and fell. He fed them spiritually as well as physically. However, the Israelites became rebellious, ungrateful children and walked away from their Father's teachings. Although the Israelites' behavior grieved God, he healed their wounds and wiped their tears - only to have his children sin again.

God's love is endless and beyond our understanding. As mere human beings we are not able to love and forgive on our own strength. Only as we let God's love flow through us to others can we begin to understand God's love for us.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "What does it mean when we say we love someone?"

Say: "In today's lesson Hosea compared God's relationship with Israel to that of a father and son."

Ask: "How does a parent care for his child? Does a parent stop loving his child when he disobeys and behaves badly?" (Allow time for discussion.)

Ask: "Is discipline a part of display love towards a rebellious child? Why?"

Examination

Say: "God's love is a gift to us and cannot be earned by good works. He gives it freely to all who will receive it. We are not capable of truly understanding God's love. Even before our birth God loved us and knew what was best for us. That was why he gave us the Ten Commandments as guidelines by which we live. In keeping his laws there would be peace and unity among his children. But, men were not able to live within these guidelines; so as further proof of God's love, he sent his son to earth to live among men.

"Jesus provided man with a perfect example of how our relationship was to be with God the Father. We read in Matthew 14:23 that Jesus set time aside daily to pray with the Father. It was during this time that Jesus received his strength to face the difficulties each new day held. As Jesus ministered through preaching, teaching and healing, he radiated God's love to man. It was God's love for us that took Jesus to the cross to die for our sins so we might have direct access to the Father (Romans 5:8). What greater display of love is there than God's love for us (John 3:16)? How it must grieve him when we reject his love and disobey his laws! Being a loving Father, he disciplines us and draws us back to him.

"As disobedient children we bring much pain and unhappiness upon ourselves. We cannot blame God for the sin we bring into our lives. In God's great love he allows us the freedom to choose to remain faithful to him. If we choose to live in sin, then we must answer to God one day."

Application

Ask: "Have you ever loved a child or individual who did not return your love? How did it make you feel? Our heavenly Father desires that we accept and return his love.

"What do you experience when you are forced to discipline someone you love? You might be hurt, angry and sad all at the same time. Each time we draw away from God he grieves deeply. He covets from us our faithfulness and love.

"Are we guilty of verbally expressing our love for God but in reality not loving him? God does not desire mere lip service (Hosea 6:6). Let us ask God to forgive us for not faithfully loving him."

Ask students to pray that God will teach them to love him as he loves us.

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that you will grow deeper in love with God daily.

2. Pray that God's love will flow through you to each student. 3. Pray that you will faithfully spend time each day with God in prayer and Bible study.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOSEA, A CALL TO REPENTANCE

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Hosea 12:1-14:10

Verses in Today's Lesson: Hosea 14:1-7

Memory Verse:

"The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that only through submission to the Lord by repentance can one be his faithful follower.

Teaching Aim: On the chalk board or large piece of paper, write the word "deceive."

Background Study

Israel had finally succeeded in rendering herself helpless before her enemies. No longer was she able to know right from wrong. She could not see herself accurately because of her involvement in pagan worship and of her corrupt dealings with her neighbors. Her relationships with neighboring countries were based upon deception. She boasted of her accumulated wealth and claimed she had committed no sin. As she had gained her wealth apart from God, she denied her sin against God. Israel had lost her identity as a people and had become as its former inhabitants, the Canaanites (Hosea 12:8).

Hosea reminded his people of their ancestor, Jacob, who had been guilty of deception and betrayal. He had stolen his brother's birthright and then deceived his father. Because of Jacob's self-will and stubbornness, he struggled with an angel of God until he became powerless. Only then did he humble himself and repent before the Lord. Hosea pointed out that Israel could not deceive God, any more than Jacob could without being rendered powerless.

Hosea pleaded with Israel to return to their God. He warned them that their security was not found in seeking false help from Assyria (Hosea 5:13), or in military power (8:14) or in the private worship of Baal (13:2). Security is found only in God. Hosea continued by stressing the importance of coming before God with confession on their lips. It is not enough to return to God, but they had to be ready to voice their repentance and their willingness to be faithful to him.

We are not told if Israel returned to the Lord. However, in Hosea 14:4, we find the tone of his message changing. From verses 4-8, God spoke through Hosea of his love for the Israelites. He told them he would heal their faithfulness, love them freely and be as the dew. The dew is a common biblical figure of speech signifying the refreshing life-giving power of the Lord. What a loving God! His love and forgiveness was a free gift to his people, if only they would repent and accept his lordship.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "What does the phrase 'to lead a life of deception' mean?" Allow time for discussion.

Ask: "Is it possible to deceive oneself concerning our sinful nature before God?" If the students answer yes, then ask them why we allow this to happen.

Ask: "Is it possible to deceive God?" (No)

Have the students turn in their Bibles to Hosea 12:2-6. After these verses are read aloud, lead in a discussion of Jacob's deception concerning the birthright (Genesis 25-28).

Ask: "Was Jacob successful in deceiving God?" (No) "Was he punished for his sin?" (Yes, he served as a slave for fourteen years as a result of someone else deceiving him.) See Hosea 12:12.

Ask: "Why did Hosea remind the Israelites of their ancestor Jacob?" (He wanted to make a comparison between Jacob's deception and that of the Israelites.)

Ask: "In what ways were Israel practicing deception?" (pagan worship, corrupt practices, gathering of wealth by means of deception)

Ask: "When was Jacob reunited with his God?" (when he wept and confessed his sin before God) Hosea 12:4

Have the students read Hosea 14:1-7 looking for the three ways God restores people to him. (healing their unfaithfulness, loves them freely and is as a dew to them.)

