

Table of Contents

1	Tell Me About God	3
2	God's Eternal Purpose.....	5
3	The Creation	7
4	The Terrible Fall.....	9
5	The Flood	11
6	The Gospel is Announced!	13
7	The Child of Promise.....	15
8	How to Build a Nation.....	17
9	The Rise of Their Deliverer.....	19
10	God Declares His Power	21
11	Meeting Their God	23
12	Training God's People to be His Treasure	25
13	The Last Days of Moses	27
14	Entering the Promised Land	29
15	Taking Over the Promised Land	31
16	The Cycle of Judges	33
17	A Worthy Woman	35
18	Pouring Out Her Soul	37
19	Israel's Rejection of God	39
20	Israel's First Earthly King	41
21	CHOICES!	43
22	Why Was God With David?.....	45
23	The King After God's Own Heart	47
24	Turning a Nation Back to God	49
25	Solomon Builds the Temple	51
26	Solomon's Seeds of Destruction	53
27	The Great Divide	55
28	The Showdown Between God and Baal	57
29	Getting Rid of Baal Worship	59
30	The End of Northern Israel	61
31	The Ups and Downs in Judah	63
32	The Boy Rulers	65
33	The Time When the Land Vomited.....	67
34	Those Left Behind.....	69
35	Life in Babylon	71
36	Coming Home!	73
37	The Jewish Queen of Persia	75
38	Rebuilding the Wall	77
39	The Nature of God and Man	79
40	The Birth of Our Savior	81
41	Beginning Christ's Ministry	83
42	The Reason Jesus Came to Earth	85

43	The Great Divide	87
44	The Last Night with His Apostles	89
45	How the Created Killed their Creator	91
46	HOPE in the Resurrection	93
47	The Promised Helper	95
48	An Unlikely Instrument of God	97
49	Taking the Gospel Further	99
50	The Gospel Spreads to Asia and Italy	101
51	The Importance of Being in Christ	103
52	The End of Time	105

Copyright © 2018 by Carolyn King Bloodworth

Scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible:

The ESV Global Study Bible®, ESV® Bible
 Copyright © 2012 by Crossway.
 All rights reserved.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®)
 Copyright © 2001 by Crossway,
 a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.
 All rights reserved.

ESV Text Edition: 2011

Lesson 1

Tell Me About God

We need to read the Bible to understand God's nature.

The objective for this year's study is to help you, as a teacher, along with your students, to get to know Who God is, and to see God's purpose woven throughout the Bible, so that you can know His love and to understand more of His holiness.

Scriptures to study and read: Psalm 24:1; 50: 10,11; 97:9; 139:1-16; 145:8; 147:4-9; Isaiah 55:8,9; Haggai 2:8; Matthew 10:29,30

Lesson:

Have you ever sat and just wondered about God? What is He like? Are there things that He loves? Are there things He hates? Does He even know what is going on on the earth below...or does He even care?

There are 2 ways to find out more about God:

1) One way is to study and look at what God created in **nature** as a whole. We can find His love everywhere: in the food we enjoy, the beautiful things He has created us that bring us happiness, all the resources He has put above the earth and below the ground so that we can create/combine/make things. He has given mankind many things to explore, He planted a natural pharmacy that helps us heal. He created many ways to protect us and His creatures. His love FILLS the earth—if you look for it!

But there are also hard things on the earth: death, sickness, hatred, poverty....the list can go on. IF we only look to understand God through nature, then we will miss out on truly understanding more about Him. We may look at the hard things in life and think that God is not loving. This is far from the truth—and we will hope to show you in a few lessons why some of these tough things happen on the earth. It is so important to truly explore this next way to find out about God—so that we will know the truth and not be deceived!

2) By far, the BEST way to find out about God is through His book—the **BIBLE**! God has scattered all over His book little clues about Him so that we can see what He is like, what pleases Him, what He is aware of and what He knows and owns. There are things that happen in the Old Testament and we might wonder why those things occurred, and many, many times, He reveals WHY He allowed certain things to take place. The more we get into His Word, the more we see just how wonderful our loving God is, and the more we will understand just a little bit more of what God is like!

If we never open our Bibles and read, then we will never really know for sure what God is like. And then, we may be listening to people who do not even believe in God, or who hate God, to tell us about His nature. So, dig into God's Word, and seek Him throughout the pages of His Word as He declares Himself through this inspired book!

GOD IS ABOVE ALL. Psalms 97:9; 145:8; Isaiah 55:8,9

We have as our God the God who is above all others. There is NO ONE, NO god, NOTHING greater than God! His thoughts and ways are higher than our thoughts. He is a God so full of love and compassion and mercy! In fact, the words that describe Him that are repeatedly found in Scripture is that God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Look for His love around you—hopefully the hatefulness of man will not overwhelm the love of God so that you can clearly see His love! God’s love fills the earth. Pray for God to open your eyes to His love!

GOD OWNS THE WORLD AND EVERYTHING IN IT. Psalms 24:1, 50:10,11; Haggai 2:8; Matthew 10:29

God owns the world, and everything in it is really HIS—we are just stewards (managers) of it the short time that we live on this earth. He owns the cattle, beasts, the gold, the silver—EVERYTHING is God’s! He knows what is going on in the earth—nothing escapes His notice. He is aware when a lowly sparrow dies. He knows what is moving in the field. He has even counted all the stars and has named each one. God did not set the world in motion and then abandon it. Daily He is watching, and sees all that is happening on the earth and He knows, and He cares.

GOD KNOWS ALL ABOUT ME. Psalms 139:1-6, Matthew 10:30

God knows all about me. He knows what I will say before I say it. He watches what I do, and sees where I go. He knows when I lie down and when I get up. He counts all of my hairs. He even knew me when I was in my mother’s womb. This goes for me...for my friends...my family...those in the village/cities...in the marketplace....for all people everywhere!

Opening and reading the inspired Word of God teaches us much about GOD. He is full of mercy and grace, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God knows all. He sees all. God owns all. He is a God of great love! We are so blessed to have as our God, a God so full of love!

+++++

APPLY IT: Sit in nature and look around you—look at the plants, the bugs, listen to the birds, and watch the animals. God made all of this! Name some foods you enjoy eating. What things in nature puts a smile on your face? Where do you like to go to explore? What resources does God provide for your community/nation to use? What plants in nature are used to help heal you? How does God provide protection for you and also for the animals (camouflage, mighty teeth, quickness, size, powerful tail, hard shell...etc.)?

Look at the people around you. God has a hair count on all of us. He knows what we are all thinking. He watches what we do. Go outside at night and look up. Can you count the stars? God not only has a star count, but has named each one!

Begin seeking God—in **nature**, but spend the most time seeking God in **His Word**. God is a LOVING God!

Lesson 2

God's Eternal Purpose

God made a plan so that we could be holy.

Review: God knows all about us all, and watches everyone. He owns the world and is well aware of what is going on in all of His creation. He is gracious and merciful, filled with steadfast love and slow to anger. There is nothing, and no one, higher or stronger or wiser than God. God is above ALL.

Scriptures to study: God's purpose—Ephesians 1:1-14, Revelation 21:1-4, Isaiah 46:9-10

God's holiness—Isaiah 6:1-3, Psalms 11:4, 77:13, 89:5, 111:9

Also: 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4

Definitions: HOLY—Set apart for a divine purpose, sinless, free from evil

REDEMPTION—To buy back, "Deliverance by payment of a price" --Nelson's Bible Dictionary

GRACE—unmerited favor, "Favor or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what that same person deserves." -- Nelson's Bible Dictionary

Lesson:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" This is how Isaiah describes God in Isaiah 6:3. God is absolutely holy. Not one sin...ever! God is set apart in heaven...His way is holy, His name is holy, His temple is holy and He is in the assembly of the holy ones. Just imagine what that means: God has not ever sinned, nor will He. He is perfect and holy. He has never lied, He has never coveted, He has never stolen anything. And, He lives in a place of perfection and holiness. No sin is found anywhere up in heaven. God is holy. His way and temple and name are holy, and holy are those who surround Him.

God cannot change His nature. Holy is what He is and always will be, forever and ever.

Now look at this verse:

Hebrews 12:14 **"Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."**

Did you catch what it will take to see the Lord? HOLINESS! Not one sin!

Since God's nature is holy, and it takes holiness to see God, God is going to provide for mankind a way so that we can be holy. (We will learn more about that as we go along.) Before God created the world, He had a plan in mind.... a plan where those in Christ would be holy and blameless. God knew that mankind would need help to be holy, because just one sin makes us unholy. God also knew His nature—that He is holy and that it takes holiness to see Him. And so slowly, throughout the pages of the Old Testament, you begin to see God's plan as it unfolds leading mankind to His beloved Son. It will be in His Son that He will have available EVERY spiritual blessing with which to bless mankind.

Can you imagine a more loving God? He knows His nature. He knows mankind will fall, and so before He created the world, He had a plan in place where mankind could be redeemed (bought back) and once again have a chance to be holy and blameless and have access to every spiritual blessing! Why do you

think He planned this? He tells us over and over—God wants ALL men to be saved.... He does not want ANYONE to be lost.

Look at the blessings God has for those in Christ: Ephesians 1

- Every spiritual blessing v. 3
- Holy and blameless v. 4
- Adoption as sons v. 5
- Grace v. 6
- Redemption through His blood v. 7
- Forgiveness of our trespasses (sins) v. 7
- An inheritance v. 11
- Sealed with the promised Holy Spirit v. 13

Can you imagine any greater blessings than those that are found in Christ? God had this plan before the foundations of the world. A plan to where mankind would have a chance to live with a Holy, Holy, Holy God. God wants all men to be saved, He does not want anyone to be lost. And so, He planned for incredible blessings to be found in His Son! But, we will learn in time, that those blessings will only be given to those who are obedient.

As we go throughout the Old Testament, we will see God's plan slowly unfold within the pages of God's Inspired Word, for it will take centuries for His plan to be revealed. God is declaring the end from the beginning. (Isaiah 46:10)

+++++

[Really work on helping the children to understand the definitions, for these words will be used all throughout the study. Changing the meaning of definitions is one ploy Satan uses throughout the ages. A constant review of these definitions will be helpful in their study—and yours-- of God and His Eternal Purpose.]

Lesson 3

The Creation

God created the whole world in just six days!

Review: Now we can add a few more things of what we have learned about God: God is above all. God knows all. He owns everything. God is gracious, merciful, full of love and slow to anger. God is holy, and is surrounded by holiness and it takes holiness to see Him. Before God even created the world, He had a plan for those in Christ to be HOLY and BLAMELESS too, because God wants all men (mankind) to be saved.

Scriptures to Study: Genesis 1, 2; Psalms 119:64; John 1

Facts to know: Who is present at the Creation? God (Gen. 1:1), Jesus (John 1:2), God's Spirit (Gen. 1:2)

Lesson:

In just thirty-one verses, God put in very simple terms, what He created in six days. But what He did on each day was far from simple—each day was filled with power, and wisdom and knowledge. He knew what things mankind would need and buried all sorts of resources just waiting to be discovered. And even thousands of years after Creation, mankind is still discovering and learning new things about God's world.

[Read the Creation account to the children:]

Day 1: Genesis 1:1-5	God made light and dark
Day 2: Genesis 1:6-8	God made the sky
Day 3: Genesis 1:9-13	God made earth/seas God made trees/plants/vegetation with seeds
Day 4: Genesis 1:14-19	God made the sun/moon/stars
Day 5: Genesis 1:20-23	God made swarms of living creatures in the waters God made every winged bird
Day 6: Genesis 1:24-31	God made the beasts of the earth, livestock, every creeping thing God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."
Genesis 2:18-25	God made the woman God gave man dominion (sovereignty or control) over fish, birds, livestock creeping things.
Day 7: Genesis 2:1-3	God rested.

Can you imagine a world so fresh and new and clean? A place with no sin, no death, no decay, no hatred...it must have been such a beautiful place. God put the man in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And then the man named the birds and livestock and beasts. When man found himself no helper, God put the man into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh. God took the man's rib and from it fashioned a woman and brought her to the man. And they became one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

This is the account of how the world began, Who created it, how many days it took, what was created on each day and in what order. This is the account of the creation inspired by the One who created it all. And to think that God just SPOKE and the world was created with such variety, beauty, and with much wisdom. What an AMAZING Creator we have!

+++++

Application: Have the students name what God created on each day. Then look around in your country and see how many trees/grasses/flowers you can name in your country? How about birds? Fish? Bugs? Livestock? Beasts of the earth? Reptiles?

Lesson 4

The Terrible Fall

Adam and Eve had a choice to make about obeying.

Review: God spoke this beautiful world into existence in 6 days. He owns this world, He filled this world with His love, He watches all that goes on within it—even a sparrow does not fall without God knowing. God is holy—not one sin, and it takes holiness to be able to see Him. Before He created the world, God had a plan in place that man could be holy and blameless in Christ. It is in today's lesson that we realize why this plan is so important.

Scriptures: Genesis 2:15-17, 3; Isaiah 59:1,2; Romans 6:23; Revelation 12:9

Lesson: Think about how nature is obedient to God: [show some seeds that are available to you] If you plant pumpkin [or change to seeds your children are familiar with] seeds, then what will grow? We do not plant pumpkin seeds and expect to grow a tree! Seeds are obedient to God. The sun/moon/stars are obedient too. Scientists know exactly when the sun will rise and set all over the world, because the sun/moon/stars obey God. [Drop a heavy object from your hand.] When I drop something from my hand, it will fall down to the ground because of gravity. We do not have to wonder if it will go flying off into the sky or fall to the ground because gravity is obedient to the One who made it.

Nature obeys God. And God is very used to being obeyed.

Now with that thought in mind, let's go back to the creation account: when God made mankind, He backed off of His power. God allowed mankind the freedom to choose for themselves if they would be obedient to God, or not. God did not FORCE mankind to obey Him. God did not CREATE mankind so that they had no choice but to obey (like nature). Instead, God let mankind CHOOSE to be obedient or not and then holds all of mankind accountable for their own choices. This was a very risky gift. Because people can choose to obey God, but they can also choose to disobey God.

Read Genesis 2:15-17.

This was their test of obedience. From the verses just read in Genesis, what trees could the man and woman eat from? Every tree. Which tree had a consequence if they ate from it? The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What would happen if they ate from it? They would die.

Think about this command: As long as they did not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they would have life. **IF** they chose to eat of this tree, then they would choose death. God was not forcing them to obey Him. God did not create them so that they would never choose anything but obedience—for that would give them no choice at all. Instead, when God created man, He set them free and allowed them to choose! He let them choose for themselves LIFE or DEATH. God was not being mean or harsh—it was a simple command. They could eat from all the other trees and have life. But LIFE or DEATH was going to be a choice for them and it would depend on their choice to OBEY GOD or DISOBEY GOD.

In chapter 3, the serpent (Satan-Rev. 12:9) was more crafty than any other beast of the field and he went to the woman and said, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

Let's stop right here and think about what the serpent was asking. Did God really say this? Look again at what God commanded in Genesis 2:16,17. Now read Genesis 3:2-4.

Let's stop again. God said you would surely die. (2:17). The serpent (Satan) said you will NOT surely die. So, who was right? The Holy One? The One Who has such love that He wants no one to perish? The One who can never lie? Or was it the one who will become known as the deceiver, the father of lies, the one who loves to kill, steal and destroy?

We need to recognize who the enemy is—our enemy is NOT God, it is Satan. God loves mankind. He gave mankind freedom—a gift that will cost Him dearly. He came up with a plan before the foundation of the world to give us a chance after mankind sinned. It is our enemy who wants us to sin. For when we sin, we are no longer holy!

Sin separates us from God. The wages of sin is death. Satan is always trying to destroy mankind. [Is. 59:1,2; Romans 6:23]

Read Genesis 3:5-13.

The woman took of the fruit and ate, and then shared it with her husband who ate as well. With just a few moments of pleasure, their whole world was about to be changed forever. They realized they were naked. They tried to make clothing out of fig leaves. When they heard God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from God.

Read Genesis 3:14-19

God had consequences for the serpent, for the woman, and for the man. And right in the middle of the consequences, God gave them a glimmer of hope: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." This bruising of Satan's head would be a crushing blow. This was a promise of Jesus who would, in time, destroy Satan's work.

God made garments of skin to clothe Adam and Eve. So that they would not be able to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil AND ALSO eat from the Tree of Life and live forever. God drove them from the garden to work the ground and He placed cherubim and a flaming sword that guarded the way to the Tree of Life.

Death was now in the world. And the world would never be the same again.

+++++

Think about this: God made garments of skin. This means some animal had to die to clothe Adam and Eve. In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus is called the Lamb of God. He also was sacrificed to take away the sins of the world. People baptized into Christ are "clothed with Christ." Maybe God was giving a preview of what was to come in the future. God would sacrifice His perfect Lamb to clothe mankind with His holiness. Again—we have a loving God who will go to great lengths to give us freedom and to give us a chance to live with Him!

Think also about how life on earth changed with that first sin: death, pain in childbirth, husband will rule over the wife, the ground was cursed and would have thorns and thistles, have to work hard for your bread, man would return to dust. Do you think getting a taste of that fruit was a good choice?

Enmity means hostility. Cherubim are a type of angel. Help your students understand these terms.

Lesson 5

The Flood

God destroyed all but Noah's family because sin kept growing.

Review: God gave to man an incredible gift—the gift of choice. We get to choose for ourselves if we will obey God—or if we will not. It's a gift with great responsibilities for God will hold each one accountable for the way we use this gift. We saw in the last lesson the devastating effect of sin—it separates our holy God from unholy man, AND it causes death—both physically and spiritually. Once men quit walking with God, we will see in today's lesson just how far away from God they go. If men drift further away from God and this behavior is never stopped, then sin and death continue to grow and infect families, cities, nations, and even the whole world. Today's lesson shows how God rescues one righteous man and his family while punishing the evil in the world.

Scriptures: Genesis 6-9, 1 Peter 3:18-22

Lesson:

About 1600 years has passed since Genesis 1. Years have come and gone. The population grew, but then so did sin. People learned all kinds of skills, and yet evil continued to grow and crept into all of society and all of the world. And God saw how great man's wickedness was and He regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart. He decided to blot out man whom He created, along with the animals, creeping things and birds of the heavens, for He was sorry He had made them.

But there was one man who found favor in God's eyes: Noah.

Noah was righteous (just) and blameless in his generation. He had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. God told Noah of His plans to destroy all flesh from the earth. Noah was to make an ark of gopher wood, cover it with pitch inside and out. It was to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high, with three decks. God was establishing His covenant with Noah, his sons, Noah's wife and his sons' wives. Noah was to bring two of every sort of living thing into the ark (a male and a female) of the birds, animals and creeping things. He was also to take with them every sort of food that was eaten and store it up to be as food for them.

And Noah did all that God commanded.

God told Noah to go into the ark with seven pairs of all clean animals and birds. For in seven days, God was going to send the rain for forty days and forty nights.

And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him.

Noah was six hundred years old. He and his family went into the ark to escape the flood waters. And the animals went into the ark, a male and his mate. They went into the ark with Noah, as God commanded Noah, and after seven days, the waters of the flood came upon the earth. And the Lord shut them in.

"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights." "The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed

and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.” (from Genesis 7)

God made a wind to blow over the earth and the waters subsided, and gradually, the waters receded from the earth. After one hundred fifty days, in the seventh month, seventeenth day, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. On the tenth month, the first day, the tops of the mountains were seen.

At the end of forty days, Noah sent forth a raven from the window. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up. Then he sent forth a dove to see if the waters had subsided, but the dove found no place to set her foot and she returned to the ark. Noah waited a week, and sent forth the dove again. This time the dove brought back a freshly plucked olive leaf. Noah knew the waters were subsiding. He waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

In the six hundred and first year, the first month, on the first day, the waters were dried from off the earth. Noah removed the covering of the ark and saw that the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, the twenty-seventh day, the earth had dried out. That day, Noah and his family along with all the animals and their families went out of the ark.

Noah built an altar to the Lord, took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said He would never again curse the ground because of man, for the intentions of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither would He strike down every living creature as He had done.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” God gave them every moving thing that lives to be food for them, along with the green plants, but they were not to eat the meat with its blood.

And God established His covenant with him and his offspring and with every living creature, that He would never again destroy the earth by flood. And God placed a rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant between God and the earth. The rainbow still represents the sign of the covenant with God and all flesh on the earth.

+++++

Talk to the children about WHY God destroyed the earth—it was because of so many EVIL choices by mankind. Evil had overwhelmed the earth. If God had not rescued Noah, what hope of redemption would there have been?

Learn these lessons:

God has given mankind the freedom to choose. Obeying His Word helps us to make good choices.

Sin/evil will creep in and grow in families/cities/countries. Salvation is found in being obedient to God. Sin grieves God. Walking with God finds favor with God.

Just as salvation was found in the ark, God tells us in the New Testament that baptism also saves you! (1 Peter 3:18-22) Salvation comes through obedience. Obedience is a choice. Are you choosing obedience?

Lesson 6

The Gospel is Announced

God plans to bless all nations through Abraham.

Review: About 1600 years passed from the creation to the flood—plenty of time to see that mankind NEEDED (and still needs) divine help. Left to themselves, mankind destroys itself. God rescued righteous Noah from all the evil and corruption and started with a righteous man and his family. It was after this time that God announced the gospel (the good news)! God's plan, that He had before the Creation (involving His Son), would be set in motion with a man of great faith—Abram.

Scripture: Abraham's story is found in Genesis 11:27-15. Gospel announced: Galatians 3:8,9
Abraham's faith was completed by his works, he is called a friend of God. James 2:21-26

Definition: FAITH—Assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is active along with works and completed by works. (Hebrews 11:1, James 2:22)

COVENANT—"An agreement between two groups that involves promises on the part of each to the other." --Nelson's Bible Dictionary

Lesson:

Let me introduce you to a man of great faith—his name was Abram. Abram had 2 brothers: Nahor and Haran. Haran had a son named Lot and Haran died in Ur. Abram had a half-sister who was also his wife. Her name was Sarai, and she was not able to have children. Abram's father's name was Terah. Terah and his family lived in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Terah, Abram, Sarai and Lot moved from Ur to go into the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there, and that was also where Terah died.

Now the Lord said to Abram to leave the land of his father's and go to a land that He would show him.

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:2,3 [Galatians 3:8 tells us that this is the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham.]

Abram was 75 at the time. His wife, Sarai, was barren. Obediently, Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, his belongings and all the people he had acquired and came to the land of Canaan. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, **"To your offspring I will give this land."** (Genesis 12: 7).

Time passed and Abram grew very rich in livestock, silver and gold. Abram called on the name of the Lord. His possessions and Lot's possessions grew so much that the land couldn't support them living together—their herdsmen began quarreling. Abram did not want strife between them and let Lot choose where to go. So, Lot chose the Jordan Valley where it was well watered, in the cities of the valley, and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Abram settled in the land of Canaan.

God told Abram to look all around him, for He would give this land to his offspring forever. **“I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.”** (Genesis 13:16)

In chapter 15:1, the Lord appeared to Abram in a vision: **“Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”** Abram was still childless and so he thought his heir would be Eliezer, a member of his household. God brought him outside and said, **“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.”** Then he said to him, **“So shall your offspring be.”** (Genesis 15:5)

And Abram believed the LORD, and He counted it to Abram as righteousness.

Abram wondered how he was to know he would possess this land. So God had him bring a 3-year old heifer, a 3 year-old female goat, a 3 year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. Abram cut the animals in half and laid each half against the other. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram, and a dreadful and great darkness fell on him. Then the Lord said to Abram:

“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” Genesis 15:13-17

“When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. And on that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. “ Genesis 15:17,18a

This was the beginning of the nation that God would build. It began with a great man of faith—a man who was fully convinced that God was able to do what He promised. (Romans 4:18-22) We see in this lesson many great promises God made to Abram. God planned to bless all the nations through this faithful man and his family.

+++++

Look at the promises God made to Abraham, for these promises will be fulfilled throughout the rest of the Bible:

- In Abram, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (Gospel message)
- Abram’s offspring would be like the dust of the earth and the stars in the sky.
- God was Abram’s shield.
- Abram’s offspring would inherit the land.
 1. 400 years they would live plus be enslaved in a foreign land.
 2. God would punish the nation they served.
 3. They would come out with great possessions.
 4. They would come back in the 4th generation.
- Abram would die at a ripe old age.

Note: if the children that are in your class are young, you may want to just teach them those 1st few promises that are in bold print. As they get older, though, the last promise found in Genesis 15:13-17 is just a nutshell (or summary) of what will happen in Exodus through Joshua.

Lesson 7

The Child of Promise

Abraham received a promise but also a test of faith.

Review: The gospel was announced to Abram—in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God promised to Abram and his offspring the land of Canaan. And yet, Abram was approaching one hundred years old, and still he and Sarai had not had a child. Abram continued to believe God and trust in His Word, even though Abram was not seeing the promises fulfilled.

Scriptures: Genesis 17-22; 2 Peter 2:4-10; Jude 7; Hebrews 11:8-19; James 2:21-23

Lesson:

Abram was ninety-nine years old, and the LORD appeared to Abram and said, **“I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”** (Genesis 17:1,2) Abram fell on his face. God changed his name to Abraham for God was making him the father of a multitude of nations, and kings would come from him. And God established His covenant with Abraham and his offspring—**to be God to him and to his offspring**, and to also give their offspring the land of Canaan. For Abraham’s part of the covenant, he was to be circumcised along with all the males born in his family. This was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.

God changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, and promised to give Abraham a son by her. God would bless her, and she would become nations, and kings would come from her. Abraham fell on his face and laughed and thought to himself about a baby being born to a hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman. And God would establish his everlasting covenant with Isaac about this time next year.

When God went up from Abraham, Abraham quickly obeyed his part of the covenant. Abraham took every male of his household that day and circumcised them all. Abraham was ninety-nine when he did this. This circumcision showed they were people of the covenant and that God was their God.

One day, Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent when he saw three men approaching. Abraham ran to meet them, bowed down to them, brought water for their feet, and quickly had his wife and servants make them a meal. They asked where his wife Sarah was, and Abraham told them she was in the tent.

The Lord then told him that Sarah would have a son about this time next year. Sarah was listening at the tent door, and Sarah laughed to herself, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” (Genesis 18:12)

Before the men left, they looked toward Sodom and Abraham went with them. The Lord said to Abraham that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was great and their sin was very grave and He was going to see whether they had done according to the outcry. Even though Abram knew he was but dust and ashes, Abraham interceded for the righteous in Sodom—would God indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? If the Lord found only ten righteous people He would spare the city. But, when the angels went there, they found the city so corrupt that God sent them to destroy it. The next morning, the angels seized Abraham’s nephew Lot, Lot’s wife, and then two daughters by the hand and brought them out of the city. The Lord was merciful to Abraham’s nephew Lot by bringing him and his family out of the city. They were not to look back or stop, but escape to the hills; lest they, too, be swept away. Disobediently, Lot’s wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire

from the Lord and overthrew them. These cities indulged in sexual immorality and pursued homosexuality and serve as an example of the punishment of eternal fire. (Jude 7)

Later, the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age. Abraham called this son Isaac, and circumcised him when he was 8 days old. Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born!

As Isaac grew, God tested Abraham, and told him to take his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains. Obediently, Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his servants and his son Isaac, and wood for the sacrifice. On the third day, Abraham saw the place he was to go from afar, and left the young men with the donkey, so that Abraham and Isaac could go over and worship and return.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, then took the fire and the knife, and went together. Isaac wondered where the lamb was for the burnt offering. "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering," Abraham said. When they came to the place God told him, Abraham built the altar, laid the wood in order, bound Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham reached out his hand to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him and said, "Abraham, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Abraham looked and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. He took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide."

The Angel said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:16-18) And Abraham returned to his young men.

