

An aerial photograph of a large, open plaza paved with light-colored tiles. A network of dark lines is drawn across the plaza, creating a complex geometric pattern of triangles and polygons. Numerous people are scattered throughout the plaza, some walking alone and others in small groups. The overall scene suggests a public space where people's paths intersect.

Road to **REDEMPTION**

Tracing God's Rescue Plan
Through His Mission People

MAX STURGE



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Tracing God's Rescue Plan
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There are occasions when you read something and you say, “I wish I had written that.” I am referring to Max Sturge’s presentation, *Road to Redemption*. The lessons take you through familiar territory: God’s journey with his people, his mission in the world, the framework for his Covenant, his coming in Jesus to redeem humanity from sin and death. Familiar, yet insightful as you go deeper, and the questions at the end of each lesson gently elicit a reflected response. *Road to Redemption* convicted me again of the truth of Scripture, convinced me even more regarding God’s longing to rescue a broken world, and compelled me to do my part in that global mission.

—General Brian Peddle,
International Leader of The Salvation Army

Road to Redemption is an excellent study guide, which meets an important need in the church. A wonderful piece of work.

—Dr. Yau Man Siew,
Tyndale Seminary, Toronto

Max Sturge provides his readers with a breathtaking overview of the biblical story. His account moves quickly from creation to new creation. The story unfolds as a plan of redemption which can best be seen in hindsight. Through this lens, the expansive biblical narrative makes sense as Sturge surveys the biblical landscape in search of God’s mission in the world. *Road to Redemption* serves well as a survey of this broad biblical panorama.

—Dr. Donald Burke,
Booth University College, Winnipeg

Road to Redemption traces the greatest story ever told. Max Sturge traces God's rescue plan for the world from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus Christ is centre stage. There is a drumbeat of expectation as we move towards his arrival. Redemption's story is amazingly good news. It is life-changing! The Holy Spirit sets a fire in our hearts that ignites a passion for the mission that has never changed—to be God's holy people who declare Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the world. *Road to Redemption* clearly and convincingly reminds us of our identity and mission. We are called to be a salvation people.

—General Linda Bond (Rtd),
Former International Leader of The Salvation Army

Much of our preaching and teaching today amounts to a bits-and-pieces approach to the biblical narrative, which does not connect our people to the grand scope of its redemptive story. In *Road to Redemption*, Max Sturge masterfully brings the pieces together in a way that deepens our understanding and appreciation of God's saving mission, clearly identifying our role and responsibility with that mission. I commend it as a valuable resource for one's biblical studies toolbox. Because it does not focus on any particular cultural perspective, it can also be an effective discipleship resource in various Army settings internationally.

—Colonel Lindsay Rowe, Retired Salvation Army Officer,
Newfoundland and Labrador

An excellent biblical overview, well-paced and fascinating. A great primer for Christians who want to know the grand arc of the redemption story without getting bogged down.

—Geoff Moulton, Editor-in-Chief and Literary Secretary,
Canada and Bermuda Territory

I have taught classes that attempt to walk students through the whole biblical narrative. While reading *Road to Redemption*, I found myself wishing this material had been available then. It is a brilliantly streamlined history of God's faithfulness in Scripture. It never overwhelmed me with complex ideas or long, complicated histories. I appreciated being able to read it in short order, but with references to Scripture and insightful theological and historical resources for further study. *Road to Redemption* will help readers see the faithfulness of God's plan for humanity and all creation. It would be enlightening for anyone who is unfamiliar with the Old Testament, or unsure about how the whole biblical narrative holds together through God's redemptive plan. It could also be a great resource for candidates and the College for Officer Training.

—Bradley Marsh, Boundless Vancouver

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WITH GRATITUDE

I am immensely indebted to those whose endorsements appear in this book. Their affirmations of the quality and value of *Road to Redemption* have confirmed why I felt compelled to pen that grand story. I am also deeply grateful for those who helped me in various ways throughout the writing process.

Thank you, Major Fred Ash, for recommending the title, *Road to Redemption*. It helped to keep me focused on the Bible's big storyline and for whom it is written—those who would appreciate having a broader and deeper understanding of the entire Bible and God's mission for the world.

Thank you, Robyn Purcell-Sturge, for your edits, including some paragraphs and/or sentences I needed to clarify and simplify to make *Road to Redemption* accessible to as many people as possible.

Thank you, Major Calvin Fudge, for your encouraging commitment to use *Road to Redemption* in your corps' discipleship program, particularly for new converts. I hope other corps will do likewise and

also make it available to others in the congregation.

Thank you, Geoff Moulton, editor-in-chief and literary secretary, for your patience and support. Without your expertise and that of your skilled staff, this Bible project would have never seen the light of day.

Thank you to the Army leaders who approved financial reimbursement for the courses I have taken at Christian academic institutions subsequent to commissioning. *Road to Redemption* is my payback for your investment in me, enabling me to now share it with Salvationists globally.

Finally, thank you to my darling wife, Doreen, for your loving support that freed me to spend hundreds of hours writing this book.

PREFACE

When I was the education officer at The Salvation Army's College for Officer Training in St. John's, N.L., from 1980 to 1986, I enjoyed developing and teaching courses on some of the Old Testament prophetic books. The most common reaction from the cadets was, "I really didn't know and understand the Old Testament." The ensuing 27 years in pastoral ministry confirmed for me that many Salvationists and other Christians are quite limited not only in their understanding of the prophetic literature, but of the Bible generally. Biblical illiteracy is a significant problem of modern Christianity.

While many Christians may have favourite books, such as Ruth, Psalms, John and Philippians, for example, and know how the biblical story ends, most would admit they do not know how it unfolded over many centuries. They have not grasped the Bible's overarching storyline, its grand narrative. I believe maturity in Christian discipleship requires our knowing "the Word of God in its fullness" (Colossians 1:25).

Commissioner Robert Hoggard, who pioneered the Army's work in Korea, says in *Searching the Scriptures*: "One of the chief reasons for misunderstanding the Bible is failure to view it as a whole. Stand back, so to speak, as when viewing the work of a master artist and, in that grand perspective, mystery and miracle, poetry and parable, history and biography fall into proper place, and there emerges the most

amazing drama ever presented to the mind of man. This drama stretches from eternity to eternity, makes all history its stage, and embraces in its action God and all humanity. It centres around the presence of evil and suffering in the world, and with utter frankness shows how the problem originated, staying with it until it is completely solved.”¹

A good way to get a broader and deeper understanding of the entire Bible is to approach it as a story or, as Hoggard says, a “drama.” That will require our becoming more acquainted with the Bible that Jesus and the New Testament writers quote and allude to hundreds of times—the Old Testament. *Road to Redemption: Tracing God’s Rescue Plan Through His Mission People* is an overview of the Bible’s storyline. Its narrative approach will help readers experience the drama and magnificent sweep of salvation history from creation to new creation.

We will focus on following God’s redemptive strategy for fallen humanity through his missionary people. His chosen partners for this fascinating journey are a particular group of Abraham’s descendants. Their story has many twists, tragedies and a spectacular climax. In concentrating on God’s relationship with his deeply flawed people, we discover humanity’s biggest problem: systemic sin and evil. At the same time, we grow in our appreciation of God’s incomparable love, patience, faithfulness and mercy.

In writing *Road to Redemption*, I have grown in my admiration for God’s fearless, prophetic preachers, such as Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah and others. They shared God’s burden, grief and love for his stubbornly wayward people. I admire the courage of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, the evangelistic fervour and tenacious perseverance of the Apostle Paul, and especially the unsurpassable love of Jesus Christ displayed in the suffering of the cross, which brought the Old Testament story to its climax in purchasing for us an eternal salvation.

I pray that readers of *Road to Redemption* will be stimulated to dig more deeply into the riches of God's written Word, and thus become even more devoted to the Word who became flesh and lived among us (see John 1:14). Jesus would be pleased with that outcome because he invites us to not only love the Lord our God "with all our heart and with all our soul," but also "with all our mind" (Matthew 22:37).

"The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8 *NLT*).

Lesson 1:

REBELLION IN A PERFECT ENVIRONMENT (GENESIS)

The Bible is a collection of 66 documents that we call “books.” About 40 different authors wrote them, spanning over 1,000 years. God is the central character throughout its various types of literature: history, poetry, prophecy, apocalypse, gospels and letters. One overarching theme drives its storyline: God’s redemptive mission. Calling the mission redemptive suggests something went wrong with God’s good creation and he plans to fix it. The road to redemption becomes the unfolding drama of God’s rescue plan for the world through his missionary partners.

Creation Stories

The various literary traditions of the ancient Near East explain creation as the product of a great conflict between the gods. Babylonian stories, for example, say that a quarrel among the gods resulted in a dead god’s body being thrown from heaven. This body became the

earth, and dribblets of blood from other wounded deities became individual humans.¹ The Genesis story of creation is unique. God *speaks* the universe into existence! Divine communication begins each stage of creation: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), for example. Nothing that God created is a god, such as the sun, moon and stars as the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians and Persians believed. Israel alone came to understand there is only one God, and that he created all that exists from nothing.

God’s Image

In his created world, God planted an idyllic garden “in the east, in Eden” (Genesis 2:8) that was nourished by four rivers. God, who is spirit, created Adam and Eve in his image. Physical humanity is thus different from the rest of creation in that we are also spiritual beings, which makes us more like God than any other part of creation. Unlike animals, we can have a personal relationship with God. Complementing each other, male and female together reflect God’s image (see Genesis 1:27). W.T. Purkiser explains God’s image in us as “the distinctive dignity of human beings, standing before God in a [personal] relationship, and representing God in dominion (ruling) over creation” (Genesis 1:28).² God put Adam and Eve in the garden to be its stewards, “to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). As God’s representatives, we are therefore expected to reflect God’s character and be ecologically responsible to him for looking after the earth, the beautiful home he created for us.

“As the church eventually learned that followers of Jesus cannot treat *people* as their slaves, we now have to learn that we cannot treat [our] planet as our slaves,” says Brian Zahnd. “As God’s image-bearing creatures we are to exercise dominion over the earth as healing caretakers, not rapacious profiteers.”³ Sadly, we are becoming increasingly aware of our abysmal failure in our stewardship of God’s creation. The severe thinning of forests and pollution of land, rivers, lakes, oceans and the atmosphere have resulted in climate

change, soil erosion, poor air quality and undrinkable water. We must all co-operate in every possible way with scientists who are urging us to respect their warnings of dire consequences if we do not take much better care of our fragile home.

Rebellion

Adam and Eve were free to enjoy God's creation—the fruit of the trees in the garden, including the tree of life. There was one limitation: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). When the serpent tempted them to defy God's command, they chose to eat the forbidden fruit, thus abusing their God-given freedom. Their defiance will have painful consequences: death, meaning death spiritually in their relationship with God and eventually physically (see Genesis 2:17). They were not satisfied with being mortals, dependent on their creator. Instead of appreciating the generous freedom God gave them and trusting his infinite wisdom to discern good and evil, they pridefully acted as if they were wiser than him. They wanted to be more than human. Choosing to be the final judges of what is right and wrong, they became their own gods, which is idolatry. “The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God,” says Christopher Wright.⁴

Their rebellion was a sinful choice for which they refused to take responsibility. When God asked Adam if he had eaten from the forbidden tree, he blamed his disobedience on Eve and God, saying, “The woman *you* put here with me—*she* gave me ... and I ate.” Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her (see Genesis 3:11-13). Their response reminds me of comedian Flip Wilson's famous quip, “The devil made me do it.” People may not blame the devil for their misbehaviour, but instead lie, cover up and make excuses. But God holds us personally accountable for disrespecting his rules that are meant for our physical, spiritual and relational well-being.

Consequences

God pronounced a curse upon the serpent. It will eat dust the rest of its life (see Genesis 3:14), meaning it will henceforth be viewed contemptuously and eventually experience a humiliating defeat (see Micah 7:16-17; Isaiah 65:25). Eve's offspring ("he") will one day crush the serpent's head, but it will only strike his heel. Though wounded in the conflict, the woman's offspring will emerge the conqueror (see Genesis 3:15). Who is this offspring? The author is laying the foundation for this drama. More will be revealed as the story unfolds throughout the Bible. In the immediate future, Eve's judgment will be increased labour pains in childbirth, probably to remind her of her rebellious attitude toward God and the daily need for his strengthening presence. "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16), suggests frustration will accompany marriage. "[Some] see 'desire' as a source of conflict between husbands and wives, just as sin desires to dominate and control."⁵

Creation came under God's judgment. Instead of being able to easily obtain food in Eden, Adam will have to work hard among thorns and thistles (see Genesis 3:18). He will experience the tensions of married life and eventually return to the dust from which God created him (see Genesis 3:19). Earlier they had expressed guilt and shame for rebelling against God by sewing fig leaves together and making coverings for themselves (see Genesis 3:7). After receiving judgment for disobedience, they now benefit from God's grace: "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and [Eve] and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). But God warned them that disobedience will result in death.

The curses already pronounced upon them are a form of death (see Genesis 3:14-19). Since sin and holiness are incompatible, the penalty for defying God's authority is banishment from the Garden of Eden, exile from his holy presence, and therefore no longer being

able to eat from the tree of life and live forever (see Genesis 3:22-23). As more humans were born, relationships quickly deteriorated outside the garden of perfect fellowship and harmony. Sinful behaviour escalated.

Escalating Evil

Eve birthed two sons, Cain and Abel. As an expression of worship, Cain, being a farmer, brought fruit, and Abel, a shepherd, offered “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock to the Lord” (Genesis 4:4). Both offerings seem acceptable as they are identified in Hebrew as *minhah*, meaning offerings, rather than *zebah*, meaning sacrifices. God was pleased with Abel’s offering, but not with Cain’s. The author of Genesis focuses on Cain’s reaction to God’s disapproval. He became angry with God and then jealous and irate enough with his righteous brother to murder him (see Genesis 4:5, 8). “The most evil aspect of the sinful heart is when it hates not only its enemies, but good [people], because they are good.”⁶ Sin expressed itself in this story as an inner corruption manifesting the symptoms of violence and injustice. God banished Cain to the land of Nod, east of Eden, to forever be a restless soul. But God mercifully protected him with a mysterious mark, guaranteeing no one would take vengeance on him (see Genesis 4:12, 14, 16).

Humanity became so wicked and violent that God decided to use a catastrophic flood to destroy humankind. Through a large boat that God called Noah to build, he preserved only Noah, his wife, their three sons and daughters-in-law, and a large selection of animals (see Genesis 6:5-9:17). This would hopefully be a new beginning for humankind. When the flood subsided, God showed his grace by promising to never again destroy life on earth through a flood (see Genesis 8:21-22). Rainbows would be the reminder of that promise (see Genesis 9:2-17). From Noah’s three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, emerged the repopulated earth after the catastrophic deluge (see Genesis 9:18-20; 10:32). How will this new humanity behave?

Tower of Babylon (Genesis 11:1-9)

God had told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and increase in number; to fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7). Genesis 11:1-9 describes a situation where everyone spoke the same language and moved to a plain in Shinar. With their technology and social unity, they desired to be independent of God. Like Adam and Eve, they wanted to decide for themselves what would be best for them. Pride-fully ambitious, they chose to build a city (Babylon, see Genesis 11:9) with a tower that would reach to the heavens. Why? So they could “make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 9:3-4). God rejected that idea (Genesis 1:28). “If as one people speaking the same language they [build] ‘a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens,’ ” then “nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.” So, God “confused their language” and “they stopped building the city” (Genesis 11:4, 6, 8). The phrase, “nothing will be impossible for them to do,” refers to “their potential for evil. When a culture unites, the power that results can be dangerous. God scattered the people to undermine their potential for destructive power.”⁷ So what is God’s solution to humanity’s rebellious heart and exile from his holy presence?

Questions

1. What do you think are the driving forces behind the degradation of the environment—land, oceans and air?
2. Cain's murder of Abel: "The most evil aspect of the sinful heart is when it hates not only its enemies, but good [people], because they are good." Why would someone hate a person because they are good?
3. Why does choosing to be the final judges of what is right and wrong mean we are acting as if we are gods?

Optional Online Resources

Overview of Genesis 1-11—<https://youtu.be/GQI72THyO5I>

Overview of Genesis 12-50—<https://youtu.be/F4isSyennFo>

Lesson 2:

MISSION LAUNCH (GENESIS)

I've long been interested in my "Sturge" genealogy. I think family trees give us a deeper understanding of who we are and how our ancestors have helped shape what we have become. The first recorded name of a Sturge in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador is John. He's my great-great-great-grandfather, but we do not know his original hometown in England, who his parents were and where he's buried. Biblical genealogies are especially important because they often contain clues to how God's redemptive mission proceeds over time. For example, the genealogy of Shem (see Genesis 11:10-26), Noah's first son, is traced down to Terah, the father of Abram.

Several covenants play a significant role in the structure of the Bible and God's relationship with his people. God initiated them by making promises and expecting his people to trust and obey him. The main covenants we will encounter in order of appearance are the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and Jeremiah's New Covenant. Their promises and conditions will determine how the divine drama of God's saving plan for humanity unfolds historically. His covenant with Abram and his family becomes the unifying thread that drives the Bible's storyline—the road to redemption.

Abrahamic Covenant

In the biblical saga, we quickly discover God's missionary heart. In response to escalating sin and pervasive evil that we saw in Genesis 4-11, God announced his mission to "crush the serpent's head" (Genesis 3:15). He begins to restore humanity's broken relationship with him by initiating a covenant with Abram: "The Lord ... said to Abram, 'Leave your country, [Haran] (modern Turkey), your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you' " (Genesis 12:1). God's redemptive strategy was to choose one particular group of people—Abram's offspring—to bless the world. His promise to Abram is good news (gospel):

"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you ...
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."
(Genesis 12:2-3)

Abram promptly obeyed. "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him" (Genesis 12:4). His faith journey began when he believed God's promise and left his homeland without knowing where he and his descendants would live. He trusted God to lead him as God's purpose for him unfolded. After he arrived in Canaan, God added to the original promise of numerous descendants: "To your offspring I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7). When he and his wife, Sarai, became too old to have children, his faith faltered regarding the promise of countless offspring. He assumed his heir would therefore be his servant, Eliezer of Damascus (see Genesis 15:2).

Gift of Righteousness

God responded to Abram's wavering faith by renewing his promise: "[Eliezer] will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir" (Genesis 15:4). To further reassure him, the Lord told Abram his progeny would be too many to count. His response

becomes the Bible's foundational statement regarding how one gets right with God: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6; see also Romans 4, Galatians 3, James 2). Abram became right with God through trusting God's *promise*.

Being righteous means he trusted and obeyed God. Yet, when Sarai failed to have a son and encouraged him to father a child through their Egyptian maidservant—a common custom then in the ancient Near East—Abram's faith faltered again when he accepted Sarai's suggestion. He fathered a son, Ishmael, through Hagar, their servant girl (see Genesis 16:1-15). Ishmael became the son conceived by a human decision and effort alone rather than through faith in God's promise. Consequently, Ishmael's descendants could not be included in Abram's offspring who would be God's missionary people for blessing the nations.

Faith Tested (Genesis 22:1-19)

When Abram was 99 years old, God reconfirmed his covenant, promising him many descendants and the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. He changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning father of many (see Genesis 17:1-8). Abraham followed through by circumcising himself and everyone in his household (see Genesis 17:1-27; 21:1-7). Circumcision became the covenant sign of being God's people. (Egyptians also practised circumcision.) God also renewed his promise that Sarai would have a son and changed her name to Sarah, meaning princess, because kings of four nations would come from her: Israel, Judah, Edom and the Amalekites (see Genesis 17:15).¹

Abraham's faith sometimes fluctuated. It undoubtedly deepened though when Isaac, the son of God's promise, finally arrived when he was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 (see Genesis 17:17). God later says he had chosen Abraham so that "he will direct his children and his household ... to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right

and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he had promised him” (Genesis 18:19). In other words, righteousness and justice—“the way of the Lord”—must characterize Abraham’s descendants. If they are to bless the nations as God had originally promised Abraham (see Genesis 12:3), they will need to reflect God’s ethical character. (Righteousness and justice will become the prominent theme of Israel’s prophets.)

God later “tested Abraham” (Genesis 22:1). But he didn’t know it was a test. God told him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. Righteous Abraham unquestioningly obeyed. He headed for the vicinity of Moriah with two servants and his son. He believed Isaac was God’s promised son through whom his offspring would bless all nations. He demonstrated his now strong faith by telling his servants to wait a distance from the site of the potential sacrifice, saying: “We will worship and then we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5). Also, when Isaac asked his father where the sacrificial lamb was, Abraham replied: “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering” (Genesis 22:8). As Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, an angel told him to stop. Seeing a ram in a nearby thicket, he sacrificed it instead of Isaac. He passed God’s faith test with flying colours. God’s intention for all future Israelites was clear: Israel must never sacrifice their children to the Lord or any other god.

When Sarah died, Abraham buried her in a cave on a field which he bought from Ephron, a Hittite (see Genesis 23:17, 20). He later arranged for his chief servant to get a wife for Isaac among his relatives in his home territory, now modern Iraq. The servant found Rebekah, who left her family, travelled to Canaan and married Isaac (see Genesis 24). After Sarah’s death, Abraham fathered more sons. However, before he died, he bequeathed all his possessions to Isaac, who thus inherited the promise of land, offspring and God’s divine presence (see Genesis 25:12-18). Therefore, only Isaac’s offspring will be God’s chosen mission people who will bless the nations.

Family Feuds and Reconciliation

Rebekah birthed twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Since Esau exited the womb first, he became the firstborn (see Genesis 25:19-26). Years later, Jacob cunningly deceived his father and cheated Esau of the family birthright. Esau threatened to kill him (see Genesis 27:41). Jacob escaped to his uncle Laban, his mother's brother, in Padam Aram (modern-day Iraq), where he married Laban's daughter, Rachel (see Genesis 28:1-2). So, God sovereignly chose undeserving Jacob to inherit the promise of many descendants who would possess Canaan and bless the world (see Genesis 12:1-3, 6-7). God, not cultural traditions, will decide how the river of divine blessing will flow through history. After an all-night, life-changing encounter with the Lord, Jacob's name, meaning deceiver, was changed to Israel, meaning one who struggles with God (see Genesis 32:22-32). Jacob and Esau eventually reconciled (see Genesis 33:1-16).

Through Rachel, Leah and several concubines, Jacob-Israel had 12 sons, Joseph being his favourite. A serious family conflict eventually erupted between Joseph and his 11 resentful brothers, resulting in their throwing him into a pit to die. When some Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, arrived, Joseph's brothers sold him to them. They took him to Egypt (see Genesis 37:28). Many years later when a severe famine occurred in Canaan, Jacob and his family migrated to Egypt. In the meantime, Joseph had become Egypt's prime minister. In spite of their having sold him into slavery, Joseph demonstrated God's grace by facilitating a deeply emotional reconciliation between himself and his brothers. He perceived God's overruling hand in what had happened to him in that he was now able to save their lives (see Genesis 45:1-15). He settled them in Goshen, in the district of Rameses (see Genesis 45:8; 47:1-11). With Pharaoh's support, the Israelites prospered, and their population grew rapidly. God's promise of numerous descendants was thus initially fulfilled in Egypt, not in the Promised Land of Canaan. Genesis closes with Jacob making Joseph promise to someday take his remains back home to Canaan.

Questions

1. Share an experience of when you had to trust God for an uncertain future outcome.
2. What has been the biggest test of your faith in God?
3. Joseph—What can parents do to avoid favouritism in their family?
4. When people have a “falling out” with someone, why is it often difficult to reconcile?

Optional Online Resource

The Sacrifice of Isaac—<https://youtu.be/6s9ldacroHM>

Lesson 3:

"LET MY PEOPLE GO" (EXODUS)

Exodus opens with the Israelites enslaved in Egypt. God's promise centuries earlier to make Abraham's progeny "as numerous as the stars in the sky" has nevertheless come to pass in these harsh circumstances (see Genesis 26:4; Exodus 1:7). God keeps his promises. But, how can a motley bunch of slaves ever accomplish the most important part of God's promise and mission—to be a blessing to the world? (See Genesis 12:3.) A dangerous threat emerged that could sabotage his redemptive plan through them (see Exodus 1:8-14).

Free at Last

The Israelites' free labour was a huge economic benefit for the new Pharaoh's building schemes. However, the Israelite population had grown so much that he saw them as a potential threat to his power. To limit their growth, Pharaoh decreed an infanticide: all newborn Hebrew boys were to be killed. His attempt failed when the Hebrew midwives courageously disobeyed him. They deceived naive Pharaoh, telling him that, unlike Egyptian mothers, the "vigorous" Hebrew women gave birth before the midwives arrived (see Exodus 1:19).

When a certain boy was born, his mother hid him for three months. Then she put him in a papyrus basket (ark) in the Nile River and trusted God to protect him. Pharaoh's daughter rescued him (see Exodus 2:5-7). She realized it was one of the Hebrew babies yet ignored her father's edict. When the boy's sister offered to recruit one of the Hebrew women to nurse him, Pharaoh's daughter happily agreed. The sister gave the baby to her mother. This baby boy, Moses, thus ended up with his birth mother raising him in Pharaoh's court (see Exodus 2:8-9)! How delightfully ironic. God has quietly worked to undermine Pharaoh's absolute authority. A smiling Providence is strategically laying the groundwork for a significant move forward in his redemptive plan through his people.