Examination

Say: "People today are no different than they were in Hosea's day. They try to find security in wealth, power and material objects. They deceive themselves and others into believing they are happy. Religion has become a ritual practiced on Sundays and forgotten during the week. They are blinded to sin by their self-will and ambition. All seems to go well until tragedy strikes and they are rendered powerless. Only then are they forced to look at the lives of deception they are living.

"God used his prophet, Hosea, to call his people to repentance. As a result of a tragedy in Hosea's own life, he came to see more clearly than any prophet before him, the depth of God's divine love for Israel. God had chosen the Israelites as his people, brought them into a good land and had given them his love and the riches of his storehouse. In spite of all of this, Israel had been ungrateful and had rejected God for Baal. Still God did not cease to love her. He called her back to himself to be redeemed.

"God's desire for his people today is the same as it was for Israel. He wants to be Lord of our lives. Daily he calls us to repentance in order that we might have true fellowship with him."

Application

Say: "This week as you study the Bible, ask God to show you areas in your life where you might be deceiving yourself. Where are you trying to find security?"

"Ask the Lord to bring to remembrance those sins you have not confessed before him.

"If you are not involved in a church, pray that God will show you a church where you can serve him. Ask him how you can use the gifts he has given to you."

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray for God's guidance in preparing to teach this lesson.
2. Pray daily for each student in your class.
3. Pray that you will be used by God to encourage your students to be faithful followers of the Lord.

CHAPTER SIX

AMOS, PROPHET OF DOOM

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Amos 1-2

Verses in Today's Lesson: Amos 1-2

Memory Verse:

"...Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they demand the more" (Luke 12:48b).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that God will hold each person responsible for his or her own sin.

Teaching Aids: Write the lesson title on the chalk board.

Background Study

This lesson is about a shepherd of Tekoa who became a prophet of God. The dates of the events are not given, but other historical events serve as dates. See Amos 2:1. The king of Judah then was Uzziah, and Israel was under Jeroboam. The earthquake is mentioned to help the reader know the date of the writing of the book.

In this study we will come across many symbolic words. When Zion is used, it will refer to Jerusalem. Edom is the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. They were the sons of Isaac. Fire appears to refer to judgement. Amos announced judgement first of the Gentile nations then the house of God, Israel.

In Amos 1-2, the prophet was against injustice done to people. Women and children (1:13) were harmless and defenseless. The sad thing was to see them being attacked, but God cared for the defenseless. He listened to them.

Chapter two describes the evils more clearly than chapter one. Moabites are accused of burning the bones of Edomite kings. This showed disrespect and utter destruction (2:1).

Judah was accused of rejecting the law of the Lord, not obeying God. According to the prophet, Judah was guilty of failure to listen to the cries of the needy (2:6). One sin led to another. The oppression of the poor led to sexual sins.

In 2:8, it was customary for the poor to pledge their only clothing if they were not able to pay a debt. The rich were supposed to return the garment in the evening for the poor to cover themselves. According to 2:12, Nazirites were set apart for God's purpose. They would keep themselves clean. They would not take a strong drink, touch a carcass or cut their hair. Israel had broken these vows. Prophets were sent by God himself, but they were stopped from speaking. This caused God to punish Israel. Amos warned Israel that their lives would be made harder and full of problems (2:13). God, through the prophets, vowed to destroy Israel. He declared that dependance on one's own strength would not help.

Why was Israel's punishment more severe than the rest of the tribes? Israel was God's chosen people. They had purposefully refused to follow God. They knew more

about God than the other nations. Israel's duty was to enlighten the others concerning God, but they failed. Therefore they deserved more severe punishment than the rest of the people.

In chapter 2:9-10, we hear a sound like the voice of a living father who has tried in vain to please a child. The Israelites were reminded of their helplessness and how a strong tribe was defeated by God so the Israelites could live happily. They had repaid this in disrespectful manner.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Two people have been entrusted with certain amounts of money, perhaps one \$ 50 and the other \$ 5. If both lose the money, which one will anger the owner most?" (the one who lost \$ 50)

Ask: "Why do you think this is so?" (It is because he was given a greater responsibility.)

Say: "The Israelites or the Jewish nation were God's chosen people. They were given greater responsibility than any of the other tribes. Moreover, they knew the principles of morality. They knew how to distinguish right from wrong because they knew the righteous God. They had better chances of living pleasant lives than their neighbors. However, they did not live according to the laws of God. They disobeyed and showed ungratefulness to God.

"Probably the Israelites were very happy when the other tribes' punishment was announced. But later when they heard their own punishment, they were very sad."

Examination

Say: "God is never happy when he has to punish people whom he loves. Many times people think God is unfair in his judgement. Instead, man is unfair in causing God to need to punish him. God punishes people to try to change their lives.

"Amos, like preachers of today, spoke the message God had given him. The sins of these tribes may seem worse than our own sins. This is a wrong idea, because God sees sin as sin. Man sees sin from a human point of view. This may distort the meaning of sin as God sees it."

Lead the students in a discussion of whether one sin is worse than another. Help them understand that all sin is disobeying God.

Ask: "Knowing that all sin is the same before God, should we feel free to sin knowingly and ask God to forgive us?" (No, we should realize how serious sin is. Then we should try not to sin.)

Say: "When God's people sin, they should know they hurt God terribly because they are very dear to him. This implies that heavy punishment will follow. Christians should be grateful to God by living as Christians. The greatest gift a child can give a father is obedience. Likewise, Christians should obey God."