God's covenant with this righteous man blesses us even today, for this is the family line through which God would send His Son into the world. Notice how quickly Abraham obeys God—even when the command is incredibly tough. Abraham's works (obedience) completed his faith [James 2:21-23], and this is why he stands out as such a great example of a man of faith even today.

+++++

If the children are young, you may just want to tell the lesson of Abram's and Sarai's name change and the promise of the son, and Isaac's birth.

As you get to older children, add the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, for they need to see how God feels about sexual sins, homosexuality, and the punishment God used to punish them.

Also, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac might be better for older children as well. It is interesting to note that God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son—for this was just a test-- but God allowed the sacrificing of His own Son so that mankind could be saved. Oh, the love of our wonderful God.

Lesson 8

How to Build a Nation

Abraham's family grew and grew through his grandson's twelve sons.

Review: Abraham was a man of great faith. God would tell him to do something, and he would act in obedience quickly. We are told in the New Testament that his works completed his faith. God made several promises to him: that God would build him into a nation, that in him all the nations would be blessed, and that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. So, how do you build one man into a nation? It is through children, and many years and many generations! It was through the promised son, Isaac, that the promised nation would come. Let's see how Abraham's family grew:

Scriptures: Genesis 24-50

Sarah finally had a son at the age of 90, and named him Isaac.

When Isaac grew up, Abraham had his servant find a wife among his people for Isaac, and he brought back Rebekah. It was a beautiful story of God's providence. It took a long time, but Rebekah finally was able to have children, and she had twin boys: Esau, the oldest, (who was red and hairy) and Jacob, the youngest, (who was holding onto Esau's heel as he was born). Esau was a skillful hunter. Jacob was quiet and lived in tents. It would be through Jacob that all of Abraham's blessings would come.

Jacob received these blessings through trickery and deceit. Because of Jacob's schemes, Esau hated Jacob and planned to kill him once Isaac had died. Rebekah, upon hearing of Esau's plans, sent Jacob to her family to get a wife. Jacob went off to Paddan-aram, the land of her family, and found Rebekah's brother, Laban, and worked for him so that he could marry Laban's daughter, Rachel. Through deceit, Laban tricked Jacob and gave him Leah instead! Then a week later, Jacob was allowed to marry Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, but Leah could have children, and Rachel could not. So the sisters gave their maid-servants to Jacob so that they could bear children for them. It was through this rivalry that Jacob's family grew. Get to know the names of these twelve sons, for they will be important in the rest of the Old Testament:

LEAH

Reuben

Simeon

Levi

Judah

Issachar

Zebulun

Dinah (daughter)

Zilpah

(Leah's servant)

Gad

Asher

RACHEL

Joseph

Benjamin

Bilhah

(Rachel's servant)

Dan

Naphtali

After 20 years, Jacob took his wives, children, flocks and all his possessions and moved back to Canaan. Jacob heard that Esau was coming to meet him. Jacob was afraid that Esau would attack his family and sent many gifts ahead of his wives and children to give to Esau. When the brothers met each other, Jacob bowed down to Esau, Esau ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, kissed him and they wept.

Out of all of Jacob's children, his favorite son was Joseph—the son of his favorite wife, Rachel. Joseph was given a coat of many colors from his father. This caused his brothers to hate him. Joseph also had dreams about his sheaf (a bundle of plants like wheat) and his brothers' sheaves and how they bowed down to his sheaf. He also dreamed about the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept this dream in mind.

Once when the brothers were pasturing their flocks away from where they lived, Jacob (also called Israel) sent Joseph to check on them. When the brothers saw Joseph coming, they planned to kill him, but instead wound up selling him to Ishmaelite (Midianite) traders. They took his coat, dipped it in blood and showed it to their father when they got home. Jacob thought a wild animal had killed Joseph, and mourned for him for many days.

The Ishmaelites sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh in Egypt. God was with Joseph and he became successful. But, because of a lie told by Potiphar's wife, Joseph wound up in prison. While he was in prison, the Lord was still with Joseph, and the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of the prisoners. Whatever Joseph did, the Lord made it succeed.

Two of Pharaoh's officials were also thrown into prison. They both had dreams; Joseph interpreted both dreams, and they both came true, just as Joseph had said. He asked the official that was restored to Pharaoh to remember him—but he did not. Two years later, Pharaoh had two dreams. He tried to get his magicians and wise men to interpret his dreams, but they could not. It was then that the official remembered Joseph. They brought Joseph out of the pit, let him shave, and change his clothes and went before Pharaoh, and Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph told him there was coming seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh put Joseph second in command of all the land of Egypt, gave him a signet ring, fine garments, gold chains and a wife.

Egypt had 7 years of plenty. Joseph kept back one/fifth of the crops, and Egypt had great stores of grain in the cities. The years of famine followed. It was during these years of famine that Joseph's brothers came to Joseph and bowed down to him (they did not recognize him). It took several trips before Joseph revealed himself to them. Joseph sent his brothers home with wagons for them to go home, gather their father Jacob (Israel) and all their belongings and move to Egypt.

When Israel and Joseph met, they wept for a long time. Joseph provided for all of his family during the time of famine. Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years. He counted Joseph's two children—Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own children—thus giving Joseph a double portion. He blessed Judah (his fourth-born son) with the Messianic promise (the one through whom God would bless the whole world). Jacob died and Joseph and his sons buried him back in the land of Canaan.

Jacob's family is the family through which God would bless the world. And it is this family that grew into the nation of Israel that we read about all throughout the Old Testament. We will see the good choices and the bad choices of this family and how God works with them and their choices throughout the ages. The story of the famine, and Joseph rising to power, is why the whole family came together as a group to the land of Egypt.

++++
Help the children understand how Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are related.

Have them memorize the twelve sons of Jacob, but instead of Joseph, have them memorize Ephraim and Manasseh (since he got the double portion). These will be the leaders for the nation of Israel. This is a lot of information for one class...for younger children, you may want to just study about how Jacob's family grew or about how they got into Egypt.

Lesson 9

The Rise of Their Deliverer

Moses was chosen to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

Review—God was building a nation through a righteous, faithful father—Abraham. Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, and Jacob had twelve sons. Jacob and his family moved to Egypt because of a severe famine. Since Joseph (Jacob’s favorite son) was second-in-command in Egypt, the whole family moved where there was a supply of food. In time, all of Jacob’s family died and a new king came into power. This was when Jacob’s family became enslaved in Egypt.

Scriptures: Exodus 1-6, Numbers 26:59; Acts 3:22, 7:17-37; Hebrews 11:23-26
Exodus through Joshua are the books that will cover the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16....watch to see how God’s story unfolds!

Lesson: Joseph died. A new king came into power who did not know Joseph. This king looked at the people of Israel, realized they were too numerous and mighty and was afraid that if war would come up, the Israelites would fight against the Egyptians and would escape. So, the Egyptians afflicted (tormented) the Israelites with heavy burdens and oppressed (overburdened) them. But the Israelites kept multiplying. This caused the Egyptians to become ruthless with them and made their lives bitter with hard service.

The king commanded the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill the baby boys. But the midwives disobeyed the king because they feared God. Since they feared God, God blessed them with families of their own. Then the king gave the command to all to cast every Israelite baby boy into the Nile river.

Now Jochebed was married to Amram, from the tribe of Levi. She had a son. The New Testament says that this son was beautiful in God’s sight and to his parents. The baby was 3 months old and Jochebed couldn’t hide him anymore. So, she made a basket, waterproofed it with tar and pitch and put the baby in it and placed the basket among the reeds while his sister, Miriam, watched from a distance.

Pharaoh’s daughter came to bathe in the river, saw the baby and took pity on him. Miriam offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. Pharaoh’s daughter agreed, and paid Jochebed to nurse her own baby. When he got older, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter to become her son, and she named him Moses, because she drew him out of the water.

Moses grew up and was raised as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. When he was forty, he went out to see his people (the Israelites) and saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite. Moses looked around, killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Pharaoh heard about it and sought to kill Moses. So Moses fled to the land of Midian where he lived and married Zipporah and had two sons—Gershom and Eliezer.

At age eighty, as Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. He saw a burning bush, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses went to go look at it. God called to him from the bush and told him to take off his sandals for he was standing on holy ground. God had seen the affliction of His people; He heard their cry, He knew their sufferings and He was coming to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them to the land flowing with milk and honey.

God was sending Moses to bring His people out of Egypt and gave Moses signs so that the people would believe. Here were the signs:

- Throwing down his staff to become a snake
- Putting his hand in his cloak and it became leprous
- Pouring water from the Nile onto dry ground and it turned into blood

Moses objected that he was not eloquent, and was slow of speech and wanted God to send someone else. God was angry at Moses. God knew Moses' brother, Aaron, could speak well. God would teach them both what to do. Aaron would speak to the people and be Moses' mouth and Moses would be as God to Aaron (Exodus 4:16). Moses was to take the staff with him so that he could do the signs God had given him.

Moses went back to his father-in-law, got his wife and sons and took the staff of God in his hand, and went on his way back to Egypt. He met his brother, Aaron, at the mountain of God (Horeb). They went to Egypt, gathered the elders of Israel, and performed the signs God had given them in their sight. The people believed, heard that God had visited the people, that He had seen how they were being treated, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him the God of the Hebrews (Israelites) had asked for him to let the people go sacrifice to the Lord in the wilderness. Not only did Pharaoh not allow them to go, but he made their tasks even more oppressive and made them find their own straw for the bricks they were making for Pharaoh. The foremen of the people blamed Moses and Aaron for this oppression. Moses complained to God and asked "Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all." (Exodus 5:23)

God said, "Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'" Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery. (Exodus 6:6-9)

God was about to show the world through Moses that He is the only God, and there is no other. God would show His mighty hand.

+++++

Continue to emphasize the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16, for Exodus – Joshua shows how this promise was fulfilled:

- Your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs.
- They will live and be enslaved four hundred years.
- They will come out with great possessions.
- They will come back here (Canaan) in the fourth generation.

God was sending the Israelites a ruler and a redeemer like Jesus: Moses. Acts 7:35

Notice how the people's lives became worse at first when Moses was going to Pharaoh. This caused them not to listen to Moses because their spirits were broken and labor was harsh. But God was about to show to the Israelites, and the Egyptians, and all those around, His mighty power.

Chapter 10

God Declares His Power

God used His signs to show Pharaoh who ruled.

Review: Abraham's family had indeed grown into a nation, and came to live in Egypt because of a famine. Joseph was taking care of them there. But that generation died, and a new king came into power that did not know Joseph. He ruthlessly oppressed Abraham's family/nation (named the Israelites or Hebrews). The time of God's promise was drawing near, so God raised up a deliverer among His people: Moses. Moses came to his people and brought them a message of hope: God had seen their affliction and was sending help! But when their lives became worse (at first) after Moses' appearing, they became discouraged with their bitter conditions, and would not listen to Moses.

Scriptures: Exodus 7-14 Related scriptures for deeper study: Psalms 78:42-53, 105:26-42; Acts 7:17-36; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Hebrews 11:24-28

Lesson: God made Moses like God to Pharaoh, and Aaron was his prophet. God was about to lay His hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel with a mighty hand. Egypt was an idolatrous nation with many gods. God was about to reveal to all WHO was the true God.

God sent 10 plagues on the Egyptians:

1. **Water to blood.** The fish died, which caused the water to stink. The magicians did the same with their secret arts. Pharaoh didn't even take this to heart.
2. **Frogs.** Frogs were in their bedrooms, ovens, and kneading bowls. The magicians did the same. Pharaoh wanted Moses to plead with the Lord to take them away. Moses cried to God, and the frogs died. But Pharaoh hardened his heart.
3. **Gnats.** Dust became gnats. Magicians couldn't produce these and declared this to be the finger of God. Pharaoh wouldn't listen.
- * 4. **Flies.** Flies were only with the Egyptians. No flies were in Goshen (where the Hebrews were). This happened so that the people would know that God was making a division between His people and Pharaoh's. The land was ruined by flies. Moses prayed, and no fly remained. Pharaoh hardened his heart.
- * 5. **Livestock die.** The Egyptian livestock—horses, donkeys, camels, herds, and flocks died, but Israel's animals did not die. Pharaoh's heart was hard.
- * 6. **Boils.** Boils were found on both man and beast in Egypt. The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he did not listen to Moses.
- * 7. **Hail.** God was using Pharaoh to show His power so His name would be proclaimed. Moses warned them to get their livestock to shelter. Those who feared God, obeyed; hail and fire flashed continually. The storm struck down every plant and broke every tree—but not in Goshen. Pharaoh still hardened his heart.
- * 8. **Locusts.** Locusts came and covered the whole land and ate every green thing. Pharaoh said, "I have sinned." He wanted Moses to plead to God to remove the locusts. Moses pleaded. The locusts left, not one remained, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.
- * 9. **Darkness.** Darkness lasted for three days. Darkness could be felt, but the people of Israel had light. The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not let them go.

*God makes a distinction between His people and the Egyptians.

Before the last plague, the Lord instituted the Passover. They were to take a lamb without blemish and on the 14th day of the month of Abib, they were to put its blood on the doorpost. When the Lord saw the blood on the door post, He would pass over that house and not allow the destroyer to enter. They were to stay in their houses, roast the lamb and eat it with their sandals on, their staff in hand, and eat it quickly. It was the Lord's Passover. This was to be a memorial day and they were to keep this Memorial every year to remember their deliverance from slavery.

- * 10. **Death of the Firstborn.** At midnight, the Lord struck down the firstborn of all the Egyptians. But the Lord, passed over the Israelites' houses. Pharaoh told the Israelites to take their livestock and GO!

The Egyptians wanted them to leave! The Israelites took their kneading troughs, asked the Egyptians for gold/silver/clothing and thus plundered the Egyptians. At the end of 430 years, all the hosts of Israel left Egypt—600,000 men plus women and children. A mixed multitude went up with them along with much livestock.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, God did not lead them through the nearest way so that they would see war and turn back to Egypt, but led them through the wilderness. They took with them bones of Joseph. The Lord led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The pillar did not depart.

God told Moses to encamp facing the Red Sea. God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and the Egyptians pursued the Israelites and drew near to them by the sea. The Israelites feared greatly and cried out to the Lord. Moses told them to see the salvation of the Lord. "The Lord would fight for you, you have only to be silent." (Exodus 14:14) Moses was to go forward and lift his staff over the sea.

The angel of the Lord moved behind the Israelites and the pillar was between the Egyptians and the Israelites—giving a pillar of light to the Israelites and darkness to the Egyptians. Moses stretched out his hand. The Lord drove back the Red Sea with a strong east wind. Israel went through the sea on dry ground—a wall of water on the left and right. The Egyptians pursued Israel. In the morning watch, the Lord looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw them into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. The Egyptians wanted to flee, for the Lord was fighting against them. When the Israelites got to the other side of the sea, Moses stretched out his hand, and the sea returned to normal, the water returned and covered the Egyptian chariots and horsemen. Not one remained.

The Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians. The Israelites saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. The people feared God and believed the Lord and His servant Moses. As the Israelites passed through the sea, the New Testament says they were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (1 Corinthians 10:2)

+++++

How did God make a distinction between His people and the Egyptians?

How did Pharaoh go from asking 'Who is the Lord' to where the Egyptians KNEW that God was the Lord?

What comfort would the pillar of cloud be to them?

Lesson 11

Meeting Their God

The ten commandments are given from God through Moses.

Review: God used Moses and Aaron to free the people of Israel. God showed His magnificent power and glory with the plagues and made a distinction between His people and Egypt. God brought His people out of Egypt without a war, the Israelites plundered the Egyptians just by asking them for their gold and silver, and God destroyed the Egyptian army by closing up the sea while the Israelites walked before them on dry ground. The world was witnessing that the Lord is God and there is no other!

Scriptures: Exodus 15:22-40:38, specifically 15:22-27, and chapters 16,17, 19,20,32

Definition: Segullah: Treasured possession. The idea is that the King owns everything, but he has a special treasure that is his segullah. God owns the world and everything in it. The people of Israel would be His Segullah IF they listen and obey.

Consecrate: To set apart or separate for God's use.

Lesson: The Israelites were free! But it did not take long before the complaining began. Moses led them into the wilderness, and they had no water! When they finally found water, it was too bitter to drink, so they grumbled. God told Moses to put in a log and the water became sweet. There God made for them a statute and a rule, and there He tested them, saying "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in His eyes, and give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."

The second month, they were hungry. They grumbled and wished they were back in Egypt. God rained down manna (it was like coriander seed, white, and tasted like wafers made with honey). This was another obedience test—they were to gather a certain amount per person, gather it early before it melted, and gather twice as much on the sixth day, and none on the Sabbath.

On the third month, they came to Sinai—the mountain of God. It appears Moses made at least **eight trips** up the mountain where He would get instructions from God, then he would come down and tell the people: **(The following scriptures are all found in the book of Exodus.)**

1st trip: 19:3-7 Moses went up the mountain. God told them to tell the people: You've seen how I've born you on eagles' wings IF you obey My voice and keep my commands, you will be my treasured possession [segullah]. Moses went down and told the elders God's words, and the people said they would obey.

2nd trip: 19:8-14 Moses brought their reply up to God. God told Moses to have them consecrate themselves for the third day, to put limits around the mountain and not to touch the mountain—man or beast.

On the third day, Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder, and there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud and the people trembled greatly.

3rd trip: 19:20-25 Tell the people not to break through to look at God and perish. Consecrate the priests. Set limits around the mountain. So, Moses went down and told the people what God had said.

God then spoke what we know as the “Ten Commandments” so that all the people heard God’s voice:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. You shall have no gods before Me. | 6. You shall not murder. |
| 2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image. | 7. You shall not commit adultery. |
| 3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. | 8. You shall not steal. |
| 4. Remember the Sabbath & keep it holy. | 9. You shall not bear false witnesses. |
| 5. Honor your father and your mother. | 10. You shall not covet. |

(These commands teach God’s people how to love God and others.)

The people trembled and were afraid and wanted Moses to talk to them instead of God.

4th trip: 20:21-24:8 Moses drew near to God in the thick darkness and God gave instructions on altars, restitution, how to treat others, and punishments for various sins. Moses came down, told the people the laws and they agreed. Moses wrote them in the Book of the Covenant.

5th trip: 24:9-11 Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab & Abihu (Aaron’s sons) plus 70 elders. They saw that under God’s feet was a pavement of sapphire! They saw God and ate and drank.

6th trip: 24:12-31:18 Moses was called up closer and to get the tablets of stone that God had written on. He stayed 40 days and nights. God gave instructions for the tabernacle and furnishings, and what was needed to worship Him. ABOVE ALL—they were to keep the Sabbaths—this was a sign that they would know that God sanctified them.

Meanwhile, while Moses was on the mountaintop with God getting instructions for the priesthood and tabernacle, Aaron (who had just seen the feet of God) was with the people fashioning a calf idol and proclaiming a feast to it. The people were out of control. God’s anger burned against His people. Moses went down the mountain, saw the people out of control, and the golden calf. He threw down the tablets, and broke them, burned the calf idol, ground it to powder and made the people drink it. Moses asked who was for the Lord, and the Levites stepped forward and began striking down the people. Three thousand people died that day.

7th trip: 32:31-35 Moses went to the Lord to try and make atonement to the Lord for the people. Then the Lord sent a plague BECAUSE they made the calf.

8th trip: 34:4-28 Moses cut 2 more tablets and took them up to God. God passed before Moses and proclaimed His love **but also** His justice towards evil. The people were to keep the Sabbaths, the Feasts, and to tear down idols. Moses was there 40 days and nights, and God wrote on the tablets again. Moses came down from Mount Sinai and his face shone because he had been talking to God.

+++++

For the younger children: Teach them about the Ten Commandments and the golden calf.

Think about this: God sent the plague BECAUSE they made the calf idol. What lessons would the plague and Levites striking down the people teach to the nation? Would this have happened if the people had been obedient when Moses was gone so long? They will see that there are consequences for disobedience, and that God is also a God of justice.

Lesson 12

Training God's People to be His Treasure

God promises great blessings for obedience but punishes disobedience.

Review: Out of all the nations of the earth, God had chosen Abraham's family (the nation called the Israelites) through whom He would bless the whole world. God freed them from slavery with His mighty hand, brought them into the wilderness, and there He fed them daily with manna and began teaching them His laws. They got to witness firsthand that God was powerful, that He cared for them daily, and that He protected them...but they also witnessed their punishment for disobedience. This time in the wilderness was crucial for them to get to know their God. They saw His loving nature AND ALSO His intolerance for their sin/disobedience.

Scriptures: Exodus 40; Leviticus 1-10, 26; Numbers 2

Definition: Atonement—to cover, cancel, exchange, reconciliation. “The act of which God restores a relationship of harmony and unity between Himself and human beings.” --Nelson's Bible Dictionary

Lesson: On Mt. Sinai, God had given Moses instructions for making a tabernacle for worshiping Him. The Israelites had worked hard contributing out of their means, then making the tent, the poles, the curtains, and the furnishings for the tabernacle. They made it according to God's specifications.

On the first day of the first month of the second year, they erected the tabernacle, the court around the tabernacle, and the altar. The cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

God taught them how to make burnt offerings, grain offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings, and peace offerings. Sacrificing animals, in accordance with the law, was the requirement God set to make atonement for their sins (blood made atonement for their lives). This was an important lesson to be ingrained into them and for them to remember.

They consecrated Aaron and his sons to be the priests. This took seven days to ordain them. Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord commanded through Moses. Aaron made the offerings as required, blessed the people, and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

But Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, took their censers, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and offered unauthorized fire, which God had not commanded them. And fire came out before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

This is what the Lord had said, “Among those who are near Me, I will be sanctified, and before all the people, I will be glorified.” (Leviticus 10:3) The people were learning a very hard lesson on the importance of obedience, and that when God is to be set apart as holy (sanctified), He is to be fully obeyed.

Not only is God holy, but they were to be holy to Him. They could only eat clean animals and birds. God taught them how to purify themselves, to stay away from things which would make them unholy (like witchcraft, idols, sexual sins, plus many many more things), and to always keep the Sabbath and feast days. God was to be their God, and they were to be His people.

They arranged their camp around the tabernacle, with the tabernacle in the middle. God was very specific where each tribe was to camp. This put the tabernacle—the place where they worshiped their God—in the very center of their camp.

God spent much time teaching the people that He would give them tremendous blessings if they would obey Him—their crops would produce, they would have peace, they were not be afraid, they would be victorious over their enemies and they would be fruitful and multiply. And He would walk among them and be their God and they would be His people. (Leviticus 26)

BUT, if they would not listen to God—if they hated His rules and would not obey His commands, God would visit them with panic, fever, their hearts would ache, and they would sow their seed in vain and be ruled by those who hated them.

IF they would not listen to this, God would discipline them sevenfold for their sins, and then listed what some of the disciplines would be.

If after this discipline, they still walked contrary to God, God would continue to strike them sevenfold for their sins, and then added harder punishments.

If after this discipline they still were not turned, God Himself would strike them sevenfold for their sins, and then added to their punishments again.

If in spite of all of this, they would not listen and walked contrary to God, then God would walk contrary to them in fury and would discipline them sevenfold for their sins...their high places would be destroyed, their land would be devastated and their enemies who settled in their land would be appalled, and God would scatter them among the nations.

BUT, if they confessed their sins, and the sins of their fathers, if their hearts were humbled and they made amends for their iniquity against God, then God would remember His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and remember the land.

We are seeing another facet of God. Remember that God allows man to choose for himself—God does not force mankind to be obedient nor does He program man not to sin. But when man chooses to sin, sin separates man from God. The wages of sin is death. And this is not what God desires for mankind—He wants all men to be saved. Just reading the Old Testament, you can observe that the nature of man is very stubborn and stiff-necked. Not many people will turn and come to God with just a verbal warning. And so, the punishments come and get progressively harder in hopes of His people repenting and coming back to God.

God planned to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's family. He was training this family in the wilderness to be holy, but their sinful choices were bringing about God's wrath. We can learn much about the sinful nature of mankind and how that brings the wrath of God by studying the Old Testament.

+++++

For the younger children, talk about building the tabernacle, consecrating Aaron and his sons and how God was pleased with that. But also teach about Nadab and Abihu. It is important for them to understand at a young age the importance of obeying God in worship, and in daily choices.

Lesson 13

The Last Days of Moses

Before he dies, Moses reminds the Israelites how to live.

Review: The Israelites had been enslaved in an idolatrous nation--Egypt. God freed them with His mighty hand. Not only did the Egyptians learn who God was, but the Israelites learned as well. God brought them into the wilderness where He took care of them, fed them bread from heaven, taught them how to worship Him, what sacrifices to make for their sins, and to differentiate between clean/unclean. They witnessed God's wrath as God punished their rebellious ways, but they also saw His daily provisions, His power, His redemption. Moses was about to go the way of mankind. Deuteronomy was Moses' last words before he died and he is reminding this generation of all God did for them, of their rebellion towards God, and of the importance to choose well. These were Moses' last words before this generation takes over the promised land.

Scriptures: Deuteronomy

Lesson: Early in their journey, Moses sent out 12 spies—1 from each tribe—into the land of Canaan. They saw it was a land flowing with milk and honey and was filled with wonderful fruit. However, they also had fortified cities, the people were tall and the spies felt like grasshoppers in their site. Two of the spies had faith in God's deliverance/power, but the other ten spies gave a discouraging report that spread throughout the camp. Because of their lack of faith in God, the Israelites had to wander one year for every day the spies were gone (so 40 years since they were gone 40 days). Plus, those 20 and older would perish in the wilderness and their children would be the ones to take over the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones allowed to enter the Promised Land for their faith in God as the two faithful spies. Even Moses and Aaron were not allowed to go in because of their disobedience along the way.

So, before Moses died, he began talking to the those who were left. They were on the brink of going into the Promised Land, and would be driving out the inhabitants with war. When they took over the land, they would spread out all over the land of Canaan, live in houses they did not build and begin making a living. Moses took his chances to tell them and remind them of some important lessons before he died.

Listen to God's statutes and rules. Do not add to them, or take away from them. As you go into the land of Canaan, obey God's laws—for that will be your wisdom and understanding. "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children." (Deuteronomy 4:7-9)

"Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you." (Deuteronomy 34-36a) So keep His statutes and commandments.

Teach them diligently to your children as you sit in your houses, walk along the way, as you lie down and rise up. Let His words be on your heart. Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might.

When you inherit the land and have many good things, do not forget God. Don't put God to the test. And when you go into the land, **drive out the nations that are there**. Do not make a covenant with them, do not intermarry with them; show them no mercy. Break down their idols and burn them. If you do these things, you will be blessed above all people. The Lord will help you take over the land. Don't be afraid of them.

Remember God's power. God is a great and awesome God. Remember how God led you and tested you to see if you would obey Him. He humbled you and fed you with manna and did not let your clothes wear out or your feet swell. He disciplined you as a man disciplines his son. You are going into a good land.

But, be careful not to forget God and His commands. If you forget God and serve other gods, then you will perish from the land like these nations.

Moses reminded them of the ten commandments, taught them where they would worship in the new land, warned them about idolatry, reminded them about clean and unclean food, tithes, feast days, cities of refuge, blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience if they forgot and turned away from God. IF they would return to God and obey His voice, the Lord would circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their offspring so that they would love the Lord their God.

These commands were not too hard, neither were they far off. God's word was to be very near them—in their mouth and in their heart so that they could do it.

Moses summoned Joshua for he would be the one to lead the people into the Promised Land. Be strong and courageous, God will go before you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

Moses wrote them a song and taught it to them. He blessed the people, then went up to Mt. Nebo and God showed him all the land of Canaan. God said, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to your offspring." (Deuteronomy 34:4)

Moses died there, at 120 years old. His eye was undimmed, and he was still strong. "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel." Deuteronomy 34:10-12

+++++

Emphasize that Moses was about to die and so he told them things he wanted them to remember: Listen to God's rules—don't add to them or take away from them—but obey them. Drive out the nations in Canaan and don't intermarry with them. Do not forget God when you begin your life in Canaan. Remember God's power, how He took care of you, led you, tested you. Teach your children and grandchildren.