Years later, Moses murdered an Egyptian he saw beating a fellow Hebrew. To escape being killed by Pharaoh, he fled to Midian where he married Zipporah, the daughter of Ruel. While in Midian, God called him to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. After initially resisting God's calling, he embraced the challenge and successfully led his people in a dramatic escape from Pharaoh's clutches. Miriam, Moses' sister, led the Israelites in boisterously celebrating God's rescuing them from oppression: "The Lord is a warrior ... Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power ... and holiness, awesome in glory" (Exodus 15:3, 6, 11). Salvation from slavery would powerfully shape the identity of God's mission people politically and religiously. Though now free from bondage to slavery, they were not liberated from enslavement to sin.

A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

The future now looks hopeful for these former slaves: "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling" (Exodus 15:13). Their enemies would not be able to prevent them from entering a new Eden, the Promised Land, "a good and spacious land flowing with milk and honey ... You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of

your inheritance ... the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established” (Exodus 3:8; 15:17). They would live daily in the presence of their holy God, and could count on his unfailing love and divine strength to sustain them in their journey to a better land.

Arriving at Elim with its 12 springs and 70 palm trees, they must have felt like they were already in the Promised Land. But moving on to the harsh Desert of Sin jolted them back to reality. They grumbled about the lack of food and water, but God met their needs (see Exodus 16:1-36). They eventually camped in front of a mountain in the Desert of Sinai. God formally covenanted with them there to be his chosen mission people for the world, fulfilling the promise made centuries earlier to Abraham, their forefather (see Genesis 12:1-3).

Though now freed from slavery, the Israelites were vulnerable to attacks from other peoples. In the “dog eats dog” reality of the ancient Near East, covenants (treaties) between rival tribes were essential for mutual protection. Two tribes, for example, would promise as equal partners to assist each other militarily. On the other hand, partners in royal covenants were not equal. A king or ruler would initiate a covenant, not with his conquered subjects, but for them. It was a lord-servant partnership. This is the type of covenant God made with the Israelites—the Mosaic covenant. It formally constituted Israel as God’s missionary people to the nations.

Chosen for Mission

Liberating the Israelites from slavery was God’s loving gift of grace: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Exodus 19:4). But God chose and freed them for a purpose: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6). They would fulfil the function of priests: to bring their holy God to other nations and other nations to God. God wanted them to reveal his identity as

the one and only true God to those who worship many false gods. Being holy meant they would be different from other peoples in their theological beliefs, values, behaviour and worship. In making them “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” God’s desire was for them to bless all nations (see Genesis 12:3). In short, Israel existed for the world and for God’s glory.

“Their vocation as missionary people was to carry their faith, which was their supreme glory, to all the nations of the world,” says General Frederick Coutts. “[This] was the reason God had chosen Israel (see Genesis 12:3)—not that she might occupy a place of greatness in the world, but that she might be the means God could use to make known to humanity his saving purpose. Israel’s ‘election’ was not to world supremacy, but to missionary duty” (see Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).¹

What Holiness Looks Like

To reflect God’s holy character, what would individual and community holiness look like? God had revealed to Abraham that he expected his people to “walk in the way of the Lord.” This meant living righteously and justly (see Genesis 18:19), thus emulating God’s ethical and moral character. To expand what holiness looks like, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments to share with his fellow Israelites (see Exodus 20:1-17).

Neighbouring nations worshipped various gods and physical images through which, they believed, they accessed their gods. The Israelites, however, were to worship only the invisible Lord and never make any physical images of him. They were not to “misuse [the Lord’s] name,” meaning “not treat God’s name, character, reputation or teachings lightly,” and avoid “blasphemy, false testimony, and giving Yahweh a bad name through inappropriate behaviour.”² They were to especially honour God by keeping the seventh day of the week holy, distinctive from the other days. They were to honour their parents, not murder, commit adultery, steal, give false testimony

about their neighbours, or covet anything belonging to others. These were the foundation stones for God's people to walk in the way of the Lord and thus be a light to their neighbours (see Isaiah 42:6).

Rescued by Grace

God had not given the Israelites these laws so that by keeping them they would be saved. He had already freed them from slavery. God's rescuing them from Egyptian oppression meant obeying God should have been a grateful response to his saving grace. They were redeemed by God's grace—not by keeping laws. They were to rely on him to keep these decrees for their personal and collective well-being. Because sin is inherently self-destructive, covenant violations would inevitably trigger drastic consequences (see Deuteronomy 27-28).

Moses confirmed the covenant by sprinkling the blood of a slain bull on the people, declaring: "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:8). When they finished building the tent of meeting (tabernacle), the people experienced an overwhelming sense of God's presence among them (see Exodus 40:34). In the tabernacle, the holy, transcendent God was actually living with his mission people!

Gracious Provision

During their three months at Mount Sinai, Moses instituted additional laws as recorded in Leviticus to guide God's people in their relationship with him. He had redeemed Israel from the sins of those who enslaved them in Egypt. Now God graciously provided for their own transgressions through animal sacrifices at the tabernacle (later the temple). The most important and solemn ritual occurred once a year on the Day of Atonement. The high priest sprinkled the blood of a slain animal on the cover (mercy seat) of the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle to atone for the sins of all the people (see Leviticus 16-17; 25:10-22). To be holy is to be cleansed from the defilement of sin. As previously stated, to be "a kingdom of priests

and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) that blesses the world, God’s mission people must reflect his holy character. Moses later summed up their responsibility to God with two commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5), and “love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

Consequences of Breaking Covenant (Deuteronomy 27-28)

After three months at Mount Sinai, the Israelites resumed their journey to Canaan. When 12 men explored the land and saw the warlike Canaanites and their seemingly unassailable, fortified cities, fear overcame faith. They persuaded everyone to discontinue the journey. They subsequently wandered in the wilderness for 39 years and nine months, but God mercifully and miraculously provided food and water for them (see Numbers 14:1-4, 34-35; Exodus 16:35).

Moses died before they entered the Promised Land, but not before God disclosed through him the terrible consequences of disrespecting the laws of their covenant with God. Obedience would result in “abundant prosperity—in the fruit of the womb, the young of [their] livestock and the crops of [their] ground ... and blessing on all the work of [their] hands” (Deuteronomy 28:11-12). Disobeying God’s commands would result in “curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hands to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.... The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies.... Because you did not serve the Lord your God in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.... The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away” (Deuteronomy 28:20, 25,

47-49). Survivors would be exiled from the Promised Land as Adam and Eve had been expelled from the Garden in Eden (see Deuteronomy 28:53-64).

Every Person for Himself

Moses' successor, Joshua, eventually drove out most of the inhabitants of Canaan and divided the land among a loose confederation of 12 tribes (see Joshua 15:63; 16:10; 18:1). After Joshua's death, charismatic leaders appeared as the need arose to fend off aggressive neighbours. The idolatrous worship of the remaining Canaanites spread among the Israelites. A pattern emerged. Idolatry resulted in an enemy country enslaving them. They cried out to God for help. God raised up a leader-judge to defeat their enemies and destroy the idols. Peace was short lived. When the leader-judge died, the people invariably reverted to idolatry and the cycle repeated. Their disregard of the Mosaic covenant's commandments resulted in tribal conflict and political chaos.

The Book of Judges relates wars with neighbouring tribes, including horrific decapitations (see Judges 7:25) and ghastly murders (see Judges 4:21), and Samson's sexual exploits and herculean feats of strength (see Judges 13-16). A grotesque mutilation (see Judges 19:1-20:7) resulted in inter-tribal warfare in which thousands were killed (see Judges 20:8-48). The author concludes with, "Everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 14:25). It is an understatement to say that during this period the Israelites fell far short of God's purpose for them to be his holy mission people and to bless other nations (see Exodus 19:5-6).

Questions

1. How was the Exodus an expression of God's grace?
2. Why do you think Pharaoh's daughter rescued baby Moses?
3. How were the liberated Israelites to be a blessing to the nations?
4. Why did the Israelites ignore the awful consequences stated in Deuteronomy 28 for persistently disobeying their foundational Mosaic covenant?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Exodus 1-18—https://youtu.be/jH_aojNJM3E

Overview of Exodus 19-40—<https://youtu.be/oNpTha80yyE>

Lesson 4:

THE BATTLE FOR ISRAEL'S FAITH (1 AND 2 KINGS; JONAH)

The author of Judges aptly summed up a chaotic period of Israelite history: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). The author was probably inferring that the Israelites, a loose confederation of tribes, needed a king like their neighbours to bring them together and create peace and order.

Transition to Kingship

During Samuel’s leadership as judge, all the Israelite elders demanded a king. Samuel anointed Saul as their first monarch (see 1 Samuel 10:1). Saul had been a capable military leader, but he disobeyed God and was removed from power (see 1 Samuel 15:1, 26). David succeeded him. He defeated Israel’s surrounding enemies and began a dynasty of 20 succeeding kings who reigned from Jerusalem. Under his leadership, Israel finally exercised complete rule over the land God had promised Abraham (see Genesis 13:14-18).

God made special commitments to David called the Davidic covenant (see 2 Samuel 7:5-17), promises similar to the ones he made to Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-9; 17:1-19). This suggested that God's promises to David were the next step in his redemptive mission to make Abraham's descendants a blessing to the world. The promises included making David's name famous, providing land where his people could live, and having offspring who would reign forever (see 2 Samuel 7:9-16). The immediate context referred to his son, Solomon, who, after David's death, succeeded him and built a house (temple) in Jerusalem to honour who the Lord is.

Divided Kingdom

After David's death, Solomon constructed a magnificent temple devoted to worshipping the Lord. He rebuilt many towns and greatly enhanced Israel's commercial prosperity. Though having the reputation of being exceedingly wise, he made some fatal mistakes. To cement his power, he arranged political alliances with nearby city states and countries. In the ancient Near East, this included marrying numerous women and having scores of concubines. His foreign wives brought their idolatrous worship with them. As he grew older, they "led him astray ... and turned his heart to other gods.... He followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites" (1 Kings 11:3-5). Solomon's idolatry set a dreadful example for his people and succeeding kings.

Rehoboam, who succeeded his father, ignored his people's protests against burdensome taxes, exploitation and oppression. Jeroboam had been the leader of Solomon's forced labourers—which included Israelites. He revolted against Rehoboam in 931 BC (see 1 Kings 5:13-15; 12:1-13) and became the first king of the 10 tribes of the break-away northern kingdom. They retained the name Israel with Samaria as its capital. Sometimes the kingdom itself was referred to as Samaria. The remnant of Judah became the southern

kingdom with the Davidic dynasty ruling from Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 12:20).

Battle for Monotheism

Jeroboam became concerned that Israelites in his northern kingdom (Israel) would want to attend religious festivals in Jerusalem, which could tempt them to permanently return to the southern kingdom of Judah. To discourage that from happening, he built idolatrous worship centres containing two calves of gold, one in Bethel and the other in Dan. He brazenly declared they were the gods that brought the Israelites up from Egypt. He staffed them with priests from the local population rather than with Levites (see 1 Kings 12:25-33). These actions violated the first and second commandments of Israel's Mosaic covenant, which prohibits idol worship and the making of idols (see Exodus 20:3-4). The covenant also restricted the priesthood to the Levites (see Numbers 3-4). King Jeroboam thus institutionalized covenant unfaithfulness in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Rampant idolatry began to seriously threaten the holiness of God's people, thus compromising their mission of being a blessing to the world (see Genesis 12:1-3). Leviticus 20:26 declares: "You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." If they worshipped false gods, how could they have been a kingdom of priests and a holy people who would inspire other nations to embrace the one true God, the Lord?

In the midst of the northern kingdom's covenant infidelity and political instability after Jeroboam's death, God's prophet, Elijah, appeared on the scene. He courageously staged on Mount Carmel a crucial, spiritual battle for Israel's loyalty to the Lord. Would they worship only the Lord (monotheism), or other gods (polytheism), or the Lord and other gods (syncretism)? Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Baal, their god of human and crop fertility, and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah. The false prophets built an altar on

which to place a sacrificial bull. “Then you will call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord,” said Elijah. “The god who answers by fire—he is God” (1 King 18:24). The pagan prophets prayed and danced all day to their god, but nothing happened, except their frenzied dancing damaged the wooden altar.

Elijah rebuilt the altar, placed his carved bull on it and ramped up the odds against himself and the Lord. He got the people to drench the altar and the offering three times with water (see 1 Kings 18:30-35). “Answer me, O Lord ... so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again” (1 Kings 18:37). The result? “Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and soil and also licked up the water in the trench” (1 Kings 18:38). The people responded, exclaiming, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God” (1 Kings 18:39)! The Lord’s spectacular intervention confirmed him alone as the one supreme God and helped to keep alive the flickering flame of Israel’s monotheistic faith.

Pagan Convert (2 Kings 5)

To remind Israel of its vocation to be a blessing by sharing her unique faith with other nations, her scribes included stories to illustrate their missionary responsibility. The healing of Naaman, a pagan military leader, is one such example. Leprosy had inflicted this army commander from Aram (Syria today). Providentially, his wife had a young Israelite maid who had been taken captive when Aram and Israel were enemies. Because she nevertheless held no bitterness against her Aramian boss, she told Naaman’s wife that an Israelite prophet, Elisha, in Samaria, could heal her husband. Arrogant Naaman angrily objected to Elisha’s prescription for healing: to wash himself seven times in Israel’s little Jordan River, a river he felt was much inferior to the Abana and Pharpar rivers in his own country (see 2 Kings 5:12). He needed to learn that neither his high leadership position nor the gifts he had brought for Elisha could earn healing

from Israel's God. He must simply obey God's word as revealed to Elisha. His servants eventually convinced him to "swallow the medicine." Naaman dipped himself seven times in the Jordan and "His flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy" (2 Kings 5:14).

His faith confession highlighted God's missionary heart and the purpose of this public healing event: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). Through the faithful witness of a captive Israelite girl and the ministry of Elisha, a non-Israelite learned that the God of Israel's monotheistic faith is the Creator-God of all peoples. He is a merciful and compassionate God who cares for everyone, including Israel's enemies. Obviously, the truth of this story was preserved in Israel's Scriptures to remind her of her divine calling to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" who would mediate the knowledge of the one true and loving God to the world. The story of Jonah strongly emphasizes the same message.

Accidental Evangelist?

Because of Israel's addiction to other peoples' gods, her prophetic preachers usually focused their ministry on their own nation. However, Scripture records God's calling at least one Israelite, Jonah, to travel to a foreign nation, Assyria, Israel's dreaded enemy. Historians say Assyrian armies tortured enemy combatants by skinning them alive, gouging out eyes and cutting off body parts—a frightening warning to neighbouring nations if they dared refuse submission to Assyria. God called Jonah to evangelize their cruel enemy! He was to call them to repent and embrace Israel's monotheistic faith by acknowledging the Lord as the only true God (see Jonah 1:1-2).

God could not have chosen a more unlikely evangelist than Jonah to travel to Nineveh, the capital and heart of the Assyrian Empire. But God's timing was strategic. The Assyrians were distracted at that time by famine, many revolts and conflicts with the Arameans and

Urartians. This situation likely made Nineveh open to a visiting Israelite evangelist. (Nineveh was near the current city of Mosul, Iraq.) But Jonah did not see God's calling as an exciting opportunity to share Israel's faith with the Ninevites. Instead, he ran from God by taking a boat to Tarshish, the opposite direction from Nineveh.

A violent storm arose and threatened the lives of those aboard the boat. Jonah took responsibility for the raging tempest, saying God was punishing him for his disobedience. He told the crew to throw him overboard and thus calm the storm. Learning from Jonah that his God created the sea and land, the crew initially refused to take his advice. Then, asking God beforehand to forgive them for drowning Jonah, they threw him overboard. A great fish swallowed him, and the stormy waves calmed down. The sailors "greatly feared the Lord, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him" (Jonah 1:16). Jonah ran from the Lord, but ironically the pagan sailors prayed to Jonah's God and worshipped him! Was he an accidental evangelist?

Jonah prayed inside the fish before it vomited him up on dry land (see Jonah 1:17-2:10). After this painful experience, he obediently headed to Nineveh. At God's instruction he preached a sermon of eight words, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (Jonah 3:4). Amazingly, the Ninevites believed God and mournfully repented of their sins (see Jonah 3:5). The king did likewise, issuing a decree, saying, "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:8-9). God mercifully forgave the king and the people, thus averting judgment.

Israel's Reason for Existence

Jonah's response to the Ninevites' repentance reveals why this story is part of Israel's Scriptures. Jonah had preached judgment: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (Jonah 3:4). But Jonah

got angry because God showed compassion towards the Ninevites. He admitted that was his reason for not initially going to Nineveh—fearing that God would be merciful towards Israel’s enemy (see Jonah 4:1-2). He believed their past hostility toward Israel deserved judgment, not mercy. He was so angry that he would rather be dead than alive (see Jonah 4:3)! The story of Jonah was clearly meant to challenge Israel to take seriously its responsibility for being God’s mission people for the world, including their enemies (see Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6). This truth is forcefully driven home in the final chapter.

Feeling his anger was justified (see Jonah 4:4), Jonah went outside the city, waiting for God to annihilate it. He was happy that God provided a large plant for shade from the sweltering sun. When the vine withered the next day, Jonah became so distraught by the blazing heat that he again wished he were dead. God asked him if he had a right to be angry about the vine (see Jonah 4:9). When he admitted he was angry enough to die, God delivered the knock-out punch: “You have been concerned about the vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow.... But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left (spiritually and morally unaware), and many cattle as well” (Jonah 4:10-11). Jonah was deeply concerned about the vine, but he couldn’t care less about the cattle, and he hated the Ninevites!

Israel existed for the sake of the world (see Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6). In not wanting to introduce his God, the Lord, to the Ninevites, was Jonah representing most Israelites at that time? How faithful were they to their divine calling? The story appropriately ends with God’s penetrating question for his mission people, “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (See Jonah 4:11.)

Singing the Mission

Israel’s awareness of its calling to bless the world is not only reflected by its storytellers, historians and prophets, but by its gifted

songwriters. In their worship, they celebrated and praised the Lord for the good news of his saving grace in freeing them from slavery in Egypt, in providing for their needs in their trek through the barren wilderness, and for bringing them back home from Babylonian captivity to the Promised Land. They felt compelled to invite the nations to forsake their non-gods, and experience with Israel the redemptive power and majesty of the one and only true God, the Lord.

“Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord all the earth....
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous deeds among all peoples....
For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens....
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength....
Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns.’ ”
(Psalm 96:1-10)

They believed neighbouring nations had seen what the Lord had done for the Israelites and that they should join them in acknowledging his righteousness, power and universal sovereignty.

“The Lord has done marvellous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.
The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
He has remembered his love

and his faithfulness to the house of Israel;
all the ends of the earth
have seen the salvation of our God.
Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music....
Shout for joy before the Lord, the King.”
(Psalm 98:1-6)

Unfortunately, Israel’s singing of the gospel of God’s redemptive grace and inviting others to join them in worshipping only the Lord were tragically compromised by her infatuation with idolatry. It became a heavy burden for God and the preachers he raised up to rescue her from self-destruction.

Questions

1. Why did Solomon marry so many women and acquire concubines as well? What were the consequences?
2. Why did Jeroboam set up idolatrous images in the northern kingdom of Israel?
3. What was the consequence of king Jeroboam’s institutionalizing covenant unfaithfulness in Israel?
4. Define monotheism, polytheism and syncretism.
5. Why do you think the story of Jonah ends with the question, “Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Jonah—<https://youtu.be/dLIabZc0O4c>

Lesson 5:

GUARDIANS OF THE COVENANT (AMOS)

We saw previously that King Jeroboam's setting up idolatrous worship centres in Bethel and Dan had institutionalized covenant infidelity in the northern kingdom of Israel. This was a blatant violation of the Mosaic covenant which prohibited worshipping other gods and making idols of them (see Exodus 20:3-4). God had reassured Elijah some years earlier that he had preserved a faithful remnant of 7,000 who were not worshipping the Canaanite god, Baal. Idolatry nevertheless persisted and ungodly kings did not lead the people based on the ethical and moral standards of their foundational Mosaic covenant. Given the Israelites' persistent covenant violations, what could God do to ensure his redemptive plan through them would still move forward?

Judgment and Hope

God raised up courageous prophets to speak words of judgment and restoration to his people. Unlike priests, they did not inherit their role by birth and were not part of Israel's religious and political establishment. Their oracles (messages) grew out of their intimate connection to God (see Exodus 33:11; Jeremiah 23:18, 21-23). But being close to God sometimes became a dangerous and costly privilege. They came from various parts of Israel and Judah. Some had direct access to the king and others communicated their messages directly to the people. The earliest ones, such as Elijah and Elisha, were oral prophets only—their messages were not written down. The oracles of later prophets, such as Amos, Micah, Isaiah and others, were recorded and became part of the Jewish Bible and eventually part of the Christian Bible.

Israel's prophets were unique. "They represent the literary record of one of the most remarkable phenomena known to the history of religion."¹ Essentially, the prophets were watchmen and guardians of the Mosaic covenant that had constituted the Israelites at Mount Sinai as God's chosen mission people (see Exodus 19-24). They exhorted Israel's kings, leaders and people to keep the laws of the Mosaic covenant and be a light to the nations. How? By reflecting God's righteousness, justice and love in personal and national life. Because they were trying to protect their people from the terrible consequences of disobeying the laws of the Mosaic covenant (see Deuteronomy 27-28), perhaps we could also call the prophets God's spiritual policemen. Though their preaching usually stressed God's judgment for his people's transgressions, their faith in God and his worldwide mission inevitably elicited hope for a brighter future for his people.

Repent or Perish

The prophets' messages can be summed up in three words: repent or perish. As God's truth-tellers, and using eloquent prose and imaginative poetry, they passionately rebuked and pleaded with their people to repent of their idolatry, immorality and social injustices. Otherwise, the inescapable consequences for covenant disloyalty would be national collapse and deportation to another country (see Deuteronomy 28:41). Turning to the Lord in repentance and obedience would bring healing and restoration. Because God created all peoples, his mission would ultimately include the conversion of Gentiles (see Isaiah 42:6; Psalm 67:1-4; 96; 99). Thus, though the prophets' oracles focused primarily on their own people, they sometimes addressed the injustices and evils of Israel's neighbours.

Amos (760-750 BC)

Though Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah (southern kingdom), God called him to focus his preaching ministry on the northern kingdom of Israel (see Amos 7:12-13). Israel was flourishing economically under King Jeroboam. Though things appeared fine on the surface, "the moral fibre of the nation was disintegrating."² Amos attacked the assumption that his people could blatantly disobey God's ethical and social demands without painful consequences. He challenged Israel's materialism, decadent morality and especially the injustices of its luxury-loving elites who seemed oblivious to the nation's toxic social reality:

"For three sins of Israel,
even for four, I will not relent.
They sell the innocent for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals.
They trample on the heads of the poor
as on the dust of the ground
and deny justice to the oppressed.

Father and son use the same girl
and so profane my holy name.
They lie down beside every altar
on garments taken in pledge.
In the house of their god
they drink wine taken as fines.”
(Amos 2:6-8)

Social and economic oppression by wealthy Israelites betrayed their history as a people whose ancestors God had compassionately rescued from slavery. God warns:

“You only have I chosen
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your sins.
An enemy will overrun your land,
pull down your strongholds
and plunder your fortresses.
On the day I punish Israel for her sins,
I will destroy the altars of Bethel....
I will tear down the winter house
along with the summer house;
the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed
and the mansions will be demolished.”
(Amos 3:2, 11, 14-15)

Israel’s vocation as God’s mission people “was not a ticket to a cozy state of privileged favouritism,” says Christopher Wright. “Rather it laid upon the people a missionary task and a moral responsibility. If they failed in these, then in a sense they fell back to the level of any other nation. They stood like all nations ... before the bar

of God's judgment, and their history by itself gave them no guaranteed protection."³ God wanted his people to model community justice and righteousness, and be a blessing to the world. Instead, injustice and oppression became widespread, making their worship a mockery in God's eyes:

“You ... turn justice into bitterness
and cast righteousness to the ground.
You hate the one who reproves in court
and despise him who tells the truth.
You trample on the poor
and force him to give you grain....
You oppress the righteous and take bribes
and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.
I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
I cannot stand your assemblies.
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them....
But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!”
(Amos 5:7, 10-12, 21-22, 24)

Confrontation

The prophets boldly denounced their peoples' blatant covenant violations. King Jeroboam of the northern kingdom (Israel) had built shrines in Bethel and Gilgal, where the Israelites worshipped the pagan Canaanite gods Baal and Ashtoreth. On one occasion, Amos, who was from the southern kingdom of Judah, went north to King Jeroboam's idolatrous shrine in Bethel and fearlessly declared God's judgment:

“The high places of Isaac (Israel) will be destroyed
and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined;
with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam....
Jeroboam will die by the sword,
and Israel will surely go into exile,
away from their native land.”
(Amos 7:9-11)

Amaziah, the priest in charge of the Bethel sanctuary, told Amos to mind his own business and go back home to Judah (southern kingdom) and earn a living there as a prophet (see Amos 7:12). He informed King Jeroboam that Amos was “raising a conspiracy against [the king] in the very heart of Israel” (Amos 7:12). Not being a paid messenger for God, Amos responded: “I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’ ” (Amos 7:14-15). Then he bluntly told Amaziah:

“Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword.
Your land will be measured and divided up,
and you will die in a pagan country.
And Israel will certainly go into exile
away from their native land.”
(Amos 7:17)

Motivated by God’s love, Amos’ dire warnings of Israel’s future political collapse and exile were meant to be a wake-up call to jolt them to repent and reform their ways. Its kings, priests and upper-class elites ignored these threats (see Amos 6:1-7). In 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered and “deported them to Assyria ... in Helah, in Gozan on the Harbor River and in the towns of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:6). They are sometimes referred to as the 10 lost tribes of Israel,

but some of them may have escaped to the southern kingdom of Judah and elsewhere.

