

# BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION



**CROSSROADS**  
PRISON MINISTRIES

## ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Bryan C., Crossroads student



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# NOTES FOR MENTORS

These introductory notes are intended (1) to help you as a mentor in your own studies and (2) to provide you with reference materials for your students.

## BIBLE VERSIONS

There are scores of English versions of the Bible. Among the more popular ones in the United States are the King James Version (also called the Authorized Version), the Revised Standard Version, the Living Bible and the New International Version. Each of these versions has undergone revision at one time or another, so there is now also the New King James Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the New Living Bible and updated or revised editions of the New International Version.

Crossroads Prison Ministries has chosen to use the basic edition of the New International Version for the Advanced Program (Tier 3) courses. Not only is the NIV currently the best-selling English version in the world, it is a translation produced by a large number of scholars from many backgrounds and denominations, all committed to the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Though not perfect (no translation is!), it represents a very good translation written in contemporary English at the level of the “average” reader. It is suitable both for public reading and private study and is currently used in many churches, schools and colleges.

## STUDY BIBLES

Most study Bibles provide the reader with an introduction to each book of the Bible, summaries or outlines of each book, numerous cross references to parallel passages, information on the historical or cultural background of the author and his times, explanatory footnotes, various charts, maps, a concordance and other helpful material.

Some study Bibles represent one consistent theological position throughout. The Reformation Study Bible, for example, consistently represents the position of historical Calvinism. Others, such as the NIV Study Bible, usually try to present a “balanced” view on disputed theological questions such as the second coming of Christ, the sacraments, the millennium, etc. The popular Thompson Chain Reference Bible contains about 600 pages of interesting and helpful material on a variety of subjects. However, all these materials have been placed in the back of the Bible as a supplement rather than next to the books or passages they describe or explain.

## CONCORDANCES

A concordance contains an alphabetical listing of some (or all) of the words found in the

Bible and lists the passages where each word is found. The passages are listed in the order in which they are found in the Bible. Many Bibles have a limited concordance in the back along with some maps and other kinds of information.

An exhaustive concordance lists all the words found in the Bible and every place where each word is found. An exhaustive concordance will also usually give the original Hebrew and Greek words for each English word. The best concordance for students who use the NIV is the *NIV Exhaustive Concordance* by Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger III (Zondervan).

## BIBLE COMMENTARIES

Bible commentaries seek to provide an explanation of most or all of the passages in the Bible. Some commentaries focus extensively on the original languages, providing word studies, grammatical analyses and a careful examination of the biblical text. Others focus more on providing a “general explanation” of a passage without getting into details provided by the more technical commentaries. Still others concentrate on providing applications as well as explanations of the Bible.

The one-volume commentaries naturally cannot provide as much information as a series of commentaries can. However, some of the best one-volume commentaries are very useful in helping the reader understand the basic flow of thought in a given book or chapter and often provide excellent insights into the meaning of a particular passage.

Commentary series written primarily by one or two persons (such as *The New Testament Commentary* by William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker) are often very useful since they present a consistent pattern of interpretation throughout all their books. If you are confident that an interpreter is competent and trustworthy, his commentary series will probably serve you well.

Some of the best commentaries are written by persons who have chosen to concentrate on a limited number of Bible books. The authors of these commentaries usually try to read as much as they can on the book(s) of their choice and provide a very careful and thoughtful explanation of each passage. However, some writers who concentrate on single books of the Bible find it difficult not to write far more than the average reader wants to know!

In general, you would do well to consult with your pastor (or a Bible teacher) concerning the best commentary or commentaries for you to use. This is especially true if you plan to purchase a commentary. Most pastors and teachers will be able to give you some very helpful advice and will also let you browse through or borrow some of their own commentaries before you make any purchases.

## BIBLE DICTIONARIES

Bible dictionaries (and encyclopedias) can provide a tremendous amount of helpful information. However, wherever possible, it is important to purchase or use one of the newer dictionaries. Old ones can be useful, too, but the newer ones are generally much more attractive, contain many more illustrations, and have much more current information. (Be careful about titles! For example, some dictionaries that have the word “new” in them are actually quite old by now. They may still contain much helpful information, but they are not as useful for the average reader as some of the more recent ones.)

Some Bible dictionaries tend to promote a consistent theological position, while others present a more “balanced” view of disputed theological matters. If you are unsure about the general theological orientation of a specific dictionary, ask your pastor or Bible teacher. If they don’t know either, read a few key entries such as “millennium,” “baptism,” “covenant,” “second coming,” etc. to help you understand how the writers approach controversial subjects.

Among the newer Bible dictionaries that should prove to be very useful for the lay person are *The Revell Bible Dictionary* (Revell, 1990) and *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nelson, revised 1995). The latter dictionary refers to itself as “the most comprehensive one-volume Bible dictionary available.” The former, richly illustrated in color, has been highly praised by a variety of persons from different theological traditions.

## OTHER RESOURCES

If you spend any time online, you probably already know that there are many websites available that provide incredible amounts of biblically related information. Websites such as **biblica.com** and **biblegateway.com** are exceptionally helpful.

A word of caution is also in order, however. Some websites contain information that may be out of date, and new online resources are created frequently. Please use discernment when searching for information using online resources. If you discover websites you would like to recommend, please let us know.

In addition to the materials available on the internet, there are hundreds of resource materials available through Christian libraries, bookstores and publishers. No other generation has had as much biblically related materials available to them as we have today. If we use these materials thoughtfully and pray faithfully for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will increasingly be equipped as servants who are able to bring out of the “storehouse” of God’s Word “new treasures as well as old” (Matthew 13:52).

## NOTES ON THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

1. “Plenary inspiration” refers to the fact that everything in the Bible was inspired—not just the so-called moral or religious teachings.
2. “Verbal inspiration” refers to the fact that the very words of Scripture (not just the thoughts or ideas behind the words!) were inspired by the Holy Spirit.
3. “Organic inspiration” refers to the fact that God usually used the unique interests, emphases, vocabularies and writing styles of each human author as he wrote own His inspired Word. This helps explain some of the differences (in emphasis or perspective) that one finds in the Gospel accounts or in other biblical records of the same event.

The concept of organic inspiration is thus opposed to the idea of “dictation” or “mechanical inspiration” where the writers are seen as “human machines” that merely record what God told them to write. Though some parts of the Bible were clearly dictated directly by God, most parts were not.

4. The original biblical writings as these came from the hands of the authors are called the “autographa” [or autographs]. These are the writings which were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Copies or translations of the autographa were not inspired by the Holy Spirit in the same way that the originals were.

However, the history of Bible transmission demonstrates that most copyists and translators had exceptionally high regard for the Scriptures. In addition, there are many indications that the Holy Spirit guided both copyists and translators in their work. The result is that we may have complete confidence that the copies of the Bible we have today are very accurate and trustworthy in every respect.

## DIFFERENCES OF INTERPRETATION

We should readily acknowledge that believers often differ among themselves in regard to the interpretation of a number of passages in the Bible. That is hardly surprising, since the Bible is a very large book and contains teachings on many subjects in a variety of forms (prophecy, history, poetry, etc.) However, what is remarkable and worth noting is that most evangelicals accept a common or basic understanding of the Bible’s teachings regarding God, man, sin, salvation, Jesus’ person, life, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming. Evangelicals also largely agree on fundamentals of Christian living, the necessity and importance of Christian missions and the final destiny of the saved and the lost.

We should be wonderfully encouraged by this Spirit-given unity rather than unduly discouraged or disturbed by the acknowledged differences.

**LIMITATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING**

As we go through this course with our students, we should never give them the impression that we feel we have “all the answers” and that those who disagree with us are therefore obviously wrong. We must always remember and acknowledge that the Holy Spirit does not limit His guidance to us! At times we may even be able to learn from our students!

We should also be careful not to confine God to some kind of theological system in which we have everything “figured out.” Theological systems may be good and even necessary, but God will always be infinitely greater than anything we can say about Him. After we have done everything we can by way of searching, studying and praying, we must humbly and joyfully stand aside and let God be God!

**STUDENT ANSWERS—AND OURS**

Do not expect your students’ answers to be as lengthy or detailed as some of the answers given in this manual. The answers provided here are intended not only to answer the questions in the lesson but also to provide you, as a mentor, with some additional material which, on occasion, you might wish to share with your students.

The answers provided in this answer key are intended to help you, as a mentor, evaluate the answers given by your students. In most instances you will probably agree with the answers provided. However, there may be times when your own approach differs somewhat from that presented here. If your approach differs significantly from the one presented here, it would be best if you would inform us where and why you differ. If, however, the differences are relatively minor, feel free to respond to your students with an approach that is comfortable to you. We assume that you have prayerfully come to the positions you hold, so we are not particularly concerned if your response to students is not phrased exactly as ours would be.

We also recognize that there are times when a student may give a very satisfactory answer to a question which differs from the one presented here. Our goal is not to produce students who think and write exactly as we would. Rather, our goal is to produce students who continue to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in their study and who develop a theological position which is consistently biblical and evangelical—even if it’s not exactly the same position we ourselves adhere to or if it’s not expressed in exactly the same way.

**COURSE INTRODUCTION**

**WHY SHOULD I READ AND STUDY THE BIBLE?**

Millions of people recognize the Bible as the greatest book that has ever been written. It speaks directly to our hearts. It answers our deepest questions and gives meaning and purpose to our lives. It guides us along the path of truth and directs our way to God and Heaven. It has already brought comfort and hope and joy to people in every country of the world. It can bring joy and peace into your own life, too!

But your motive for studying the Bible will largely determine what you get out of it. If you study it primarily to satisfy your curiosity or to impress other people or to win arguments about religion, the benefits you get will be small—and they will soon fade away. But if you want to grow in your knowledge of God, if you want to love and serve God more faithfully, and if you desire to become the kind of person God wants you to be, your study of the Bible will be richly fulfilling—and eternally rewarding.

**WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM?**

Most of the words found in the Bible are very ordinary words, the same words you can find in many other books. The words were also written down by ordinary people in a rather ordinary way. Each writer collected information and expressed his thoughts in his own unique way.

However, in spite of all these “ordinary” things, the Bible is obviously much more than an ordinary book! And the reason for that is plain. According to the Bible itself, God guided each of the writers in such a way that they wrote precisely the truths God wanted them to write. God also revealed to the writers many things that they would never be able to learn or figure out on their own. And as they wrote, God kept them from writing anything that was not true or that would lead people astray.

Ultimately, therefore, the Bible is not man’s word but the Word of God. It is God who made the Bible what it is. He is its Author. And precisely because the Bible is God’s Word, it is able to change the hearts and lives of those who read it!

**WHAT IS THE BIBLE ALL ABOUT?**

The Bible tells us about the creation of man and the world, the beginning of sin in the world, the rise and fall of various kingdoms and the lives of many important persons. The primary purpose of the Bible, however, is to teach us how God saved a fallen world from the results of man’s sin and how we may personally find peace with God and enjoy eternal life with Him. God accomplished all this through sending His own Son Jesus into the world to pay the penalty for our sin and to restore us to a right relationship with Him. Some day there will be a new Heaven and a new earth in which believers will live with God forever in perfect righteousness and joy.

**WHY DO I NEED A COURSE ON HOW TO READ THE BIBLE?**

Perhaps you are wondering, “Why do I need a whole course on ‘How to Read the Bible’? Isn’t the teaching of the Bible plain enough by itself? Won’t the Holy Spirit teach me everything I need to know?”



The Holy Spirit will teach you all you need to know for salvation. He will teach you how to live a life that is pleasing to God. He will also help you become the kind of person God wants you to be. And sometimes He will do all these things without the help of others. But that’s not the way He usually works.

In almost every area of life, we need others to help us learn, understand, and grow. With Bible study, it’s the same. We wouldn’t even have a Bible in English at all if it weren’t for people who translated the Bible into our language! And there would be many important facts about the history and culture of Bible times that we would never know unless someone else taught us.

Thankfully, there are many people who are willing and able to teach us. Many of these people have devoted their entire adult lives to studying the Bible. They are eager to share their knowledge with anyone who is willing to learn. And when we learn from them, we are actually learning from the Holy Spirit—even though He is teaching us through the help of others.

HOW WILL I BENEFIT FROM STUDYING THIS COURSE?

If you faithfully study each lesson in this course, you will continue to find new and exciting truths as you study the Bible. You will learn more about the greatness and goodness of God and His wonderful plan of salvation. You will see how all the parts of the Bible fit together. You will learn where each important person fits in the story of the Bible. You will learn how to avoid common mistakes people make when studying the Bible. And you will gain confidence in interpreting the Bible for yourself. The Bible will increasingly become your most precious treasure—God’s gift to you of truth and love.

HOW SHOULD I USE THIS INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL?

This material provides you with a brief overview of the entire Bible. It also provides you with helpful information on some of the people and stories you read about in the Bible. And it gives you a timeline to help you keep the stories in the Bible in proper historical perspective.

You may wish to read all of this material before you begin your study of any of the lessons in this course. However, most of the material in the booklet relates primarily to Lessons 5 through 12.

WHAT SUBJECTS DO THE 12 LESSONS COVER?

Each lesson in the course focuses on a particular subject or theme. Here are the titles:

- Lesson 1: *Basic Principles of Interpretation*
- Lesson 2: *Guidelines for Bible Study*
- Lesson 3: *Cautions and Suggestions*
- Lesson 4: *Communicating Creatively*
- Lesson 5: *Understanding Old Testament History*
- Lesson 6: *Understanding the Prophetic Books*
- Lesson 7: *Understanding the Wisdom Literature*
- Lesson 8: *The Relationship Between the Old and the New Testaments*
- Lesson 9: *Understanding the Gospels and Acts*
- Lesson 10: *Understanding the Epistles*
- Lesson 11: *Understanding the Book of Revelation*
- Lesson 12: *Putting It All Together: A Theological Perspective*

SOME KEY WORDS AND NAMES IN THE BIBLE

**Abraham**—The father of the Jewish nation (Israel) who through faith became the father of all believers. God established His covenant of grace with Abraham, promising him many blessings and requiring him to trust Him and obey whatever He told him to do.

**Anoint**—To pour oil over someone’s head in a religious ceremony. In the Old Testament, Israelite kings and priests were anointed as a sign that they were chosen and equipped by God for a special work or position. In the New Testament, Jesus was symbolically anointed by the Holy Spirit to indicate that He was chosen and equipped by God for His saving work.

**Apostle**—One of the 12 disciples Jesus chose to be official witnesses of His life, death and resurrection. The apostles were appointed by Christ to bring His message to the entire world. In the book of Acts, Paul and a few others are also called apostles even though they were not numbered among the original 12 disciples.

**Ark**—The boat in which Noah, his family and two of every kind of animal were saved from the flood. The ark is also the name given to the gold-covered sacred box that served as a symbol of the presence of God among His people. The ark was first kept in the tabernacle and was later placed in the temple. It is often referred to as the Ark of the Covenant.

**Atonement**—Making payment for a wrong and thereby restoring harmony between persons who have been estranged from each other. In the Old Testament, priests offered sacrifices for people who confessed their sin and wanted to be made right with God. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ made the perfect sacrifice which provided complete payment for the sins of all who believe in Him.

**Believer**—A person who accepts Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, the Son of God, and trusts in Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. A Christian.

**Blasphemy**—Claiming that one is God or like God. Blasphemy may also refer to a lack of reverence for God or for sacred things. Jewish law required that people guilty of blasphemy should be put to death. The Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy when He claimed to be the Son of God.

**Canaan**—Another name for the land of Israel, the land God promised to give to Abraham and his descendants. The original inhabitants of Canaan were extremely wicked and were condemned by God to complete destruction.

**Caesar**—The title of the Roman emperor. During the time of Jesus and the early church, the Caesars ruled over Israel since Israel was part of the Roman empire.

**Chief Priest**—One of the leading Jewish priests who had special authority in both religious and political matters during the time of Jesus.

**Christ**—The Greek counterpart of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” Both Christ and Messiah mean “anointed.” Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His work as Savior of the world.

**Christian**—Someone who believes in Jesus Christ for salvation and who lives according to the teachings of Jesus, following Him as Lord. A believer.