Tell about Moses' death.

Lesson 14

Entering the Promised Land

The Israelites, under Joshua's leadership, finally enter the Promised Land.

Review: For 40 years, the Israelites had wandered in the desert waiting to enter the Promised Land. Their families had been enslaved in Egypt until God freed them with His powerful hand. They crossed over the Red Sea on dry ground and watched as the sea covered over their enemies. God fed them in the desert, taught them how to worship Him, how to separate themselves from the unclean/unholy, and God promised to bless them IF they were obedient, but they would receive cursings if they were disobedient. God was teaching them how to be His people. They were to go into the promised land and take it over, but the parents lacked faith that God would lead them. Because of their lack of faith, they did not get to go into the promised land and died in the wilderness. Now it was time for them, as the children of those enslaved in Egypt, to come into this land promised centuries before to Abraham.

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 7:20-26; 8:7-9; 11:11,12; 18:9-14; Leviticus 18:21-30; Joshua 1-6; Hebrews 11:31 Remember the promise to Abraham: Genesis 15:13-16

Lesson: The land of Canaan (the Promised Land) was a land of hills and valleys, which was watered with the rains of heaven. It was a land that God cared for and kept His eyes on. It was filled with wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive trees and honey. The stones were iron, and the hills were filled with copper. Before Moses died, he appointed Joshua as the leader of the Israelites, and the children (of those enslaved) had grown up and were ready to take over the land. The only people older than 60 years old were Joshua and Caleb.

God had promised to send hornets before them to drive out the people, but the Israelites had to be very careful to be obedient to God. They were God's special treasure, and obedience to God's commands was necessary for God to continue to be with them. They definitely needed God to help them and protect them, because taking over the land was a big undertaking.

Even though the land of Canaan was beautiful to look at, it was FILLED with idolatry and sin. They burned their children as an offering to their idols, the land was filled with sexual immorality, homosexuality and other sexual sins. They practiced divination, fortune telling, interpreted omens, practiced sorcery and inquired of the dead. These things were an abomination to the Lord and this was why God was driving them out. We learned during the days of Noah what happens if these sins are left unchecked--sin continues to spread, bringing more and more people into an unholy state and bringing death. God gave the Canaanites 400 years to repent, and since they did not, the land would vomit them out (sometimes this happens with war). God also warned the Israelites going into Canaan that they MUST obey Him and never practice these abominations. If they did, then the land would vomit them out too! Sin corrupts the world. And evil, with free reign, will spread to more and more people.

God told Joshua many times to be strong and very courageous, to meditate on God's law day and night, to be careful to obey it, and God would be with him wherever he went. Joshua encouraged the commanders to be very obedient to God.

Joshua secretly sent two spies into the land. They stayed at Rahab's house, and when men came looking for the spies, she hid them on the roof under some flax. Rahab had heard all about how powerful the God of the Israelites was—how He dried up the Red Sea, and how they had defeated Og and Sihon. Since

Rahab helped the spies, the spies promised to save all who were in her house IF she did not tell anyone their business and if she put a scarlet cord in her window. They would deal kindly with her since she dealt kindly with them.

She let them down by a rope through the window. The spies went into the hills, remained three days and came back to the camp and told the people, “Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.” (Joshua 2:24)

It was time to cross the Jordan, which was overflowing its banks. They were to consecrate themselves, then the priests carried the ark of the covenant before the people. They stepped into the Jordan and the waters of the Jordan were cut off from flowing and rose in a heap far away at Adam. And all Israel passed over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. They took 12 stones from the Jordan to make a memorial to remember when they crossed the Jordan on dry ground. When the priests came up out of the Jordan, the waters returned to overflowing its banks. When the Canaanites heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan, their hearts melted because of the people of Israel.

The Israelites circumcised the sons because the fathers had not been obedient in the wilderness. They celebrated the Passover, and the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land.

Now the city of Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the Israelites. None went out, none came in. They were to march around the city one time for six days, with seven priests bearing seven trumpets, horns blowing as they went, and the ark of the covenant following them. The armed men went before the priests, and the rear guard walked behind the ark. They were not to shout or make their voices heard. They would circle the city, then come back and spend the night in the camp.

On the seventh day, they were to rise early at dawn, march around the city in the same way, but this time they were to go around seven times. On the seventh time, Joshua said, “Shout, for the Lord has given you the city. And the city and all that was within it were to be devoted to the Lord for destruction.” They were not to take anything that was devoted. All the silver and gold, bronze and iron were holy to the Lord and were to go into His treasury. Rahab and all who were in her house were to live. But everything else was to be devoted to destruction—all the people and animals. When the people shouted, the wall fell down flat and the Israelites went into the city. They devoted all in the city to destruction. But the two spies went into Rahab’s house and brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel, and then they burned the city with fire and everything in it. Only the silver, gold, bronze and iron were put into the treasury of the Lord.

And Rahab lived in Israel because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. So, the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land

++++
Joshua can be a hard book for people—maybe because it is hard to understand why God would command all the people to be killed. That is why it is so important to read those verses in Leviticus 18 and Deuteronomy 18—for it reminds us that these people were a very wicked people, and God gave them four centuries to repent, and they did not. If the Israelites did not drive them out, then the Canaanites would quickly corrupt God’s people and influence them to practice these things too. If the Israelites went into the land and began practicing these things that the Canaanites did, the land would vomit them out, too. Obedience to God was the key to their success.

Lesson 15

Taking Over the Promised Land

The Israelites take over the Promised Land, defeating the Canaanites.

Review: Centuries before, God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. It was a beautiful land that God cared for, but the inhabitants had filled this beautiful land with their evil practices. It was time for the Israelites to clean out the sin, and to be very careful, as God's chosen people, to be obedient to God. Otherwise, they too, would eventually become like the Canaanites.

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 18:9-14, *Deuteronomy 12:31, 20:16-18; Joshua 7-24

Lesson: The Canaanites were a wicked people, doing things they ought not to do. When the Israelites came into the promised land, they were not to inquire about their false gods or find out how they worshiped their gods. For God said, "You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods." (Deuteronomy 12:31) God did not want these abominable practices to be taught to His people.

As the Israelites began conquering the cities, it was incredibly important for them to pay attention to God's commands and carry them out as He commanded so that God would continue to go with them. They had already conquered Jericho and had been victorious.

Joshua sent spies to the next town Ai. It was a small town and they did not need the whole army. They sent 3,000 men—but the Israelites fled from Ai and 36 men had been killed! Now the Israelites hearts melted and became like water.

Why had this happened? Why had God not helped them be victorious?

They found out that one man—Achan—had NOT obeyed the Lord in the battle of Jericho. He had taken a beautiful cloak, some silver and a wedge of gold for himself. Because he disobeyed God, 36 men lost their lives. Achan and all his family and all his possessions were stoned by the Israelites. They piled over him a great heap of stones and called that place the Valley of Achor (trouble).

The Israelites were learning AGAIN that they needed to obey God in everything.

Israel went up again to Ai. This time, they followed God's commands and were victorious over Ai.

When the Gibeonites heard what the Israelites had done to Jericho and Ai, they took worn-out sacks (torn and mended), patched sandals, food that was dry and crusty and came to the Israelites. They lied to Israel and told them they came from a faraway country (they actually lived close by). They wanted to make a covenant with Israel promising to be their servants, and Joshua and the men believed them and made a covenant with them without consulting God. When they found out the Gibeonites deceived them, Joshua made them wood cutters and drawers of water.

When the king of Jerusalem heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, and then heard how the Gibeonites had made peace with Israel, he joined with four more kings and went to fight against Gibeon to make war against it. Gibeon sent word to Joshua and wanted Israel to save them. Joshua gathered the men of war, marched all night, threw those kings into a panic and struck them with a great blow. As they fled before Israel, God threw down large hailstones. Joshua asked God for the sun not to go down until

they had taken vengeance on their enemies. The sun stopped for about a whole day. There has not been a day like this before or since, when God heeded the voice of a man and fought for Israel.

The Israelites continued to take over southern Canaan. Then they turned to the north. Northern Canaan came out together as a great mass of people, like the sands on the seashore. But the Lord gave them into the hands of Israel. Joshua did just as the Lord commanded Moses. There was not a city that made peace with Israel except the Gibeonites.

When the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan, they drew lots and gave each tribe their inheritance from the land. Each tribe would have to work together and continue clearing out the land and conquering the people, and destroying their idols. And the people went into the land where they had not labored, into cities that they had not built, and now owned vineyards and orchards that they did not plant.

When Joshua grew old, he gathered the elders, judges and officers. Like Moses, he, too, had some final words to tell their leaders: Remember how God helped them take over the land. Be very strong and do all that is written in the law. Do not mix with the Canaanites, do not swear by their gods or serve or bow down to them, make sure you do not intermarry with them or they will be a snare and a trap to you, and God will no longer drive them out.

Joshua told them he was about to die, but to remember that not one word of God's had failed of all the good things God had promised. BUT, just as the good things had been fulfilled, so the Lord would bring the evil things on them IF they transgressed the covenant of God. God's anger would be kindled and they would perish quickly from this good land.

Joshua gathered the tribes together and reminded them how God had brought them out of Egypt, brought them into Canaan and gave it to them. "Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. He wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God, took a large stone and set it by the sanctuary of God. This stone was a witness of the words that God spoke to them. And Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.

Joshua died at age 110. Israel served God throughout the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived Joshua.

+++++

The promise God promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-17 was finally fulfilled in this book. (The books of Exodus – Joshua tell how this promise was fulfilled).

We have looked at some very righteous men who were obedient to God: Noah, Abraham, Moses and now Joshua. How important was it that Joshua obeyed God in everything?

What lessons did they learn with Achan?

Why was it so important for them to destroy the Canaanites, to destroy their gods, and to not intermarry with them?

Lesson 16

The Cycle of Judges

Judge after judge delivered disobedient Israel from their enemies.

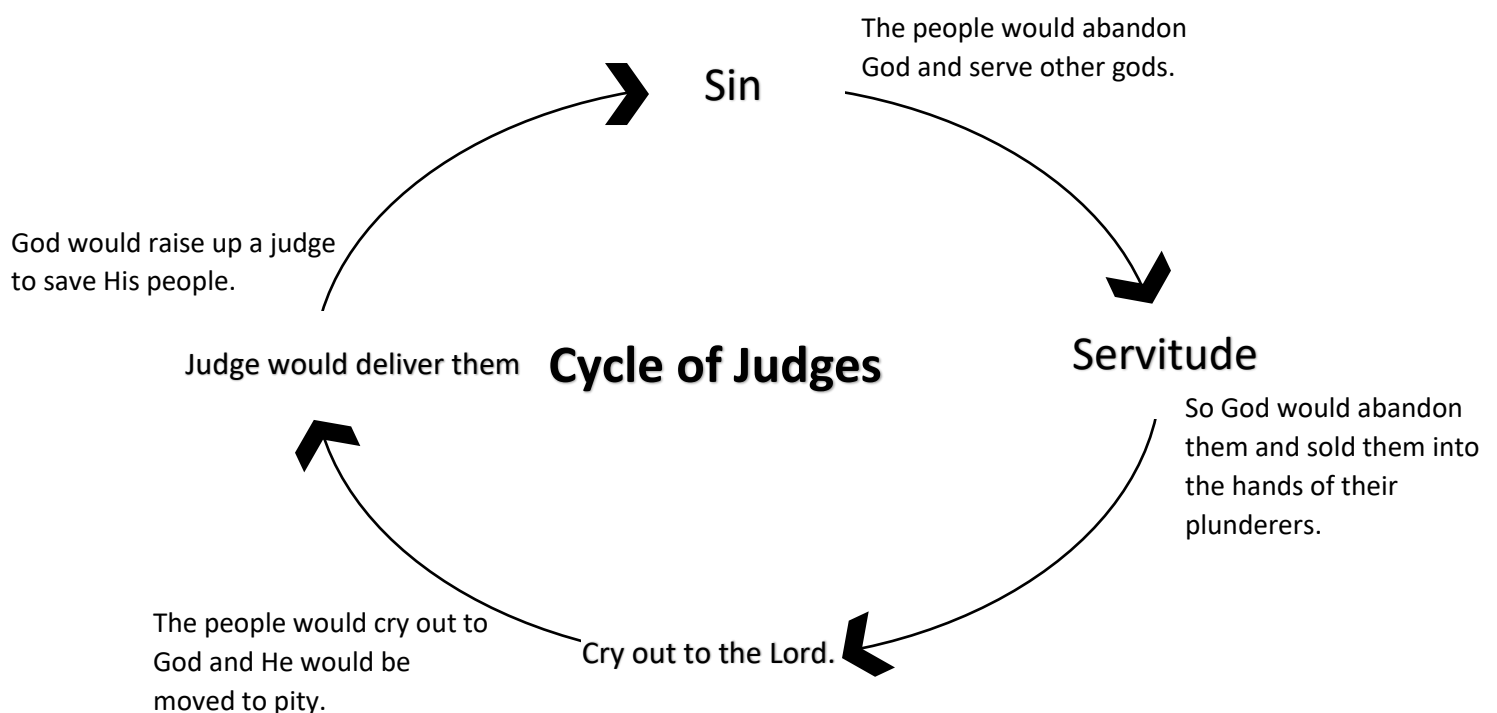
Review: In the desert, the Israelites witnessed God's daily provisions. God was the center of their camp. They had a faithful leader in Moses. And they also witnessed God's wrath for their disobedience. When the time came to go into the promised land, it was important that they continued to remember the lessons they learned while in the desert: Listen to God's laws and obey them, teach them to your children, drive out the inhabitants of Canaan, stay away from the unclean/unholy things/idols, remember God's power and provisions, etc. But as they spread out in the land, it took more of an effort to worship God; the Israelites were spread out all over the country of Canaan, they got busy with their lives, and with their new possessions, God became less and less important to His people. Before Joshua died, he renewed the covenant, promising to obey God and not to forsake Him. Let's see what was going on in the book of Judges and how well the people kept the covenant of being God's people.

Scriptures: The cycle of Judges: Judges 2:11-19, and Gideon: Judges 6,7,8

Lesson: After the death of Joshua, the Israelites were still trying to take over parts of the promised land. These tribes failed to drive the Canaanites out: Judah (1:19), Benjamin (1:21), Manasseh (1:27), Ephraim (1:25), Zebulun (1:30), Asher (1:31), Naphtali (1:33), and Dan (1:34).

Why did this happen? Wasn't God going to go before them? Judges 2:1-5 gives us the answer to that question: The people did not obey God's voice. The failing was with the people—in their choices. And they also failed to teach their children. And so a whole generation grew up who did not know God, nor the work He had done for Israel.

The Israelites began to intermingle and marry the Canaanites, and they began to serve their gods. God's people—His treasured possession—were not treasuring God. They were not keeping their part of the covenant. And so we see this cycle over and over in Judges: (Judges 2:11-19)



This cycle happened over and over in Judges, with many stories we could tell. But because of time, we will only focus on one judge: Gideon.

The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years. The Midianites overpowered Israel and the Israelites hid in dens and caves and strongholds. When they planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites would come up against them and devour their produce leaving no food, no sheep, oxen or donkeys. Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord.

Gideon was beating out wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites. An angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and wanted him to pull down the Baal and Asherah pole, build an altar to God and sacrifice his father's bull as an offering. Gideon took ten men and did it at night, because he was afraid of his family and the men of town.

Gideon needed reassurance that God would save them from the Midianites and asked God for 2 signs: 1) dew on the fleece alone and the ground be dry 2) fleece alone would be dry and the ground have dew. God gave him the reassurance he was asking for, and these things happened.

Gideon gathered the men for battle. But God said there were too many men and that Gideon was to send home all who were trembling or fearful. So 22,000 returned home, and 10,000 stayed. There were still too many men. God had them go to the water and told Gideon that those who lapped the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, would be set aside. Three hundred men lapped water like this—putting their hands to their mouths—these would be Gideon's army.

Now the camp of Midian was spread out in the valley below. They were like locusts in abundance and their camels were without number, like sands on the seashore. Gideon was to go down to the outpost of the enemy and listen and then he would be encouraged. So he went down, heard them tell of a dream that a cake of barley bread struck a tent and flattened it. His comrade said that this was none other than the sword of Gideon...God was giving into his hand Midian and all the camp. As soon as Gideon heard the dream and interpretation, he worshiped God. Returning to camp, he divided the 300 men into three companies and gave each one a trumpet and an empty jar with a torch inside. When Gideon blew his trumpet, they were to blow their trumpet, too, and shout, "For the Lord and for Gideon."

They came to the outskirts of the camp. With the beginning of the middle watch, they blew their trumpets, smashed the jars and cried out. Every man STOOD in his place around camp and the enemy ran, cried out, fought against each other, and fled. The Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. The men of Israel called out reinforcements and they pursued after Midian.

After the victory, the Israelites wanted Gideon to rule over them. He would not, but he asked for a gold earring from each man from the spoil instead. With all of the gold, he made an ephod, and put it in his city. But it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

+++++

The book of Judges has many difficult accounts of what the Israelites were doing. There is a phrase that helps you to understand what was happening: "there was no king in Israel". God was not their king—this was obvious, for the people were not obedient to the commands of God. When people live without God's laws, they make terrible decisions. God's people were forsaking Him, and it shows in the book of Judges.

Lesson 17

A Worthy Woman

Ruth's faithful love results in being in Christ's lineage.

Review: The Israelites were falling further away from God while in the promised land. During the period of the judges, the Israelites would fall away from God, God would sell them to their oppressors, the Israelites repented and cried out to God, then God would send a judge (or deliverer). These were the days the Israelites had no king—God was not their king and we see much depravity during this time. But remember the long-term promise God made to Abraham: that all the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham. This blessing came through Isaac, then Jacob, then Judah. Today we will be introduced to another family that will play a key part in the storyline of this blessing.

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 24:19, Ruth, Matthew 1:5—(notice who Boaz's mother is)

Definition: Redeem—to buy back

Lesson: During the time of the judges, there was a man named Elimelech, along with his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, who moved to Moab because of a famine in Israel. While they were there, the two sons were married to Moabite wives: Ruth and Orpah.

Elimelech's family lived there ten years, but Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion all died. Left as a widow, Naomi heard that God had visited her people and given them food, so she set out for Bethlehem with her two daughters-in-law who were also widows. But then she told them to go back to their mother's house. Orpah obeyed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her and said, "Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die." Naomi saw Ruth's determination and said no more.

When Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, they needed food. Ruth went into a field to work and it so happened to be the field of Boaz's, a relative of Elimelech and a worthy man, so she labored in the field. Boaz gave instructions to the reapers not to reproach her and to pull some bundles out from the sheaves and leave for her, for Boaz had heard of how Ruth left her homeland and had come to a people she did not know. When Ruth beat out all she had gleaned, it was an ephah of barley. She went home and showed it to Naomi who wondered where she went to harvest. Naomi was pleased it was Boaz's field, for he was a close relative. Ruth stayed through the harvest, gleaning until the end of barley and wheat harvest, and she lived with Naomi.

Naomi had a plan for Ruth. She told Ruth to go to Boaz's threshing floor. Then Naomi said, "when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." (Ruth 3:4) Ruth agreed to do all that Naomi had told her.

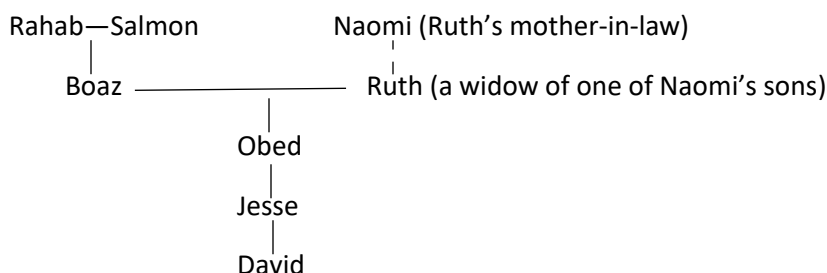
Boaz had eaten, and his heart was merry; he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Ruth came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight, Boaz was startled that a woman lay at his feet! He wondered who it was and Ruth said, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." (Ruth 3:9) Boaz told her not to fear that all the townsmen knew she was a worthy woman. But, there was a redeemer nearer than Boaz. If he would redeem Ruth, then good. But if he was not willing, then Boaz would. He had Ruth leave before the morning light, but gave her six measures of barley to take home to Naomi.

Boaz went to the gate, and sat down. When the redeemer came, Boaz spoke to him. He took ten men of the elders of the city and they all sat down. Boaz told the redeemer that Naomi was selling her parcel of land that belonged to their relative Elimelech. If he would redeem it, then redeem it. But if not, then Boaz would. The relative wanted to redeem it. Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from Naomi, you acquire Ruth, in order to carry on the name of Ruth’s husband who has died.”

The redeemer said he could not do that, lest it impair his own inheritance, so Boaz could redeem it! Boaz said to the elders, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon, along with Ruth, to be my wife and to perpetuate the name of the dead—that the name of the dead would not be cut off. You are witnesses today.”

Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. In time, she bore a son. The women said to Naomi, “Blessed by the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!” (Ruth 4:14) Then Naomi took this child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. “And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse, the father of David.” (Ruth 4:14)

And so, this beautiful story of a redeemer, introduces a family who will be important to God’s promise to bless all the nations through Abraham.



+++++

Even though God’s people were growing more unfaithful, God was ever faithful to His covenant to Abraham and continued to use faithful people to carry on His plan. God introduces Ruth—a Moabite—who moves to Israel with her mother-in-law. Here she was redeemed by Boaz. It is through this family of Boaz and Ruth that God will bless this world.

Name Ruth’s two famous mothers-in-law. [Rahab and Naomi]

Lesson 18

Pouring Out Her Soul

Hannah's son, Samuel served in the temple, learning to obey God.

Review: God's chosen people struggled being faithful and obedient to Him. During the times of the Judges, they repeated a cycle over and over again: they would sin, God would allow their enemies to overtake them and the Israelites would serve them, they repented and would cry out to God, then God would send a judge to save them. It is in this climate that the story of Samuel begins.

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 1-4

Lesson: There was a man named Elkanah, who had two wives—Penninah and Hannah. Penninah had children, but Hannah had none. They went to Shiloh every year to the tabernacle to worship, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord.

Now, when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Penninah and to all her children. But to Hannah, he would give a double portion, because he loved her, but the Lord closed her womb. And Penninah would do things to irritate Hannah because God had closed her womb, and she would do this every year. Hannah would weep and would not eat.

Eli, the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple. Hannah, in her deep distress, vowed a vow to the Lord, that if He would give her a son, she would give him to the Lord. And she continued praying to the Lord.

After she left the temple, she was no longer sad. They returned home and the Lord remembered her, and in due time, she had a son. She named him Samuel for "I have asked for him from the Lord."

When Samuel was weaned, she took the child, young as he was, to live at the temple. And there she brought her sacrifice and worshiped God there. The boy ministered to the Lord in Eli's presence.

Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were worthless men. They did not know the Lord. They would take the people's sacrifice by force so that the people could not offer their sacrifices to God in the way that God had commanded because of these wicked priests. Their sin was very great in God's sight, for they treated God's offering with contempt.

Samuel was ministering before the Lord. And every year, Hannah would make him a little robe and take it at the yearly sacrifice. God blessed her with three sons and two daughters. Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord.

Eli was very old. He kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they would lie with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. He said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people... If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death. (1 Samuel 2:25)

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.

A man of God came to Eli to give him a message: "Why do you honor your sons before Me and fatten yourselves on the best part of every offering? Those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Days are coming when I will cut off your strength. Hophni and Phinehas

will die on the same day. And I will raise up a faithful priest who will do what is in My heart and in My mind.”

Eli’s family was going to be punished most severely because of the sins of Hophni and Phinehas.

The Lord began to speak to Samuel. God told Samuel that He would punish Eli’s house because his sons blasphemed God and he did not restrain them. Even though Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision, he told him everything that the Lord had said and hid nothing from him. The Lord continued to reveal Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. When the Philistines began to kill the Israelites, the Israelites sent to Shiloh and brought out the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Hophni and Phinehas were with the ark of the covenant of God. As soon as the ark came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout. The Philistines fought hard, Israel was defeated and they fled to their homes. There was a great slaughter, for 30,000 foot soldiers of Israel fell. The ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli died, just as the man of God had said.

A young man ran from the battle line to Shiloh with the news from the battle that Israel fled before the Philistines, that they were greatly defeated, that Hophni and Phinehas had died and that the ark of God was captured. When Eli heard this, Eli fell over backward, his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. He judged Israel 40 years.

Phinehas’ wife was about to give birth. When she heard the news of the ark of God being captured, and that her father-in-law and husband were dead, she gave birth and died. She named the baby “Ichabod” for “the glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.” (1 Samuel 4:22)

+++++

Think about Hophni and Phinehas. These 2 priests were to be obedient to God, help the people with their sacrifices, and minister before the Lord. Instead, they were using their position to take the sacrifices of God and keep the best portions for themselves, and to do all sorts of evil at the tent of meeting. With the older children, discuss the difficulties it would be for the people to try and be obedient to God while having the priests do things in a manner not prescribed by God.

Contrast the difference between Hophni/Phinehas and Samuel. God was raising and training a faithful priest to take over when the unfaithful priests were killed.

Can you see a divine reason for Hannah’s womb being closed? Do you think she would have vowed to give a child to the Lord if she had not been barren for so long? Samuel becomes a very important, faithful leader for the Israelites.

Lesson 19

Israel's Rejection of God

Israel rejects God (and His judges) and demands a king.

Review: When the Israelites came into the Promised Land, they were to totally destroy all the idols in the land, they were not to inquire of the Canaanites as to how they worshiped their gods and they were not to intermarry with the Canaanites. When the Israelites chose to disobey God, it wasn't long until they began to worship the detestable idols of the land. In the last lesson, we learned about the priesthood being perverted by wicked men. We saw over and over that people continued to struggle to remain faithful to God. But God is ever faithful. He used the longings of a barren, righteous woman, who vowed to give her child back to God, to help lead the people back to Him. But will the Israelites respond?

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 5-8

Lesson: The glory of God had departed Israel, for now the ark of God was living in the land of the Philistines. The hand of the Lord was heavy on the Philistines, and a great terror came on them all. So, the Philistines sent the ark of God back to Israel, on a cart, and the cows pulling the cart stopped at Joshua's field in Beth-Shemesh. The men of Beth-Shemesh offered sacrifices. They sent messages to the men of Kiriath-Jearim that the ark of God was back and they came and brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill. It lodged there 20 years and Israel lamented after God.

Samuel told them, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." (1 Samuel 7:3) And so, they did. They put away their idols and served God only. At Mizpah, the people fasted and said, "We have sinned against the Lord."

When the Philistines heard the people had gathered at Mizpah, they came to make war on them. The Israelites were afraid of the Philistines. This time, (instead of bringing the ark of God into the battlefield like they did with Hophni and Phinehas), they said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us." And so, Samuel offered a sacrifice. The Lord thundered with a mighty sound and threw the Philistines into confusion, and were defeated before Israel.

Samuel took a stone, set it between Mizpah and Shen and called it "Ebenezer"—for "til now the Lord has helped us." The Philistines were subdued. And God was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel, and the cities the Philistines took were restored to Israel. Samuel judged Israel all of his life.

When Samuel was old, he made his sons—Joel and Abijah—judges over Israel. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways and perverted justice, took bribes and turned aside after gain. The people said to Samuel, "Behold you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." (1 Samuel 8:3) This displeased Samuel. And Samuel prayed to God. God told Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." (1 Samuel 8:7-9)

Samuel told them that the king would take their sons to be over his chariots and to be his horsemen, commanders, farmers, harvesters, and to make implements and equipment. Their daughters would be

perfumers, cooks, and bakers. The king would take the best of their fields, vineyards, and orchards. He would take one tenth of their grain and wine and give it to his servants. He would take their servants and make them his, and their donkeys and put them to work. He would take one tenth of their flocks and they themselves would be his slaves. And they would cry to the Lord, and He will not answer them.

