

**FAITH REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL**

**CURRICULUM PROJECT ©**

**\*\* Grades 7-8, Year I \*\***

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# **BIBLE SURVEY, PART I**

**by Robert C. Walton**

**Grades 7-8  
Year 1  
Quarter 1**



# **THE CREATION**

## **Genesis 1-2**

### **Lesson Aim**

To introduce the Bible Survey and show students how the creation account is foundational to all that follows.

### **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:4** - "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."

### **Lesson Background**

The first year of the curriculum for grades seven and eight consists of a survey of the Bible. The first two quarters cover the Old Testament, while the third and fourth quarters summarize the New Testament. We will be considering the biblical material in an order that is neither strictly textual nor strictly chronological, but rather a combination of the two. The reason for this is to maintain the flow of a survey while at the same time giving students a feel for the chronological relationships that exist among the biblical materials. The first quarter, which begins with this lesson, will cover the books of Genesis through II Chronicles.

If the book of Genesis is foundational, the creation account found in its first two chapters is even more so. As we approach the creation story today, we could consider it from several different angles. We could, for instance, concentrate on the creation-evolution controversy; another possibility would be to go over various theories concerning the days of creation; or we could talk about the significance of the creation

narrative in setting the stage for the rest of Scripture. If we were spending the entire quarter on Genesis 1-11, we would certainly do all of these things. Since we only have one week to devote to this passage, however, we will concentrate our attention on the latter two areas only. While consideration of these will certainly have a bearing on the creation-evolution controversy, we simply do not have the time to do justice to that complex subject.

Today's lesson will thus be divided into two sections, the first dealing with the significance of creation, the second with the days of creation. In going through the material on the days of creation, be sure to help your students understand both the strengths and weaknesses of the various positions, along with what each implies concerning the relationship of the Bible and science. The section on the significance of creation is vitally important because it generates the perspective from which the whole Bible was written. Christians look at the world differently than non-Christians do, and these two chapters clarify much of that difference. Your students must realize the importance of looking at the world from a Christian perspective.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Start the lesson by reading the following to your students: "In the beginning, there were hydrogen atoms scattered through empty space. As they moved randomly about, their gravitational attractions and interactions with one another slowly generated a great vortex in space, whirling and spinning, drawing more and more atoms into itself, until all the matter in the universe was caught up in this spinning mass. As the vortex spun faster and faster, the atoms were drawn closer and closer to the center, which became denser and denser as time passed. Finally, the heat generated by this spinning mass set off an explosion, scattering the matter of the universe far and wide. As this matter was thrown outward through the universe, it continued to spin in smaller vortices, which came together into great gaseous masses that we know as stars. Smaller clouds of matter cooled to form planets. On at least one of these planets, the cooling process was accompanied by violent electrical discharges in the gases surrounding the planet. Through millions of years of such discharges, electrical energy by chance came into contact with just the right combination of atoms to produce what we call Life. Over millions of years more, this Life began to change. Radiation and changing conditions on earth produced mutations and adaptations by means of which this Life became gradually more complex, developing from a single-celled organism to one with many cells, then to more complex creatures of the sea, and finally to the creatures of the land. As these organisms changed, adapted, and diversified, some developed mechanisms for gaining control over their environment. They began to use tools and dominate the creatures around them. Through millions of years of change, this evolutionary process produced Man himself. Man, of course, is not the end of this process. Evolution continues, and we have every expectation that Man himself will some day evolve into a creature as superior to modern man as modern man is to those primitives who first came down out of the trees millions of years ago."

If Genesis 1 had been written by a modern scientist, it might sound something like what appears above. What difference does it make how everything got here? Why is it important for a Christian to believe in creation?

### **1. The Significance of Creation**

In answering the question about what difference the doctrine of creation makes for the Christian, the easiest thing to do is to go through the first two chapters of Genesis verse by verse and point out key ideas as they appear. Have your students turn to Genesis 1 and begin reading. Go around the room, having each student read a verse, until the first two chapters are completed. After appropriate verses, stop and comment to the students about the importance of what that verse teaches. The following ideas should be brought out in your comments:

1:1 - God has always existed, but matter has not. Everything that exists in the world has been made by God and is under His control. God is separate from His creation, but is involved in it. Make sure your students see that these ideas contrast with the paragraph you read at the beginning of the lesson, which assumed that there was no God, that matter had always existed, and that everything was governed by chance.

1:4 - Everything created by God was good. The world in which we now live is not good, but is full of sin and corruption. This evil is not the fault of God, but is the result of man's rebellion against Him. Because sin is an abnormal condition, different from the way God made things to be, there is hope for change. The God who made everything good can also remake everything the same way. The secularist, however, has only the hope that man will evolve to the point where evil is overcome, but there is nothing good in the universe to give any encouragement that such a thing is possible.

1:26 - Man is different from the rest of God's creation. He is made in God's image, and is therefore like God in some ways. Man is not merely a higher form of animal. Those who think so have no basis for morality. They believe that ideas of right and wrong evolved along with everything else, and continue to change as man "progresses." If man is no more than an animal, not only is there no standard for right and wrong, there also is no real value to human life. As we have seen so often today, many believe that some human lives are simply not worth living and may be sacrificed for the convenience of others.

1:28 - God gave man dominion over His creation. Man is responsible to care for what God has made. This does not mean that snail darters and laboratory monkeys are as valuable as human lives, nor does it mean that man is free to abuse nature.

2:1 - The work of creation is finished. Man is not merely another link in a long chain of evolution. God has made what He intended to make, and the work is done.

2:7 - Human life is a gift of God, not the chance interaction of molecules and electrical energy that then evolved over millions of years. Life comes from God and belongs to God. We do not have the right to take that life apart from the specific commands given by God Himself.

2:17 - Man is accountable to God for what he does, and God will punish man's disobedience. Man is not the ruler of his own destiny, accountable to no one but himself. Death continually reminds us God's justice.

2:21-25 - The idea of marriage and the family came from God. It is not merely a social convenience that evolved over the years and is open to change at any time. God intended people to live in families - one man, one woman, and their children - and when we depart from that pattern, society suffers the consequences.

## **2. The Days of Creation**

Interpretations of Genesis 1 in recent years have tended to focus on the scientific questions raised through advances in astronomy, physics, and biology. Our interest in these issues causes us to ask questions of the text that the text was never intended to answer. We will start by surveying some of the approaches taken in the last few centuries and attempt to connect them to the purpose of the text as delivered to the original recipients. The result should be a clearer idea of what we should and should not be expecting Genesis 1 to tell us.

### **A. Chronological Interpretations**

The most common approaches to Genesis 1 over the years have focused on the meaning of the chronology of the passage.

## 1. The Twenty-Four-Hour Day Theory

This view simply views the days of Genesis 1 as normal 24-hour periods, and is clearly the most straightforward approach to the passage. It is supported not only by the repeated assertions of “evening and morning,” but also by the reference to the creative week in Exodus 20:11. Interestingly enough, this interpretation is not only supported by many evangelicals, but also by a significant number of liberal scholars, who unfortunately go on to argue that the passage is therefore simply wrong. Obviously, the Twenty-four Hour Day Theory completely contradicts all current scientific evidence concerning the age of the earth and requires massive use of the idea of created age; those who believe that God created the universe in six literal days must also believe that He created it in a mature state. It also generates problems when it is compared to the extended picture of the sixth day given in Genesis 2.

## 2. The Gap Theory

One way Christians have tried to put the Bible and science together is through what is called the Gap Theory. This approach also asserts a literal creation week, but inserts between the first two verses of Genesis 1 an indeterminately large period of time. Gap theorists believe that verse 2 should be translated to say that “the earth became formless and empty,” implying a previous creation that God destroyed. Usually this destruction is connected by Gap theorists with the fall from Heaven of Satan. Scriptural support is derived from the possibility of translating the verb in question as *became* (possible, yes, but far less likely than the simple *was*) and passages such as Isaiah 45:18 and Jeremiah 4:23. To read into the prophetic passages statements about the early history of the earth is to stretch them far beyond what their contexts permit. In short, the Gap Theory, while certainly possible, can claim no scriptural support whatever. On the other hand, no positive scriptural evidence may be marshaled against it. It is pure speculation - an attempt to be biblical and leave room for the findings of modern science, maintaining both an old earth and a young human race, so that the geological ages, dinosaurs, and primitive hominids can be placed nicely within the gap before the alleged re-creation.

## 3. The Day-Age Theory

The basic idea behind the Day-Age Theory is the notion that the creative days of Genesis 1 are long periods of time rather than 24-hour days. In support of such an interpretation, scholars note that the Hebrew word for *day* has much the same semantic range as the English word and is susceptible to such a meaning (e.g., “the day of the Lord”). Opponents point out that the numbering of days in Scripture always refers to 24-hour periods. Proponents also argue that the biblical evidence for the sixth and seventh days points to periods longer than 24 hours (the description of the activity of the sixth day in Genesis 2 seems difficult to squeeze into such a short period of time, while the seventh day continues to the present, since believers are invited in Hebrews 4:11 to enter into God’s rest).

Obviously, this approach leaves room, not only for astronomical and geological evidence, but also for the evolutionary process. Most theistic evolutionists follow some form of this argument. A serious problem with it arises, however, when one notes that the existence of plants (third day) for long ages prior to the creation of animals (fifth and sixth days) is impossible because of the interdependence that exists between the plant and animal kingdoms. While the 24-hour day approach is often criticized for having light and evenings and mornings before the creation of the sun, one must note that the problem is even more severe for the Day-Age theorist. Most respond to this by arguing that the fourth day represents the time at which the sun became visible from the earth because of atmospheric changes caused by plant photosynthesis.



## 4. Progressive Creation Theory

The theory of Progressive Creation is similar in most respects to the older Day-Age Theory except that it sees the days of Genesis 1 as specific creative acts of God separated by long periods of time. This is somewhat less evolutionary in character than the Day-Age Theory, but is susceptible to the same criticisms. Some who take this approach argue that, while the creative days are separated by many eons, the ages following those creative days overlap. While this does not completely solve the interdependence problem mentioned above, it does make things flow a bit more smoothly. Notice, too, that such an approach coheres more easily with the modern evolutionary theory of *punctuated equilibrium*, in which long periods of stasis are interrupted with brief, intense periods of rapid change.

### B. Literary Interpretations

In the last few decades, increasing recognition of the milieu in which the book of Genesis was written has caused some scholars to question whether or not Genesis 1 should be read in chronological terms at all. These scholars have advocated instead a literary approach, arguing that those who argue about chronology are simply asking the wrong questions of the text. Here are some examples of recent literary approaches to the interpretation of Genesis 1.

#### 1. The Vision Theory

This theory completely denies that any scientific conclusions may be drawn from the account of creation in Genesis 1. Advocates argue instead that the account recorded here is the result of six nights of visions given to a chosen man in which God revealed the scope of his creative activity. The six days are not thus a chronology of how God created the world, but instead a chronology of how He revealed His handiwork to His chosen servant. When this approach is taken, it clearly leaves people free to adopt any scientific explanation currently in favor without fear of facing contradiction from Scripture.

#### 2. The Framework Theory

The Framework Theory also denies that Genesis 1 makes any statements that can be taken as scientific in nature. It views the passage as poetic and points out that the events of the days exhibit a curious parallelism:

DAY 1 - light	DAY 4 - light bearers
DAY 2 - sea and sky	DAY 5 - fish and birds
DAY 3 - dry land	DAY 6 - animals and man

The parallels are interesting, though incomplete - plants are left out, for instance - but the Framework Theory does emphasize issues of form and function that were major concerns of people in the Ancient Near East. On the other hand, the chapter completely lacks all characteristics of Hebrew poetry. When the Bible does give a poetic account of creation (e.g., Psalm 104), it is very different from Genesis 1.

#### 3. The Liturgical Theory

Very similar to the Framework Theory, this approach views Genesis 1 as a worship text that somehow found its way into the Bible out of its original context. Again, the implication would be that the passage is useless for scientific purposes.

## **4. The Temple Theory**

This approach suggests that Genesis 1 is a description of the creative labors of God that was deliberately modeled on man's work week. God thus completes the work of building a temple He wishes to inhabit in a work week of six days, then on the seventh day enters and inhabits that temple. Though Isaiah 66:1-2 pictures Heaven as God's throne and the earth as His footstool, several problems exist with this approach. The first is that Genesis 1 pictures the creation as made for man rather than for God. After all, God needs no material dwelling place. Furthermore, the Temple Theory makes the seventh day the climax of the creative week. Though God's rest is that toward which all things move (Hebrews 4:1-11), the extended description of the sixth day in Genesis 2 would seem to indicate that the climax of God's work is the creation of man, for whose habitation the entire universe was assembled.

### **C. The Concept of Created Age**

Anyone who takes the Genesis account of creation at all seriously must to some extent accept the notion of created age simply because Adam and Eve were created by God as adults rather than infants. The objection to created age therefore cannot be that the Bible does not support the idea. The issue is one of degree.

Secondly, our concept of the power of God enters into the discussion. One cannot question the fact that God has the power to create a mature universe. Since the Bible pictures man as the pinnacle of creation, should we be surprised if God created a world that was fully prepared for human habitation, complete not only with natural resources but also with the light from the stars already reaching the earth?

The obvious criticism that is often raised here is that the concept of created age makes God a deceiver. This is true only if we assume that God intended the universe to be studied and interpreted in purely naturalistic terms. When the psalmist said that the heavens declare the glory of God, he did not mean that the eye of the natural man would find God in the study of the stars. In fact, Romans 1:18-25 indicates clearly that sinful man perverts whatever evidence of God's power is to be found in nature. Man's efforts to understand the universe apart from God are sinful in themselves. How can we expect them to yield truth? Furthermore, truth is discernible only to the eyes of faith. We face the same problem when dealing with evidence for the existence of God or the inspiration of Scripture.

The important thing here is not to give your students a definitive conclusion about the days of creation (though I favor the 24-hour approach). Instead, make sure they understand how the Bible and science should relate to one another. Firstly, they must know that God's Word and God's world are not at odds with one another. The Bible and science do not contradict one another; it is only in the area of interpretation that the two are in conflict. Secondly, they should recognize that our approach to science should be conditioned by the Word of God, and not the other way around. Too many people start with science and try to force the Bible into some popular scientific theory. It is far better to seek a faithful reading of Scripture, then interpret the findings of science in light of what the Bible teaches.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by summarizing the importance of the creation account. Christians look at the world differently than do non-Christians, and much of the difference can be traced to these two chapters. If your students learn to look at the world in a Christian way, they will find themselves more and more in conflict with the thinking of those around them. Their ideas will be different, and so will their values. As we begin our Bible survey, your students must understand that what they are learning matters - it makes all of life different. It matters because it is true.



## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## THE CREATION

1. Fill in the following chart with information from today's lesson:

THEORY	DESCRIPTION	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	EVALUATION
24-HOUR DAY THEORY				
GAP THEORY				
DAY-AGE THEORY				
PROGRESSIVE CREATION				
VISION THEORY				
FRAMEWORK THEORY				
LITURGICAL THEORY				
TEMPLE THEORY				

2. What difference does the biblical account of creation make for your understanding of the following issues?

Abortion -

Divorce -

Mercy killing -

Animal rights -

Environmental protection -

# **FROM THE FALL TO BABEL**

## **Genesis 3-11**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students the devastating effects of sin on God's perfect world.

### **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:5** - "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

### **Lesson Background**

Last week we saw that God created a perfect world. This week we will see the devastating effects of sin upon that world. On the surface, few sections of Scripture are more discouraging than Genesis 3-11. We move from sin to murder to debauchery to self-reliance, and see God respond in judgment each time, with banishment, exile, near-universal destruction, and scattering. Through it all, we have the monotonous refrain of the genealogies - ". . . and he died." Sin produces death; there is no stronger indication of its seriousness.

While the four narratives to be covered today are all very familiar to your students, they probably have never seen the patterns that connect them. These early chapters of Genesis establish a pattern that may be traced throughout Scripture - one of sin, judgment, and mercy. Sin is judged so that man cannot take it lightly, but God is merciful to those who fear Him.

While we clearly cannot cover the accounts of the Fall, the murder of Abel by Cain, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel in any detail, their familiarity should enable your students to analyze the patterns found in this section without extensive reference to the narratives themselves. The structure of the lesson will follow the overall pattern of the section - we will look at sin, judgment, and mercy - rather than considering each narrative separately.

The lesson has two major applications for your students. The first is that sin has serious consequences, both self-induced and in terms of divine judgment. Our society does not take sin seriously, and Christians can very easily fall into the trap of doing likewise. Secondly, God's mercy leads men to salvation. With the exception of Noah, we see God showing mercy in all of these passages to people who have as yet shown no repentance. In salvation, the first step, like all the others, belongs to God, not us. Your students must realize that God is continually showing His mercy to unbelievers (what we call "common grace"), and that the purpose of this mercy is to lead unbelievers to repentance.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by dividing your class up into four groups and assigning to each group one of the major narratives of the section under consideration today (the Fall - Genesis 3; Cain and Abel - Genesis 4; the Flood - Genesis 6-9; the Tower of Babel - Genesis 11:1-9). Give each group a few minutes to look over its assigned passage, telling them to look for three major themes - sin, judgment, and mercy. As you go through each major topic as a class, have the group talk about ways in which each theme appears in the passage assigned to them. You as a teacher should then fill in any gaps left by the students.