Application

Say: "During the time of Amos' prophecy, many evils and injustices were revealed. As you look around you today, do you find any similarities to the

evils which Amos mentioned? How can immoral behavior be stamped out of your society?

"The people of God in the time of Amos had failed in their responsibility before God. This failure of God's people brought many problems. Therefore, the best way to stamp out evil in the society today is by Christians becoming who they are supposed to be wherever they go.

"Law and order cannot be established if Christians live like other people. Christians should speak out on all forms of injustice and immorality. They should abstain from taking bribes and from oppression of the poor and weak. Christians should create a society in which people respect one another. This will happen only when Christians respect one another. If Christians would oppose bribery, it would be wiped out in a short time. It takes a lot of courage for someone to say no to sinful desires. In order to see a change for good in people's behavior, there must be a change in the lives of Christians."

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray for countries where Christians have not been a good witness so they can learn that God expects them to live as believers.
2. Pray for the leaders of your country, that they will know God and lead people in love and unity.
3. Pray that Christians will be a good example to those who are not believers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AMOS CONDEMNS FALSE WORSHIP

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Amos 3-6

Verses in Today's Lesson: Amos 3-6

Memory Verse:

"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Teaching Aids: Write "False Worship" on the chalk board or paper.

Background Study

Although the kingdom had been divided into the North and the South, Amos had a message for both. Amos used a collective term, Israel, to mean both. It was basically one kingdom. David united the two into one strong kingdom under God.

Early in chapter 3 Amos told the nation, Israel, that their punishment would be severe because they knew the true God and what he wanted them to do. He reminded them of the time they were slaves and without a homeland. God freed them and gave them a homeland. Amos was from the countryside, and he spoke to people who lived in town.

Amos tried to convince his listeners that nothing, good or bad, happened without God's knowledge. (Amos 3:6) This means God is actively working in history. In verse 7 it is clear that God will not bring calamity without informing the people. This brought a great honor for the prophets, to know what God was about to do. The wickedness and oppression in Samaria were so great that pagan nations, Egypt and Assyria, would see it. God's people knew how to do right, but violence and robbery were real among them.

The prophet could foresee danger from an enemy. That enemy would overcome their defenses. The Israelites would not be as strong as they used to be.

The frequent mention of lions and sheep reminds us that Amos was from the countryside. He dealt with these animals every day.

The word, Jacob, in verse 13 refers to the nation of Israel. This is not the brother of Esau.

In verse 14 we see "the altars of Bethel" and "the horns of the altar." People of the northern kingdom worshipped at Bethel. They considered Bethel a holy place. According to the Jewish tradition, the horns of the altar were the four corners. Anyone who had committed an offense would find refuge there. Therefore Amos was telling the people of God that there would be no place to hide from the wrath of God. The house of God would not have a place to hide. There would be no secure place in all of Israel.

It seems from Amos 3:15 that some rich people lived luxuriously while the poor became poorer and miserable. The rich had houses to live in when the weather became hot and when it became cold. The poor had no place to rest. The houses of the rich were decorated with ivory. Amos proclaimed that all the houses of the rich would be destroyed. That destruction took place when the Assyrians came.

In Amos 4:1-3, there is a continuation of the condemnation of the rich people of Samaria. Amos called them "cows of Bashan." Their worship, Amos said, was false. He accused them of being hypocrites when giving their sacrifices and offerings.

In Amos 4:6, cleanness of teeth refers to a famine. Still the people did not trust the Lord. He also talked of drought in verse 7-8. Verse 10 refers to an epidemic, and verse eleven to an earthquake. Amos advised God's people to prepare to meet him.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Why do you think God decided to speak to his people through prophets?" Let the students give their ideas, but remind them that the prophets lived with the people and were, therefore, visible to their eyes. In this way the people would understand who God was.

Say: "God told Amos to prophesy to people who were more educated than he was. That is to important. God gave him the proper words to say before the Israelites.

"Amos' words about drought and famine were very important to the people. He was not afraid of what people would say. He was more concerned with what God would say.

"It appears Amos was very bitter because of the way the poor people were being treated because he was from the countryside. The prophet was convinced that God would do what he had said he would do although it was harsh and unbelievable. No one would be able to do the work of a prophet without a call from God. God's people had forgotten their responsibility as God's people. They turned to what was evil and did what was not pleasing before God. They oppressed the poor and thought God would be silent and not punish them. However the prophet announced that God would punish them. There would be no hiding place sufficient to hide them from God's destruction. The horns of the altar would be no more."

Application

Ask: "How can we worship in a way that pleases God?" Let the students discuss this. Be sure they include that we must first examine our relationship with our fellow man. Before we do this, all we do in worshipping God is empty worship.

Ask: "How can we share what we have with those who don't have as much?" (We can give money to those individuals sometimes, or to charitable organizations. Another good way to do this is by giving to churches in the form of offerings. Then the church can help poor people.)

Ask: "How can you know whether those people have been lazy and as a result they have suffered?" (This is not important to us. If we have possessions and they do not, we need to share. We need to understand that we are not well-off because we are better than others, but God has blessed us. We need to be good stewards of

what we have to benefit others. Then God will bless us, and our worship will be meaningful.

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that the students will understand that true worship is giving of ourselves first before we give money.
2. Pray that each student will understand this lesson and practice it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AMOS INTERPRETS GOD'S VISION

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Amos 7-9

Verses in Today's Lesson: Amos 7-9:10

Memory Verse:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that God is always willing to forgive our sins when we repent and confess our sins to him.

Teaching Aids: Chalk board and chalk.