“God permitted Israel (northern kingdom) to suffer the consequences of its own evil actions.... What God did was to strip away Israel’s national/political identity. He allowed Assyria to carry [them] into captivity and resettle the people in a foreign country. Their [self-inflicted] punishment was that they would be absorbed into the pagan world—so absorbed that ... they never regained their identity as a nation.... The Israelites had wanted to adopt the lifestyle and customs of their neighbours.... God [granted] their wish. Their idolatry, immorality, and exploitation of the poor had polluted their faith in God. He judged them by allowing them to become totally immersed in their paganism.”⁴ So, has God given up on his people being a blessing to the world?

Future Restoration

Israel’s prophets passionately pleaded with God’s people to repent or they would suffer the traumatic experience of national collapse and exile. However, they usually expressed beyond doom and disaster the hope of a brighter tomorrow. Thus, Amos ends his prophecy:

“In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent.
I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins
and build it as it used to be,
so that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations that bear my name ...
I will bring back my exiled people Israel;
they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;
they will make gardens and eat their fruit.”

(Amos 9:11-14)

“In that day” (see Amos 9:11) is an Old Testament prophetic expression referring to a time in the undetermined future when God’s righteousness would be completely actualized on earth. A time when he would save his people and judge the world. Amos here emphasizes the saving and restoring aspect of “that day.” He says a Davidic ruler would eventually bring his exiled people back to the Promised Land where they would flourish (see Amos 9:13, 15), but “the remnant of Edom” (Gentiles) would then be included in God’s mission people. The New Testament reveals how this happens (see Acts 15:12-19).

Questions

1. What was the role of Israel’s ancient prophets?
2. What made Israel’s worship in Amos’ day a mockery to God? (See Amos 5:7, 10-12, 21-22, 24.)
3. What were the consequences of Israel’s covenant violations? (See Amos 7:17; 2 Kings 17:6.)
4. Amos challenged Israel’s materialism, decadent morality and social injustices. Where do you see these three sins today?
5. Beyond the trauma of national destruction and exile, what kind of future does God promise his mission people? (See Amos 9:11-15.)

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Amos—<https://youtu.be/mGgWaPGpGz4>

Lesson 6:

"O LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET ME GO" (HOSEA)

In the midst of Israel's pervasive idolatry, social injustices and political chaos, Hosea's tragic marital situation became a revelation of God's amazing grace, his stubborn love for his erring children and, of course, for us. Unlike Amos, Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom of Israel and his oracles generally feel less harsh than those of Amos. Through the Sinai (Mosaic) covenant, God had established a reciprocal love relationship with Israel comparable to the marriage covenant. Hosea's loyalty to his adulterous wife, Gomer, testified to God's unrelenting love for his spiritually adulterous mission people. Just as she broke Hosea's heart, so Israel's love affair with idols broke God's heart (see Hosea 1-3). Hosea depicts God as a profoundly distressed and abandoned lover trying to woo his unfaithful people back into his loving arms.

God's Grace

What does covenant disloyalty look like? The nation's spiritual infidelity became a fixed disposition: "They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of [spiritual] prostitution

leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.... Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.... They are unfaithful to the Lord” (Hosea 4:12; 5:4, 7). “There is ... no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.... Though Ephraim (Israel) built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning” (Hosea 4:1-2; 8:11).

Hosea’s description of such sinful depravity showed that the Israelites were failing disastrously in their calling to be God’s covenant-keeping mission people. How did he feel about their behaviour? He tenderly expressed his feelings about Israel’s stubborn refusal to repent by switching from the wife-husband analogy to the father-son relationship. Hosea seems to actually know God’s feelings, what Walter Brueggemann calls, “the hidden (i.e., internal) life of YHWH” (the Lord).¹ He senses the Lord feels torn between allowing his people to reap the judgment they deserve—national disaster and displacement—or mercifully rescuing them. He doesn’t want to “devastate Ephraim” (Israel), to completely destroy the people he loves.

“When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more I called Israel,
the further they went from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.
It was I who taught Israel to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not know it was I who healed them.
I led them with the cords of human kindness,
with ties of love;
I lifted the yoke from their neck
and bent down to feed them.
Will they not return to Egypt

and will not Assyria rule over them? ...
How can I give you up, Ephraim (Israel)?
How can I hand you over, Israel [to your enemies]?
My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.
I will not carry out my fierce anger,
nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim.
For I am God and not man—
the Holy One among you.
I will not come in wrath.”
(Hosea 11:1-9)

In the Lord’s emotional journey with Israel, his faithful love tempered his wrath. He would not allow them to be obliterated. He would make sure a remnant survived to carry through his saving plan for humanity. Hosea later pleaded for them to repent, even giving them the words to use:

“Return, Israel, to the Lord your God.
Your sins have been your downfall!
Take words with you and return to the Lord.
Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously,
that we may offer the fruit of our lips.
Assyria cannot save us;
we will not mount warhorses.
We will never again say
“Our gods” to what our own hands have made,
for in you the fatherless find compassion.’ ”
(Hosea 14:1-3)

Better Days Ahead

With open arms, God longed to embrace his wayward people. Judgment gave way to a poetic description of the hope of restoration when God’s people would flourish abundantly in the distant future:

“I will heal their waywardness and love them freely,
 for my anger has turned away from them.
 I will be like the dew to Israel;
 he will blossom like a lily.
 Like a cedar of Lebanon
 he will send down his roots;
 his young shoots will grow.
 His splendour will be like an olive tree,
 his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.
 People will dwell again in his shade;
 they will flourish like the grain.
 They will blossom like a vine....
 O Ephraim (Israel), what more have I to do with idols?
 I will ... care for him.
 I am like a flourishing juniper;
 your fruitfulness comes from me.”
 (Hosea 14:4-8)

Earlier God was portrayed as divorcing his wife, Israel, and no longer loving her because of her spiritual unfaithfulness (see Hosea 1:6-9). But God’s promise that Abraham will have many descendants who will bless the world still stands: “The Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore.” Though now they are not God’s people, one day they will again be “sons of the living God” and the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be reunited with one king (see Hosea 1:10-11). God’s mission people will become his wife again:

“You will call me ‘my husband’; ...
 I will betroth you to me forever;
 I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
 in love and compassion....
 I will plant her for myself in the land....

I will say to those called ‘not my people,’
‘You are my people’ and they will say,
‘You are my God.’ ”
(Hosea 2:16, 19-20, 23)

After being exiled, “the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days” (Hosea 3:5). The statement, “[They] will be like the sand on the seashore” (Hosea 1:10-11), links the Davidic covenant with the Abrahamic covenant (see Genesis 15:15-16; 22:17), with a Davidic descendant becoming their king (see Hosea 3:5). Hosea thus affirms what Amos expressed—God’s mission of making Abraham’s descendants a blessing to the nations will be carried forward through the Davidic dynasty, a revelation which the prophet Isaiah will expand.

Hosea’s love for his unfaithful wife is a beautiful picture of God’s compassion for Israel, his unfaithful wife, a love that refuses to quit. It is also meant to speak to our hearts of God’s incomparable love for us as expressed in General John Gowans’ song:

Don’t assume that God’s dismissed you from his mind,
Don’t assume that God’s forgotten to be kind;
For no matter what you do,
His love still follows you;
Don’t think that you have left him far behind.

*For his love remains the same, He knows you by your name,
Don’t think because you failed him he despairs;
For he gives to those who ask
His grace for every task,
God plans for you in love for he still cares.*

Don't assume that God will plan for you no more,
Don't assume that there's no future to explore;
For your life he'll redesign, the pattern be divine;
Don't think that your repentance he'll ignore.

Don't assume you cannot give what he'll demand,
Don't assume that God condemns you out of hand;
For he gives to those who ask
His grace for every task;
Don't think that God will fail to understand.²

Questions

1. How is Hosea's marital situation similar to God's relationship with Israel?
2. Why doesn't God want to totally destroy Israel?
3. How will God's promise of Abraham's descendants becoming a blessing to the world be accomplished "in the last days"? (See Hosea 3:5.)
4. How did reading the various verses (poetry) of Hosea quoted in this chapter affect you and why?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Hosea—<https://youtu.be/kE6SZ1ogOVU>

Lesson 7:

TRUE ISRAEL WITHIN ISRAEL (ISAIAH; MICAH)

During the ministries of Amos and Hosea, we saw the Israelites of the northern kingdom of Israel dismissing God's warnings of national destruction and refusing to repent. Consequently, Israel ended in 722 BC at the hands of the Assyrians. Yet, the hope for a brighter future was not lost. God would preserve a remnant through whom his mission in the world would continue (see Amos 9:8, 11-12). Hosea foresaw the Israelites becoming God's people again. He would woo and betroth them to himself in an everlasting bond of enduring love (see Hosea 2:19-20). Hosea did not reveal how this would happen, except that a Davidic king would be God's redemptive agent.

Confronting Corruption (Isaiah, 740-681 BC)

In the final years leading up to the end of the northern kingdom of Israel, Isaiah became God's messenger to the southern kingdom of Judah. His service spanned the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Though living in Jerusalem, he would have been keenly aware of the political deterioration and eventual end of the

northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. During that critical period, he was probably attentive to Hosea's ministry in Israel (754-714 BC). His wife was a prophetess (see Isaiah 8:3). They had at least two sons. He worked in and around Jerusalem and probably belonged to the upper classes. He had no problem visiting kings Ahaz and Hezekiah (see Isaiah 7:3ff; 37:21ff; 38:1-8), and had ready access to government officials (see Isaiah 22:15-25).

Isaiah boldly exposed the spiritual and moral condition of God's wayward people in Judah, addressing the similar issues Amos and Hosea had identified and condemned in Israel.

“Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth!
For the Lord has spoken:”
‘I reared children and brought them up,
but they rebelled against me.
The ox knows his master,
the donkey his owner's manager,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.
Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!
They have forsaken the Lord;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him.’ ”
(Isaiah 1:2-4)

He likened the rulers and people to those of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Isaiah 1:10). Because of their infatuation with many gods, their worship had become phony and repugnant to him:

“The multitude of your sacrifices—
what are they to me?...
I have more than enough of burnt offerings....

I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats....
Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
Your incense is detestable to me....
I cannot bear your evil assemblies...
They have become a burden to me.
Even if you offer many prayers,
I will not listen.”
(Isaiah 1:11, 13-15)

But the Lord’s compassionate heart has not given up on them:

“Come now, let us reason together....
Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow....
If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the best from the land;
but if you resist and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword.”
(Isaiah 1:18-20)

Perils of Prosperity

Judah had become prosperous (see Isaiah 2:7), but economic prosperity and what we might today call self-indulgent consumerism, led them to be overly confident in their own resources. This resulted in arrogance and self-sufficiency (see Isaiah 2:17, 22). Judah’s social life offended the holiness of God and like the northern kingdom (Israel), it will also end in calamity:

“Woe to those who rise early in the morning
to run after their drinks,
who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine.

They have harps and lyres at their banquets,
tambourines and flutes and wine,
but they have no regard for the [saving] deeds of the Lord,
no respect for the work of his hands.
Therefore my people will go into exile
for lack of understanding;
their men of rank will die of hunger
and their masses will be parched with thirst.”
(Isaiah 5:11-13)

Having so long disobeyed God’s commandments (see Isaiah 5:24), their moral depravity and defiled consciences have robbed them of the ability to tell right from wrong:

“Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes
and clever in their own sight.”
(Isaiah 5:20-21)

Israel is radically out of sync with God. With his people, including their leaders, being spiritually dull and morally debased, how can the Lord possibly use them to be a light to the world? (See Isaiah 49:6.) What is God’s solution to this missional dilemma?

Purified Remnant

Isaiah had a vision of God’s incomparable holiness (see Isaiah 6:1-3). God cleansed and commissioned him to be his mouthpiece in exhorting his people to wholeheartedly turn to the Lord and reform

their ways. God warned him, however, that his people generally were so calloused and spiritually blind that the message would fall on deaf ears (see Isaiah 6:9-13). Isaiah asked how long this condition would last. The Lord said that in the future destruction of the kingdom of Judah he would preserve a righteous remnant of his people—“the holy seed will be the stump in the land,” like a stump surviving after a large tree has been cut down (see Isaiah 6:11-13). The future restoration of the Israelites will include a spiritually *purified remnant*, the “holy seed,” who will obey God’s call to repentance. It is through them that God’s redemptive mission for humanity will continue (see Isaiah 10:20-23).

A Just and Righteous Kingdom

After Israel had divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, they sometimes clashed militarily. On one occasion, Aram (Syria today) and Israel plotted to conquer Judah so that Judah would then help them fend off the threatening Assyrians. God gave Isaiah a sign: he would have a son, Immanuel, meaning “God with us,” and Aram and Ephraim (Israel) would fail in their mission. They would soon be “laid waste” by the powerful Assyrians (see Isaiah 7:1-2; 13-17)—which is what happened when they eventually ravaged Israel. However, Assyria was unable to conquer Judah. Out of this turbulent period in the history of Israel and Judah came one of the most significant prophecies in the Old Testament. It focuses on a remarkable Davidic king who seems to be more than human:

“To us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace

there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord God Almighty
will accomplish this."
(Isaiah 9:6-7)

Repentant Remnant

With God's help, Judah survived the Assyrian onslaught, though greatly weakened. The Babylonians eventually conquered Assyria, a just judgment for its overweening pride and arrogance (see Isaiah 10:5-19; 24-34). Judah would be its next victim. But all would not be lost for God's mission people. Though Israel and Judah would both end as nations, God would ensure a repentant remnant survived.

"In that day the remnant of Israel,
the survivors of the house of Jacob
will no longer rely on [Assyria]
who struck them down,
but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel....
A remnant of Jacob (Israel) will return to the mighty God.
Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand of the sea
destruction has been decreed."
(Isaiah 10:20-22)

Israel was now seen as consisting of many *covenant violators* and a *faithful remnant*. This revelation has profound implications. Even if Israel and Judah end nationally, God's redemptive mission could still continue through a righteous remnant who would rely on him to further his saving purposes for the world.

"The most significant result of the prophets' ethical concern is that it will not be [national] Israel as such that enters into the

eschatological (end-time) kingdom of God but only a believing, purified remnant,” says George Ladd. “The Israel of the restoration which will experience the final salvation will be only a fragment or remnant of the nation as a whole. Amos likens the Israel of the past to a brand plucked from the burning, and the Israel of the future will be like a few scraps of a sheep saved from the lion’s mouth (see Amos 3:12). Micah uses the phrase, ‘the remnant of Jacob,’ as practically synonymous for Israel (see Micah 5:7-8). The redeemed of the future will experience the [end-time] salvation not because they are Israelites but because they are faithful, holy and righteous. Back of this expectation lies the deeper concept, seldom explicit in the Old Testament but constantly implicit, that the true Israel is of the spirit rather than of the flesh” (see Jeremiah 4:4).¹

Ladd further illustrates the concept of a faithful remnant from Israel’s earlier history: “Only the remnant of Noah and his family were saved from the flood. Isaac and his seed alone inherited the promise given to Abraham. Of the generation that escaped Egypt and wandered in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb entered into the Promised Land. Elijah was told of 7,000 faithful who had not bowed down to Baal. Jeremiah distinguished between those who are circumcised only in flesh and those who are circumcised in heart (see Jeremiah 4:4; Deuteronomy 10:15-16). The distinction rests not upon nationality, race, or cult, but upon faith. It is fundamentally a spiritual relationship.”² In short, *righteous Israel are those who put their trust in Yahweh alone as God and are faithful in living out the ethical requirements of the Mosaic covenant*, the covenant that formally created them as God’s people. Only this righteous remnant therefore qualified to be his mission people for the world.

Isaiah expanded the character qualities and role of the future ideal Davidic king who would reign over this faithful remnant: a shoot (offspring) from the stump of Jesse (David’s father), upon whom would rest the Spirit of the Lord, “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of the

knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:2-3). He would righteously judge the poor and defend the weak. He would strike the earth and kill the wicked with “the rod of his mouth,” meaning presumably the powerful truth of his authoritative word would “overwhelm the wicked” (see Isaiah 11:3-4; 49:2; Revelation 19:15; Hebrews 4:12).³ Through this Davidic king the earth would “be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). (“Knowledge of the Lord” means knowing God personally.) “People will reverence the Lord, now having a correct understanding of his existence, perfections, plans, and claims and will be disposed to yield to those claims, thus producing universal peace.”⁴

Deliverer from Bethlehem (Micah)

Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, was from Moresheth-gath, Judah, about 40 kilometres (25 miles) southwest from Jerusalem. He preached to an increasingly depraved and violent society for 20-25 years (see Micah 2:1-11; 6:1-12). Idolatry was a disturbing reality, as was flagrant injustice against the poor, bribery in their courts and dishonest business practices (see Micah 2:1-2; 3:1-3; 6:11; 7:3). Consequently, the emotional trauma of exile would be inevitable (see Micah 4:9-10), but a suffering, faithful remnant could look forward to a glorious restoration to the land in the distant future. Peoples from the nations of the world would stream to Jerusalem to learn about the ways of the Lord. Wars would cease and God’s people would forever worship and faithfully obey him (see Micah 4:6-8; 4:1-5).

God revealed to Micah that out of insignificant Bethlehem would emerge a seemingly supernatural Davidic shepherd who would rule over his restored, secure people, and “his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace” (bring peace) (see Micah 5:1-5). Idolatry would be eliminated (see Micah 5:10-14), thus the root sin of their covenant violations would no longer be effective. What does the Lord require of them in the meantime? “To act justly

and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [their] God” (Micah 6:8).

The promise of an ideal Davidic ruler was meant to encourage hope in God’s people for a kingdom of peace and justice, and for them to become a blessing to the world (see Genesis 12:3). But how could this happen, given their long history of displaying rebellious and spiritually desensitized hearts? Kings usually resorted to warfare to establish and expand their kingdoms and empires. Though they sometimes provided a temporary stability and peace, they inevitably became victims of other ambitious, power-seeking rulers. Is it not then the common need of all peoples to have a radically changed heart that would shun violence and military aggression? So, how and when would their hearts be changed?

Questions

1. Why was Judah’s worship repugnant to God, and why wouldn’t he listen to their prayers? (See Isaiah 1:10-15.)
2. What are the spiritual dangers of prosperity? (See Isaiah 2:7, 17, 22.)
3. What is meant by a true Israel within national Israel?
4. What disturbing evils are present in Judah during Micah’s ministry, and what will be their eventual results? (See Micah 2:1-2; 3:1-3; 6:11; 7:3.)
5. What is Judah’s encouraging hope for a better future? (See Micah 5:1-5.)
6. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20).
Where do you see this situation in our day?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Isaiah 1-39—<https://youtu.be/d0A6Uchb1F8>

Lesson 8:

NEW COVENANT (JEREMIAH)

The need for a profound inner change in God's mission people in Judah, the southern kingdom, eventually became a spiritual and political crisis. Good king Hezekiah reigned for 42 years (729-686 BC) and began to reverse the Israelites' spiritual bankruptcy. But his son, Manasseh, who succeeded him and ruled for 55 years, built altars to foreign gods, including in the temple, practised sorcery and witchcraft, and even sacrificed his sons to pagan gods (see 2 Chronicles 33:1-6). After Assyrian military commanders took him captive to Babylon, Manasseh repented, and God arranged for him to return to his throne in Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 33:10-13). He attempted to undo the spiritual damage he had inflicted by removing idols, re-establishing regular sacrifices in the temple and instructing the people to worship only the Lord (see 2 Chronicles 33:14-17).

Manasseh's son, Amon, succeeded him. Unfortunately, he had not bought into his father's religious reforms. Though his officials murdered him after he had reigned for only two years, he succeeded in undoing everything his father had accomplished (see 2 Chronicles 33:21-25). But Josiah, his son, undertook massive reforms. He removed idols from the land, abolished all pagan worship centres,

and ordered the Levites and priests to repair the temple. Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered the book of the law (probably Deuteronomy) in the temple. King Josiah read it and became convicted by how far he and his people had strayed from the requirements of the Mosaic covenant. He led an extensive religious reformation which culminated in a nationwide celebration of Passover (see 2 Chronicles 34:22-35:19). Josiah and his army later unwisely confronted Egyptian Pharaoh Neco and his troops as they marched to join the Assyrians in a battle against Babylon. Egyptian archers killed him (see 2 Chronicles 35:23).

Davidic Monarchy Ends

The collapse of the Davidic monarchy in the southern kingdom of Judah occurred over a period of 20 years (606-586 BC). After Josiah's death in 605 BC, the people replaced him with Jehoahaz. Three months later, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt replaced king Jehoahaz with Jehoiakim and imposed a heavy tax on Judah. Judah was therefore no longer an independent nation. The Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in 605 BC. In 597 BC, they exiled Judah's 28-year-old Davidic king Jehoiachin—who had ruled for only three months—along with several thousand of its leading citizens and soldiers (see 2 Kings 24:10-16). They also took the treasures of the palaces and temple to Babylon. With king Jehoiachin now a prisoner in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar placed a puppet Davidic king on the throne in Jerusalem—Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle. After reigning for 11 years, Zedekiah foolishly rebelled against Babylon. The Babylonians conquered and exiled the Israelites of Judah in 586 BC. They slaughtered Zedekiah's sons before his eyes, then blinded Zedekiah and took him to Babylon to show other potential insurgents what would happen if they rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The Davidic monarchy finally ended.

Experiencing God's Burden and Grief

During these unstable years leading up to the end of the Davidic dynasty, God's courageous messenger, Jeremiah, a priest from Anathoth, Judah, passionately pleaded with Judah's kings and people to repent of their covenant violations and turn to the Lord. He realized that king Josiah's religious reforms had not changed his peoples' hearts: "Judah did not return to [the Lord] with all her heart, but only in pretense" (Jeremiah 3:10). Jeremiah felt and expressed God's burden for the wayward people he loved:

"What fault did your fathers find in me,
that they strayed so far from me?
They followed worthless (empty) idols
and became worthless themselves.
They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord,
who brought us up out of Egypt
and led us through the barren wilderness,
a land where no one travels and no one lives?' "
(Jeremiah 2:5-6)

"My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
cisterns that cannot hold water."
(Jeremiah 2:13)

"How gladly would I treat you like sons,
and give you a desirable land,
the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.
I thought you would call me 'Father'

and not turn away from following me.
But like a woman unfaithful to her husband,
so you have been unfaithful to me.”
(Jeremiah 3:19)

“No one repents of his wickedness,
saying, ‘What have I done?’
Each pursues his own course
like a horse charging into battle.”
(Jeremiah 8:6)

Identifying with God’s pain and grief over his stubbornly unfaithful people, Jeremiah laments:

“Since my people are crushed, I am crushed;
I mourn, and horror grips me.
Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no healing
for the wound of my people?
Oh, that my head were a spring of water
and my eyes a fountain of tears.
I would weep day and night for ... my people.
Oh, that I had in the desert,
a lodging place for travellers,
so that I might leave my people
and go away from them;
for they are all adulterers,
a crowd of unfaithful people.”
(Jeremiah 8:21-9:2)

The Pain of Truth Telling

Jeremiah's severe honesty in boldly speaking truth to power frequently created conflict with Judah's kings and other Israelite leaders. Contrary to popular beliefs in the eternity of the Davidic line of kings in Judah and the indestructibility of the temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16), Jeremiah preached the unpopular truth that God's mission people would only continue as a nation if they faithfully obeyed the Mosaic covenant (see Exodus 19:5-6). Otherwise, Judah—including the temple and city—would be destroyed and the people exiled (see Deuteronomy 28-29). Israel's leaders felt such preaching was undermining their authority and the peoples' morale in the face of enemy threats. They saw him as a traitor and therefore treated him harshly. King Jehoiakim, for example, arrested him in the temple courts (see Jeremiah 26:1-2, 4, 6, 8-9, 11). Some elders dismissed the charge by reminding the king that the prophet Micah had said the same thing years previously and the then king Hezekiah had treated him respectfully (see Jeremiah 26:16-19). But later, Pashur, a priest, had him beaten and put in the public stocks overnight for preaching the nation's imminent demise (see Jeremiah 20:1-2).