“But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.” 1 Samuel 8:19-22

And, just like that, the people chose a path that would lead them back into slavery. God freed them from a king centuries before and became their spiritual king. But the people wanted an earthly king, to lead them into battle. This choice was a very costly decision.

++++
Do you see what the people are doing? God freed them from slavery in Egypt. He provided for their daily needs. He went before them to clear out the Promised Land. God was their king—the King of kings. God warned them of what an earthly king would do. An earthly king would take their children, their animals, their grain—all they owned—and even their life if they chose an earthly king to reign over them. But the people wanted to go back into slavery again. People have a hard time being faithful to God!

Contrast the battles with the Philistines when Hophni and Phinehas were the priests, and when Samuel was the judge. How did they try and get God to come into battle with them with the priests? How did they enter the battle with Samuel as their leader? Which one had favorable results? Do you think it would be wise to consider both ways and continue to remember? Which way gave them success?

Lesson 20

Israel's First Earthly King

Samuel anoints Saul to be Israel's first earthly king.

Review: God's chosen people were the Israelites. God freed them from slavery, and gave them a beautiful land and helped drive the Canaanites out. God gave them righteous laws, and great promises. The Israelites were God's treasured possession (Segullah). And they repay God's kindness by requesting an inferior, earthly king. They just rejected God Almighty as their king in exchange for a fallible man. This was a terrible trade.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 9-12

Lesson: There was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish and who was a man of wealth. He had a handsome son named Saul who was, from his shoulders up, taller than any of the people.

Kish's donkeys were lost and Saul and his servant went to look for them. They could not find them, so they went to see if the man of God--the prophet Samuel--could tell them where they might be. As they entered the city, Samuel came toward them.

Now the day before, the Lord revealed to Samuel that He would send a man from Benjamin. Samuel was to anoint him as prince over His people Israel, to save them from the Philistines. When Samuel met Saul and his servant, he sent them to the high place to eat with him and told Saul his donkeys had been found. Samuel brought them to the hall and gave them a place at the head of those invited to eat (about 30 people). They ate with Samuel that day.

"When they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul on Samuel's roof, and he lay down to sleep. At the break of dawn Samuel called to Saul on the roof, 'Up, that I may send you on your way.' So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street." Samuel wanted the servant to go on ahead while Samuel had a word with Saul. (1 Samuel 9:25,26)

Samuel took a flask of oil, poured it on Saul's head, kissed him and said, "Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over His people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies." (1 Samuel 10:11) Samuel told him of three signs that would happen to him to know that God had anointed him as prince. "Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you. Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do." (1 Samuel 10:7,8)

As he left Samuel, God gave Saul a different heart. And all the signs came to pass that day.

The people gathered at Mizpah at the request of Samuel. Samuel reminded them that God delivered them from the Egyptians, but today they had rejected God as their king. They were to present themselves by tribes and by their thousands. The tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. Then the Matrites was chosen and Saul, son of Kish was taken by lot. But they could not find him. They inquired of the Lord and Saul had hidden himself among the baggage.

When he stood up and he was taller than all the people, Samuel said, "Do you see whom the Lord has chosen? The people shouted, "Long live the king!" Samuel read the people the rights and duties of the kingship, wrote them in a book and laid it before the Lord. Then Samuel sent them home.

Saul went home as well, along with men of valor, whose hearts God had touched. But worthless fellows despised him and brought him no present.

Now Nahash the Ammonite besieged Jabesh-Gilead and threatened them. The elders of Jabesh requested seven days to see if anyone would save them. When the people of Israel heard it, they wept. The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul and he mustered the men. They came into the camp and struck down the Ammonites.

Later, Samuel had the people meet them at Gilgal and there they made Saul king before the Lord. They sacrificed peace offerings before God and the men rejoiced greatly.

Then Samuel addressed the crowd, and told them he was old and grey. He reminded them how the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to bring them out of Egypt. But they forgot God and He sold them into the hands of plunderers. And they cried to the Lord, admitted their sin in how they forsook God and served idols. And God sent judges to deliver them. But when they saw Nahash, they wanted another king, even though God was their king. “If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well. But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king. Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the Lord, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for yourselves a king.” (1 Samuel 12:14-17)

And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king.” (1 Samuel 12:19)

And Samuel said to the people, “Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.” (1 Samuel 12:20-25)

+++++

For the older children: Even though the Israelites rejected God as king, look how God was still trying to help them—He gave Saul a different heart, God had touched men of valor to go along with Saul, the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul and they struck down the Ammonites. God is still trying to help them—even though they had just rejected Him as king.

What was the requirement of the people and the king for it to go well with them? [fear God, serve and obey Him]

When would God’s hand be against them and the king? [When they disobeyed and rebelled against God’s commands.]

Lesson 21

CHOICES!

Saul disobeyed; David was quietly anointed king and killed Goliath.

Review: God's chosen people--the people God had singled out from all the nations to show His power to and through, to care for, to free from slavery and bring to a new land, rejected God as their king. What they got for an earthly king was a poor substitute—Saul. He was tall, handsome and came from a wealthy family, but did these qualities make him a good king?

Scripture: 1 Samuel 13-17

Lesson: The Philistines had come up against the Israelites. They were like sands on the seashore—30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen. Israel was trembling. Saul waited for seven days at Gilgal as Samuel had instructed, But Samuel had not come and Saul's people were scattering. Since Samuel was not there, Saul went ahead and offered the burnt offering himself [this was against God's commands since he was not a priest]. As soon as he finished offering it, Samuel came.

'What have you done?' asked Samuel. Saul told him the people were scattering, Samuel was not there to offer it, the Philistines were at Mishmash and Saul admitted he had not sought the Lord's favor. So, he offered it himself. Samuel told him, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13,14)

Samuel left Gilgal.

Later God commanded Saul to devote to destruction (destroy) the Amalekites for what they had done to Israel when they had come out of Egypt. They were to spare no one and no animal.

But Saul spared the king, and the best animals to sacrifice to God. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction. Then he went to Carmel and set up a monument for himself.

When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said, "I have kept the Lord's command." Samuel asked why he could hear bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen. Saul admitted they saved the best to sacrifice to God. Samuel told him that God sent him on a mission to fight the Amalekites, the sinners, to fight against them until they were consumed. Why didn't he obey the voice of the Lord? Why did Saul pounce on the spoil and do what is evil in God's sight? Saul said, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. ...But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." Samuel told him, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king." (from 1 Samuel 15:13-23)

Saul said, "I have sinned... I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the Lord." Samuel said, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." (1 Samuel 15:25,26) When Samuel left, he did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul, and the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Later, the Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem with his anointing oil to anoint a new king. Samuel invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice. Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, but the Lord had not chosen any of these. Did Jesse have any more sons? He found out that Jesse had one more son who was keeping the sheep. Jesse was to get him. When the youngest came in, he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. God said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." God was looking at this young man's heart.

The Philistines were gathered against the Israelites in battle, each on a mountain with a valley in between. There came out Goliath—their champion—whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze, a coat of mail that weighed five thousand shekels, bronze armor on his legs and a javelin (spear) on his back, a spear in his hand and an armor bearer. Daily he would defy Israel and wanted to fight a man. But the Israelites were too afraid. He did this for forty days.

Three of Jesse's sons were at the battle. Jesse sent David with cheeses for the commander and tokens for his sons. When David got to the battleground, he heard Goliath's defiance of God's army and he saw God's army run from fear.

"And David said to the men who stood by him, 'What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?'" (1 Samuel 17:26) The king would give him riches, his daughter in marriage and make his father's house exempt from taxes.

David volunteered to fight Goliath. David remembered how he himself had killed a lion and a bear when they took a sheep, and Goliath would be like one of them since he defied the armies of the living God. Since God delivered David from the lion and bear, He would deliver him from Goliath.

David took his staff, five smooth stones, his sling and approached the Philistine. The Philistine saw David and disdained him, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? Come and I will feed your body to the birds and beasts." And Goliath cursed David by his gods.

"Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand." (1 Samuel 17:45-47)

The Philistine came near. David ran towards him, put his hand in the bag, took out a stone and slung it. The stone struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead and he fell on his face to the ground. David ran to the Philistine, took his sword, and cut off his head. When the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel pursued the Philistine and plundered them. Because David was willing to step out in faith, God gained a great victory.

++++
For older children: contrast the difference in Saul's choices and David's. What were the consequences of both?

Why was God displeased with Saul?

Lesson 22

Why Was God with David?

Saul tried to kill David and grew further from God.

Review: God had blessed His people (the Israelites) with freedom, daily provisions, a new land—His blessings were abundant. But the people did not respond in kind to His love. They went after other idols, they rejected Him as king and wanted a physical king who would go before them into battle. This king was to be obedient to God, but the reality of it all was that Saul did as he saw fit. Because of his choices, God planned to give his kingdom to another man—a man after God’s own heart. When David went out boldly against Goliath because he was defying the army of the living God, we get a glimpse into what God was seeing in David.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 18-31, 2 Chronicles 15:2

Lesson: Because one man was brave enough and courageous enough to stand against the enemy, other men stepped up and were courageous too.

When David returned from striking the giant, the women came out with singing and dancing to meet Saul with songs of joy. They sang, “Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” (1 Samuel 18:7) This refrain displeased Saul and made him angry that they credited David with having a greater victory than Saul. And Saul eyed David from that day on.

Saul was also afraid of David because the Lord was with David but had departed from Saul.

[Why had God departed Saul? When we look at 2 Chronicles 15:2. Saul had left God, but David had not.]

David was having success in his undertakings, for the Lord was with him. All Israel and Judah loved him. Michal (Saul’s daughter) loved David. Jonathan (Saul’s son) loved David. David would lead the people into battle and have more success than others.

Saul was seeing that (1) God had departed from himself, (2) David went in and out before the people and had success in everything, (3) Israel and Judah loved David, (4) his children loved David, and (5) God was with David. Saul grew jealous of David, grew even more afraid of David and finally became his enemy. David’s name was highly esteemed.

So, Saul began to try and kill David—the very one through whom God brought victory after victory to his nation. Saul would throw his spear at David and try and pin him to the wall. He had a plan so that the Philistines might kill him. He told his servants to kill David and even sent men to bring David up on his bed so that he could kill David himself. He even hurled a spear at his own son for befriending David.

David, Israel’s best commander, had to get away from his king to keep from being killed. He went to Nob, the city of the priests, and the priest gave him Goliath’s sword. David fled over to the Philistines, but was afraid the Philistines would kill him, so he went to a cave. His brothers and also his father’s house came to him there. People in distress, in debt, or those bitter in soul also joined David. About four hundred men came to him. He later moved to a forest, the desert, the hills, the wilderness and back over to the Philistines. The number of men with David continued to grow. David was continually relying on God to help him and guide him.

Saul, on the other hand, kept going further away from God, and even started destroying his own countrymen. He lied about David saying David was trying to kill Saul. And so, with men believing that lie, Saul had men to kill the inhabitants of Nob--the city of priests--and put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep—just for helping out David when he was running from Saul. Saul also led his army out to search for David.

Towards the end of Saul's life, God would not answer Saul with dreams or prophets. The Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel. Since Saul could not get an answer from God, and Samuel had died earlier, he consulted a witch to get answers. She brought up Samuel with her magic arts. Samuel told Saul that the Lord had torn his kingdom away and was giving it to David because Saul did not obey God's voice. Moreover, the Lord would give Israel—including Saul and Saul's sons to be with Samuel.

The next day in battle, the Philistines fought the Israelites and overtook Saul and his sons and they struck them down. Saul was badly wounded and wanted his armor-bearer to strike him with the sword. When he refused, Saul fell on his own sword. The Philistines came the next day, and when they saw Saul, they cut off his head, stripped off his armor and put it in their temple, and fastened Saul's body to the wall.

But when some of the Israelites heard what the Philistines had done to Saul's body, the valiant men rose, marched all night, and took Saul's and his sons' bodies off the wall, burned them and buried their bones. And they fasted seven days.

The nation of Israel was without their king.

+++++

Have the children of all ages memorize 2 Chronicles 15:2. This concept is so prevalent all through the Old Testament. What does it take for God to be with you? Forsake you? How was David with God? How did Saul forsake God? Does this mean that if God is with you that you will never have any problems? You can look at David's life and see that this is not true. But God will be with you as you face your worldly problems.

Both men were anointed as king. God even changed Saul's heart. But through repeated times of disobedience to God, Saul wound up at the end of his life seeking a witch, which was far from where he started! It's so important to guard your heart all of your life....from when you are young until you pass from this earth. Life is going to be filled with hardships and trials, but daily decisions need to be made to be with God, to draw closer to Him through Bible study and prayer.

Learn from these two men, for their choices were very different. David was not born a man after God's heart. He moved into that position by daily seeking his God. He was not a perfect man by any means, but he tried to be obedient to God. And when he was not and was faced with his disobedience, he repented and turned to God.

Lesson 23

The King After God's Own Heart

David was a man after God's own heart, through obedience.

Review: Israel had not kept their end of the covenant. They rejected God as their king and wanted an earthly king (like the other nations). Saul was their first king—tall, rich, handsome—but Saul lost his kingdom by being disobedient to God. He also treated his best commander as an enemy, and annihilated a whole town that had many priests in it. He sank so low that before he died, he inquired of a witch in a desperate attempt to talk to Samuel. After being splintered during Saul's reign, the kingdom of Israel would make some positive changes under David's reign as king. This is why, even today, upright leaders are so important to a nation.

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 5-7; 1 Chronicles 13, 15, 16, 17; Numbers 4:15

Lesson: Years ago, when David was still at home tending his father's sheep, Samuel had anointed David as king. It took a few years before he became king over all of Israel. But, this was the king God wanted on the throne.

David was 30 when he began to reign. He reigned 40 years. He took over Jerusalem and called it the City of David. David became greater and greater, for God was with him. The Philistines would come against David, and David would inquire of God. Whatever God commanded, David would obey. And God would give him victory.

David wanted the ark of God to be brought to the city of David. The Israelites did not seek the Lord's will during Saul's reign. (The ark is called by the name of the Lord who sits enthroned above the cherubim). So David gathered a great assembly to bring up the ark of God from the house of Abinadab to bring the ark to Jerusalem. They carried the ark of God on a new cart and all Israel were rejoicing with all their might. And Abinadab's sons—Uzzah and Ahio—were driving the new cart with the ark of God and Ahio went before the ark.

"And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God." (2 Samuel 6:5-7)

And David was angry because the Lord had burst forth against Uzzah and he was afraid of the Lord that day and was not willing to take the ark of the Lord into the city of David, so he put the ark in the house of Obed-edom. The Lord blessed Obed-edom and the ark remained there three months.

David built houses for himself in the city of David and prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. Then David said no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord had chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to Him forever. "Because you did not carry it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule." (1 Chronicles 15:3)

To the Levites, David told them to consecrate themselves so that they could bring up the ark. And the Levites carried the ark on their shoulders with the poles as God commanded through Moses. And David

had many people involved in bringing up the ark: musicians, gatekeepers, trumpet blowers, and singers. "And because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams." (1 Chronicles 15:26)

All Israel brought up the ark and the people shouted and played trumpets, cymbals, harps and lyres. And David was dancing and rejoicing. "They brought in the ark of God that day and set it inside the tent David had pitched for it, and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God." (1 Chronicles 16:1) And David blessed the people in the name of the Lord and distributed to all Israel a loaf of bread, a portion of meat and a cake of raisins. Then he appointed some Levites to invoke, to thank and to praised the God of Israel.

Now when David lived in his house of cedar, the ark of the covenant was under a tent. He told Nathan the prophet that he wanted to build a house for the ark of the covenant to stay in, but God wanted David's son to build it for David had killed too many men in war. God wanted David to know that He took David from the pasture to be prince of His people. God had been with David wherever he had gone and had cut off his enemies. And God would make him a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. Moreover, God declared to David that the Lord would build him a house. And when his days were fulfilled, He would raise up his offspring, one of his own sons, and he would build a house for God and God would establish his throne forever. God would confirm David in His house and in His kingdom forever and David's throne would be established forever.

David went in and sat before the Lord, "Who am I, O Lord, and what is my house that you brought us thus far...There is none like You, O Lord, and what is My house, O Lord, and there is no God besides you. And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making for yourself a name for great and awesome things...? And you made your people Israel to be your people forever, and you, O Lord, became their God." "And now, O Lord, you are God, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now you have been pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue, forever before you, for it is you, O Lord, who have blessed and it is blessed forever. "(from 1 Chronicles 17:16-27)

+++++

David had his heart into bringing up the ark the first time, but since they were NOT doing it obediently, God struck Uzzah down. God had already warned them about how to carry the ark during Moses' time (Numbers 4:15). The next time David tried to bring up the ark, he read how they were to bring it up. God wants our heart in our service to Him and also our worship to Him, but He also wants us to be obedient in our actions. This lesson continues to serve as an example to us still today.

David wanted to build God a house, but since he was a man of war, God wanted his son to build it for him. Instead, God built David a house forever and would establish his throne forever. We know this was fulfilled in God's Son, Jesus, Who would reign forever.

God will bless the world through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, through Judah and now through David.

Lesson 24

Turning a Nation Back to God

David's love for God turned the Israelites' heart to God.

Review: When the Israelites rejected God as their king, they wanted a physical king and they got Saul. Even though God changed his heart, by the end of Saul's life, he had gone so far away from God that he was consulting a witch. During Saul's reign, the ark of God continued to stay in a house, and worship of God was seldom mentioned. This was the kingdom David inherited from Saul. David, a man after God's own heart, did much to turn the nation back to God. It is a story buried very subtly in the writings in Chronicles.

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 11,12; 1 Chronicles 15, 22-29 + many of the Psalms

Lesson: Even though David was a man after God's own heart, he definitely was not a perfect man. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed in battle to cover it up. God did not try and hide those stories—they are in the Scriptures so that we can learn lessons. Because David despised the word of the Lord and did these things, David suffered some very hard consequences that brought him much sorrow. The writings about David in 2 Samuel goes into details about these consequences.

1 and 2 Samuel tells about the life of David. 1 Kings tells about David in his old age, his death, the kingdom going to Solomon and all about Solomon's life. 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings tells about the time of the divided kingdom and the kings that followed afterwards. So, by the time you come to David's story again in 1 Chronicles, you might forget where the nation of Israel was when David began reigning.

David LOVED God. He praised God and extolled (highly praised) God so much in his lifetime. He poured out his soul to God. David had a lot of enemies—men who hated him—and he was always going to God for help. He realized that God was his Shepherd, His Helper, His Rock and Strength. He felt God's love and spent much time in thanksgiving to God, and praised God very publicly. And so, as you read the Psalms, you can see habits that David incorporated into his daily life that helped to move him closer to God.

David loved God and wanted His Presence near, so he pitched a tent and had the ark moved out of the house of Abinadab and moved to the city in which he lived. He felt bad that he lived in a house while the ark of God stayed in a tent, so he wanted to build a magnificent house for God. Instead, God promised to build him a house where David's throne would be established forever. This promise from God would be fulfilled through Jesus—who was born through David's lineage.

As mentioned before, when Saul was king, the ark of God lived in a house. There was no mention of worship during Saul's reign—and just because it was not mentioned, does not mean they were not worshipping, but why did the ark continue to stay in a house and not the tabernacle? The Bible student sees Saul slipping further and further from God throughout his lifetime: he divided the kingdom by trying to kill David, his best commander. He would not annihilate (destroy utterly) the Ammonites as God commanded but he did have his men annihilate a whole town of priests—a town of fellow Israelites. By the end of his life, he was consulting a witch. This was the leadership of Saul. And when the leadership is evil, evil begins to permeate a country.

When David became king of Israel and Judah, his love for God got many people involved in worship. When he brought the ark of God into town, he got hundreds of Levites involved. He had some to be musicians,

gatekeepers (guards), singers, movers of the ark. The people were working together to worship God (1 Chronicles 15). In 1 Chronicles 22, David made extensive preparations for the temple for Solomon to build. He encouraged his son Solomon, and the leaders to seek God. In 1 Chronicles 23, David was numbering the Levites and then putting them to work by the tens of thousands in worshipping God. And, David was having them do things in obedience to the Lord [evidently, he had learned a valuable lesson with Uzzah.]

In 1 Chronicles 25, David was working with them in families. In 1 Chronicles 26:31, which was David's last year of life, he was still searching for men of great ability. Before David died, he gathered the people and his son, Solomon, who was to take his place, and said, "And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. Be careful now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong and do it." (1 Chronicles 28:9) David gave Solomon his plan for the temple and all the furnishings.

David provided for the house of God many precious metals and stones. He also provided for the holy house out of his own treasury, and encouraged the leaders to do the same—and they did! David blessed the Lord in the presence of the assembly, and then told the assembly to bless God, and they did. They offered many sacrifices that day. And the Israelites ate and drank before God, and on that day, they had great gladness. (from 1 Chronicles 29)

These are some of the reasons David was/and still is such a great example—for his life continues to show us great leadership skills today. David loved God. He led by example. David was very verbal in his praise to God—not only to his family, but in the great assemblies. He got many people involved in the service of the Lord and he learned to do it according to God's commands. And in the forty years that David was king, the nation went from the ark of God being in a house and very little mention of worshipping God, to thousands upon thousands actively worshipping God!

David reigned over Israel forty years and during those forty years, he shepherded God's people closer to God. And God blessed the nation of Israel. "Then he died at a good age, full of days, riches, and honor. And Solomon his son reigned in his place." (1 Chronicles 29:28; Psalms 78:70-72)

+++++

Contrast the leadership of Saul and David.

[Saul was not obedient to God's commands, and continued to move further away from God. He tried to kill his best commander, commanded others to kill him, sent the army to go after him, and even killed a town of priests for helping David just a little. He sacrificed to God himself, instead of obediently waiting for a priest, and when he no longer got any answers from God, he consulted a witch.]

[David loved God. He praised God, relied on Him, obeyed Him in battle, wanted His presence near him in Jerusalem, wanted to build God a magnificent house. David did not always obey God either, but when he was confronted, he repented of his sins and paid a high price in consequences with his family. But even through it all, David kept moving closer to God. He worked hard to get thousands of people involved in the worship of God in all sorts of roles. He set the example and encouraged people to follow him. He moved closer to God when Saul moved further away.]

Lesson 25

Solomon builds the Temple

Solomon, the third king, built a temple for God.

Review: The Israelites first king, Saul, went further away from God. But their second king, David, brought the Israelites back to God and got many people involved in worshiping and serving God. Before David passed away, he had all of the materials needed for his son Solomon to begin the building of the temple for God. He even donated much from his personal treasure and challenged the leaders to follow his example. When David died at a good old age, he left his son Solomon to be the new (third) king of Israel.

Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 1-9; 1 King 2-10; Deuteronomy 17:16-20

Lesson: Solomon, along with a big assembly of leaders, went to Gibeon to the tent of meeting and the bronze altar, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it. That night, God appeared to Solomon and told him to ask what God could give to him. Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge to govern God's people. Because he asked for this and not for wealth, honor or the life of those who hated him, or even long life, then God would also give him riches, possessions and honor. And IF he walked like David and obeyed Him, God would lengthen his days. (1 Kings 3:14)

Solomon gathered fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen and stationed them in chariot cities. He made silver and gold as common as stones, and imported horses from Egypt. Solomon's actions went against God's command He made in Deuteronomy 17:16-17: "Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold."

Solomon built a temple for God's name on Mount Moriah. It was 60 cubits long and 20 cubits wide. He lined the house with fine gold, and also made the temple furnishings and covered them with gold. When they finished, Solomon assembled the people and they brought the ark to rest in the Most Holy Place of the temple. Solomon blessed the people and prayed to God and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices and offerings. And the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the people saw the fire come down, they bowed down, and gave thanks to God.

Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep when they dedicated the house of God. They held a feast for seven days and it was a very great assembly. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month, he sent the people away to their homes—joyful and glad of heart for the prosperity that God granted David, Solomon and the people.

It took Solomon seven years to build God's house, but it took thirteen years to build his own house. Solomon's house dwarfed the temple of God. It was 100 cubits long and 50 cubits wide. Solomon also built the Hall of Pillars, the Hall of the Throne, Hall of Judgment, and a house for Pharaoh's daughter.

God appeared to Solomon a second time and laid out some choices for Solomon:

IF he obeys God's commands, God would establish his throne.

IF he forsakes God's commands and serves other gods, then God would cut Israel off from this land, and this temple would become a heap of ruins and people would pass by it and hiss and say,

“Why has God done thus to this land and to this house?” And they will say, because they abandoned the God who brought them out of Egypt and worshiped other gods. So the Lord brought this disaster on them. (from 1 Kings 9)

Solomon’s wealth continued to increase: the weight of gold that came to him was 666 talents, besides that that came in with the merchants and explorers. He made himself a great ivory throne and overlaid it with the finest of gold, with six steps and twelve lions; one on each end of the steps. The likes of it had never been made in any kingdom. All of his drinking vessels were of pure gold. “For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.”

Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules. Year by year, Solomon’s wealth grew in abundance.

And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. And the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah. And Solomon’s import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king’s traders received them from Kue at a price. A chariot could be imported from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver and a horse for 150, and so through the king’s traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria.” (1 Kings 10:22-29)

God had indeed blessed Solomon and gave him much wisdom and knowledge. But Solomon had his part to play—he was to continue to be obedient to God and to worship God only. Would Solomon have the self-discipline with all of this wealth? Would he worship God only?

+++++

Compare the size of the house Solomon built for God and the one he built for himself. Whose house was bigger?

What temptations do you think Solomon faced because he had everything he wanted?

Mount Moriah is where the temple was built. It was also in these mountains that Abraham was to sacrifice his son. Genesis 22:2,14

What did Solomon choose to do with his wisdom? Was he wise enough to seek God in his life and encourage the nation he ruled to draw closer to God? Or was his interest in physical pursuits?

In the next lesson, we will study about how Solomon used the gift of wisdom that God gave to him.

Lesson 26

Solomon's Seeds of Destruction

Wealth, honor, women and disobedience were the downfalls of Solomon.

Review: Saul was Israel's first earthly king. He was a jealous king and his leadership took Israel away from God. David was the second king—a king after God's own heart that changed the trajectory of Israel and got many men involved in the service of the Lord. Solomon, David's son was the third king. God gave him wisdom—so much so that people came from everywhere to listen to him. God also blessed him with riches. Would Solomon be wise enough and disciplined enough to be obedient with all of his abundance of physical blessings?

Scriptures: 1 Kings 11 Deuteronomy 17:14-20

Lesson: Solomon changed the looks of his nation with all of the building projects going up everywhere: the temple, his house, Pharaoh's daughter's house, the different halls plus all the store cities. The wealth and blessings flowing into Israel was in great abundance. With abundance, power, and wealth, Solomon began putting what he wanted ABOVE what God commanded. Look at what God commanded in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and think about Solomon's actions and his choices. "When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold."

"And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel."

King Solomon loved many foreign women from the nations that God told His people not to intermarry. God knew these women would surely turn their heart away after their gods. But Solomon clung to these women in love. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. And his wives turned his heart away, just like God had said.

When he was old, his wives turned his heart away to where he was not wholly true to God like his father David. Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians and Molech, the abomination of the Ammonites. He built a high place for Chemosh and Molech [this hill became known as the "mount of corruption." [2 Kings 23:13]

And just as God had warned, this intermarriage with foreign women became disastrous for the nation of Israel—this nation that God had done so much for. This was how they were repaying God for the way He had blessed them.