### **1. Sin**

The sin found in Genesis 3 is obvious, but be sure to point out to your students that Adam and Eve succumbed to temptations that Satan still throws in the paths of God's people today. The same temptations listed in I John 2:16 are found in Genesis 3, and are the common experience of people throughout history. The sin of Adam and Eve consisted of putting themselves before God. They didn't trust God to provide for their physical needs, they didn't believe the words God had spoken to them, and they in their pride thought that their judgment was equal to God's. People sin today in the same way, and Christians are by no means immune. If there are students in your class who are not believers, be sure to indicate that the sin of Adam and Eve has become the way of life for those outside Christ. The same pride, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance are presented to the unbelieving world as virtues.

In Genesis 4, we find that those who strike out against God inevitably strike out against their fellow men. Those who choose themselves over God will also choose themselves over other people. Cain struck out in his anger against anyone who received what he did not - in this case, his brother Abel.

The account of the Flood presents a dismal scene of the consequences of self-reliance. The men who had chosen themselves over God soon became immersed in evil to the extent that they are described as being without redeeming social value. It should not surprise us at all that, while the sin of Cain had been one of violence, the sin of the antediluvian race was primarily sexual in nature. [Many explanations have been given for Genesis 6:4, but the one I like best sees it as an indication that the rulers were taking advantage of their power to extract sexual favors from whomever they chose - see the article by John Walton in *The Genesis Debate*, edited by Ronald Youngblood, Thomas Nelson, 1986.] Sex and violence continue to be the main ways in which the sinful urges of man find expression in our modern world. Yet it is sexual sin that gives to the world the stench of universal corruption that is offensive to God's people, but even more so to God Himself.



In the account of the Tower of Babel, we find man setting himself forward as the measure of all things. The tower-builders saw themselves as masters of their own fate, controllers of their own destiny. We see here no indications of overt perversity, but the oppressive air of arrogance hangs heavy over the entire passage. Many unbelievers today abhor the sex and violence around us as much as Christians do, yet they eagerly espouse the pride of the tower-builders. God hates the inner attitude of self-sufficiency as much as he hates the corruption of outward sin. Christians today must shun the pride being encouraged by the world as much as the overt perversion around us on every side.

## **2. Judgment**

God always judges sin. The judgment may come immediately, as with Adam and Eve, or it may be delayed, as when the Flood came 120 years after God's proclamation of judgment. Any who think it will not come are fooling themselves, however.

In the case of Adam and Eve, judgment fell immediately. It consisted of a curse and banishment from the Garden of Eden. The curse turned what had previously been pleasurable into a burden. For Eve, childbirth became a source of terrible agony. For Adam, labor became painful rather than fulfilling. For both of them, their relationship of leadership and helpful support became a source of conflict. Banishment from the Garden involved separation from the life they had been given by God. God had told them that if they sinned they would die. While they continued to live after they were excluded from the Garden, they were separated from the eternal life that has its source in God, and their bodies began the decay that leads inevitably to physical death.

The judgment of Cain seems surprisingly mild. It is difficult for us to imagine why God did not strike him dead for killing his brother. Yet the banishment from the society of men was a severe judgment indeed. Cain and his wife (who had to have been one of his many sisters - Adam and Eve had time for lots of children in their nine hundred or so years) were sent out into the wilderness, apart from the other descendants of Adam. While the children of Seth apparently served God as Abel had done, Cain and his line cared nothing for God. God's judgment was to give the murderer a long life, but one apart from the possibility of repentance. Cain was rejected by God, condemned to live out the remainder of his life in separation from the source of true life. The accomplishments of Cain and his family, though they include building, domestication of animals, metal-working, and music, seem hollow when done in isolation from God. Abel's life had been short but full; Cain's life was long but empty.

The judgment of the Flood is the clearest and most drastic of all those seen in this section of Genesis. God literally washed the earth clean of the corruption that man had brought upon it. In II Peter 3, Peter sees the Flood as analogous to the Last Judgment, when God will finally destroy all who rebel against Him. As there was no escape in Noah's day for those who cared nothing for God, so there will be none in that final day of judgment. The most frightening thing about the judgment of the Flood is that no one believed God would do it. Noah, described as a preacher of righteousness in II Peter 2:5, told the people of his day about the coming judgment, but apparently was ignored. Jesus warned that people in the day of the final judgment will be like those in Noah's day (Matthew 24:37-39). In making the comparison, He doesn't describe them as incorrigibly wicked, but rather points out that they will be going about the normal business of life with no concern for God. People today are conditioned to think about God (when they think about Him at all) as a God of love who would never hurt a fly. Judgment doesn't scare people because, like those of Noah's day, they simply do not believe that God would really do it.

The judgment of the Tower of Babel is interesting because of the irony of what God did. In building the tower, men were proclaiming their self-sufficiency, seeking to build their own earthly security by banding together in a stable community rather than continuing the nomadic ways of their fathers. God simply showed

them how shallow their supposed security really was. People today go to great lengths to build security for themselves through financial means. Such security is every bit as much a house of cards as the ziggurat constructed at Babel. With a single stroke, God could easily demolish the security with which men comfort themselves.

Before leaving this section, be sure to comment on the genealogies found in this part of Genesis (chapters 5 and 11). Along with the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, they serve to show the all-encompassing nature of the judgment of God. The continual refrain of the genealogies is that all men, small and great, died, just as God had promised. The Table of Nations shows the thoroughness with which men were scattered throughout the world by the judgment of Babel. In the same way that none was excluded from the punishment of death stemming from the sin of Adam and Eve, so no peoples were excluded from the scattering of Babel - all those who descended from the sons of Noah were separated by the confusion of tongues into tribal groups, far from the security they hoped to find in unified effort at Babel.

### **3. Mercy**

God is a God of mercy, and that characteristic comes out clearly even in the judgments of the great sins of mankind in these chapters. This will be the hardest for your students to pick out, so you may have to “prime the pump” a bit to draw out of them the examples of God’s mercy found in this section of Genesis.

In the case of Adam and Eve, God showed mercy by not striking them dead on the spot, of course. But He also made provision for covering their sin (by killing an animal to make clothing to cover their nakedness), promised to destroy Satan by means of the woman’s eventual Descendant, and kept them from being confirmed in an eternal state of sinfulness by banishing them from the Garden and barring the way to the Tree of Life.

The incident of Cain shows the mercy of God because, while God condemned Cain to an empty existence, He protected him from the wrath of his fellow men. God usually does not allow men to be as bad as they normally would be without Him. He acts to restrain their sinfulness, so that life on earth is more than one continuous round of slaughter and death. As Jesus indicated in Luke 13:1-9, the death all around us should cause us to praise God, because we should realize the extent to which God is restraining the sinfulness of man. If God were to give men what they deserve, this world would be barren of people very quickly.

God’s mercy in the Flood is revealed, not only through His preservation of Noah and the other living creatures, but also through His promise never to destroy the earth by water again. God’s promise to withhold His wrath should not make us think that our world is somehow superior to that of Noah. The sins of Noah’s day would pale in comparison with our own. God is patient because, as Peter says in II Peter 3:9, He wants people to repent. The Flood underscores that patience because it demonstrates that it is not motivated by weakness or the inability to do anything about the wickedness of men.

The mercy of God in the Tower of Babel is not really apparent until we get to the following chapter. There we find that God, having scattered the self-sufficient population of the world to the fringes of the Mediterranean basin, then calls out of that scattered population one man, Abraham, who is to be the father of His chosen people. God persistently refuses to leave man to the consequences of his own sin, but again and again reaches out in mercy to His wayward creatures.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, remind your students of the two major applications of the lesson. The first is that sin has consequences. As Paul told the Galatians, a man will reap what he sows. Our society cannot expect to get away with the sins it is flaunting in the face of God, and neither can the individuals in it, or those in your class. Sin destroys what is good and brings destruction upon the perpetrators. On the other hand, God is merciful. Not all are cast aside like Cain or destroyed like the generation of Noah's day. God reaches out in mercy, leading sinners to repentance. Some in your class have experienced that mercy. Others remain unrepentant in the face of it. Encourage them to turn from their sin and find in God the only source of true life.



## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## FROM THE FALL TO BABEL

1. What are the four major incidents described in Genesis 3-11?
2. How is each of these incidents an indication of the sinfulness of man? How are the same tendencies visible in the world today?
3. All four of the incidents covered today show God's judgment of sin. Why don't we see God judging sin today - or do we? How does II Peter 3:3-9 help us to understand God's apparent inactivity?
4. How does each of the incidents in Genesis 3-11 show the mercy of God? How is God's mercy evident in the world today?
5. How is God showing His mercy to you? How are you responding to God's mercy in your life?



# **THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM**

## **Genesis 12-50**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students how God initiated and maintained a covenant with Abraham and his family, and how this covenant is still being maintained today.

### **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:6** - “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

### **Lesson Background**

After the repeated sinful rebellion of God’s creatures in the early chapters of Genesis, we see that God puts His plan of redemption into effect in what might strike us as an odd way - He singles out one man out of the entire population of the earth and makes a covenant with that one man that He intends to use to bless the entire human race. That one man, of course, is Abraham, and the remainder of the book of Genesis tells the story of his family as God prepares a people to be the vehicle for His covenant blessings.

As we did last week, we will survey this portion of Scripture by tracing out major themes repeated throughout the section. Because of the length of the material to be considered today, we will not attempt to divide it up among the students. Instead, the burden will fall on the teacher to synthesize a group of narratives that again will be largely familiar to the members of the class. The two key themes to be found in this section of Genesis are God’s sovereignty in maintaining the covenant and man’s efforts to fulfill the covenant. Since human efforts to fulfill the covenant in Genesis uniformly ended in disaster, your students should be able to learn from this lesson that God’s work must be done in God’s way and according to God’s

time schedule; when we attempt to take God’s work into our own hands and “help Him out a little,” the result is failure. God, on the other hand, constantly surprises us with His way of doing things. His choices are almost always contrary to human reason, and His plan beyond what we could possibly conceive ahead of time.

Your students should come away from the lesson understanding that trying to help God’s work by doing what “seems sensible” is not wise, and expecting to know the details of what God is going to do ahead of time is not realistic. These principles are important for them, particularly as they approach the critical decisions of life in the years ahead. God leads His people in ways they would not expect, using means that are not those normally chosen by men.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by handing out to your students copies of Abraham’s family tree. Go over it with them, making sure they understand the relationships that are shown on the diagram. Then introduce the concept of a covenant. Tell your students that a covenant is an agreement between two parties, but that the covenants in the Bible are not negotiated agreements, but instead the kind of agreements imposed on the loser of a war by the winner. In the same way that the conqueror dictates the terms by which the vanquished is to live, so God dictated the terms of His covenant with Abraham. Then move on to describe the two basic themes that run through this portion of the book of Genesis - the sovereignty of God in establishing and maintaining the covenant and the efforts of man to fulfill the covenant.

### **1. The Sovereignty of God in Maintaining the Covenant**

The covenant between God and Abraham was in some ways two-sided and in some ways dependent on God alone. It was two-sided in the sense that both God and man had obligations under the terms of the covenant. These obligations were very serious, and the consequences of failure on man’s part were dreadful indeed. On the other hand, the ultimate maintenance of the covenant rested with God alone. God promised that His covenant would not fail, and He pledged Himself to carry it through. There are many narratives in the book of Genesis that demonstrate this truth.

#### **A. The Call of Abram (Genesis 12:1-9)**

God’s sovereignty in establishing His covenant is clear from its very inception. God called Abram and told him to leave everything and move to a land not yet designated. There is no indication in the passage that Abram knew or trusted God before God came to him. God simply chose him, appeared to him, and told him what to do.

#### **B. The Confirmation of the Covenant (Genesis 15)**

It was customary in the ancient Near East for the parties involved in a covenant to offer sacrifices to their gods, but before the sacrifices were burned, to walk together between the pieces of the slaughtered animals as an oath of loyalty to the covenant. They were saying, in effect, that the gods were free to do to them what had happened to the animals if they violated the terms of the covenant. The important aspect of the ceremony in Genesis 15 is that God passes between the pieces of the sacrifice alone - it is God and God only who is responsible for maintaining the covenant. This is why we refer to the Abrahamic Covenant as unconditional. God pledged Himself to carry it out no matter what man did.



### **C. The Renaming of Abram (Genesis 17)**

The giving of a name was a sign of authority in the ancient Near East. By changing Abram's name, God was asserting His authority over Abram, and in effect redefining his identity. From Abram, "Exalted father," he became Abraham, "the father of many," as God had promised that he would become. At the same time, God institutes the rite of circumcision. This painful (to an adult) and humbling practice became the distinctive badge of the Jews, a source of scorn and mockery to Gentiles throughout their history. When God sets His people apart, the distinction is not always easy to bear.

### **D. The Birth of Isaac (Genesis 21:1-7)**

God had promised Abraham a son, but He wanted to make sure that there could be no question that the child had come from Him. As a result, God waited until childbirth was physically impossible, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, before the promised son was given.

### **E. The Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22)**

God continued to impress upon Abraham His complete sovereign authority over his life by requiring him to give up the son of promise through sacrifice. Abraham was finally learning his lesson, as he obeyed God without question, realizing that if God said He was going to provide Abraham with descendants, He would do it, no matter how impossible it seemed to the feeble brain of Abraham.

### **F. The Choice of Jacob (Genesis 25:19-26)**

Isaac grew up and married Rebekah, and they had twin boys, Jacob and Esau. Esau was the older because he emerged from the womb first, but God said before they were born that the younger would be the one through whom the covenant line would flow. This was totally in opposition to the culture of the day, and was also in opposition to character. God clearly did not choose Jacob because of his righteousness. Jacob was a trickster and deceiver from the moment of his birth, yet God chose to use him. On the other hand, He rejected Esau. God is sovereign, and has the authority to choose, use, or reject any of His creatures.

### **G. Jacob's Dream (Genesis 28:10-22)**

Jacob had done nothing up to this point to deserve God's favor, yet here God appears to confirm the covenant with this wayward son of Isaac. Though Jacob realized the importance of what had occurred, it did not seem to make any difference in his character.

### **H. The Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-45)**

The sovereignty of God is again displayed in the way by which He preserved His covenant people in the time of famine in the land. The preparation He made involved sending Joseph into slavery by the hand of his brothers, then having him work his way into the favor of the pharaoh, thus being in a position to protect his brothers and preserve the lives of his family during the great famine.

### **I. The Blessings of Jacob (Genesis 48-49)**

God's sovereign control of history is again seen in the blessings Jacob bestows upon his own sons and the sons of Joseph. The dying blessings of a father had prophetic significance, and Jacob speaks as

God's mouthpiece, choosing the younger son of Joseph over the elder and defining the characters of the tribes that were to spring from his own children.

## **2. The Efforts of Man to Fulfill God's Covenant**

Though God promised He would bring His Word to pass, very few people in the book of Genesis really acted like they believed Him. Most tried again and again to give God a helping hand, accomplishing nothing in the process except to make life difficult for themselves and their descendants.

### **A. Keeping the Family Together (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:7-17)**

Abraham (on two occasions) and Isaac both felt compelled to lie, or at least tell half-truths, in order to protect their wives against foreign rulers. In doing so, they failed to trust God to perpetuate the covenant line in His way. Your students must realize that God's work can never be advanced by breaking God's laws.

### **B. The Birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16)**

The son of promise was not forthcoming, so Abraham, at Sarah's suggestion, decided to take matters into his own hands by having a son by his wife's concubine Hagar. The son who was born, Ishmael, has been a thorn in his father's side ever since. Not only did he cause strife in the family, but his descendants, the Arabs, have fought with the descendants of Abraham for the last 4000 years.