Background Study

The vision mentioned in Amos 7-9:10 is of locusts. The locust is a type of insect similar to a grasshopper. It eats crops and can cause famine. In those days the first crop had to be paid to the king. The farmers could keep the second crop for themselves. Now read Amos 7:1. The king's crop had been cut, and the locusts were coming as the second crop was growing. This meant there would be no food and so a famine would come soon. This was a vision of destruction, therefore the prophet pleaded with God to spare the people from this tragedy. In Amos 7:5 we see the picture of the prophet acting as a representative of man to God.

God's response to Amos' request is recorded in Amos 7:3. The word, repent, has two meanings. It means turning away from sin and a change of mind. When a person changes his mind about a previous decision, he is said to have repented. This is the way the word is used in this verse.

In Amos 7:4-6, we see the word, fire, used. This vision may have referred to a drought which would leave all wells and springs dry. The result would be much suffering. There would be bad fires, and many would starve to death.

The vision in Amos 7:7-9 featured an ordinary tool used by builders. A plumb line is hung beside the wall. It shows quickly if the wall is not straight. Israel, like a newly built wall, needed testing with a plumb line. The result was that the wall was crooked and therefore it would fall. This was the nation of Israel. God vowed never to excuse them again.

Read Amos 7:9. All altars and shrines were built on high places, like on top of hills. These worship customs were copied from Israel's neighbors, the Canaanites. The Israelites had disregarded the law and had done what was unpleasant. They hardly listened to the prophets who warned them about their crooked ways. As far as obeying the law and listening to the prophets, Israel was like a crooked wall.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask students if there have been times in their lives when they had to warn someone about a wrong they had done. Allow some time for them to name those instances as you write on the board. Do not use names.

Say: "The prophet Amos had warned the nation of Israel of certain evils earlier, but they constantly refused to repent."

Ask: "What steps do you take after warning someone without success?" Listen to their answers.

Say: "One method might be to educate the person on the dangers of doing or behaving a certain way. Then you must give them time to adopt the method."

Ask: "What would you do if it took a long time without success?" Let the students give you a solution.

Say: "The next step for most people might be punishment. In Amos 7:1-3, according to the prophet's vision, God prepared to bring locusts. They would consume the crops at a very tender stage. This was Israel's last hope as far as food was concerned.

Say: "In Amos 7:2, Amos pleaded with God to forgive the people. Amos did that because he knew he was dealing with a merciful God. The locusts would have brought great misfortune."

Say: "One important work of a prophet was to speak for God, to represent God. They were God's messengers. However in this case, Amos represented the people to God.

Ask: "Did God listen to the prophet?" Read Amos 7:3. "Repent" here does not mean that God is a sinner and has to repent. This word applied to God means to change a previous decision or to withdraw what had been decided.

Say: "God constantly used prophets to warn the people of approaching calamity."

Examination

"A great misfortune was about to come, but Amos the prophet saved the situation. It is important to remember that God foresees things or events before they happen. God did not want to punish his people. He wanted his people to change and obey him.

"God is always pleased by people who repent of their sins. Often times we sin because of bad influence from bad friends. We may not recognize that they are bad, but they have a bad influence on us. Anything or anyone who draws us away from the love of God is a bad influence on us.

"At other times, those influences might come from our neighbors. We copy their ways and the results become a tragedy. The Israelites followed the practices of the Canaanites regarding high places."

Discuss instances when people would be punished for wrongs done. Can punishment be equivalent to showing love? When we sin, should God punish us always, part of the time or never?

Application

Ask: "Why does man constantly sin against God?"

After discussion say, "It is because man is not complete. He is not what God meant for him to be. God created man in his image so he could worship him. He also gave him the ability to identify wrong from right and good from bad."

Ask: "Is it true that no one is perfect on the face of the earth?" Read Romans 3:23. It is true.

Ask: "Some people claim that when they become Christians, they stop sinning. Do you believe that is true?" (It is not possible for man to live a sinless life. Jesus was the only person who has ever lived a life without sin.)

Ask: "Does this mean we should not try to live a Christian life?" (No, it does not. We should go to Christ for spiritual strength. He will help us do the things we should.)

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that God will show you your sins.
2. Pray for forgiveness of those sins before you teach this lesson.
3. Pray that God will help you accept the young people without judging them.

CHAPTER NINE

AMOS PROPHECIES GOD'S BLESSINGS

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Amos 9

Verses in Today's Lesson: Amos 9:11-15

Memory Verse:

"And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household'" (Acts 16:31).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students there is hope for those who will obey God's will.

Teaching Aids: None

Background Study

Amos 9:1-10 shows that God vowed to destroy Israel. The first verse of this passage shows that no one person will escape or flee the punishment. In verse 2 Sheol is a place they may try to hide. The Jewish people believed that after death people went to a place where they became as shadows. It was a place of spirits without bodies. Since God is a Spirit, he would be able to take them from Sheol. God claimed that heaven would not be a suitable place to hide because he would be there too. The top of Mount Carmel would not be high enough to stop God from getting there. There would be no sea too deep for God. He would find them no matter where they went.

In verse 7 God reminded the Israelites of the Exodus event. In verse 11 there is a great change in the type of speech. The words of destruction suddenly changed into hope, and everlasting hope.

Verse 11 used the word, booth, to mean the house or family of King David. This family ended in Israel and survived only in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. God was saying he would bring hope like the time of David and Solomon. Even though the people were punished, this did not end the kingdom.

The prophet, Nathan, explained this hope later to David. He said there would be an everlasting kingdom established from David. It was not an earthly kingdom. He was talking about Jesus who was descendant of David. He was the only one who could qualify. Read 2 Samuel 7:13.