God was angry with Solomon, because his heart turned away from God. God appeared to him twice and commanded him that he should not go after other gods. But he did not obey God.

God said that since Solomon did not obey God's commands, he would tear the kingdom from him and give it to his servant. Yet for David's sake, He would leave him a tribe and would not do this during Solomon's lifetime.

God raised up several adversaries against Solomon. One of whom was his servant—Jeroboam—who lifted up his hand against the king. This is why Jeroboam was against Solomon: Solomon built the Millo. Jeroboam was very able and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious, he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. Around that time, Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem. The prophet Ahijah found Jeroboam on the road. Ahijah was wearing a new garment and only the two of them were there in the open country. Ahijah laid hold of the new garment and tore it into twelve pieces. He told Jeroboam to take ten pieces, for the Lord was about to tear the kingdom from Solomon's hand and give Jeroboam ten tribes BECAUSE Israel had forsaken God and worshiped Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom and had not obeyed God. Yet for the sake of David, God would give Solomon's son a tribe so that David's lamp would be before him.

Then God offered Jeroboam a choice: "If you will listen to all that I command you and will walk in My ways, and do what is right in My eyes by keeping My statutes and My commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you." [1 Kings 11:38]

Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam rose and fled to Egypt and was in Egypt until Solomon died.

And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem forty years and slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. And Rehoboam, his son, reigned in his place.

+++++

What command had God given His people concerning intermarriage with people from foreign nations?

What caused Solomon's heart to turn away from God?

Why was Solomon's kingdom torn away from him?

Describe the differences in the three kings: Saul, David, Solomon

Why was an earthly king disastrous to the nation of Israel?

Lesson 27

The Great Divide

A once-united Israel is divided into Northern and Southern kingdoms.

Review: Remember God's covenant to Abraham: God would bless all the nations of the world through Abraham. The promise to David was that He would establish a king forever that would be from David's house. God was still working towards those promises. But to the nation of Israel, God had told them all the blessings they would receive for obedience, and all the curses they would bring upon themselves for disobedience. David had brought the nation together in the worship of God. But Solomon, with all his wealth and prosperity, brought in idols because of his foreign wives and God was going to divide his kingdom because of this. From here until the end of the Old Testament, the nation falls further away from God. God sends prophets to try and turn the nation back to Him. Watch carefully how the Israelites respond, for they will show us the nature of mankind.

Scriptures: Blessings and Cursings: Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28; 1 Kings 12-14

Lesson: God had given Jeroboam a wonderful opportunity: if he would listen to God's commands and obey them as David did, God would build Jeroboam a house like David's. (see 1 Kings 11:38) Jeroboam was in Egypt, but as soon as he heard that Solomon had died, he returned to Israel.

The Israelites went to Shechem to make Rehoboam (Solomon's son) the new king. They wanted Rehoboam to lighten the heavy yoke Solomon had put on them. If he would lighten the yoke, they would serve him. Rehoboam sent the people away for three days while he got advice. The old men told him if he would serve the people and speak good words to them, they would be their servants.

But the young men who had grown up with Rehoboam told him to lay a heavy yoke on them. When the people came back, Rehoboam talked to the people harshly, forsaking the counsel of the older men. Rehoboam did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord.

Rehoboam sent out the man in charge of forced labor, and they stoned him. And Israel rebelled against the house of David. Rehoboam assembled the two tribes left to him (Judah and Benjamin) against the other ten tribes. He was trying to restore his kingdom. But God told him not to, for this was from the Lord. And they listened to the Lord and went home.

Now Israel was divided into two: Northern Israel had ten tribes with Jeroboam as their king. They are referred to as "Israel". Southern Judah had two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) with Rehoboam as their king. They became known as "Judah".

Jeroboam went to Shechem and lived there. He was afraid the kingdom of Israel would revert back to David's house. And instead of obeying God and letting God build his house into one like David's, he instead totally changed their religion:

WHO ⇒ Jeroboam made two golden calves to worship instead of worshiping God.

WHERE ⇒ They worshiped at Bethel and Dan instead of Jerusalem.

PRIESTHOOD ⇒ Priests were from any tribe instead of the Levites like God commanded.

FEAST DAYS ⇒ 8th month 15th day instead of 7th month 15th day.

God sent a prophet to confront Jeroboam. The prophet cried out against the altar Jeroboam built in Bethel. He prophesied that one of David's sons (Josiah) would defile this altar in the future. Signs happened during the prophet's visit, but Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people. And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and destroy it from the face of the earth.

Jeroboam's son got sick. Jeroboam's wife disguised herself and went to the prophet Ahijah to see if the child would recover. Now, Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were dim because of his age. The Lord told Ahijah that Jeroboam's wife would be coming and what he was to say to her. When she came to Ahijah, she pretended to be someone else. Ahijah knew it was Jeroboam's wife and he told her to tell Jeroboam, "Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over my people Israel and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, and yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes, but you have done evil above all who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back, therefore behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam" "... the Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin." (from 1 Kings 14:7-18) Ahijah also told her that when she entered the city, her child would die. And sure enough, these things happened to Jeroboam. Jeroboam slept with his fathers, and Nadab, his son, reigned in his place.

Now Rehoboam—the king of Judah-- made his fortresses strong and stocked them with provisions and put shields and spears in the cities to make Judah strong. And the priests and Levites from Israel left their lands and holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam cast them out from serving as priests. And those who set their hearts on seeking God came to Judah and strengthened the kingdom for three years.

But when Rehoboam was strong, he abandoned God's law and so God abandoned him. The king of Egypt came and took away his gold shields. When Rehoboam humbled himself, God's wrath turned from him.

Rehoboam reigned seventeen years in Judah. Jeroboam reigned for twenty-two years in Israel. Israel never turned from Jeroboam's sin of changing gods and worshiping the golden calves. And so, this part of the nation brought curses on themselves because of their choices to be disobedient. God would send to them many prophets to try and turn them back to Him, but they never turned from their idols. Judah (David's house) was sometimes faithful and obedient to God but oftentimes they were not faithful. It was their choices that brought God's blessings and cursings.

+++++

Help your students remember the difference between Israel and Judah: Israel changed their worship from the true God to two golden calves. They had ten of the tribes. None of their kings were faithful/obedient to God. Israel had many different dynasties and families that reigned. Jeroboam was the first king of the ten tribes of Israel. Judah still had the temple in Jerusalem, and worshiped God at times. They only had two of the tribes—Benjamin and Judah. David's family line reigned all through the kings in Judah. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was the first king over the two tribes of Judah. What caused God to abandon Rehoboam? (See 2 Chronicles 12:1, and 2 Chronicles 15:2) Did their choices matter? Do yours?

Lesson 28

The Showdown Between God and Baal

Baal worshipers lost the contest to Elijah's true God.

Review: God continues to be faithful towards His promise of blessing the world through Abraham's offspring (Israelites). God chose the Israelites to be His chosen people, brought them out of slavery and into the Promised Land. In return for God's kindness, the Israelites rejected God as their king. And because of their unfaithfulness, their kingdom split: Israel (northern ten tribes) and Judah (southern two tribes). God offered Jeroboam (the king of Israel) a chance for God to build his house like David's if he obeyed like David. But Jeroboam chose to go far from God—he brought in two golden calves to worship instead and changed every bit of the worship of God to the way he wanted. Northern Israel never came back to God...they never did get rid of the golden calves. Judah would have its ups and downs.

Scripture: 1 Kings 16-19, James 5:17

Lesson: Northern Israel got off to a really bad start with Jeroboam by totally rejecting the worship of God and His commands. Their kings went through several assassinations and now Ahab sat on the throne of Israel. Ahab was the most wicked king Israel had had and he was married to Jezebel (a foreigner) who served and worshiped Baal. Ahab built an altar and a house of Baal in Samaria. Ahab also erected an Asherah pole.

God sent someone to challenge this wicked king Ahab, to try and turn Ahab away from his idols—and that was Elijah, the prophet. Elijah said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." (1 Kings 17:1)

Elijah had a nature like ours. He prayed that it would not rain—and for three and a half years, it did not rain. Elijah hid by the brook Cherith and drank from the brook and the ravens fed him bread and meat. But after a while, the brook dried up.

Elijah then moved to Zarephath, where a widow fed him. God blessed the widow and He did not allow her oil or flour to run out until God sent rain.

With no rain on the land, Ahab himself looked everywhere for Elijah and he sent people to look for Elijah. Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord. Now, Ahab had a man who was over his household who feared the Lord. His name was Obadiah. When Jezebel was killing the prophets, Obadiah took 100 prophets and hid them in a cave and fed them bread and water.

Once, Ahab and Obadiah had split up and were looking for some water in the valleys. Perhaps they would find grass to keep his horses and mules alive. As Obadiah was going on his way, he met Elijah. Elijah wanted Obadiah to tell Ahab that he had found Elijah. Obadiah was afraid the Spirit would take Elijah away and Ahab would kill him if he could not find Elijah. But, Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

"When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, 'Is it you, you troubler of Israel?' And he answered, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.' " (1 Kings 18:17-19)

So, Ahab sent and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. Elijah came to the people. “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him.” But the people were silent, and did not answer him a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

Elijah had a contest to see who was the true God. Either God was the true God, or Baal was the true one. Elijah had each side prepare a bull for a sacrifice, lay it on the wood, put no fire to it, then each side would cry out, and the God who answered by fire, he is God. The people agreed to this. The prophets of Baal took a bull and prepared it. They called on Baal from morning to noon, but there was no voice, and no one answered. Elijah mocked them, “perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” And they cried aloud and cut themselves as was their custom. As midday passed, they raved on until evening. There was no voice. No one answered. No one paid attention.

Then the people came near to Elijah. He repaired the altar of the Lord for it had been thrown down. He made a trench around the altar, put the wood on, and then cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. He had four jars filled with water poured on the burnt offering and the wood, then repeated that two more times until the water ran around the altar and filled the trench with water.

Elijah prayed, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.” (1 Kings 18:36-39)

Elijah told the people to seize the prophets of Baal and put them to death. (How many were killed?) Then the Lord sent a great rain.

But even after this great miracle, Ahab continued to sell himself to do evil. (1 Kings 21:20)

+++++

When the Israelites received the ten commandments, their first command was to have no other gods before God. God’s people now not only had the two golden calves, but now Ahab and Jezebel had brought in Baal worship. God was showing the people that Baal was no god. He was showing Himself to be the true God. Even though God showed this miracle with a powerful hand, Ahab persisted in this evil.

Elijah felt like he was the only one faithful, but in reality, there were 7,000 people who had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Once the kings bring in idols, it takes a strong hand to get them out.

Lesson 29

Getting Rid of Baal Worship

As Baal worship increased, God sent Jehu to stop it.

Review: Once Northern Israel rejected worshiping God, they never returned to God, but continued worshiping idols. In fact, when Ahab came into power, along with his wicked wife Jezebel, they brought in the vile worship of Baal and tried to destroy the Lord's prophets. God sent a strong prophet to counter Ahab. In the showdown on Mount Carmel, when over four hundred prophets of Baal were killed, the Israelites had a chance to choose God again. But the worship of Baal continued. In today's lesson, God sends in a strong hand to finish off the job of ending Baal worship.

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 30:16-20; 2 Kings 2, 9, 10

[To help you understand about Baal worship, years ago, the Oriental Institute excavated a town close to Samaria. In the stratum when Ahab reigned, close to the temple of Ashtoreth—Baal's goddess wife—was a cemetery where many jars were discovered that contained the remains of many babies that were sacrificed in the temple worship. So when you consider the prophets and worshipers of Baal and Ashtoreth, remember that they were murderers of many innocent babies. This was the worship God's people chose over the worship of Him. God uses Jehu—who does not seem to be a righteous man—to carry out His judgments on Ahab, his family and the worshipers of Baal.]

Lesson: After the contest of God and Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah ran for his life, for Jezebel was making murderous threats. It was after this time, that Elijah called Elisha to assist him. Elisha was with Elijah and saw when the chariots and horses of fire took Elijah up by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha succeeded Elijah, and had many interesting stories in his life.

One day, Elisha called one of the sons of the prophets to take a flask of oil, go to Ramoth-Gilead and find Jehu, lead him into the inner chambers and anoint him king over Israel. Then he was to open the door and run. The young prophet did as he was told, and told Jehu he was to strike down Ahab's house, and avenge on Jezebel the blood of the servants of the Lord.

Jehu did just that. With a bow and arrow, he shot Ahab's son, Joram, who was the king of Israel at that time. He also killed Ahaziah, king of Judah, who was Ahab's grandson. When he rode into the town of Jezreel, Jezebel looked down out of the window. Jehu told the eunuchs to throw her down out of the window. They did, and the horses trampled her, then the dogs ate her. They found no more than her skull, feet, and hands.

Jehu sent a letter to Samaria and told the elders to kill the sons of Ahab...and they did. Then, he struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab, his close friends and priests until none were left.

Jehu assembled all the people of Israel and said to them, "Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve him much. Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers and all his priests. Let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Baal. Whoever is missing shall not live." (2 Kings 10:18,19) (But Jehu did this as a trick in order to destroy the worshipers of Baal.)

All the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. They entered the house of Baal, and brought out robes for all the worshipers of Baal. Jehu went in and said, "Search and

see that there is no servant of the LORD here among you, but only the worshipers of Baal.” Then they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. (2 Kings 10:23)

Jehu had stationed eighty men outside and said, “The man who allows any of those whom I give into your hands to escape shall forfeit his life.” (2 Kings 10:24) As soon as the burnt offering was ended, they went and put all to the sword. They went into the inner room of the house of Baal, brought out the pillar that was in the house of Baal and burned it. And they demolished the pillar of Baal, demolished the house of Baal, and made it a public toilet to this day.

Thus, Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel.

Because Jehu followed God’s orders, his sons would sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation. No other family reigned in Israel through so many generations.

Even though Jehu was obedient in this, he still was not careful to walk in God’s laws. He did not turn from Jeroboam’s sin of worshiping the golden calves.

These are the generations of Jehu that reigned: Jehu—Jehoahaz—Jehoash—Jeroboam (II)—Zechariah

2 Kings 13:10, 14:23,29

+++++

Do you remember back in Leviticus 26, how God begins with a light punishment first for disobedience, and then it gets progressively worse if the people do not repent? Think about how this started first with a drought. Then the prophets were killed on Mount Carmel and they saw overwhelming evidence that the Lord was God. Then God sent Jehu to wipe out all who worshiped at the altar of Baal. You can see how easily sin creeps in, and if it is not stopped, it would spread to Judah as well. It was during the period of the divided kingdom that many of the prophets came in to try and turn the people back to God. We see very quickly the lack of faithfulness of mankind, and yet God continued to offer the people a chance to repent and live.

Lesson 30

The End of Northern Israel

Their lack of true worship sent Israel into exile.

Review: When Moses was alive, he warned them of the perversions of the Canaanites and warned them again and again not to intermarry with them, nor to worship their gods. If they did, God would destroy them. The Israelites rejected God as their king and wanted an earthly king. Because of Solomon's disobedience, the Israelites were divided into northern Israel and southern Judah. Jeroboam, king of Israel, sinned greatly by totally changing God's worship to a worship he wanted, and even set up two golden calves to be their gods. Israel never came back to the worship of God. During Ahab's reign, Baal worship was brought in. It took a strong hand to wipe it out. Even so, they never went back to worshipping God. They forsook God, so God was about to send them into exile.

Scriptures: 2 Kings 17; 2 Chronicles 15:2; Leviticus 26

Lesson: God sent Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Hosea and Amos (to name a few) to Israel. Israel was choosing a wrong path. God kept warning them by the prophets, to try to turn them from their wicked ways. God does not want anyone to perish...but we see time and again that He holds each one accountable for their choices. God wanted the people of Israel to turn back to Him, but the people were stiff-necked, stubborn and did not want to turn back to God.

Israel had many more kings than we have studied about, yet NONE of Israel's kings made steps to bring northern Israel back to God. And so, just as God warned them in Leviticus 26, that just as the land of Canaan vomited out the Canaanites because they made the land unclean, the land would vomit them out as well if they made it unclean by their lives and choices. God taught them in 2 Chronicles 15:2 that if they forsook Him, He would forsake them.

And so, in the ninth year of Hoshea (the king of Israel), the king of Assyria captured the capital city of Israel—Samaria—and carried the Israelites away and placed them in different cities.

Why did God do this? At one time, the Israelites were His treasured possession, but they became a people who despised Him by repaying His goodness with their unfaithfulness. Pay close attention to the word "BECAUSE" in the Old Testament. This answers many questions of "WHY". It answers WHY God sent the Israelites into exile. 2 Kings 17:7-18

- The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God things that were not right.
- They built for themselves high places in all their towns.
- They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree and made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away.
- They did wicked things provoking the LORD to anger.
- They served idols, which the LORD had said, "You shall not do this".
- The LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commands and statutes."

But the people would not listen—they were stubborn; they despised God's commands and covenant. They went after false idols and followed the nations around them. They abandoned God's commands and

worshipped false gods (the two golden calves, the Asherah, the host of heaven and Baal). They burned their children as sacrifices and sold themselves to do evil.

God warned them over and over. He gave them His commands. Moses had warned them centuries earlier that exile was coming if they forsook God. Their daily choices, not to listen to God, not to worship Him as He commanded, not to sacrifice to Him, to forget Him—cost them their homes, their nation, and their home land.

And so, since they rejected God, God rejected them and gave them into the hands of their plunderers. Israel was exiled into the land of Assyria.

Can we learn from their example?

What does this say about God?

What does this say about the nature of man?

Following God is a choice we must work at daily—no matter what others do....no matter what our leaders or kings do. This is why the Old Testament is so important, for it teaches us the importance of obedience, the nature of God, and the nature of mankind. And if God warns us of something, we need to listen and take notice—for GOD NEVER LIES.

+++++

What actions did the Israelites do that caused God to send them into exile?

Who were some of the prophets God sent to them?

What are some things happening in your life/family/country that you know do not please God?

Since we do not have prophets today, how can we find out what pleases or displeases God?

Lesson 31

The Ups and Downs in Judah

Cycles of obedience and disobedience affect Judah's faithfulness to God.

Review: Once the northern kingdom rejected the worship of God and began worshiping idols, they never came back to God. Their king brought in the worship of Baal, and it spread throughout their nation. Jehu eradicated their worship of Baal, but they never renounced the worship of idols. Because they rejected God, God rejected them and sent the northern tribes of Israel into exile in Assyria. They never came back as a nation. Judah would have known this, but was knowledge enough? Would it cause Judah to act differently?

Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 27-32; 2 Kings 15:32-20:21

Lesson: But what about the other part of the kingdom that was called Judah--the one that came from Solomon's line? We learned a little bit about them earlier with Rehoboam. Did they remain faithful to God?

Judah was continually going back and forth—sometimes they grew closer to God, then sometimes they would grow further away. The kings that did what was right in God's eyes, would do sweeping reforms and rid the nation of idols. Other kings would bring the idols right back into the country.

Whereas Israel kept changing their kings due to assassinations, Judah's kings were all from the line of David. So, they might have a faithful father, followed by an unfaithful son, followed by a faithful grandson. Continue to pay very close attention to the word BECAUSE during the reign of the kings, for it shows the reasoning behind their successes and failures.

Jotham did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. "Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God." (2 Chronicles 27:6) Jotham reigned 16 years, then he died.

But Jotham's son Ahaz did not do what was right. "And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done, but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals, and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree." (2 Chronicles 28:1-4) Therefore, God gave Judah into the hands of the king of Syria and the king of Israel. In one day, 120,000 men of valor were killed because they had forsaken the Lord. They also had the Edomites carrying away some of their people; the Philistines were making raids on their cities. "For the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the Lord. So Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. For Ahaz took a portion from the house of the Lord and the house of the king and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria, but it did not help him." (2 Chronicles 28:19-21)

In the time of his distress, Ahaz became more faithless to God. He worshiped the gods of those who defeated him, cut into pieces some of the vessels of God, and shut the doors of God's house. He made high places to make offerings to other gods, provoking the Lord to anger. He even built a new altar according to an altar he had seen in a foreign land. This new altar was used instead of God's altar.

Ahaz reigned 16 years and was buried in the city, but not in the tomb of the kings. His son, Hezekiah became the next king of Judah.

Hezekiah was very different than his father, for he acted in accordance with God's Word. In the first day of the first month of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple, and repaired them. He brought in the priests and Levites and removed all the filth from the Holy Place. Then they consecrated the house of the Lord and finished by the sixteenth of the month.

The people assembled together and offered thousands of offerings to the LORD and they sang and worshiped the LORD together. "And Hezekiah and the people rejoiced because God had provided for the people, for the thing came about suddenly." (2 Chronicles 29:36)

They celebrated the Passover, even though not everyone was clean, and Hezekiah asked people to come from Judah and Israel too (for Israel had not yet gone into exile). Hezekiah asked for God's forgiveness since they were not all clean but were coming back to the LORD, and the LORD heard him and healed them. And the people kept the Feast of the Unleavened Bread with great gladness and they sang to the LORD with all their might. There was great joy in worshiping God as He commanded.

When they finished, they went out and broke down the idols, and the king led the people into giving back to the LORD. Hezekiah did what was good and right and faithful, and everything he did, he did with all his heart, so he prospered.

In the fourteenth year of his reign, the Assyrians (who had taken Israel into exile) came and attacked one of his towns. The Assyrians said much against God and wrote letters against God and cast contempt on God. The Assyrians shouted that the God of Hezekiah would not deliver the people from the Assyrians.

Because of their talk, Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah cried out to God in heaven. And the LORD sent an angel who cut off all the mighty officers of the Assyrians—185,000 men, and the Assyrians returned to their own land. When their king went into the house of his god, some of his sons struck him down.

Hezekiah became sick and was to the point of death. Hezekiah prayed to the LORD and God healed him and gave him fifteen more years of life. But Hezekiah became proud and wrath came upon him and he humbled himself so that God's wrath did not come upon him during Hezekiah's life.

Hezekiah died and Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

+++++

Notice when the people worship God as He commanded, there is great joy! Plus, also notice how quickly reform can take place.

Jotham was right before God. His son Ahaz was very wicked. Ahaz' son, Hezekiah made sweeping reforms. Three generations...three very different choices that each king made. What choices will you make in your lifetime?

Whose god was able to save? The God of Hezekiah or the god of the Assyrians?

Whose god is the true God?

Lesson 32

The Boy Rulers

Judah had young kings (ages 8 and 12) who made big decisions.

Review: Israel went into exile because of their unfaithfulness. Judah, depending on the character and choices of their king, either drew closer to God or further away. Ahaz was a wicked king that closed the doors of the temple. His son, Hezekiah, opened the doors on his first day as king, and threw out all the filth from the temple. Hezekiah brought in sweeping reforms and the nation turned back to God and God blessed them. Hezekiah was near death, but God extended his life fifteen years, and during this extension of his life, he fathered a son, Manasseh.

Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 33 and 34; 2 Kings 21-23

Lesson: After Hezekiah died, his twelve-year-old son Manasseh became king, and he reigned for fifty-five years. He rebuilt the high places that his righteous father had broken down, and erected altars to Baals and Asherahs. He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. He burned his sons and used magic, and sorcery and set a carved idol in the house of God. Manasseh led Judah and Jerusalem to do MORE EVIL than the nations God had destroyed. He shed so much innocent blood till it filled Jerusalem from one end to the other.

“The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.” (2 Chronicles 33:10-13)

When he returned to Judah, “he took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD.” “He restored the altar of the LORD and offered sacrifices of peace offerings and thanksgiving.”

When Manasseh died, his son Amon reigned in his place. Amon reigned two years and did evil in God’s sight. His servants put him to death. And the people of the land made Amon’s son Josiah king in his place.

Josiah was eight when he began to reign. In his eighth year to reign, he began to seek the Lord. In his twelfth year, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the Baals and Asherim. He went far and wide to break down altars and images into powder and cut down the incense altars. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

In his eighteenth year to reign, they began to repair and restore the house of the LORD, and the Levites did the work faithfully. While they were in the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD, so they brought the book to the king and read it to him. The king heard the words of the Law, tore his clothes and inquired of the LORD for himself and for Judah, for great wrath was poured out on them BECAUSE their fathers had not kept the word of the LORD.

And they inquired of the LORD and found out that God would bring disaster on Judah BECAUSE they had forsaken God. But, **BECAUSE** Josiah’s heart was tender and he humbled himself, he would not see the disaster.

They gathered the people—both great and small—and he read to them the Book of the Covenant they found in the house of the LORD. They made a covenant before God to walk in His commandments. Josiah went out and began clearing the corruption out of the country. They brought out of the temple the vessels made for Baal, Asherah and the host of heaven and burned them and carried the ashes to Bethel. He brought out the Asherah out of the temple, burned it and spread the ashes on the graves of the common people. He broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD. He defiled Topheth so that no one might burn his son or daughter to Molech. He removed the things Ahaz and Manasseh had put up and burned them with fire. And he defiled the mount of corruption which Solomon had made and broke them and defiled them. Then he went from Judah to Israel, pulled down their golden calves that Jeroboam made, and he removed all the shrines in the cities of Samaria. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

Josiah kept the Passover—they prepared themselves and then Josiah and his officials contributed to the people their animals for offerings. They brought thousands of offerings to the LORD and did as it was written in the Book of Moses. No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah—the priests and Levites, all Judah and Israel were present. This was in Josiah’s eighteenth year to reign.

Josiah put away the mediums, idols, fortune tellers, the abominations that were seen in the land, that he might establish the words of the law that they found in the temple of the LORD. Before him, there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.

Still, the LORD did not turn from the burning of His great wrath by which His anger kindled against Judah, BECAUSE of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked. [Re-read 2 Kings 21:10-16...Judah crossed the line. They went too far with their evil. They became WORSE THAN the nations they drove out.]

Neco, the king of Egypt, went to fight at Carchemish and Josiah went to meet him. God warned Josiah through Neco not to come out and fight him, but Josiah did not listen to his words. Josiah came out and disguised himself, and was wounded in battle. He died from his wounds and was buried in the tomb of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

+++++

God could have sent Judah into exile during Manasseh’s reign—when the people would have been at their worst and the most evil. Their consequences were coming. They had gone too far. But God gave the people a chance to repent before the consequences for their nation came.

What happened when they found the Book of the Lord? If they never would have lost the Book of the Lord, do you think they might not have dropped this far into sin? Way back during the time of Moses, God commanded the people that if they got a king, the king would need to write for himself in a book a copy of the law, and then he was to read it all of his life, learn to fear God and keep God’s laws and statutes (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Do you think their nation would have made different choices if the king was doing this on a daily basis, as well as the people? God had given the Israelites a good law, but it was important for the people to **daily** make good choices to live obediently to it. When the law is lost.... when it is forgotten...when it is neglected, then people forget the law and they forget the love of God. That’s why it is so important to keep on keeping on in your knowledge and study of God’s Word!

Lesson 33

The Time When the Land Vomited

Jeremiah continued to warn the nation to return to God.

Review: When God brought His chosen people into the land of Canaan, they were to clear out the Canaanites, destroy their idols, not mingle in marriage with them nor pick up their practices. The Canaanites had become an abomination to God with all of their magic arts, burning their children in the fire to their idols, and all of their perversions with sex. Through the years, God's people began to let go of God as their king. They began worshiping idols, they brought idols into the temple and disregarded His Word, and worshiped whoever and however they wanted. During Manasseh's reign, they became worse than the nations they drove out. Their consequences were coming. The Lord would drive them from the land, and the land would vomit them out. Josiah's sweeping reforms helped give the people another opportunity to get their lives right before God before their consequences came as a nation.