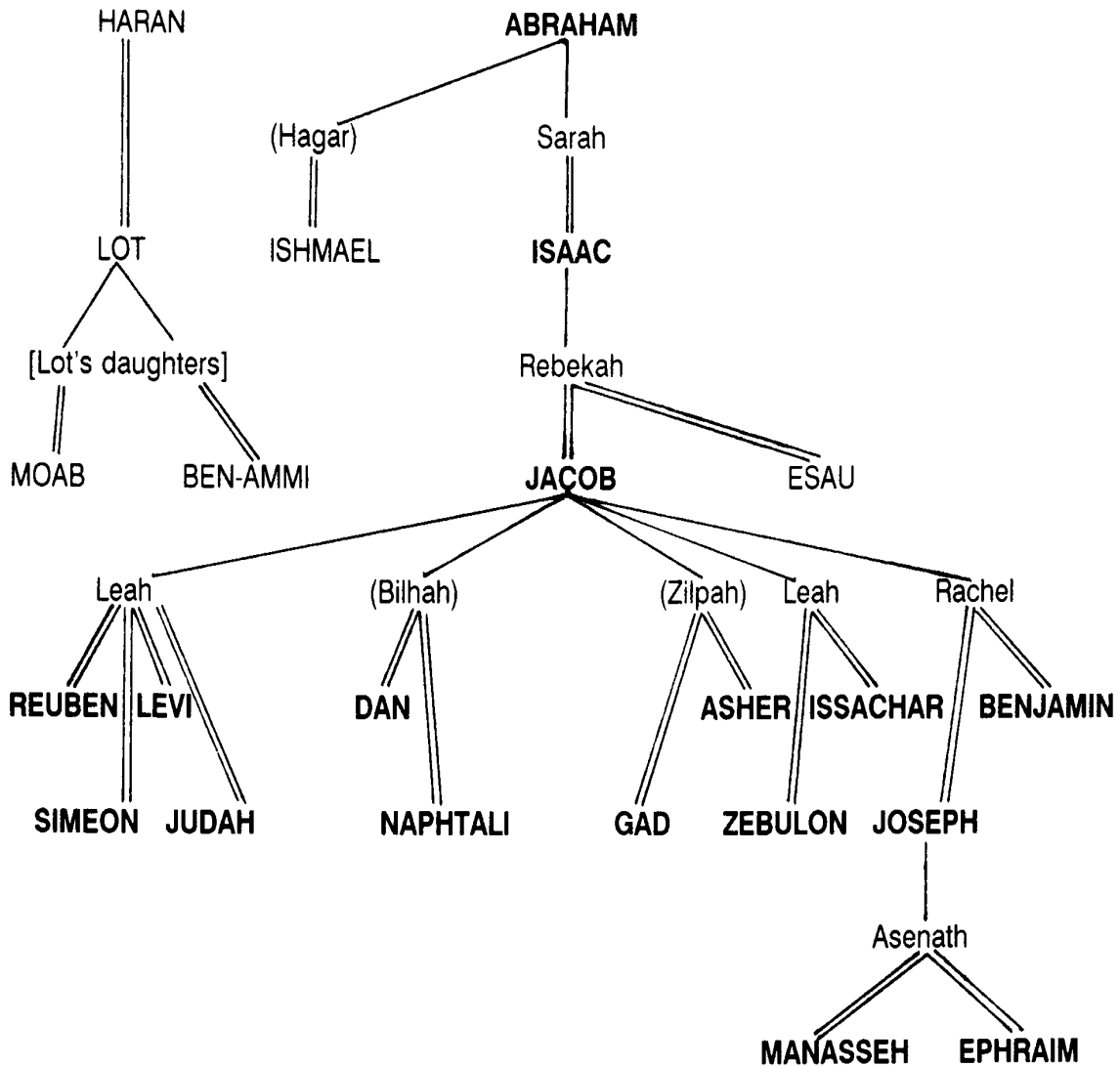
### **C. Jacob Obtains Esau's Birthright (Genesis 25:27-34) and Blessing (Genesis 27)**

Jacob was never one to leave anything to chance - or to God. Though he had been promised from birth that the covenant line would go through him, both he and his mother were constantly scheming to advance God's plans in their own way. Jacob traded a pot of soup to get the birthright and gained the dying blessing of his father by tricking the old man with the help of his mother Rebekah. All he gained was what God intended to give him anyway, but he lost the love of his brother, and was forced to flee his home, never to see his mother again. Esau, too, alienated from his family and bitter over the treatment he had received, gave birth to the Edomites, Israel's frequent enemies, and the progenitors of the notorious Herod family of the New Testament.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reminding your students that, if they are among God's people, God has a covenant with them as well. God will keep it, and their responsibility is to obey God, not to take His work into their own hands.

## ABRAHAM'S FAMILY TREE



### **KEY**

- CAPITAL LETTERS = men
- small letters = women
- single line = marriage (or at least sexual relations)
- double line = children
- bold** = covenant line
- parentheses = concubines



## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM**

1. What is a covenant? What makes the covenants of the Bible different from the covenants made between nations in Bible times and today?
2. Name three different incidents that show that God's covenant with Abraham and his family was unconditional. How do these incidents show this?
3. Name three incidents in which Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob tried to help God keep the covenant, and show how those efforts produced disaster.
4. What are some ways Christians today try to help God out by doing things their own way? Why is it foolish to try to improve on God's instructions for living our lives and accomplishing His plan?



# **EXODUS**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students how God delivered His covenant people from slavery in Egypt and gave them His law in the desert.

## **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:7** - “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”

## **Lesson Background**

The book of Exodus is the story of God’s work of salvation. It begins with Israel in slavery in the land of Egypt and ends with Israel in worship at the foot of Mount Sinai. It contains exciting narrative, foundational law, and marvelous symbolism. As is the case with any survey, the most difficult question involves how to capsuleize this rich book in order to cover it in a single week.

The book of Genesis ended with the family of Jacob in Egypt, safe from the famine that had ravaged the Near East because of God’s sovereign provision through Joseph. The family of Jacob was given a place of honor and a fertile piece of land in Goshen. Egypt was at that time being ruled by foreign invaders known as the Hyksos, who had conquered Egypt generations before. When the dynasty created by the Hyksos was overthrown later by native Egyptians, the contributions of the Israelites were no longer appreciated, and since

they were associated with the hated foreign regime, they were quickly reduced to servitude. Despite their enslavement, they continued to multiply until they posed a threat to their Egyptian masters by sheer force of their numbers. At this point the book of Exodus begins.

The book of Exodus may easily be divided into three sections, dealing with deliverance (chapters 1-18), law (chapters 19-24), and worship (chapters 25-40). These three divisions were important to the nation of Israel as it came into being, and they are equally important to Christians today. The first section, the narrative of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, demonstrates God's power over the false gods of this world (the plagues) and the necessity for blood atonement (Passover) and cleansing (Red Sea). The law given at Sinai shows the need for a life of obedience; under this section, we will be discussing the major divisions of the law (moral, civil, and ceremonial). The third section of the book deals with the construction of and worship associated with the Tabernacle, which served as a visual aid to teach the Israelites about God and can teach us today as well. The application of the lesson will thus focus on three basic necessities for any Christian - salvation, obedience, and worship.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by asking your students what it would be like to live without electricity for a prolonged period of time. What familiar aspects of our lives would change? List some of the things we depend on that would be useless without electricity. Suppose that God, in order to show Himself to be more powerful than the "gods" of our world (communications, computers, etc.), shut down all the electricity in the world in order to get people's attention. Do you think it would work? Would such a drastic act force people to worship Him, or would they only become angry and more rebellious against God? If your students concluded that such an action would only turn people against God more strongly, they got the point. The example of the plagues from Exodus shows that wonders alone harden the heart if not combined with the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit. Turn now to the survey of Exodus, beginning with God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt.

### **1. Deliverance (Exodus 1-18)**

The narrative portion of the book of Exodus details God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

#### **A. The Preparation of Moses (Exodus 1-4)**

God miraculously spared the life of Moses, then spent eighty years preparing him for the job he had to do. The first forty years were spent as a prince in the Egyptian court, where he had the best education available in the world at that time. The next forty years were spent in the wilderness of Midian, learning survival methods that would prove invaluable as he led the people through the desert. God taught him spiritual lessons as well, showing him both how to lead and how to be humble - a combination mastered by Moses to an extent matched by few in history. Moses is a useful example to your students in many ways. He trusted God even when his "career" seemed to be sidetracked, and he learned the lesson of servant leadership.



## **B. The Ten Plagues (Exodus 5-11)**

The ten plagues God sent against the land of Egypt were not so much a battle of wills with the pharaoh (a title like *king* or *emperor*, not a name) as they were a demonstration of God's power in opposition to the gods of Egypt. Egypt was a polytheistic society that worshiped many gods, most associated with nature. The plagues showed the utter impotence of the Egyptian gods against the God of Israel.

Water into Blood - The Nile was the lifeblood of Egyptian agriculture. Its seasonal flooding provided the water needed for crops to grow in the narrow band of arable land on either side of its banks. The Egyptians personified the Nile as a god and worshiped it in seasonal celebrations. What was to the Egyptians the source of life was turned by God into a source of stench, pollution, and death.

Frogs - Frogs were worshiped by Egyptians as omens of fertility, and the people of the land were not permitted to kill them. God created a situation where the people were overrun with their own overly-fertile fertility symbols!

Lice and Flies - Drawn by the carcasses of the dead frogs, the third and fourth plagues both had the result of making the people of the land ceremonially unclean and thus unfit for worship. Even if they had wanted to ask their gods for help, they were in no position to do so, since they could not participate in worship in their unclean condition.

Sick Livestock and Sick People - The land was filled with germs and disease, and both animals and people got terribly sick in the fifth and sixth plagues. Sick animals were unfit for sacrifice, and boils kept the people from entering their temples. Thus their worship continued to be hindered by the power of God.

Hail and Locusts - God now attacked the gods of agriculture in the seventh and eighth plagues. The rain god brought destructive hail rather than life-giving water, and a swarm of locusts then chewed up whatever the hail had left on the land.

Darkness - The ninth plague assaulted the most powerful of all Egyptian deities, Ra, the sun god. Even he was powerless against the almighty God of Israel.

Death Angel - Even here, God showed His power over the gods of Egypt. The Egyptians worshiped the pharaoh as the incarnation of a god, and his oldest son, next in line for the throne, was among those killed.

## **C. From Egypt to Sinai (Exodus 12-18)**

In the flight from Egypt to Mount Sinai, God showed His people that He was able to provide everything they needed - protection, food, and water. He protected them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and later from the Amalekites in the wilderness. He gave them manna from the skies and water from the rocks. The blessings of God are not the result of our effort, but come from trusting Him to provide what He has promised.

### **2. Law (Exodus 19-24)**

At Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the law by which His people were to live. Traditionally, that law is divided into three portions - the moral law, the civil law, and the ceremonial law. What are the uses of these portions of the law for Christians today?

## **A. The Moral Law**

The moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments. These apply to all people at all times and all places. This is true because they are a summary of the character of God, and thus of His will for His creatures. Since God does not change, neither does His will for human behavior. Jesus expanded on the meaning of the moral law in the Sermon on the Mount.

## **B. The Civil Law**

The civil law was the law by which Israel was to govern itself. It provided the basis for what is called a theocracy, which is a form of government where God is formally acknowledged as the Head. Because we do not live under a theocracy today, the specific requirements of the civil law do not apply to us (we do not, for instance, stone adulterers). The principles expressed in the civil law, however, can be very helpful to Christians today in defining what political and social justice should be and in formulating positions on various issues of social significance in the modern world.

## **C. The Ceremonial Law**

The book of Hebrews tells us that the ceremonial law was fulfilled in Christ. Thus we no longer are required to offer sacrifices or celebrate Jewish holidays. Since these things were fulfilled in Christ, however, we should expect that we can learn something about the ministry of Christ by studying these ceremonies. We will see this both in the last section of today's lesson, as we look at the Tabernacle, and next week, as we survey the book of Leviticus.

## **3. Worship (Exodus 25-40)**

At this point, hand out to students the page containing the Tabernacle diagram. As the different parts of the Tabernacle are covered in the class discussion, have students insert them in the appropriate places in the diagram.

### **A. The Altar of Sacrifice**

Located right at the entrance to the Tabernacle, this large altar was where animals were offered to God as burnt offerings. The shedding of blood was essential to the sacrificial system, since the people needed to understand that sin required the death of the sinner or a substitute.

### **B. The Laver**

A large wash-basin located between the altar of sacrifice and the entrance to the enclosed Holy Place was for the use of the priests, who were required to wash themselves before entering the Tabernacle enclosure. One cannot enter into the presence of God with unclean hands.

### **C. The Menorah**

The Holy Place was a curtained enclosure that admitted no light from the outside. This seven-branched lampstand, located on the left side as one entered the Holy Place, supplied light for the priests as they went about their duties. It is often thought to symbolize Christ, the Light of the World. The oil supplying the lamps is associated with the Holy Spirit in Zechariah 4.

## **D. The Bread of the Presence**

The priests were supplied with food at congregational expense, largely by being given a share of the offerings brought to the Tabernacle. Inside the Holy Place, on the right side opposite the menorah, was a table containing twelve loaves of bread, one for each of the tribes of Israel. The priests were permitted to eat this bread. It was called the Bread of the Presence (KJV “shewbread”) because it was displayed in the Tabernacle, which symbolized the presence of God. Jesus, when He talked about the spiritual life that He gave to His people, described Himself as the Bread of Life.

## **E. The Altar of Incense**

At the back of the Holy Place, right in front of the entrance to the Holy of Holies, was a small altar used for the burning of incense. The incense symbolized prayer, as its sweet smell ascended to the nostrils of God.

## **F. The Veil**

The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies were separated by a heavy curtain or veil. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God, and that only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. This was the veil in Herod’s Temple that was split from top to bottom when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51), indicating that the way into God’s presence was now open to people through the blood of Christ.

## **G. The Ark of the Covenant**

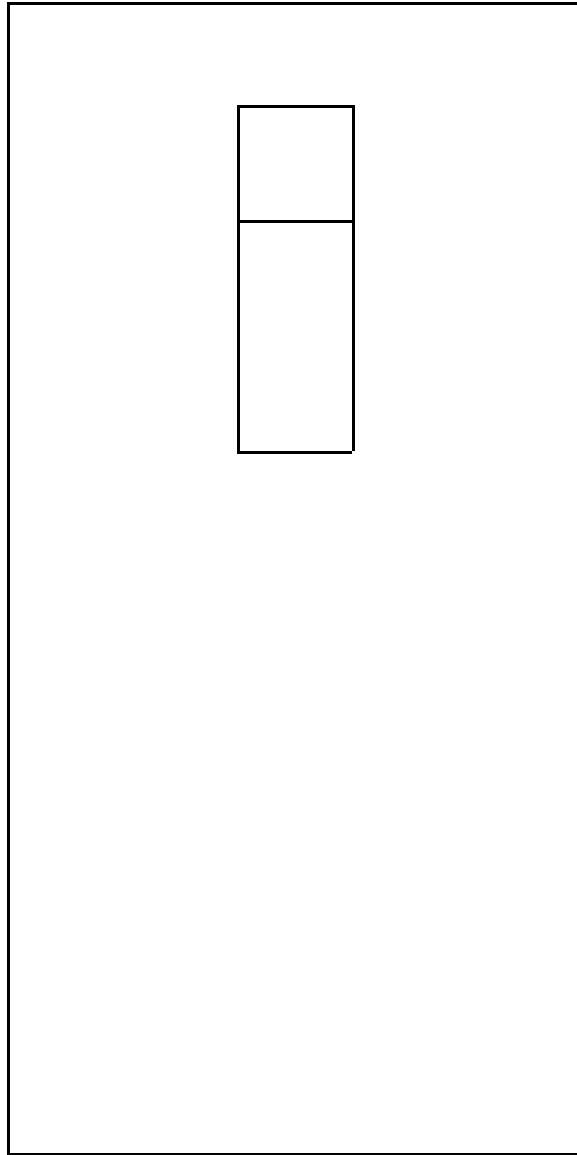
The ark eventually contained the tables of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and the rod of Aaron that budded, demonstrating God’s recognition of his priestly authority. Above the ark were two cherubim, forming the mercy seat on which the blood was to be poured on the Day of Atonement.

The entire scheme of worship not only pointed to Christ, but also emphasized the holiness of God. Access to Him was severely limited, making clear to the people that God was separate from sin. This theme will be explored further next week.



## THE TABERNACLE IN THE WILDERNESS

On this diagram of the Tabernacle, draw the following in their proper locations: the altar of sacrifice, the laver, the table of the bread of the Presence, the menorah, the altar of incense, the veil, and the ark of the covenant.





## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## EXODUS

1. How did the first eighty years of Moses' life help prepare him for the job of leading Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the Promised Land?
2. List the ten plagues, and show how they demonstrated the power of God over the gods of Egypt.
3. What are the three main divisions of the law? Which are applicable to us today? How are those parts of the law that no longer apply to us useful for Christians today?
4. How did the arrangement of the Tabernacle illustrate the holiness of God?
5. How did the worship of the Tabernacle point to the work of Christ?





# LEVITICUS

## Lesson Aim

To show students that the ceremonial law gave pictorial expression to the holiness of God.

## Memory Verse

**Hebrews 11:8** - “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

## Lesson Background

There are few books in the Bible that seem less capable of providing the foundation for an effective middle school Sunday School lesson than the book of Leviticus. The book contains little narrative, and the laws with which it is filled are obsolete in the sense that we are no longer bound by them today. They describe the obscure rituals of a nomadic people who lived over three thousand years ago in a place halfway around the world. How, then, can such a book be relevant to a young teenager in twenty-first-century America?

As it has in our last several lessons, thematic treatment of the material will provide a way of deriving its relevance for the students in your class. The book of Leviticus has a central theme that runs clearly throughout the book; that theme is holiness. Because the God of Israel is a holy God, he requires that His people be holy, not only in their dealings with Him, but also in their dealings with one another. The book of Leviticus gives instructions for maintaining that holiness. In looking at a book such as this one, it is easy

to get the impression that the way to a holy life is through prescribed ritual. Yet it is just such outward ritual that was condemned so strongly by Jesus when He encountered it in the lives of the Pharisees. Thus we miss the point of the book of Leviticus if we see there only a God who requires strict adherence to certain rituals in order to gain acceptance before Him. The clean hands of those who follow the ritual must be accompanied by a pure heart, or the ritual is worthless.

When Jesus was asked to summarize the Old Testament law in Matthew 22:37-39, He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” The book of Leviticus tells us that one of the ways in which we can love God and love our neighbor is to live clean lives before them. Our society does not encourage purity; in fact, it does everything possible to put before the eyes of our young people things that are abominable in God’s sight. Today’s lesson is thus an important one for your students because they must learn to evaluate the offerings of the society around them by asking not “What’s wrong with it?” but “Is it pure in the sight of God?”