Jeremiah's other inflammatory message was that Judah should submit to Babylon and thus save the nation, the temple and their lives. He was convinced God would use Babylon to humble Judah, that resistance would not save Jerusalem, but only result in unnecessary bloodshed and carnage. However, relatives in his hometown of Anathoth plotted to murder him for advocating surrender to Babylon (see Jeremiah 11:18-23). Their scheme failed. He obviously believed that even if they were exiled to a foreign land without the temple, its offerings and ritual sacrifices, they could still be connected by faith to the Lord.

Because his people would not repent and would eventually suffer terribly in the Babylonian attack on Judah, the Lord told Jeremiah not to marry. He would therefore avoid the heartache of seeing his wife and children being killed or starving because of famine and

disease (see Jeremiah 16:1-7)—which would be an inevitable result of the Babylonians' prolonged siege of Jerusalem.

When the Babylonians took king Jehoiachin and several thousand prominent leaders and soldiers to Babylon in 597 BC, Jeremiah wrote them a God-inspired letter (see Jeremiah 29:1-23). He encouraged them to settle down, raise their children and prosper in Babylon. "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city.... Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.... But when seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call upon me ... and I will listen to you. You will seek and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you" (Jeremiah 29:7, 10-13). Telling them to pray for Babylon must have been a shocker. Pray for those who had destroyed their temple, the nation, killed many of their friends and loved ones, and dragged the survivors off to Babylon? Expecting them to be missionaries to the Babylonians, their evil enemy? Jeremiah understood and identified with their broken spirits. He knew the healing of the trauma they had experienced would take time, but that wholeheartedly seeking God in a foreign land would bring peace to their deeply troubled souls.

Despair

During the Babylonians' final siege of the city, the princes of the court arrested Jeremiah as a traitor, beat him and imprisoned him in a dungeon for a long time (see Jeremiah 37:11-16). King Zedekiah eventually intervened and saved him (see Jeremiah 37:17-21). Later they threw him into a deep, muddy cistern and he would have starved to death but for a friendly Ethiopian who rescued him (see Jeremiah 38:1-13). Jeremiah became a victim of ridicule, betrayal and unjust suffering for faithfully preaching God's unpleasant truths. He angrily accused the Lord of having deceived and overpowered him

in calling him to his prophetic ministry (see Jeremiah 20:7-8). He wanted to quit, but because God's word was in his heart like a fire, he felt compelled to preach it (see Jeremiah 20:9).

At one point, Jeremiah sank into the pit of despair, lamenting,

“Cursed be the day I was born!

May the day my mother bore me not be blessed!

Cursed be the man who brought my father the news,

who made him very glad, saying,

‘A child is born to you—a son!’

May that man be like the towns

the Lord overthrew without pity.

May he hear wailing in the morning,

a battle cry at noon.

For he did not kill me in the womb,

with my mother as my grave,

her womb enlarged forever.

Why did I ever come out of the womb

to see trouble and sorrow

and to end my days in shame?”

(Jeremiah 20:14-18)

In ancient Israel, cursing either God or one's parents invited the death penalty (see Leviticus 20:9). Jeremiah narrowly avoided doing both by cursing the day of his birth and the man who brought his father the news of his birth (see Jeremiah 20:14-15). But in cursing the day of his birth, by inference he was cursing God's calling, who had planned his prophetic ministry before he was born (see Jeremiah 1:5). He bitterly wished he had never left his mother's womb, which he illustrated with a grotesque picture—his mother's womb, with him inside as a baby, remaining enlarged forever (see Jeremiah 20:17)! Given the persecution and stress he experienced for many years, I wonder if today he might have been diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder?

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry led him into a Gethsemane from which the Lord never released him. We owe this remarkable man a tremendous debt for his faithfulness to God in spite of political pressure, physical harassment, family betrayal and a generally unfruitful ministry. Though sometimes experiencing the depths of despair, he never lost hope in God's redemptive mission through his people. What did that hope look like?

New Covenant—Internalized Teachings

Like previous prophets, Jeremiah clung to the belief that someday God would bring a remnant of Israelites back to the land and “raise up to David a righteous branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is right and just in the land” (Jeremiah 23:5-6). Reflecting upon his people's lengthy history of addiction to the false gods of their neighbours and their refusal to trust in the Lord alone for their national well-being, Jeremiah heard God's diagnosis of their problem: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). His people had no desire to repent. The sin problem, he realized, was not about circumstances or outside influences, but their spiritually corrupt inner nature. How could a sin-hardened people who were incapable of obeying God ever be a blessing to the world as he had promised Abraham? (See Genesis 12:1-3.) Jeremiah believed God's people needed a profound spiritual transformation. He finally perceived the Lord's solution. The Lord would make a new covenant with his people that would change them inwardly and bring them closer to him:

“The time is coming ...
when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them....
This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time ...
I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest....
For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."
(Jeremiah 31:31-34)

When would this new covenant of forgiveness and a close, personal relationship with God happen? Jeremiah says, "The time is coming...." (Jeremiah 31:31), meaning that sometime in the indeterminate future God's new covenant will give his mission people a fresh start. God will write his teachings (law) on their hearts and forgive their sins. Ezekiel will further reveal how that will happen.

Questions

1. What were Jeremiah's two unpopular messages to Israel's religious and political establishment?
2. What is meant by the Old Testament prophetic expressions, "the time is coming," "in the last days" and "the day of the Lord"?
3. What does it mean that Israelite worship at the temple had become syncretistic?
4. What was Jeremiah's diagnosis of the source of his people's wickedness, and what did he see as the cure?
5. In spite of so much heartache and suffering, why was Jeremiah faithful to God's calling? (See Jeremiah 1:1-10; 20:7-9.)

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Jeremiah—<https://youtu.be/RSK36cHbrk0>

Overview of Lamentations—<https://youtu.be/p8GDFPdaQZQ>

Lesson 9:

HEART TRANSPLANT (EZEKIEL)

The prophet-priest Ezekiel was part of the 597 BC exiles we mentioned previously. He began preaching to them in Babylon in 592 BC (see Ezekiel 3:11). Ezekiel imaginatively communicated in words and dramatic actions how Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. In a vision, he saw his people being slaughtered and fell face down, crying out: “Ah, Sovereign Lord! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” (Ezekiel 9:8). The Lord affirmed only that the people had brought this calamity upon themselves because of their social injustices and detestable practice of idolatry in the temple (see Ezekiel 9:9-10). They were mingling the beliefs and rituals of their idolatrous neighbours with their worship of the Lord (syncretism). Abominable practices included child sacrifice and the worship of animal images, the Babylonian god, Tammuz, and the sun (see Ezekiel 8:1-18; 14:1-8). Their spiritual leaders were part of this depraved idolatry.

Preserving a Remnant

We recall that in his 11th year as king, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. After a lengthy siege, the Babylonians destroyed

Jerusalem and the temple and exiled most of the people in 586 BC. Escaping Israelites took Jeremiah with them to Egypt (see Jeremiah 43:6). Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian army commander, left behind only a remnant of poor people to serve as farmers and vinedressers for Nebuchadnezzar (see 2 Kings 25:12). This national calamity vindicated what God's prophetic messengers had been saying for generations and what Moses, hundreds of years before them, had said would occur if they persisted in disrespecting the Mosaic covenant (see Deuteronomy 27-28), the covenant that formally constituted them as a nation.

In spite of his people's unrepentant hearts and the life-changing catastrophe that had befallen them, Ezekiel clung to God's promises to Abraham and David of his redemptive plan through his mission people: "I will bring you back from the nations where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again" (Ezekiel 11:17; 28:25-26). As previous prophets had promised, God's word was now: "I will spare a few of them (remnant) from the sword, famine and plague, so that in the nations where they go they may acknowledge all their detestable practices" (Ezekiel 12:16). Banishment from the land would hopefully make them see how dreadfully sinful and misguided their behaviour had been.

Entitlement

Meanwhile, those left amid Jerusalem's ruins after the city had fallen were trying to understand the devastating loss they had experienced, saying, "Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we (his descendants) are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession" (Ezekiel 33:24). However, just as Adam and Eve's disobedience resulted in exile from the garden in Eden, God replied that his people's sinful behaviour had disqualified them from living in the Promised Land (see Ezekiel 33:25-29). What did they not understand?

Their sense of entitlement to dwell forever in the land was likely

based on two ideas: God's promises to Abraham: "The whole land of Canaan ... I will give [you] and your descendants after you as an *everlasting* possession" (Genesis 17:8). Centuries later he promised that Davidic kings would rule over his people *forever* (see 2 Samuel 7:11-16). However, they conveniently overlooked an important "if" in their Mosaic covenant: "Now *if* you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.... You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). This covenant's stipulations were greatly expanded in Deuteronomy, repeatedly asserting that disobedience, especially idolatry, would result in much suffering and expulsion from the land (see Deuteronomy 27-28). They nevertheless became spiritually dull and willfully blind to the prophetic warnings of national disaster and exile. Because God's redemptive mission for them and the rest of humanity could not be defeated, a hopeful future had to lie beyond the nation's destruction.

A Future Shepherd King

Israel's shepherds—kings and other leaders—had not taken proper care of their flock but had "ruled them harshly and brutally ... caring for themselves rather than their flock," asserts Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 34:4, 8). So, the God of abundant grace and compassion would himself "search for [his] sheep and look after them, ... bring them out from the nations and ... into their own land, ... and shepherd them with justice" (Ezekiel 34:11, 13, 16). But who would be his agent in this restorative process? Though the Davidic dynasty had finally come to an end politically, the promise of a future everlasting kingdom still stood: "I will place over them my servant, David, and he will tend them ... and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them" (Ezekiel 34:23-24). But who would be this ideal Davidic king who would fully embody the love, mercy and righteousness of the heavenly king of the universe and bring his sovereign rule to earth?

New Heart, New Spirit

Building on Jeremiah's prophetic insight, Ezekiel revealed how God would change his peoples' stubborn, disobedient hearts. After restoring them to the land, he would "sprinkle clean water on [them], cleanse them from all [their] impurities ... and idols", ... give them "a new heart and put a new spirit in them, ... remove [their] stony hearts" and give them "a heart of flesh" (see Ezekiel 36:25-26; 37:12-14). Not only would God perform a spiritual heart transplant on them, he would provide the spiritual energy for this new heart to beat with the rhythm of his heart: "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and ... keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:27). God's Spirit would profoundly change the core of their beings and empower them to faithfully obey him. This inner transformation also means his people would have the moral credibility to truly be his holy mission people for the world (see Exodus 19:5-6). But with both kingdoms now ended and the Israelites from Judah exiled in Babylon, how long would they have to wait for this new transformational experience? The current generation would not experience it. Neither would those who eventually returned from exile about 70 years later. The road to redemption would require 500 more years to reach its destination.

Hope

Though both Israel and Judah no longer existed politically, Ezekiel referred to God's surviving mission remnant as Israel. The exiles in Babylon felt discouraged about their future, saying "How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4). God inspired Ezekiel's imagination with a hopeful vision of a valley of dead bones, which represented the despondent Israelite survivors in exile. God breathed upon them and they came to life (see Ezekiel 37:1-10), symbolizing a future restoration to their land. He promised unity for his estranged and displaced people under one king, to "save them from all their sinful backsliding." They would be his people again and he

would be their only God. Worshipping other gods would finally end (see Ezekiel 37:15-17, 22-23).

“My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will ... be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land ... where your ancestors lived ... and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever” (Ezekiel 37:24-28). The New Testament reveals the king who would inaugurate the new, everlasting covenant and also make plain the nature of the sanctuary (temple) that would be among them forever.

Through Jeremiah, God had promised his people a new covenant: “I will put my law in their minds, write it on their hearts, ... forgive their wickedness and ... remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Ezekiel now promised that God would cleanse them from all their impurities, give them a new heart, put a new spirit in them, remove their stony hearts and give them a heart of flesh (see Ezekiel 36:25-26). But how could an infinitely holy and righteous God justly forgive “wickedness and ... remember their sins no more?” Isaiah will deepen our insight into how that will happen.

Questions

1. While Ezekiel is exiled in Babylon, what abominable practices are happening at the temple in Jerusalem?
2. Why is God going to nevertheless preserve a remnant of them? (See Ezekiel 12:16.)
3. The Israelites sense of entitlement to live forever in the Promised Land was likely based on what two ideas? (See Genesis 13:14-17; 17:1-16; 2 Samuel 7:11-16.)
4. Who will be God's agent in restoring his people to himself and to their homeland?
5. What led you to ask God for a heart transplant?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Ezekiel 1-33—<https://youtu.be/R-CIPu1nko8>

Overview of Ezekiel 34-48—https://youtu.be/SDeCWW_Bnyw

Lesson 10:

A MYSTERIOUS SERVANT (ISAIAH; DANIEL)

We have followed the story of God's mission people and his unfolding, redemptive plan for humanity from Genesis to the end of Israel and Judah nationally. We now turn to the second major portion of the Book of Isaiah. Here God spoke to the exiles in Babylon who were about to return to the Promised Land. In exile, they had grieved the loss of the Davidic monarchy, their land and magnificent temple, and felt God had forsaken them.

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.

There on the poplars we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’
How can we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a foreign land?”

(Psalm 137:1-4)

Good News (Gospel)

Their devastating losses crushed their hope for a brighter future and made it difficult to trust God's love. But God had good news for them:

“Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God.
“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.”
(Isaiah 40:1-2)

The vast majority of Israelites nevertheless chose to stay in Babylon. But God was about to vindicate the truth his prophets had faithfully preached for several generations. After the end of nationhood and the trauma of exile, he would bring a remnant of his people back to their homeland, for though “the grass withers and the flowers fall ... the word (promise) of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:1-2, 8). This mighty, sovereign Lord is not only the creator of the universe, king of the nations of the world and the Lord of history, he is a tenderhearted shepherd who:

“... gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those who have young.”
(Isaiah 40:11)

Trusting God's love will renew his people's belief in a brighter tomorrow:

“Do not be afraid ... O little (remnant) Israel,
for I myself will help you.”
(Isaiah 40:14)

New Exodus

Israel's prophets were convinced the Lord is the ruler of all nations. Everyone is ultimately accountable to him (see Amos 1-2). He is therefore free to use foreign nations and empires to discipline his mission people (see Isaiah 10:5-11), further his redemptive purposes (see Habakkuk 1-2) and use them as instruments in freeing his people from exile. We should not be surprised then when Isaiah says God is about to do a "new thing," initiate a new Exodus, by using a Persian leader, Cyrus the Great, to send his people back home (see Isaiah 45:1-7; 48:6). When Cyrus conquered Babylon, God told the Israelites the time was finally ripe for returning to the Promised Land.

"Leave Babylon,
flee from the Babylonians!
Announce this with joy and proclaim it."
(Isaiah 48:20)

Isaiah viewed Cyrus as God's anointed shepherd who would free his people from exile and help them rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (see Isaiah 44:24-45:1-6). Interestingly, archeologists and historians have discovered that Cyrus credited his victory over the Babylonians to Marduk, the state god of Babylon, and to Sin, the moon-god in Chaldea. It seems he was a clever politician. He did not realize, of course, that the Lord was using him for his saving purposes on behalf of his people (see Isaiah 45:4-5). In supporting the Israelite remnant's return to their homeland, Cyrus was far more humane than the previous rulers of the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires who permanently exiled their conquered peoples.

Rejoicing over the news of Israel's imminent return to their land, the Lord's prophetic messenger declares a joy-filled gospel:

"How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news.

Who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
Who say to Zion
‘Your God reigns!’
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
together they shout for joy.
When the Lord returns to Zion,
they will see it with their own eyes.
Burst into songs of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord will lay bare his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
and the ends of the earth will see
the salvation of our God....
But you will not leave [Babylon] in haste
or go in flight;
for the Lord will go before you,
the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”
(Isaiah 52:7-10,12)

Mysterious Servant

In this historical context of an approaching joyful, redemptive event for the remnant, Isaiah introduces us to a mysterious servant. The word “servant” occurs numerous times in Isaiah 40-55. Sometimes he is identified nationally as Israel or Jacob (see Isaiah 44:1; 45:4; 49:3). Other times the servant is an individual who endures harsh treatment during his service to God:

“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary....
[He] has opened my ears,
and I have not been rebellious....
I offered my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard.
I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting....
He who vindicates me is near.”
(Isaiah 50:4-8)

The Israelites had suffered much. The Assyrians had killed thousands of them living in the northern kingdom of Israel and exiled the survivors in 722 BC. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in the southern kingdom of Judah and took the surviving Israelites to Babylon in 586 BC. Since Jacob-Israel was a man (son of Isaac) and also a nation (Israel) that descended from him, Jewish scholars view Isaiah 50:4-8 as Israel or a faithful remnant within the nation being personified as a suffering individual. But that interpretation is difficult to sustain in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. It is surely the most remarkable passage in the Old Testament.

Atoning Sin-bearer

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 dramatically announces that nations, kings and the Israelites will be shocked by the servant’s life because they thought his affliction—being whipped, mocked and spat upon (see Isaiah 50:6)—was God’s punishment (see Isaiah 53:4). However, they realized the servant suffered for others, and not because he had sinned. The servant “took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.... He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our sins” (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Servant Israel suffered terribly for their own transgressions—their blatant, covenant violations. However, the servant in Isaiah 53 suffered vicariously for others, thereby providing forgiveness and

healing to his persecutors. People thus confess: “We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). The servant’s ministry and suffering ended in death (see Isaiah 53:7-8). Atonement for sin rests in a crushed and despised human being (see Isaiah 53:7-10). This is the only occurrence in the Old Testament of a human sacrifice for sin. But death did not end his story.

The servant’s suffering and death will result in many becoming righteous (see Isaiah 53:11). The Lord will vindicate and exalt his faithful servant, saying, “I will give him a portion among the great ... because he poured out his life unto death, was numbered with the transgressors, bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). While it does not explicitly say the atoning servant will be resurrected, Isaiah 53:11 hints that “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied,” suggesting his reward will be life beyond death. Could this be a messianic figure?

Though Judaism has sometimes interpreted this mysterious servant messianically, George Ladd says that “When in Judaism the Messiah suffers, it is not in an atoning death but [suffering] in conflict with his enemies.”¹ Likewise, none of Isaiah’s references to an ideal, future Davidic king in such passages as Isaiah 9:1-6 and 11:1-9 speak of him as atoning for the sins of the nations. But, if he is not the anticipated Davidic Messiah, who is he? The Book of Daniel adds another mystery to this biblical drama.

Heavenly Son of Man

The downfall of the kingdom of Judah included deportations of its citizens over a period of several years. Daniel was one of those exiles and was probably a member of Judah’s royal family (see Daniel 1:3-4). He lived in the Babylonian court until the empire collapsed and then served the Medo-Persian Empire that succeeded it. He and his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego became a faithful, godly

remnant in the Babylonian court as they served king Nebuchadnezzar.

In tracing the unfolding drama of God's redemptive mission through Scripture, Daniel's vision of a mysterious son of man must be included: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days (God) and was led into his presence. God gives him authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and people of every language worshipped him. His dominion is everlasting and his kingdom will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). Who is this son of man?

In Ezekiel, son of man refers to the prophet himself (see Ezekiel 2:1, 3; 3:1, 3, 17). In Daniel 7:13-14, however, the son of man "comes with the clouds of heaven," a symbol elsewhere in the Bible of God's presence, authority and majesty (see Exodus 13:21-22; Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1). After the collapse of successive worldly empires (see Daniel 7:1-12), God gives this son of man the authority to rule over an indestructible kingdom and nations worship him. Since only God himself should be worshipped, this person must be divine. His eternal kingdom parallels God's kingdom (see Daniel 4:13). Who is this heavenly son of man?

No explicit reference is made in the Book of Daniel about a future, mighty Davidic king. However, when God gives the kingdom to the son of man, "he will share it with the saints of the Most High (God)" (Daniel 7:18, 22). "In other words," explains Paul House, "the promised kingdom will be led by the son of man and populated by the [faithful] people of God."² Since only a messianic figure could be given God's kingdom, the implication is that this son of man is "the true David [and] ... also the true Son of man."³ We recall, as well, God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:16 of an eternal rule, and in Isaiah 9:6-7 and 11:10-11 of a Davidic king reigning over a dominion free from warfare and strife. Who is Daniel's heavenly son of man? (See Daniel 7:13.) The drama continues. We need to wait some time

for that question to be answered. In the meantime, we recall that Jeremiah had promised the Lord would restore his people to their homeland within 70 years of being exiled (see Jeremiah 29:10).

Questions

1. In Isaiah's servant description, how can Israel, or a faithful remnant within Israel, be an individual?
2. In what sense does the Persian ruler, Cyrus, become God's shepherd?
3. Why will God free the Israelites from exile in Babylon? (See Isaiah 49:6.)
4. Why didn't the Israelites believe that Isaiah's servant of the Lord was pointing towards a future Messiah?
5. How can Daniel's heavenly son of man be understood as the son of David? (See Daniel 7:13-14, 18, 22.)

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Isaiah 40-66—<https://youtu.be/TzdEPuqgQg>

Overview of Daniel—<https://youtu.be/9cSC9uobtPM>

Lesson 11:

GOD RESTORES THE REMNANT (EZRA; NEHEMIAH)

Cyrus, the leader of the Medo-Persian Empire, conquered Babylon in 538 BC. He was not an oppressive monarch and gave his conquered peoples the freedom to practise their own religion. His tolerant attitude cleared the way for the Israelites (now called Jews) to return to Judah. He gave them permission to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem (see Ezra 1:1-3). Cyrus also returned the temple vessels Nebuchadnezzar had confiscated (see Ezra 1:7-8). The Jews nevertheless remained subjects of the Persian Empire. Sheshbazzar, a prince of Judah, was made governor.

Temple Restoration

Rabbi Ken Spiro says a million Jews probably chose to stay in Babylon under Persian governance.¹ A remnant of 42,360 returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC (see Ezra 2:64-65) and began to reconstruct the temple a year later (see Ezra 1-3). We saw how Israel's prophets had unsuccessfully hammered home for generations that their people's addiction to idolatry would result in national destruction and exile. Those who returned home from Babylon seemed, for the most part,

to have learned their lesson and have rejected polytheism. Neighbouring peoples wanted to assist with building the temple, saying they worshipped the same God as the returned Jewish exiles (see Ezra 4:1-2). The remnant's leaders refused their offer, calling them enemies because they also worshipped false gods (see 2 Kings 17:3-22). The leaders did not want the people to fall into the same trap that had resulted in their nation being exiled—combining the worship of the Lord with devotion to other gods (syncretism). Resenting this rebuff, their enemies persuaded the Persian government to stop constructing the temple (see Ezra 4:1-24).

Rebuilding did not resume until 16 years later under the leadership of governor Zerubbabel, and with encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (see Ezra 5:1-2). Haggai said that God was with them and “in a little while” the Lord Almighty would fill the restored temple with glory, and “the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.... And in this place [he] will grant peace” (Haggai 2:7, 19).

Zechariah then began to prophesy the word of the Lord: “I will return to Jerusalem with great mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt.... My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and [I] will again comfort Jerusalem” (Zechariah 1:16-17). Zechariah further echoed the hopes of the prophets before the exile, including the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham many centuries earlier: “Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion (Jerusalem). For I am coming and I will live among you.... Many *nations* will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people.... The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem” (Zechariah 2:10-12). He encouraged his people:

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,

gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim (Israel)
and the warhorses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the river to the ends of the earth.”

(Zechariah 9:9-10)

How could this gentle king possibly defeat his peoples’ enemies and usher in a worldwide peace without warhorses, chariots and battle bows? Such an idea must have mystified the returned exiles. In response to the prophets’ encouragement, the work recommenced (see Ezra 5:2). Unfortunately, the local Persian governor strongly protested the Jews’ right to do this and reported the situation to recently enthroned king Darius (see Ezra 5:3, 5). Darius honoured Cyrus’ original decree and asked that prayers for his welfare be offered in the new temple (see Ezra 6:1, 6-10). They completed the work in four years (see Ezra 6:15). The priests, Levites and other returned exiles joyfully celebrated the dedication of the house of God and the Passover (see Ezra 6:16-17, 19, 22).

Purifying the Remnant (Ezra 7-10)

Regardless of obstacles, a remnant had faithfully obeyed God’s call to leave Babylon and return to their ancestral land. Restoring the temple was a significant accomplishment, but personal and corporate purity would be much more challenging to attain and sustain. “The remnant must be continuously renewed,” writes Paul House. “Purity can be lost in a single generation, and, once lost, it can be regained only through difficult reformation. Such [renewal] can be achieved only through divine action mediated through the lives of dedicated remnant leaders and followers.”²

Before Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, many of the returned exiles,

including the priests and Levites, had intermarried with their idolatrous neighbours. Because the worship of foreign gods had contributed significantly to Israel and Judah's downfall and exile, Ezra was appalled at the remnant's covenant infidelity (see Ezra 9:1-7) and its potential for polluting their faith, worship and behaviour. How could the returned exiles fulfil their responsibility to be a blessing to others (see Genesis 12:1-3), to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (see Exodus 19:5-6), if their worship and behaviour were no different from their neighbours? God's mission people needed spiritual renewal.