Scriptures: Leviticus 18:24-30, Deuteronomy 18:9-14, 2 Kings 23:31-25:30; Jeremiah 26, 33,36, 39; Daniel 1:1-7; Esther 2:5,6

Lesson: When Josiah was killed in battle, his sons and grandson reigned until Judah was taken into captivity:

1. Jehoahaz (Josiah's son)—was 23 when he began his reign. He reigned three months, did evil and Pharaoh Neco took him to Egypt and made Judah pay him money. Jehoahaz died there in Egypt.
2. Jehoiakim (Josiah's son)—began to reign at age 25, and reigned for eleven years. The king of Babylon came and Jehoiakim became his servant. It was around this time that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were taken to Babylon along with some of the vessels of the house of God, and the king of Babylon put the vessels in the treasury of his god. Judah was also attacked by bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites. This came because of Manasseh's sins and all the innocent blood that was shed that God was not willing to forgive.

During his reign, Jeremiah the prophet would come and prophesy to the people in hopes that people would hear of the coming disaster on Judah, turn from their evil way and God would forgive them. God wanted the people to come back to Him. Jeremiah would dictate and Baruch, his helper, would write God's words and read it to the people because Jeremiah was banned from going to the temple. Baruch was then told to read it to Jehoiakim's officials. Upon hearing it, the officials turned to one another in fear. They made Baruch and Jeremiah go and hide. Jehudi read it to the king. When Jehudi read the words of the Lord, King Jehoiakim would cut off the columns from the scroll they had just read and burn them in the firepot. The king and his servants were not afraid that they had burned up God's Word. The king commanded them to seize Baruch and Jeremiah, but God had hidden them.

Jeremiah continued to try and turn God's people back to God. The priests and the prophets wanted Jeremiah to be sentenced to death (Jer. 26:11). God kept offering the people life or death. He was showing them what they could do if they wanted to live...but the people were stubborn. Jehoiakim did many abominations in the sight of the Lord, and he died.

3. Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim's son) was put in as king. He reigned three months and Nebuchadnezzar brought him to Babylon along with precious vessels from the house of the Lord.

Nebuchadnezzar (King of Babylon) attacked Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin gave himself up. The king of Babylon carried off the royal family, his officials, people of nobility, the mighty men of valor, craftsmen and smiths plus 10,000 captives, along with the treasures of the house of the Lord and of the kings' house.

4. Zedekiah (Josiah's son), 21, was made king and reigned eleven years. God told him through the prophet Jeremiah to obey the king of Babylon, but he rebelled. In the ninth year, Babylon built siege works around Jerusalem.

In the eleventh year, an opening was made in Jerusalem. And the officials of the king of Babylon sat in the middle gate. Zedekiah and the soldiers saw them and escaped through another gate, but they were caught. The last thing Zedekiah saw before his eyes were put out was his sons being killed. He was taken in chains to Babylon.

Jeremiah, however, was given his freedom as his prize of war because he put his trust in God. Gedaliah, the new governor, was to take care of him.

The Babylonians burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every great house they burned. They also broke down the walls of Jerusalem. The Babylonians took the pillars of bronze, the stands, and the bronze sea, and broke them up and carried them into Babylon. They carried the rest of the people in the city into exile. Only the poorest of the land were left to be vinedressers and plowmen. They were left with Gedaliah as governor.

So, why did this happen to Judah? God tells them over and over through the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 16:11-13 "Because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the Lord, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to me. Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor."

Jeremiah 19:4, 5 "Because the people have forsaken Me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into My mind— "

God sent prophets to try and turn them back to Him. He also sent droughts and famines...bands of enemies...and yet, the people continued to go on with their stubborn ways. God wanted them to choose life, and He kept offering them a chance to LIVE. And yet by their choices, they continued to choose death. They forsook God, so God forsook them...just like He said.

Can we learn from Judah's history? It was their **DAILY** choices that caused the land to vomit them out.

+++++

List the reasons why God sent them into exile. Imagine what this would have been like to see foreign officials in your gate, to be taken in captivity to a foreign land, to see your city burned or be left behind.

Lesson 34

Those Left Behind

Those left behind, though given a chance to follow God, refused.

Review: Judah had fallen to the Babylonians, who laid siege to their beloved capital, finally entered it and set fire to every important building in the city. The temple was burned. The Babylonians carried off all the precious metals from the temple, plus all the furnishings. And the wall around their city was broken down. The last thing the king saw was witnessing the murder of his sons. Then they put his eyes out and carried him off to Babylon. Many more people were taken to Babylon as exiles. Only the very poor were left behind. Jeremiah stayed behind as well.

Scriptures: Jeremiah 40-44, 2 Chronicles 36,

Lesson: There are three sets of people we will look at. We will cover one group today, and the next two groups in the next lesson: (1) the poorest left behind, (2) the ones exiled in Babylon with Ezekiel the prophet, and (3) the nobles taken captive in Nebuchadnezzar's court.

(1) The poor left behind.

When Nebuchadnezzar burned Jerusalem and took many back to Babylon, he left the poorest under a governor named Gedaliah. They were to harvest the wine and summer fruit, serve the king of Babylon, and it would go well with them. When other Judeans, who were scattered in different countries, heard there was a remnant left, they came back to Judah and harvested too.

Ishmael, a chief officer of the king and of royal blood, came and assassinated Gedaliah, along with the Judeans with him. Ishmael also killed the plus the Chaldean [Babylonian] officers. He then took captive the people who had been with Gedaliah and set out to cross over to the Ammonites. These captives were rescued by a man named Johanan, who took the people near Bethlehem, with the intention of going all the way to Egypt. Those left behind were afraid of the Babylonians, even more so now, because Ishmael had killed their soldiers.

The commanders of the forces, Johanan, and all the people came near to Jeremiah to see what God wanted them to do. They promised Jeremiah that they would obey God—whatever He said. They even said to Jeremiah, "May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the Lord your God sends you to us. Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we are sending you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

At the end of ten days, God's Word came to Jeremiah. He summoned the commanders, Johanan, and the people together to give them the Word of God: "If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I relent of the disaster that I did to you. Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid. Do not fear him, declares the Lord, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land. But if you say, 'We will not remain in this land,' disobeying the voice of the Lord your God and saying, 'No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war or hear the sound of the trumpet or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there,' then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there in the land of

Egypt, and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow close after you to Egypt, and there you shall die. All the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to live there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by disease. They shall have no remnant or survivor from the disaster that I will bring upon them.” (Jeremiah 42:10-17)

The people thought Jeremiah was lying to them and did not obey God. The commanders and Johanan took the remnant of Judah that had returned there to live, plus Jeremiah and Baruch and went to Egypt.

In Egypt, Jeremiah reminded the people of what they had just gone through: of the disaster God had brought on them because they served other gods and how God sent prophets to them to warn them that God hated this. But, they did not listen nor turn from their idols. So, God’s wrath was poured out on them. Since the poor left behind saw all of this and set their face against God, then God would set His face against them.

The people replied to Jeremiah, “We will not listen to you. But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine.” (Jeremiah 44:16-18)

Jeremiah warned them again and told them that God was watching over their responses and He would not watch over them for good and He would put an end to them.

+++++

Imagine how these people felt when they were left after the siege: their world was totally different than what they knew. Their landmarks and important buildings were burned, as well as all the important houses. Many people were gone. Their leaders were gone. Their king was taken captive. Their governor was assassinated. They were poor, extremely fearful and unsettled.

God was still offering these people life. If they would just stay in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, they would be alright. But, if they went back to Egypt, God would be against them.

God offered them a chance of life or death. God gave these people the FREEDOM to CHOOSE! Did they choose life or death? (2 Chron 15:1,2)

They went to Egypt and vowed to make offerings to the queen of heaven. They forsook God, so God forsook them.

God’s anger is seen time and time again in the Old Testament, but it is because of His peoples’ choices and their stubbornness. God is a loving and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love. He is a God who continues to offer LIFE and DEATH so that mankind is free to choose. God does not want anyone to perish. He sends prophets to warn the people time and again. But, when His people continue to be so stubborn, when they will not listen, when they are so full of pride and disobedience, when they worship their false idols, then God watches over them for harm.

This is a lesson for us all!

Lesson 35

Life in Babylon

Some exiles stood firm in their promise of obedience to God.

Review: God had given His people the promised land—the land He had promised centuries before to His faithful servant Abraham. Abraham’s family grew into the nation of Israel and they were to drive out the wicked Canaanites from the land, destroy their gods, and not intermarry with the people. But, in time, the Israelites became WORSE THAN the Canaanites and God drove them out of the land: the Assyrians took over Israel, and the Babylonians destroyed Judah. A small group who were the poorest of the poor were allowed to stay in their homeland of Judah, and harvest the fruit. But in fear, they went to Egypt—this was in total defiance to the command of God. God gave them up to disaster there after numerous warnings. But what happened to the exiles in Babylon who were carried off in captivity?

Scriptures: Ezekiel 16, 33:30-33; Daniel 1-6, 10:11,12,18,19

Lesson: Last lesson, we learned about the poor left behind. Today, we will look at two of the groups that were deported to Babylon: The exiles in Babylon, and the captives in the king’s court.

(2) **The exiles in Babylon.** The people in Jerusalem were not destroyed all at once. They deported captives several times before totally destroying the city. When Jehoiachin was king, he gave himself up to the king of Babylon who carried off the royal family, his officials, people of nobility, the mighty men of valor, craftsmen and smiths plus 10,000 captives. Jeremiah had sent a letter to the exiles telling them to settle down and settle in—they were going to be in Babylon for 70 years. Ezekiel the prophet, who was also deported was as hardened and as unyielding as the Israelites to whom God was sending him. The Israelites were hoping for a speedy return to Jerusalem, but Ezekiel kept warning them that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed.

Ezekiel told them an allegory (a word picture so that they could recognize the meaning.)

God had taken them in their youth when no one had compassion on them. He cleaned them, dressed them in beautiful garments and fed them fine food. They became beautiful and famous and rose to be a queen. But they trusted in their beauty and fame and sold their bodies for money. They took the jewelry God gave them to make idols. They took the children born to God and sacrificed them as food for their idols. This was how they were repaying God.

God wanted His people to repent and turn from their evil ways. The countrymen would speak about their love for God. They would sit and listen to His words. But they did not act on their love or practice it. They would listen to Ezekiel like “one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.” (Ezekiel 33:22) The exiles in Babylon expressed devotion to God, but never put their devotion into practice.

(3) **Daniel and his friends in the king’s court.** While Jeremiah was working with the people left behind, and Ezekiel was with the exiles in Babylon, Daniel was in the king’s court in Babylon. He was taken in the first deportation and was of noble blood. Even as a captive in a foreign land, Daniel was resolved (determined) to be obedient to God. And so, because of his strong beliefs and purposes, he rose to power in this foreign land. Babylon was the leading city in the most powerful empire of its time. [The Babylonian empire lasted about 70 years, so Daniel would have been there from its rise until it fell.]

The angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel and kept telling Daniel he was greatly loved.

Let's examine some of the events that happened in Daniel's life (and his friends' lives):

Daniel 1--When Daniel first went into exile, he was resolved and determined to obey God in this foreign land. The king found him and his friends ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Daniel 2—Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and wanted the wise men to tell him the dream and its meaning. When they could not, Nebuchadnezzar wanted all of the wise men put to death. Daniel spoke to the king's officer with wisdom and tact, and went into the king and asked for time. Daniel then went to his friends and urged them to plead to God for mercy. God answered their request and Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The king appointed Daniel to a high position, made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.

Daniel 3—Nebuchadnezzar built a statue and wanted everyone to worship it. The penalty for disobedience was to be thrown into the fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not bow down, and the king threw them into the furnace. When they came out without being hurt, without their clothes burned or the hair on their singed and no smell of fire on them, Nebuchadnezzar praised God who saved His servants. He promoted Daniel's three friends in the province of Babylon.

Daniel 5—Belshazzar's Feast—the night that Babylon fell, Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall. Daniel was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom, but then Belshazzar was killed that very night and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom.

Daniel 6— [By now, Daniel would have been a very old man] Darius placed Daniel as a very high official who became distinguished above the rest. Darius planned to set him over the whole kingdom, but the other officials had the king sign a law that no one could bow down to any god or man but the king. The king signed it. The officials found Daniel praying to God, and threw him in the lion's den. But, God shut the lions' mouths, and Daniel was not harmed.

No wonder God called him "greatly loved."

Which group of people showed by their actions that they loved God?

--The poor left behind promised to obey God, but would not. They vowed to worship idols and kept that vow.

--The exiles in Babylon expressed devotion to God, but never put their devotion into practice.

--Daniel and his friends resolved to stand firm in obedience to God, even though they were captives in a foreign land.

+++++

Which of these groups showed their faithfulness? [Daniel and his friends.]

Do you see how Daniel's faith was made complete by what he did? (James 2:22) Faith is more than lip service. Faith is active with works and faith is completed by works.

Lesson 36

Coming Home!

God turned hearts and the temple was rebuilt; exiles returned joyfully.

Review: After God's people lived in the Promised Land for many centuries, they began to let go of God and His Word, and eventually became WORSE THAN the nations they drove out. So, God sent the Assyrians to take over northern Israel, and the Babylonians (Chaldeans) to take over southern Judah. There was a group of the poorest people left behind, who chose to disregard God's command to stay in Judah. They went to Egypt where God promised they would be destroyed. The exiles in Babylon, with Ezekiel as their prophet, promised devotion to God, but would not practice it. These captives in the king's court, were the ones who were resolved to stay faithful to God while living in this pagan city. After they first got to Babylon, Jeremiah wrote the exiles a letter that said to settle in the land, that they would be there for 70 years. In today's lesson, they get to go home—back to their home country of Judah!

Scriptures: Ezra 1-6; Jeremiah 25:12,13 29:10; 2 Chronicles 36:22,23

Lesson: With the remaining time left recorded in the Old Testament, we will look at three time periods:

1. About 536-516 B.C. (20 years), the first group returned to Jerusalem and built the temple. This is recorded in Ezra 1-6. Haggai and Zechariah are prophets during this time.

About 40 years in between.

2. About 478-473 B.C. (5 years)—Esther becomes Queen of Persia and saves her people from annihilation. The book of Esther tells of this story.

About 16 years in between.

3. About 457-444 B.C. (13 years)—Ezra returns to Jerusalem with a group. 13 years later, Nehemiah returns and rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem. This is in the last half of Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah.

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, who made a proclamation and put it in writing that the Lord had charged him to build Him a house at Jerusalem. All who wanted to go back were allowed to do that, and to help with the temple.

The head of houses, priests and Levites—everyone whose spirit God had stirred--got ready to return to Jerusalem. Cyrus brought out 5,400 articles of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the house of God. Cyrus had them counted and moved from Babylon back to Jerusalem. And a large company of people--priests, Levites, servants, horses, mules, camels and donkey-- returned to their homeland. When they arrived in Jerusalem, some heads of families contributed for the house of God to be erected on the temple site.

In the seventh month, the children of Israel were in the towns and the people gathered as one man in Jerusalem. Jeshua and his fellow priests built the altar of God to burn offerings on it, as was written in God's Law. And they offered burnt offerings on it morning and evening and kept the Feast of Booths. They gave money to masons and carpenters and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the Sea, according to the grant from Cyrus.

In the second year after returning, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua and others began to build the temple. When the builders laid the foundation, the priests played their trumpets and the Levites their cymbals. They sang and praised and gave thanks to God. But many of the old men, who had seen the first house, wept

with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of the house of God being laid, though many shouted for joy. And the sound was heard from far away—people shouting and people weeping.

Now the opponents of Judah heard that the exiles were rebuilding the temple. They approached Zerubbabel and wanted to build with them. But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the leaders said they would have nothing to do with the building, that it would be for the exiles alone to rebuild the temple.

So the adversaries discouraged the people, made them afraid to build, bribed counselors to frustrate their purpose, and wrote an accusing letter against them to the King of Persia. They asked the king to look in the records to see that this city had been rebellious and that was why it was destroyed. The king found out that it was indeed a rebellious city. The king made a decree that this city could not be rebuilt until a decree was made by him.

And the work on the house of God in Jerusalem stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius.

Now the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews. Zerubbabel and Jeshua began to rebuild the house of God and the prophets of God supported them. A governor wanted to know who gave them a decree to build this building. But, God's eye was on them and they did not stop until a report went to King Darius and an answer was returned. Tattenai, the governor, sent a letter wondering if Cyrus really did make a decree to build a house of God.

Darius made a search and found that Cyrus had decreed it, that the vessels from the house of God be restored to them, and that the governor and his associates were to keep away and let this work alone. The cost was to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, and whatever was needed for sacrifices to the God of heaven was to be given daily without fail.

The elders built and prospered and finished the temple by the decree of God and the decree of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, and they celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. They set up the priests and Levites in accordance to the Book of Moses.

And on the 14th day of the first month, the exiles who returned kept the Passover (the Feast of the Unleavened Bread) with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the King of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God.

+++++

When Darius the king searched the records, how did he aide the Israelites in the rebuilding? [The vessels from the house of God were to be restored, the governor and his associates were to keep away and let this work alone. And that the cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue]

List the things the adversaries kept doing to the Israelites. [Discouraged the people, made them afraid to build, bribed counselors to frustrate their purpose, and wrote an accusing letter against them to the King of Persia and tried to stop them again the second time.] Note: these tactics are still being used to try and discourage God's people from doing the work of the Lord.

What brought the people much joy? [When they dedicated the house of God and when they obeyed His commands. Obeying God as a group like that brings about the joy of the Lord.]

Lesson 37

The Jewish Queen of Persia

Esther's courage 'for such a time as this' saved Jews.

Review: A remnant of God's people returned from Babylon to Jerusalem where they rebuilt the temple, and it was paid for by the Persians. It was smaller in size than the temple that Solomon built. When they returned, the people were trying to do things according to the Word of the Lord. The setting for today's story happened about forty years after the temple was built, but back in the land of Persia. The Israelites are now referred to as **Jews**.

Scriptures: Esther

Lesson: King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) reigned in Persia over 127 provinces. In his third year of his reign, he gave a feast for all of his officials, servants, army, nobles and governors to show his greatness for 180 days. Then the king gave a feast for all the people in Susa—great and small—and it lasted for seven days. The royal wine was served and the people were given the liberty to drink as they wished.

Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women.

King Ahasuerus summoned Queen Vashti to come before him in her royal crown to show the people her beauty. She refused, and this so angered the king that he banned her from his presence. His officials did not want other women to follow her example of disobedience to their husbands.

And so a search for a new queen began.

Now there was a man named Mordecai, a Jew who had been taken away as an exile, who had brought up his cousin Esther (who had no parents). Esther had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and Mordecai took her as his daughter when her parents died.

A law was proclaimed and many young maidens were taken for the king; Esther was also taken. Esther did not tell anyone she was a Jew. And when it was her time to go before the king, the king loved Esther more than the other women and he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

One day, Mordecai was sitting at the gate and he became aware of a plot being made by two of the king's men who guarded the door—they wanted to kill the king. Mordecai told Esther and Esther told the king who investigated the men and the men were hung. This was recorded in the king's chronicles.

The king promoted Haman, the Agagite, set his throne above all the officials and commanded all to bow down and pay respect to Haman. Mordecai, because he was a Jew, refused to bow to him, and Haman was furious because of his refusal. Haman wanted to not only lay hands on Mordecai, but also to destroy his people.

Haman told the king that there were people in his province whose laws were different from everyone else's and they refused to keep the king's laws. It was not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. So a law was made by Haman that on the 12th month, 13th day, the people were to destroy the Jews and plunder their goods. Messengers took it to the people in Susa and the city was thrown into confusion as the king and Haman sat down to drink.

When Mordecai heard the news, he went into mourning and sat at the king's gate. The queen heard about this and sent someone to find out what was wrong with Mordecai and he gave her a copy of the

written decree. Mordecai wanted Esther to beg the king's favor. But coming before the king without being summoned was a death sentence, unless he held out his golden scepter. She had not been called by him for 30 days. Mordecai told her, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

So the Jews fasted for Esther, as well as Esther and her maidens. Esther put on her royal robes and when the king saw her, he held out his scepter. She invited the king and Haman to a feast. After they attended, the king was willing to give her anything she asked for—even up to half of his kingdom. She requested them to come again the next day and she would tell him her request.

Haman went out joyfully—that is until he saw Mordecai—and then he was filled with wrath. He decided to have tall gallows [a wooden frame on which condemned persons are killed by hanging] built so that he could have Mordecai hung on it.

During the night, the king could not sleep and had the royal records brought in and the king saw how Mordecai had reported the plot by his men who had planned to kill him, and also found out that nothing had been done for him. The next morning, Haman entered the palace with the plans to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai. The king saw Haman and asked him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" Haman thought that the king wanted to honor him, and listed off ways to honor that man. The king told Haman to do all of those things for Mordecai. When Haman carried out the king's orders, Haman went home in mourning and covered his head.

On the second day of the feast, the king and Haman joined Esther again. The king asked what she wished for, and her wish was for her life and the life of her people, for they had been sold to be totally destroyed. The king said, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" Esther answered, "This wicked Haman!" Haman was terrified. The king left in his wrath and Haman stayed to beg Esther for his life. When the king found out Haman had built a gallows for Mordecai, he had Haman hung on it.

Esther told the king how Mordecai was kin to her and brought him before the king. He gave Haman's signet ring to him, his house to Esther and gave Mordecai permission to write another edict in regards to the Jews. Two months after the first edict, a new edict was written which gave the Jews the right to defend themselves from those who came to kill and plunder them.

On the 12th month, the 13th day, the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them, and no one could stand against them. Mordecai was second in rank to the king and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitudes of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his brothers.

+++++

What circumstances helped to advance Esther and Mordecai in Persia? [Esther's beauty, Mordecai's willingness to help save the king, the king's inability to sleep and chose the royal records to be read, Haman's pride in wanting all to bow to him and his hatred toward Mordecai...]

Once again, we see God helping His people come into some top positions in this foreign land.

Lesson 38

Rebuilding the Wall

Nehemiah's encouragement and faithfulness led to the wall being rebuilt.

Review: God had a plan to bless the world through Abraham. God was still working towards that blessing through Abraham's family/nation. Even though this Jewish nation had been exiled because of their disobedience, a remnant came back to build a temple. But their walls around Jerusalem were still broken down from when the Babylonians destroyed their city. Back in Persia, Haman sought to annihilate God's people. But, God used Esther's beauty, the king of Persia's love for her, and Mordecai's wisdom to thwart Haman's evil plan and to also elevate the Jewish people. It was Queen Esther's stepson—King Artaxerxes—who was the king in today's story. God's hand was working with His people—whether it was in their homeland or in Persia.

Scripture: Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah

Lesson: About sixteen years after Esther was queen, Ezra returned to Jerusalem. The people had built the temple. Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, to do it and to teach His statutes and rules in Israel. Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, sent a decree with Ezra that whatever Ezra required and God decreed, it would be paid for out of the royal treasuries.

A company of people accompanied Ezra to Jerusalem and they arrived safely because the hand of the Lord was on Ezra. When he got to Jerusalem, he found out that the people, the priests and the Levites had already begun intermingling in marriage with the Canaanites. Upon hearing of their disobedience, Ezra tore his garment and sat down sickened at his fellow Israelites. Ezra called an assembly for all the returned exiles to attend. The people trembled at the word of God because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles. Ezra repented for the sins of his people and confessed their sins. And a great many of the people wept bitterly. A proclamation was made that ALL the Jews that had returned were to come to Jerusalem. Ezra told them they had broken faith by marrying foreign women. They were to put aside their foreign wives and to separate themselves from the people.

While Ezra went to Jerusalem as a priest and to teach the people God's laws, Nehemiah came 13 years later as a governor to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah found out that the wall around Jerusalem was still broken down and its gates were destroyed by fire. When he heard this, Nehemiah wept and mourned for days, fasted and prayed to God—confessing the sins of his people, remembering Moses' words that God would scatter them for their unfaithfulness, but if they returned to God and were obedient to God's commands, God would bring them back. Nehemiah prayed that God would be attentive to his prayer and give success to him and grant him mercy in the sight of the king.

When Nehemiah took the wine to give to the king, the king noticed that he was sad and asked about his sadness. Nehemiah told the king about the situation in Jerusalem—that his city was in ruins. So he asked the king for these things: (1) if he could send him to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem, (2) to give him letters to let him pass through to Judah and (3) give a letter to the keeper of the king's forest for timber for the gates of the temple, for the wall of the city and for a house for him to live in.

The king granted him what he asked.

Now the king sent with Nehemiah some officers and horsemen. When he arrived in Jerusalem, Nehemiah went at night with a few men and inspected the wall on horseback.

Nehemiah gathered the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials and told them the hand of God had been on them for good and how the king had spoken to him. The people were ready to work together and rebuild the wall.

These Jews began rebuilding the wall: priests, men of Jericho, individuals, goldsmiths, perfumers, rulers of half districts (one with his daughters), temple servants and merchants each took a portion of the wall and worked at it. But the nobles would not stoop to serve the Lord. Sanballot the Horonite heard they were building the wall and was greatly enraged, and jeered at the Jews. Tobiah the Ammonite servant also laughed at them. But the people had a mind to work and the wall was joined to half its height.

Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, Ammonites and Ashdodites plotted to fight against the Jews. So, the people prayed for God to set a guard to protect them. The strength of the people working was failing and they were concerned for their lives because of their enemies. Nehemiah positioned families together to guard the people as they worked. Half worked on construction and half guarded them. And all who were building were also armed with a weapon in one hand and would work with the other hand.

The enemies continued to try and draw Nehemiah away from his work. They were trying to frighten Nehemiah so he would sin and then give him a bad name in order to taunt him. But Nehemiah did not give in to their schemes.

The wall was finished in 52 days! When the surrounding nations heard this, they were afraid and they realized the Jews were able to do this because God helped them.

The Jews gathered together as one man inside the city. Ezra the priest stood on a wooden platform and read the Law to all who could understand. They read from the Law of God clearly, and helped the people with what was read so that they could understand it. That day was a holy day, they were to eat, drink, and send portions to anyone who had nothing ready. And the joy of the Lord was their strength.

On the second day, the heads of the fathers' houses, priests and Levites came to study the Law. They found out they should have been dwelling in booths in the seventh month. So the people went out, gathered branches and made booths—for from the days of Joshua, the people of Israel had not done so. And there was great rejoicing.

On the 24th day, they confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers, they read from the Book of the Law for a quarter of the day, and for another quarter of it they worshiped God and confessed their sins. Then they made a firm covenant in writing; and on the sealed document they put the names of their princes, Levites and priests.

Nehemiah returned to the king for awhile, but when he came back, the people were beginning to fall into sin—intermarriage, buying/selling on the Sabbath, and much more. Nehemiah confronted them for these were the very things that caused the children of Israel to fall away from God, which brought about their destruction.

Nehemiah did much good for the people.

+++++

Lesson 39

The Nature of God and Man

The Old Testament is a schoolmaster to point to Jesus.

Definition: Covenant—an agreement between God and His people in which God makes a certain promise and then He requires His people to behave in a certain way. Sometimes a covenant is unilateral, or one-sided, that God imposes on Himself.

Lesson: The Old Testament is such a wonderful teacher for mankind for it gives us insights into the nature of God and man. It is important for us to continually look and study the Bible—for it contains within it the words of Life! It takes much discipline to take the time to read, study and then to obey God's commands, but the rewards for that are more than we can ever imagine.

We can look into the world and everything in it and see that the One who created it has great wisdom, understanding, imagination and makes the world work together in such a complete way. But to really know God and gain a better understanding of His nature, it takes studying the Scriptures. If we looked at the world alone to try and understand God without opening His Word, then our understanding of Him would be filled with misunderstandings—for there are heartaches in the world, and we might come to a wrong conclusion about God and His love.

As we open the pages of God's Word, we are told that God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Bible teaches us that God is HOLY—not one sin ever—and that it takes holiness to see Him. The Old Testament shows us the devastating effects of sin: its penalty is death, and it separates God from man.

But God had a plan before He created the world for a way for mankind to be holy in His sight—and that plan included His Son. It is His Son that the Old Testament keeps pointing to, and keeps showing how desperately mankind needs a Savior.