**Church**—The people of all times and places who believe in Jesus Christ and are united to Him as members of His one spiritual body. In the Bible the word “church” is used to refer either to believers in a local area or to all believers in the entire world.

**Circumcision**—Among the Jews, a sign of the removal of sin and impurity. God commanded the Jews to circumcise all their males as a sign of His covenant relationship with them, a covenant that included the children of believing parents.

**Council**—In New Testament times, a group of 71 Jewish leaders who together held the highest Jewish authority in the land of Israel. The Council, ruled by the High Priest, was also called the Sanhedrin or the Supreme Court.

**Covenant**—A solemn agreement or arrangement in which God promised His people special blessings and required of them complete trust and obedience. God always took the initiative in making a covenant and He always set the conditions of the covenant. Man's obligation was to respond to God in trust and obedience.

**David**—The second king of Israel. David was one of the best known and most loved kings in the history of Israel. God promised David that one of his descendants would live and reign as king forever. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

**Deacon**—One of the leaders of the early church whose special responsibility was to minister to people who were poor or in need. Deacons served as spiritual leaders in the church along with the elders.

**Demon**—An evil spirit. Demons were originally created by God as good spirits or angels, but they rebelled against God, going their own way. Demons continue to oppose the work of God in every possible way and cause much harm and evil in the world.

**Devil**—Another name for Satan, the leader of the world's evil spirits. Individual demons are also sometimes referred to as devils. See **Satan**.

**Disciple**—Someone who listens to and follows the teachings of another person. Both Jesus and John the Baptist had disciples. Jesus chose 12 of His followers to be His special witnesses and representatives. These 12 disciples were also later called apostles.

**Election**—In the Old Testament, a reference to God's sovereign choice of Abraham and his descendants to be His own special people. In the New Testament, election usually refers to God's sovereign choice of people to salvation in Christ.

**Exile**—The forced removal of the Jews from their homeland into foreign countries because of their sin and disobedience.

**Elder**—In the Jewish community, leaders among the people, usually chosen from among the older men. In the Christian church, spiritual leaders who had special responsibility for the teaching and ruling functions of the church.

**Exodus**—The miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in the land of Egypt through the mighty hand of God. The exodus from Egypt provides the name for the second book of the Bible, which describes the Israelites' deliverance.

**Gentile**—Anyone who is not a Jew. The Jews generally looked down on the Gentiles as being spiritually and morally inferior. The Jews sometimes referred to them derisively as "the uncircumcised" or as "dogs."

**Gospel**—The story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The word Gospel means "Good News."

**Heaven**—The dwelling place of God; also, the future eternal home of all believers who trust in Christ for salvation.

**Hell**—The place of eternal punishment for the devil and all unbelievers who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ and trust Him for salvation.

**High Priest**—The chief religious leader of the Jews in the areas of worship and sacrifice. In New Testament times, the High Priest also had much political authority and served as the leader of the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin).

**Israel**—Another name for the Jews, God's chosen people. The Israelites were descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob. Jacob's name was later changed to Israel and his descendants were therefore called Israelites. Israel is also the name of the homeland of the Jews, east of the Mediterranean Sea. This land is sometimes referred to as the Holy Land or the Promised Land. In some versions of the Bible, Israel is referred to as Palestine. The word Israel is also used in the New Testament to refer to the Christian church, the redeemed people of God.

**Judah**—One of the 12 sons of Jacob (Israel). Judah was also the name of the southern kingdom which was formed after the Jews were divided into two separate kingdoms. David and Jesus were direct descendants of Abraham through his great grandson Judah.

**Jerusalem**—The capital city of the Jews, which served as the center of Jewish religious and political life for many generations. The "new Jerusalem" is the name given to the heavenly city in which believers will live forever in glory with Jesus and the Father.

**Jews**—The descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. All the kings of Israel were Jews as were Jesus, the 12 disciples, and most of the first Christian believers. See **Israel**.

**Justification**—The act of declaring a person who believes in Christ as righteous in God's sight and no longer guilty before Him or worthy of punishment. Believers are justified because Christ paid the penalty for their sins and His perfect righteousness is legally reckoned to their account.

**Kingdom of God**—The rule of God as this rule is reflected in the hearts and lives of His people both as individuals and as organized groups of believers. The Kingdom of God is present wherever people love and honor and serve God in the name of Jesus. However, the full blessings of the Kingdom will not be experienced until Jesus returns from Heaven. Then believers will live and reign with Christ in perfect glory and joy forever.

**Law**—A reference to the Ten Commandments which God gave His people through Moses on Mount Sinai. Sometimes "The Law" refers primarily to the first five books of the Old Testament. On occasion "law" may refer simply to any command or requirement given by God. The Jewish leaders added many detailed laws of their own to those which God Himself gave in the Scriptures.

**Levite**—A member of the Jewish tribe named after Jacob's son Levi. The Levites were set apart by God for special duties and privileges in Jewish religious life. The priests who offered sacrifices and served in the temple were all from the tribe of Levi.

**Lord**—A title frequently used for God or for Jesus. A lord is one who is ruler and master, someone to be honored and obeyed. In the Old Testament the word LORD in small capital letters is a way of presenting God's personal name. This name of God is presented in some Bible versions as Jehovah or as Yahweh. Jehovah, Yahweh and LORD are thus three different ways of presenting the same Hebrew word.



**Lost**—A spiritual term referring to someone who is not a believer in Jesus and whose sins are not forgiven.

**Messiah**—The person whose coming was foretold in the Old Testament as the one who would bring peace and blessing to the whole world and especially to the Jews. Jesus is that Messiah who fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies, kept the Old Testament laws and established a spiritual kingdom. See Christ.

**Parable**—A story about ordinary earthly things which teaches a spiritual or moral lesson.

**Passover**—An annual Jewish feast which was first celebrated on the night the Jews were delivered from slavery in Egypt. On that night an angel of death killed all the first born children of the Egyptians but “passed over” the Jewish homes which were protected or covered by the blood of the Passover lamb. In the New Testament, Jesus is called the Passover Lamb whose blood covers over the sins of all those who trust in Him.

**Pastor**—The spiritual leader of a church or group of believers. Pastors were responsible for the spiritual growth and welfare of those entrusted to their care.

**Pharisee**—A New Testament religious leader and teacher of the Jews. The Pharisees kept the Old Testament laws very strictly and observed many additional laws of their own. Many of them were proud and arrogant and opposed Jesus when He was on earth, though some Pharisees later came to believe in Him.

**Pilate**—The Roman Governor who was ruling over Israel during the days of Jesus. Pilate recognized Jesus’ innocence and wanted to set Him free but eventually gave in to the demand of the Jews that Jesus be crucified.

**Priest**—A Jewish religious leader of the tribe of Levi who acted as a representative of the people in their worship of God. Priests offered sacrifices and performed other acts of worship in the tabernacle and later in the temple. In a few passages in the New Testament, all believers are referred to as priests since they offer sacrifices of love, worship and praise.

**Promised Land**—The land of Canaan promised to Abraham and his descendants. See **Canaan** and **Israel**.

**Prophet**—Someone who brought messages from God to the people. These messages could be spoken or written and could refer to the past, the present or the future.

**Reconciliation**—The restoration of harmony and peace between persons who have been estranged from each other. Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, made it possible for sinners to be reconciled to God.

**Redemption**—Paying the necessary “price” to secure a person’s release from slavery or bondage of some kind. In the New Testament, Jesus redeems people from the slavery and penalty of sin by giving His life on the cross for their salvation.

**Sabbath**—The day of the week set aside for rest from daily labor and for the worship and praise of God. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was the seventh or last day of the week. In the New Testament, Christians began to worship on the first day of the week in honor of the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, both of which took place on the first day of the week. The Christians’ day of rest is called the Lord’s Day.

**Sacrifice**—The offering of an animal or of food to God as an act of worship or as a sign of repentance and sorrow for sin. In the Old Testament, God required the people to offer these sacrifices as tokens of thanksgiving for His blessings, as indications of sorrow for sin, and as signs that pointed forward to the perfect redemptive sacrifice which Jesus Christ would make for the sins of the world. After Jesus died on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, animal sacrifices were no longer required. However, believers are expected to offer to God “sacrifices” of thanksgiving, praise, and loving service.

**Sadducee**—A member of a Jewish religious group which exercised both religious and political power in the days of Jesus. Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament as the Word of God. They did not believe in angels, demons or the resurrection of the body. They usually opposed the Pharisees but joined with them in opposing Jesus and His followers.

**Salvation**—Deliverance from the guilt and punishment of sin. Included in the blessings of salvation are the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God and the gift of eternal life. Salvation comes to all those who put their complete trust in Jesus Christ as the One who paid the penalty for their sin and who also follow Jesus as their Lord.

**Sanctification**—The work of the Holy Spirit in a believer by which he becomes increasingly conformed in holiness and love to the image of his Lord Jesus Christ.

**Samaritans**—A mixed group of people formed by the intermarriage of Jews and Gentiles after most of the people of the kingdom of Israel were carried into captivity in Assyria. Samaritans worshiped the true God but did not accept the entire Old Testament or worship God according to all the Jewish requirements and regulations. Most Jews despised the Samaritans and would have nothing to do with them.

**Sanhedrin**—The ruling Jewish Council in New Testament times. See **Council**.

**Satan**—The ruler of all the evil spirits in the universe. Satan was once a powerful and glorious angel, but in pride he opposed God and His authority and fell from Heaven. Many other angels followed Satan at the time of his fall. Satan continues to oppose God, Christ and the people of God. He has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus but is still permitted to oppose the work of Christ on earth. When Jesus comes back again, Satan will be totally defeated and will ultimately be thrown into Hell.

**Savior**—A title for Jesus, who saves people from their sins and gives them the gift of eternal life.

**Scribe**—A person who specialized in understanding, copying and teaching the Scriptures. In the New International Version, scribes are referred to in the New Testament as “teachers of the law.”

**Scripture**—Another name for the Bible or for part of the Bible, such as the writings of the Old Testament. Sometimes also called Scriptures.

**Sin**—Any thought, word, attitude, motive, desire or deed which is contrary to the will of God. Specific sins involve both doing things which are done in violation of God’s law and failing to do the things which God requires. Sin may also refer to man’s basic disposition to commit specific sins, to his natural opposition to God and the things of God. People commit sins because they are sinful by nature, opposed to God and His will for them. All sin, whether by nature or by choice, leaves a person guilty before God and deserving of punishment.



**Sovereignty**—A reference to God’s position as supreme ruler of the universe who controls all things and works out all things according to His own purpose and will.

**Synagogue**—A meeting place where Jews gathered for worship, fellowship and instruction. Synagogues were first founded during the period of the exile. There was only one Jewish temple, but there were many synagogues both in Israel and in foreign lands.

**Tabernacle**—The central meeting place of the Israelites for worship, sacrifice and fellowship before the temple was built. The tabernacle was constructed according to specific and detailed plans that God gave to Moses while the Israelites were on the way from Egypt to Canaan. It was built in such a way that it could be moved from place to place as the Israelites traveled. The tabernacle continued to serve as the Jews’ meeting place for hundreds of years after they settled in the Promised Land.

**Temple**—The central meeting place of the Jews for formal worship, sacrifice and fellowship. The first temple was built by King Solomon and destroyed by the Babylonians. Another temple was built by the Jews who returned from exile. This temple, later enlarged and beautified by King Herod, was destroyed by the Romans in the year A.D. 70.

**Testament**—One of the two main divisions of the Bible. The Old Testament includes the 39 books or writings that describe the history of God’s people from creation to the coming of the Messiah. The New Testament includes 27 books that describe the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the history of the early Christian church. The words Old Testament and New Testament basically refer to the Old Covenant and New Covenant. See Lesson 12.

**Tithe**—One-tenth of all one’s income. The Jews were required to give a tithe to God both as an act of worship and thankfulness and as a sign of their acknowledged dependence on God. Giving a tenth of one’s income to God is generally considered to be a minimum standard of giving for all believers.

**Tribe**—In the Old Testament, a tribe usually refers to the people who descended from one of the 12 sons of Jacob (Israel). Since Jacob had 12 sons, there were 12 Jewish tribes.

**Word of God**—The Word of God may refer either to a spoken or a written message of God to His people. Jesus Christ is also called the Word of God because He is the final and authoritative message of God to men.

TIMELINE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

PERSONS OR EVENTS

God creates man and the world  
Man falls into sin  
Noah is saved from the flood  
**Abraham is called by God**  
The Israelites live in Egypt  
**Moses leads the people out of Egypt**  
The Israelites conquer Canaan under Joshua  
Judges rule over God’s people  
Saul serves as the first king of Israel  
**David reigns as the second king of Israel**  
Solomon builds the temple  
**The Jewish kingdom is divided into Israel and Judah**  
Elijah and Elisha prophesy in Israel  
Jonah prophesies to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria  
Isaiah prophesies to Israel and Judah  
**Israel falls to the Assyrians**  
Jeremiah prophesies to Judah  
Daniel is taken captive to Babylon  
Ezekiel is taken captive to Babylon  
**Judah falls to the Babylonians**  
Some Jews return to Jerusalem from Babylon  
The Jews build a new temple in Jerusalem  
Esther becomes queen in Persia  
Ezra leads another group of Jews to Jerusalem from exile  
Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem  
Malachi prophesies in Judah  
**Jesus Christ is born**  
Jesus is crucified and rises again  
Paul is converted and becomes a missionary  
Peter and Paul are martyred  
Matthew, Mark and Luke write their Gospel accounts  
**Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans**  
John writes his Gospel account, letters and Revelation

APPROXIMATE TIME

Uncertain  
Uncertain  
Uncertain  
**2100 B.C.**  
1850-1450 B.C.  
**1450 B.C.**  
1400-1375 B.C.  
1375-1050 B.C.  
1050-1010 B.C.  
**1010-970 B.C.**  
965 B.C.  
**930 B.C.**  
875-800 B.C.  
790-750 B.C.  
740-685 B.C.  
**722 B.C.**  
626-586 B.C.  
605-535 B.C.  
592-570 B.C.  
**586 B.C.**  
536 B.C.  
516 B.C.  
479 B.C.  
458 B.C.  
445 B.C.  
450-400 B.C.  
**6-4 B.C.**  
A.D. 30-33  
A.D. 35  
A.D. 65  
A.D. 60-65  
**A.D. 70**  
after A.D. 70

Note: B.C. stands for “Before Christ.” A.D. stands for the Latin words Anno Domini which mean, “In the year of our (the) Lord.” The dates before the reign of King Saul are often debated. The dates after Saul are usually considered to be reasonably accurate, though some of them are also debated.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO HELP YOU IN YOUR STUDY

**Study Bible**—A modern study Bible contains explanatory notes, outlines, maps, practical applications and many other features which can be of great help to you as you seek to understand the Bible. Some study Bibles consistently teach everything from one theological position (such as the Geneva Study Bible). Others present a variety of positions (such as the New International Study Bible). As you read the notes in any study Bible, remember that the notes are not inspired by the Holy Spirit in the way the Bible text itself is.

**Bible Concordance**—An exhaustive Bible concordance gives an alphabetical listing of all the words in the Bible along with all the places in the Bible where each word is found. Some concordances also provide the original Greek or Hebrew word which lies behind each English word.

**Bible Dictionary**—A good Bible dictionary provides an explanation or description of every significant person, place or thing in the Bible. Many Bible dictionaries, such as *The Revell Bible Dictionary* (1990) and *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1995) are packed with relevant, interesting and helpful information and are illustrated with beautiful pictures of many of the subjects covered. Most recent Bible dictionaries also contain a variety of outlines, maps, charts and graphs as well as interesting articles on a number of special topics.

**Bible Commentary**—A Bible commentary provides an explanation or interpretation of a part or all of the Bible. Some commentaries are very detailed while others are more general. Some are more practical while others deal more extensively with matters of grammar, history, word studies and the like. Commentaries can be extremely helpful, but one must be careful not to become overly dependent on commentaries nor overly committed to just one writer.