Verse 12 meant that however big the punishment, God would always preserve a few people who would continue to exist and form the nation.

Amos 9:13 describes the greatness of the day with abundance of harvest. There would be so much harvest that it would continue longer than usual. When God blessed the people, he would do it in every area of their lives.

Amos saw all of this to benefit the Israelites and keep them from forgetting their God. In fact, God was saying there would never be a time when the nation of Israel would come to an end. He had made that promise to Abraham. He would not break his agreement which was broken and renewed. These agreements depended

on God's righteousness. Abraham accepted them through faith which led him to trust God.

In Amos 9:15, God said he would plant them and no one would ever be able to pluck them up. A plant can die from any of three things: lack of water and food, disease or being plucked or cut. God said none of these things would happen, therefore the plant would continue indefinitely. When the people sinned, God drew them back to himself.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Have you ever planned to punish a person? This person may have been a younger brother or sister, a friend or someone else. How did you feel if that person repented?"

Say: "Your bitterness was gone when the person repented and you were reconciled. Because you are a Christian and because you represent Christ, you would find it easy to forgive that person."

Say: "Amos announced God's judgement on his people. Later God decided to forgive them and forget their sin."

"In Amos 9:1-10, we learn that God was not happy with the people of Israel. He had watched them from the time he rescued them from bondage."

Continue: "In verse 11 he promised to return the former glory of the people of Israel. David was mentioned in this verse. He was the greatest king of the people of God."

Ask: "What can you remember about King David?"

Let the group tell what they remember about David, during and before he became king. Be sure they include the following: He was the second king of the nation of Israel. He was a musician in the palace of King Saul when he was a young man. Whenever he sinned, David was willing to repent. This made him a great king. The coming of Jesus, a descendant of David, brought blessings to all nations of the earth.

Examination

Say: "Although God had vowed to destroy Israel, he changed his mind to benefit his beloved. Does changing of the mind show weakness?" After a short time of discussion, be sure the students understand that it does not show weakness. It shows how much God loved his people.

Say: "If God in his holiness changed his mind and forgave his people, how much more do we need to forgive those who do wrong to us. When God forgives us, we should not forget our previous condition."

Say: "It is very easy to forget God when everything is going smoothly. When food is sufficient, harvest is good, the weather is good and the family is healthy we sometimes forget about the one who has caused it to be that way. God cares about what we shall eat and drink, whether we believe in him or not. When we fall, he is there to lift us up like he did Israel. He constantly renews our spiritual lives if we have believed in him."

Application

Say: "The Israelites were God's people because God chose them."

Ask: "Why can people today become the children of God?" Let the class discuss this. Be sure they understand that we are God's children because he chose us also. It is not his will that anyone should perish.

Say: "We become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. This means we should decide to agree with him about certain things. First, we should agree with God that we are sinners. Secondly, we must admit that God loves us even when we are sinner."

Ask: "How does he continue loving us even when we sin? We cannot understand this, but he does love us and he wants to save us."

Say: "Man has no hope without God. He must ask Jesus to take control of his life. Man must accept Jesus and his forgiveness of our sin to gain salvation."

Prayer Suggestion

1. Pray that your students will seek God's will in everything they do.
2. Pray for God to help your students who are Christians to mature in the faith.
3. Pray that God will help you teach this lesson.

CHAPTER TEN

JONAH RUNS FROM GOD

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Jonah

Verses in Today's Lesson: Jonah 1

Memory Verse

"Whither shall I go to from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!" (Psalms 139:7-8).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students they cannot escape from God.

Teaching Aids: Write the names of the last four lessons in this book on the chalk board. These lesson are all about Jonah. Tick the lesson you will study today.

Background Study

Jonah was the son of Amitai. We do not know much about him except what we find from this book. There is one quotation in Matthew 12:40. We know from Jonah 1:2 that God called Jonah to go to Nineveh. Jonah's response is not written, but we may assume he did not like the idea of going there. In verse 3 he had decided to go to Tarshish. This was an effort to flee from God.

While Jonah was on his way to Tarshish, God brought a strong wind which threatened to break the ship into pieces. The sailors remembered God, but verse 5 shows that they worshipped many gods.

Verse 5 also tells us that Jonah was asleep in the inner part of the ship. He did not even know that this was a bad time for anyone to be asleep. Perhaps this shows that he was not worried about what he had done, and he was not sorry he had disobeyed God.

In verse 6 the captain found Jonah and told him to pray to his God. We do not learn whether Jonah did pray or not. It would have been difficult to pray to God while he was running from him.

Finally the sailors decided to cast lots and find out who had brought this trouble to them. The lot fell on Jonah. Was this a part of God's plan to bring Jonah back to himself?

It seems in verse 9 that Jonah realized his lost condition. At least he dared to say he was a Hebrew and he feared the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. This was also an indication that his God was able to save him from the danger of the sea. In verse 12 he even suggested they throw him into the sea so it would be quiet down. Did Jonah believe his God would save him even then? Was he showing a great faith in God even though he was running away?

Perhaps one of the main reasons Jonah had not wanted to go to Nineveh was that he did not want to preach to people who were not Jews. Then Jonah found himself on a ship with non-Jews who worshipped gods of many kinds. They prayed to their

gods before Jonah did. God used the experience to awaken Jonah from his physical and spiritual sleep. Perhaps in the days that followed, Jonah realized that God had saved those men who were not Jews also.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Have you ever done something out of anger and hatred? What was the result? Was it pleasant?" If the students will discuss this, list the results on the chalk board.