The lesson today will be divided into two parts. The first will consider what it means to live a clean life before God and will focus on the sacrificial system. The second part will look at living a clean life before others and will focus on the principles of sexual purity and social justice as they appear in the book of Leviticus.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Start the lesson with a comparison between two stories. In the fairy tale *Cinderella*, a beautiful, hard-working young girl is left behind while her mean and ugly step-sisters go to the prince’s ball. They leave in their fancy carriage, wearing lovely dresses, while Cinderella sits at home and weeps in her dirty rags. In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus told a story about a wedding feast. Toward the end of the story, people are being dragged in off the streets because the invited guests were too busy to come. One guest, however, arrives improperly dressed and is promptly ejected from the feast. In the story of Cinderella, a dirty dress is associated with honest hard labor, while the clean dresses of the step-sisters are intended to picture laziness and arrogance. In Jesus’ parable, however, the dirty clothing does not represent industry, but sin; only those wearing the clean clothes of righteousness can enter the kingdom of God. This week’s book in our Bible survey talks about those clean clothes of righteousness. The book of Leviticus told the nation of Israel what they needed to do in order to be clean and acceptable before God. While we do not need to do the same things God required of Israel in their wilderness wanderings, the principles remain the same, and we can learn quite a bit about what is involved in living righteously from this book.

### **1. Living a Clean Life Before God**

The book of Leviticus is a bloody book. The first seven chapters detail sacrifice after sacrifice to be offered by the people of Israel in different situations. Though we usually picture the priests of Israel in pristine white outfits, their clothing must have been a bloody mess by the time they were done their daily work in the Tabernacle. The place must have been rather foul-smelling, too - this explains why the incense was burning in the Holy Place all the time. Between the blood of the slaughtered animals and the stench of burning flesh on the altar, the worship of God in Israel must have assaulted the nostrils.

Why did God require such a bloody form of worship? Why couldn’t the people just sing hymns, pray, and listen to sermons like we do? Allow your students to discuss these questions for a few minutes. Hopefully they will be able to realize that worship is not intended for pleasure or comfort, but is supposed to bring honor to God and teach the people about Him. What did the Old Testament sacrifices teach the

people about God? They showed clearly that the God who was being worshiped by the nation of Israel was a holy God. He could not tolerate sin. How did the sacrifices tell the people that God was holy?

### **A. By the Limited Access to God**

The sacrificial system demonstrated that God was holy by carefully defining how and under what circumstances God could be approached. God could only be approached by certain people, the priests, and only at certain times. The priests had to go through prescribed rituals in order to cleanse themselves before coming into the presence of God or officiating at worship. By these restrictions, God was telling His people that He was not to be taken lightly. Only those who had been cleansed in God's way could hope to stand before Him, and even those had to have been chosen by God Himself first - not everyone was eligible to come into His presence.

### **B. By the Shedding of Blood**

If God wanted to present a picture of cleanliness and purity to His people, one would think He could have thought of some more effective way than the bloody mess that must have occurred daily in the Tabernacle. The blood, however, was essential to communicate another important aspect of God's holiness. God is so holy that sin must be punished by death. God cannot simply "let the sinner slide" and retain His holy character. But God is also a God of mercy. Therefore He did not require the death of the sinner himself, but permitted a substitution - an animal could be killed in place of the sinner, and the sinner could thus be cleansed. Now, we know from the New Testament that the killing of animals did not really pay for sin. It was only a symbol of the real sacrifice for sin, the blood of Jesus that was shed on the Cross.

What do these things tell us about our lives today? God's standards have not changed. People today still cannot come before God on their own terms. God takes sin seriously enough that Jesus had to die to pay for it. We cannot take it less seriously. If the same standards applied to the worship in your church as applied to the banquet in Jesus' parable, would you be allowed to sit down in the pew this morning? Are your clothes clean with the righteousness of Christ, or would you be thrown out for wearing the dirty rags of your own good deeds?

## **2. Living a Clean Life Before Others**

The book of Leviticus also talks about the importance of living a clean life in society. It gives dietary regulations, health regulations, laws dealing with marriage, and laws dealing with land distribution, among others. We will focus today on these latter two areas, since they have the most immediate application to the lives of your students.

### **A. Sexual Purity**

The book of Leviticus prohibits many kinds of sexual activity, including incest, homosexuality, bestiality, and adultery, all of which are punishable by death. While Leviticus does not deal specifically with premarital sex, that topic is covered elsewhere in the law. God requires that His people be clean in their attitudes toward sex. He specifically mentions over and over again that Israel is not to copy the practices of the nations around them, or they will surely fall into the abominations that He forbids. Christians today must be doubly careful not to copy the attitudes and actions of the surrounding world with regard to sex. We are being told today that any sexual behavior is acceptable as long as it is done with the consent of both parties, or as long as it is done wisely, in order to avoid the possible consequences. The issue goes much deeper than consent and consequences, however. God's people must live pure lives no matter what those around them

do or say, no matter what they permit or accept. Living a clean life before others means having different standards, ones that are not dictated by society, but by God's Word.

## **B. Social Justice**

The laws of Leviticus 25 strike a strange chord in the ears of a capitalistic society. In the Year of Jubilee, land was to be returned to its original owners by those who had purchased it, and slaves were to be set free by owners who had bought them. What was the purpose of these laws? They demonstrated that everything, both the land and its people, belonged to God, and that those who owned the land and those who owned slaves did not possess any absolute right to them, but rather were using what belonged to the Lord.

The laws of Leviticus also provide for the needs of the poor. The Israelites are not to take advantage of the poor, but are to help them in a number of ways. They are to leave gleanings in the fields for them to harvest (19:9-10) and are not permitted to charge them interest when they lend them money (25:35-38).

What these laws tell us is that living clean lives also involves caring about other people. Our society teaches us to think of ourselves and to consider our possessions as our own with no strings attached. God does not approve of that sort of thinking. He expects His people to recognize that all they have comes from Him and belongs to Him, and therefore must be used for Him, and that we are responsible to care for the needs of other people. As in the first section, living a holy life means marching to the beat of a different drummer than that followed by the surrounding world.

Your students are at a stage where peer pressure is exceptionally heavy and hard to resist. They are changing from childhood to young adulthood and are not sure how to make that change smoothly. The great tendency among young teens is to look away from adults and toward their peers to find out how best to make that important transition. Your students must understand that God demands that His people be set apart from the surrounding world. If your students are Christians, they cannot afford to pattern their lives after the world around them. They must be holy, both in their worship of God and in their behavior toward other people.

## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## LEVITICUS

1. What is the major theme of the book of Leviticus?
2. Why did God require Israel to offer bloody sacrifices when they worshiped Him? Why are we not required to offer sacrifices when we worship today?
3. How does the sacrificial system illustrate the holiness of God?
4. Why was it important for the Israelites to take a different attitude toward sex than the people around them? Why is it equally important for Christians in America today?
5. What did the Year of Jubilee demonstrate about the land and the people of Israel? How should the same attitude appear in our behavior?
6. Why is it dangerous for Christian teenagers to derive their standards from their peers?



# **NUMBERS**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students how the desert wanderings of the Israelites were intended as lessons for us today, demonstrating the dangers of falling away from God.

## **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:9-10** - "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

## **Lesson Background**

When Paul insists in I Corinthians 10:1-13 that history has important lessons to teach God's people, most of the examples that he uses are taken from the book of Numbers. The fourth book of the Pentateuch is the one that chronicles the wilderness wanderings of the nation of Israel. As such, it is the record of Israel's failure and God's faithfulness. As Paul says in I Corinthians 10, God's people need to be warned of the danger of falling away by ignoring the goodness of God. The temptations that befell the Israelites are common to God's people of all ages, and your students are no different.

The book divides rather neatly into three sections. The first fourteen chapters deal with the journey from Egypt to Canaan and end with the unbelief that causes God to condemn them to forty years of aimless wandering. The next six chapters give a few isolated incidents from the forty years, which must otherwise have been excessively monotonous. The last sixteen chapters cover the final purposeful journey to the borders of the Promised Land. Instead of covering the book according to its three major divisions, however,

it will be more helpful for your middle school students to look at the book by examining its four characteristic sins. If these indeed are to be examples for us, the sins of the people are certainly ones that middle school students must learn to avoid. These four characteristic sins are unbelief (Numbers 13-14), rebellion (Numbers 16), complaining (Numbers 21:4-9), and compromise (Numbers 25). We will look at each of these sins in turn, along with examples of them from the book of Numbers. It should not be at all difficult to see how these apply to the lives of your students.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Depending on the size of your class, begin the session by having them prepare a skit or skits for presentation during the lesson. If your class is small, have them choose one incident to act out - either the report of the spies in Numbers 13-14, the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16, or the incident of the bronze snake in Numbers 21 (for obvious reasons, we will not include Numbers 25 for dramatization). If your class is large enough for three skits, divide the class into three groups and have each one prepare a brief skit based on its assigned passage. Prior to the discussion of each passage, have the group give the skit if one is available. This should help the students to think a bit more concretely about what was happening in these incidents.

### **1. Unbelief - the Report of the Spies (Numbers 13-14)**

Not long after God gave the law at Sinai, the Israelites arrived at the southern border of the Promised Land. God told Moses to send a group of spies to reconnoiter the land. He sent one from each tribe. They found a land of plentiful crops inhabited by a powerful race of wicked peoples called the Canaanites. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, were confident that God was able to bring them into the land despite the obstacles, since they had seen God bring them out of Egypt by great works of power. The other ten spies, however, advised against the attempt, maintaining that Israel was too weak to conquer the land. The people accepted the negative report of the majority and refused to enter the land. God punished them for their unbelief by telling them that they were condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years - one year for each day the spies were in the land - and that none of those over the age of twenty except Joshua and Caleb would live to enter the land God had promised to the nation. The unbelief displayed by the people on this occasion was the root of all the other problems that appear later in the book. Because they did not trust God, they faced perpetual difficulties in trying to live in God's world.

Your students also live in God's world. They are not conditioned to see it that way, however. Like the majority of the Israelites, they are predisposed to look at only those things that are seen, ignoring the unseen, despite much evidence from the past that God is sovereign over His world. Those who have been raised in Christian homes are terribly susceptible to the unbelief demonstrated by the wilderness generation. They have been exposed to God for many years, but do they really know Him? Often they think they do, but when put to the test, they think like any worldlying. Whether your students have this problem or not can best be detected by looking at the other sins that stemmed from unbelief in the lives of the Israelites in the wilderness.

### **2. Rebellion - the Revolt of Korah (Numbers 16)**

During the years of wandering, some of the Israelites became dissatisfied with the leadership of Moses (and since Moses had been appointed and was being directed by God, they were really revolting against God Himself). A man named Korah led a revolt, claiming (very democratically, of course) that all of God's people were equal, and therefore Moses had no right to set himself up as an authority over the



people. God put the revolt down in no uncertain terms when the earth opened up and swallowed the leaders of the rebellion.

Your students are at an age where rebellion against authority is very common. Whether it be parents, teachers, or the law of the state, young teens often challenge authority. Too often we as adults are told to view such rebellion as “natural” or “just a phase they’re going through.” It is natural, of course, but we as Christians know that man’s nature is to sin. Rebellion cannot be excused or tolerated in the life of the Christian, no matter what age he may be. No matter what those around them are doing, your students must realize that to rebel against the authority of their parents and teachers is to rebel against God, and that God does not take such things lightly. Too many teenagers have lost years of their lives by wasting them in ungodly rebellion against authority. Your students must see that they do not have the right to do as they please. Authorities may not always be right, but God has put them where they are for a reason. Christians are responsible for obedience; those in authority are accountable to God for what they do.

### **3. Complaining - the Bronze Snake (Numbers 21:4-9)**

In your class you may have some overt rebels, but you will also have some “good kids” who wouldn’t dream of challenging authority overtly. But they readily engage in another sin to which the Israelites constantly succumbed - the sin of griping and complaining.

One example of this sin occurs in the incident of the bronze snake in Numbers 21. What were the Israelites complaining about? They were bored, they were hungry and thirsty, and they hated the food God had given them. Little things - these were the same kinds of things your students complain about most often. As a school teacher, I constantly heard my students complain about uncomfortable chairs, boring classes, hot or cold classrooms, and petty rules. In complaining, they lost sight of many large things for which they ought to be grateful. The Israelites were the same way. They forgot the horrors of Egyptian slavery and God’s miraculous deliverance; they forgot to be grateful for the life-giving manna from heaven, and instead complained about its flat taste and monotony. In response, God sent poisonous snakes that bit and killed many people. Their only means of deliverance was to turn their eyes back where they should have been all along - to the God who was the source of their life.

It might be a helpful exercise at this point to have your students make two lists. Choose one of three areas - home, school, or church. Have the students list the things they most often complain about in connection with the area they have chosen. Then list the things they should be thankful about. A comparison of the lists should show them that complaining tends to focus their thoughts on minor things while they ignore the great blessings God is giving them. God may not send poisonous snakes to bite your students, but He could take away from them the blessings they take so easily for granted.

### **4. Compromise - the Corruption of Moab (Numbers 25)**

The curious tale of Balaam, the prophet-for-hire, concludes with the account given in Numbers 25. Balaam seems to have been a genuine prophet, but he had sold himself out for material gain and was willing to use his services for the benefit of the highest bidder (mercenary preachers are still with us today, of course, and they bring as much shame on the name of God as did Balaam). Whenever Balaam tried to curse Israel, as he had been hired to do by the king of Moab, God intervened and Balaam unwillingly spoke words of blessing instead. He finally realized that God was not going to let him utter a curse against His people, and he advised the king of Moab to try a different strategy - that of corrupting the people through compromise. The Moabites feigned friendship toward Israel, and as a gesture of peace, invited their new friends to a celebration. This celebration, of course, involved the worship of Baal, the god of the Moabites, who was worshiped through ritual prostitution, among other things (Baal was a fertility god, and acts promoting

fertility were part of the worship in his temples). God responded by killing all those who participated in Moabite worship, a total of 24,000 people.

These Israelites believed they could worship God at one time and be involved in the practices of the world at another without contradiction. God showed them that such behavior was impossible. Your students today face the same temptation. They go to church and worship, then go home and watch smut on television or their computers or listen to it on their devices. They cannot serve two masters. The God of Israel is a jealous God who will not allow His people to give their allegiance to any lesser deity.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the sins of Israel in the book of Numbers and their consequences. Remind the students that the temptations faced by Israel in the wilderness are common to all Christians. Ask each student to think about the sins covered today, and to consider which of the four poses the greatest problem for him or her. Then encourage them to pray specifically for God's help in dealing with that particular sin in their lives.

## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## NUMBERS

1. Why did it take the Israelites forty years to get from Egypt to the Promised Land?
2. What was the fundamental sin for which God killed the generation that had come out of Egypt?
3. Why is rebellion against human authority a sin against God?
4. Why is it a sin to complain?
5. List the five things you complain about most often. Then list five things you should be thankful for, but almost never are. Then pray to God to help you be a thankful rather than a complaining person.
6. In Numbers 25, the Israelites sinned by compromising with the immoral worship of the Moabites. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to compromise with the immoral practices of the world around you? What can you do to help yourself resist these temptations?



# **DEUTERONOMY**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students God's faithfulness to His people through Moses' review of God's covenant relationship with Israel.

## **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:11** - "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise."

## **Lesson Background**

The book of Deuteronomy consists mostly of a single sermon delivered in a single day by Moses when the Israelites had camped on the eastern side of the Jordan River in preparation for entering the Promised Land. The book amounts largely to a review of God's covenant relationship with Israel. In it, Moses goes over what God has done for Israel and the law He has given them, then proceeds to give a long series of exhortations and warnings about keeping the law, the blessings that will result from obedience, and the terrible consequences that will follow disobedience. At the end of the book, Moses dies and is succeeded by Joshua as the leader of the people. Before he dies, he composes a song of remembrance to help the people keep in mind what he has told them in his final words to the nation.

The structure of the book follows closely the standard format used in the second millennium B.C. for political treaties. It begins with a review of the history of the relationship between the parties of the covenant. This historical prologue is followed by the listing of the stipulations of the covenant, then by a section of curses and blessings, in which the gods of the parties involved are called upon to ratify the covenant by blessing those who keep it and cursing those who violate it (of course, in this case, God Himself

ratifies the covenant). The end of the covenant details succession arrangements needed to perpetuate the covenant for future generations.

How are we then to summarize the book of Deuteronomy in one lesson for the benefit of a group of middle school students? We will use the covenant framework into which the book naturally fits, and by comparing it with a peace treaty between a conqueror and his conquered foe, help the students to understand the functions of the different parts of the covenant. The major application of the book can be drawn from the parable Jesus told in Luke 14:31-33. In the story of a king who is about to fight a war against an enemy who has him badly outnumbered, Jesus indicates that the king really has two choices - surrender or annihilation. In the same way that God imposed His covenant on the people of Israel as a conquering king upon his new subjects, so your students have to recognize that, if they are Christians, they are subject to God's covenant. If they are not, the fact that they have not been conquered by Christ does not mean they are free; it means they face imminent destruction through the judgment of God.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the class by telling your students that they are the ruling council of a tribe of Hittites. They have just conquered a tribe of nomadic Midianites. It is now time to prepare and sign a peace treaty. As the conquerors, they have the right to dictate the terms of the peace. Have them, as a group, write up the outline of a treaty with the Midianites. The treaty should contain the following sections:

**HISTORICAL PROLOGUE** - This should tell, in one paragraph, about the previous dealings of the Hittites and Midianites. Did you have any earlier treaties? What happened? Did they lapse, or did one side or both violate them? Have you fought any wars in previous years? Who won?

**COVENANT STIPULATIONS** - This is the heart of the covenant. It lists the responsibilities of both parties. What must the Midianites do for the Hittites? What will the Hittites promise to do in return? Is the alliance primarily military or economic?