**Other Helps**—There are also topical Bibles, Bible handbooks, theological wordbooks, theological dictionaries, books on synonyms, the parables, individual people and a vast variety of other subjects. English readers also have access to thousands of books, magazine articles and Christian periodicals. In addition, many helpful computer programs are now available for the serious Bible student while the Internet increasingly provides significant help as well. Thoughtful students can also learn much from preachers, conference speakers, radio and television programs and personal discussions with knowledgeable and godly persons.

CONCLUSION

Learning what the Bible teaches can be the most wonderful and exciting learning you will ever do. However, the final goal of Bible study is not simply acquiring more information! The goal is learning more about your wonderful God, His greatness and His glory, His goodness and His love, His justice and His holiness—and learning how you can live in fellowship with this God in a life of trust and obedience, a life that pleases and honors God, makes you a blessing to many others and fills your own life with peace and joy.



## LESSON 1: Basic Principles of Interpretation

This lesson contains 10 basic principles or truths that will help you interpret the Bible properly. If you remember each of them as you study, you will make a good beginning in understanding what the Bible teaches. You will also avoid some of the errors which have led people to misunderstand what the Bible means or to misapply what it says.

### 10 PRINCIPLES

#### **Principle 1. The Bible is Without Error and is Our Only Trustworthy Guide for Faith and Life.**

Because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it is without error. It is also the final authority for what we should believe and how we should live. Though we can learn many things from other books and teachers, there is no other teacher or book or writing which can ever take the place of the Bible.

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16)*

*"The Scripture cannot be broken." (John 10:35)*

#### **Principle 2. The Bible is Its Own Best Interpreter.**

Since the Bible has only one primary Author (the Holy Spirit), each part of the Bible is consistent with every other part. We should therefore interpret every passage in the Bible in the light of other biblical passages on the same subject. Though we can learn much about the Bible from studying other books and by listening to godly pastors and teachers, our best aid to understanding the Bible will always be the Bible itself.

*"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished." (Matthew 5:18)*

*"Your Word is truth." (John 17:17)*

#### **Principle 3. The Entire Bible is Centered around Jesus Christ.**

Though not every passage in the Bible refers to Jesus Christ directly, the entire Bible is centered around Him. The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows His coming in

many different ways, and the New Testament tells us about His life, ministry and the church which He founded. Jesus Christ is the heart and center of the entire Bible.

*"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me." (John 5:39)*

*"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27)*

#### **Principle 4. The Message of the Bible is Redemptive.**

Though the Bible gives us helpful information on a variety of subjects, it is not written as a textbook on history or science or philosophy or psychology. Its purpose is to teach us about the God of creation and His saving work in history through Jesus Christ. By studying the Bible we may learn how to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus and how to live a life of gratitude and obedience to God for that gift.

*"From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:15)*

*"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31)*

#### **Principle 5. The Message of the Bible is Progressive.**

Since the Bible was written over the course of several centuries, it represents a gradual unfolding of God's message to us. Everything the Bible says from the very beginning is true, but God's later revelation often provides additional information or new insights which go far beyond the truths revealed earlier. In the Old Testament, for example, we learn that God is willing to forgive the sins of those who sincerely repent and trust Him for forgiveness. In the New Testament we learn about the tremendous sacrifice God Himself made to make that forgiveness possible.

*"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son [Jesus]." (Hebrews 1:1-2)*

*"The Gospel He [God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures . . ."*  
(Romans 1:2)

#### **Principle 6. The Message of the Bible is Historical.**

The Bible describes what really happened to real people who lived in real places at specific times in history. It is not a book of legends or myths or fairy tales. Much of the

material is dated carefully and precisely. It is a sober historical account of what God did and will yet do to redeem the world and bring man back into fellowship with Himself.

*“Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave through his servant Moses.” (1 Kings 8:56)*

*“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word . . . I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning . . . so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:1-4)*

**Principle 7. The Message of the Bible is Understandable.**

The purpose of the Bible is to reveal, not to hide. One does not have to have an advanced degree or years of theological study in order to understand what the Bible is all about. Its highest wisdom and deepest truths can be learned and understood by the simplest believer who studies it prayerfully under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

*“The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” (Psalm 119:130)*

*“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. . . will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I [Jesus] have said to you.” (John 14:26)*

**Principle 8. Some Biblical Truths are Beyond Our Understanding.**

Though we can readily understand all we need to know for salvation and holy living, there are some things in the Bible which we accept simply by faith. For example, we will never fully be able to understand everything the Bible reveals about God—His eternal being, His infinite love, His amazing grace, His perfect justice or His sovereign will. God’s ways will always be higher than our ways and His thoughts will be higher than our thoughts. We should never limit God or His ways to our own understanding.

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

*“Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing out!” (Romans 11:33)*

**Principle 9. The Message of the Bible is Life-Changing.**

The Bible was not given primarily to inform us but to transform us. It was given as God’s perfect guideline for our lives—to help us know what to believe and how to live. If we learn many things about the Bible but are not changed by it, our study will do us very little good. We must study in order to learn and learn in order to live!

*“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:2)*

*“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.” (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)*

**Principle 10. The Message of the Bible is Personal.**

Though the Bible reveals to us eternal truths about an infinite God and His work of creation and redemption, it also speaks to us personally. God is concerned not only about the nations of the world but also about every individual in the world. The Bible is God’s message to YOU.

*“God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3-4)*

*“The Lord . . . is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)*

**QUESTIONS: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION**

NOTE: Some of the questions in this lesson are based on the material presented in the Course Introduction. You may wish to review that information as you seek to answer these questions.

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- 1. A. In what way is the Bible an “ordinary” book?

**The Bible is an ordinary book in the sense that it was written down by ordinary people using ordinary words in a rather ordinary way. There are no hidden or secret codes which one must figure out before he is able to understand it or make good sense of it. An average reader can understand the basic message which it presents.**



B. In what way is the Bible an “extraordinary” book?

**The Bible is an extraordinary book in that it was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God guided the writers in such a way that they wrote exactly what He wanted them to write and kept them from error in their writing. The Bible also contains spiritual truth that can ultimately be understood only with the help of the divine Author. Though written by men in a rather ordinary way (for the most part), the Bible is truly the Word of God.**

C. Write out three Scripture passages that describe ways in which the Bible is an extraordinary book. Write out the passage and include the reference.

**SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**

**(1) “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:16**

**(2) “The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35**

**(3) “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.” Matthew 5:18**

**(4) “Your Word is truth.” John 17:17**

2. A. How would you explain the difference between Bible *reading* and Bible *study*?

**Bible study involves a concentrated, thoughtful effort to understand what you read and to appreciate its significance for your life. It is quite possible to read without a desire to understand or without taking seriously what you learn.**

B. What does Acts 17:11 teach us about the Bereans?

**The Bereans received Paul’s message with eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**

C. Do you think most believers today follow the example of the Bereans? Please explain your answer.

**Many people today study the Bible as seriously and as diligently as the Bereans did. Christian bookstores sell thousands of study books. Many pastors lead their people in a careful study of the books of the Bible. Radio pastors and teachers abound. There are hundreds of Christian colleges where the Bible is carefully taught. The Internet provides seemingly endless teaching for serious Bible students. And the number of evangelical seminaries seems to be increasing all the time. HOWEVER, there are far too many believers who do not take advantage of any of these services or opportunities. Many do not read the Bible faithfully. Many others read but do not study. And many Christians in foreign lands do not have study resources available to them. So, though there are millions of “Bereans” in today’s world, there are also millions of nominal Christians who do not have or take the time to read and study the Bible the way they should.**

3. As we seek to understand the Bible, what is the significance of each of the following Scriptures?

A. 1 Corinthians 2:14—**This passage teaches us that we need the help of the Holy Spirit in order to interpret and understand the Bible aright. There are many things in the Bible which may seem foolish to a reader until the Spirit gives him the spiritual insight necessary to understand the significance of what he is reading.**

B. John 14:26—**Jesus said that the promised Holy Spirit will “teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” This was spoken first of all to the disciples, but His promise also has relevance for us as we seek the help of the Spirit in understanding the Bible.**

C. Ephesians 4:11-14—**Pastors and teachers were given to the church to prepare God’s people for works of service, to build them up in the faith and to help them attain unity in the faith and in the knowledge of Christ, so that they would not be tossed about “by every wind of teaching” or by the craftiness of those would lead them astray.**

4. How would you respond to someone who says: “We have the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, so it’s totally unnecessary for us to have a study course on Hermeneutics or any other helps of any kind”?

**Our primary teacher must always be the Holy Spirit. However, the Spirit almost always uses MEANS to help us understand the Bible. One of those means is faithful, diligent, prayerful study. Moreover, the Spirit gives spiritual and intellectual gifts to many other persons in the body of Christ for the purpose of**

helping others grow in knowledge and understanding. If we didn't need help from others, the spiritual gifts of "pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Corinthians 12:8) would not be necessary.

At the same time, it is very important for us to remember that we should not look to some human interpreter as our primary or ultimate source of understanding. Many people rather blindly follow a cult leader or even a denominational or church leader as their spiritual guru. This can be very dangerous and destructive. As we look to others for help in understanding the Bible, we must be very careful to make sure that these "others" are themselves being led by the Holy Spirit.

5. Describe each of the following study aids that may help us in our understanding of the Bible.
  - A. Bible Concordance—**A Bible concordance provides an alphabetical listing of all the words in the Bible along with all the places in the Bible where each word is found.**
  - B. Bible Dictionary—**A Bible dictionary provides an explanation or description of every significant person, place, or thing in the Bible.**
  - C. Bible Commentary—**A Bible commentary provides an explanation or interpretation of a part or all of the Bible.**
  - D. Study Bible—**A study Bible contains explanatory notes, outlines, maps, practical applications and many other features which help us understand the Bible.**
6. Define or describe the following words as they appear in the Bible.
  - A. Anoint—**To pour oil over someone's head in a religious ceremony to indicate that a person was chosen and equipped by God for special service.**
  - B. Atonement—**Making payment for a wrong and thereby restoring harmony between persons who have been estranged from each other.**
  - C. Blasphemy—**Claiming that one is God or like God. Blasphemy may also refer to a lack of reverence for God or for sacred things.**
  - D. Chief Priest—**One of the leading Jewish priests who had special authority in both religious and political matters during the time of Jesus.**

- E. Exile—**The forced removal of the Jews from their homeland into foreign countries because of their sin and disobedience.**
  - F. Gentile—**Anyone who is not a Jew (that is, anyone who is not a descendant of Abraham through his son Isaac and Jacob/Israel).**
  - G. Messiah—**The person whose coming was foretold in the Old Testament as the one would bring peace and blessing to the whole world and especially to the Jews. Another name for Christ.**
  - H. Promised Land—**The land of Canaan (Israel) promised to Abraham and his descendants.**
  - I. Sovereignty—**A reference to God's position as supreme ruler of the universe who controls all things and works out all things according to His own purpose and will.**
  - J. Tithe—**One-tenth of all one's income. The Jews were required to give God a tithe as an act of worship and thankfulness and also as a sign of their acknowledged dependence on God.**
7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "It's good to study other books besides the Bible, but the Bible is the final authority on what God wants us to know and how He wants us to live." Give the reason for your answer.

**AGREE. Only the Bible was verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and is therefore infallible in what it teaches. However, the Holy Spirit has enabled many people to write books that can instruct or guide or inspire us.**
  8. Indicate which of the following statements are true and which are false. Circle T or F and give the reason for your answer.
    - A. The Bible is written in highly technical language so that it usually takes an expert to figure out what a passage means. T or **F**

Reason:

**For the most part the Bible is written in ordinary language that can be understood by an average reader. (Note: Originally, the New Testament was written in koine Greek, the language understood by the average reader of the day. Most New Testaments in English today require only average reading ability. Among the most widely-used English translations in America today, the one requiring the highest level of reading ability is the King James Version.)**



- B. Since the Bible is such a large book, we may expect to find many inconsistencies and contradictions in it. T or **F**

Reason:

**Since the entire Bible was inspired by the same divine author, it is consistent throughout and free from contradictions. At times there may be “apparent” contradictions, but most of these can be resolved by careful analysis and study.**

- C. It is impossible to be saved without understanding everything in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. T or **F**

Reason:

**One can actually be saved by knowing very little about the Bible. Salvation comes through a saving relationship with a person, Jesus Christ, and is not based on extensive knowledge or understanding of biblical details. At the same time, the more a person knows about the Bible, the deeper his understanding of the wonder and glory of salvation will be.**

- D. Since the main purpose of the Bible is to teach us the way of salvation, the Bible is often inaccurate in matters of science and history. T or **F**

Reason:

**Though it is true that the main purpose of the Bible is to teach the way of salvation, it is also accurate in all other matters that it INTENDS to teach. When, for example, it speaks of the “rising and setting” of the sun, it does not intend to teach us about science but simply refers to something which we all “observe” and speak of in everyday, non-scientific language.**

9. A. What is meant by the saying “The Bible is its own best interpreter”?

**Though the Bible was written by many different individuals, the primary author of the entire Bible is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if we read something in the Bible that may be difficult at first to interpret or understand, we should seek for some other passages in the Bible which can shed light on the “difficult” passage.**

- B. Give an example where you interpret a more “difficult” passage in the Bible in the light of “simpler” or clearer passages.

**A variety of examples will probably be given by your students. If, for some reason, they cannot think of a good example on their own, you might suggest the following: In Luke 14:26 we are told that in order to follow Christ we must “hate” our father and mother and wife and children. In other passages of the Bible we are told to love others as ourselves (Matthew 22:39), to love our wives (Ephesians 5:25), to honor and obey our parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:2) and to provide for our families (1 Timothy 5:8). Obviously, therefore, to “hate” our families does not mean that we are to have a negative attitude toward them. Rather, we are never to place our love for family above our love for Christ.**

10. A. How do you understand the following statement: “The Bible is without error”?

**The Bible, as it was originally written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is completely trustworthy in all it teaches and presents. It will not mislead us or present us with teachings which it claims to be true when they are not. (Note: Some errors have apparently crept in during the copying and translation of the biblical text, but these alleged errors are few, and none of them confuses or destroys the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures.)**

- B. What do you do when you come across things in the Bible which seem to contain “errors” of one kind or another?

### **SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**

**See also the supplementary notes at the end of this lesson.**

**If one confronts seeming “errors” of one kind or another, it is desirable to do the following.**

- (1) Pray for illumination.**
- (2) Carefully read and study the “problem passage” in context.**
- (3) Seek the assistance of pastors or teachers or other knowledgeable leaders.**
- (4) Recognize that some “errors” may have resulted from the copying or translation of the text.**
- (5) Wait for further illumination from whatever source God may provide it.**
- (6) Continue to focus on the teachings in the Scriptures which present no problem in regard to alleged errors.**

11. A. What does it mean that “The message of the Bible is progressive”?

**The message of the Bible is progressive in the sense that God does not reveal everything at once. Passages in the Bible which were written later may give additional information on a subject or may give insights into the proper understanding of a message given earlier.**

B. Write out two New Testament passages (include the references) that support the idea that the message of the Bible is progressive.

#### **SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**

**(1) “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son (Jesus).” Hebrews 1:1-2**

**(2) “The Scripture . . . announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham.” Galatians 3:8**

**(3) “The Gospel He [God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures . . .” Romans 1:2**

C. Give three specific Scriptural examples of “progressive revelation.”

#### **SAMPLE**

**Note to mentors: Examples provided by the students will obviously vary. If your students have difficulty coming up with examples on their own, or if their examples are not particularly good, you might wish to share one or more of the following with them.**

**(1) In the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:17), we read that God told Adam not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, because on the day he ate of it, he would die. Only later did Adam understand the full significance of the “death” to which God referred.**

**(2) In Genesis 3:15, we read that there would be enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Throughout the rest of the Bible we read about the outworkings of this great conflict. It is not until much later that we find out specifically Who the “seed of the woman” really was and how He would crush the serpent’s (Satan’s) head.**

**(3) In Genesis 12:3, Abraham was promised that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. Only much later did the people realize that**

**would some day put Jews and Gentiles on an equal spiritual footing before Him and that the message of salvation through Abraham’s descendant Jesus Christ would be preached to the entire world.**

12. How would you respond to the following statement: “The message of the Bible is partly historical but it also contains some myths and legends which we can no longer accept with our modern understanding”?