Say: "The result of doing things out of anger is usually misfortune, unhappiness or shame. The prophet Jonah found this to be true in his experience of running from God.

"In Jonah 1 we do not know why Jonah was running from God when he knew what God expected of him. This should help us know that when someone knows what he should do and does not do it, it is sin.

"In Jonah 1:3, we read about the preparation of Jonah's journey to Tarshish. Verse 4 states clearly that God was not pleased by Jonah's action. God sent a mighty wind to cause the sailors to remember their gods while Jonah slept.

"In verse 6 Jonah was still asleep inspite of the wind which was bringing fear to everyone else. Jonah even introduced himself to the sailors without much fear. He was prepared to face the inevitable danger.

"The sailors asked Jonah what they should do about the problem. Jonah said they should throw him into the sea. He even said it was he who caused the storm."

Examination

Use your Background Study and the students' books and lead the class to tell what they know about Jonah and his attempt to escape from God.

Say: "The solution for our sin is not running away from God in shame."

Ask: "What would have been a better way to solve this problem?" Let the students discuss this. Be sure they include that Jonah should have confessed to God that he did not want to go to Nineveh. He could have asked God to give him a love for the people there and to enable him to go and preach effectively. Can the students suggest other things Jonah could have done?

Application

Ask: "What does this lesson teach Christians?" Allow the students to answer.

Say: "It teaches us that we cannot hide ourselves or anything from the sight of God. He knows everything about us, including our thoughts and our attitudes. When we try to hide from God, we show that we do not know who God is. God is loving and forgiving. He will help us when we ask him."

Ask: "In fact, can we really hide anything from God? No, we cannot. Our Memory Verse for today helps us understand that we can not go anywhere that God does not know all about it."

Ask: "What is the remedy for all of this? It is to admit our sin, accept any punishment sincerely. We can be sure of God's forgiveness whenever we ask for it."

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that the students will learn to admit their sins to God and to ask forgiveness from him.
2. Pray that they will also learn to admit their wrong doing to friends and ask them to forgive them.
3. Pray that this lesson will cause a change in the lives of your students' thoughts and actions.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JONAH RUNS TO GOD

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Jonah 2

Verses in Today's Lesson: Jonah 2

Memory Verse:

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to thee, into thy holy temple" (Jonah 2:7).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that God always forgives when his children repent.

Teaching Aids: The students' book and chalk board

Background Study

In Jonah 2:1 Jonah expressed gratitude to God for what he had done for him. Jonah said he was in distress, and the Lord helped him. Jonah declared he was like a dead person because of his position in the belly of the fish. Being in the sea for three days and nights was a miracle to Jonah. He was surrounded by water, and the waves rolled. The only thoughts which would come to Jonah were of despair. But Jonah discovered that God's presence was with him. Jonah was happy to realize that he was not at the end but at the beginning of a new relationship with God. Read verses 4-7.

In verse 5, Jonah was overwhelmed by remembering his experience in the sea. The water choked him, and the weeds covered his head. He saw the situation as death, where the gates close forever. However God was able to unlock the gates and keep him alive. No one else could help Jonah. It was God alone who could save him.

In verse 8 Jonah denounced those who worship idols instead of the true God. Jonah said he preferred loyalty to disobedience. He could not think of going against the commandments of God. Jonah promised to sing praises to God and offer sacrifices, and he said he would fulfil his promises to God. Perhaps it was at this time that he decided to go to Nineveh. At that time, nothing could stop Jonah from obeying God.

Jonah declared that salvation comes from the Lord. See verse 9. He probably remembered how the sailors were filled with panic and how they threw things overboard. There was no salvation for them, but God was their salvation.

We see the time that Jonah was in the belly of the fish as a time of prayer and repentance. We see the goodness of God as he spared his disobedient child.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "What do you say when you hurt someone? Sometimes a person will hurt another intentionally or accidentally." The students might say "Sorry, I apologize," or they might explain why the occasion happened.

Say: "In the account of Jonah we learn about a runaway prophet who could not go very far. Jonah realized immediately that he was wrong."

Ask: "Why do you suppose Jonah prayed the words in verse 2 of Jonah 2?" Have the members turn to that chapter. Remind them that Jonah had had a dramatic experience in the belly of the fish.

Ask: "Why was Jonah in distress?" Expect answers like: He was running away from God, He had sinned against God.

Ask: "What type of sin did Jonah commit?" Answer may include: He was disobedient to God, he committed a sin of negligence, he refused to do what he knew was right and did what was wrong. Allow the students to discuss this.

Say: "Look in the second chapter of Jonah and let us list things which suggest Jonah's repentance." (See verses 2, 4, 6 and 7).

Say: "Look at this chapter again and let us describe his experience in the sea." Expect answers like: He felt like a dead person, he was in anguish, pain and fear, the waves rolled over him (3), the water choked him (5) and seaweed wrapped around his head (5).

Ask: "What did he do when he thought he was dying?" See verse 7. He prayed a prayer of repentance.

Ask: "What does verse 8 teach us concerning our relationship to God?" It teaches us to be faithful and to worship the one true God. "What do you learn in verse 7 about our relationship to God? What should we do when we have sinned and therefore we have a serious problem?" (repent)

Ask: "What verses show us that God would hear our prayers?" (verse 6)

Say: "If God forgave someone like Jonah, can he forgive anybody?" Yes, he can forgive you and me when we have sinned too.

Examination

Ask: "Why do you think Jonah faced these problems?" Say: "He faced these problems so he would come to his senses. Some people can not seem to change a way of living or a habit without a dramatic experience."