**CURSES AND BLESSINGS** - What will the gods of the Hittites and Midianites promise to those who keep the covenant? What will they do to those who violate it? [e.g., "If you fail to supply two hundred mounted and armed warriors for my army each year, may the fleas of two hundred camels infest your armpits."]

**SUCCESSION ARRANGEMENTS** - What happens if the king of the Hittites or the Sheik of Midian dies? Who will succeed as ruler? Will he be bound by this covenant? How long will the terms of this covenant be binding?

After your students have completed this exercise, point out that what they have done illustrates the format used to structure treaties in the time of Moses. Then tell them that, when Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy, he used this same format to remind the people of Israel of the covenant they had with God. Then spend the remainder of the lesson time reviewing the major sections of Deuteronomy, focusing specifically on the purpose of each section in the life of Israel.

### **1. Historical Prologue (Deuteronomy 1-3)**

The first three chapters of Deuteronomy summarize in very brief terms the history of the previous forty years, from the time Israel broke camp at Mount Sinai after having received the law to the encampment on the east of the Jordan where they were now being addressed by Moses for the last time. The summary includes the sorry incident of the spies, the rebelliousness of the people, and the recent victories God had

given them over enemies who had tried to impede their progress to the Promised Land. This historical summary serves to remind Israel both of God's faithfulness and their unfaithfulness. The people to whom Moses was speaking were the younger generation, who remembered little of Egypt, and many of whom had been born in the wilderness. Much of the rebellion he describes had been led by their parents, who were now dead. They needed to be reminded not to follow in their parents' footsteps, but also to be encouraged that God could give them victory in the great battles ahead. Their parents had refused to enter the land forty years earlier out of fear. The children had seen God give victory, and thus had no reason to fear as they prepared to enter the land from which their parents had turned away.

## **2. Covenant Stipulations (Deuteronomy 4-26)**

The covenant stipulations begin, naturally enough, with the Ten Commandments in chapter five, but then go on to focus on laws specifically designed for the people of Israel once they are in the land of Canaan. They are no longer to be nomads. A settled people need new laws, which God gives them in these chapters. But these new laws are based on the same principles by which they had lived in the wilderness, as summarized in the Decalogue. The new laws include emphasis on the perpetual teaching of the law in the family (chapter 6), instructions for driving out the Canaanites (chapter 7), warnings to avoid borrowing the idolatrous worship of the Canaanites (chapters 12-13), instructions about prophets, priests, and kings, the officers of the new regime (chapters 17-18), the establishment of cities of refuge as part of the criminal justice system (chapter 19), and various other miscellaneous instructions.

These are not intended to replace the laws given at Sinai, but to supplement them in order to help the people deal with a new historical situation. Point out to your students that God's law never changes, but the application of the basic principles underlying the law will change as the circumstances of God's people change. The Ten Commandments will always be valid, but the specific laws associated with their application will change over the years. For example, in the same way that the Israelites in the wilderness did not need cities of refuge, but those in the land did, so Christians a hundred years ago did not need laws to help them sort out questions of medical ethics like organ transplants and test-tube babies, but Christians today do.

## **3. Curses and Blessings (Deuteronomy 27-30)**

What we do with the law of God is not a sort of optional curiosity. God's law carries with it consequences of the most serious sort. In these chapters, God indicates the blessings He will give the Israelites if they keep His law and the curses that will fall upon them if they violate it. Throughout Israel's history, the truth of these promises and threats is borne out repeatedly. When Israel obeyed God or repented of the sins they had committed, God blessed them with material prosperity and victory over their enemies. When they forgot God and followed idols, God sent drought, famine, disease, defeat, and finally captivity.

Does this mean that those who preach the Gospel of Prosperity are right, that God will make those who follow Him rich? Jesus makes it clear in the New Testament that we are not to seek after the things of this world. Instead, we should see that God will bless His people in ways that are far more meaningful and permanent, with spiritual blessings that satisfy far more than material possessions. The other side, of course, is that no one can ignore the law of God and expect to get away with it forever. Though God is patient and slow to judge sin, He will judge. Consequences of disobedience come both in this life and in the life to come.

#### **4. Succession Arrangements (Deuteronomy 31-34)**

God's covenant with His people is not restricted to one generation or associated with one powerful personality. God's work goes on, even when one whom He has used greatly dies. When Moses was called home by God, Joshua was ready to step into the vacuum. God's work uses people, but does not depend on them. God's work goes on when people fail or when they die. One of the great things about God's covenant with man is its unconditional nature, as we saw in Genesis 15. The covenant will not be broken. It may have negative consequences for individuals and nations who violate it, but it will not fail in its ultimate purposes.

#### **Conclusion**

Close the lesson by discussing with your students the parable in Luke 14:31-33. Encourage your students to consider where they stand in relation to God's covenant. Are they among the conquered, who are subject to the privileges and responsibilities of a relationship with God, or are they still enemies in rebellion against Him, who face only inevitable destruction if they persist in rebelling against the true king?



## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## DEUTERONOMY

1. What were the historical circumstances under which the book of Deuteronomy was given to the nation of Israel?
2. What were the four major sections of the treaties used for political agreements in the time of Moses? What was the major purpose of each section?
3. Why was it important for Moses to remind the new generation of Israelites about the history of God's dealings with their parents?
4. Why did God have to give new laws to the people when they entered the Promised Land? Did these new laws invalidate the ones given at Sinai?
5. What does God promise today to those who keep His covenant? What will happen to those who violate it?



# **JOSHUA**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students that God completes the deliverance He promises to His people, as He gave Israel peace in the Promised Land.

## **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:12** - "And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore."

## **Lesson Background**

In Hebrews 4, the author of Hebrews compares the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua to the heavenly rest of the Christian. He says that the rest given by God through Joshua was only partial, while the rest given to His people by Christ is complete and permanent. Because of this passage, many commentators throughout the years have seen in the book of Joshua a symbolic picture of the Christian life - a life of warfare and partial rest, prefiguring the eternal rest to come in heaven. While I would not totally accept this typology to the extent that some seek to use it, the book of Joshua certainly does give us a picture of God's salvation - He delivers His people from their enemies and gives them victory, as He has promised to do.

The book of Joshua, while it may have been written by Joshua himself or possibly some other man of God such as Samuel, does not identify its author. The book falls easily into three major sections, describing the Israelites as they enter the land (Joshua 1-5), conquer the land (Joshua 6-12), and settle the land (Joshua 13-24). Spiritual applications to the Christian life are numerous, though we should try to make

these applications without too much overt reliance on questionable typology. We will cover the book by examining its three major sections, in the process surveying the major incidents contained in each. This will give your students a general overview of the book, but will also provide the opportunity for you to apply the spiritual truths contained in these stories to the lives of your students. [NOTE: In surveying the book, it would be useful to obtain a map of Canaan at the time of the Conquest to show your students how the events of the book of Joshua relate to one another geographically.]

## **Lesson Procedure**

Start the class by asking your students to list some hymns in which the Christian life is compared to a battle. They should be able to come up with “Onward, Christian Soldiers” and “The Son of God Goes Forth to War,” among many others. What is there about the Christian life that makes it like a war? What New Testament passages reinforce this imagery? Certainly we find word pictures using warfare in Ephesians 6:10-18 and II Timothy 2:3-4. Because the Christian life is pictured as a battle that God wins for His people, it should not surprise us that the book of Joshua is the source of a great deal of spiritual truth about the Christian life. In it, we find God fulfilling His promise to His people by giving them victory in the land He had promised to give them.

### **1. Entering the Land (Joshua 1-5)**

After the death of Moses, Joshua was appointed to be the leader of the nation of Israel. Joshua had a tough act to follow, but he was well prepared for it, having served as Moses’ assistant throughout most of the forty years in the wilderness. He now faced the task of leading the people into the land of Canaan and subduing its inhabitants. The people of Canaan were the descendants of Canaan, the grandson of Noah, who had been cursed by Noah in Genesis 9. The Canaanite civilization was corrupt and barbarous. They practiced a religion that was based on local fertility cults that worshiped Baal and his consort Astarte. The rites associated with these fertility cults included ritual prostitution (both heterosexual and homosexual) and human sacrifice, among other disgusting things. Joshua and the Israelites were to be God’s instruments of judgment upon this vile and corrupt “civilization.”

In the opening chapter of the book, God assures Joshua that he will not have to tackle his task alone. God promises to be with Him and to give him the strength that he needs to accomplish the job before him. Our situation today is no different. When Jesus sent His disciples out into the world with a job to do, He did not send them alone, but promised to be with them and give them the power they needed to do the job (Matthew 28:18-20).

In Joshua 2, Joshua sends spies to check out the first major Canaanite city they were to encounter, the city of Jericho, an oasis on the western side of the Jordan River. The spies were housed and protected by a prostitute named Rahab, who showed that she had turned from the idolatry that had made her a prostitute to the God of Israel by her actions in behalf of God’s people. The application here is that, while God’s people must know something about the enemy they must fight, they should not get involved with the evil practices of that enemy. Too many Christians know too much about the ways of the world because they are immersed in those ways. Their lives are no different from those of the “enemy.” Other Christians, however, shut themselves away in Christian “ghettoes,” rarely coming into contact with the world, and thus are totally unprepared to oppose what the world is doing.

In chapters three through five, Israel crosses the Jordan, circumcises those who have not yet undergone that ritual identification with the people of God, then celebrates the Passover. Worship must precede service. Christians are in no position to meet the enemy until we have met God and spent time in His presence.

## **2. Conquering the Land (Joshua 6-12)**

The defeat of the Canaanites is summarized in a brief seven chapters. Chapter six speaks of the fall of Jericho, the famous story of the collapse of the walls of the city after the Israelites do no more than walk around it thirteen times in seven days. Two lessons can come from this. First of all, the battles against evil are won by God. As the fiasco at Ai in chapter seven clearly shows, battles fought without God are battles lost, no matter how easy they may seem. Secondly, we must see that in the fight against sin, there can be no compromise with the enemy. God ordered Joshua to destroy every man, woman, and child in Jericho with the exception of Rahab and her family. This may seem terribly cruel and harsh to our way of thinking, but we must remember that God has the right to judge sin by imposing death if He so chooses. The book of Judges gives ample evidence that what happened to Jericho was necessary. Where the Israelites failed to destroy the Canaanites, they inevitably wound up compromising with them and falling into idolatry.

Chapter seven speaks of the sin of Achan, the cause of the defeat at Ai. This further illustrates the principle that sin is destructive in the life of the Christian, keeping him from being used by God. A much more striking application is that sin in one person can destroy the effectiveness of a whole group of people. God's church cannot serve Him effectively if it tolerates sin in its midst. Church discipline is vital as a prerequisite to victory in the battle against Satan. Once the discipline has been carried out, Israel wins an easy victory over Ai in chapter eight.

Chapter nine demonstrates that compromise not only comes through sin, but also through independent action. The Gibeonites were able to fool Joshua and the other leaders of Israel because they made a treaty with them without consulting God first. Human wisdom, no matter how clever, can never take the place of God's wisdom. We set ourselves up for failure when we leave God out of the decisions of our lives.

The rest of the conquest is summarized in chapters ten through twelve. Chapter ten tells of the defeat of the Southern Confederation, including the famous incident where the sun stood still. In chapter eleven, we have the defeat of the Northern Confederation under the leadership of Jabin, king of Hazor. Chapter twelve lists all the kings defeated by Joshua and the Israelites.

## **3. Settling the Land (Joshua 13-24)**

As chapter thirteen begins, we find that the Conquest, though largely successful, was not complete. Some Canaanites still remained in the land. It was to become the responsibility of the individual tribes to drive the remaining Canaanites from the territories to which they were assigned. Chapters thirteen through nineteen then give details of the division of the land among the twelve tribes. The tribal territories were assigned by lot. This was not, however, considered a random means of assignment, nor were the land divisions being left to chance. The Israelites were convinced that the lot fell according to God's sovereign will. The tribal lands were thus assigned according to the will of God.

In chapters twenty and twenty-one, special cities for special purposes were designated. These were the Cities of Refuge and the Levitical Cities. The Cities of Refuge were for the purpose of giving justice to those who had killed someone accidentally. There were six of these cities, three on each side of the Jordan, spread from the north to the south. If someone accidentally killed a person, he could flee to the nearest City

of Refuge and be safe. Upon arrival, a trial would be held to determine if the death was truly accidental. If the person had been murdered, the killer would be executed. If the verdict was accidental death, the killer would have to stay in the City of Refuge until the death of the current High Priest. These provisions both displayed mercy in the case of accidental deaths and were sufficiently severe in their punishment to discourage carelessness.

The Levitical Cities were set aside for the use of the members of the tribe of Levi. The Levites had been designated as priestly assistants by God and needed to devote all of their time to their religious responsibilities. Thus they were given forty-eight cities spread throughout the land, four in the territory of each tribe. This allowed them to minister to all Israel without having to be concerned with protecting tribal lands of their own. As God did in Israel, God today also designates certain people to devote all of their time and energy to ministering among His people. As did the Levites, such men deserve the support of those among whom they serve.

## **Conclusion**

The book of Joshua ends with the death of Joshua, and as Moses did, we find him speaking his last words to the people, and in so doing reminding them of the covenant relationship they had with God. End your lesson with a brief review of the principles relating to the Christian life that you have gone over with the class in the course of surveying the book of Joshua.

## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## JOSHUA

1. What was the Canaanite religion like? Why did God order them exterminated?
2. How does the book of Joshua demonstrate that God's people gain victory through the power of God, and not in their own strength?
3. What incidents in the book of Joshua demonstrate the disastrous consequences of sin in the life of the Christian? in the life of the church?
4. What were the serious consequences that resulted from the incomplete conquest of the Canaanites?
5. Why were the Levites not given land of their own?





# **JUDGES AND RUTH**

## **Lesson Aim**

To demonstrate to students the consequences of disobedience along with the willingness of God to forgive the sins of His people.

## **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:13-14** - "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own."

## **Lesson Background**

The period between the Conquest under Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy in Israel under Saul was a period of virtual chaos lasting about three hundred and fifty years. During this time, the Israelites repeatedly fell away from the worship of God by involving themselves in the worship practices of the Canaanite tribes that remained in the land after the Conquest. Each time they fell away, God would allow them to be brought into subjection to one of the tribal groups either inside or on the borders of the land. After years of suffering, they would repent, and God would send a deliverer to throw off the shackles of the oppressor. These deliverers were called judges. One source of confusion in the book of Judges involves what precisely these judges were. Part of the problem lies in the fact that two different kinds of judges appear in the book. One type is the military deliverer just described. Some of these had judicial functions as well (Deborah, for instance), but many were known simply for their military prowess (Jephthah, Samson). Another group of judges, usually given brief mention at certain junctures in the narrative, had as their major function the settling of disputes, and do not appear to have been involved in military endeavors (Tola, Jair,

etc.). Almost all of the judges supervised local jurisdictions; none was recognized throughout the entire land. In fact, many of the narratives in the book of Judges probably overlap in time (if you add up the times given for the reigns of the judges, you get much more than 350 years).

The main body of narrative in the book of Judges follows the cycle described in 2:10-23. This cycle of relapse, retribution, repentance, and restoration is repeated over and over again throughout the book. The main narrative is preceded by a prologue in chapters one and two that sets the stage for the period and explains the apostasy of the people in the generation following the death of Joshua, focusing on their failure to drive the Canaanites from the land, thus setting themselves up for compromise and idolatry. At the end of the book, we have an epilogue (chapters 17-21) that consists of two stories, the Danite migration and the Benjamite civil war, which give us something of the flavor of life during the period of the judges. The book of Ruth could well be an addition to that epilogue. Though it was written later than the book of Judges (Judges was probably written during the reign of Saul - possibly by Samuel - while Ruth had to have been written during the reign of David), Ruth also gives us a picture of life during the period, and shows us that not all of the Israelites had turned aside from the worship of God.

The book of Judges is a fascinating book with some of the most interesting narratives in all of Scripture. Some of these are quite familiar to your students, while others would be known only to a few. The book is so full of stories that to focus on one or two would fail to give a good picture of the book, while to cover all of them would do justice to none. As a result, we will be relying on your students' knowledge of many of the book's narratives in order to bring out key lessons from Judges and Ruth. There are three key lessons on which we will be concentrating our attention. The first is the danger of compromise with the world, most easily seen in the cycle that dominates the book. The second is the fact that God uses weak people. The judges were hardly the type of people we would choose as our representatives, yet God not only chose them, but used them effectively. This should be an encouragement to your students, many of whom see themselves as capable of little for God at this point. The third lesson of the book is that God will preserve for Himself a faithful witness in the bleakest of times. To see this lesson, we will focus largely on the book of Ruth, which points to faithfulness to a much greater extent than the predominantly negative accounts in the book of Judges.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by reviewing the information from the prologue of the book of Judges, filling in the gap between Joshua and Judges. Note how the people remained faithful during the lifetimes of the elders who had served under Joshua, but that the next generation had fallen away by worshiping idols. Also introduce the cycle that characterizes the book by drawing a circle on the board and marking the steps of the cycle around the edge of the circle, showing that the Israelites moved continuously around the circle for about 350 years. Then remind the students of the major narratives of the book; refreshing their memories about Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson (as well as Ruth) will enable them to tie together facts from the stories with the principles we will be discussing. They may not be as familiar with the narratives of Othniel and Ehud, but we will not be referring to them very often.