When God made man and woman, He set them in a garden, gave them access to a tree of Life and a tree that brought death. God told them the consequences, but then allowed them the freedom to choose. They chose to eat from the tree that brought death. God made clothes for Adam and Eve and they paid great consequences for their sin. Their sin separated them from God and brought spiritual death. And physical death, with all of its many heartaches, had entered the world.

With sin in the world, it permeated and grew until the world was so wicked that God brought a flood to destroy life on earth, but saved a remnant of the people with the ark. Noah was a man of faith, and his obedience and faithfulness to God, saved his family.

With faithful Abraham, God made a covenant with him: (1) All the nations of the world would be blessed in Abraham. (2) He also promised him that his offspring would be enslaved in a land not their own. That God would judge the nation they served and they would come out with many possessions, and would come back to the promised land in the fourth generation.

The covenant that God made with Abraham that all nations of the world would be blessed would be centuries/generations in the making. It would be fulfilled in the New Testament with Jesus. God gave many clues throughout the Old Testament period through prophets and through faithful men, that Someone was coming. He would come through the line of Judah, and would be a king from David's line

and would sit on His throne forever. Many, many prophesies were made throughout different centuries and they all pointed to the person of Jesus. So the people knew someone was coming.

The other promise to Abraham (about how his family would, in time, receive the promised land) would be fulfilled in the books of Exodus through Joshua. The story of how they lost not only the promised land but how they rejected God as their God and King, and even how God tried to warn them through the prophets was told in Judges through Malachi.

Abraham's family grew into a nation that became known as the Israelites (and later known as the Jews). They were enslaved by the Egyptians. God redeemed them from slavery with a powerful hand. He led them in the wilderness where for 40 years, He trained them to be His holy and treasured people. They learned about God, were given good laws, were taught about the blessings of obedience and were taught about the curses of disobedience. God taught them how He wanted them to worship Him, and how to learn the difference in clean and unclean and how to make sacrifices for their sins that would be pleasing to God.

God brought them to the land He promised Abraham—the land of Canaan. He helped the Israelites, and drove out the evil inhabitants of Canaan. God's people went into this beautiful land and enjoyed it, and had houses they had not built, and wells they had not dug.

But, the people were not faithful to God. They made terrible choices: they worshiped other idols, sacrificed their children to those idols, they lost the book of God's Law and returned evil for the good God gave them. So, God sent them into captivity. After 70 years, God brought back a remnant to Jerusalem.

It was through this remnant that He would send His dearly beloved Son who would redeem mankind. Jesus would obey God's will. Jesus would provide a way for sins to be forgiven. Jesus would show the perfect way to live—the way to love God and others. Jesus was coming—but the people would have to wait before He came—and that wait was about 400 years.

We see all throughout the Old Testament the faithfulness of God and His steadfast love. God remained true to His Word and to His promises and to His covenant. But the people did not. God was continually offering His people life and death and the freedom to choose. But the decisions of His people, so much of the time, was death. Death was not why God created mankind. He wants mankind to live, and be free, and have eternal life. Because of His love for us, He gives us the gift of choice—obedience to God brings life, disobedience to Him brings death. It's a choice for each one. Throughout the pages of the Old Testament, He was working toward a way to redeem mankind and to make a way where mankind could choose to be in His Son, to be holy and to live!

The Old Testament came to a close with Malachi and a promise. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." God's best was still to come—the One who would come to bless all the nations of the world!

Sin is the problem. Jesus is the solution. And God will reveal this mysterious plan in the New Testament.

+++++

Lesson 40

The Birth of Our Savior

Our Savior came to Earth in the form of baby Jesus.

Review: God revealed throughout the Old Testament that the woman's seed would crush the head of Satan, that God would bless the world through Abraham, that Abraham's family would grow into a nation, and from that nation, God would establish a king to reign forever from the family of David. Many prophets would prophesy about the One to come, so the people were looking for a Messiah—a Savior. And they needed one! Their God was a holy God and they had trouble remaining faithful to Him. Mankind needed help! The time was right, and God sent forth His beloved Son.

Scriptures: Malachi 4:5,6; Luke 1,2, Matthew 2

Lesson: At the very end of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, God said, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

In the days of Herod, King of Judea, a priest named Zechariah had a wife named Elizabeth. They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in God's commandments. But they had no children and they were both advanced in years. When Zechariah was serving as priest, an angel named Gabriel, appeared to him and said, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:13-17) When his service ended, Zechariah went to his home. Elizabeth conceived and for five months, kept herself hidden.

In her sixth month, Gabriel appeared to a virgin named Mary who was engaged to Joseph. Gabriel said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." "And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And then Gabriel left. (from Luke 1:28-38)

Mary went with haste to the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped for joy in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary praised God and remained with Elizabeth three months. When Elizabeth gave birth, she bore a son. On the eighth day, they circumcised the baby. Zechariah, who had been unable to speak since he saw the angel, wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and he blessed God.

The child grew up and became strong in spirit and he was in the wilderness.

Now a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the world should be registered. Joseph went from Nazareth to Bethlehem, with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While in Bethlehem, she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid the baby in a manger, for the inn had no place for them.

Shepherds were in that region, keeping watch over their flock, and an angel of the Lord appeared to them and said, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12) And suddenly, there was a multitude of heavenly host praising God. When they left, the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. And the shepherds told them what the angel had said. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard.

At the end of eight days, the baby was circumcised and He was called Jesus.

When the time for purification came according to the Law of Moses, they brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice. Simeon, a righteous and devout man, whom the spirit was upon, came and took Jesus in his arms and blessed God, "...my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32) Anna, an 84 year old prophetess, came up that very hour, gave thanks to God, and spoke of Him to whom all were waiting for redemption.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus returned to Galilee. "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him." Luke 2:40

Wise men came from the east seeking the one born king of the Jews, for they had seen his star, and they came to worship Him. King Herod found out from the chief priests where the Christ was to be born. Herod told the wise men that when they found the child, to let him know so that he too could worship Him. They went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly. Going into the house, they saw the child with His mother, fell down and worshiped Him. Opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream, the wise men did not return to Herod. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told them to flee to Egypt. Joseph, took the child and His mother by night and left to go to Egypt. When Herod realized he had been tricked by the wise men, he had the male babies two years and younger killed in the region of Bethlehem.

And Joseph and Mary stayed in Egypt until Herod died. And they moved back to Israel to a city called Nazareth.

+++++

Psalms 4:3 "But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself." Name the godly men and women He chose to use in today's story. [Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna How did God use these people in His plan?]

What were some of the things prophesied about John? What was prophesied about Jesus in this lesson?

Lesson 41

Beginning Christ's Ministry

Jesus chooses His apostles and teaches many lessons about living.

Review: Hundreds of prophecies pointed to Jesus. God used righteous people to bring his Son into the world: a righteous old priest and his barren, righteous wife had a son named John who would go before Jesus, to prepare the people for Him. A young virgin, whom God highly favored, was the mother of His beloved Son. Jesus came into this world to a lowly couple with the grandest announcement of His birth—a multitude of angels came to the shepherds. Simeon and Anna, both devout followers of God, rejoiced to see God's salvation. The gifts of the Magi, no doubt helped to finance their sudden trip to Egypt. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.

Scriptures: Mark 1:1-20; Luke 4:1-13; 5:27-32, 6:12-16; Matthew 4:23-7:29

Lesson: John came baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And many came out to him to be baptized in the Jordan river and confess their sins.

John wore clothes of camel's hair and wore a leather belt; he ate locusts and wild honey. He preached, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7,8)

In those days, Jesus came and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And when He came up out of the water, the heavens were torn open and the Spirit descended on Him like a dove. A voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11)

The spirit immediately led Him out into the wilderness. He fasted 40 days and nights and was hungry. Satan came and tempted Him, and with each temptation, Jesus answered the deceiver with "It is written..." Then Satan left Him until an opportune time.

John was arrested, and Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God. He passed by the Sea of Galilee and saw Simon and Andrew casting a net into the sea, for these brothers were fishermen. "Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17) Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Jesus went on further and saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were mending their nets in their boat. Jesus called them, and they left their father in the boat with the hired hands and followed him. Later, Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi (also called Matthew) sitting at a tax booth. Jesus said, "Follow Me." He left everything and followed Jesus. Levi made a great feast in his house for Jesus.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the gospel and healing every disease. And His fame spread and they brought all kinds of sick, those with various diseases and pains, paralytics and epileptics, and those oppressed by demons. And He healed each one who was brought to Him. And great crowds followed Him.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and sat down. He taught them what we now call the Beatitudes:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:3-12

He taught His disciples that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. To be great in the kingdom, you must obey the commandments and teach them. He taught them about anger, lust, divorce, taking oaths, and retaliation. He gave them commands that were against human nature, such as: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, do not be anxious about your life (what you will eat, drink, or wear) these things will be added to you if you put God's kingdom and righteousness first. He taught about not doing things for show such as giving to the needy, praying in the synagogues and street corners and fasting—all of these things are to be done between you and your Father. No one can serve two Masters—you cannot serve God and money. Ask....seek...knock. God gives good gifts to those who ask him. Whatever you wish others would do to you, do also to them. Enter by the narrow gate—the way is hard that leads to life and few find it. The gate to destruction is wide and easy. Beware of false teachers—you can recognize them by their fruit. These are just a few of the lessons Jesus taught.

One night, Jesus went to the mountain to pray and He continued in prayer all night. In the morning, Jesus called His disciples and chose 12 of them to be His apostles: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (Son of Alphaeus), Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

+++++

The Word of God is referred to as a sword (Hebrews 4:12). How did Jesus use this weapon against His enemy—Satan? [He always answered with “It is written...”]

Memorize the 12 apostles. Who were the fishermen? [Peter, Andrew, James, John] Who was a tax collector? [Matthew] Who was a zealot? [Simon] Who became a traitor? [Judas Iscariot]

These twelve men followed Jesus around. They were able to witness things that the rest of the world did not witness. And for the remaining time that Jesus had left on earth, Jesus was training them to carry on the greatest mission of all time.

Can you imagine getting to walk and talk with the Creator of the Universe, to listen to His sermons, to see just how much He cared for the suffering of others and to see how much He loved His Father? This time with the apostles would change their lives forever.

Lesson 42

The Reason Jesus Came to Earth

Jesus accomplished a lot in His ministry so people would believe.

Review: God is a HOLY God without any sin. He has such love for mankind that He set us free. The trouble with freedom is that while mankind is not forced to obey, mankind is also free to disobey. Disobedience is sin, and sin brings separation from God and death. Sin makes man unholy and separates God from mankind. Jesus came to help mankind with this situation! For hundreds of years, prophecies gave hints as to this One who was coming—He would be born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, God would call Him out of Egypt, Elijah would go before Him and turn the heart of the fathers to the children. And so the study of Jesus is so important! Jesus had an important mission—He is our Help, our Hope and is the only way mankind will be able to be with God.

Scriptures: Matthew 1:21, Mark 1:38, Luke 4:36-42, 19:10, John 6:38, 10:10, 12:46, 1 John 3:8, 4:14

Lesson: Jesus' ministry lasted only three short years. He chose 12 men to be His Apostles. These men would have an important job to be able to carry on His mission after He was gone.

There were many reasons Jesus came to this earth: He would save His people from their sins, He came to preach, to seek and save the lost, to do God's will, to give mankind life and to have it abundantly. He came as a light, to destroy the devil's works, and to be the Savior of the world.

Look again at why Jesus came—to SAVE, to PREACH, to OBEY GOD, to give LIFE, to be a LIGHT, to DESTROY Satan's works. This was a lot to accomplish in three years.

He needed the people to look further than their everyday lives, and to look beyond the physical—to look to their eternal destination. People needed to listen to Him, to believe that He truly was God's Son, to see what true love for God looks like. And so, when He came to the earth, He was not in a castle or palace--far removed from people--He was not protected or guarded from the people. He lived as a common person. He ate with them, lived among them, served them, healed them and helped them.

Jesus had compassion on the people. He would command the unclean spirits to come out of people. He rebuked a fever and it would leave. He laid His hands on the sick and healed them. And so reports about Him spread and the crowds came. And when they came, this gave Jesus an opportunity to preach to them. All of these miracles of healing showed that Jesus cared about the individual, that He was not just an ordinary man, but One with incredible power. These miracles opened a door for Jesus—and the people listened to Him.

But if Jesus spent His whole time healing, it would not allow Him to do what He came for—to preach...to save. This was His greater mission! The spiritual was more important than the physical. The eternal is more important than the temporal. In Luke 4:42, the people were looking for Him and would have kept Him from leaving them, but He needed to preach to other towns too.

Once Jesus chose His apostles, they traveled around with Jesus. They watched His compassion as He healed all who came to Him, they listened to His parables and teachings. They saw His perfect love for His Father and love for others. One of their trips would have been such a faith building trip.

Luke 8:22-56, describes this incredible trip:

1. They were in the boat and a windstorm started filling up the boat with water. Jesus rebuked the wind and waves and the storm stopped and all became calm.
2. They stepped out on land, and a demon-possessed man, who lived among the tombs, met them. He kept breaking his restraints, and no man could calm him. Jesus drove the demons out of the man into a herd of pigs that ran down the hill into the water and drowned.
3. They returned from that place and a crowd welcomed them and pressed them. Jesus felt power leave Him when a woman touched His fringe, and she was healed.
4. Jairus' 12-year-old daughter died and Peter, James and John were allowed to see Jesus bring her back to life.

Do you see how the Apostles would be powerful witnesses after seeing all of these incredible miracles? They just witnessed Jesus doing what no man could ever do: the wind and waves obeyed Him, He was stronger than the strong man, healing came from touching His fringe and He was more powerful than death.

After this, Jesus sent out the twelve Apostles and gave them authority over all demons, to cure diseases, to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to heal. They were to take nothing—no staff, no bag, no food, no money, not even a change of clothes.

They returned from this trip and told Jesus all that they had done. He took them and withdrew to Bethsaida. The crowds learned of it and followed them and Jesus welcomed them, spoke to them about the kingdom of God and Jesus healed them. Then He fed 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish.

After this, Jesus appointed 72 others and sent them ahead of Him—two by two—to go to every town and place where He was about to go. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Luke 10:2) They, too, were to take nothing, heal the sick and say, “the kingdom of God has come near to you.”

The 72 returned with joy!

Jesus was training people to GO! They were learning to get out of their comfort zone, to have faith that Jesus would help them even though they had no provisions. They were learning to talk about Jesus and to teach the truth. Their job as witnesses to the Creator was very important.

+++++

Since Jesus' mission on earth was so short, it was important that He train men to be ready to go out and tell others about Him. He allowed them to watch Him in action, and then He sent them out on their own without Him. Later He sent an even bigger group ahead of Him into all the towns that He was about to visit. It takes many laborers to bring in a harvest.

Remember that God wants all people to be saved. Why is it important to train people to carry on His message? What were they told to pray earnestly for? [The Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.] Is it important for there to be lots of laborers today? [Yes.] Who are the laborers? Can we be laborers?

When Jesus is stronger than nature, the demons, the doctors, and death, how would that help to increase the faith of the apostles? [They were eye-witnesses of these great miracles, so they could see there is NOTHING impossible with God and so they could be a witness to others of His power.]

Lesson 43

The Great Divide

Jesus used miracles, parables and questions to teach the people.

Review: The Messiah had been born! After waiting for centuries, Jesus was not only walking the streets on earth, but was finally in Israel! People were following Him in masses as He healed them and cared for them. His compassion opened up a way for Jesus to teach them—for His main purpose was to seek and save the lost. Jesus chose 12 Apostles to travel with Him and this allowed them to witness even more powerful miracles. Jesus sent out the 12, and later 72. This helped train them for when He would be gone—because the gospel would be left in the hands of mankind.

Scriptures: Matthew 12-14,18-22; Luke 5-8; John 11,12; Hebrews 2:1-4

Lesson: Jesus came doing powerful miracles. Miracles confirmed His power. It showed that Jesus was more powerful than anything or anyone else. Miracles played an important part in establishing His supremacy over all things, for it showed He was more powerful than nature, demons, sickness, death, and men. Miracles helped people to put their faith in Jesus.

Miracles played an important part in His ministry, but other parts of His ministry were important too. Jesus came to preach and to save humanity that was lost. Jesus taught the people simply using parables. A parable used familiar objects to teach a heavenly lesson: birds, seeds, weeds, fish, coins, sheep, etc. These were items the people understood, for they were in their daily lives. Sometimes, before a parable was recorded in the Scriptures, it would explain why the parable was told. Matthew 18:1—this parable was told so that people would always pray and not lose heart. Matthew 18:9—was told to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Matthew 19:11 was told because some supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. So, as a reader, look closely at the parable and the words preceding it to see if the reason for the parable was given.

The masses of the people followed Him. We read about the crowds pressing in on Him so that they could hear God's Word (Luke 5:1). In Luke 6:17,18, a "great crowd of disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon", "came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases." Also a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to Him (Luke 8:4). So we see how the masses of people followed—wanting healing and wanting to listen. But the leaders of the Jews did not have this love for Jesus. The Pharisees conspired to destroy Him (Matthew 12:14). The Jews were seeking to kill Him (John 7:1). They even picked up stones to kill Him (John 8:59). And so we see a big division among the people—some loved Jesus and some definitely did not.

One day, Jesus was with His apostles and heard that Lazarus was ill. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha and were all friends with Jesus. Jesus stayed two days longer and then went to see Lazarus back in Judea. The apostles knew that the Jews were wanting to stone Jesus. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. He went to the cave where Lazarus was laid, had them take away the stone and said, "Lazarus, come out." And he did! When many of the Jews witnessed this, they believed in Him. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So they made plans to put Jesus to death. They wanted the people to let them know where He was, because Jesus was no longer walking openly among the Jews.

Six days before the Passover, Lazarus's sisters—Mary and Martha—gave a dinner for Jesus. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was also at the dinner. Mary anointed Jesus' feet with very expensive ointment and wiped them with her hair. A large crowd came wanting to see not only Jesus, but Lazarus too, for they had heard that he had been raised from the dead. For many people who had seen that Jesus had raised Lazarus, had believed in Jesus. And so, the chief priests decided not only to put Jesus to death, but also to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of Lazarus, many Jews were believing in Jesus.

The next day, the crowd that came for the feast heard that Jesus was coming. When Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, the disciples brought a donkey and her colt, put their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. The crowd spread their cloaks, along with branches they had cut from the trees, and spread them on the road. As Jesus rode the donkey, the crowd shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9) The whole city of Jerusalem was stirred up because of Jesus.

The tension between the religious leaders (the chief priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, the Council) and Jesus was growing. Jesus entered the temple and drove out the money-changers, and those who sold. Jesus rebuked them for making His house of prayer a den of robbers. Then Jesus healed those who came to Him in the temple. The chief priests and scribes saw all the wonderful things that Jesus had done, and how the children cried out praises in the temple, and they were indignant (had strong displeasure).

The chief priests and elders began to question His authority as to who gave Him permission to do the things He was doing. Jesus would answer their question with a question of His own, and they would not answer Him because they were afraid of the crowd. Jesus would also tell parables for them, but they were harder parables for these religious leaders: they would include an obedient son and a disobedient son, wicked tenants who produced no fruit and killed the Master's son, and a wedding feast where people were too busy with their lives to come to the feast. The chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, and figured out that He was talking about them. And they went out to try and catch Him in His words. No matter who tried to catch Him, Jesus answered well, and no one was able to answer Him a word. From that time on, they quit asking Him anymore questions.

Jesus gave overwhelming evidence of His divine nature. Many people believed Him, but many religious leaders were indignant. They saw Jesus as a threat to their power. And instead of putting their faith in this man, they became stiff-necked and began to actively seek His death. Even with seeing all of the signs that Jesus performed, they still did not believe in Him.

+++++

Seeing the reactions of these two crowds, we realize that people will either believe in Jesus or they will not. Those that are against Jesus are very active in shutting Him down and intimidating the people. This practice continues today. Were they able to stop Jesus from accomplishing His mission?

Describe the two groups. Tell how the two different groups responded to Jesus.

How will you react to Jesus? Will you believe in Him? Or will you be stiff-necked against your Savior?

Lesson 44

The Last Night with His Apostles

Jesus taught many lessons to keep followers from falling away.

Review: The prophets foretold about the Messiah. When Jesus came, He came with powerful miracles and healings. This confirmed that He was truly the Son of God. Jesus used these healings as an opportunity to show how much he cared for the people and their sufferings, which would open their hearts to His preaching. It was His Words, though, that gave true Life. Jesus ministered to the physical needs to try and bring them to their spiritual needs. Crowds of people followed Him and loved Him, but the religious leaders, on the whole, were not only against Him, but were actively looking for a way to put Him to death.

Scriptures: John 13-17; Luke 22:1-6

Lesson: Jesus knew He was about to depart out of this world and return to His Father. He loved His own to the very end. This last supper with His apostles was one more chance to teach them again before their world turned upside down. And so Jesus used this quiet time--away from a crowd--to serve them, to remind them what love for God and mankind looked like, to teach them about the world's hatred and about the Helper He would send. The apostle John, the disciple that Jesus loved, devoted five chapters to this one night! So this night must have been a very important night for learning.

These teachings come from John 13-17:

The devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. Judas had conspired with the chief priest for an opportunity to betray Jesus in the absence of a crowd.

Being a servant: Jesus rose from supper, poured water into a basin and washed the disciples' feet. "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." "...a servant is not greater than his master". (John 13:13-15, 15:20)

Jesus taught them many more things on this night:

Betrayal: "One of you will betray Me." "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I dipped it." So Jesus dipped the morsel of bread, and gave it to Judas Iscariot. Satan entered Judas after he had taken the bread. Jesus said, "What you are going to do, do quickly." No one at the table knew why Jesus said this. Judas Iscariot, after receiving the morsel, went out and it was night. (John 13:21,26-27)

Being a disciple: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." [Disciples of Jesus can be seen by their love for one another and for bearing much fruit.] (John 13:34,35; 15:8)

I am the Way: "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." [Jesus is the only way to God. He's preparing a place and will come back to take His faithful servants to be with Him.] (John 14:2,3,6)

Love for God and Jesus is obedience: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” “Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” “Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.” “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.” [Loving God is shown by obedience to His commands. Those who do not love God do not obey Him. Obedience to His commands keeps one abiding (remaining) in His love.] (John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:10)

Holy Spirit: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” [The Holy Spirit is a Helper, dwells within, teaches all things, and brings to remembrance what Jesus said. This Helper would not be sent until Jesus left. He would guide them into all truth and would speak what He hears. He is the spirit of truth and would bear witness of Jesus.] (John 14:16-17,26; 16:7, 13-15; 15:26)

Hatred of the world: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” “‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” “And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.” [Persecution comes because people do not know God or His Son.] (John 15:18,20,21; 16:3)

Jesus said all of these things to them to keep them from falling away.

Jesus then offered up a prayer for them—a prayer for them to be unified with God and Jesus. He asked that the Father keep them from the evil one, and to sanctify them with truth. Then He prayed for us today! He prayed that we, too, may be one just as the Father and Christ are One, and that others will be in Them. He prayed that the love with which God had loved Jesus may be in them and Christ in them.

And when Jesus spoke these words, He went out with His disciples across the Kidron Valley to the garden.

+++++

The reason Jesus came to earth—to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins—was about to take place. It would be a horrific scene for Jesus’ apostles to witness, especially since they knew He was powerful enough to stop it. And so, instead of warning them about what was about to take place, He reinforces some very important lessons for them to remember. His death would be a trial for their soul.

As a teacher, see if the children can remember some of the lessons about being a disciple, Jesus being the way, love for God and Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the hatred of the world.

Lesson 45

How the Created Killed Their Creator

Sadly, the very ones Jesus came to save killed Him.

Review: The Jews knew God was sending a King who would help them. Even though they had studied many prophecies in the Scriptures and Jesus came performing powerful miracles, many of the Jews still did not believe. In fact, they were jealous of Him for He had quite a following of people. The leaders of the Jewish people not only rejected Jesus but actively worked to put Him to death. Today's lesson is what Jesus did to pay for your sins and my sins. It shows the depth He would go to, to give us a chance for heaven! Oh, the wonderful love of Jesus!

Scripture: Matthew 26,27; Mark 14,15; Luke 22,23; John 18,19

Lesson: After Lazarus was raised from the dead, the people who witnessed this powerful miracle kept spreading this around. The chief priests were afraid everyone would believe in Him and the Romans would take away their place and the nation. Jesus was a threat to their power.

And so, they gave orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they were to arrest Him. The chief priests and elders plotted to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill Him, but not during the feast—because they did not want an uproar. Judas Iscariot agreed to look for an opportunity to betray Jesus in the absence of a crowd. The chief priests and elders were happy and agreed to pay him money.

After spending the evening with His apostles during the last supper, Jesus went out with them to the Mount of Olives, as was His custom. There He prayed earnestly for God to remove this cup (take this away), and an angel came and strengthened Him.

Judas came leading a crowd of soldiers from the chief priests and Pharisees with their lanterns, torches and weapons. Judas came forward and kissed Jesus, indicating to the soldiers who they were to arrest. Peter cut off the right ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus touched his ear, said “No more of this!” and healed him. They seized Jesus and led Him away, bringing Him to the high priest's house under the cloak of darkness.

The apostles scattered. Only Peter and John followed at a distance. John was able to get into the court of the high priest because John knew the high priest. John was able to get Peter into the courtyard as well. They warmed themselves by the fire.

Before Annas (the father-in-law of the high priest) and Caiphas (the high priest)—There in the house of the high priest, the high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. Jesus answered. One of the officers struck Jesus with his hand. Then they sent Him **bound to Caiphas**, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders gathered. Now they were seeking false testimony so they could put Him to death, but found none. At last, two came forward and said that Jesus claimed He was able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days. The high priest asked Jesus if He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said, ‘You have said so.’ The high priest tore His robes and said Jesus had uttered blasphemy and the council's judgment was that Jesus deserved death. They spit in His face and struck Him.

Meanwhile, Peter was in the courtyard denying Jesus three times before the rooster crowed—just as Jesus had told him he would. When the cock crowed, Peter remembered what Jesus had said. Jesus looked at Peter and Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Before Pilate—The council arose and **brought Jesus to Pilate**. They could not go into Pilate’s house or they would be defiled and could not eat the Passover. Their charge to Pilate was that Jesus was misleading the Jews and forbidding them to give tribute to Caesar and claiming He was a king. Pilate found Jesus innocent. But they were urgent and said Jesus stirred up the people. So **Pilate sent Jesus to Herod** who questioned Him at some length. The chief priests and scribes stood by and vehemently accused Him. The soldiers treated Jesus with contempt, mocked Him, arrayed Him in splendid clothes and sent Him **back to Pilate**. Herod found nothing in Him that deserved death.

Pilate had a custom that he released a man at the Passover and wondered if they wanted the king of the Jews released. The people wanted Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, released instead. Pilate’s wife even told Pilate not to have anything to do with this innocent man. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

Pilate wanted to punish and release Jesus. To satisfy the crowd, he released Barabbas and scourged Jesus and delivered Him to be crucified. The soldiers clothed Him in a purple cloak, twisting a crown of thorns and put it on His head. They saluted Him, struck His head, spit on Him and mocked Him. They stripped Him of His purple cloak, put His own clothes on Him and led Jesus out to be crucified.

And they **brought Him to a place called Golgotha** (which means Place of a Skull), and offered Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He refused. They divided his clothes. And on the third hour (9:00 in the morning), they crucified Him with two criminals—one on His right and one on His left. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” Jesus said.

The rulers scoffed at Him. The soldiers mocked Him. The criminals harshly criticized Him.