Ask: "Did this experiences help Jonah in any way?" As the students discuss this they should say yes because it led him to pray a prayer of repentance, thanksgiving and praise. See verse 9. Say: "While Jonah was running away from God, he did not think of turning to God. He felt that he could handle things his own way. But when a person begins to feel his need of God's help, he will humble himself. He must feel helpless before God and seek forgiveness from him. Jonah reached the lowest possible point in life; he thought he had come to the end of his life. Then he became aware of God's presence, and he repented and made a promise. He promised to do what God wanted him to do."

Application

Ask: "Which is the best time to repent? Is it when one has problems or when he is happy? A person should be aware of his lost condition and repent while he has time. God is very understanding. He knows who will respond immediately and who will not. He is patient, but he will not wait forever." Read Isaiah 55:6-7.

Say: "Death is a fearful thing for those who have not repented of their sin before God. We should not wait until problems swallow us to pray and ask for forgiveness. God is merciful and just. But he does require that we come to him and ask for forgiveness. Have you repented of your sin and asked for God's forgiveness?"

Prayer Suggestions

1. Ask God to show you any sin in your life so you can repent and be forgiven.
2. Pray for those in your class, that they will repent of their sin and turn to God for salvation.
3. Is there a member of your family who needs your prayers in this matter? Ask God to convict them of sin and lead them to repentance and forgiveness.

CHAPTER TWELVE

JONAH RUNS WITH GOD

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Jonah

Verses in Today's Lesson: Jonah 3

Memory Verse:

"Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." (Acts 2:38).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students that God is faithful to do what he says he will do.

Teaching Aids: Chalk board and chalk.

Background Study

At the end of Jonah 2 we read, "And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

In chapter 3:1, God showed his forgiveness by not even mentioning the sins which his rebellious servant, Jonah had done. Instead he stated the mission which he had for Jonah to do. Jonah would go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. God would give him a message to deliver to the people there.

Jonah knew the kind of message God would send to that city. He must tell them of the severe judgement that would come if they did not repent of their sin.

The city was so large it took three days to walk across the city. Jonah walked in the city he shouted, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (See verse 4).

As people of Nineveh heard this message, they believed God would do what he said. Therefore the people put on sackcloth to show their sorrow and repentance. Then they cried to God. All the people did this, whether they were young or old. When the king heard what his people were doing and the reason they were doing it, he too joined them. He left his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. This was a sign of humility, repentance and sorrow by the king for the sins he and his people had committed.

In verse seven, we learn the king made a proclamation to his people. No man, no beast, herds nor flock were to eat anything or drink anything. All were to be covered with sackcloth. Each one was to cry out to God and to turn from the evil ways. They hoped that God might change his mind and forgive the people.

When God saw how they had repented, he forgave them. The Ninevites were not prepared to die, therefore they were willing to turn away from evil. They refused to enjoy the pleasures of the life they had lived. They were prepared to be uncomfortable for this time in the hope of gaining forgiveness. We do not know exactly what sins the Ninevites had done. The important thing is they were willing to leave it and repent.

The animals were included in this because that showed the sincere concern of the people. The animals could not repent, and they had no sin for which to repent, but they were included to show the repentance of their owners.

What do you learn about God in reading verse 10? God is merciful, and he shows steadfast love. He gives this love and mercy, even though his people do not deserve it.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Can you remember a time when you rebelled against authority?" Do not require the students to answer, but they will think of those times in their lives. Ask: "What happened to you because of whatever you did? Were you punished in some way? Did you succeed in keeping your rebellion secret so the authorities did not know about it?" Again, do not expect answers.

Say: "It is easy to rebel because one thinks of his own needs and wants instead of the good of all people who are involved. Think about Jonah for a few minutes. God gave Jonah a very important job to do. He was to go to the great city of Nineveh in Assyria. He was to tell people that their city would be destroyed very soon because of their sin. Jonah was to call on those people to repent."

Ask: "Why do you think Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh to do the job God gave him?" Let the students discuss possible reasons. They might say he was afraid. Someone might say Jonah did not like the people of Nineveh for some reason. Perhaps he wanted them to be punished. He did not want them to repent and get forgiveness. Did Jonah have prejudice in his heart against the people of Nineveh? Did he think they were too bad to be forgiven? Whatever the sin of Nineveh, Jonah did not want to obey God."

Examination

Ask: "Was Jonah justified to act the way he did? No, he had no right to disobey God. Did he not realize that his own disobedience would also result in punishment? If Jonah had not disobeyed God, he would have been exposed to the strange smell in the belly of the fish! He would not have felt like dying.

"After Jonah spent his time in the fish, he was put forth on the shore. He decided to go where God wanted him to go. He would do the work God had for him to do. He would even go to Nineveh and tell them of the punishment that was coming if they did not repent.

"Jonah begin his journey immediately, and when he got to the city he began to proclaim his message. When the people heard punishment they were facing, they were very sorry. They began to remove their fine garments and put on sackcloth. This showed their humility and repentance because of their sin. Even the king heard the sad news, and he joined the people in sackcloth and in sitting in ashes" (Teacher, use your Background Study to explain the meaning of this action. Explain that they even put sackcloth on their animals, and all men and beasts fasted.)

"What do you suppose God would do in a situation like this?" Let the students discuss his reaction. Say: "God is merciful. He is also faithful to forgive all who come to him in confession and repentance. He will never turn anyone away who

comes to him and asks for forgiveness. God wants to forgive so much that he gave his only Son to make a way for our salvation."