### **1. God Hates Compromise**

Last week, we saw that God ordered the total extermination of the Canaanites. He wanted the land wiped clean of their evil influence. The first thing the book of Judges tells us is that the tribes of Israel, who had been entrusted with the responsibility for eradicating the Canaanites who remained in their respective territories, had failed to do their job. Many Canaanites remained, and their lifestyle and worship continued throughout the period to be a temptation and a threat to the people of Israel.

Why were the Israelites so susceptible to idolatry? Several reasons can be asserted. First of all, the collapse began in the second generation. The people who had seen God work in the wilderness and in the Conquest had died. Their children had known nothing but the peace and prosperity of the Promised Land and had not seen God work firsthand the way their parents had. They lacked both motivation and faith in their fight against sin. Many of your students are probably second-generation Christians. Has the fact that they have grown up in Christian homes made them soft on sin and unwilling to fight against it? Has it made their relationship with God distant, almost second-hand, so that they go through the motions of worship with little reality?

Secondly, the Israelites lived in a world that was unswervingly polytheistic. All of the nations with which Israel had contact believed that there were many gods in the world, each with his or her own special area of influence. Many were henotheistic, meaning that they acknowledged the existence of many gods despite the fact that they worshiped only one, the god associated with their tribe (Judges 11:24 shows that this type of thinking was not entirely foreign to Israel). Israel thus was alone in its strict monotheism. It was very easy for the thinking of the world to creep into Israelite practice. Too many of them reasoned that there would be no harm in supplementing their worship of Jehovah with the worship of the local baal (the word simply means “lord”; Baal was not the name of a single god, but rather a general title given to a whole group of local fertility gods whose worship was associated with the seasons of planting and harvest). Such syncretism seemed eminently reasonable to the pagan world, but was detestable to God. Your students today face the same temptation to compromise by accepting the values universally espoused by the world around them. Relativism is universally accepted; no one believes there are absolute standards of right and wrong any more. Your students face a strong temptation to shove their religion into a tiny compartment in the corner of their lives and adopt the attitudes of the world when they are among their peers. It is hard to be different, especially when that difference is ridiculed as unreasonable or illogical by people on all sides. God, however, requires that His people be different and not accept the values of the surrounding world, no matter how prevalent.

## **2. God Uses Weak People**

When reading the book of Judges, it is easy to get the impression that God must have been hard-pressed for people to do His work, because He certainly wound up having to settle for a bunch of losers. The fact of the matter is, however, that the weaknesses of the judges should be an encouragement to us, since it shows us that God can use us, as well. Take a few minutes now to review some of the weaknesses of the people God used in this book.

### **A. The Assassin (Ehud)**

Ehud’s main qualification to be a deliverer of Israel was his skill with a knife. He was left-handed, and thus was able to conceal his dagger against his right thigh, where he knew he would not be searched. He thus gained entrance into the quarters of Eglon, king of Moab, and left his knife buried in Eglon’s ample midsection.

### **B. The Woman (Deborah)**

In our era of feminism, we have been taught that women can do anything men can do. The ancient world did not by any means share this attitude. Women were relegated to the menial tasks of the tent and village, and were not even permitted to enter the councils of war. To find a battle led by a woman was not only highly unusual, it also provides a commentary on the condition of the Israelite men of the day. Deborah was a woman of faith, but the fact that she had to lead the people shows that few men shared her faith.

### **C. The Coward (Gideon)**

When we first meet Gideon, he is threshing wheat in a winepress. The Midianites had been raiding the land on their war camels, stealing the crops as soon as the Israelites could harvest them. Gideon was hiding his meager crop in an unlikely location to keep it away from the fearsome marauders. Gideon later did show himself to be a courageous leader, but it was like pulling teeth for God to get him to lead. When the angel called him, Gideon tried to argue his way out of it (much as Moses had done centuries earlier at the burning bush); he later used the business with the fleece to try to reassure himself and bolster his shaky confidence.

### **D. The Mobster (Jephthah)**

Jephthah was an illegitimate child, the son of a prostitute, who was thrown out of the house by his father's brothers and became a bandit chieftain in the wilderness of Transjordan. Though he evidently trusted God, his knowledge of spiritual things was nil. Not only does he appear to have believed that the gods of the other nations actually existed, but he also accepted the heathen practice of sacrifice as a means of bargaining with God that produced such tragic consequences in his own family.

### **E. The Playboy (Samson)**

Samson was a man of great physical strength and great moral weakness. He apparently never saw a girl he didn't like. His lack of self-control in the area of sex led to his ultimate downfall, though in the meantime God used his frequent spats over women as an excuse to demolish and demoralize the Philistines.

Your students need to appreciate the importance of these incidents for them. They have weaknesses, often very serious ones, as do we all. They need to realize that weaknesses do not disqualify a person from God's service. In fact, it is in our weaknesses that the power of God is displayed even more clearly, as Paul pointed out in I Corinthians 1:26-31. Of course, this does not give us any excuse for ignoring our weaknesses, or for failing to try to overcome our sins.

## **3. God Preserves a Witness**

The marvel of the period of the judges is that after 350 years of chaos and disaster, Israel still emerged as God's people, including a number who were committed to the faith of their fathers. This shows, like no other portion of Scripture, that God is faithful to His promises and will preserve for Himself a faithful witness in the darkest of times. Often that witness comes from an unusual source, but God will not leave Himself without a voice in the world.

No book illustrates this principle more clearly than the book of Ruth. In the period of the judges, with idolatry and immorality all around, a man named Elimelech, because of a famine, leaves the inheritance given to him by God to settle in Moab. There his sons marry pagan wives, and the family appears to be well on the way toward deserting the God of Israel. But what happens? Unlike what we have seen happen in the book of Judges over and over again, the pagans, rather than bringing the Israelites over to their way of thinking and worship, are attracted to the God of Israel. Ruth, the Moabite wife of Elimelech's son, accompanies her widowed mother-in-law Naomi back to Israel and adopts Israel's God in the process. From this faithful young lady, God brings the family that will produce, not only the greatest king in Israel's history, but eventually the Messiah, Jesus Christ Himself.

Your students may have cause in the years to come to wonder whether God has left Himself with any faithful witness in the world. Some of your more sensitive Christian students may look around at their classmates in school and wonder if anyone else really loves the Lord (unfortunately, this is often true of Christian schools as well as public ones). Yet they should be encouraged by the story of Ruth. No matter how bleak the situation may seem to be, God is at work, and He has not deserted His people, nor will His purposes be permitted to fail.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the three major applications that have been the focus of today's study. Remind your students of the evils of compromise with the world, but encourage them with the fact that God can and does use weak, flawed people, and that His work will surely prosper, no matter what appearances to the contrary may be.



## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## JUDGES AND RUTH

1. Who were the judges? What were their responsibilities?
2. Why did the failure of the Israelites to drive the last of the Canaanites from the land turn out to be such a serious mistake on their part?
3. Why was it so easy for the Israelites to add worship of the Canaanite gods to their worship of the true God?
4. What are some of the weaknesses that characterized the men and women God used to accomplish His work in the book of Judges?
5. What are some of the weaknesses in your life that keep you from serving God the way you should? What are some of the steps you should take to try to eliminate those weaknesses?





# **THE UNITED MONARCHY PERIOD**

**I Samuel 1 - I Kings 11; I Chronicles 1 - II Chronicles 9**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students important lessons on Christian leadership drawn from the lives of Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon.

## **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:15** - "If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return."

## **Lesson Background**

The period of the United Monarchy is by all accounts the high point of Israel's history. In this 150-year period (approximately 1080-930 B.C.) we find Samuel's leadership in the transition from judges to kings, the establishment of the monarchy in Saul, the career of David, the model for all future kings, and the reign of Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. During this time, the kingdom of Israel grew to its largest and most powerful under the blessing of God. Yet the United Monarchy period also provides some important warnings for us. We see failures ranging from the incompetence of Eli and the sins of Hophni and Phinehas to the carnal cravings of Israel after a king to the headstrong apostasy of Saul to the murder and adultery committed by David to the entrapment of Solomon by his pagan wives. This is by no means a Golden Age, but God has much to teach us from it.

There are many ways we could approach this section of Scripture, but the way that would be most helpful for your students is to focus on the four main characters - Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon - and to concentrate our attention on one aspect of their lives, namely the leadership they gave to the people of

God. These four men provide both positive and negative examples to help us understand what is involved in good Christian leadership. Your students need to understand what it takes to make a solid spiritual leader. It requires submission to the will of God (Samuel). It is not based on innate ability or outward attractiveness (Saul). It requires a heart that yearns after God, but brings with it severe temptations for the abuse of power (David). Wisdom is its greatest virtue, but that wisdom can come to nothing if it is seduced by the values of the world (Solomon). Many of the narratives from the United Monarchy period will be familiar to your students, so they should be able to follow the stories you use to illustrate the lesson's points about Christian leadership. For some of the narratives that may be a bit more obscure, some explanation may be necessary.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Start the class by asking your students to write down on a piece of paper the names of three people that they consider to be good examples of ideal leaders (not from Scripture). Have them turn their lists in and discuss for a few minutes the names that are found there. Most will probably be political or military leaders. What made these men good leaders? Was it their ability to devise strategy, their skill at motivating their followers, their talent for outmaneuvering the enemy, or simply their wealth and power? Next have your class repeat the procedure for leaders from Scripture, excluding Jesus. Were those who were chosen capable leaders for different reasons? Is there a difference between the qualifications for Christian leadership and those for leadership in the secular world? Point out that the United Monarchy period, which is our subject for study today, gives us four examples of leadership. These four examples teach us both good and bad things about what it means to be a spiritual leader.

### **1. Samuel**

Samuel serves as a bridge between the judges and the kings. He was the last and greatest of the judges in the sense that he judged all Israel, not just a portion of the nation as the others had done. He was the last before Christ Himself to exercise all three theocratic offices - prophet, priest, and king (in the sense of ruling over the people as a judge). After him, the kingship and priesthood were divided, as the monarchy went to the tribe of Judah while the priesthood remained with the tribe of Levi.

Like many other great men of Scripture, Samuel was born to a barren woman by a miracle of God. Throughout Scripture, God makes the point again and again that His work of deliverance is His from beginning to end. Samuel was dedicated to the Lord by his mother and began as a young child to serve in the Tabernacle as an assistant to the elderly priest, Eli. He received a special calling from God at a young age, and after the death of Eli he became the leader of the nation, judging on a circuit that carried him from one end of Israel to the other. Later, he was the one used by God to anoint the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David.

What does Samuel teach us about good spiritual leadership? The most important lesson we can learn from Samuel is one he himself learned as a young child, and that is that one cannot lead others unless he submits his will to the will of God. From the early years of his life, Samuel learned to submit to the will of God. As a child, it could not have been easy for him to leave his parents and come to the sanctuary to serve with Eli. As a young man, it was not easy for him to stand by while the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, abused their priestly office through public immorality. As an established leader of the people, it was not easy for him to step aside and anoint Saul, a man about whom he had serious doubts, to be the new leader of the nation. Yet in all these things, Samuel was willing to do what God told him to do. It was this willingness to follow God rather than his own instincts that made Samuel a great spiritual leader.

Your students must learn this same lesson. They should not expect God to speak to them in an audible voice at night, but they must understand that God has spoken to them through His Word. Only those who study and live by God's Word are qualified to lead others spiritually. Samuel was great because he was totally committed to God and submitted his will to God's will at every turn.

## **2. Saul**

By human standards, Saul was certainly the most capable leader among the group of men we are studying today. He was strong, tall, and handsome, and certainly looked the part of a leader. In a day like ours when how a person looks on television determines his or her ability to win an election, Saul would have won in a landslide. Much the same sort of thinking motivated Israel at the time. They begged God to give them a king. The reason they wanted one was because all the nations around them had one. God warned them through Samuel that a king would take their money (through taxes) and their children (to serve in his army and his court), but they wanted one anyway. Such fleshly motives were accompanied by fleshly standards for choosing a leader. Saul is never said to be a godly man, but instead is described in terms of his size and appearance.

As it turned out, size and appearance were about all he had going for him. When the people first tried to make him king, he hid among the baggage of the representatives of his tribe. After a few initial victories over the Philistines, Saul's record in office was one of continual failure and spiritual decline. The man had absolutely no spiritual sensitivity. He nearly caused the death of his own son Jonathan by making a foolish and arbitrary rule during battle. He ignorantly usurped the office of the priest by offering sacrifice when Samuel's arrival was delayed. He refused to obey God's command when he spared the king of the Amalekites after God had ordered him to exterminate the tribe completely. Then after bringing the young man David into his court, he became insanely jealous and spent the rest of his life pursuing David instead of directing his energies against the enemies of God's people.

There is much that your students can learn from Saul. The first and the most obvious is that God's qualifications for leadership are different from those of men. Saul was the perfect leader from a human standpoint, but he was a miserable failure because he lacked the understanding of and submission to the will of God necessary in a spiritual leader.

Secondly, they should recognize that adding human judgment to the express will of God turns obedience into disobedience. When Saul used his own judgment by offering sacrifice and by sparing Agag, he disobeyed the explicit command of God. We should never think that we can deviate from the clearly stated will of God by using our own judgment and still be within the realm of sound spiritual leadership.

Thirdly, a clear mark of a leader who has turned away from godliness is that he spends more time attacking others of God's people than he does attacking God's enemies. Tragically, too many Christian leaders over the years have expended all of their time and energy in assaults against other Christians and have been totally incapacitated in the fight against evil as a result. No spiritual leader is worthy of being followed who spends most of his time attacking other Christians.

## **3. David**

While Saul had been the king given to Israel by God against His better judgment, David was a man after God's own heart and the king chosen by God to begin the line from whom the Messiah would come. He was anointed by Samuel and began his career with a bang by defeating Goliath. Saul quickly became jealous, however, and David was forced to flee for his life and hide out in the wilderness with a loyal band of men. After Saul's death, David was anointed king by the tribe of Judah, but it took seven years before he

consolidated his authority over all of Israel. David not only gained power over all Israel, but also had great success in defeating Israel's enemies. The Philistines, who had for many years been Israel's nemesis, were subjugated once and for all during the reign of David. Through all his successes, David gave glory to God and led the people in worshiping their true Deliverer, both by his personal example and by the many songs of worship he wrote.

Even such a promising reign as this, however, was marred by the effects of sin. David's great sin, of course, was the adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. By this act David brought continual trouble to his own family, as the children of his various wives feuded with one another, and one of his sons, Absalom, even tried to dethrone his father.

Your students have much to learn from David, as well. He, like Saul, was a man of great talent, but his talents were turned over to the Lord. Thus when David had opportunities to exert his own will over the will of God, he usually refused to do so (for instance, when he could have killed Saul on two occasions but refused to take God's will into his own hands). Great ability did not make David self-willed.

Secondly, we must recognize that, while sin does not always deprive a person of the opportunity to lead, it always has negative consequences. No leader can get away with open sin. But God is merciful, and will restore those who repent as David did, though He will not remove the consequences of their sin.

Thirdly, we must recognize that good Christian leadership is rooted in worship. David was a great man of God because he worshiped God with his whole being. He was a leader who left his mark on many generations that followed because he taught others how to live in the presence of God.

#### **4. Solomon**

Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, was another who, like Saul, found ability more of a distraction than an asset. Like Saul, he began well. When God asked him what he wanted, he chose wisdom over riches and honor, and God told him he would have all three. His wisdom gained fame all over the known world; he expanded the kingdom of Israel to its greatest extent; he undertook fabulous building projects, including the great Temple in Jerusalem. Yet in these successes lay the roots of his failure. His fame and his conquests led to numerous political alliances, which in those days were cemented by marriage. As a result, Solomon wound up with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, most of whom were idolaters. A thousand women is enough to drive anyone over the edge, and Solomon's wisdom here failed him. He kept the wives (and their politically powerful fathers) happy by building temples to their various gods in the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. These temples became the major source of the idolatry into which the people of Judah would later fall. The building projects also led to trouble, since they required extremely high taxes, which caused discontent among the people - a discontent that later led to the revolt of the ten northern tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam.

In learning from Solomon, we must recognize that great intelligence and wealth often turn a man away from God. Those who have human wisdom often depend upon it rather than God, and those who have wealth tend to trust it rather than God. Starting well is not enough. A man must persevere in order to be an effective leader for God.

Secondly, your students should see that worldly success brings with it the temptation to compromise. Solomon made political alliances as they became necessary because of his increased standing in the secular world. Many Christians have found themselves compromised by the ways of the world in which they suddenly find themselves being accepted and praised. Often, Christian leaders are better off if the world does not praise them.

Thirdly, Solomon teaches us that the greatest wisdom often comes through the trials of life. It is as an old man that he wrote the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. He clearly had learned from his failures and was able to pass the wisdom that he had gained on to others. Failure is painful, but it can be a tremendous learning experience if we respond to it rightly.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the main applications from each of the four leaders of the united kingdom of Israel covered today. Encourage your students to strive for leadership in the spiritual realm, but to do so within the scope of the will of God, depending on Him rather than on the natural talents they may have. Warn them also about the temptations associated with acceptance by the secular world. Be sure to include a word for those in your class who may not be Christians. The type of leadership discussed today is not only alien to the world's definition of a leader, but is impossible for those who are not in Christ.



**FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT    THE UNITED MONARCHY  
PERIOD**

Complete the following chart by reviewing the lives of Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon as they are recorded in I and II Samuel and I Kings 1-11. For each of the four men, write down incidents from their lives, along with the Scripture references where they are located. Classify these incidents as successes or failures. Then list, either from today’s class or from your own study, lessons about leadership that Christians can learn from the lives of these four men.

NAME	SUCCESSES	FAILURES	LEADERSHIP LESSONS
SAMUEL			
SAUL			
DAVID			
SOLOMON			





# **THE DIVIDED MONARCHY PERIOD - ISRAEL**

**I Kings 12 - II Kings 17**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students the immense destructive power of idolatry as manifested in the history of the Northern Kingdom.

## **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:16** - "Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

## **Lesson Background**

The Divided Monarchy period is probably the most confusing and least-understood portion of Old Testament history. Obviously, a survey format does not allow us to consider it in any detail, but we will attempt to give both an historical overview and a thematic treatment of the material during the next two weeks. The major sources for our information about the divided monarchy are the books of Kings and Chronicles (actually I Kings 12 - II Kings 25 and II Chronicles 10-36). These books, like most of the Old Testament historical books, are anonymous, but some scholars postulate that the books of Kings could have been compiled from court records by the prophet Jeremiah, while the Chronicles could be the work of Ezra the scribe in the years following the Babylonian Captivity. We also can glean information about the period from the writings of the prophets, most of whom fall into this era. A chart has been included for the benefit of you and your students so that you can gain an overview of the period of Israel's monarchy.

Why did the kingdom divide? Though the immediate reason for the division was the foolish behavior of Rehoboam, a deeper reason behind the split was a long-standing rivalry between the tribes of Judah and

Ephraim. When Jacob blessed his sons before his death, he indicated that Judah would be the father of kings, but the right of primogeniture fell to Joseph, whose sons became two tribes. The younger of those two sons, Ephraim, was preferred before the older Manasseh. During the wilderness wanderings, Judah, the largest tribe, led the march, but the Conquest was led by Joshua, an Ephraimite. After the Conquest, Judah was given the largest territory, but Ephraim's land contained the two cities specifically associated with the worship of God - Bethel and Shiloh. During the period of the judges, Ephraim twice expressed indignation at being overlooked, and was as a result pacified by Gideon (Judges 8:1-3) and slaughtered by Jephthah (Judges 12:1-6). When the first king was chosen, he was chosen, not from the kingly tribe of Judah, but from Benjamin, the smallest tribe, whose territory served as a buffer between Judah and Ephraim. The eventual capital, Jerusalem, was also in Benjamite territory. When Saul died, Judah immediately backed David as king, but the Ephraimites supported Ishbosheth, the son of Saul. Thus the division that occurred after the death of Solomon was based on long-standing rivalries and was not a spur-of-the-moment thing.

In today's lesson, we will focus our attention on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The record of Israel's history is one of dismal failure. This is not to say that the people were in constant misery; there were many political successes and much economic prosperity associated with the history of the Northern Kingdom. But in the area that really counts - the attitude of the people toward God - Israel was an unmitigated disaster. The nineteen kings of the North, who fall into nine distinct dynasties, are all evaluated by the books of Kings as wicked, largely because they perpetuated the idolatry initiated by Jeroboam when he set up the golden calves in Bethel and Dan to keep his people from going down to Jerusalem to worship. In addition to this, the Northern Kingdom frequently flirted with the fertility cults of the Canaanites, especially the Baal cult introduced by Jezebel, the Phoenician wife of Ahab. Despite the prophets sent by God, Israel declined further and further into sin until God sent judgment in the form of the Assyrians, who conquered Samaria in 722 B.C. and scattered the population of Israel throughout the Assyrian Empire. There they intermarried and lost their identity as Jews. Those who remained in the land intermarried with other peoples conquered by the Assyrians and became the Samaritans, a people hated by the Jews from the end of the Babylonian Captivity onward.

The lesson of the Northern Kingdom is one of expediency. The kings of the north again and again put political and economic gain ahead of spiritual values. Your students must learn that spiritual things cannot be manipulated for temporal good. Many today try to do just that, of course, including politicians who say the right words to try to garner the "evangelical vote." Religious and ethical decisions cannot be made on the basis of pragmatism or convenience. When your students decide what to do when faced with the pressure of their peers, does their religion become a matter of convenience, to be used when it helps them to do what they want, but forgotten when its teachings are inconvenient?

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by giving out the chart of the kings of Israel and Judah. Make sure your students understand the chart, especially how the prophets fit into the overall picture. The chart will be useful, not only for the two lessons on the divided monarchy, but also for the remainder of this quarter and the next. Students should therefore save their charts, or better yet, the teacher should keep them in the classroom for future reference.

### **1. The Division of The Kingdom**

After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam came to the throne. He foolishly refused to take the advice of his father's counselors and decided to raise taxes even higher than the oppressive level maintained by Solomon. This was all the excuse the Ephraimites needed. They spearheaded a rebellion under the

leadership of Jeroboam, who had been a government official during the reign of Solomon, but had been sent into exile when the prophet Ahijah said he would one day rule the ten northern tribes. The kingdom was thus divided, with Rehoboam ruling Judah and Benjamin while Jeroboam became king of the other ten tribes.

## **2. The Great Sin of Israel**

Jeroboam was an effective administrator and quickly moved to consolidate his power. He fortified the border cities of Shechem and Penuel on either side of the Jordan and began construction of a new capital city at Tirzah. He knew that his main enemy at this point was the Southern Kingdom, so he not only protected himself against them militarily, he also decided to prevent religion from being used against him. He knew that if his people regularly took pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple, they soon would be back in the political camp of his enemy Rehoboam. In order to prevent this loss of support and enthusiasm for the revolt, he established shrines at Bethel in the south and Dan in the north, thus providing places of worship within the Northern Kingdom. It would not now be necessary for the people of Israel to go to Jerusalem to worship, and Jeroboam would find it easier to maintain their loyalty. These calves were not intended to be pagan idols, but, like the Golden Calf in the wilderness, were supposed to be representations of Jehovah. Such blasphemy caused most of the priests and Levites to flee to the south, so Jeroboam simply consecrated his own priests - anyone willing to pay the fee! This idolatry is the sin about which the books of Kings speak over and over again. The perpetuation of this worship brings to every one of Jeroboam's successors a negative evaluation from Scripture, and eventually brought upon Israel the judgment of God.

Take a few minutes at this point to discuss with your students the dangers of a religion of convenience. Jeroboam attempted to shape the worship of God to make it enhance his political goals. Such behavior is not foreign to our own age. Many people try to use religion for political purposes, whether it be political candidates in our own country or the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Your students will also be tempted to shape their religious beliefs according to what is convenient. It is too easy to shape moral convictions on the basis of what one wants to do. Those who are Christians must resist the temptation to believe that something is all right just because they want to do it.

## **3. The History of The Northern Kingdom**

We now turn to a brief survey of the history of the Northern Kingdom. Within the scope of this lesson, detail is impossible, but you should be able to give your students a general overview of the 200-year history of Israel.

### **A. At War with Judah (931-870)**

The first sixty years of Israel's history were spent in periodic conflicts with Judah. These skirmishes generally tended to be inconclusive, but they served to intensify the dislike and mistrust the two kingdoms had for one another. This was also a period of political instability in the north. Jeroboam was succeeded by his son Nadab, who was assassinated by Baasha of Issachar, thus ending the first dynasty of the Northern Kingdom. He was succeeded by his son Elah, who was assassinated by one of his commanding officers, Zimri, who then proclaimed himself king. The army, however, declared another general, Omri, to be the new king. The army then marched on Tirzah, Zimri committed suicide after one whole week of rule, and Omri became the king. After consolidating his authority by putting down a rebellion led by a man named Tibni, he went on to become one of the greatest rulers in the Middle East of his day. He moved the capital to Samaria, a nearly impregnable fortress on a hill, and formed an alliance with the great trading power of the region, Phoenicia, by marrying his son Ahab to Jezebel, the daughter of the Phoenician king.

Omri was so influential in the region that for one hundred years after his death Israel was referred to by the Assyrians as “the land of Omri,” yet the Bible gives him a scant six verses, and all of it negative. This shows that what is important to man is not important to God. Omri may have accomplished great things on the human level, but he led the people further into idolatry through his alliance with Phoenicia, which brought Baal worship into the land with a vengeance.

## **B. Alliance with Judah (870-841)**

Ahab was a capable administrator, an active builder, and a successful military leader, but was morally spineless. He was led about by the nose by his wife, who filled the land with images of Baal and persecuted the prophets of God. Ahab was wise enough to realize that the only way his country could have stability was by ending the constant fighting with Judah and forming an alliance that would protect both of them against the real menace, the growing power of Syria. Such an alliance was formed when the son of Jehoshaphat (Jehoram) was married to the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (Athaliah). As long as the dynasty of Omri lasted, there was peace between Israel and Judah. They had military success during this time, but the alliance was harmful to Judah religiously. Meanwhile, Israel was sinking further and further into Baal worship. After many warnings from the prophet Elijah, God sent judgment, using a general by the name of Jehu to wipe out all who remained of the house of Omri.

## **C. A Middle Eastern Power (841-752)**

Jehu’s dynasty, which lasted for five generations and almost ninety years, was the longest and strongest of Israel’s dynasties. Jehu was a terrific revolutionary, but a poor king. He wiped out the house of Omri and eradicated Baal worship from the land, but turned back to the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. He was politically weak because, in destroying the house of Omri, he had also destroyed his alliances with Judah and Phoenicia. But this period was one of a change in power in the Middle East. Syria, Israel’s long-time enemy, was on the wane, and the Assyrians were getting ready to build their empire. After dealing a severe blow to Syria, however, the Assyrians went into a period of decline and confusion, and during this time Israel became the dominant power in the region under the leadership of Jeroboam II. He expanded the territory of Israel until it rivaled in size the empire ruled by Solomon. Yet he, like Omri, is given very little space in Scripture, and all of it negative because of the idolatry he encouraged among the people. The dynasty of Jehu came to an abrupt end when Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II, was assassinated by Shallum, one of his generals.

## **D. Decline and Fall (752-722)**

The last thirty years of the Northern Kingdom were chaotic. Israel was ruled by five kings from four different dynasties, two of whom ruled concurrently. Shallum, who had assassinated Zechariah, was himself murdered by Menahem after ruling only a month. Menahem prevented an Assyrian invasion only by paying a heavy bribe. He was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, who ruled for only two years before being assassinated by Pekah, one of his generals, who had already been leading the Transjordan tribes in opposition to Menahem’s policy of appeasement toward Assyria. Pekah tried to organize an alliance to oppose Assyria, but this alliance was brutally put down, and Pekah was replaced by Hoshea, a puppet of the Assyrian king. When Hoshea refused to pay the tribute imposed by the Assyrians, the brutal warriors of Sargon III destroyed Samaria and scattered the people of Israel all over their far-flung empire. Thus God finally imposed His judgment on the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

Close the lesson by reminding your students that pragmatic thinking is a habit that is hard to break. As the succeeding kings of Israel found idolatry a convenient political tool, so they will find that immorality and materialism are easy to live with in our world and easy to rationalize if they try hard enough. Such habits are hard to break, and ultimately bring down the wrath of God, as they did with the nation of Israel.



## THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

### THE UNITED MONARCHY

Kings and  
Prophets in  
the Northern  
Kingdom of  
Israel  
931-722 B.C.

SAUL (1051-1011)

DAVID (1011-971)

SOLOMON (971-931)

Kings and  
Prophets in  
the Southern  
Kingdom of  
Judah  
931-586 B.C.

JEROBOAM (931-910)*		930		REHOBOAM (931-913)
NADAB (910-909)				ABIJAM (913-911)
BAASHA (909-886)*		900		ASA (911-870)
ELAH (886-885)				
ZIMRI (885)*				
OMRI (885-874)*				JEHOSHAPHAT (873-848)
AHAB (874-853)	ELIJAH			JEHORAM (853-841)
AHAZIAH (853-852)		850	OBADIAH	AHAZIAH (841)
JEHORAM (852-841)				[ATHALIAH] (841-835)
JEHU (841-814)*	ELISHA		JOEL	JOASH (835-796)
JEHOAHAZ (814-798)				AMAZIAH (796-767)
JEHOASH (798-782)	JONAH	800		UZZIAH (790-740)
JEROBOAM II (793-753)				JOTHAM (750-731)
ZECHARIAH (753-752)	AMOS			
SHALLUM (752)*				AHAZ (735-715)
MENACHEM (752-742)*	HOSEA	750	ISAAH MICAH	
PEKAHIAH (742-740)				HEZEKIAH (728-686)
PEKAH (752-732)*				MANASSEH (695-642)
HOSHEA (732-722)*		700		
		650	NAHUM	AMON (642-640)
				JOSIAH (640-609)
			JEREMIAH	JEHOAHAZ (609)
			ZEPHANIAH	JEHOIAKIM (609-597)
			HABAKKUK	JEHOIACHIN (597)
		600	DANIEL	ZEDEKIAH (597-586)
			EZEKIEL	
		580		

\*indicates the beginning of a new dynasty in the Northern Kingdom





## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE DIVIDED MONARCHY PERIOD - ISRAEL**

1. What were the reasons for the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon?
2. Why did Jeroboam set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan?
3. What made Omri an effective ruler? Why does the Bible condemn him?
4. Why did Ahab seek an alliance with the king of Judah?
5. Where did the worship of Baal in Israel come from?
6. Who were the three main enemies of Israel during the two hundred years in which the Northern Kingdom existed?
7. What happened to the Northern Kingdom after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.? Does the Bible ever mention them again?



# **THE DIVIDED MONARCHY PERIOD - JUDAH**

## **II Chronicles 10-36**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students how God can keep His promises despite the sins of men, yet how those who turn away from God suffer the consequences of their sin despite the fulfillment of God's purposes.

### **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:17-18** - "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'"

### **Lesson Background**

This week we continue our study of the Divided Monarchy by looking at the Southern Kingdom of Judah. While Israel might be likened to the human race in the days of Noah, who fell deeper and deeper into sin despite repeated warnings and were finally subject to the judgment of God, Judah might be compared to the situation in the book of Judges. What we find is a people who, despite frequent failings, are God's people. He keeps on calling them back to Himself despite their sin. Thus in the Southern Kingdom we see repeated cycles of apostasy and repentance, with the leadership in times of revival being provided by godly kings. Of the nineteen kings who reigned over Judah, eight are said to be good rulers. This does not mean that they were perfect or that their reigns were godly throughout, but it does indicate a basic spiritual motivation that God used to call His people back to Himself.

The fact that God repeatedly acted to restore the nation as a whole does not mean that He ignored the sins of individuals, of course. Those who turned away from God suffered the consequences, though God

continued to preserve the nation. Even when the sin of the people had gotten so bad that captivity was necessary to cure them of the idolatry that had become rampant in the land, God promised restoration. The history of Judah thus provides both encouragement and warning. The encouragement lies in the fact that God will never forsake His people, but will keep His covenant with them. The warning may be found in the fact that, like the wilderness generation, many of those who were outwardly identified with God's people showed that they did not belong to God by their lack of faith. Your students need to recognize that God can be trusted to keep those whom He has chosen, but that those who profess to belong to Him must examine their lives to see whether they are indeed God's people.

The history of Judah is found in both the books of Kings and the books of Chronicles, with considerable overlap. The Chronicles deal only with Judah, and focus much more closely on the worship of the people than do the books of Kings. The books of Kings alternate between Judah and Israel in chronological sequence and concentrate more on the political situation. In studying the history of Judah this week, we will be dividing the 345-year period during which Judah existed into five parts and surveying the ebb and flow of the kingdom during each of those segments. Again, detail will be beyond our reach, but the main lessons should be clear to your students throughout.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Have your students look again at their charts of the kings and prophets of the Divided Monarchy period. Point out that this week we will be covering the Southern Kingdom, and that they should follow along to be able to relate what you go over today to what was covered last week.

### **1. From Rehoboam to Asa**

Rehoboam was not a godly man. We saw last week his foolish actions that brought about the division of the kingdom. He compounded his foolishness by attempting immediately to invade the rebellious North to bring the ten tribes back under his control. Finally, a prophet stopped him by telling him that the division had been of God and that an invasion would do no good. In the same way that the golden calves were the major source of idolatry in the North, the idol temples set up by Solomon for his pagan wives were the cause of much temptation in Judah. Though the priests and Levites who fled the idolatry of Jeroboam enhanced the spiritual climate in the South, Rehoboam canceled out any advantage they could have brought by building even more pagan places of worship. His son Abijah was not much better, although we do have a remarkable instance of "foxhole Christianity" where he prayed to God for deliverance when the armies of Israel had his troops surrounded, and God answered his prayer.

Abijah was succeeded by the godly Asa, who is the first of the kings of Judah to get a positive rating from Scripture. Though he sought to cleanse the land of idols, he himself tended to trust in his own strength rather than turning to God for help when he was in trouble. This lack of faith caused him to suffer constant warfare during his reign, and eventually God sent him an incurable illness that forced him to turn the throne over to his son.

Very early in the history of Judah we get the opportunity to see that bad men can sometimes do things that appear to be righteous, while good men can do foolish and prideful things. What makes the difference? Why is Abijah's foxhole prayer seen as the desperate act of a wicked man, while Asa's self-reliance is evaluated as the lapse of one who is righteous? Obviously, God knows the heart; He realized that, while religion for Abijah was a matter of convenience, Asa truly wanted to honor God despite his lack of consistency. God knows our hearts as well. We cannot fool Him with acts of religious desperation or hypocrisy, but He is willing to forgive those who truly love Him.