A large group of men, women and children gathered around Ezra as he passionately and publicly interceded in prayer. He confessed and wept for his people's sins (see Ezra 10:1). It took three months to sift out from 110 cases of intermarriage those who had compromised their faith (see Ezra 10:9, 17). (Some men may have been declared innocent because their wives had embraced the Lord, the God of the Jews.) These painful divorces were not a form of ethnic cleansing. They took this severe measure to counter the danger of idolatrous wives turning their husbands and children toward pagan gods and certain detestable practices—as had happened to king Solomon. These religious practices had included child sacrifice and religious prostitution at the temple. Ezra believed that preserving personal and community holiness required costly measures.

Securing Protection (Nehemiah)

Cities in the ancient Middle East took care of security by building protective walls around their perimeters. In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed not only the sacred temple in Jerusalem, but also the wall surrounding it and its gates. The returned remnant now needed a wall for protection against enemy attacks.

While serving as the trusted cup bearer to Artaxerxes, the Persian ruler, Nehemiah felt God burdening him with a daunting responsibility: to rebuild Jerusalem's dilapidated walls and burnt

gates, thereby ensuring the people's safety and relieving their anxiety (see Nehemiah 2:1). In answer to Nehemiah's prayer, God prompted Persian king Artaxerxes to give him permission to lead the rebuilding project. Artaxerxes gave him timber from his forest and an armed escort for the trip to Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 2:1-9).

Nehemiah is now recognized as governor of Judah (see Nehemiah 5:14; 10:1). His ministry overlapped somewhat with Ezra (see Nehemiah 8:9). Permission to proceed with the project did not exempt him from local opposition. Sanballat the Horonite, governor of Samaria, and Tobiah the Ammonite saw his plan as a threat to their political influence in the region. Nehemiah believed "the gracious hand of ... God was upon [him]." In spite of opposition from neighbouring leaders, including an attempt to assassinate him (see Nehemiah 6:1-4), Nehemiah led the people in finishing the wall in only 52 days (see Nehemiah 6:15). Through his skilled and courageous leadership, the remnant was now physically secure and had political status. However, reforming the inner life of the people became Ezra's challenge as their priest (Ezra 7:12).

Covenant Renewal (Nehemiah 8-9)

The people asked Ezra to teach them from the book of the law (probably Deuteronomy). When they heard God's requirements for their worship and behaviour, guilt overwhelmed them. They confessed their failures and concluded with a joyful celebration (see Nehemiah 8:1, 9-12). They promised not to intermarry with those outside their faith, to keep the Sabbath holy and to financially support the temple (see Nehemiah 10:29-39). "Ezra organized the Jewish community around the law, the Torah," says John Timmer. "From this time on, the distinguishing mark of a Jew would be neither national existence nor ethnic peculiarity, but adherence to the law. The law opened a way to overcome the ethnic and geographical limitations of former days. It would accompany the Jews wherever they went."³ In other words, they could study and live the law, and worship the Lord wher-

ever they lived.

The law itself did not transform their hearts. When Nehemiah left Jerusalem for a while, they relapsed spiritually. Some men married non-Jewish women, the temple was seriously neglected and the Sabbath dishonoured. Nehemiah successfully dealt with these various offenses (see Nehemiah 13:4-31). Renewal had begun, but the Book of Nehemiah closes with its readers wondering, “Why doesn’t spiritual reformation last?” God had been faithful in keeping his promise to bring a chastened remnant back to the Promised Land. He helped them rebuild the temple and restore its liturgical worship. Ezra and Nehemiah have held up the Mosaic covenant as the standard for faithfulness to God. What is missing? Why do God’s people inevitably backslide and thus fail to be his holy mission people for the world? (See Isaiah 49:6.) The remnant obviously needs what God had earlier promised through Jeremiah and Ezekiel:

“This is the covenant I will make with ... Israel....

I will put my law in their minds

and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.”

(Jeremiah 31:33)

God had said that at some point after restoring them to their land, he would “sprinkle clean water on [them], cleanse them from all [their] impurities ... and idols, ... give them a new heart and put a new spirit in them, remove [their] stony hearts and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:25-26). Not only would God perform a spiritual heart transplant, he would provide the inner power for obedience to his standards of behaviour: “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and ... keep my laws.... I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 36:27; 39:29). God’s prophetic messengers realized that divine intervention was the only answer for his peoples’ stubborn hearts and chronic backsliding.

Cleansing and Mission Empowerment

With his people now back home in Canaan struggling to rebuild their lives and the economy, the Lord gave them a good news promise that would embrace not only “the house of Israel” but all peoples, thus fulfilling his original promise to Abraham to make them a blessing to the world:

“ ... I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit.”
(Joel 2:28-29)

As the Old Testament’s storyline of God’s redemptive plan closes in Malachi, idolatry is no longer a serious issue among the remnant (see Malachi 2:11). The Israelites were living under the administration of a local governor (see Malachi 1:8) but were still a tiny province in the vast Persian Empire. Many seemed to be disillusioned, probably because the glowing prophetic promises of Haggai and Zechariah of prosperity and the return of God’s glorious presence did not match with the harsh, current reality of their economic circumstances (see Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 8:1-9:17). Their bringing blemished sacrifices for worship, and the priests being lax in their teaching and other duties perhaps reflected their discouragement. Divorce was prevalent and they were negligent with tithes and offerings (see Malachi 1:6-2:16; 3:6-8).

God reassured them he would come to purify his people, including those responsible for the worship activities of the temple. The Lord would send a messenger to prepare the way for his personal visit: “ ‘See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his

temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,' says the Lord Almighty. 'But who can endure the day of his coming? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap' " (Malachi 3:1-2).

The Old Testament closes with an intriguing promise. Before the purifying judgment of the day of the Lord (see Malachi 4:1-4), God would send his people the prophet Elijah who "will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:5-6). We discover they would need to wait 400 years for this forerunner to appear. He would then be followed by the Lord's personal visit to them. What would the Lord's visit look like and what would he do for his people?

Incomplete Revelation

Beginning with God's promise in Genesis that Eve's seed would crush the head of the serpent, and the promise that Abraham's descendants would bless the world, the story of God's global rescue plan through his people had unfolded slowly, often painfully, over many centuries. Several main redemptive characters have emerged:

- A future ideal Davidic shepherd king who will rule forever over an obedient remnant in the Promised Land (see Ezekiel 37:24-28; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5).
- A suffering servant, a mysterious figure who is a gentle and persevering communicator of the Lord's justice, truth and light to the nations. His undeserved suffering and death will atone for the sins of the world (see Isaiah 53).
- A heavenly son of man to whom God gives authority to rule over an indestructible kingdom with nations worshipping him (see Daniel 7:13-14, 17-18).

How are these three redemptive figures related—or are they?

“Each prophetic word in the Old Testament is partial and fragmentary,” says George Ladd. “The Jews never knew how to put these [prophetic figures] together.”⁴ The New Testament will solve the mystery of how the road to redemption will be completed. But we first need to briefly survey the 400 years of Israel’s tumultuous history in the time between the Old and New Testaments. This period helps us understand the historical, cultural and religious context we encounter in the New Testament.

Questions

1. Why did the returned Jewish exiles from Babylon refuse help from their neighbours to rebuild their temple?
2. Why did Ezra pressure Israelite men to divorce their non-Israelite wives?
3. What part did Nehemiah play in establishing the physical security of the returned exiles? (See Nehemiah 1-7.)
4. After exile, what became the distinguishing mark of the Israelites, now called Jews?
5. What promise did God give Joel regarding his original promise to Abraham of making his descendants a blessing to the world?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Ezra/Nehemiah—<https://youtu.be/MkETkRv9tG8>

Lesson 12:

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

In following God's mission through the Old Testament, it seems that the road to redemption is definitely going somewhere. However, God doesn't seem to be in a hurry to bring his saving plan to a climax. Four centuries will elapse before a prophetic voice is heard again in Israel and for God's rescue mission to begin to accelerate. During these 400 years, God's people experience huge changes politically, religiously and culturally.

The Persian Period—539-336 BC

While exiled in Babylon, the Israelites (now called Jews) began to worship in synagogues they constructed throughout the Persian Empire. After returning home to Judah, priests performed the required sacrifices at the rebuilt temple. The focus of synagogue worship was the teaching and study of religious law, which the scribes interpreted and preserved. During this time, conflicts developed between Jews and Samaritans—Jews who had intermarried with Babylonians and other ethnic groups. The Samaritans erected a temple in the north and blended elements of pagan beliefs and rituals

with their worship of Israel's God, Yahweh. Ethnic and religious strife resulted, creating the poisonous relationship between Samaritans and Jews that we encounter in the Gospels.

The Hellenistic (Greek) Period—336-165 BC

When Alexander the Great conquered the Persians, his vast Greek empire eventually extended as far as western India. Alexander died quite young, but his empire continued under the rule of his generals, who divided it into four sections. Ptolemy Soter ruled the Egypt and Israel part of the empire. The Jews kept on living and worshipping peacefully under foreign rulers and became increasingly influenced by Greek culture. They began to learn, speak and write in Greek, the trade language of Hellenistic civilization. Some Jewish scholars translated their Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) into Greek, calling it the Septuagint. Jesus and many New Testament writers quote from this Greek translation. The Greek of the New Testament was the common language of the Eastern Mediterranean from the conquests of Alexander the Great.

The Maccabean Period—165-63 BC

When the Syrian section of the Greek empire overthrew the Egyptian-Israel part in 198 BC, Israel came under a Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes IV. He attempted to completely wipe out Judaism. He defiled the Jerusalem temple by erecting a statue of Zeus, the supreme god of Greek mythology. He disallowed sacrifices to the Lord, banned circumcision, made Jews eat non-kosher pork, and abolished Sabbaths and feast days. Some Jews tried to co-operate with Antiochus, while others resisted. The non-co-operators became the Pharisees ("pious ones") and those loyal to the priests became the forerunners of the New Testament Sadducees.

The situation boiled over when Mattathias, an old priest, refused to offer a pagan sacrifice at the temple. He killed a Syrian officer, escaped to the hills and recruited faithful Jews to rebel against the Syrians. Mattathias' son, Maccabeus, overcame the Syrians and achieved independence for Israel from 165-63 BC. The Maccabean Dynasty (also called the Hasmonean Dynasty) assumed kingship and also the office of high priest. Over time, Israel's rulers became increasingly unpopular and the country became more and more unstable.

The Roman Period—63 BC-135 AD

By the time leaders of the Roman Empire became interested in Israel, the nation could not defend itself. After 102 years of independence, Israel again came under the rule of a foreign power. Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC and Rome installed as leader an Idumean named Antipater. His son, Herod the Great, followed him as king of the Jews. Jesus was born under his rule. Freedom of worship and restricted authority over their own affairs were allowed, but they wanted more. Many dreamed of Israel becoming a powerful, independent nation again under a Davidic king as prophesied, they believed, in their Scriptures. Ideas of a militaristic Messiah appeared in various Jewish writings, which influenced the messianic expectations we encounter when Jesus arrives on the scene.¹

Lesson 13:

REDEFINING MESSIAHSHIP (MATTHEW)

In its long history of stubbornly disobeying God, Israel was a microcosm of rebellious, sinful humanity. The history of Israel and the nations depicted in the Old Testament reveals that “Sin and evil affect history ... through the generations of humanity,” says Christopher Wright. “There is no area of life on earth in which we are free from the influence of our own sin and the sin of others. The Old Testament portrays ... a very big problem to which there needs to be a very big answer.”¹ What will be the big answer for humanity’s big problem of the corruption of the human heart—the source of systemic sin and evil?

The Old Testament has revealed three redemptive figures: an ideal Davidic king (see Ezekiel 37:24-28; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5), a mysterious suffering servant (see Isaiah 53) and a heavenly son of man (see Daniel 7:13-14). The New Testament shows how these three are connected for rescuing humanity from sin’s powerful influence. The New Testament also shows how the Old Testament remnant idea fits into God’s redemptive mission and how it clarifies who his missionary people are today.

Fiery Baptism

We cannot imagine the excitement among many Jews in Israel around 30 AD. After the prophetic voice had been quiet for 400 years, a strangely dressed man in the Judean desert region, John the Baptist, announced the Lord was about to visit his people. He declared he was preparing the way for him, fulfilling Malachi 4:5-6. Just as we might clean and tidy up our homes when expecting visitors, John called on Jews from Jerusalem and the Judean countryside to prepare for this special visitor by turning from their sins.

John did not believe his fellow Jews were rightly related to God simply because they were ethnic descendants of Abraham. He warned Israel's influential religious establishment, the Pharisees and Sadducees, of the "coming wrath" (see Matthew 3:7). He announced the axe (of judgment) was swinging toward the root of the trees; therefore, non-bearing fruit trees would be cut down and burned. Their repentance should "produce fruit," meaning, truly changed lives ethically and morally (see Matthew 3:7-10), and they would thus escape the impending judgment. "Current Jewish thought looked for a visitation of God's wrath upon the Gentiles," says George Ladd. "Like Amos 700 years earlier, John turns God's wrath upon Jews who will not repent!"²

John said the One succeeding him would not baptize his people with water, but with the Holy Spirit and fire (see Matthew 3:11), likely meaning that repentant Jews would be baptized by the Holy Spirit, but the unrepentant would be baptized with judgment. Ignoring the warnings of Amos and other prophets centuries earlier had led to the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC. Was John suggesting Israel's history would soon repeat itself?

Who Is Jesus of Nazareth?

Jesus of Nazareth approached John to be baptized by him. Sinless Jesus was not only identifying himself with his sinful people (see 1

Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15), but also anticipating being baptized by suffering. That insight is confirmed when Jesus hears God's voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). These words are a quote from Isaiah 42:1, which is the first of four poems in Isaiah about a mysterious suffering servant. Matthew is hinting that the mission of God's Son will include a baptism of pain. Ladd asserts this is also implied by Matthew's saying that Jesus was baptized "to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

Though Jesus is sinless, because in baptism he was identifying with his people, "the righteousness he would fulfil," says Ladd, "is probably Isaiah 53:11: 'Because of his experience [of suffering], my righteous servant will justify (save) many; and he will bear their iniquities.'"³ This allusion to the servant references in Isaiah "indicates that Jesus realized from the very beginning that his [messianic] mission was to be carried out in terms of the servant of the Lord rather than in terms of [a] ruling Davidic king."⁴

Satan Versus Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11)

Jesus was destined to be Isaiah's suffering servant, but was he ready for that painful vocation? (See Isaiah 53.) Before he launched his ministry, Satan tempted him to choose a way other than sacrificial love to restore humanity's relationship with its Creator-Father. He did not challenge Jesus as Messiah, but as God's Son (see Matthew 4:3, 6). Since only a sinless person can atone for the transgressions of others, only Jesus, God's sinless Son, was qualified to be the world's Saviour from the guilt and power of sin. Becoming very hungry while fasting for 40 days and nights, would he use his supernatural power to turn desert stones into bread? Or would he trust his Father to nourish and guide him throughout his ministry? Would he try to win people's obedience to the Father's will by performing spectacular feats such as jumping off the temple's peak and God's rescuing him before he hits the ground? Would he aspire to be the leader of

the kingdoms of the world by being a war-like messianic Davidic king who crushes his enemies with brute force? Jesus rejected these satanic temptations to self-sufficiency, self-display, worldly power and began to preach, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17). In continuity with John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets’ calls to repentance, Jesus summoned his people to turn from sin and surrender totally to God as the sovereign King of their lives. However, because the kingdom of God—his kingly rule—had arrived on earth in Jesus in *disguise*, how would his people, especially Israel’s religious leaders, recognize his true identity and mission as the suffering servant?

God Reigning on Earth

Jesus recruited four fishermen beside the Sea of Galilee to partner with him in his ministry: two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John (see Matthew 4:18-20). What would the kingdom of heaven that Jesus was inaugurating look like? As he taught and preached throughout Galilee (the good news also spread to Syria) and healed scores of people with serious diseases, “large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him” (Matthew 4:25). God’s kingly reign on earth meant Jews and Gentiles were being made whole spiritually, socially and physically. Jesus’ healings made visible the presence of God’s rule on earth. Through him God was accomplishing his holistic mission of restoring his broken creation as Israel’s prophets had promised. But was that how Israel’s leaders and his people would view Jesus and his ministry?

In the Old Testament, God is often referred to as king of Israel (see Deuteronomy 33:5; Psalm 84:3), and frequently celebrated as king of the nations of the earth (see Psalm 29:10; Jeremiah 46:18). However, because of the corruption of the human heart, manifested in rebellion against God, his kingly rule was only partially realized in Israel’s history. Her God-inspired prophets looked forward to a

time when God's redemptive rule and authority would finally set all things right. The Israelites thus divided history into two ages: the present age contaminated by sin and evil, and the age to come when God would intervene to renew his people and judge and destroy his enemies. The idea of God's reigning on earth in Jesus of Nazareth without any changes politically in Israel and the world therefore became a stumbling block to Israel's leaders.

Jesus' authoritative teachings and healings, including exorcisms, began to enthrall the crowds. However, he warned them loyalty to him may include persecution, insults and false accusations for doing what was morally right (see Matthew 5:1-12). His teaching and healing ministry became so demanding that he "called 12 disciples to *him* and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (Matthew 10:1). In Judaism, students chose their rabbi (teacher). Jesus was unique: he selected his students (disciples). Why 12? Why not nine or 17? Not one of Jesus' actions was unnecessary or frivolous. They suggested significant theological truths.

God's True Mission People

Abraham's descendants originally consisted of 12 tribes, which eventually became the nation of Israel. God had called them to be his holy mission people to bless the world (see Exodus 19:5-6). He wanted Israel to be a light to other nations by worshipping only the Lord, acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with the Lord (see Exodus 20:3; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 49:6). In choosing 12 disciples, Jesus was symbolically making a public statement about who his mission partners would be—initially, a spiritually renewed remnant within Israel—who would be loyal to him.

At first, he focused his teaching about the arrival of the kingdom primarily, but not exclusively, on his fellow Jews. He called them "the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). They had strayed from their heavenly shepherd and needed to return to him. The mission would

be difficult. His disciples would sometimes feel like they were sheep among wolves. They would be arrested and brought before local councils, governors and kings. In following Jesus, they could even expect family betrayal and death (see Matthew 11:17-22), but he declared, “whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:37-38). In short, in following Jesus, one should not be surprised at becoming a martyr. We can understand then why Jesus referred to himself as the narrow gate to the difficult road to everlasting life and “only a *few* (remnant) find it” (Matthew 7:14).

“Discipleship to Jesus was not like discipleship to a Jewish rabbi,” says George Ladd. “The rabbis bound their disciples not to themselves but to the Torah (religious law); Jesus bound his disciples to himself. He required his disciples to surrender without reservation to his authority. The relationship had no parallel in Judaism. Discipleship to Jesus meant nothing less than complete personal commitment to him and his message [because] *in him, [people] are confronted by God himself*.

“It follows that if Jesus proclaimed the messianic salvation,” continues Ladd, “if he offered to Israel the fulfilment of her true destiny, then this destiny was actually accomplished in those who received his message. The recipients of the messianic salvation [thus] became the true Israel, representatives of the nation as a whole. [Although] the word ‘Israel’ is never applied to Jesus’ [Jewish] disciples, the idea is present, if not the term. Jesus’ disciples are the recipients of the messianic salvation, the people of the kingdom, the true Israel [the faithful remnant].”⁵ As evidence for this idea, Ladd suggests that Jesus’ designation of the disciples as a “little flock” (see Luke 12:32) is probably “a reference to the Old Testament concept of Israel as the sheep of God’s pasture, now embodied in Jesus’ [Jewish] disciples” (see Isaiah 40:11).⁶ Jesus had come as the shepherd who would “rescue the lost sheep of Israel and bring them into the fold of the messianic salvation (Ezekiel 34:15). Israel, as a whole, was deaf to the

voice of the shepherd, but those who followed the shepherd (remnant) constitute his fold, the little flock.”⁷

Jesus’ call of the Twelve Apostles to share his mission “is a symbolic act setting forth the *continuity* between his disciples and Israel,” Ladd adds. “That the Twelve represent Israel is shown by their eschatological (end-time) role. They are to sit on 12 thrones, ‘judging the 12 tribes of Israel’ (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). Whether this saying means that the Twelve are to determine the destiny of Israel by judgment or to rule over them, they are destined to be the head of the eschatological Israel, [the redeemed followers of Jesus].”⁸

By calling out a remnant, Jesus freed his [Jewish] disciples from their political ties with national Israel that was rejecting him and released them to be God’s mission people for the world. “The kingdom which had come with power in [Jesus] was inward, spiritual and comprehensive, knowing no limits, no frontiers, no boundaries,” explains General Frederick Coutts. “Grace, not race, [brings] a person into [God’s] kingdom, and he who does the will of the King belongs to the kingdom.”⁹ That Jewish Christian remnant and their Gentile converts would soon take the saving message of the gospel to the world. In the meantime, Jesus’ actions and radical teachings would expose the hearts of Israel’s religious leaders.

Mission Hostility

Jesus’ missional activities often conflicted with the beliefs and traditions of Israel’s religious leaders. Acting like he’s God, he said to a paralytic, “Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven.” Some of the teachers of the law saw this as blasphemy, for only God can forgive sins (see Matthew 9:2-3). His teaching about God’s kingly authority being present in his ministry included creative interpretations of some of their religious laws, which conflicted with the traditional understanding of Israel’s teachers. Healing (working) on the Sabbath, for example, offended them, but Jesus believed Sabbath laws should not usurp genuine human need. He defended his approach to

religious laws by stating, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8), thus claiming the authority to interpret the law as God does.

Jesus’ healings and clever rebuttals of Israel’s leaders elicited praise to God from the people generally (see Matthew 9:8). Following his dispute with Jerusalem’s power brokers, Matthew quoted Isaiah’s first poem about the ministry of the servant of the Lord: “In his name the nations will put their hope” (Isaiah 42:4; Matthew 12:21). Jesus would fulfil the role of Isaiah’s suffering servant. Animosity towards him intensified when he healed “a demon possessed man who was blind and mute,” and the many astonished onlookers asked, “Could this be the Son of David?” (Messiah) (Matthew 12:22-23). The Pharisees, however, began to see him as a dangerous threat to their authority and potentially to the nation, so they “went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus” (Matthew 12:14).

Jesus later attributed their rejecting him to willful spiritual blindness: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand” (Matthew 13:13). Like John the Baptist and Israel’s ancient prophets, Jesus boldly spoke truth to power. He infuriated them by not requiring his disciples to wash their hands before they ate. He pointed out how they avoided helping their parents by misapplying the law for personal gain, thus “nullifying the word of God” (Matthew 15:6). He called them hypocrites because they “honour [God] with their lips, but their hearts are far from [him] and their teachings are but *rules taught by men*” (Matthew 15:7-9). The hostile response of Israel’s leaders to Jesus was a foreboding reminder of what happened to their ancestors centuries earlier. They had refused to heed the prophetic call to repentance and obedience to their covenant God and consequently experienced the destruction of their country.

By the time of Jesus, many Jews viewed the messianic Davidic king as a powerful military leader who would permanently conquer Israel’s enemies and restore the nation to independence (see Acts

1:6). By having the idea of the Son of David quickly follow the reference to the suffering servant, Matthew was likely hinting that the two are connected—even though no Jewish scholar in Israel would link them. How could a conquering messianic Davidic king be humiliated and crucified? (See Isaiah 53.) A crucified Messiah was self-contradictory.

Exciting News

Any thought of Jesus being the popularly desired Davidic Messiah would alarm the Sanhedrin, Israel's governing religious council. They knew from recently attempted revolts by Jewish Zealots that the powerful Roman army would crush any uprising for national independence. To discredit Jesus, they angrily suggested he had performed the exorcism healing of a deaf and blind man through the power of the devil, Beelzebub (see Matthew 12:22-24). Jesus countered their insult by declaring that his doing this life-changing miracle through the power of the Holy Spirit actually affirmed the presence of God's kingly authority in him and his ministry: "The kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). The presence of God's kingly reign inaugurated by Jesus is exciting news for all who are willing to enter it through the narrow gate of self-denial, and sometimes, suffering (see Matthew 7:13-14).

"In some Jewish circles, a maimed Jew was not a full member of the community," explains N.T. Wright. "In addition to the burden of being blind, or lame or deaf, such a Jew was blemished and unable to be a full Israelite.... Jesus' healing miracles must be seen clearly as bestowing the gift of shalom, wholeness, to those who lacked it, bringing not only physical health but renewed membership in the people of Yahweh. [Likewise] his miracles performed for Gentiles (see Matthew 8:5-13; 15:21-28), including Samaritans (see Luke 17:11-19), bore witness to the inclusion within the people of Yahweh those who had formerly been outside."¹⁰

Redefining Messiahship (Matthew 16:13-28)

When Jesus visited the region of Caesarea Philippi in northern Israel, he asked his disciples who people thought he was. They suggested John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. Then he asked who they thought he was. Simon Peter's response is a turning point in Matthew: "You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus told Peter his answer was a revelation from his heavenly Father, but he warned his disciples to keep this insight a secret (see Matthew 16:20). Why? Peter was undoubtedly thinking of a military concept of messiah, which Jesus had rejected when Satan tempted him just before he began his ministry (see Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus had chosen instead the way of Isaiah's suffering servant, and they were not ready for such a radical alternative.