**This is FALSE. The Bible does contain parables and allegories, but everything which the Bible presents as historical is historical. Jesus and the New Testament affirmed the historicity of Old Testament events (such as the stories of the flood, Jonah, Job, Adam and Eve), which some people claim to be mythical or legendary. If we grant to interpreters the right to determine what is historical and what is not, we will soon have a Bible which cannot be trusted at all.**

13. A. What does it mean that “The Bible is Christ-centered”?

**The person, life and saving work of Jesus Christ form the heart and center of the Bible’s message.**

B. Do you think the Old Testament is Christ-centered too? If you answer NO, indicate why. If you answer YES, give examples to prove your point.

**YES. The Old Testament is Christ-centered, too, though obviously not in the same way as the New Testament is. In the New Testament, Christ is actually present in person and all books written after the Gospel accounts refer to who He was, what He said and what He did or was going to do. In the Old Testament He is “present” primarily by way of type, shadow, and prophecy and, on occasion (possibly), in pre-incarnation theophanies. However, the entire Old Testament prepares the way for His coming, points forward to His coming, and in many ways foreshadows His coming. Without the future ministry of Jesus Christ, much of the Old Testament would lose its meaning and significance. For example:**

**(1) The entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament pointed forward to the One who was to come. He was to be both priest and sacrifice (John 1:29 and the book of Hebrews) and was the true temple or tabernacle in which God dwelled (John 1:14).**

**(2) Many Old Testament prophecies, such as those in Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 61, pointed forward to Christ’s coming.**

**(3) All redemptive promises made in the Old Testament of forgiveness, redemption, and freedom are fully fulfilled only in Christ (John 5:39; Luke 24:27).**



14. According to Psalm 119, there are many spiritual benefits we can derive from reading and studying the Bible. Read the following verses and indicate the particular spiritual benefit mentioned in each verse.
- A. Psalm 119:9—**Studying the Bible helps us keep our way pure.**
  - B. Psalm 119:11—**Studying the Bible helps keep us from sin.**
  - C. Psalm 119:133—**Studying the Bible helps direct our footsteps so that no sin rules over us.**
  - D. Psalm 119:165—**Studying the Bible gives us peace and keeps us from stumbling.**
  - E. Psalm 119:171—**Studying the Bible causes our lips to overflow with praise.**

15. The following rhymes are sometimes used to describe the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. What do you think they mean?

- A. “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is by the New revealed.”

**The truths of the New Testament are present in the Old Testament though they appear there in a somewhat “hidden” form and are not yet revealed in all their fullness. It is not until one reads the New Testament that he is fully able to understand the truths revealed in the Old Testament.**

- B. “The New is in the Old contained; the Old is by the New explained.”

**This saying teaches essentially the same thing as the first one. The truths of the New Testament are already present in the Old Testament in “seed” or germinal form. One needs the New Testament, however, to fully explain all the Old Testament teachings regarding God, sin, sacrifice, forgiveness and other concepts.**

16. In this lesson there are 10 Basic Principles of Interpretation. Each of the following statements VIOLATES one of those Principles. Write out which principle is violated by each statement. Follow the example.

Example: Statement: “The Bible has no more authority than any other book.”

Violates Principle\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_: The Bible is Without Error and is our only Trustworthy Guide for Faith and Life.

- A. Statement: “The Old Testament view of God is completely inconsistent with the New Testament view of God.”

Violates Principle\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_: **The Bible is Its Own Best Interpreter**

- B. Statement: “It takes an expert to understand most things in the Bible.”

Violates Principle\_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_: **The Message of the Bible is Understandable**

- C. Statement: “The primary purpose of the Bible is to give us basic insights into the subjects of morality and psychology.”

Violates Principle\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_: **The Message of the Bible is Redemptive**

- D. Statement: “The Bible mixes myths and legends with history to give us an interesting view of the ancient world.”

Violates Principle\_\_\_\_6\_\_\_\_: **The Message of the Bible is Historical**

- E. Statement: “The Bible deals with great and wonderful things that happened in the past but has little to do with our own personal situation today.”

Violates Principle\_\_\_\_10\_\_\_\_: **The Message of the Bible is Personal**

17. A. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If a person is living close to God and walking in obedience, he will not find any passages in the Bible hard to understand”? Give the reason for your answer.

**DISAGREE. It is generally true that the closer we walk with God and the more we live in obedience, the greater will be our understanding of the Bible. However, there will always be passages on which believers disagree and there will always be passages which will be very difficult for us to interpret.**

- B. List some Scriptures (at least two) that support your position.

**SAMPLE**

**Peter found that some of Paul’s letters were hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). Moreover, some of the prophets did not even fully understand their own prophecies (1 Peter 1:10-12). And Jesus’ own disciples failed to understand the Old Testament Scriptures insofar as they referred to Christ (Luke 24:25-27).**

18. Principle 4 teaches that the Bible is not to be regarded as a textbook on history or science or psychology. Do you think this means that the Bible is of absolutely no value for understanding science or history or psychology? Please explain your answer, giving examples, if possible, to demonstrate your position.

**The Bible usually does not give us information concerning science and psychology or history in precise “scientific” or “technical” terms. That was not the Bible’s purpose. However, the Bible does contain information that is useful in helping us understand man’s mind, his emotions, his responses, his history, and the world in which he lives. The Bible also makes clear that the world in which we are living is affected in many negative ways by man’s sin and God’s judgment upon it.**

19. A. Explain what is meant by the statement that “The Bible was not given primarily to inform us but to transform us.”

**The Bible was given to us not only to help us know what to believe but also to help us become the kind of people God wants us to be. If we learn many things about God and the Bible but are not changed by what we learn, our study will do us very little good.**

- B. Write out two Scripture passages (include reference) that support the statement made in A above.

**1. “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:2**

**2. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.” 1 Corinthians 8:1-3**

20. A. Explain what is meant by Principle 10: “The message of the Bible is personal.”

**The Bible is not simply addressed to “mankind” as a whole but is written to us as individual persons who are challenged to respond to the Bible’s message personally and individually. God wants each person in the world to know Him, to believe in Him, to be saved through His grace and to live a life of obedience in gratitude to Him. (Believers must also respond to God’s Word “corporately” as the body of Christ, but this body is made up of individual members, each of whom must make a personal response of faith to the message of the Bible.)**

- B. Write out two Scripture passages (include references) that teach that God does not want anyone to perish but rather that everyone will come to a knowledge of the truth.

**1. “God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3-4**

**2. “The Lord . . . is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. The Bible was written almost two thousand years ago. How can it still be a guide for our life today? Don’t we need new answers for today’s questions and new solutions for today’s problems?

**It is true that the Bible gives us information concerning things that happened long ago. It is also true that some of the laws and guidelines in the Bible were intended for a specific group of people at a specific time in history. However, there are three important things to remember in this regard.**

**First, the Bible contains many laws and principles which are TIMELESS and ABSOLUTE. Their importance, value, truthfulness and relevance are not limited to one time period or to one set of historical or cultural circumstances. They are valid always and everywhere. They will, of course, have to be prayerfully applied to new situations, but the truths themselves do not change.**

**Second, the Bible tells us about many EVENTS which have ETERNAL significance. For example, Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension are significant for everyone everywhere.**

**Third, it should not be considered unusual that the moral and spiritual truths of the Bible are still relevant today. There are many things about the natural world which were also known and taught many years ago. For example, such things as the law of gravity and various laws of physics and mathematics are not considered irrelevant today simply because they were first taught or discovered long ago. The same thing is true of abiding spiritual and moral laws.**

2. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement: “It is better to know a few things in the Bible and live according to what we know than to know everything in the Bible and not live by it”?



**AGREE.** The purpose of the Bible is to enable us to find salvation, life, joy and peace and to help us live lives of trust and obedience. It makes very little difference how much we learn if we are not living according to the truths we know. Obviously, the ideal goal is to learn as much as we can and ALSO to live according to all that we know. Many of the leaders in Jesus' own day knew a lot about the Scriptures and studied them faithfully but did not recognize Jesus as the Savior and Messiah when He was right in front of them (John 5:39). It's just as possible today to learn lots of facts and to store up information in our minds without truly knowing Christ, trusting Him or living for Him.

3. Psalm 119:105 says God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. In what ways is the Bible a lamp to your feet and a light for *your* path?

**Answers here will depend on the individual student. Each student, however, should be able to say that the Bible is the ultimate guide for helping him to determine what is right and what is wrong, what pleases God and what doesn't, what he should do and what he shouldn't.**

4. Principle 8 teaches that there are some things in the Bible which are beyond our understanding.

- A. Please give three examples of things in the Bible you cannot fully understand.

### **SAMPLE**

**Students will obviously vary in the things they present here. They may, in fact, surprise you by their answers. Some, for example, may emphasize such things as the sovereignty of God, the eternity of God, the fact that God is invisible yet has been "seen" by some people, the mystery of election and predestination, the doctrine of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ in one person and other profound teachings concerning God. Others may stress such things as why God allows suffering, the possibility of man's "free will" when God controls all things, God's love for unworthy sinners, Christ's willingness to die for us, etc.**

- B. Why do you think God has made these things known to us if we cannot fully understand them?

**God reveals all these things because they are true! Also, though He wants us to know and love Him, He also wants us to remember that He is far exalted above anything we can think or imagine. Further, He wants us to live lives of trust, prayer and obedience while always recognizing that His ways are far**

**above our ways and that He is ultimately the One who is in control of our lives—not we ourselves (Romans 11:33; Isaiah 55:8-9, etc.).**

**He does want us to know that He is sovereign, eternal, omniscient and omnipresent. And He also wants us to know that He is merciful, loving and just. But His purpose in giving us the Bible was not so that we could figure everything out! Nor was it His intention to give us the tools to construct some kind of theological box in which we neatly fit together everything God has revealed to us about Himself. Though we can understand all we need to know about God, we will never fully understand the mystery of His decrees or the perfections of His justice or the depth of His love.**

**If we could understand everything about God and His ways, we would be equal to God (see Job 38-40; Isaiah 40:12-31; 1 Corinthians 2:11). And that can never be. When there are things in the Bible we do not understand, therefore, we are brought to an appropriate position of wonder, humility, meekness and awe. We do not need to understand everything about Him. But we can joyfully and confidently trust Him! Our God is so much more wonderful than we can even begin to imagine!**

5. In Ecclesiastes 12:12 we read, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." Do you think this saying is true also when it comes to Bible study? Please give the reason for your answer.

**Not always, but sometimes. The number of books related to the Bible is enormously great. No one can begin to master or even read them all. And, yes, Bible study, as exhilarating and enriching as it may be, can also be very tiring at times—simply because of our human limitations.**

**It is important for us, therefore, to use our limited time and energies to read and study those things which are most valuable to us personally. We don't need to know everything! And we certainly don't have to try to read everything.**

**Faithful and diligent Bible study should always be high on our list of priorities. However, we should make sure that Bible study never becomes more of a burden than a blessing, more of a duty than a delight. Each of us will have to develop our own pattern and time of study to make sure that God's Word continues to be "sweet to our taste" and "sweeter than honey to our mouth" (Psalm 119:103).**

## SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES for mentors regarding Lesson 1

### Question 10 B.

Students will respond in different ways to this question. Try to help them address the subject appropriately by neither dismissing the alleged discrepancies too lightly nor taking them too seriously. Also, help them achieve a balance in their understanding by sharing with them (as necessary and helpful) some or all of the following.

First, students should realize that almost all “problems” of this kind have been known for hundreds of years. The problems may be new to the student but they are not new to the church.

Second, students should begin by prayerfully seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit as they deal with the problem (whether the problem is real or simply alleged).

Third, students should remember that the Holy Spirit has also led many other thinking Christians to deal with the alleged problems. They should therefore seek to avail themselves of whatever resources are available to them. If a student does not have access to helpful resources, the mentor may be able to do some studying on his/her own and share the results of his/her study with the student.

Finally, do not act as if a student’s problem is not real or significant. If he/she has taken the time to write to you about it, it certainly is real and significant to him/her. Help him/her work through it if you can. At the same time, make sure that the student sees that these “still unsolved” problems should not serve as barriers to faith. Many alleged problems have been satisfactorily resolved over the years. It is highly likely that others will be resolved in the future. And even if there are some things that we never fully resolve, they should not be permitted to outweigh the incredible value and power of the basic message of the Bible or the unquestioned accuracy of the vast majority of its teachings.

This course is written from the perspective that the Bible is internally consistent with itself and contains no essential contradictions. However, it is readily acknowledged that there are some “difficulties” which have not yet been fully resolved to everyone’s complete satisfaction. The following thoughts are presented as helpful guidelines as you deal with any of the alleged difficulties.

1. Always interpret less clear passages in the light of those which are more clear.
2. Remember that differences in emphasis, focus, number or order of events do not necessarily indicate discrepancies or contradictions. Each account indicates how things appeared to a given author who selected and arranged his information to

suit his purpose. This kind of selective emphasis may be compared to that of contemporary writers who describe an accident, a concert, a ball game or any other activity in a way that reflects their own focus or purpose.

3. The biblical writers were rarely concerned with contemporary standards of historical or numerical accuracy. For example, they often used round numbers rather than exact numbers and often described events from the perspective of the “ordinary” (non-scientific) observer. Moreover, they chose to report on those things which were important for their spiritual purpose, often leaving out any mention of events which were of much more importance to “secular” historians.
4. Since all of the original writings have been lost, it is very possible and even probable that the copies of the ancient manuscripts which we have today do contain transcription errors of one kind or another. It should be noted, however, that most biblical scholars agree that the best copies of the originals which we have today are extremely accurate and largely free from error.
5. Many so-called “problems” in the past have been resolved through new archaeological discoveries, a better understanding of the biblical languages, the finding of new manuscripts or in other ways. There is good reason to believe, therefore, that some existing “problems” may well be resolved in the future in the same way.
6. There are several books and articles and even an Internet website which deal very helpfully with some of the alleged problems. Serious students or those troubled by some apparent discrepancies in the Bible would do well to consult some of these sources.

See, for example:

When Critics Ask, a Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties, by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe (Victor Books, 1992).

Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, by Gleason L. Archer (Zondervan, 1982).

Hard Sayings of the Bible, by Walter Kaiser, Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred Brauch (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

## LESSON 2: Guidelines for Bible Study

Many things in the Bible are easy to understand. Some are more difficult. As you begin to study the Bible on your own, the following 10 guidelines should help you. If you consistently follow these guidelines throughout your study, you will not only increase your understanding of the Bible, but you will also avoid many errors of interpretation. You will also gain confidence and joy as you continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

### 10 GUIDELINES

#### **Guideline 1. Always Pray for the Guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

Remember that the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible. He understands it. He knows what it means, and He knows how you should apply it in your life. He is the best Teacher you will ever have. Pray for wisdom. Pray for understanding. Pray for insight. Always seek His guidance first. He is THE Teacher.

#### **Guideline 2. Study Each Passage in Its Context.**

The “context” is the setting in which a verse is found. The specific context is formed by the verses which come before and after a passage. The general context is formed by the entire chapter in which a passage is found, the book of which it is a part, the other writings of the author, the Old or New Testament in which the passage appears and the message of the Bible as a whole. The context is also formed by the customs and culture of the people to whom the Bible was first written.

If you take a passage out of its context, you can make the Bible say almost anything you want it to say. You can use it to justify evil, support a pet theory, condemn some innocent thing you don’t like or develop a doctrinal idea that is totally out of harmony with the rest of the Bible.

#### **Guideline 3. Interpret Each Passage Literally Unless the Context Makes It Clear that a Literal Interpretation Is Not Intended or When a Literal Interpretation Would Be Out of Harmony With Other Teachings In the Bible.**

For the most part, the Bible is written in ordinary language using ordinary words and ordinary grammar. Most passages are clearly intended to be interpreted literally. However, there are some passages which are clearly not intended to be taken literally. When you are unsure whether a passage should be interpreted literally or not, interpret

less clear passages in light of those which are more clear, earlier passages in light of those which are later, and Old Testament passages in light of the New Testament.