At the sixth hour (12:00), darkness covered the whole land until the ninth hour (3:00 in the afternoon), while the sun’s light failed. Standing by the cross was Jesus’ mother, His aunt, Mary (the wife of Clopas) and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw His mother and John (the disciple Jesus loved) standing nearby, and said, “Woman, behold your son!” And to John He said, “Behold, your mother!”

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachthani?” which means “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”

He uttered a loud cry and breathed His last. And the curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom. The earth shook and rocks split open. The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and came out of the tombs. They went into the holy city and appeared to many.

The centurion who was witnessing all of this said, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

And a rich man—Joseph of Arimathea—asked Pilate for the body and wrapped Jesus in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb. They rolled a great stone in front of it.

The next day, the chief priests and Pharisees had Pilate put guards at the tomb and make it as secure as they could.

And on the Sabbath, His disciples rested according to the commandment.

+++++

Lesson 46

HOPE in the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus shows His power over everything!

Review: Jesus—the Master of gravity, nature, sickness, and the demons—was dead. His people/nation killed Him with the hands of the Romans in such a cruel way. He was so powerful. Why did Jesus and God allow this to happen? Jesus could have stopped this....and yet, He did not. And God did not either. In fact, we read that this was God’s plan from the beginning. Why did He go through with this? Because Jesus endured all of this without one sin, He became the PERFECT sacrifice for our sins! This is the payment God demanded for our sins. This was the cost to redeem us! Oh, what a Savior! Oh, how God must love us to allow His own beloved Son to go through all of that for us!

Scriptures: Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20,21, Romans 1:1-5, 1 Corinthians 15:3-11

Lesson: “Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.” (Matthew 28:1-3)

Mary Magdalene, Mary (Mother of James), Salome, Joanna and other women rose early on the first day of the week, and took spices so that they might go and anoint Jesus’ body. They were wondering who would roll the stone away. But when they got to the tomb, the stone (that was very large) had already been rolled away. And they saw an angel that told them that Jesus had risen, and to come and see where He lay and to tell His disciples that Jesus was going to Galilee and would see them there.

Jesus appeared to quite a few people on that Sunday:

- Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9,10) -- Other women (Matthew 28:1-10)
- Peter (Luke 24:34) -- Two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)
- Ten of the Apostles (without Thomas....Judas Iscariot had hanged himself) (Luke 24:36-49, John 20:24)

Jesus also appeared to others before He ascended into heaven:

- 8 days later—the Apostles with Thomas (John 20:26-31)
- Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John + 2 others beside the Sea of Galilee (John 21)
- the apostles in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20)
- 500 brethren (1 Corinthians 15: 6)
- James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- Final appearance and His ascension into heaven (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51, Acts 1:3)
- Paul, last of all, (1 Corinthians 15:8)

It was important for so many people to witness His resurrection, for it was His resurrection that declared Jesus to be God’s Son (Romans 1:1-5). His miracles attested to it, but it was the resurrection that proved He was stronger than death....that He was stronger than Satan. And because He lives, we can live! The

grave is not our final resting place. “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ” (1 Corinthians 15:14-17)

So, do you see why the resurrection is so important? It proved Jesus was God’s Son. It proved His power over death and Satan. It shows that the dead are raised and gives us hope for eternal life! For if Christ was not raised, He would have been just another man and we would still be full of sin.

Praise be to God for the Resurrection of His dear Son!

Jesus presented Himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them for 40 days and speaking to them about the kingdom of God. They were not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Holy Spirit, which He promised to send. They would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them and they would be Jesus’ witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up to Heaven in a cloud.

They returned to Jerusalem and went to the upper room. They devoted themselves to prayer. Mary, the mother of Jesus, along with His brothers, and other women and others (about 120 in all) were together. They needed someone to take the place of Judas—someone who had been there from the beginning from John’s baptism through the resurrection, for one of these men must be a witness to the resurrection. They put forward two men: Barsabbas (Justus) and Matthias. They prayed for God to choose and cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. He was numbered with the eleven apostles.

And they obediently waited for God’s timing—for when He would send the Holy Spirit—the Helper Jesus promised to send.

+++++

Why was the resurrection so important? [It proved that Jesus truly is God’s Son. It proves His power over death and Satan. It gives us hope to know that the dead are raised. If He was not raised, then our faith is pointless.]

What were the apostles to wait for, and where were they to be witnesses? [They were to wait for the Holy Spirit, and to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.]

Refresh your mind on what the Holy Spirit was going to do: John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7, 13-15. The Holy Spirit was about to be sent on the earth to help the apostles.

Lesson 47

The Promised Helper

The Holy Spirit comes on the Day of Pentecost.

Review—Jesus came down and had convincing proofs of His divine nature. He came to preach, to be the Savior of the World, and to destroy the devil’s work. His ministry was short—three years—but during that time, He trained His apostles to carry on His work. The night before His death, Jesus told His apostles that he would send them a Helper—the Holy Spirit. The Promised Helper would teach them all things, bring to their remembrance what Jesus had said and would guide them into all truth. So the Holy Spirit would be necessary to help them know God’s truth and to help them get the message of hope out correctly! It was imperative that they get God’s message out just as God wanted it. The Spirit would help them with that. The apostles were to witness to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, but they would have to wait to begin in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come. And obediently, they waited on God’s timing.

Scripture: Acts 1-2

Lesson—It was the Day of Pentecost—50 days since the Passover, and a little over a week since Jesus ascended into heaven. Pentecost was one of the feasts that the Jewish males were to appear before the Lord (Deuteronomy 16:16—it was also referred to as the Feast of Weeks). So, the city of Jerusalem was filled with devout Jews from every nation under heaven. This would have given God’s treasured possession the best opportunity to hear what they needed to do to be saved.

“And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:2-4)

The crowd came together when they heard the sound and were bewildered because they could hear these Galileans speaking in their own native language—about a dozen different languages—and they heard them telling the mighty works of God. Many wondered what it all meant. Others thought they were drunk.

[The following are bits and pieces of Acts 2] Then Peter stood up and said, “These people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,” “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.”

“[David], being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

When the people heard the words of Peter, they were “cut to the heart” and wondered, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

[Listen very carefully to their answer because the Spirit that God had just sent that very day was about to tell them what God required for them to obey for salvation. This was the Spirit that would guide them into all truth.]

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received His word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:38-41

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Acts 2:42-47

+++++

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were one in purpose—they were working towards the salvation of mankind. Study Peter’s reply when the people asked “What shall we do?”, for the Spirit is giving them the truth. Mankind continually wants to change the way to be saved into their own plan. So we must keep going back to what the **Spirit of Truth** inspired Peter to say.

When the Jews that were devoted to God came to Pentecost that year, they probably stayed longer than they intended. To help each other out, people sold their possessions and distributed them as needed. This allowed people to be able to stay longer, listen to this new teaching and enjoy being with fellow Christians before going back to their homes in different countries.

Also, this gift of the Holy Spirit given to all who are baptized (in Acts 2:38) is a different gift than the miraculous gift given to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, Acts 5:12). The apostles could pass that gift on to whom they laid their hands (Acts 8:14-18). But there is no record that those who had received this miraculous measure from the apostles could pass it on again. When those with this miraculous gift died, then the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit that was so evident in Acts, perished with them. We still have today many gifts of the Holy Spirit—He bears fruit (Gal. 5:22-24), we have His masterpiece (the Bible), we are to keep in step with (or walk by) the spirit (Galatians 5:25).

Lesson 48

An Unlikely Instrument of God

The church grew despite the persecution it had to endure.

Review: Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sins. His resurrection proclaimed with power that He truly was the Son of God. At Pentecost, when devout Jews came from all over the world, and heard and witnessed the Holy Spirit being poured out on the apostles, they became convicted that they had indeed killed God's own Son, and wondered what they could do. Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. That day, 3000 souls were baptized and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Scriptures: Acts 6-9

Lesson: The number of believers kept growing as they continued to proclaim in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. This annoyed the priests and Sadducees and they arrested Peter and John and threatened them to keep quiet after they were released. They did not. The number of believers continued to grow. The high priest and those with him were filled with jealousy and arrested the apostles. But an angel let them out. They were found in the temple at daybreak preaching again. They beat the apostles and told them not to speak in Jesus' name. But the apostles did not stop. They kept boldly spreading the gospel and the disciples multiplied greatly. Even a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Stephen was a man of good repute, was full of wisdom and the Spirit. He did great wonders and signs. When certain men rose up and disputed with him, they could not stand up to his wisdom. The elders and scribes secretly set up false witnesses against Stephen and stirred up the people. Stephen had many powerful words and spoke against him. His enemies were enraged, ground their teeth, cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid their garments down at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning him, Stephen called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." "Lord do not hold this thing against them." And Stephen fell asleep.

And Saul approved of his execution.

"And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison." (Acts 8:1-3)

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. They paid attention to his words and witnessed the healing he brought. There was much joy in the city. Philip also preached to the Ethiopian eunuch as he was returning to his country. Philip told him the good news about Jesus and he stopped the chariot and Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing murderous threats against the believers, and he went to the high priest and asked for letters for the synagogues at Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way, he could bind them up and bring them to Jerusalem.

"Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you

persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” (Acts 9:3-9)

“Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.” Acts 9:10-19

Saul immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues and increased all the more in strength. The people who heard him were amazed this was the same man who came to persecute them. The Jews in Damascus were watching the gates in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and lowered him down in a basket through an opening in the wall.

“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.” Acts 9:26-30

And the church had peace and was being built up.

+++++

Remember why Jesus said persecution comes. [They do not know God or Jesus. John 15:21, 16:3. Since this is the case, do you see why studying the Word and sharing it with others would be a solution to persecution?]

When persecution came, there were some definite blessings that came out of this horrible situation. What were they? [People started scattering and taking the gospel with them, which allowed more people to hear the good news of the gospel. Saul was more determined to persecute until he saw the light. He became God’s chosen instrument.]

How did the fellow believers and Jews react to Saul’s conversion? [Jews wanted to kill him. The disciples were amazed. But those in Jerusalem were afraid of him. It took a brother they trusted—Barnabas—to stand by him and bring him to the apostles and tell his story—more lessons for us to learn!]

Lesson 49

Taking the Gospel Further

Paul's first and second missionary journeys helped spread the Gospel.

Review: Since Pentecost, the church continued to grow and increase in number. The chief priests and Pharisees were jealous of the apostles and how their numbers were growing. They would threaten the apostles to get them to stop talking about Jesus and were starting to beat them. When their persecution reached the point of stoning Stephen, the disciples scattered. But wherever they went, they took the gospel with them. Saul began ravaging the church and went from house to house to put disciples in prison. On his way to Damascus to persecute the church there, a bright light shown upon him and Jesus asked him why he was persecuting Him. Saul was blind for three days. When Ananias came and told him about Jesus, scales fell from his eyes, and he was baptized. Immediately, Saul began preaching. He would learn how much he would have to suffer for Jesus.

Scriptures: Acts 13-18, Colossians 4:10

Lesson: The gospel needs to be spread, for God wants all men to be saved. It takes courage and boldness in the hearts of men to carry the Good News. God had chosen His instrument that He wanted to take the good news of the gospel to the Jews and the Gentiles: Saul of Tarsus!

The spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul (also called Paul) for the work he had called them for. They also took with them Barnabas' cousin—John Mark. They set sail for the island of Cyprus and arrived at Salamis and went through the whole island to Paphos. Elymus the Jewish false prophet, who was a magician, opposed Barnabas and Saul and tried to keep the proconsul away from the faith. Saul filled with the Holy Spirit, opposed him, made him blind for a time, and the proconsul believed.

They set sail from Paphos and came to Perga. John Mark left them and went back home to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas went on to Antioch where Paul went to the synagogue and reasoned there. The next Sabbath, almost the whole city came out. Jews were filled with jealousy, and reviled him. So Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles, who rejoiced and glorified God. The Jews caused the devout women and leading men to be angry and turned against them and drove them out of the city.

Going onto Iconium, the Jews and Greeks believed and they remained a long time speaking boldly. But unbelieving Jews stirred up Gentiles and divided the city. They tried to stone them, and they fled to Lystra.

At Lystra, Paul healed a crippled man. When the crowds saw this healing, they thought gods had come in the likeness of men. They called Barnabas "Zeus", and Paul they called "Hermes". The people of Lystra tried to sacrifice to them. Paul and Barnabas tore their garments, and told them they were men too. They barely restrained them from sacrificing to them.

But then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came, persuaded the crowd, and they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. But when the disciples gathered around Saul, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went to Derbe with Barnabas, where they made many disciples. They went back through Lystra, Iconium, strengthening their souls and appointing elders in every church. When they sailed to Antioch, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them and how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. This was the end of the first missionary trip.

Time passed, and Paul and Barnabas wanted to see how the churches were doing. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark again, but Paul did not. This caused such a sharp disagreement among them that Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas.

Paul and Silas went to Derbe and Lystra where they picked up a young believer named Timothy. The Holy Spirit forbade them to speak in Asia and Bithynia. Paul saw a vision in Troas of a Macedonian urging him to help them. So they left Troas accompanied by Luke (a physician) and went to Philippi.

While in Philippi, Paul converted a seller of purple—a woman named Lydia. He cast out the demon of a slave girl and her owners dragged Paul into the marketplace where they were beaten and thrown into prison. Paul and Silas were praying and singing in prison, and the soldiers were listening to them. An earthquake opened the doors and unfastened their bonds. The jailer woke up, and seeing the doors opened, was about to kill himself. Paul stopped him. The jailer asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The jailer took them to his house. They taught his family and they were all baptized. The next day they were released.

In Thessalonica, Paul reasoned with them for three Sabbaths, and persuaded many devout Greeks and leading women. The Jews were jealous and formed a mob and dragged out Jason and some of the brothers and took them to the city authorities. They sent Paul and Silas to Berea.

At Berea, they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if it was so. Jews from Thessalonica stirred up the crowds. They sent off Paul; and Silas and Timothy remained.

Paul went onto Athens—a city full of idols. He reasoned with the Jews in the synagogues and in the marketplace. The people of Athens spent time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. Some believed.

From there, Paul went to Corinth, where he met Aquilla and Priscilla and worked as tentmakers with them. Silas and Timothy met back up with Paul here. They stayed one and a half years in Corinth, for God had many people there.

Paul, Priscilla and Aquilla sailed for Ephesus where Paul reasoned with the Jews, and then he sailed onto Caesarea where he went up to greet the church, and then went down to Antioch. This completed the second missionary journey.

+++++

Paul was a hard worker for the Lord, who gave himself fully to the work of the Lord—through good times and very difficult times. He never gave up. He kept on working, giving, preaching, and writing. Look back at the hard times during the first journey. What if Paul would have given up after he encountered such opposition and a stoning in Lystra? Paul endured many hardships for Christ and kept going in his work for the Lord. Paul teaches us many great lessons! You can see why God chose him as an instrument for Him!

Think about the connections Paul and Silas picked up on the 2nd journey—Timothy, Luke, Priscilla, Aquilla, the Philippians, Corinthians, Ephesians, Thessalonians. The Philippians were his joy and crown (Philippians 4:1) as were the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:19). Discuss where Paul usually went first when entering a city. [He would go to the Jews first. When they rejected him he offered salvation to the Gentiles.]

Lesson 50

The Gospel Spreads to Asia and Italy

Despite shipwrecks, prison and false charges, Paul continues to preach.

Review: God knew what He was doing when he singled out Paul. When Paul saw the light and turned to God, repented and was baptized, he was such an effective tool for God. Paul went on his first missionary journey with Barnabas and John Mark. His second journey was with Silas. The Spirit forbade him to go to Asia and Bithynia, so he went to Macedonia. The gospel was spreading and many people were converted, but also many were very much against him and he suffered much for the gospel. Paul went first to the Jews, but when the Jews opposed him, he would then go to the Gentiles and teach them. In these journeys, we can see that God wants all men to be saved. It takes people who love God and allow Him to use them as an instrument for the gospel to be spread quickly. Even when Paul was stuck in prison, many of his letters were included in the Bible, so that people in our generation today can learn of the gospel. Praise be to God for wanting us all to be saved and for men who gave up their lives to get the message out to as many people as possible!

Scriptures: Acts 18:23-28:31

Lesson: (to Ephesus) Paul went off on his third journey and went from one place to the next in the region of Galatia and Phrygia. When he arrived in Ephesus, Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue for three months, but when some became stubborn and spoke evil of the Way (which was another name for the church), he withdrew and took disciples with him to the hall of Tyrannus—for two years. All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord. And many who practiced magic arts burned their books publicly. He sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, and then stayed in Asia for awhile.

There was a great riot concerning the Way, for the craftsmen who made shrines of the goddess Artemis were afraid of losing their livelihood. The crowd dragged Gaius and Aristarchus (Paul's traveling companions) into the theater. Paul wanted to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. For two hours they shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." When the town clerk finally quieted the crowd, he told them they needed to settle these things in court because they were in danger of being charged with rioting. And he dismissed the assembly.

(to Greece and Troas 20:2-15) From Ephesus, Paul went to Greece and stayed for three months. A plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria and he decided to return through Macedonia. He sailed from Philippi to Troas, where Eutychus, sitting in a window, fell asleep and fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. Paul raised him from the dead. They set sail for Miletus.

(Miletus 20:17-38) Paul sent for the elders of Ephesus to come. Paul told them he would not see them again, to pay attention to themselves, to be on the alert for fierce wolves would come from among them. They accompanied Paul to the ship. There was much weeping on the part of all, for Paul told them they would never see him again.

(Finishing the third journey) He travelled to Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea (where they told him he would be bound). And in Jerusalem, when he came to bring alms to the nation (24:17), he was arrested.

(Going to Italy as a prisoner) [Through the prison system, Paul was allowed to preach the gospel of Jesus to prisoners and those in authority, from the lowest class who **could not** come to hear him, to the highest class who **would not** come to hear him. Once again, one can see how God wants all men to be saved!]

Paul was in the temple, and some Jews from Asia stirred up the crowd. They seized Paul and started shouting "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." (Acts 21:28) People came running from all directions, they seized Paul, dragged him out from the temple and immediately shut the gates. They were trying to kill him when a Roman commander came with some officers and soldiers and ran into the crowd. He arrested Paul and tried to find out what he had done. The crowd was so out of control, that Paul had to be carried by the soldiers.

Paul was able to stand on the steps and talk to the crowd. When he spoke to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. He told of how he was very zealous for the Law until he saw the light and was baptized and had his sins washed away. When the crowd heard this account, they said, "Rid the earth of him!"

Wanting to find out what Paul was being accused of, the commander brought Paul the next day before the Sanhedrin, and the chief priests. After Paul spoke awhile, a great uproar arose among the Jewish leaders. The next morning, some Jews took an oath not to eat anything until they killed Paul. When the commander found out about the plot, he got a detachment of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen and took him to Caesarea by night, so that Paul arrived safely to governor Felix.

The Jews accused Paul before Felix the governor, who kept Paul in custody, but gave him liberties so that his friends could tend to his needs. When Felix brought his Jewish wife to hear Paul, he spoke of faith, righteousness, self-control and the coming judgment. He sent for Paul often and conversed with him. He left Paul in prison for two years as a favor to the Jews.

Festus took Felix's place as governor. The Jews from Jerusalem brought many serious charges which they could not prove. Paul appealed to Caesar—the Emperor in Rome.

King Agrippa and his wife Bernice came with great pomp and with military tribunes and prominent men of the city and Paul testified to all about his conversion, his purpose and about the Christ.

When they finally sailed for Italy, the sailing was slow, difficult and dangerous because it was getting too late in the year. The ship was caught in a northeaster. They cast overboard the cargo and tackle and went two weeks without food. Paul urged the people to take some food, for God had told Paul that not a hair was to perish from the heads of any of them. They took bread, gave thanks, ate and were encouraged. There were 276 persons in the ship. When they ate enough, they lightened the ship by throwing out the wheat. Running the vessel aground, the bow was stuck and the stern was broken up by the surf. They all made it to land to an island called Malta.

The native people showed unusual kindness to them. Paul healed the people on the island who had diseases. The people of Malta honored them greatly and when they were about to sail, they put on board what they needed. Three months passed and they set sail for Rome.

When in Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier that guarded him. Paul called the Jewish leaders but they had not received any letters from Judea about him. Great numbers came to Paul. Some believed. Some did not. He lived there two years at his own expense and welcomed all who came, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus.

+++++

Lesson 51

The Importance of Being in Christ

The choices we make now will determine our eternity later.

Review: Do you remember from the beginning how God gave mankind a special gift? God gave mankind freedom to choose life or death, knowing full well that man would not always choose correctly and would sin. It takes holiness to see a holy God and to be in His presence. Since God cannot change who He is, sin becomes a big problem for mankind. For when anyone sins, sin separates them from God, and brings death for each one who sins. But, God had a plan before the world was even created and it would involve His Son. God grew a nation from a righteous man (Abraham). God took this nation that had become enslaved, and freed them, taught them His good laws, took care of them, and brought them into the land He had promised Abraham centuries before. God kept promising to send a Messiah through the line of Abraham and through the family of David, whose kingdom would never cease. It was through Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed and that blessing would come through God's Son—Christ. It was through this nation that God would send His Son who would redeem (buy back) mankind. But it would also take our freewill to access this free gift through obedience to God and His word. It is a gift freely given and available to all—for God wants all men to be saved.

Scriptures: Acts 20:31, Ephesians 1

Lesson: Paul spent three years teaching the Ephesians, and look at the first chapter of the letter he wrote to them: Ephesians 1:3-14. He talks of God having a plan before creation and that EVERY spiritual blessing is in Christ. And then he begins to name some of those blessings: **Holy And Blameless (1:4), Adoption As Sons (1:5), Grace (1:6), Redemption (1:7), Forgiveness (1:7), Have An Inheritance (1:11), Sealed With The Promised Holy Spirit (1:13).**

It is being in Christ that gives us all of these wonderful blessings—EVERY spiritual blessing!

But realize, too, that being in Christ is a choice on our part. We will have to CHOOSE to be in Christ. So how do we get into Christ?

Galatians 3:27 "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Romans 6:3 "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

We must choose to be baptized—immersed—into Christ for the forgiveness of sins so that we can have all the spiritual blessings: be holy and blameless, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and an inheritance!

Baptism is a key. This is why when the Jews realized they had killed God's beloved Son and asked what they should do on the day of Pentecost, that the apostles, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." It is in obedience to this command that puts us into Christ where all of these blessings are given.

But baptism is just a beginning place. It does not give us grace as a cover so that we can sin all we want. Grace is not a license for sin. (See Romans 6:1, 15)

God commands His children to:

- Grow in Christian virtues and keep practicing them (2 Peter 1:3-10)
- Grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 3:18)
- Be zealous and devoted to do good works (Titus 2:14, 3:1, 3:8, 3:14)
- Walk in the light (1 John 1:7)
- Keep loving each other earnestly (1 Peter 4:8)

(this is not at all a complete list)

These daily choices will never earn for us salvation—we cannot work for that, for we will never be “good enough”. We can never do enough good deeds to cover our sins or outweigh our sins. It does not work like that. It is a free gift that God offers and gives to those who love Him enough to obey Him.

And so daily, we have to make choices about our life. Are we going to do what we want or are we going to be obedient to God? It is a constant war on our choices. And Satan is a deceiver and has many ploys to encourage us to choose disobedience. But always remember that God is our Helper and Provider and gives us tools and weapons to aid us.

God has given us everything we need for life and godliness, but HE WILL NOT FORCE US TO BE OBEDIENT! This is our decision for our lives. And we have witnessed throughout the study of the Old Testament—which is our teacher, or guardian—that the path the majority of people take is not trying to be obedient.

Jesus is the only way to God. It is by being in Christ that makes man holy, that gives forgiveness of sins, that offers grace. It is a gift that is freely offered, but one where each one of us must choose to obey and to keep growing in the grace and knowledge, and to be zealous for good works. It costs something on our part—time, daily choices, and obedience to God’s Word, giving up our desires, etc.

The sacrifice of Jesus is the covering God provides. This is the blessing promised long ago through Abraham. It is offered to everybody, every nation, every country—salvation is for all. For God wants All people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4, Ezekiel, 18:23,32; 33;11). But your choices will determine if you want this for yourself or not.

So what will you choose for your eternity? LIFE or DEATH

+++++

What blessings are found in Christ? [holiness, blameless, grace, redemption, inheritance, forgiveness, adoption as sons, the Holy Spirit]

How does one get into Christ? [through baptism]

Are these blessings available outside of Christ? [no. Jesus is the only way to access these blessings.]

These blessings are freely given, but they must be accessed by each one of us through our obedience to His plan.

When did God come up with this plan? [Before creation]

Lesson 52

The End of Time

The choice of eternal life or death is our choice.

Genesis begins with telling us about the beginning of time. Revelation ends with the end of time. God was preparing for the end of time before the creation of the world. He had a plan for man's redemption long before the first sin.

We learned about God's holiness and how He does not have one sin. He has never sinned, nor will He. He is holy, surrounded by holiness and it takes holiness to see Him. Yet, when God put the man and the woman in the garden, He set them free. He did not force their obedience, nor did He program them so that they could never sin. He let them choose LIFE or DEATH, then held them accountable for their choices. But He also had a plan to redeem them from death once they sinned, and planned a way for mankind to be holy, but it would take obedience to God's plan to access those blessings.

God talked about the woman's seed crushing the head of Satan, which would be a victorious blow. By the time we read about Abraham, God was announcing the gospel to him that through him, all the nations of the world would be blessed. In David, God proclaimed that he would always have someone on the throne forever. All of these prophecies, and hundreds more, were fulfilled in the person of Jesus! Jesus came to give us help, and hope, to show us how to love God and others. He died as our sacrifice—so that we could have a chance to live with Him forever. Time will come to an end. God knows exactly what is coming at the end of time. And He gives us a glimpse of that time:

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." (2 Peter 3:9,10)

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done." Revelation 20:11,12

"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done." Matthew 16:27

"For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us will give an account of himself to God." Romans 14:11,12

"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak," Matthew 12:36

"For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." Ecclesiastes 12:14 Judgment Day is coming for all of mankind. We will all be held accountable for what we did while we lived on earth. Our choices will decide if we will LIVE eternally with God, or if we will be part of the second death—shut out from the presence of God.

So, who will be thrown into the lake of fire? “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” Revelation 21:8 “Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” Revelation 22:15. “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:14,15

This is what God is trying to save mankind from. This is what God is redeeming man from. All throughout the Bible, God was working to bless the world, for He knew what was coming in the second death—an existence apart from Him. And existing without God is hopeless, void of light and love.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:1-4.

The street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. Revelation 21:21

Its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. Revelation 21:22

There is no need of sun or moon, for God’s glory gives its light and its lamp is the Lamb. Rev. 21:23

The river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, and the tree of life is there yielding its fruit each month. Revelation 22:2

The gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. Revelation 21:25

We will stand before God and the books will be opened. Which set of books will your name be in? The book of life or the other books? God wants no one to perish. He knows we are going to sin and has made every provision to help us along the way—mercy, grace, forgiveness, adoption as sons, redemption, being clothed with Christ. But He does not provide our obedience. That requires us choosing to do things God’s way—being obedient, growing, being a living sacrifice, bearing fruit, loving—there are lots of choices DAILY of doing things God’s way and being OBEDIENT to God.

God wants everyone to be saved. But, the sad thing is, most people will not choose to be obedient to God’s plan. We saw this time and time again in the story of God’s people. The majority of people drift away from God and choose their own path. Most people will not keep their eyes focused on eternity.

But, what about you? What will you choose? Where will YOU spend your eternity?

God will help you every step of the way, if you will stay close to Him. Eternity never ends. Once you die, your eternity begins and your fate is sealed. There is no crossing over from death to life. Your decisions have to be made while you live. CHOOSE LIFE! Obey God. Seek God and His Son. Learn of God’s great love for mankind. God has a glorious future waiting in heaven for those who love Him enough to obey Him. What will you CHOOSE? Won’t you love someone else enough to share God’s plan with them too?