Jesus explained he would suffer in Jerusalem at the hands of Israel's religious leaders and be killed, but on the third day be raised to life (see Matthew 16:21). That Israel's redemption required God's Son to suffer, die and be resurrected is so shockingly incompatible with the disciples' views of the anticipated Messiah that Peter reprimanded Jesus: "Never, Lord.... This shall never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22). Jesus then returned the rebuke, telling Peter he was a satanic stumbling block, meaning he was not seeing things from God's perspective. Jesus told them that following him would involve denying oneself and taking up one's cross, which was a ghastly thought to the disciples. Taking up one's cross in ancient Palestine meant brutal, shameful crucifixion (see Matthew 16:24-26). They are still clueless to Jesus' true identity as the suffering servant who atones for the sins of the world (see Isaiah 53).

Jesus had earlier commended Peter for his God-given insight in recognizing him as Messiah (see Matthew 6:16), but Peter's understanding of Messiah as a military-style Davidic ruler obviously needed modification. If Jesus told everyone too soon that he was their expected Messiah, many would have demanded he liberate

them from the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire. In fact, after the miraculous feeding of 5,000 men, plus women and children (see Matthew 14:21), the Gospel of John says the people were so impressed that they regarded him as a God-sent political liberator. Jesus realized they wanted to pressure him to be their king (see John 6:14-15). D.A. Carson suggests that John's "specification of 5,000 men is a way of drawing attention to a potential guerrilla force of eager recruits willing and able to serve the right leader."¹¹

Having dealt with this same satanic temptation before he started his ministry (see Matthew 4:8-9), "Jesus withdrew again to a mountain by himself" (John 6:15) to talk to his heavenly Father about his mission (see John 6:45-47). "He knew that the wrong sort of 'king' would not only divert them from the things that really mattered but could lead them into a conflict with Rome from which they could not escape without a disastrous beating," says Carson.¹²

Awe and Mystery (Matthew 17:1-13)

After trying to redefine the disciples' concept of Messiah as the suffering servant (see Matthew 16:21)—which they did not grasp—Jesus took Peter, James and John to a mountain where "he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light" (Matthew 17:2). Jesus' unrecognized glory (divinity) for a few moments radiated through his humanity. Then they saw Moses and Elijah, who had been dead for centuries, talking to Jesus. Moses likely represented the law, and Elijah, the prophets. Moses promised his people that "the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me.... You must listen to (obey) *him*" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Awestruck by this vision, Peter asked Jesus for permission to put up three memorial tabernacles (or tents), one each for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. He seemed to be implying the two Old Testament figures were as equally authoritative and important as Jesus. But a voice from a bright cloud responded to Peter's request: "This is my Son,

whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen to (obey) *him!*" (Matthew 17:5). Yes, God used Moses to free his people from physical slavery and oppression and to mediate God's law to them. Yes, on Mount Carmel, God used Elijah to temporally deliver Israel from slavery to idolatry. But Jesus is far superior to Moses and Elijah. He is God's divine, sinless Son who would deliver humanity from its biggest problem—heart corruption expressed in slavery to sin and evil. Jesus is greater than Moses and Elijah! So now his disciples must listen to and obey him!

Luke's Gospel adds that Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about his "departure which he was about to bring to fulfilment in Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Luke is hinting at Jesus' approaching death, but he uses the Greek word *exodon*, meaning exodus (to come out of), the word used to describe their ancestors' liberation from slavery in Egypt. In other words, the death of Jesus will be a new Exodus by which God will bring people out of the slavery of sin and create an inwardly renewed people, a renewed Israel spiritually, a new humanity. Jesus ordered the three disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen "until the Son of Man is risen from the dead" (Mark 9:9). Then they would understand his messianic purpose. In the meantime, they were puzzled about the meaning of the "Son of Man is risen from the dead" because the Old Testament (their Bible) does not mention a Son of Man being raised from death.

The Sun Has Risen

Brian Zahnd eloquently summarizes the profound significance of Jesus' transfiguration: "Moses and Elijah ... the law and the prophets ... were the lesser lights in the pre-Christ night sky. They were the moon and stars sent by God, but they were not the fullness of divine light. Israel could grope forward by the moonlight of the Torah; the ancient Israelites could navigate through the pagan night by the constellations of the prophets.... But with the coming of Christ, morning has broken, the new day has dawned, and the sun of

righteousness has risen with healing in its rays (Malachi 4:2). Now the moon and the stars, Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets are eclipsed by the full glory of God in Christ! The moon and stars recede from view because the sun has risen.”¹³

When all the disciples subsequently came together in Galilee, Jesus repeated that he would be killed and raised from the dead on the third day. They were “filled with grief” (Matthew 17:23) and still did not understand what he meant. They were afraid to ask him (see Mark 9:32; Luke 9:45). Why didn’t they know how to connect the conquering Davidic Messiah, the suffering servant of the Lord and Daniel’s heavenly son of man? Because, as previously stated, their Hebrew Bible did not show how they could be one redemptive figure. God’s mission was reaching its climax, but his disciples, his closest friends, had still not grasped how it would happen and who Jesus really was.

Questions

1. What was Satan’s goal in tempting Jesus? (See Matthew 4:1-11.)
2. What do these New Testament verses say about the source and essence of temptation and sin?
 - a) James 1:12-15
 - b) 1 Peter 5:8-9
 - c) 1 Corinthians 7:5
 - d) Mark 7:20-23; Matthew 12:33-37
3. What was the symbolic meaning of Jesus calling 12 disciples to be his mission partners? (See Matthew 4:18-20; 10:1.)

4. When Peter says to Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), why does Jesus warn them not to tell others he is the Messiah?
5. How was Jesus’ call to discipleship different from that of the rabbis?
6. Though Jesus repeatedly told the Twelve Apostles that he would be rejected, killed and raised to life again, why didn’t they understand what he meant?
7. How do you think secular/unchurched people today feel about Jesus and the church?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Matthew 1-13—<https://youtu.be/3Dv4-n6OYGI>

Lesson 14:

JUDGMENT— DOOMED CITY AND NATION (MATTHEW; LUKE)

On his final visit to Jerusalem with his 12 disciples, Jesus repeated that he would be betrayed to Israel's religious leaders who would condemn him to death. The Roman authorities would mock, flog and crucify him, but he would be raised from death on the third day (see Matthew 20:17-19). Yet, in spite of what Jesus had just said about his imminent destiny, James and John's mother knelt with them before Jesus and arrogantly asked him if he would honour her sons by having them sit (rule) with him in his kingdom (see Matthew 20:20-21). Were they not listening to what he had just clearly said? They were still baffled about his identity. Why didn't they understand him?

The only kingdoms they knew were created and sustained by powerful rulers using military might. Their hope was that Jesus was their expected Davidic Messiah who would free them from Roman oppression and re-establish an earthly Jewish kingdom independent

from Roman rule. Jesus quickly told them they did not understand his mission, and asked, “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” (See Matthew 20:22.) He meant his cup of suffering, but again they did not understand what he was saying, and stated, “We can [drink it]” (Matthew 20:22). They were blind to Jesus’ identity as the suffering servant of the Lord. After this event, Luke records two blind men who repeatedly shouted out to Jesus, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us” (Matthew 20:30, 31). Jesus healed their physical blindness “and they followed him” (Matthew. 20:34). However, having called Jesus Son of David (Messiah), they were nevertheless just as blind as the disciples were to the kind of Messiah Jesus was (Luke 18:34).

A King’s Prerogative (Matthew 21:1-27)

Israel’s religious life and messianic expectations focused on their beloved city of Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples had walked all the way from Galilee to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives. Why stop there instead of walking a few hundred more metres into Jerusalem? And why did he arrange for two of his disciples to get a donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem? (See Mark 11:1-7.) Christopher Wright calls it “a dramatic and totally deliberate piece of prophetic theatre.”¹ Jesus’ symbolic action of riding on a donkey in his triumphal procession towards the city fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy: “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

Nearing the end of his ministry, Jesus was openly, yet humbly, declaring he was the Davidic Messiah, but was coming as the king of peace—though the disciples and the people thought otherwise. The people showed their submission to him as King by spreading their cloaks on the road and expressed Jewish nationalism by waving palm branches.² When he entered the city, some people wondered who he was. “The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee’ ” (Matthew 21:11).

In Israelite tradition, the king represented God and was the

ultimate custodian of and authority over the temple. King Solomon had built their first temple. Centuries before Jesus, kings Joash and Hezekiah repaired the temple and purified its worship, especially ridding it of pagan idols (see 2 Chronicles 24:4-16; 29:1-16). The day after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus asserted his kingly authority by “driving out all who were buying and selling inside the temple, overturning the tables of the money changers,” accusing them of turning God’s house from a place of prayer into a “den of robbers” (see Matthew 21:13). In this clearly kingly, symbolic action, Jesus did what faithful Israelite kings did.

The Jewish leaders wanted to know the source of his authority to do this. He refused to tell them when they would not acknowledge the source of John the Baptist’s authority—whether it was from men or God. If they said John’s authority was from God, Jesus could reply: “Then why didn’t you heed his call for repentance?” If they said John’s authority was from men, the people would be angry because they all respected John as God’s prophetic messenger (see Matthew 21:25-27). Many scholars believe Jesus’ public cleansing of the temple foreshadowed its eventual destruction by the Romans 40 years later.

Subversive Vineyard Parables (Matthew 21:28-46)

In the Old Testament, Israel is sometimes called a vineyard, notably in Isaiah 5. God reminded Israel how he had “planted” them in the Promised Land and done everything he could for them to produce “good grapes,” yet all he reaped was “bad grapes” (see Isaiah 5:1-4). That is, God “looked for justice, but saw bloodshed. For righteousness, but heard cries of distress” (Isaiah 5:7). Israel would reap terrible consequences for its covenant violations: The Lord would completely destroy his vineyard and turn it into a wasteland (see Isaiah 5:5-6)—which is exactly what the Assyrians did to the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. The Babylonians conquered Judah in 586 BC, totally destroyed the temple and exiled the people. Knowing the consequences of Israel’s history of covenant violations, Jesus

became deeply disturbed by the injustice and hypocrisy of Israel's current religious leaders. How could he expose their spiritual blindness and their unfaithfulness to God?

Jesus often used subversive parables to challenge the religious and political status quo. After his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he told the religious authorities two vineyard stories. His intent was to unmask their guilt before God and reveal the consequences of their willful blindness to what God was so powerfully saying and doing through his ministry. His first story was about a father who one day told his son to work in their vineyard. He initially refused, but later obeyed. The father said the same thing to the second son, who immediately replied he would obey. However, he did nothing. After Jesus asked his listeners which of the two sons did as his father asked him, they said the first one (see Matthew 21:28-32).

“The father ... symbolizes God. The first son symbolizes notorious sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes, who initially rebel against the Father's will but later repent and obey. The other son represents the chief priests and elders who promised obedience to God but never fulfilled their commitment.”³ Jesus bluntly applied the story to the religious leaders: “John (the Baptist) came ... to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him” (Matthew 21:32). Notice Jesus repeated the accusatory word “you” four times in these two sentences. Can you imagine how angry they must have felt being contrasted to repentant prostitutes?

In the second vineyard parable (see Matthew 21:33-46), the landowner (God) rented his vineyard (Israel) to several tenants (Jewish leaders). When he sent his servants (Old Testament prophets) to collect his fruit, the tenants “beat one, killed another and stoned a third” (Matthew 21:35). They did the same to the second lot of servants. He finally sent his son, thinking, “They will respect my son” (Jesus) (Matthew 21:37). Instead they killed him, hoping to acquire

the son's inheritance. Jesus' application to the chief priests and Pharisees threatened their authority, saying: "When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants (religious leaders)? He will bring those wretches to a wretched end ... and will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.... The kingdom of God (vineyard) will be taken from you and given to a people (Jesus' disciples/followers) who will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:40-41, 43). Knowing he was referring to them, the chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to arrest him. They refrained because the onlookers viewed Jesus as a prophet (see Matthew 21:46).

God's True Mission People

The drama of God's redemptive plan is now reaching a crucial turning point in salvation and human history. Jesus was saying that Israel's corrupt religious leaders and the nation as a whole would forfeit their responsibility to be God's missionary people for the world. Who then were the "other tenants"? The faithful followers of Messiah Jesus. Initially, a believing Jewish remnant, but later Gentiles would also be added to his mission people, thus fulfilling God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing and light to the nations (see Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 49:6). Geography and land are irrelevant to membership in God's kingdom. No nation, including Israel, can and never will contain God's kingdom. The good news is that no matter where we are on earth, we can repent of our sins and obediently live under the kingly authority of Jesus Christ. His spiritual kingdom is global.

General Frederick Coutts' earlier quote deserves repeating here: "[Israel's] vocation as missionary people was to carry the faith which was their supreme glory to all the nations of the world. [This] was the reason ... God had chosen Israel (see Genesis 12:3)—not that she might occupy a place of greatness in the world ... but that she might be the means God could use to make known to humanity his saving

purpose.... Israel's 'election' was not to world supremacy, but to missionary duty" (see Isaiah 42:6).

Judgment—Temple and Nation Doomed

In the next parable, Jesus switched from the vineyard metaphor to a wedding banquet allegory of Israel's history. He told about a king (God) who prepared an elaborate wedding banquet for his son (Jesus) (see Matthew 22:1-14). "The wedding banquet symbolized the great messianic feast that Jews expected to share with the Messiah at the beginning of his rule."⁴ Those invited (Old Testament Israel) refused the invitation, persecuted and killed the servants (the prophets) who delivered the invitation. The enraged king (God) "sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city" (Jerusalem in 586 BC) for refusing to honour his son (see Matthew 22:7).

Anticipating being murdered, Jesus was saying that Israel's history would repeat itself. God would soon harshly judge her religious leaders for handing him over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. As in the Old Testament, a historical judgment means God would not protect the nation from attackers—in this case from Roman armies when Jewish Zealots rebelled against Rome 33 years later in 66 AD. Jesus later wept over Jerusalem's anticipated suffering and destruction that occurred in 70 AD (see Luke 19:41-44).

He then pronounced woes upon the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, blind guides, fools and vipers because, though outwardly deeply pious, inwardly their hearts were proud and corrupt (see Matthew 23:1-34). How then could they be God's mission people who would bless the nations? (See Genesis 12:3.) They therefore would not escape "being condemned to hell" (see Matthew. 23:33). Jesus grieved for "this generation" because of what they would soon suffer for rejecting him and his loving, protective care (see Matthew 23:36-37). He prophetically warned them: "Look, your house (temple) is left to you desolate" (abandoned) (Matthew 23:38).

During the ministry of Ezekiel centuries earlier, God abandoned the temple Solomon had built. The Babylonians destroyed it in 586 BC and exiled the leaders, artisans and most of the people. Jesus was saying that in the looming future, God would not protect their current magnificent temple. He would abandon it. After a nearly five-month siege, the Roman army demolished it in 70 AD, destroyed most of the city and exiled the people—only 40 years after Jesus’ ominous warning: “ ... Not one stone here [of the temple] will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). Israel’s leaders should have known that “When someone has been given much, much will be required in return” (Luke 12:48 *NLT*).

Betrayal and Crucifixion

Realizing Jesus’ threatening parables were directed at them, Israel’s religious leaders schemed to arrest him (see Matthew 21:45-46). They met with Caiaphas the high priest to decide how to get rid of him (see Matthew 26:3-4). They didn’t want to antagonize the people who saw him as the one who would free them from the clutches of Rome and elevate Israel’s political status in the world. The chief priests were delighted when Judas, one of the Twelve Apostles, offered to hand him over to them for 30 silver coins (see Mark 14:10-11).⁵ While celebrating Passover with the Twelve, Jesus twice said one of them would betray him. They all asserted: “Surely, not I, Lord” (Matthew 26:22). But when Judas said, “Surely not I, Rabbi,” Jesus replied, “Yes, it is you” (Matthew 26:25).

He then proceeded to transform the meaning of Passover. The unleavened bread will henceforth symbolize his body which will be scourged and crucified. The cup [of wine] will symbolize his “blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28), fulfilling Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant through which God will internalize his law on peoples’ hearts, “forgive their wickedness and ... remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:31, 33, 34). The temple with its sacrifices for sin will

therefore no longer need to exist or be rebuilt after its destruction in 70 AD. Because the original Passover was followed by their ancestors' exodus from Egyptian slavery, Jesus' transformation of the Passover means it will be followed by a new exodus that will free humanity from slavery to sin.

Jesus knew Roman soldiers would torture and murder him through crucifixion. Adding to his physical pain was the realization that in taking upon himself the sins of the world, he would feel abandoned by his Father (see Matthew 27:46). After agonizing in prayer in Gethsemane, three times asking if this excruciating ordeal could be avoided (see Matthew 26:39), he bravely submitted to his Father's will. John's Gospel records his final words on the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30). He had said that he came "to save ... the lost" (Luke 19:10). As the sinless servant of the Lord, he atoned for the sins of the world (see 1 John 2:2). "The ugliness of the cross is found in human sin," says Brian Zahnd, [but] "the beauty of the cross is found in divine forgiveness."⁶ Reconciliation with God and salvation from the power of sin and death are now available for everyone—Jews and Gentiles (see John 3:16). Hallelujah!

Resurrection—Astonishment and Joy

The brutal, shameful death of Jesus devastated his disciples. He had repeatedly told them he would be betrayed, killed and raised from death. Yet, they did not know how to interpret that information because in Judaism, a crucified Messiah did not make sense. Luke's Gospel describes the mood of Cleopas and another disciple on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the third day after Jesus' Crucifixion: "Their faces [were] downcast" (Luke 24:17). Why? "We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel" (Luke 24:21 *NLT*). To the very end of Jesus' life, Cleopas and his friend, like the Twelve Apostles, understood Jesus through their vision of Jewish nationalism accomplished by warfare.

They wanted Jesus to be a violent, military deliverer like king

David who would free Israel from the oppressive rule of the Romans (see Mark 11:9-10). In talking to Jesus, who had mysteriously appeared unidentified, walking alongside them, they said several women and others had gone to Jesus' tomb and found it empty. They didn't know where his body was (see Luke 24:22-24). When Jesus "broke bread" in Emmaus with Cleopas and his friend, they suddenly realized the stranger was the risen Christ (Messiah) (see Luke 24:30-32).

In the meantime, the women who discovered the empty tomb, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of Jesus, shared what they had seen with the remaining 11 disciples. (Judas had hanged himself after his betrayal of Jesus.)⁴ Peter ran to the tomb, "saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering ... what had happened" (Luke 24:10-12). Resurrection was the furthest thing from Peter's mind. He and the other disciples could see no obvious evidence in their Scriptures of a Messiah who would be brutally tortured and murdered by his own people and then rise from the grave. Resurrection was not supposed to occur until the end of time when God judges the world, destroys the wicked and ushers in global peace through their Messiah. How could they have been so wrong?

Questions

1. What was the significance of Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey? (See Matthew 21:1-11.)
2. Why did the Pharisees want to arrest Jesus after he told them the two vineyard parables? (See Luke 21:28-46.)
3. What is Jesus' disturbing message in the parable of the wedding banquet? (See Matthew 22:1-4.)
4. How did Jesus transform the meaning of Passover?
5. Why didn't the disciples expect the Resurrection of Jesus?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Matthew 14-28—<https://youtu.be/GGCF3OPWN14>

Jesus cleanses the temple (see Matthew 21:12-13; John 2:13-17)—
https://youtu.be/z8z_Noilw1E

Lesson 15:

WHO IS JESUS?

Many centuries after Jesus' Ascension to heaven, most Jews still do not believe he is God's Son and humanity's Messiah-Saviour. A crucified Messiah has been a stumbling block for them (see 1 Corinthians 1:23). Jewish scholars interpret Isaiah's suffering servant passages as referring to Israel or particularly to faithful believers within Israel personified as an individual. But Christians go one step further. "The servant individually personified is seemingly Israel reduced to one," explains Lt-Colonel Cyril Boyden. "The one through whom God's saving purposes were to be accomplished.... Where Israel had failed to fulfil Yahweh's mission, [Jesus Christ], representing and embodying Israel, brought it to fruition. At the centre of history, the servant was Israel, for Jesus Christ was the true Israel."¹ Jesus was the faithful remnant of one. Seeing the resurrected Jesus and recalling how he had suffered and died, his disciples were convinced he was Isaiah's suffering servant of the Lord.

Suffering Servant

The New Testament often alludes and testifies to Jesus as Isaiah's suffering servant. For example, the Holy Spirit led Philip, a Jewish convert to Jesus, to an encounter with an Ethiopian official. He was returning home in his chariot after worshipping at the temple in

Jerusalem (see Acts 8:27-35). Hearing the official reading from the prophet Isaiah, Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. When the official said he did not understand whether Isaiah 53:7-8 was referring to Isaiah himself or to someone else, Philip told him it referred to Jesus:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice,
who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

The Gentile Ethiopian believed, and Philip welcomed him as a new follower of Jesus by baptizing him. Then the official “went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). Because Acts 8:35 says, “Then Philip *began* with that passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus,” the inference is that he also used other Old Testament texts to show that Jesus was the promised Servant-Messiah. There are also several texts in the New Testament that quote or allude to the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 as referring to Jesus. For example, when Jesus healed Peter’s mother of a fever, Matthew quotes Isaiah 53:4: “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.” Speaking to his disciples before his arrest, Jesus quoted Isaiah 53:12: “It is written, ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors,’ and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment” (Luke 22:37).

In his epistle to persecuted believers, Peter says they were called to suffer for the sake of Christ “because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth’ ” (1 Peter 2:21-22; Isaiah 53:9). Then Peter even more clearly refers to Jesus as the servant from Isaiah 53:4-5, saying: “When they hurled their

insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:23-24).

Before his conversion, Paul fiercely persecuted the early followers of Jesus because he believed they were betraying the Jewish faith. A visionary experience of the risen Jesus changed his life (see Acts 9), and he subsequently became a passionate preacher of the gospel. His magnificent description in Philippians 2:6-11 of Jesus’ condescension as God’s Son must have been inspired by the servant of Isaiah 53. Bible scholars think it was likely an early Christian hymn:

“ ... Being in very nature God,
[he] did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped, but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus is the suffering servant whom God has vindicated and exalted to the status of Lord (i.e. God)! (Regarding Jesus as the servant of the Lord, see also Luke 4:18-19; Acts 4:27-29; John 13:1-17.) Who then is Daniel’s mysterious son of man? (See Daniel 7:13-14.) How does he fit into God’s redemptive mission?

Son of Man

Earlier we saw that Ezekiel frequently referred to himself as “son of man.” However, in Daniel 7:13-14, the son of man “comes with the

clouds of heaven,” clouds being a symbol in the Bible of God’s presence, authority and majesty (see Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1). After the collapse of successive worldly empires (see Daniel 7:1-12), God gave the son of man the authority to rule over an everlasting kingdom and nations worshipped him. Since only God himself should be worshipped, this person must have been divine. His indestructible kingdom paralleled God’s kingdom (see Daniel 4:13). Who was this mysterious heavenly being?

No explicit reference is made in Daniel about a messianic Davidic king. However, when God gives the kingdom to this son of man, “he will share it ‘with the saints of the Most High’ ” (see Daniel 7:18, 22). In other words, the promised kingdom “will be led by the Son of man and populated by the [faithful] people of God,” explains Paul House.² Since only a messianic figure could be given the kingdom of God, the suggestion is that this heavenly son of man was “the true David [and] ... also the true Son of man.”³ We also recall God’s initial promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:16 of an eternal rule, and in Isaiah 9:6-7 and 11:10-11 of a Davidic king reigning over a dominion free from warfare and strife.

Jesus knew his people expected a militaristic Davidic Messiah who would violently free them from the oppression of the Roman Empire and establish a kingdom that would eclipse the glory of kings Solomon and David. Since that was not his mission, Jesus chose to be deliberately evasive about his true identity. He identified himself with the ambiguous title, son of man, and frequently infused it with different meanings. This title gave him enough time to heal, preach and teach about the kingdom of God without people constantly pressuring him to lead them as Messiah in a revolt against their Roman overseers—which would have happened if he had said from the start of his ministry, “I am your Messiah.”

At his trial, Caiaphas the high priest asked Jesus, “Are you the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus knew the time had finally come for him to unequivocally affirm, “I am. And you will

see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62). Caiaphas instantly knew Jesus was referring to Daniel 7:13-14, 17-18—the Son of Man sitting with God on his throne, ruling with God over his people who worshipped him (see Mark 8:38). Jesus’ provocative claim was clearly blasphemy to Caiaphas, and it sealed his fate.

Daniel’s prophecy (see Daniel 7:13-14) did not foresee an earthly, suffering son of man being betrayed and killed. Jesus filled in the prophecy of the heavenly Son of Man with his own content of suffering and a future return. Likewise, the suffering servant of the Lord and the messianic Davidic king are not joined in the Old Testament—at least not according to Jewish interpreters. Jesus brought these three together in himself.