#### **Guideline 4. Pay Careful Attention to Grammar and to Each Word in a Passage.**

Look carefully at the grammatical structure of each sentence. Pay close attention to the tenses of verbs, singulars and plurals, introductory words, connecting words and word order. Study each word to determine its meaning. Remember that a word may not mean the same thing every time it is used in the Bible. This is particularly true when the word is being used by different authors or in different contexts.

#### **Guideline 5. Always Try to Determine How the First Readers of the Bible Understood a Passage.**

What did the passage mean to people who first read the Bible? How would they understand it? If you don’t try to learn how the original readers understood a passage, you may try to make the Bible teach something which neither the writers nor the first readers even thought about.

#### **Guideline 6. Recognize the Different Types of Literature in the Bible.**

There are at least six different types of literature found in the Bible: history, poetry, prophecy, gospel, epistle, and the apocalypse (the book of Revelation). Each type has a language or style or form that is different from the others. It is important to recognize these differences so that you can interpret each passage appropriately. (Lessons 6 through 11 provide a more extensive study of each of the six literature types.)

#### **Guideline 7. Pay Careful Attention to Unusual Expressions or Figures of Speech.**

The Bible writers often use creative ways of bringing their message to their readers. For example, they frequently use such figures of speech as allegories, similes, metaphors, hyperbole, parables, personification, anthropomorphisms, etc. Be alert to these as you read and study. (See Lesson 4 for a study of figures of speech in the Bible.)

#### **Guideline 8. Learn the Basic Message of the Bible as a Whole Before Getting Overly Involved in Controversial Passages.**

Learn the biblical foundation for the main teachings of the Bible before spending a lot of time on the more difficult or controversial passages. There will always be passages in the Bible on which believers differ. Start with the ones on which they agree!

#### **Guideline 9. Ask Six Familiar Questions When Reading a Passage.**



- A. Who were the first readers? Who was the author?
- B. What is the general subject the author is talking about in this passage?
- C. When was the passage written? What were the times or circumstances when it was written?
- D. Where in the Bible is this passage found? Is it found in the Old Testament—or in the New Testament? Is it found in a poetical passage such as the Psalms, in a historical section—or where?
- E. Why is the author writing about this subject at this point?
- F. How is the author trying to make his point? Is he using ordinary language? Is he using a parable, poetry, a figure of speech? Is he presenting his own thinking or the ideas of someone else?

**Guideline 10. Find the Basic Meaning of a Passage Before Seeking to Apply It to Your Life.**

Your first task, with the help of the Holy Spirit, is to understand the basic meaning of a passage. After you have done that, you should then seek the Spirit’s help in applying the truth of the passage to your personal life. A text may have multiple applications but it usually has only one essential meaning.

**QUESTIONS: GUIDELINES FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

- 1. A. Why is it important to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit when you read the Bible?  
  
**The Holy Spirit is the One who inspired the Bible and enabled the authors to write what they did. He alone knows exactly what every word and every passage means. He is the One Jesus said would be THE teacher of His disciples. Besides, He not only knows what each passage means, He knows also how each biblical truth should be applied to our lives. See 2 Peter 1:21; John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14.**
- B. When you pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read the Bible, how do you expect Him to answer your prayer?

**Each student will probably have different expectations—even as most of us do. Perhaps the most important thing you can do at this point is to encourage each student to always spend some time in prayer when reading and studying God’s Word. It is not so important how the Spirit leads him but that He leads him.**

**Generally, students will learn from others—either through listening to sermons or lectures, by participating in discussions or by reading what others have written. The Spirit may also give them a discerning mind to be able to distinguish truth from error in what they hear or read. However, students should also realize that the Spirit may on occasion give them direct insights into the meaning of a Scripture passage without any assistance from others whatsoever.**

**It’s always inspiring to hear the stories of both individuals and groups of believers who have come to a very solid understanding of the Bible without any help from anyone else. The Spirit does truly continue to lead His people into all truth. May our hearts and minds continually be open to His leading as we faithfully pray for His guidance and direction.**

- C. If possible, give an example or two of how the Holy Spirit has helped you in the past as you studied the Bible.

**It should be interesting and instructive to see how students respond.**

- 2. A. What does it mean to read a Bible passage “in context”?

**To read a passage “in context” is to read it in its specific biblical setting and not as an isolated statement. One should seek to understand what an author is trying to teach in a given book, or chapter, or section and then interpret a verse (or longer passage) in the light of that setting. The verses which come before and which follow a passage form the “immediate context.” The immediate context usually will help the reader understand an author’s meaning and purpose.**

**If the immediate context does not provide much help (as, for example, in the book of Proverbs), the reader should try to understand how a given passage fits in with the teaching of the Bible as a whole. No single passage should be interpreted in such a way that it goes contrary to other teachings in the Bible.**

B. Why is it important to read each Bible passage “in context”?

If every passage is not read “in context,” the Bible becomes a collection of isolated sayings, quotes, or stories which have little relationship to one another. It then becomes relatively easy to make the Bible say whatever the interpreter wants it to say.

Some people take isolated verses in the Bible and build an ethic, a lifestyle or a theology on those verses while remaining ignorant (intentionally or otherwise) of the Bible’s message as a whole. All kinds of errors of interpretation (and consequent application) have come about because people have interpreted some passages out of context.

**Note: One way to understand the overall context of each passage is to read and study the entire Bible. If you limit your Bible reading to certain “favorite” passages or to certain parts of the Bible, you will run the risk of reading a passage out of context. That can easily lead to misinterpretation or to an overemphasis on certain things and the neglect of others. The more you understand the Bible as a whole, the greater will be your understanding of the context of each passage and the more likely will your interpretation be correct.**

3. In one or two sentences, describe the specific context of each of the following familiar verses.

**Note to mentor: Students may well describe the context here in different words or in different ways—all of which might be considered reasonably correct. Do not “challenge” their comments unless they are obviously wrong or unless they forget something you believe is very significant or important.**

- A. John 3:16—**Jesus is talking to Nicodemus about spiritual and heavenly truths which Nicodemus does not understand. Jesus then talks to him about Moses who lifted up the serpent in the wilderness for the physical healing of those who believed. Then He goes on to indicate that He, the Son of Man, must also be lifted up so that those who believe in Him may have eternal life.**
- B. Acts 4:12—**Peter and John had healed a lame man at the temple gate. They were then jailed because of their testimony. The following day they were taken before the leaders of the Jews who challenged them to say by whose power or name they had healed the lame man. In response Peter told them about Jesus, the One they had rejected and crucified.**

- C. John 10:11—**Jesus is comparing Himself with others who had served as “leaders” of the people. They were not true “shepherds” who really cared for them. They were just hired shepherds who cared more about themselves than about the “sheep” they were supposed to take care of. Jesus truly cared about His sheep (followers) and would be giving His life for them.**

- D. Philippians 4:13—**Paul is writing about the love and concern which the Philippian believers had shown to him. Paul acknowledged that he had experienced a variety of circumstances—some pleasant and some very difficult. But he said he had learned the secret of being content in every situation—whether poverty or plenty.**

4. Read each of the following passages in context. Then in front of each one write whether the statement should be interpreted literally or not. Write YES if it should be interpreted literally. Write NO if it should not be interpreted literally. Then give the reason for your answer. Follow the example.

EXAMPLE: YES “Go and buy a clay jar from a potter.” Jeremiah 19:1  
Reason: Jeremiah really had to buy an ordinary clay pot.

NO “We have this treasure in jars of clay.” 2 Corinthians 4:7  
Reason: People are not literally jars made of clay.

- A. YES “When I am afraid, I will trust in you.” Psalm 56:3  
Reason: **We definitely may trust in God when we are afraid.**
- B. NO “He will cover you with his feathers.” Psalm 91:4  
Reason: **God does not have feathers; this is a figure of speech.**
- C. YES “He forgives all your sins.” Psalm 103:3  
Reason: **God does indeed forgive all our sins.**
- D. NO “You . . . hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.” Micah 7:19  
Reason: **God forgives our sins, but He doesn’t literally throw them anywhere.**
- E. NO “He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies.” Psalm 18:14  
Reason: **God doesn’t literally shoot arrows; He is spiritual, not physical.**

5. Leviticus 26:26 says that the people would eat and not be satisfied. Or, as one version translates it, “You will eat and go away hungry.” Some people say the writer is trying to teach people that they need to learn more about good nutrition.

- A. Do you agree with this interpretation? **NO**
- B. What is the general context in which this passage is found?

**In this passage (beginning already in verse 14), God is describing the punishment that he will inflict on those who do not obey Him. Included in the punishment will be a shortage of food.**

- C. What do you think this verse means?

**This passage isn't talking about nutrition at all but rather about God's judgment of a sinful people. They would simply not have enough to eat because God would be punishing them. They might have a little but they would never have enough to satisfy their hunger.**

6. Read each of the following passages in the light of Guideline 4. Then indicate the importance or meaning of the UNDERLINED words.

- A. Romans 12:1: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers . . ."

**Believers were challenged to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord BECAUSE of all the mercies He had shown them. These mercies were described in the preceding chapters.**

- B. Galatians 3:16: "and to your seed"

**Paul is describing how the blessings God promised to Abraham would be fulfilled. The primary fulfillment would be found in and through just ONE of Abraham's descendants, namely, JESUS CHRIST. He was the promised SEED of Abraham.**

- C. Colossians 1:16: "For by him all things were created"

**In verse 15 Paul indicates that Jesus Christ is the firstborn over all creation. In verse 16 he gives the REASON why He is called the firstborn. It wasn't, as some sects affirm, because Jesus was created first, but it was because everything was created through Him (vs. 16) and everything holds together in Him (vs. 17).**

- D. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world"

**The word "so" in this verse describes the MANNER of God's love rather than the "degree" of God's love. He demonstrated His love by giving His Son.**

**(Note to mentors: Some of you and some of your students may not agree with this interpretation. Don't argue the point with your student. However, do recognize that the interpretation given here is most likely the correct one and that it is the one favored in some of the recent translations.)**

- E. Acts 22:28: "But I was born a citizen"

**Paul contrasts his own Roman citizenship with that of the Roman commander. The commander had his citizenship by purchase while Paul had his by birth. The "but" strongly sets the two situations over against each other, emphasizing the special advantage Paul had over the commander.**

7. A. List six different types of literature found in the Bible and give an example of each of the six types. Using number 1 as an example, fill in 2-6 below.

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Type: <b>HISTORY</b>     | Example: <b>The book of Judges</b>                                     |
| 2. Type: <b>POETRY</b>      | Example: <b>The book of Psalms (or other poetic books or passages)</b> |
| 3. Type: <b>PROPHECY</b>    | Example: <b>Isaiah (or one of the other prophets)</b>                  |
| 4. Type: <b>GOSPEL</b>      | Example: <b>Matthew, Mark, Luke or John</b>                            |
| 5. Type: <b>EPISTLE</b>     | Example: <b>Romans (or one of the other epistles)</b>                  |
| 6. Type: <b>APOCALYPTIC</b> | Example: <b>Revelation (or parts of Daniel or Ezekiel)</b>             |

- B. Why is it helpful to understand which "type" of literature you are reading?

**The different types of literature in the Bible must often be interpreted differently. For example, in poetry we will often find many figures of speech which are not to be taken literally. The historical books and the book of Revelation both describe "historical" events, but they do so in very different ways. The prophets and the authors of the epistles both conveyed messages to God's people, but their style of writing is usually different. By recognizing and understanding these things, it is possible to avoid errors of interpretation which easily result when one neglects the specific features of each type of writing.**

8. Read the following verses and explain them in your own words.



**Note to mentors: Students may well paraphrase or explain these Proverbs in different ways—all of which may be quite acceptable. Be flexible in your approach and encouraging in your response—particularly if your students are insightful in their interpretation.**

- A. Proverbs 28:23—**It's important to be honest when talking to others. Flattery may provide a temporary benefit, but a person will gain more in the long run if he honestly (and humbly, we might add) shows a person where he is wrong.**
- B. Proverbs 25:28—**A person who lacks self-control leaves himself open to all kinds of "attacks" by others. As a city whose walls are broken down, his defenses are broken down. He becomes vulnerable to temptation, to failure and to defeat.**
- C. Proverbs 14:12—**We may convince ourselves that a certain course of action is acceptable and right, but if we pursue it we will find that it leads us to moral, spiritual or physical failure—and even possibly death itself (especially spiritual death).**
9. The interpretation given to each of the following statements is wrong. Read each "interpretation" and then explain WHY it is wrong. In your answer, refer to one or more of the Guidelines in this lesson that is violated. Follow the example.

Example: Philippians 3:2 teaches that: "We shouldn't have pets, especially dogs."

Response: Paul isn't talking about pets here but about people. He is warning his readers against evil people who teach wrong ideas about circumcision. The interpretation given violates several of the Guidelines such as #2, #5, #7 and #10.

**Note to mentors: Allow some flexibility in the answers provided. One could probably make a case for a variety of answers here, especially in regard to the Guidelines being violated.**

- A. Luke 12:19 teaches that: "We should take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry."  
Response: **Jesus is condemning, not approving of the person who spoke these words about eating, drinking and being merry. The person who said this had his priorities totally wrong and paid the consequences for his folly.**

**Violates Guidelines 1, 2 and 5.**

- B. Matthew 19:10 teaches that: "It is better not to get married."  
Response: **The disciples said these words in response to Jesus' teaching about the seriousness of marriage and the sinfulness of divorce. There may well be situations where it is better for a person not to marry (see 1 Corinthians 7), but Jesus is certainly not teaching that here.**

**Violates Guidelines 1, 2, 5 and 8.**

- C. Amos 5:23 teaches that: "God will not listen to the music of those who play the harp."  
Response: **God is here speaking about His negative response to people who were merely concerned with external religious exercises rather than with humble, sincere and heartfelt worship. They had continued some of the "prescribed" rituals without being concerned with justice and righteousness. Therefore, the playing of harps under these circumstances was simply "noise" to Him.**

**Violates Guidelines 1, 2, 3, 5 and 9.**

- D. Isaiah 56:12 teaches that: "We should all drink our fill of beer."  
Response: **Verse 12 certainly does not represent anything that God approves. The context in which this verse is found is formed by the preceding verses, beginning in verse 9. The people and their leaders are both being condemned for the things they were saying and doing.**

**Violates Guidelines 1, 2, 5, 9 and 10.**

- E. Psalm 18:16 teaches that: "God saved the writer from drowning."  
Response: **Psalm 18 contains several figures of speech and "poetic" expressions. Verse 16, like several other expressions in this Psalm, is clearly not to be taken literally. Rather, the "deep waters" are a symbolic reference to the severe trials and dangers from which the Lord had delivered the writer.**

**Violates Guidelines 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9.**

10. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7.

- A. WHO wrote this passage? **THE APOSTLE PAUL**
- B. WHAT is the general subject the author is writing about here? **SEXUAL MORALITY**

- C. WHY does he write about this subject?
1. Verse 6 — **He wants his readers to know that God will punish all those who are sexually immoral or who take advantage of others sexually.**
  2. Verse 7 — **He reminds his readers that God called them to live a pure and holy life.**
- D. What WARNING does he give in verse 8?
- He warns them that those who reject his instruction are really rejecting God and not merely himself.**

11. The following three verses are found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Please explain what you think each verse means.