## **2. From Jehoshaphat to Athaliah**

Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, was, along with Hezekiah and Josiah, one of the three best kings of the Southern Kingdom. He not only went further than his father had gone in removing idols from the land, but he also took positive steps. He sent teachers of the law throughout Judah (and even into Israel) to make sure the people knew God's law, then he remodeled the judicial system to bring it into conformity with the law given by God to Moses. It is these reforms for which he is highly praised by the writers of Kings and Chronicles.

Jehoshaphat enjoyed a peaceful reign, though peace was purchased at a terrible price. He reconciled Judah with its greatest enemy at the time - the Northern Kingdom of Israel - by marriage, allowing his son Jehoram to marry Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. While this bought peace in the days of Hezekiah, it caused nothing but trouble in the years following his death. From the beginning, it was clear that God did not approve of the alliance between Judah and Israel. Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life in the battle in which Ahab was killed. A later joint shipping venture never came to fruition because God sank the ships before they got out of the harbor. After Jehoshaphat died, Jehoram turned the people back to idolatry through the influence of his wife Athaliah, who was a chip off the old block (Jezebel's, that is). His reign was one of almost constant defeats on the field of battle, and he finally died of an intestinal disorder. He was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who reigned less than a year before being murdered in Jehu's destruction of the house of Omri.

At this point Athaliah, the Queen Mother, seized the throne, and promptly murdered all of her grandsons to assure that she would have no rivals. Only the baby Joash escaped, and was hidden in the Temple for six years by Jehoiada the priest. When Joash reached the age of seven, Jehoiada engineered a coronation ceremony, at which time Athaliah fled, only to be caught and slaughtered by an angry mob.

The good reign of Jehoshaphat was marred by a foolish compromise - the alliance with Israel, which appeared at the time to be the height of wisdom. It brought trouble to the next two generations of Jehoshaphat's family and nearly caused the extermination of the house of David, the Messianic line. Your students need to realize that even relatively minor sins and acts of foolishness by God's people can have terrible consequences, not only for them, but also for future generations.

## **3. From Joash to Jotham**

The four kings during this period are all called good by Scripture, but it is obvious that "good" refers more to the condition of their hearts than to their capability as rulers. Joash was a fundamentally weak man who was dominated by his advisors. As long as the godly Jehoiada lived, Joash ruled well, but after the old priest died, Joash turned to idolatry, and later put the son of Jehoiada to death for rebuking him. He wound up being murdered in his bed.

His son Amaziah began well, but was filled with pride after God gave him a victory over the Edomites, leading to his defeat and capture by Israel. He foolishly attempted to pray to the gods of Edom as well as to the Lord (insurance?), and was captured and imprisoned as a result. He lost the confidence of his people and wound up being assassinated after his release from prison in Israel. His son Uzziah had the same problem, succumbing to pride after some early victories. He tried to usurp the office of priest and offer a sacrifice in the Temple, and God struck him down with leprosy as a result. His son Jotham was said to be a good king, though he reigned alone for only five years, but he left the land full of idolatry. Thus after a period of one hundred years of rule by good kings, the Southern Kingdom was still full of idols. These good men were too weak to influence others, and thus the nation went seriously downhill in the direction of God's judgment.

The application here is that good men must be concerned about others as well as themselves. If good men do nothing to influence those around them, their world will suffer the judgment of God, even as Sodom suffered despite the presence of Lot, who though godly himself, had influenced no one around him, not even his daughters.

#### **4. From Ahaz to Amon**

Ahaz, the son of Jotham, was a blatant idolater. He not only worshiped Baal, but he also offered human sacrifices on the pagan altars. Later in his career, he saw a pagan altar he liked while visiting Assyria and ordered a copy made for the Temple in Jerusalem! Amazingly, God promised him through Isaiah that the kingdom would not be destroyed (the famous prophecy of the virgin birth in Isaiah 7), but it was so seriously weakened that Judah became a virtual vassal state to Assyria.

When Hezekiah assumed the throne, he ended both the idolatry of his father and the policy of appeasing the Assyrians. He cleansed the land of idols and purified the Temple after the desecrations of Ahaz. He also reestablished the celebration of the Passover and reorganized the priests and Levites. He continued to pay tribute to Assyria as long as Sargon, the conqueror of Samaria, ruled, but cut off tribute when his weak son Sennacherib assumed the throne. Assyria prepared to invade its recalcitrant vassal. Just before the invasion, Hezekiah became ill, and God told him he was going to die. Hezekiah begged for a reprieve, and God granted him fifteen more years. God then gave him a miraculous victory over the Assyrians by destroying 185,000 Assyrian soldiers overnight while Hezekiah was penned up in a besieged Jerusalem. In his pride, Hezekiah made the mistake of showing off his treasures to an ambassador from Babylon - a mistake that was to cause trouble a century down the road.

Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, was anything but a chip off the old block. He restored the policies of his grandfather Ahaz and extended idolatry even further. His reign, which was the longest one in the Divided Monarchy period, created a situation that was said to be worse than the foul practices of the Canaanites whom Joshua had been ordered to exterminate. Manasseh eventually was captured by the Assyrians and imprisoned in Babylon. After all of his evil doings, he repented in prison, and God amazingly listened to his prayers, released him from prison and restored him to the throne. The damage had been done, however. The people of Judah were by this time irredeemably fallen into idolatry. When Manasseh tried to restore Temple worship, nobody came, but instead offered sacrifices to Jehovah on the pagan high places! When his son Amon came to the throne, he undid his father's meager reforms and quickly returned to the worst kinds of idolatry. He was murdered by his own palace servants after less than two years on the throne.

The lesson here is that deathbed repentances may bring salvation to the one who repents, but they cannot undo a lifetime of evil. Manasseh may have saved himself, but he destroyed the nation. Your students must heed the advice of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:1.

#### **5. From Josiah to Zedekiah**

Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight and showed no tendency to follow in his father's footsteps. He initiated a thoroughgoing reform, wiping out idolatry in all its forms, cleaning out the Temple, and restoring the worship of God. The extent to which matters had fallen is indicated by the fact that when the book of the law was discovered by those cleaning the Temple, no one had any idea what it contained. Josiah cleaned up the land, but not the hearts of the people. Idolatry was too firmly ingrained, and his reforms only postponed the inevitable judgment of God. When Josiah died in battle against the Egyptians, the final decline began.

The last four kings of Judah, three sons and a grandson of Josiah, were little more than puppets. They were foolish, incompetent rulers whose attempts to play politics in the face of the ever-growing Babylonian power led to the captivity of the best men in the nation and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem. All during this time, the prophet Jeremiah was warning the nation of the captivity to come and advising peaceful surrender to the Babylonians. These kings, however, were incapable of recognizing the voice of God when they heard it, and listened instead to false prophets who encouraged rebellion and resistance. The result was destruction. Even that destruction, however, led to preservation, as God kept His people alive in Babylon and eventually brought them back to the land.

## **Conclusion**

Close the lesson by reminding your students that God is faithful to His promises and His people, shows mercy to those who repent of their sin, but will surely punish evil. Even evil that is repented of at a later date will bring negative consequences to those who do the evil and to those who live after them.





## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE DIVIDED MONARCHY PERIOD - JUDAH**

1. How does the history of Judah show God's intention to carry out His promise of sending a Messiah to save His people?
2. What was the major reason for which the "good" kings of Judah were considered good by the writers of the books of Kings and Chronicles?
3. How do the lives of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Manasseh show that the wicked and foolish things people do can hurt those who follow them for generations to come?
4. How does the history of Judah show how God uses pagan nations to carry out His purposes with His own people?
5. Why is it important for you to follow and obey God now, rather than waiting until you are older?



# **ELIJAH AND ELISHA**

## **I Kings 17 - II Kings 13**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students how men who are faithful to God can have an impact in a world that is in rebellion against Him.

### **Memory Verse**

**Hebrews 11:19** - "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

### **Lesson Background**

Having surveyed the Divided Monarchy period over the last two weeks, we now return to the middle of that period to focus on two men to whom the books of Kings allot a significant amount of time and space, the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Most of the incidents recorded in Scripture involving these prophets occurred during the dynasty of Omri in the Northern Kingdom, though Elisha lived until the reign of Jehoahaz. Elijah was most active during the reign of Ahab, while Elisha did most of the deeds ascribed to him in Scripture during the reign of Jehoram of Israel. The Omrid dynasty was evil and idolatrous, but these men of God left their mark on the history of the period. They show us what a man who is dedicated to God can accomplish in an age of national wickedness and perversion.

Elijah and Elisha were very different from one another. Elijah was a rough man of the desert who stuck out like a sore thumb in the prosperous court of Ahab; Elisha was a prosperous farmer who fit easily into the society around him. Elijah ministered for the most part to the rulers of his day; his only recorded contact with common people was his stay with the widow of Zarephath. Elisha, on the other hand, had

relatively little recorded contact with court officials, but often helped the common people through his exercise of the power of God. In the New Testament, John the Baptist is compared to Elijah because of the nature of the ministry he was called upon to perform. Elisha is often compared to Jesus Himself because of the types of miracles he did. Since this latter point of comparison is not explicitly made in Scripture itself, we will not press it to any great length, though the relationship is an interesting one.

Today's lesson will focus upon the impact made by these two great men of God on a corrupt society. Their influence can be seen in three major areas - political, social, and religious. We will examine each in turn, drawing examples from the careers of Elijah and Elisha to illustrate their impact in these areas. Your students need to understand that though each of them is only one person, he or she can be greatly used by God in a wicked world to bring about change for the better.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Introduce the lesson by having your students look once again at the chronological charts of the Divided Monarchy period. Show them where Elijah and Elisha fit into the sequence of events, and review the Omrid dynasty of Israel, being sure to include the characteristic Baal worship of the period and the animosity between Israel and Syria that dominated the politics of the day. Tell your students that Elijah and Elisha were men who stood virtually alone for God (though not as alone as Elijah at one time thought) in an age of wickedness. Yet they were men used by God to bring change into the world in which they lived. That change can be seen in three areas of life - the realms of politics, society, and religion.

### **1. Political Impact**

God is sovereign over the world He has made and governs all that men do. Political rulers may think of themselves as exercising great power, but they can do nothing apart from the oversight of God. The ministries of Elijah and Elisha make this clear. Note the following examples:

#### **A. Elijah Anoints Hazael and Jehu (I Kings 19:15-17)**

Political change was long overdue. The wickedness of the line of Omri was ripe for punishment. God instructed Elijah to anoint Jehu to end Omri's line. Since God is sovereign over the world at large, and not just His own people, He also instructed Elijah to anoint Hazael as king of Syria (though it is uncertain whether Elijah ever did these things in person, or whether they were carried out through Elijah's appointed successor, Elisha - see points F and G). When God wants to change the power structure of this world, He is perfectly capable of doing so.

#### **B. Elijah Proclaims the End of Ahab's Line and God's Postponement of Judgment (I Kings 21:17-29)**

After the incident of Naboth's vineyard, which surely shows Ahab at his worst and most venal, God sends Elijah to announce the end of Ahab's line. Though the murder of Naboth stimulated the announcement, the judgment was the result of prolonged wickedness and idolatry. Amazingly, Ahab shows signs of repentance, and God postpones judgment until after his death. As can be seen in the following chapter, Ahab's repentance was temporary at best and seemed to accomplish no lasting change in his character. But the mercy of God is truly extraordinary, and even for this brief show of repentance, God is willing to postpone judgment. The God with whom we deal is amazingly compassionate to His sinful creatures.

### **C. Elisha Gives Military Counsel to Jehoram (II Kings 3:11-19)**

Sometimes the prophets were God's instruments of intervention in military conflicts. In this case, The Israel-Judah alliance is about to do battle with the Moabites. Elisha somewhat reluctantly gives advice, largely for the sake of the godly Jehoshaphat, which leads to a resounding victory.

### **D. Elisha Gives Military Intelligence to Jehoram and Protects the Syrian Army (II Kings 6:8-23)**

Though the Old Testament may often give the opposite impression, God cares for the lives of all His creatures. In this incident, we again see Elisha giving military advice to Jehoram, this time communicated to him by God directly from the secret councils of the Syrian leadership. When the Syrians pursue Elisha and surround him in Dothan, God preserves the lives of both Elisha and the blinded Syrians.

### **E. The Lord Lifts the Syrian Siege of Samaria (II Kings 6:24-7:20)**

Here Ben-Hadad of Syria has besieged Samaria, producing a famine within the city walls. God miraculously lifts the siege by convincing the Syrians that the Egyptian army is advancing from the rear. Elisha, meanwhile, is able to comfort the suffering population by giving them God's assurance that the famine will soon end. It is worth noting that the ones God is sparing and comforting here are the same idolaters who deserve His judgment.

### **F. Elisha Brings About a Change in the Syrian Monarchy (II Kings 8:7-15)**

Elisha here is used by God as a tool to bring about the change in the Syrian monarchy that He had previously ordained. Elisha is the one who puts the idea into Hazeal's head that he will be king, and this leads him to murder his master Ben-Hadad.

### **G. Elisha Stimulates Jehu's Slaughter of the House of Omri (II Kings 9:1-13)**

Similarly, Elisha sends word to Jehu, an Israelite general, that he is to become king, and commissions him to wipe out the house of Omri, which he proceeds to do with great enthusiasm. God accomplishes His work through men, and often bad men at that, who operate on the basis of motives that are less than pure.

## **2. Social Impact**

Elijah and Elisha did not restrict their activities to the courts of the powerful. They also actively spread God's mercy to those who were in need. Note the following:

### **A. Elijah Helps the Widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:7-24)**

While being pursued by the vengeful Ahab, Elijah hid where no one would think to look - in the home territory of Jezebel. While there, he helped a kind widow during the time of drought and raised her son from the dead. God responds to faith, even when found in unusual places.

## **B. Elisha Purifies the Water of Jericho (II Kings 2:19-22)**

Jericho was an oasis at the edge of the wilderness, and its water supply was vital to its survival. God here meets the needs of the people through Elisha.

## **C. Elisha Multiplies the Widow's Oil (II Kings 4:1-7)**

Elisha spent quite a bit of time in the prophetic schools training others for the ministry of God's Word. Here he provides for the widow of one of his students, allowing her to pay a debt so her sons would not be sold into slavery.

## **D. Elisha Raises the Shunammite's Son (II Kings 4:8-37)**

In an experience similar to Elijah's at Zarephath, Elisha raises the son of a couple who had shown him frequent hospitality after having miraculously provided the son for the couple in the first place.

## **E. Elisha Feeds the Hungry Prophets (II Kings 4:38-44)**

Again we find Elisha ministering to his ministerial students, providing food when the food they had prepared was poisonous and multiplying food that had been brought for the occasion so that everyone had more than enough. [Point out here the similarity with Jesus' feeding of the five thousand to get your students thinking in the direction they will need to go with their take-home paper.]

## **F. Elisha Heals Naaman (II Kings 5)**

The healing of an enemy general again shows that God's mercy extends beyond the realm of His chosen people. This soldier learned to worship the true God much as did the centurion whose servant Jesus healed.

## **G. Elisha Recovers the Lost Axhead (II Kings 6:1-7)**

Elisha's students seemed to have nothing but trouble. Here they were trying to build a new school, but lost their axhead in the process. Elisha miraculously recovered it from the water into which it had fallen.

## **3. Religious Impact**

While the political and social impact of Elijah and Elisha was considerable, their main task was to turn the people away from their idolatry to the worship of the true God. Their political activity and their assistance of the needy never got in the way of their continual assaults against the bastion of false worship.

## **A. Elijah Against the Prophets of Baal (I Kings 17:1; 18:16-45)**

This is perhaps the best known incident from the ministry of Elijah. The drought was a direct challenge to Baal, a storm god who was given credit for making the land fertile. But the storm god could produce neither water nor fire, while Jehovah was able to close the heavens, ignite a fire despite a soaked altar and sacrifice, and send a violent rain in response to Elijah's prayer. Elijah's ministry of turning the people from idols to God and eliciting repentance from sinners was the main basis upon which he is compared with John the Baptist in the New Testament.

## **B. Elijah Condemns Ahaziah's Idolatry (II Kings 1)**

The son of Ahab became ill and consulted one of the local baals to find if he would live (this particular god, whose name means "Lord of the Flies," is the basis for the Jewish tradition of the prince of devils, Beelzebub). Elijah challenges the foolishness of going to a false god for such information and informs the king that he will not recover. The king then tries to kill Elijah, but God protects him from Ahaziah's guards.

## **C. Elisha Calls God's Wrath Down on Mockers (II Kings 2:23-24)**

False worship always brings disrespect for the ministers of God. Here we have an example of such disrespect and God's response to it. God will tolerate neither large-scale idolatry nor its small-scale manifestations. Our society today must be challenged not only for its denial of the Lordship of Christ over the big things in life, but also for the seemingly minor types of behavior that stem from such a denial. Disrespect for those in authority, especially spiritual authority, is no stranger to our own time, and stems from the same kind of false worship (of man himself rather than wooden idols) that produced it in the day of Elijah and Elisha.

## **Conclusion**

Summarize the lesson by reminding your students that one person can make a difference. Each child of God can be used to bring about change, whether in the realm of politics, social issues, or religion, by being faithful to God in a wicked world. But political or social issues should never be allowed to obscure the responsibility God has given us to worship Him rightly and oppose false worship wherever it may be found.