Mystery Solved

Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled Israel’s messianic hopes, but not in the way his people expected. He was the long-awaited Davidic king (see Luke 1:67-75), but not a war-conquering Messiah who would establish a Jewish political kingdom in Israel. He inaugurated a global, spiritual kingdom of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). He rules an eternal kingdom not from earthly Jerusalem, but from the heavenly Jerusalem (see Hebrews 12:22).

To the astonishment of his disciples, he was Isaiah’s servant of the Lord whose death had atoned for the sins of the nations (see Isaiah 53; 1 John 2:2). To further clarify Jesus’ self-designation as Son of Man, George Ladd lists three distinct categories of the title in Matthew, Mark and Luke:

- The earthly Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins (see Matthew 9:6). He is Lord of the Sabbath (see Matthew 12:8). He has come eating and drinking (see Matthew 11:19) but has nowhere to lay his head (see Matthew 8:20). He sows the good seed (see Matthew

13:37) and came to seek and save the lost (see Luke 19:10). He is betrayed with a kiss (see Luke 22:48).⁴

- The suffering Son of Man must suffer many things (see Mark 8:31). He came to serve and give his life (see Mark 10:45) but will rise from the dead (see Mark 9:9). He is delivered to the chief priests, condemned to death and rises from death (see Matthew 10:33). He will be three days in the earth (see Mark 10:45).⁵
- Daniel's heavenly Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels at the end of time (see Mark 8:38). He will sit at the right hand of power and come with the clouds of heaven at an hour we do not expect (see Mark 14:62; Luke 12:40). He will sit on his glorious throne where we will stand before him to be judged (see Matthew 19:28; Luke 21:36).⁶

This heavenly Son of Man description refers to Jesus' Second Coming. Caiaphas and other Jews would not have interpreted their Bible, the Old Testament, as saying the Messiah would come to earth twice. Daniel's heavenly Son of Man came unexpectedly in disguise in Jesus as a man among his people! However, he will appear as the heavenly Son of Man to judge the world at his Second Coming. (See Diagram 1.)

Diknon Eberhart, who progressed from theological drifter to Reform Jew to Orthodox Jew and finally to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord, testifies, "The Old Testament begged for the climax of the New Testament."⁷ Jesus is the climax of Israel's Old Testament story. What, then, is God's mission now while we await Jesus' Second Coming as the heavenly Son of Man? And who will be the people who have God's missionary heart and be his partners through whom he will accomplish his redemptive mission?

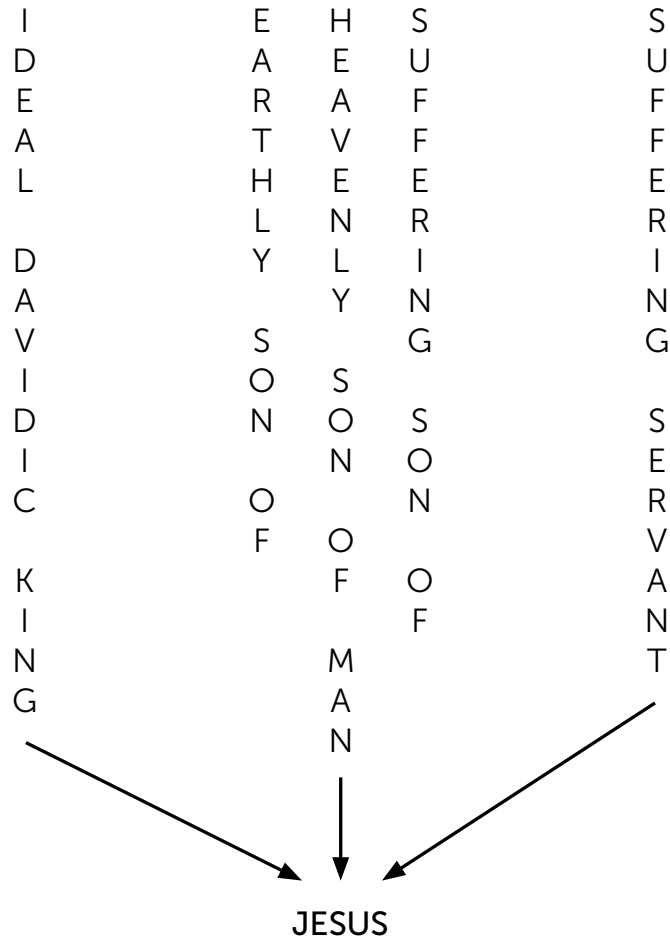
Questions

1. In what way is Jesus with his disciples today? (See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5; 16:6-7; Romans 8:9.)
2. What New Testament passages identify Jesus as Isaiah's suffering servant of the Lord?
3. What convinced Jesus' disciples that he was the expected servant of the Lord, Daniel's heavenly Son of Man and Isaiah's Davidic King, and had therefore completed the Old Testament story?
4. Why was Jesus evasive about his identity?
5. Who is Jesus to you?

Optional Online Resource

Jesus with the high priest, Caiaphas—<https://youtu.be/XzZvonbUMz0>

Diagram 1: Who Is Jesus?



Old Testament Promise	New Testament Fulfilment
Ideal Davidic political king (Messiah)	Jesus, Suffering Servant, Davidic Messiah, atoned for sin, rose from death, rules his people from heavenly Jerusalem (see Hebrews 12:22)
Suffering servant will atone for sins of the world and rise from death (see Isaiah 53:11-12)	
Heavenly son of man (see Daniel 7:13-14, 18, 27)—A pre-existent heavenly being comes to earth with the glorious kingdom of God to rule over an eternal kingdom	Jesus' reinterpretation of Daniel 7:13-14, 18, 27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An earthly Son of Man (see Matthew 9:6; 12:8) • A suffering Son of Man (see Mark 8:31; 10:45) • A future apocalyptic Son of Man who will resurrect and judge the world, and rule over converted Jews and Gentiles in the new heaven and new earth (see Mark 8:31; 14:62; Revelation 7:4-17; 21:1-4)

“The Old Testament begged for the climax of the New Testament.”
Dikkon Eberhart

Lesson 16:

EMPOWERED TO BLESS THE NATIONS (ACTS)

In recent years, mission has become a popular concept in many spheres of life. A distinctive feature of a mission is its focus. Different means are used to accomplish a mission. In a movie, the mission could be to rescue prisoners held captive by terrorists. It would require, among other things, strategic planning, the selection of an expertly trained team and the choice of appropriate military equipment. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s political mission was to gain equality of rights and opportunities for Black people in America. He used public rallies, protests and preaching against segregation as a means of accomplishing his goal. A charitable organization's mission might be to wipe out HIV-AIDS in Africa. That task would require having qualified medical personnel, a lot of money and ways of raising it, and probably inviting other organizations to partner with them. Many nations collaborated on a worldwide mission to create and distribute an effective vaccine for the life-threatening COVID-19 virus.

God's Mission Through Jesus

We learned from Israel's history that humanity desperately needs to be reconciled to God, rescued from the slavery of systemic sin and evil, and inwardly renewed by the Spirit of God. That transformative journey began when he promised Abraham that his offspring would bless the world (see Genesis 12:3). The New Testament begins with Matthew stating that God's mission through Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, is to "save his people from their sins" (see Matthew 1:21). This is the redemptive starting point of God's mission to reconnect fallen humanity to himself, thereby ending the exile from him that began in Eden. As Jeremiah had promised, God came to earth in Jesus to renew his covenant with his people: "I will forgive their sins and remember their wickedness no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).

Mark's Gospel has Jesus "announcing the good news of God," inviting people to repent and believe that God's kingdom—his kingly rule and authority—was upon them through his ministry. He proceeded to show what God's kingdom looks like on earth by forgiving sins and healing people spiritually, mentally and physically (see Mark 1:14-15).

Luke reports Jesus saying his mission was "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10), fulfilling God's promise through Ezekiel to the ancient, negligent leaders of Israel: "My shepherds did not search for my flock but [only] cared for themselves.... I myself will search for my sheep and look after them" (Ezekiel 34:8, 11). In Jesus, God seeks his straying sheep, those separated from his presence, and he will save them—bring them back to himself (see Jeremiah 31:10; Zechariah 9:16). Jesus' heart went out to the crowds he met in Israel's towns and villages, seeing them as "harassed and helpless like sheep, without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Unlike ancient Israel's selfish leaders, Jesus said of himself: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

John states Jesus' mission is to make people "children of God" (John 1:12). This involves receiving eternal life through repentance

and faith in him and being inwardly renewed by the Spirit (see John 1:12-13; 3:16), which fulfils God's promise through Ezekiel: "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and ... laws" (Ezekiel 36:27).

Though Jesus focused his mission primarily on his fellow Jews, he showed the Father's missionary heart by sometimes ministering to Gentiles. He healed the demon possessed daughter of a Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon (see Matthew 15:21-28), two Gentile Gaderene demoniacs (see Matthew 8:28-34) and the son of a Roman centurion (see Matthew 8:8). The latter case was particularly significant because he chose to enter the home of this Gentile, which made him ritually unclean in the eyes of Israel's religious leaders. In his first visit to his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus infuriated the synagogue congregation by comparing them to the faithless Israelites of Elijah and Elisha's time. He said God had sent these two prophets to heal in the Gentile lands of Sidon and Aram (now Syria). Feeling offended, the people attempted to throw him off a cliff, but failed (see Luke 4:20-30). Unlike his assailants, Jesus had no cultural bias.

Centuries of animosity existed between Jews and Samaritans. On one occasion, however, Jesus deliberately chose to travel through Samaria and stopped at a well near the town of Sychar. His talking to a Samaritan woman there surprised his Jewish disciples. Through his conversation with her, she realized he was their Messiah. When she shared her testimony with her townsfolk, many Samaritans believed in him (see John 4:39). Jesus stayed with them two days, resulting in many confessing: "This man is the Saviour of the world" (John 4:40-42). Abraham and Isaiah must have smiled from their balconies in heaven (see Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6). Jesus is the descendant of Abraham who became the ultimate blessing for all peoples (see Genesis 12:3)—salvation from the power of sin and death for all who repent and confess him as Lord and Saviour (see Romans 10:9-10).

Sadly, Israel rejected God's coming to them in Jesus, but God

strategically preserved a faithful remnant within the nation. To continue his mission after his Resurrection, Jesus appeared to his remnant Jewish followers and commissioned them to make disciples of all nations, promising to be with them forever (see Matthew 28:20). But how will he be with them? He told them to stay in Jerusalem “until the Holy Spirit fills you” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5 *NLT*). In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the “Spirit of Jesus” and the “Spirit of Christ” (see Acts 16:6-7; Romans 8:9). Jesus will continue to be with them through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Global Outreach

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, his disciples asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (See Acts 1:6.) In spite of Jesus’ coming as a peaceful Messiah whom God had resurrected from death, they were still hoping he would lead a revolt to expel the Roman soldiers from their land and make Israel an independent nation with Jesus as their king. They had assumed from “his resurrection and the promise of the Spirit that the messianic era had dawned and the final salvation of Israel was imminent” (see Ezekiel 36:27; Joel 2:28).¹

Though the messianic era had indeed begun in Jesus, he corrected their grand, nationalistic aspirations. He promised they would receive power from the Holy Spirit, not to overthrow the occupying Roman forces, but to be his witnesses in spreading the good news of salvation through Jesus throughout the world (see Acts 1:8). “Jesus was the climax of Israel’s story,” says Peter Enns. “Jerusalem and the land of Israel are no longer God’s focal points. The disciples are to leave their land and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to follow Jesus and what he commanded, spreading the word of a different kind of kingdom and a different kind of king.”²

One hundred twenty followers of Jesus met in an upper room in Jerusalem for 10 days to prayerfully await the promised empowering,

cleansing Spirit of God. Peter initiated their decision to choose Matthias as an apostolic replacement for Judas (see Acts 1:12-26), who had handed Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. Why was Peter, their leader, so eager to restore the apostolic number from 11 to 12?

As earlier explained, by publicly calling out 12 disciples from within Israel, Jesus was symbolically telling the nation, which had started out as 12 tribes, that it was those who followed him and obeyed his teachings who were the faithful, true Israel (see Romans 9:6-8). Jesus was restructuring Israel around himself. They would be his mission people who would reflect his holy character (see Exodus 19:5-6), be a light to the nations (see Isaiah 42:6) and seek the lost as he did (see Ezekiel 34:11-16; Luke 15:4; 19:10).

Prayerfully waiting for the outpouring of God's Spirit to be equipped for their global task, Peter wanted to reaffirm Jesus' symbolic action of choosing 12 disciples when he started his ministry. Why? Because Jesus' Jewish followers in the upper room were the faithful remnant in continuity with the righteous Israelite remnant we encountered in the Old Testament (see Isaiah 7:3; 10:20-22). General Frederick Coutts says they "stood for a tried and tested group who would keep [Israel's] true religion alive whatever the national fortunes or misfortunes."³ Israel failed to understand that being ethnically descended from Abraham did not automatically mean they had submitted to his kingly authority over their lives (see Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 4:16-17). Like Abraham, we become righteous before God, not through self-effort, but through believing his promise of salvation—forgiveness of sins and a right standing with God—through repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour (see Romans 4:9-5:3; 10:1-4, 9-13).

Last Days Have Arrived

When the day of Pentecost arrived, the Holy Spirit filled the Jewish remnant followers of Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem. ["They]

began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). Scores of God-fearing Jews from around the Mediterranean region who had come to celebrate Pentecost were astonished to hear the apostles “declaring the wonders of God in their own [languages]” and wondered what it meant (see Acts 2:11-12). Peter addressed them, saying the outpouring of God’s Spirit meant “the last days” as prophesied by Joel had begun and would continue until Jesus returned (see Joel 3:18-23; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:1). “They are the ‘last days’ in that the coming of the Messiah ... has occurred.”⁴ God’s future had arrived, a foretaste of heaven, so, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Jesus) will be saved” (Acts 2:21).

Before looking at the response to Peter’s sermon, we should understand that Jesus’ death and Resurrection inaugurated the last days. The Apostle John called it “the last hour” (1 John 2:18). However, we await the Second Coming of Jesus when he returns to judge the world and renew all of creation (see Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 21:1). Jesus called this consummation of God’s kingdom “the last day” (see John 6:39, 40, 44, 54) and “the close/end of the age” (see Matthew 28:20; Mt 13:39-40, 49). (See diagram and further explanation of end-time terminology in Appendix 1.)

God’s Mission Catches Fire

When Peter concluded his speech, saying, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Messiah)” (Acts 2:36), the Jews asked him how they should respond to this convicting truth. Peter told them to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” and they would be forgiven and receive the promised Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38-39). Several thousand responded positively to Peter’s passionate sermon and were added to the 120 in the upper room. The rest of the Book of Acts traces the growth of Jesus’

remnant followers around a large part of the Mediterranean world. Peter focused on his fellow Jews. After his dramatic conversion, Paul (formerly named Saul), a Jewish Roman citizen from Tarsus, initially targeted fellow Jews in synagogues, but eventually concentrated on Gentiles.

The followers of Messiah Jesus eventually faced strong opposition from the Jewish religious authorities. Persecution resulted in the martyrdom of Stephen, “a man full of God’s grace and power, [who] did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people” (Acts 6:8-7:60). However, ill-treating Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem backfired. It scattered them and they “preached the word wherever they went,” including in “Judea and Samaria” (see Acts 8:1, 4). Because converted Gentiles were receiving the same Holy Spirit as converted Jews, a special meeting of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem formally embraced them as genuine followers of Messiah Jesus (see Acts 15:6-9). Also, James explained that Gentiles becoming part of the people of God—his missionary people—fulfilled an Old Testament promise (see Acts 15:13-21) by the prophet Amos:

“Afterward I will return
and restore the fallen house of David (i.e., kingdom).
I will rebuild its ruins and restore it,
so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord,
including the Gentiles—
all those I have called to be mine.
The Lord has spoken—
he who made these things known so long ago.”
(Amos 9:11-12 *NLT*)

Jesus fulfilled Amos’ prophecy because he is a descendant of king David. The spiritual kingdom he inaugurated includes Jewish and Gentile converts to Messiah Jesus. Here is how the concept of God’s mission people developed in the Bible:

GOD'S MISSION PEOPLE

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Israel (Nation)	Faithful remnant within nation	JESUS—Jewish remnant of one	Remnant Jewish followers of Jesus	Worldwide Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus
Genesis 12:1-3	Isaiah 1:21-26	1 Peter 2:23-24	Mark 3:14-19	John 10:16
Exodus 19:5-6	Isaiah 4:2-4	Hebrews 4:15	Matthew 16:18-19	Matthew 21:33-46
Isaiah 42:6	Isaiah 10:20-22	2 Corinthians 5:21	Luke 12:32	Romans 9:1-8
Isaiah 49:6	Isaiah 37:30-32		Matthew 19:28	Romans 11
	Micah 2:12-13		Romans 9:1-8	James 1:1
			Acts 1-7	1 Peter 1:1
				1 Peter 2:9
				Revelation 4:4, 9-11
				Revelation 5:6-10
				Revelation 7:1-10
				Ephesians 2-3

Costly Evangelism

This new movement within Judaism was initially called the Way (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) and the sect of the Nazarenes (see Acts 24:5; 28:22). In his emotional farewell message to the overseers of the Ephesian congregation, Paul refers to all the followers of Jesus in the city as “the flock” and “the church (*ekklesia*, assembly) of God” (see Acts 20:28). God’s mission had taken a major step forward. The apostles, who were Jewish converts to Jesus, had officially embraced Gentiles as their brothers and sisters under God’s kingly reign. Though Jesus’ redemptive work had put Jews and Gentiles on equal terms with God, the path forward would be difficult.

Paul and his helpers undertook several evangelistic tours throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. In spite of antagonism from their Jewish brothers, assemblies of Jesus’ disciples were created in such places as Antioch in Syria, Antioch in Pisidia, Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, Lystra, Athens, Rome and Corinth. Though the Jerusalem Council had not required Gentile converts to be

circumcised (see Acts 15:19-29), it became a serious problem for Paul on one occasion when he visited Jerusalem. Learning he no longer adhered to this aspect of their religious laws and did not follow other Jewish customs, some Jews in Jerusalem from the province of Asia plotted to kill him.

A Roman commander saved Paul's life and allowed him to speak to the crowd. When he told them that the Lord had called him to take the message of salvation to Gentiles, the crowd threatened to kill him. The Roman commander took him to a barracks for protection. Forty Jewish men schemed to kill him while he was being transferred on horse to Caesarea to appear before Felix, the Roman governor (see Acts 21-23). Their plan failed. Over a period of several years, Roman governors Felix, Porcius Festus and king Agrippa tried Paul in court (see Acts 24-26). Because he appealed his case to Caesar, he was sent by boat to Rome to stand trial.

Boldly Preaching in Rome

After surviving a shipwreck at Malta, they eventually reached Rome and Paul was allowed to live by himself in a rented home, guarded by a soldier (see Acts 28:16). To explain his presence in Rome, he met with a group of Jewish leaders (likely from the synagogues) and later with an even larger group. He told them he had done nothing wrong against his fellow brethren. He took a whole day "to explain ... to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the prophets. Some were convinced ... but others would not believe" (Acts 28:23-24).

Those who refused to believe left after Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, which says the ancient Israelites' hearts had become "calloused" and they had "closed their eyes" [to the truth] (see Acts 28:25, 27). He concluded with, "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen" (Acts 28:28). Jewish and Gentile converts who had confessed Jesus is Lord and

believed that God raised him from the dead had become God's missionary people for the world (see Romans 10:9-10). However, Paul was hopeful that over time many more Jews would accept Jesus by faith as Messiah and Lord (see Romans 10:1; 11:25-26). (See Appendix 2, "And so, all Israel will be saved.")

During his two years in Rome, Paul had the unhindered opportunity to boldly "preach the kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31). God had fulfilled his purpose for him as an evangelist and church planter. Christian tradition says Roman emperor, Nero, had Paul executed in 64 or 65 AD. God used Paul powerfully as an evangelist to fellow Jews, but especially Gentiles. The 13 letters attributed to him in the New Testament have been enormously influential over the past 2,000 years in shaping people's understanding of the Christian faith. The gospel that had been "announced in advance to Abraham, the man of faith" (see Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8), many centuries prior to Paul's conversion, has subsequently captured the hearts of millions of people throughout the world. To God be the glory! But redemption's story is not finished yet.

Questions

1. After Judas' death, why did Peter want to restore the apostolic number from 11 to 12?
2. How do the four Gospels express Jesus' mission?
3. What was the new Spirit empowered movement within Judaism initially called?
 - a. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22
 - b. Acts 24:5; 28:22
4. In what sense have we been living in "the last days" since Jesus' Resurrection?
5. What terms do Jesus and the Apostle John use in referring to the end times and the end of the world?
6. In what way is Jesus with his disciples today?
7. What impresses you about the Apostle Paul?
8. How would you like to bless others?

Lesson 17:

A GLORIOUS HOPE

The road to redemption has been long and winding through the history of God's people. Why did he select a particular group of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be his "treasured possession" (see Deuteronomy 7:6), his mission people for the world? Not because they were in any way superior to or more numerous than other peoples (see Deuteronomy 7:7). In fact, in Israel's long history of stubbornly disobeying God, it became a microcosm of humanity's rebellion against God.

Being chosen as God's mission partners is a unique honour and privilege. But with it comes a heavy responsibility. He called ancient Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Why? God wanted them to be "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6) by modelling personal and community holiness, righteousness and social justice to other peoples. Over many centuries, Israel's sins of idolatry, sexual immorality and social injustices in exploiting the poor compromised their credibility as his mission people. God therefore warned them through Amos: "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your sins" (Amos 3:1-2). To whom much is given, much will be required (see Luke 12:48).

The consequence for their sinful behaviour would be national destruction and exile. That is exactly what happened in spite of God's

prophetic messengers pleading with them for several centuries to wholeheartedly turn to God, repent of their sins and be faithful to the teachings of their Mosaic covenant. However, God also promised that one day his Spirit would change his people's hearts so that his mission of blessing the nations will be successful (see Ezekiel 36:26). How did that eventually happen?

New Creation

In succumbing to the serpent's temptation to disobey God, Adam and Eve lost their innocence and became inwardly corrupt. Having rebelled against God and with his image in them now marred, he exiled them from his holy presence. However, he promised that one day he would "crush" the tempter's head (see Genesis 3:5). The exciting news is that through the cross and Resurrection of Jesus, God has "crushed" Satan's head. How? By providing forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, spiritual transformation, victory over death, and the wisdom and power to obey God through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:7; 2 Corinthians 5:18; John 16:13).

In Jesus, heaven has invaded earth. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come," says Paul (2 Corinthians 5:17). God's new creation has truly begun. A bit of the glorious future awaiting God's people has broken into the present. The Holy Spirit's presence in God's spiritually renewed people is actually the deposit and guarantee of the new world to come (see 2 Corinthians 5:5). However, reconciliation with God and salvation from the power of systemic sin and evil are just the beginning of a lifelong journey of spiritual development. We need to daily co-operate with God as he seeks to completely restore his image in us.

Becoming Like Jesus

We saw in Genesis 1:27-28 that being created in God's image means humans possess the distinctive dignity of representing him in ruling over his creation. But throughout God's journey with rebellious

Israel, we repeatedly saw what God's "image" looks like—his character—the kind of God he is. Loving, merciful, forgiving, patient, compassionate, longsuffering, gracious, morally pure, righteous and just. In the New Testament, Paul brilliantly summarizes God's fore-ordained plan for us: "to be conformed to the likeness (image) of his Son, [Jesus Christ]" (Romans 8:29). Because Jesus is the perfect image of God (see Hebrews 1:3), to be like him is to reflect God's holy character. God wants us to become increasingly like Jesus and thus like himself. Sanctification is the theological term for this ongoing progress in spiritual formation. Let's see how Paul applies this idea pastorally.

Since many of the converts to Jesus had been steeped in idolatry and various types of immoral and unethical behaviour, breaking away from past sinful attitudes and lifestyles became a huge challenge. In his letters to different congregations, Paul often holds them accountable for their failures. To be God's credible mission co-workers, Paul wanted them to be "conformed to the likeness (image) of Jesus," (Romans 8:39). He therefore prays for the Thessalonian believers that God's sanctifying work in them will be all-encompassing: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). (Note that Paul says blameless, not sinless.) What does personal, relational and community holiness look like in practice? We rid ourselves of everything that is unholy, un-Christlike in character. We apply to our lives, for example, Paul's negative and positive instructions to the Colossian believers: "Put to death sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.... Rid yourselves of ... anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language.... Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.... As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe

yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:5, 8, 10, 12-14). He likewise instructs the Ephesian believers: “Be imitators of God ... as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2). But how can we live up to such a high standard of behaviour? Only with God’s help. How does it happen?

Christlikeness Actualized

Our becoming like Jesus Christ in character is only possible through the inward presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The initial, inner change through the Spirit is called regeneration, and occurs at conversion when we repent and trust Jesus as our Saviour (see Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 3:16; Romans 8:9). But to keep moving forward in Christian maturity requires complete dedication to God and to his will and purpose for our lives: “I urge you, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices.... Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1-2). How is Christlikeness actualized and sustained over time?