- A. Matthew 6:3—**When we give to those in need, we should not do so with a lot of "fanfare" so that others will see it and give us praise for it. Rather, we should do so in such a way that no attention is called to ourselves.**
- B. Matthew 6:21—**We will naturally concentrate our time, energy and affection on those things which mean the most to us. If earthly things are most important to us, we will focus most of our time and energy on earthly things. If "spiritual" things are most important to us, that will be clearly reflected in how we live.**
- C. Matthew 7:1—**We are not to condemn others or judge them negatively or critically without first paying careful attention to things that need to be taken care of in our own lives. This passage does not teach that we may never evaluate a person's conduct or tell him that it violates God's laws or that it is inappropriate for other reasons. The Bible makes very clear in other passages that it is both necessary and important for us to evaluate people's conduct so that we may rescue them from wrong doing and dissociate ourselves from those who would lead us or others astray.**

12. What do you think the following passages meant to the people who first heard them or read them?

- A. Isaiah 1:18—**The Jews of Isaiah's day were called to examine their lives thoughtfully. They were sinning and needed to change (verses 11-17). But even though their lives were deeply stained red with sin—stained with the colors of the blood they often shed (verse 15), they could be forgiven and made as white as the wool of a sacrificial lamb or the freshly fallen snow**

**from heaven which hid from sight the dirt on the ground. This was a tremendous "offer" from God, but it would require a tremendous heart-change and genuine repentance on their part (verse 19).**

- B. Matthew 9:16—**The Jews of Jesus' day understood that unshrunk cloth would shrink when washed. As a result, it would pull away from an old, "thoroughly shrunk" garment and leave a hole bigger than the one it was intended to cover. Jesus' teachings and ways were like "unshrunk" cloth to these people. The "fasting" which the people wanted his disciples to do would be inappropriate at this point since it didn't fit with the message Jesus was teaching or the new life He was bringing. The people could not simply accept a teaching of Jesus here and there and try to fit it into their old legalistic thought system. They needed a whole new way of thinking and living.**
- C. Matthew 5:41—**Apparently, in Jesus day, the Roman soldiers (or others) had the authority to compel people to carry something for them or to perform some other act of service for them. (Recall, for example, how Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Jesus' cross.) Jesus taught that people should not resist or complain when they were compelled to do something but rather that they should go "the extra mile." That is, they should do more than was asked of them rather than fretting or rebelling over it.**

13. Read each of the following passages and then REWRITE each of them using sayings or expressions that are more familiar to us today.

- A. Matthew 23:24—**"You get bent out of shape over a minor theological point, but you swallow big heresies hook, line and sinker."**
- B. Matthew 7:4—**"How can you tell someone, 'Let me clean your glasses,' when all you have are glass eyes yourself!"**
- C. Matthew 6:2—**"When you give to poor people, don't call the reporter from the TV station so that you get on the 10 o'clock news. If you do, that's the only reward you'll ever get."**

14. To answer the following two questions, read the verse cited as well as the context (chapter, section or entire book of the Bible) surrounding each verse.

- A. Do you think that 1 Peter 3:3 teaches that women should never wear jewelry? Please give the reason for your answer.

**No. Peter is not saying that the wearing of jewelry is always wrong, but he warns his readers against the practice of putting too much emphasis on external things while neglecting more important things. He wants them to remember that true beauty does not come from external adornment but from inward character.**

- B. Do you think 1 Timothy 2:9 teaches that women should never braid their hair? Please give the reason for your answer.

**No. Paul is not concerned first of all about hair styles but about any kind of adornment or activity that would cause offense or be considered immodest. In his day, braids were often fastened with expensive jewelry of one kind or another intended to call attention to the wearer. Paul's concern, therefore, was not with hair style per se, but with anything which was inconsistent with appropriate standards of modesty and humility—particularly in worship settings.**

15. One of the best known parables of Jesus is the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). In this parable, Jesus said that the younger brother was “dead” (verse 32). What do you think Jesus meant by that?

**The younger brother had not actually died physically, but he had died morally and spiritually. He was “dead” in his sins (Ephesians 2:1). He was separated from the life of God (his father) and would be separated from Him forever if he did not repent and come back to Him.**

16. Read John 11:25-26. In verse 25 Jesus says that a person will live even though he dies. In verse 26 he says that a believer will never die. How would you explain this?

**Jesus might possibly have been referring to a person's physical resurrection in the future, though we would then have expected Him to say “live again.” It is more probable, therefore, that he meant that a person who is spiritually alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5; John 3:3-7; 5:24; 2 Corinthians 5:17) will continue to live even after his physical death. This life in Christ is so important that it totally overshadows a person's physical existence. Nothing—not even the death of the body—can destroy this life or bring it to an end. Those who are alive in Christ will live forever!**

17. Explain what you think the word “forever” means in each of the following passages.

- A. Psalm 23:6—**The word “forever” here means without any end, eternally.**

- B. 1 Kings 8:13—**The word “forever” here indicates that the temple, as long as history continued, will serve as the earthly house of the Lord. Solomon certainly did not believe that the earthly temple he built would last eternally.**

- C. Isaiah 34:10—**Edom's condemnation and punishment (see verses 8 and 9) would never be reversed or diminished as long as the world stands. The condemnation was divinely decreed and nothing would ever change it.**

18. In Revelation 21:10-20, we find a description of the New Jerusalem (which many people identify with the heaven where believers will spend eternity with Christ).

- A. Do you think the description that the author of Revelation provides is a literal description of the New Jerusalem? Give the reason for your answer.

**This description is very likely NOT literal. The book of Revelation is an example of apocalyptic literature in which extensive use is made of figurative language. Early on in the book, for example, Jesus Himself is portrayed in highly symbolic language (Revelation 1:13- 16). In chapter 5 He is called a Lion and presented as a Lamb. In chapter 4, God Himself is pictured as a precious gem surrounded by a rainbow. Throughout the book we find graphic descriptions of unusual creatures and amazing activities.**

- B. Explain in general terms what you think this passage teaches us.

**The description of heaven (the New Jerusalem) in chapters 21 and 22 contains many symbolic elements which help us think of grandeur, greatness and glory—all far beyond anything we can imagine or describe. There will be the complete absence of everything that has marred our happiness and joy on earth and the presence of everything good and glorious. At the same time, the special joy and blessing of heaven will not be found in “things” but in Jesus. He is the light and glory of heaven. Just being in His presence forever will, by itself, be a source of endless joy.**

19. Read 1 Peter 5:1-4.

- A. Who was the author of this passage? **The apostle Peter.**

- B. What is the general message of the author in this passage?

**Peter is teaching the elders of the church how to serve God willingly, faithfully, eagerly, humbly and effectively, assuring them that those who do so will be rewarded by Christ when He returns with a crown of glory that would never fade away.**



C. Identify any figures of speech the author uses in this passage.

**Peter refers to the elders as “shepherds” (5:2).  
He refers to believers as “the flock” (5:3).  
He refers to Christ as the “Chief Shepherd” (5:4).  
He refers to a “crown of glory that will never fade away” (5:4).**

D. Who were the first readers of this passage? (See 1 Peter 1:1-2).

**The first readers were God’s elect people (believers) scattered throughout various countries in Asia Minor.**

20. Jesus said, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

A. What do you think Jesus meant by this statement?

**Jesus meant that anyone who wants to be His follower must, for His sake, be willing to forsake anything and to face everything, even death itself.**

B. Give some specific applications of what that means for us today.

**There are many specific examples of true discipleship which a student may refer to here. His answers will probably give you an insight into the things he feels he has “given up” in order to follow Christ—or to the persecution he may have had to endure because of his faith. Encourage him to remain steadfast in his commitment to Christ and to persevere in living for his Savior.**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Guideline 8 indicates that we should learn the basic message of the Bible as a whole before getting overly involved in controversial passages. How would you describe (in one or two paragraphs) the main message of the Bible to someone who has never read the Bible before?

**A wide variety of presentations will be very acceptable here, but each presentation should include most of the following truths—as well as others that a student might choose to mention.**

**The Bible is a book of LIFE. It teaches us about God—who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. It tells about His work of creation with man being the crown of that creation. It describes man’s fall into sin, and**

**shows how man may be saved from the guilt and penalty of his sin through God’s eternal Son Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us how to be holy and joyful and how to live in fellowship with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit. It shows us how to live a life of obedience and service that brings glory to God and blessing to others. It also encourages us to bring the message of Christ to others so that they, too, may share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. Finally, it describes man’s final and eternal destiny—either with God in the glory of the new heavens and the new earth or apart from Him forever.**

2. This lesson presents 10 Guidelines for interpreting the Bible.

A. Which of these guidelines do you think are violated or neglected most often?

**The answer to this question will obviously depend on the reader. In general, however, it would seem that Guideline 2 may be violated more than any of the others. Also, many may neglect to pray seriously for the leading of the Holy Spirit when they read and study the Bible (Guideline 1). Every one of the Guidelines will probably be violated at one time or another by most people. Let each student therefore present his own thoughts without trying to “correct” him.**

B. Why do you think these guidelines are violated so often?

**Why are these guidelines violated? For various reasons. People who are not very familiar with the Bible will often look upon each statement or verse in the Bible as a “truth” which can and does stand all by itself. Without understanding the message of the Bible as a whole, they neglect to interpret a passage in the light of either the immediate or general context in which a passage is found. Also, without understanding the varieties of literature in the Bible, they may easily mistake a poetic metaphor for a literal description, or engage in another similar error. Knowing and appreciating the style of literature in which a passage is written can be essential to understanding it in proper context.**

C. Give three specific examples of violations of Guideline 2 that you personally have heard or read.

### SAMPLE

**Students will obviously provide different examples here. Most of them will likely prove interesting and informative. There will probably be some that are not at all new to you, while others may surprise you.**

3. How do you personally deal with a situation where you believe someone is clearly misinterpreting a certain passage of the Bible or applying it wrongly—and yet he keeps on insisting that he is right and you are wrong?

**Any serious Bible student will sooner or later (usually sooner) come across people or writers who present their understanding of a Bible passage with great passion—even though they may be totally wrong. The temptation in such situations is to become rather passionate in defense of one’s own interpretation. This is particularly true if the disputed passage is of great practical significance.**

**How should we respond in such a situation? First, we must remember to pray for the guidance, grace, and proper attitude that we will need. Then, we should honestly attempt to understand why a person holds to the position he does. If there are “reasonable” grounds for his interpretation, we should recognize them and acknowledge them. If not (as we see it), we should humbly and quietly point that out. After listening to the other person, we should patiently and quietly (without undue passion) present the reasons for our own understanding of the disputed passage. If we have already seriously considered the other person’s interpretation without getting unduly upset over it, we may expect that our own thoughtful and quiet presentation may be given a “hearing” as well.**

**Finally, if the other person is adamant in holding to his own position and unwilling to consider your position seriously, accept that. Do not get into a heated argument over it. Do not let passion replace love. Winning an argument while losing a “friend” or potential friend just isn’t worth it. And, of course, rarely does it bring anyone closer to the truth or closer to Christ.**

4. Question 3 in this lesson refers to Philippians 4:13. What does this verse mean to you personally? How is it a blessing to you? Can you give any specific examples where you have experienced the reality of this verse in a special way?

**As you reflect on your students’ presentation here, you might wish to remind yourself—and them, if necessary—of Paul’s own intention in writing this verse. Paul never intended to give the impression that he could do anything and everything that came into his mind. He never pretended that he was some kind of superman who could transcend the normal limitations that every other person is subject to. Nor was he referring here to the fact that God sometimes enabled him to work exceptional miracles. Rather, he was referring in this passage to the fact that he could deal with any and every situation that came his way because Christ gave him the strength to do so. He could handle success and failure, prosperity and adversity, good times and bad times—and he could do it without pride or murmuring or complaining. Moreover, through Christ’s strength, he could do everything that Christ called him to do. His intention here was to focus on Christ, not on himself.**

## LESSON 3: Cautions and Suggestions

Since the Bible is such a big book, and there is so much to learn, you may become frustrated or even discouraged at times in your Bible study. You may read some things you don’t understand and forget some things that you do! You may not even remember today what you learned just yesterday. You may read chapter after chapter of interesting things but just cannot keep everything straight. You may even get to the point where you wonder at times whether your study is really worth all the effort you are putting into it.

### PART ONE: CAUTIONS

If you are a wise and careful driver, you will pay careful attention to the road signs that tell you of dangers ahead. These caution signs may warn you of school zones, speed zones, road construction, dangerous curves, falling rocks, or other hazards. Careful drivers pay attention. Thoughtless drivers often pay the penalty for failing to do so!

There are also some dangers you should watch out for as you make your “study cruise” through the Bible. The following 10 Caution Signs will help you spot some “danger zones” in your study and also help you avoid errors of interpretation.

**Caution 1. Do not read the Bible as a collection of isolated sayings, quotes and stories.**

Each part must be seen in the context of the Bible as a whole. Though there are definitely isolated “gems” in the Bible, all of them fit into the book as a whole—just like the pieces of a puzzle. Even though each part can be examined and appreciated by itself, its full purpose and meaning will be found only in its relation to the other parts.

**Caution 2. Do not consider each part of the Bible to be equally important.**

Though each verse and word in the Bible is inspired by God, some verses will clearly prove more helpful than others in your endeavor to understand the plans and purposes of God and His will for your life. Understanding why God gave specific details for how the Tabernacle was to be created is important, but it’s better to focus on, for example, reading Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount or understanding His parables when you are first studying the Bible. Later you will be able to study other parts of the Bible and learn how these, too, can be a blessing to you.

**Caution 3. Do not assume that every law, command or promise in the Bible was intended for all people of all times and places.**

Many Old Testament teachings were intended only for the people of Israel at a specific time and place. Many prophecies and promises are conditional—even when the conditions are not immediately expressed. There are also New Testament commands and promises which were given only to certain people and were not intended for everyone. For example, Jesus’ command to the rich young ruler to give up all his possessions in order to follow Jesus was not meant to apply to everyone (Matthew 19:16-26, Mark 10:17-27, Luke 18:18-27).

**Caution 4. Do not build doctrinal or moral teachings on the basis of exceptional or unusual passages.**

Never attempt to refute or undermine a fundamental teaching of the Bible on the basis of a parable, allegory, figure of speech or unusual saying. Always build foundational teachings on passages which are clear, consistent and readily understandable.

**Caution 5. Do not assume that a word means the same thing every time it is used in the Bible.**

Unless you are reading an original manuscript of the Bible written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, you are reading a translation. Translators chose the best words possible based on each passage’s intended meaning. In many cases, the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic languages feature multiple words that correspond to a single word in the English language—for example, different types of love, ways we are saved or levels of faith—and these nuances are often lost in translation. Because of this, a word such as “love” in an English translation may have different meanings in different contexts. A word may even be used in the same context in more than one way. Also, inclusive words such as “always,” “never,” “forever,” “everywhere” and “everyone” must be carefully interpreted. Sometimes they must be interpreted very literally. At other times they may be limited by the immediate context or by other teachings in the Bible.

**Caution 6. Do not look upon the Bible as a modern textbook on history or psychology or science.**

The Bible is always accurate according to the purpose for which it was written. However, it may not always be considered “accurate” according to certain modern standards. For example, the Bible states says that the sun rises and sets (just as we do today) without intending to teach anything about the rotation of the earth around the sun. Such statements become a “problem” only when they are believed to teach something which they never intended to teach.

**Caution 7. Do not force texts into saying what you want them to say.**

It is appropriate to look for passages which clearly teach a certain truth, but it is wrong to twist passages in such a way that they are made to teach something which they never intended to teach. Let the Bible speak for itself! Listen carefully to what the Bible says rather than making the Bible say what you want to hear!

**Caution 8. Do not look upon every statement in the Bible as absolutely true when taken by itself.**

For example, the Bible presents many sayings of Job’s three friends, but some of the things they said were later condemned by God. The writer of Ecclesiastes sometimes chooses to present things from a point of view that is secular, earthly, and temporal. The statements of an unbeliever or an evil spirit are sometimes included in the Bible without implying that they represent God’s point of view on the subject. Be careful to read every passage in the Bible, especially those that appear “unusual” or “different,” in the light of the clear teachings of the Bible as a whole.

**Caution 9. Do not try to “explain away” things in the Bible which you do not like or which seem “unworthy” of God—such as His anger, justice, and punishment of sin.**

Your task is not to try to fit the Bible into some idea of how things “should” be. Your task is to learn what God has said about how things are. Let God be God!

**Caution 10. Do not become overly dependent on others as you try to understand the Bible.**

You will often be able to benefit from the help of others, but first prayerfully try to understand a passage on your own before turning to Bible dictionaries or commentaries for understanding. Remember, the Holy Spirit will always be your best Teacher!

## PART TWO: SUGGESTIONS

This section has some very simple and practical suggestions to help you in your study. If you read each suggestion carefully and apply it to your reading, your study of the Bible should increasingly become a joy and blessing to you—rather than a burden or an obligation.