Application

Ask: "What causes people to repent when they sin today? Is it fear of punishment? Is it to please someone else? Sinners should repent because we belong to God. He made us, he saved us and he keeps us. He has made a way for us to come to him. When we rebel against him, he is ready and willing for us to come back to him in repentance.

"Are there people you do not feel you should witness too for some reason? Are they different from you? Have they offended you in some way? Do you consider them worse than other people? God loves those people too and wants them to repent. We have no right to choose where we will work and to whom we shall witness. We must obey God."

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that God will remove any prejudice in your heart and give you a concern for all people everywhere.
2. Pray that God will help you teach this lesson so the student's will repent of sin in their lives.
3. Pray that you and your students will be lights to lead people to Jesus where you are.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JONAH RUNS AHEAD OF GOD

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Scripture: Jonah 4

Verses in Today's Lesson: Jonah 4

Memory Verse:

"I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry" (Psalms 40:1).

Lesson Aim: To teach my students the importance of waiting for God.

Teaching Aids: Write the title on the chalk board or paper.

Background Study

In our previous lesson we studied about Jonah running with God. In this lesson, however, Jonah has gone ahead of God. What does this mean? This lesson will answer that question.

It is important to remember that in Jonah 2:10 the great fish deposited Jonah on the shore. It was after this event that Jonah was convinced that he needed to agree with God's command. After Jonah's repentance, the Lord commissioned him to go to the city of Nineveh. This is where this lesson begins.

Jonah noted with disgust and anger that God had forgiven the Ninevites after they repented. In Jonah 4:1-2, Jonah tried to justify his wrong doing. The justification is worse because it was directed to God who knew all that was in Jonah's mind. He claimed he was justified to flee to Tarshish. In verse 2, he blamed God for being good, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. This is not a reason to blame someone, but Jonah, like any other person in sin, blamed those in the right.

In verse 3, the writer painted a picture of envy, hatred, despair and death. He was envious of the step of repentance the Ninevites took. We can tell from his words that he actually hated the Ninevites. This prophet had reached a point of no return. In verse 4 we see that he was angry and even preferred death to life. Jonah was angry with everyone: God and the Ninevites. God's question to Jonah is not answered.

In verse 5 Jonah left and went outside the city by himself to see what would happen to the city. At this time God was constantly finding ways to communicate the truth to angry Jonah. Earlier God had asked Jonah a question, but Jonah did not answer it.

Look at verse 6. God decided to speak to Jonah through actions and happenings. God caused a plant to grow and provide shade for Jonah. Then he sent a worm to attack the plant. The shade had made Jonah comfortable for some time. When the plant dried up, Jonah became very uncomfortable again. Again, he preferred death to life.

For a second time, God wanted to show whether Jonah was justified to be angry because of the plant. God tried to convince Jonah that anger was not the answer to the problem, but Jonah refused to hear. The story ended with God's love. God explained how important Nineveh was to him.

The book has an uncertain ending, however. We are not told whether Jonah repented.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Have you ever been angry because of someone you respected very much? Perhaps it was a classmate, a parent, a brother, sister or friend." Do not require students to answer this question.

Say: "Jonah thought he was angry because of God. God had done only what was right. Jonah was really angry because of his own wrong-doing. The bad deeds of disobedience constantly followed him, and because of that God became his rival and enemy." Have a student read Jonah 4.

"Jonah was exceedingly angry because God forgave the Ninevites. In verse 2 Jonah tried to remind God of what he had said in his effort to justify going to Tarshish. He blamed God for being merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

"In verse 3 Jonah was so angry that he preferred death to life."

Ask: "Do you think Jonah was right in saying this? Did he really mean what he said?"

Say: "Jonah said these words out of his anger. In verse 4 he was asked a question by God." Ask: "What was the question? And how did Jonah respond?"

Say: "From verse 6-11 Jonah was not willing to agree with God about his anger. Their study ends prematurely. We are not told whether or not Jonah repented."

Examination

"Since God knows everything about all people, he knew what Jonah intended to do. He (God) knew when Jonah decided to run away from him on his way to Tarshish. Jonah got angry for no reason simply because he did not want to go to Nineveh. He did not give a reason for not going to that city, but we can tell that Jonah hated those people. Jonah was so angry with God that he said things he could not have said had he not been angry. Anger can cause us to say things we did not intend to say."

Ask: "Can you think of some times when anger has caused trouble?" Allow students to answer if they will.

Say: "The evangelist, Billy Graham, said anger can cause a child to refuse to eat. Jonah was so angry at that point that death was the only answer that he could see."

Application

"What is anger?" It is a strong feeling of unhappiness inside a person. It may come when one has been insulted or wronged. It may be the result of cruelty or injustice. It often makes people want to quarrel or fight back."

Ask: "How do we control anger?" (We can allow Christ to control us. He can prevent our sinning while being angry. When the devil is in control of a life, anger begins to rule.)

Ask: "Is all anger sinful?" (No, it is only when that anger begins to take control of the life.) "The psalmist said, 'Be angry, but sin not...' (Psalms 4:4). Jesus was even angry at times. See Mark 3:5 and Matthew 21:12-13."

Ask: "How can we run away from God? There is no way we can escape from God. He knows all about us, our actions, our thoughts, our deeds. We may try to run away from God when we sin and refuse to admit we are wrong. Pride might cause us to conduct ourselves before God in an unpleasant manner. This might lead to broken relationships in the home or between friends. But in all this, God knows what is really in our hearts. We should never act or make important decisions when we are angry."

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that your students will be patient and wait upon God.
2. Pray that the Holy Spirit will take control in the lives of your students.
3. Pray that God will use this lesson to change the young people in your church to be more like he wants them to be.