The verb in Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian believers to “be filled with the Spirit” (see Ephesians 5:18) is in the present continuous tense. This suggests we must continually invite God to fill us with his Spirit. As we co-operate with the Spirit, he makes us more and more like Jesus in character (see Romans 8:29). He likewise stresses to the Christians in Corinth the sanctifying process of becoming like Jesus: “We who ... reflect the Lord’s glory are being transformed (present continuous tense) into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “We must reflect Christlikeness in all aspects of life,” says

General Brian Peddle, “recognizing that holiness restores our humanity and our relationship with God, others and the world. Every Salvationist should be a living example of biblical authenticity.”¹ Christlikeness becomes a challenging and fulfilling lifelong pursuit that climaxes when God welcomes us into his eternal presence (see 1 John 3:2). Christlikeness, more than anything else, gives us the character credibility to be God’s representatives and partners in accomplishing his redemptive mission globally.

Holistic Ministry

Since its earliest days, the Christian community has been demonstrating the practical application of God’s love and holistic mission in the world. Inspired by the healing and teaching ministry of Jesus, his followers have built orphanages, medical clinics and hospitals, and inspired the creation of scores of schools and universities. As a church and charitable organization, The Salvation Army, as of 2021, serves in 132 countries. It provides a vast number of varied ministries, depending on the needs of each country, including the education of children from primary to high school, training of nurses, and vocational training for physically disabled men and boys. The Army provides immigrant and refugee services, shelters for people experiencing homelessness, addictions recovery/treatment programs, emergency disaster services, hostels for boys, girls, men and women, adult/youth residential correctional services, and safe houses for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery.

We rejoice that these needed ministries, through the power of the Spirit, will continue to be transformational in the lives of people worldwide. We will not eliminate all the misery and heartache in God’s world (see Mark 14:7), but we will keep partnering with God, pressing on joyfully with his work. We look forward to the time when he makes everything right, and his faithful servants reach their glorious destiny.

Glorious Hope

Cleansed from sin and continually filled with the Spirit of Jesus, we need never worry about God's condemning us on judgment day (see Romans 8:1), but instead rejoice in the hope of eventually "sharing God's glory" (Romans 5:2 *NLT*). His indwelling Spirit is our power source for serving, witnessing and becoming like Jesus. God has given us the Spirit as a deposit (down payment) guaranteeing what is to come—the indescribable splendour of living with Jesus and his redeemed followers in God's new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:5; Revelation 21:1-2). That exhilarating truth reminds me of the chorus:

“O that will be glory for me,
glory for me, glory for me.
When by his grace I shall look on his face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.”²

But the road to this mind-blowing glory begins with denying oneself and taking up one's cross (see Matthew 16:24). Many Christians then and now experience hardships and suffering. “Persecution for Christ's sake is authentication of what we believe,” writes Lt-Colonel Allen Satterlee. “Faith cannot be known until it is tested any more than steel can prove its strength until it is put under stress. If haters marshal their forces in a charge against us, any pain they inflict is swallowed up in the glory that awaits us.”³ He quotes E. Stanley Jones: “Even if death should come, I am like the bird on the twig of the tree when the storm tries to shake it off. ‘All right,’ the bird says to itself, ‘shake me off. I’ve still got wings.’ ”⁴

Even in hardship, Christians can take comfort in knowing that God's reign has arrived on earth in Jesus. Lives are being changed daily through the witness of his dedicated followers. “Each God-honouring church is an outpost in enemy territory,” says Satterlee. “Each Spirit-filled Christian is a soldier in the battle. To be sure, our enemy continues to fire volleys, and he has sent spies among us who

undermine our unity, distract us from our priorities, and continue to batter and abuse us. But the kingdom shall come, on earth as in heaven. That [assertion] is more than wishful thinking. It describes our destiny.”⁵

Eden Transcended

The Genesis story of creation began with humans in intimate fellowship with God in an idyllic garden in Eden, from which flowed a river that nourished all kinds of trees with edible fruit (see Genesis 2:8-10). God exiled them from this perfect environment because of their rebellious behaviour in eating from the garden’s prohibited tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For defying his authority, God subjected them and subsequent humankind to “painful toil,” “thorns and thistles,” increased pain in childbirth and eventually death (see Genesis 3:16-19).

Since the Fall, creation has been in bondage to decay and groaning like a woman in labour, longing for God to birth a new world order that will reverse the effects of the Fall (see Romans 8:22). Paul describes it as creation being “liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). The good news is that through Jesus’ Crucifixion, Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, God’s new creation has begun. Millions of people have been and continue to be reconciled to God and freed from the guilt and power of sin (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). God’s ultimate mission will be consummated when Jesus returns and evil in all its personal and social manifestations is obliterated and his purified people are living peacefully together in his renewed creation.

God’s original promise of using Abraham’s descendants to bless the nations culminates in a grand mission of cosmic redemption, a new creation—a “new heaven and new earth”—where death and pain no longer exist (see Revelation 21:1, 4). John’s inspired vision has God coming down from heaven to dwell forever with his people in his new creation, “the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride

for her husband” (Revelation 21:1-3). The splendour of this garden city far transcends the glory of the Garden of Eden, with “the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city” (Revelation 22: 1-2). Jewish and Gentile converts to Messiah Jesus are being nourished by drinking the water of life and eating from the tree of life, symbols of God’s life-generating presence (see Revelation 21:6; 22:1-2, 14). They are enjoying intimate fellowship with God himself and the Lord Jesus Christ (see Revelation 22:14, 17).

“On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face ... and they will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:2-5). The prayer Jesus invited his followers to use is finally answered: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 7:10). In God’s new creation, heaven and earth have become one.

Top-Priority Mission

In becoming devoted followers of Jesus, we choose to leave behind what Paul Bunyan calls the “City of Destruction,” and begin traveling on the King’s Road to the “Celestial City.” The King’s Road in Revelation has led God’s mission people to a magnificent garden city—“the Holy City, the new Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:2). The world we all patiently wait and hope for is coming. Meanwhile, knowing Jesus as our Saviour challenges us to make him known globally, to invite others to join us on the road to the Celestial City (see Revelation 21:1).

“The whole point of God’s story is the redemption of all creation through a gospel that is for the whosoever,” says General Brian Peddle.⁶ God has given us the responsibility of telling, living and singing that story, of partnering with him to bring his boundless love and

transforming grace to a world still gripped by the darkness of systemic sin and evil (see Acts 1:8). Our urgent mission must be to “make disciples of all nations” by teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] has commanded (see Matthew 28:19-20).

“Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in your name.
Watching while sanity dies.
Touched by the madness and lies.

*Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out your Spirit we pray.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out your Spirit on us we pray.*

May now your Church rise with power and love,
That glorious gospel proclaim.
In every nation salvation will come,
To those who believe in your name.
Help us bring light to this world
That we might speed your return.

Great celebration on that final day
When out of the heavens you come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrows will end,
And rulers will bow at your throne.
Our great commission complete,
Then face-to-face we shall meet.”⁷

“Amen. Come Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

Questions

1. In one sentence, what did God want Israel to be and do?
2. Why is the holiness of God's mission people so important?
3. What does it mean to be holy?
4. Who influenced you the most to leave behind the "City of Destruction" and travel the King's Road to the "Celestial City"? How did they influence you?
5. Whom does Jesus want you to invite to join you on the King's Highway to the new Jerusalem?

Optional Online Resource

Overview of Revelation 1-11—<https://youtu.be/5nvVVcYD-0w>

Overview of Revelation 12-22—<https://youtu.be/QpnIrbq2bKo>

Appendix 1:

GOD'S KINGDOM (ALREADY/NOT YET)

The Old Testament prophets, writing from their present age (the time of promise), spoke of “the last days” as a far-off future fulfilment (e.g., Jeremiah 23:20; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1).

The Old Testament Expectation of the Last Days

The Present Age (of Old Testament writers)	The Last Days
The Time of Promise	Fulfilment Time

In the following New Testament diagram, “the last days” become the present age (time of fulfilment), beginning with the Resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:17-19). But the last days will not be fully realized until the “Last Day” when Jesus returns (see John 6:39-40, 44, 54). Note the other New Testament terms below the diagram that can be added to the “already” and “not yet” of God’s kingdom.

The NT Restructuring of the OT Expectation of the Last Days (End-time)¹

		The Age to Come (Partially Realized)	Fully Realized
	J	"Already"	"Not Yet"
	E	The Last Days (Acts 2:14-18)	Jesus Returns
	S	The Present Age (Mark 10:30)	Age to Come (Mark 10:30)
	U	The Last Hour (1 John 2:18)	The Last Day (John 6:39-40)
	S		New Heaven, New Earth (Revelation 21:1)
Old Testament Time of Promise		Time of Old Testament Fulfilment	

Various terms are used in the New Testament when referring to the first and second comings of Jesus. They express the tension between Jesus' inauguration of God's kingly rule (kingdom) on earth (already) and the consummation of the kingdom when he returns (not yet).

"Already"—Jesus' First Coming

The Resurrection of Jesus was the beginning of God's new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17), the "last days" promised in the Old Testament: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the [Old Testament] prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these *last days* he has spoken to us by his Son ... through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

"There will be terrible times in the *last days*. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive ... unholy, without love ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-3).

“Now listen, you rich people.... You have hoarded wealth in the *last days*. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you” (James 5:4).

“You must understand that in the *last days* scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires” (2 Peter 3:3).

“Now these things occurred [to the Israelites in the wilderness] as examples and were written down as warnings to us, on whom the *fulfilment of the ages has come*” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

“Dear children, this is the *last hour*, and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the *last hour*” (1 John 2:18).

“The man who denies that Jesus is the Christ (i.e., Messiah) is the antichrist” (1 John 2:22).

“Not Yet”—Jesus’ Second Coming

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the *last day*. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him, shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the *last day*” (John 6:39-40; see also John 6:44, 54).

“The enemy who sows [the weeds] is the devil. The harvest is the *end of the age*.... As the weeds are burned in the fire, so it will be at the *end of the age*” (Matthew 13:39-40).

“And surely I am with you always to the *end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

“He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the *day of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 1:8).

“I hope that ... you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the *day of the Lord Jesus*” (2 Corinthians 1:14).

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Jesus’ followers (already) is the down payment, foretaste and guarantee of our future life in the new heaven and new earth (not yet) (see 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14). The Spirit has brought God’s tomorrow into our present! The kingdom of heaven is already here—partially. Living under God’s reign now is “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” says Paul (Romans 14:17).

Note: *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (2010) provides explanations of such ideas as the kingdom of God, resurrection of the body, hell and heaven, immortality of the soul, judgment, and various views regarding Christ’s Second Coming (see page 223-245).

Appendix 2:

"AND SO ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED"

Though the Apostle Paul was grateful for the relative success of his evangelistic endeavours, he confessed to having “great sorrow and unceasing anguish in [his] heart” because the vast majority of his fellow Jews, “the people of Israel,” were not embracing the risen Jesus as Messiah and Lord (see Romans 9:2, 4). He tackles this issue in Romans 9-11 by showing from their Jewish Scriptures how Jesus has fulfilled God’s ancient promises to his people.

Paul acknowledges the unearned privileges God had conferred upon his fellow Jews, such as sonship, the covenants, the law, temple worship, special promises, and their ancestral patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. From them Jesus emerged as the human Messiah, but also as “the Christ (Messiah), who is God over all, blessed forever” (Romans 9:4-5).

God had revealed to Isaiah that despite national Israel’s destruction and exile, he would preserve a righteous remnant (see Isaiah 10:20-22). National/political Israel would henceforth be seen as many covenant violators plus a faithful remnant—a true Israel within Israel. This idea is also seen in the Old Testament understanding of circumcision. Faithful Israel is not those who are only

physically circumcised as a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham, but those whose hearts are circumcised by the Spirit of God (see Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). They love God “with all their heart and all their soul” (Deuteronomy 6:6). They steadfastly trust and obey the Lord and therefore qualify to be his mission people for the world.

Trusting God’s Promises

Paul elaborates on the different spiritual standings of these two groups of Israelites in Romans 9:6-9 (*The Voice*), stating: “The truth is that not everyone descended from Israel (Jacob) is truly Israel. Just because people can claim Abraham as their father does not make them his true children. But in the Scriptures, it says, ‘Through Isaac your covenant children will be named’ (see Genesis 21:12). The proper interpretation is this: Abraham’s children by natural descent are not necessarily God’s covenant people; what matters is that his children receive and live the *promise*. For this is the word God promised: ‘In due time, I will come, and Sarah will give birth to a son’ ” (see Genesis 18:10, 14). Applying this idea to the church, we might say that just because people—frequently or infrequently—attend worship does not mean they have all embraced God’s *promise* of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus (see Matthew 1:21; Galatians 3:14, 22), are “born of the Spirit” (see John 3:5-8) and are genuine followers of Jesus.

God declared Abraham rightly related to him (righteous) because he trusted God’s *promise* of a son through Sarah—though he was old and Sarah was well beyond child-bearing age. Their descendants would bless the world (see Genesis 12:3). However, when Sarah failed to have a son, instead of continuing to trust God for the promised son, she encouraged Abraham to father a child through Hagar, their Egyptian maidservant. Abraham’s faith in God’s *promise* faltered. He agreed with Sarah’s suggestion.

Hagar gave birth to Ishmael (see Genesis 16:1-15). Paul says

Ishmael was, therefore, conceived solely by a human decision and effort—by works rather than through *faith in God's promise*. Thus, Ishmael's descendants cannot be God's covenant mission people. Later, God renewed his *promise* to Abraham of a son through Sarah (see Genesis 18:10). This time he trusted God's *promise* and Sarah birthed Isaac. Unlike the birth of Ishmael, Isaac came as the result of faith in God's *promise*. His offspring would therefore be the ones to bless the nations.

Hope

Paul's sorrow over his Jewish kinsmen's refusal to embrace Jesus as Messiah and Lord eventually gives way to hope when he declares that the majority have experienced "a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25). He believes many more will come to faith in Jesus after a certain number of Gentiles are converted (see Romans 11:11-12, 25-26). "And so (i.e., in this way), all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

"Many people find this puzzling," says N.T. Wright. "But [in] Romans 9:6, Paul has declared that 'not all who are of Israel are in fact Israel.' [Similarly] he spoke of the 'Israel of God', meaning the whole family of the Messiah, Jew and Gentile alike (see Galatians 6:16; compare Galatians 3:26-29). A hardening has come upon Israel (see Romans 11:25), allowing time for the nations to come in; and that is how God is saving all Israel (see Romans 11:26).... All Israel? That means all the family of Abraham—and that includes believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews" (Romans 4:16).¹ Paul is saying that through these two people groups accepting Messiah Jesus as Lord and Saviour, God is saving "all Israel"—the faithful Israel of God, his mission people for the nations.

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine states: "In fulfilling his purpose for the world God works not only through individuals but through a chosen community. In Old Testament times the congregation of Israel was his chosen instrument. Today the Christian

fellowship has this calling and responsibility. The church is composed of the people whom God has called together in Jesus Christ, a fellowship which includes all disciples of Jesus irrespective of national and racial backgrounds (see Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 3:11). It is also called the ‘Israel of God’ (see Galatians 6:16), inheriting and continuing in the light of the Christian revelation the place and work once given to [national] Israel.”² (See 1 Peter 2:9-10 in relation to Exodus 19:6 and Hosea 2:23).

Paul explains to the church in Ephesus: “God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets. And this is God’s plan: both Gentiles and Jews who believe the good news share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the *promise* of blessings because they belong to Christ [Messiah] Jesus” (Ephesians 3:4-6 *New Living Translation*). In short, the New Testament reveals that all people who belong to Jesus Christ are true children of Abraham (see Galatians 3:29).

Summary

Knowing that a remnant of his fellow Jews have become converts to Jesus gives Paul hope that many more will eventually embrace salvation through Jesus—“*if* they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in” (Romans 11:23), and that is the way “all Israel”—Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus—will be saved. In Jesus, both “are being built together to become a dwelling place (temple) in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). This means that Gentile and Jewish believers are now God’s missionary people for the world (see Isaiah 49:6; Acts 15:1-30).

Optional Online Resource

“Why most Jews don’t follow Jesus” by Eitan Bar—<https://youtu.be/yynjGKwVTjg>

ENDNOTES

Preface

1. Allen Satterlee, *Notable Quotables*, quoting Robert Hoggard (Atlanta, Georgia, USA: The Salvation Army Supplies, 1985), p. 16. For Commissioner Hoggard's remarkable pioneering work in Korea and his service elsewhere, see <https://londonkoreanlinks.net/2008/11/23/salvation-army-in-korea/>.

Lesson 1: Rebellion in a Perfect Environment (Genesis)

1. Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Dovers Grove, IL, USA: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 113.
2. W.T. Purkiser, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, Vol. 1 (Kansas City, MO, USA: Beacon Hill Press, 1983), p. 35.
3. Brian Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* (New York: an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a Division of Penguin Random House, LLC, New York, 2017), p. 192-193.
4. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 2008), p. 125.
5. *The Quest Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 6.
6. "Outlines of Cadets' Bible Lessons," The William Booth Memorial Training College, revised with corrections by International Headquarters, 2006, p. 203.
7. *The Quest Study Bible*, p. 15.

Lesson 2: Mission Launch (Genesis)

1. *HCBS Study Bible*, Holman Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), p. 39.

Lesson 3: "Let My People Go" (Exodus)

1. Frederick Coutts, *The Kingdom of God* (London, UK: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1951), p. 18-19.
2. Paul House, p. 113. For the meaning of misusing God's name, House also references Walter Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 124.

Lesson 5: Guardians of the Covenant (Amos)

1. E. W. Heaton, *The Old Testament Prophets* (Edinburgh, UK: R. & R. Clark Ltd., 1958), p. 18.
2. *The Quest Study Bible*, p. 1256.
3. Christopher H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, Second Edition (Downers Grove, IL, USA: InterVarsity Press, 2014), p. 50.
4. *The Quest Study Bible*, p. 1267.

Lesson 6: "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go" (Hosea)

1. Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN, USA: Fortress Press, 2012), p. 85.
2. John Gowans, *The Song Book of The Salvation Army*, North American Edition (Alexandria, VA, USA: National Headquarters, 2015), p.147.

Lesson 7: True Israel Within Israel (Isaiah; Micah)

1. George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 72-73.
2. Ladd, p. 73-74.
3. *Barnes' Notes*, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/isaiah/11.htm>, notes on Isaiah 11:4.
4. *Barnes' Notes* on Isaiah 11:9.

Lesson 10: A Mysterious Servant (Isaiah; Daniel)

1. George, Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 155.
2. Paul House, p. 506.
3. Paul House, quoting Walter Kaiser, p. 50.

Lesson 11: God Restores the Remnant (Ezra; Nehemiah)

1. Rabbi Ken Spiro, "The Jews of Babylon History, Crash Course #43," <https://www.aish.com/jl/h/cc/48949881.html>, accessed April 8, 2020.
2. Paul House, p. 516.
3. John Timmer, *They Shall be My People* (2850 Kalamazoo, MI: The Board of Christian Publications, Christian Reformed Church, 1983), p. 73.
4. George Ladd, "The Kingdom of God," *Handbook of Biblical Prophecy*, eds. Carl E. Amerding and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 131-132.

Lesson 12: Between the Testaments

1. This is an adaptation (without direct quotations) of an article in the *Life Application Study Bible*, New Living Translation, Second Edition (Wheaton, IL, USA: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 1525-1528.

Lesson 13: Redefining Messiahship (Matthew)

1. Christopher Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, p. 40-41.
2. George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 40.
3. Ladd, p. 184.
4. Ladd, p. 184.
5. Ladd, p. 107-108.
6. Ladd, p. 108.
7. Ladd, p. 108.
8. Ladd, p. 109.
9. Frederick L. Coutts, *The Kingdom of God* (London, UK: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, Ltd., 1951), p. 6-7.
10. N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN, USA: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 191-192.
11. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 270.
12. D.A. Carson, p. 272.
13. Brian Zahnd, p.53.

Lesson 14: Judgment—Doomed City and Nation (Matthew; Luke)

1. Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 2010), p. 188.
2. *ESV Study Bible*, Side notes (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Bibles, 2008), p. 1865.
3. *HCSB Study Bible*, p. 1655.
4. *HCSB Study Bible*, p. 1655.
5. Several reasons are offered for Judas' betrayal. He kept the disciples' money bag and "used to help himself to what was put in it" (John 12:6). He was a thief. When he observed a woman in the home of Simon the leper pour on Jesus' head a perfume worth the equivalent of a year's wages, he and the disciples complained it could have been sold and the money given to the poor (see Matthew 26:8-9). Since the Jews perfumed corpses in those days, Jesus saw the woman's action as anticipating and preparing for his burial. Also, Israel's kings were anointed with oil. Since Jesus was the Messiah, anointing his head would indicate the beginning of his reign, "but to the surprise of Judas [and the disciples] his throne would be a cross and his diadem a crown of thorns." (Ibid., p. 1664)

Judas had heard Jesus frequently speaking about his death. He may have become confused and disheartened when he realized Jesus would not establish the long-awaited political kingdom people wanted. Perhaps he thought having Jesus arrested would prompt him to use his supernatural power to finally lead a revolt against Rome and set up the expected Davidic kingdom.

At the moment of betrayal during the Last Supper, John simply says, "Satan entered into [Judas]" (John 13:27). During his 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus had rejected Satan's temptation to use his supernatural power as God's Son to rule over all the kingdoms of the world (see Matthew 4:8-9)—which could only occur through military conquest. Jesus had decided that was not his mission. John's stating that "Satan entered Judas," may have been his way of saying that Judas wanted Jesus to liberate Israel by military force, thus disobeying the Father's will—the way of the cross.

6. Brian Zahnd, p. 84-85.

Lesson 15: Who Is Jesus?

1. Lt-Colonel Cyril Boyden, "Servant of the Lord," *The Officer*, September 1963, p. 531, 594.
2. Paul House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 506.
3. Paul House, quoting Gerhard Von Rad and Walter Kaiser, p. 505.
4. George Ladd, *New Testament Theology*, p. 149.
5. George Ladd, p. 149-150.
6. George Ladd, p. 150-151.
7. Dikkon Eberhart, "Crossing the Road to Christ," *Christianity Today*, December 2019, p. 71.

Lesson 16: Empowered to Bless the Nations (Acts)

1. *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2080.
2. Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), p. 209.
3. Frederick Coutts, *The Timeless Prophets* (London, UK: Lutherworth Press, Jarrold & Sons, 1944), p. 31-32.
4. *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2084.

Lesson 17: A Glorious Hope

1. Brian Peddle, *The Salvation Army Year Book 2020* (London, UK: Salvation Books, 2019), p. 4.
2. Charles H. Gabriel, *The Song Book of The Salvation Army*, North American Edition (Alexandria, VA, USA, 2015), Song 557, p. 166.
3. Allen Satterlee, *The Kingdom Revealed* (Indianapolis, ID, USA: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2018), p. 50.
4. Satterlee, p. 50, quoting E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Mount, A Working Philosophy of Life*

(Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1931), p. 82.

5. Allen Satterlee, p. 116.
6. Brian Peddle, *The Salvation Army Year Book*, 2020, p. 3-4.
7. Noel Richards and Gerald Coates, *The Song Book of The Salvation Army*, Song 220, p. 73.

Appendix 1: God's Kingdom (Already/Not Yet)

1. The New Testament restructuring of the Old Testament expectation of the Last Days. The diagram is adapted from the *ESV Study Bible*, p. 1804.

Appendix 2: "And So, All Israel Will Be Saved"

1. N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone, Part 2* (Louisville, KY, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 59-60.
2. *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (St. Albans, Herts., Great Britain: The Campfield Press), 1969, p. 70.

Have you ever tried to read the Bible straight through? You may have run out of gas by Leviticus or been bewildered by the prophetic writings of Daniel. Did you puzzle over the meaning of the Psalms or sigh with relief when you hit the Gospels? Could you disentangle the Apostle Paul's letters or decipher the mesmerizing imagery in Revelation? The good news is that the Bible is easier to understand when it is viewed as an overarching drama, from Genesis to Revelation. Max Sturge's *Road to Redemption: Tracing God's Rescue Plan Through His Mission People* is a primer that deftly guides readers through God's mission story of redeeming fallen humanity, first through Israel and then through Jesus and the birth of the church. In the pages of Scripture, we see our own brokenness and need for God's saving grace and experience the magnificent sweep of salvation history from creation to new creation.

There are occasions when you read something and you say, "I wish I had written that." *Road to Redemption* convicted me again of the truth of Scripture, convinced me even more regarding God's longing to rescue a broken world, and compelled me to do my part in that global mission.

—General Brian Peddle, International Leader of The Salvation Army

Road to Redemption is an excellent study guide, which meets an important need in the church. A wonderful piece of work.

—Dr. Yau Man Siew, Tyndale Seminary, Toronto



Major Max Sturge served for 41 years as a passionate teacher, preacher and officer in The Salvation Army, including 27 years in corps ministry and six years teaching biblical studies and theology at the College for Officer Training in St. John's, N.L. His first book, *Miraculous Healing* (2015), explored the perplexing questions of suffering and God's intervention in our world. Through *Road to Redemption*, Max aims to further enhance people's knowledge and appreciation of the Bible and its Author. Max and his wife, Doreen, delight in their three children and their families, including six grandchildren. The Sturges live in Guelph, Ontario, where they enjoy walking its many trails.

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Religion / Christianity