**Suggestion 1. Learn to read the Bible as a simple, joyful, obedient believer.**

Remember that you don’t have to become a Bible scholar before Bible study can be a great blessing to you. Even the simplest believer can learn things that an “expert” might miss. If you do become an “expert” some day, that’s fine. But don’t make that your primary goal!



**Suggestion 2. Rejoice in every new truth you discover in the Bible without being overly concerned about things you do not understand.**

The interpretation of the Bible will always be a lifelong challenge. There will always be more to be discovered, more to be understood and more to put into practice. As the Bible becomes more and more precious to you, you will increasingly find delight in hearing God’s voice and walking God’s way—even if there is much more for you to discover and learn.

**Suggestion 3. Include Scripture selections from both the New Testament and the Old Testament in your daily reading.**

In general, it is better not to begin your study of the Bible by reading it straight through from beginning to end as you would a novel or history book. There are several Bible reading guides available that can help you read through the entire Bible meaningfully by including passages from both Old and New Testament each day.

**Suggestion 4. Read the Bible in more than one version or translation.**

In some of the older versions, the grammar and style may be unfamiliar and some words may be difficult to understand. In some of the newer versions, the language is contemporary and lively, but the translation may be more of a paraphrase than a strict translation. By reading the Bible in more than one version you can often get the best of both the old and the new translations.

**Suggestion 5. Read whole chapters of the Bible or even whole books at one sitting—even if you don’t understand everything you are reading.**

The Holy Spirit will help you think in biblical terms, and you will begin to see things that you never saw before.

**Suggestion 6. Try to find something in the Bible each day which you can immediately put into practice.**

Then try to find something each day which you can share with someone else. By practicing and sharing what you learn, you will find that you will not quickly forget it.

**Suggestion 7. Memorize as much of the Bible as you can.**

Memorizing will help fix God’s Word in your mind so that it will become a constant practical guide for your life. Memorizing Scripture will also help you to interpret Scripture in the light of Scripture. The more you remember about what you have read before, the less likely you are to read the Bible out of context.

**Suggestion 8. Develop a systematic pattern for your Bible reading.**

Don’t study by way of the “chance opening”—reading wherever you happen to open the Bible. God can certainly bless even your “hopscotch” reading, but you will get much more out of your study if you prayerfully walk through the Bible rather than hopping and skipping around in it.

**Suggestion 9. Underline or highlight verses as you read the Bible.**

Make notes on what you read. Make your Bible a treasure of your own notes, responses and observations. If the pages of the Bible you are reading don’t provide enough room for your thoughts, keep a separate notebook of your own responses. Writing things down will help you concentrate on what you are reading. It will also help you to remember and apply what you have read!

**Suggestion 10. Think and meditate and pray while you study the Bible.**

Don’t rush through it! Look patiently for new truths about God, salvation, trust and obedience. Seek to find new ways to put these truths into practice in your life. Don’t feel that you have to study the Bible so many minutes or hours a week in order to please God! It’s better to learn a little and put that little into practice in a fruitful life of trust and obedience than to learn a lot and become frustrated in the process. If you can read the Bible through in a year, that’s fine. But if you prayerfully study and “live” your way through only a small part of it in a year, that may be even better.

**QUESTIONS: CAUTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

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1. Read Psalm 119:16, 17, 33, 34, 44.
- A. What promises does the writer make in these verses?

1. Verse 16: **“I will not neglect your Word.”**

2. Verse 17: **“I will obey your Word.”**

3. Verse 33: **“I will keep your decrees to the end.”**

4. Verse 34: **“I will keep your law with all my heart.”**

5. Verse 44: **“I will obey your law for ever and ever.”**
- B. Do you think the writer actually intended to keep these promises? Or do you think these were simply “poetic exaggerations”? Please explain your answer.

**There may well be a measure of “poetic exaggeration” in the writer’s promises, but he, as well as many of us, did sincerely desire to keep God’s**

**law always and with all his heart. The fact that he failed to keep these promises perfectly does not negate the fact that the promises were sincerely made.**

2. A. Please explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “It is possible to study the Bible diligently but still not understand its basic teachings or find salvation through its message.”

**AGREE.** Regrettably, there have always been many people throughout history who, like the spiritual “leaders” of Jesus’ day, read and studied the Bible but never understood it or found salvation through it. Some students might argue that the Holy Spirit will surely keep a faithful student from error. However, many followers of the sects and cults spend a lot of time in the Bible but miss its basic message. Moreover, many professional Bible scholars do not know Christ as Savior or follow Him as Lord even though they spend most of their time studying the Scriptures.

- B. What do you think Paul meant in Romans 10:2?

**The Jewish leaders of Paul’s day were very zealous in their commitment to the Old Testament and their faithful study of it. However, their diligence and zeal did not lead to an understanding of God or His ways. They did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah or understand that the Old Testament prophecies and promises all pointed to Him.**

- C. Can you give any modern-day examples of people who could be described by either John 5:39-40 or Romans 10:2?

**Among present day examples would be the followers of such groups as the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science and dozens of radical sects in some foreign lands. These people all claim to base their teachings on the Bible and many of them diligently study it, but their zeal has not led to a saving knowledge.**

3. A. There is a popular children’s song which contains the following line about the Bible: “Every promise in the Book is mine, every chapter, every verse, every line.” Do you agree with this statement? Please explain your answer.

**NO.** There are many promises in the Bible which were given to specific people at specific times. It is not only wrong but also dangerous for anyone to assume that he can claim every promise in the Bible as intended for him personally. On the other hand, we may be sure that every promise clearly **INTENDED** for all of God’s people will also apply to us if we believe.

- B. Give three Scripture passages which support your position.

### **SAMPLE**

**See, for example, the promises given in Psalm 34:20; Psalm 91:7; Joshua 1:3; 1 Kings 3:13, etc. We cannot claim those promises for ourselves today and expect that we will be kept from all possible harm or difficulty or injustice or that we will be granted earthly success in every endeavor.**

4. Do you believe the following statement is true? “Since the entire Bible is inspired by God, every part of it is equally important.” Carefully explain your answer.

**NO.** Though every part of the Bible is there for a specific purpose, not every part is equally important. Many verses and even chapters could be deleted from the Bible without changing the fundamental truths or the basic message of the Bible. In that sense, the Bible is like the human body. Each part was created for a specific purpose but every part is not equally important. We can easily live a meaningful life without some fingers, toes, and several other body parts, though we cannot live without our brain, lungs, or cardiovascular system.

5. A. How would you respond to the following statement? “After you once learn the meaning of a word in the Bible, you will always know what that word means wherever you find it in the Bible.”

**DISAGREE!** The Bible has many words which do not mean the same thing every time they are used. Moreover, the same English word may represent different Hebrew or Greek words. It’s important to read each word in context. It’s also helpful to know the Greek or Hebrew word which lies behind the English word.

- B. Give at least three examples which illustrate or prove your point.

### **SAMPLE**

**Note to mentors: There are many other words which your student may choose. Included are such theological words as justification, sanctification, and salvation as well as words such as soul, die, love, perish, etc.**

**(1)** The English word “hell” in some Bible versions (such as the KJV) represents different Hebrew words which mean quite different things.

**(2)** The word “save” can mean “rescue,” “deliver from earthly peril,” or have reference to spiritual salvation from sin.

**(3) The word “live” may refer simply to existence, but it may also refer to a spiritual dimension of life which goes well beyond the physical.**

6. Read Ecclesiastes 1:18.

A. What is the general context in which this verse is found?

**The writer is bemoaning the fact that knowledge and even wisdom have their significant limits. An increase in understanding how the world “runs” is not sufficient to provide ultimate satisfaction or a sense of meaning and purpose in life.**

B. How would you respond to a student who says to his teacher or his parents on the basis of this verse, “I am not going to study my lessons anymore because all it will do is give me more sorrow and more grief.”

**Students have to realize that storing up information by itself will not solve their problems or meet their deepest needs. They must also realize that the more we know about the world, the more we will know about its hurts, disappointments, failures and injustices. This knowledge definitely may lead to an increase in sorrow and grief. Learning and studying apart from God and the light of His Word may well produce a sense of frustration and hopelessness. This is what the writer of Ecclesiastes seems to be focusing on. Living “under the sun” without the SON must often seem futile and meaningless.**

**At the same time, God has given us minds by which to learn and understand more about Him and His world. Such knowledge CAN be helpful, fruitful, and beneficial for others as well as for ourselves. Without adequate knowledge, we cannot effectively serve as God’s witnesses, servants, care takers or representatives. Ignoring problems does not make them go away. A lack of knowledge makes it much more difficult to deal helpfully with the problems of the world. People involved in research, for example, have often made great strides in helping us overcome or cope with sickness, disease, hunger, pain, stress and suffering. Christians must be aware of what is going on in their world so they can be salt and light in this world. If they don’t show love and compassion and understanding, who will!?**

7. A. Read Revelation 7:1 and 20:8. Both of these passages refer to the “four corners of the earth.” Do you think these passages are trying to teach us that the earth is flat? Give the reason for your answer.

**NO. Revelation 7:1 and 20:8 are clearly not referring in these passages to questions about the shape of the earth. Their focus in context is on something totally different. The phrase “four corners of the earth” is simply an idiomatic way of referring to the entire inhabited world. The same idiom is still used today and very few people misunderstand it.**

B. Read Isaiah 40:22. Do you think the author is here trying to teach us that the earth is round? Give the reason for your answer.

**NO. In the first place, the earth is a sphere and not a circle. Moreover, the author in this passage isn’t talking about geography but about the incomparable God and His rule and control over the entire inhabited earth and all that takes place upon it. The reference in this verse to people who seem as “grasshoppers” in God’s sight helps us understand the general emphasis of the passage. (Note: The word translated “circle” is used only three times in the Old Testament. In Proverbs 8:27 it is translated as “horizon.” In Job 22:14 it is translated “vaulted” as part of the phrase “vaulted heavens.”)**

C. Read Psalm 33:6, Psalm 33:9, and Psalm 8:3. Do you think these verses intend to tell us HOW God created the heavens? Please give the reason for your answer.

**NO. All three passages refer to creation, but in Psalm 33:6 and 9, the impression is given that God simply “spoke” or “breathed” the world into existence. In Psalm 8:3, on the other hand, we seem to have a reference to God’s “dexterity” in creating the heavens through the use of his fingers. Note that “speaking” and “breathing” and “working with fingers” are anthropomorphisms—descriptions of God or His activities in human terms. (Anthropomorphisms will be covered in detail in Lesson 4).**

8. How would you respond to the following statement? “The best way to learn from the Bible is to first pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then open the Bible and start reading wherever the Holy Spirit prompts you to open it.”

**It is very rare that anyone makes meaningful progress in any field without systematic, diligent, structured study. It is no different with the study of the Bible. Although the Holy Spirit may graciously reveal some wonderful truths to us by the “point and read” method, God expects us to use our minds as we study. Bible study is not a place to “let your fingers do the walking.” We should pray that the Spirit will lead us to understand His word as we study it faithfully, diligently and systematically. “Hopscotch” is an appropriate game for children; it is not appropriate for the study of the Bible.**



9. Read Luke 14:12.

A. Describe the context in which this verse is found.

**In the Luke 14 context, Jesus is talking about the dangers of exalting ourselves or trying to find positions of honor and prestige. In the more immediate context he is condemning those whose primary purpose in showing hospitality is to receive return favors.**

B. Do you think Jesus means that we should never invite our friends and relatives over for a meal?

**NO, Jesus is not in any way suggesting that we should not invite family and friends over for a meal.**

1. If not, what do you think Jesus DOES mean?

**When one reads the passage in context, it is clear that Jesus is here teaching that we should not invite others for a meal in order that or with the expectation that we will get invited back! We should help and serve others out of love and kindness—not so that we can get something in return.**

2. Please give two or three Scripture passages which help to illustrate or prove your point.

#### **SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**

**(1) In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul emphasizes the necessity and importance of taking care of the needs of one's family.**

**(2) In 1 John 3:17, the writer makes it very clear that we should serve others in need. He makes no exception regarding relatives or friends.**

**(3) In Mark 7:9-13, Jesus condemns those who use some kind of religious excuse to keep them from helping their parents.**

10. Each one of the following “interpretations” of a Scripture passage disregards one or more of the CAUTIONS presented in this lesson. First, read each biblical passage in context. Then, indicate which caution or cautions are disregarded by the “interpretation.” Follow the example.

EXAMPLE: John 12:19 teaches that “everyone believed in Jesus at that time.”  
Disregards caution 5, 7 and 8.

A. **1 Corinthians 6:12 teaches that “Christians may do whatever they please.”**  
Disregards caution 1, 4 and 7.

B. **John 9:3 teaches that “neither the blind man nor his parents ever sinned.”**  
Disregards caution 1 and 4.

C. **2 Thessalonians 1:8 should not be taken too seriously because “God is love.”**  
Disregards caution 7 and 9.

D. **Psalm 53:1 teaches that “there is no God.”**  
Disregards caution 1 and 8.

E. **Exodus 17:6 teaches that “God will always miraculously provide water (and everything else) for us whenever we need it.”**  
Disregards caution 1 and 3.

11. A. How would you respond to a person who says on the basis of Ecclesiastes 3:19: “There is no difference between people and animals”?

**Ecclesiastes 3:19 is looking at life from the point of view of the ordinary observer. To such a person it APPEARS that exactly the same thing happens to both men and animals when they die. If a person does not have any other source of information beyond simple observation, it would SEEM that the death of men and animals is the same. However, from OTHER passages of Scripture, we know that men and animals are significantly different—both in life and in death.**

B. List three Scripture passages which support your position.

#### **SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**

**(1) Genesis 1:26-27. God creates man in His own likeness and image.**

**(2) Genesis 9:5-6 prohibits the killing of humans because they bear God's image. No such restriction is made concerning animals.**

**(3) Genesis 1:26 and 2:18-20. Man was given dominion over all the animals, ruling over them as God's vicegerent. No animal could serve as a suitable “helper” for man. Men and animals are significantly different from each other.**

12. Thoughtfully evaluate each of the following statements.

- A. “It’s important to read the Bible through at least once each year, even if you have to rush through it.”

**Rushing through the Bible is rarely helpful or enlightening. One who rushes through the Bible appears to be more eager to get through it than to gain something from it. Reading through the Bible once a year can be very worthwhile, but only if the reader makes sure that He is reading prayerfully, carefully, and with a sincere desire to put into practice what he learns.**

- B. “It’s not very important how MUCH you read the Bible. It’s just as helpful to read the Bible thirty minutes a week as thirty minutes a day.”

**This statement is not true. It is true, of course, that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to reading the Bible, but they certainly are not mutually exclusive. It’s somewhat like eating. It’s better to eat good food than “junk” food. However, one doesn’t quit eating after one or two bites of good food! A student who truly loves the Word of God will want to study it as much as he can. Having a poor spiritual appetite is not a good sign!**

- C. “It may be good for some people to read the Bible each day, but for most people that’s not at all necessary or helpful.”

**People need “spiritual food” each day just as much as they need food for their bodies each day. One can certainly live for many days without reading the Bible—just as a person can live for many days without eating food—but daily Bible study is as important for normal spiritual life as the eating of food is for normal physical life.**

13. A. Presented below are three versions of Ecclesiastes 10:10. Circle the number of the statement which is easiest for you to understand.

**Note to mentors: It will be a rare student who honestly chooses number 1. Either number 2 or 3 will be the normal choice**

1. “If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.” (KJV)

2. “If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.” (NIV)

3. “A dull ax requires great strength; be wise and sharpen the blade.” (Living Bible)

- B. Give three reasons why it is often helpful to read a passage in more than one version.

### **SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**

**(1) Some versions are not totally clear because of the language used.**

**(2) We can get so accustomed to one version that we “glide over” certain thoughts or ideas in our “customary” versions.**

**(3) A second version will often give us new insights into a passage.**

**(4) A second version can either confirm or challenge our understanding of a passage.**

14. Evaluate each of the following statements, indicating why you agree or disagree with each one.

- A. It is wise to read the Bible systematically rather than jumping around from one passage or book to another.

**The consistent playing of biblical “hopscotch” will keep us from having a systematic understanding of the Bible. It will also lead us to read passages out of context and will deprive us of the benefits derived from a careful, thoughtful study of a biblical book as God gave it to us.**

- B. It is not necessary or important to memorize Bible passages since we can look them up whenever we want to.

**Memorizing the Bible is one of the best ways to begin living by what the Bible teaches. It’s true that many (though surely not all) of us can look up passages when we want to, but we are far more likely to develop a biblical lifestyle when we have the Word laid up in our hearts and minds and not simply laid up on a shelf in our closet.**

- C. We should be careful not to share with others what we learn lest they think we are simply showing off our knowledge of the Bible.

**It’s true that some people like to show off how much they know about the Bible. In general, however, we err far more frequently by NOT sharing with**

**others what we know. We cannot be a faithful witness to the truths of God if we never talk about them to anyone. True, our deeds sometimes speak “louder” than our words, but words are also necessary to direct people to Christ and to teach them the way to God.**

15. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1 and 7:32-35 in context and explain what you think Paul is teaching in this passage.

**Paul is teaching here that there are times and situations when it is better not to marry in the interest of serving the Lord more effectively. He clearly recognizes in verses 2-5 that God ordained marriage for our benefit. However, he emphasizes that an unmarried person is free from the obligations and responsibilities that the married person has and that he may therefore be able to live a life of greater devotion and service to the Lord if he continues in his unmarried state. Paul seems to emphasize this point particularly in light of the fact that “the time is short” (verse 29). This may refer to the fact that opportunities for serving Christ are limited because of the brevity of life or the expected return of Christ, or he may be referring to the special circumstances under which many of the early Christians were living. With persecution a reality, he may have wanted to spare the believers there from adding to their burdens and to keep them from the diminished effectiveness which could result from their assuming the responsibilities of marriage and family life.**

16. Evaluate each of the following statements in the light of Caution #4 (“Do not build doctrinal or moral teachings on the basis of exceptional or unusual passages”).

- A. “The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-24) teaches us that our Father in heaven will graciously forgive anyone who repents of his sin whether or not he believes in Jesus.”

**Jesus taught this parable to demonstrate the love of God (and of Himself) for sinners. He did not intend here to teach anything about His own sacrifice for sins or anything related to the payment of sin. He was simply emphasizing God’s boundless love for His children and His eagerness to see them “come back” to Him in sincere and humble repentance. Remember that parables generally are intended to teach only ONE primary truth. Parables are NOT intended to serve as “theological textbooks” or guides through the ordo salutis.**

- B. “1 Peter 3:21 teaches that everyone who is baptized will be saved.”

**Baptism is clearly important and significant. Jesus made clear that all who believe in Him should confirm their faith in the waters of baptism which**

**symbolize being buried and rising with Christ. Further, baptism brings spiritual blessings to those who are baptized. However, baptism itself does not save. Only faith in Christ saves.**

**The wording of 1 Peter 3:21 is clearly unique. There are no other passages in the New Testament like it. Two other things might be noted here. First, Paul pointed out in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 that he was sent to PREACH, not to baptize. Faith comes by HEARING the Word, he emphasized (Romans 10:17), so he focused on preaching and not on baptism. If salvation came by baptism itself, Paul would surely have been sent to baptize!**

**Secondly, 1 Peter 3:20 indicates that Noah and his family were saved “through water.” Actually, they were saved “from” the water of the flood. At the same time, however, the water which punished the unbelievers was the means God used of separating him from the sinful world around him. Even so, the waters of baptism also symbolically separate us from the unbelieving world and consecrate us to Christ.**

- C. “Luke 18:22 teaches that one sure way to gain eternal life is to sell everything we have and give it to the poor.”

**The rich young man in Luke 18 apparently had an undue love for money. Money was more important to him than Christ was. His wealth stood between himself and his salvation. In that context, it was necessary for him to sell everything and give his wealth to the poor in order that he might remove the barrier that stood between himself and Christ. Only by doing that would he be able to become a follower of Christ.**

**Anyone today who has a comparable love of money may indeed have to sell everything in order to follow Christ. However, selling everything gains us nothing by itself. The selling itself is not meritorious; it simply may make it possible for us to do what needs to be done in order to have salvation: namely, trust in Jesus and follow Him (see Luke 18:22).**

17. Do you think the following statement is true or not? “You will never learn to understand the basic message of the Bible unless you read all of it through from cover to cover.” Please explain your answer.

**NO. This statement is not true for several reasons:**

**SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**



- (1) It's quite possible to understand the basic message of the Bible without reading any of it at all! One can learn this message rather quickly by simply listening to others who are well informed about the Bible.
- (2) One can understand the basic message of the Bible by reading only a few selected passages. One will obviously not have a complete or full understanding in this way, but he will still have a basic understanding.
- (3) There are many things in the Bible which are not easy to understand. A reader can easily get involved in secondary matters if he tries to learn everything before he learns the main thing!

18. A. What do you think Paul is teaching us in 2 Timothy 4:3-4?

**Paul is teaching that the time is coming when people will no longer believe the sound teaching of God's Word but will listen only to teachers who tell them what they want to hear. As a result, they will believe all kinds of foolish and meaningless things which have no basis in fact while rejecting the traditional truths of the Scriptures.**

B. Give three contemporary examples of the truth of Paul's teaching in these verses.

#### **SAMPLE**

**Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.**

- (1) The number of cults and sects which have some connection to the Bible or to Christianity continues to rise dramatically.
- (2) Many people daily read their horoscope, go to fortunetellers, play with tarot cards and Ouija boards, and put a lot of confidence in astrology.
- (3) Millions of Americans have turned to eastern religions of one kind or another, and millions more are involved in the New Age movement or in other activities which have their roots in eastern mysticism.

19. Each of the following verses might be considered a "hard saying"—either difficult to understand or difficult to accept. For each statement (1) indicate WHY some people might consider it a "hard saying" and (2) explain the statement as best you can in the light of the rest of the Bible.

**Note to mentors: The answers students give here may legitimately differ somewhat from the answers given below. Be flexible as you respond to their answers.**

A. Psalm 11:5

1. **Many people teach that God is all love and therefore reject or deny those teachings in the Bible which emphasize God's hatred of sin and His punishment of it. Further, this is one of the very rare passages in Scripture which speak of God hating not just sin but those who callously pursue it.**
2. **The Bible has many passages which teach that God hates sin and will punish it—both in this life and in the life to come. Also, there are a few other passages, such as Psalm 5:5 which teach that God loathes or hates or is angry with the sinner. This "hatred" does not negate God's redemptive love for the world, but it does show God's intense opposition to all that is (and all who are) unholy in His sight.**

B. Romans 9:18

1. **There are many, especially Arminians, who are uncomfortable with the idea of God's sovereignty in salvation. According to those who hold this position, man, not God, takes the decisive first step in redemption. God allegedly extends His salvation to all, and man on his own decides to accept or reject His divine proffer of grace.**
2. **This passage must be taken exactly for what it says. Even though it may go beyond our understanding or contrary to our ideas of "fairness," God is indeed sovereign in salvation as well as everywhere else. At the same time, man continues to be responsible for his own actions and for his personal response to the message of salvation.**

C. Matthew 6:15

1. **This passage teaches that God will forgive us only when we ourselves forgive others. This may seem far too "harsh" for many—especially for those who have difficulty forgiving those who have grievously offended them.**
2. **This passage seems to teach that God's forgiveness not only removes guilt but also changes the person who is forgiven. Those who are truly forgiven will serve as channels of God's forgiving love, so that God's forgiving grace flows through them to others who have sinned against them. Someone who is unwilling to forgive may be looked upon as one who has not yet been changed or renewed by God's forgiving love.**

**It probably should also be noted, however, that it's not possible truly to forgive someone who is unwilling to repent and seek forgiveness. In such situations, it is the OFFENDER and not the OFFENDED who blocks the forgiving process.**

**It should also be emphasized that our willingness to forgive others is the RESULT and not the CAUSE of God's forgiving us.**

20. Evaluate the following statement: "It is better to read and practice two verses which you understand than to read two whole chapters which you do not understand or put into practice."

**This is TRUE. The goal of reading the Bible is that we may understand it and LIVE by it. Reading without understanding or without practicing what we read is worth little.**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Sometimes a "simple, joyful, obedient believer" gets much more benefit from studying the Bible than a so-called "expert" does.

A. Why do you think this is so?

**The simple believer may read the Bible more prayerfully, more humbly, more expectantly and with a greater sense of reliance on the Holy Spirit than the expert does. The simple believer may also look for things that will help him love God more and serve Him better while the expert may focus more on details, problems, nuances and other scholarly pursuits which may not have any immediate or direct relevance for his personal life.**

B. What dangers might there be in becoming an "expert" in the Bible?

**The expert may neglect to pray for the Spirit's leading since he already has a good knowledge of the Scriptures. Further, as noted above, he may focus more on details, problems, nuances and other scholarly pursuits without seeking to apply the message of the Scriptures to his own life. He may also face the temptation of studying the Scriptures in order to maintain a well-deserved reputation as a scholar or study primarily for the purpose of writing and selling books on a given subject. It's wonderful to be an "expert" in understanding the Bible, but there definitely are dangers connected with so-called expertise.**

C. What benefits might there be in becoming an "expert" in the Bible?

**An expert may understand far more than the average reader. He will likely avoid many errors of interpretation made by those who are less informed. He will also have to spend less time on searching for relevant information or parallel passages than the ordinary reader does. In most instances he will also have an understanding of the original languages in which the Bible was written, so he will have the advantage of knowing the precise meaning of the words in the original text. He will be able to appreciate many nuances of meaning and significance which many readers will miss.**

**We should also acknowledge with gratitude that there are many "experts" or professional Bible scholars who read the Bible with anticipation, expectation, humility and a deep sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit.**

**At this point, however, our primary emphasis is on the fact that one does not have to be an expert in order to profit from reading or studying the Bible. One can find much joy and delight and personal benefit from reading the Bible as a very simple believer.**

2. Please describe your own "pattern" of Bible reading and study. Include answers to the following questions (but don't necessarily limit yourself to answering these questions). How do you prepare yourself "spiritually" for your Bible study? When do you usually read the Bible—morning, evening or another time? How much do you try to read each day? Do you read and study alone or with others? Do you try to finish one whole book before going on to another one? Do you read again one day what you read the day before? Do you outline the material, make notes on it, memorize some verses, underline special verses?

**Each student will likely have a different "pattern" of study. If it seems to you as a mentor that a student does not have a systematic and fruitful pattern of daily study, encourage him to develop one. If his pattern of study appears to be less than ideal, help him develop one which may be more fruitful for him. Do remember that your student's situation (regarding availability of resources, general atmosphere, etc.) will likely be very different from your own. At the same time, remember that some people who are in prison have a lot more time to read and study than you do!**

3. The rewards of faithful Bible study are many (Proverbs 3:13-15; 2 Timothy 3:15-17). Please list some of the things you learned or the blessings you received from your own Bible study during the past few weeks.

**Read with interest! Where possible, provide approval and encouragement. If a student has little to offer, provide the stimulation and incentive for him to read with greater spiritual benefit in the future.**

**Also recognize that a student’s answer here may reflect some deep needs which are not being addressed in his life. For example, he may be wrestling with doubt, guilt, indecision, loneliness, temptation or some other problem of great concern to him. If you sense that the latter situation may be true, you may try to draw him out somehow and direct him to specific passages, books, or other resources which might help to meet his need(s).**

4. A. What do you think James meant to teach us in James 1:22-24?  
  
**James seems to be teaching that study and learning which does not result in some continuing spiritual benefit in our lives is of little value.**
- B. Describe some things which you learned from your Bible study recently and also put into practice! Give specific examples.  
  
**Responses here will obviously vary greatly from one student to another. If a student seems to feel that he has little opportunity to put into practice what he learns, you may be able to provide some ideas or suggestions for him. Continue to encourage him not simply to LEARN FROM the Bible but also to LIVE BY it.**
5. Please outline a 30-DAY READING GUIDE to the Bible for someone who has never read the Bible before. What verses or stories would you recommend they read? Indicate which passages, chapters or books of the Bible that should be read on each of the thirty days and why you chose each section.

*Example: Day 12 – Exodus 3: The story of Moses and the burning bush points to the powerful ways God sometimes interrupts our lives and gives us new purpose.*

**This assignment should provide a very interesting challenge for almost every student. Some students may take the assignment rather lightly and simply list some favorite passages along with some others that they “landed on” in a “flip and search” procedure. Others will put some real time and effort into their 30-Day Reading Guide. In almost every situation, you should be able to learn some interesting things about your student’s spiritual progress as well as his sensitivity, creativity and understanding.**

**If you encounter some exceptionally fine 30-Day Reading Guides, please share them with us. We may in turn have an opportunity to share these guides with others.**

**Be sure to encourage every student who has obviously spent serious time on completing this assignment—even if the result leaves something to be desired. Where appropriate, make some suggestions of your own, so that each student will profit in one way or another from completing the assignment.**

Day 1 –	Day 11 –	Day 21 –
Day 2 –	Day 12 –	Day 22 –
Day 3 –	Day 13 –	Day 23 –
Day 4 –	Day 14 –	Day 24 –
Day 5 –	Day 15 –	Day 25 –
Day 6 –	Day 16 –	Day 26 –
Day 7 –	Day 17 –	Day 27 –
Day 8 –	Day 18 –	Day 28 –
Day 9 –	Day 19 –	Day 29 –
Day 10 –	Day 20 –	Day 30 –



## LESSON 4: Communicating Creatively

Much of the Bible is written in simple and straightforward language. However, the writers of the Bible also use a variety of creative ways to communicate their message to us. In this lesson you will study some of those “creative” ways and learn how best to interpret them.

### FIGURES OF SPEECH

Figures of speech are expressions in which common, ordinary words are used in an uncommon or unusual way. The Bible frequently uses figures of speech of one kind or another. As soon as we recognize a biblical expression as a figure of speech and not something to be taken literally, we will have made the first step toward interpreting it properly.

#### 1. ANTHROPOMORPHISMS (An • throw • po • MOR • fizms): Descriptions of God or His activities in human terms.

- The Bible often speaks about God as if He had human emotions, human responses, human limitations, and a human body. (See, for example, Exodus 15:8; Psalm 44:3; Psalm 34:15; Psalm 18:14; Isaiah 19:1; 37:29.) At times the Bible even refers to God as if He had non-human features such as feathers or wings (Psalm 91:4).
- How should we interpret these anthropomorphisms? We must begin with the highest view of God presented in the Bible and interpret everything else in the light of those basic teachings. According to the Bible, God is an eternal Spirit of infinite perfections. He is before all things, above all things, creator of all things, separate from all things, and ruler over all things. He knows all things, is present everywhere, and can do absolutely anything He chooses to do. (See, for example, Psalm 90:2; Psalm 139:1-12; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:16.) Those teachings form our starting point. No interpretation of Scripture can be correct if it takes anything away from the uniqueness, the majesty, the glory or the holiness of God.
- Why, then, do the Bible writers sometimes use human terms for God? By using these terms the writers help us understand that this God who is so absolutely different from us is also in some ways “like” us. If we knew only about God’s infinite perfections, it would be difficult for us to understand that He truly wants us to know Him, to love Him, to enjoy Him, and to have fellowship with Him. By using anthropomorphisms the writers help us to understand that God is truly personal, that He is genuinely concerned about all that happens on the earth, and that He responds to everything we do, feel and experience.

#### 2. SIMILES (SIM • uh • leez) and METAPHORS (MET • ah • forz): Figures of speech in which two very different things are said to be like each other or in which the one is actually called the other.

- Similes and metaphors are basically the same except for one thing—in a simile, something is said to be “like” something else, whereas in a metaphor, one thing is actually called something else. For example, in Psalm 18:2, 31, and 46, God is called a “Rock.” In 1 Peter 2:4, Jesus is called a “Stone.” In James 4:14, people are said to be “a mist.” Those are all metaphors. In Psalm 102:6, the writer says he is “like a desert owl.” In Psalm 49:12 man is said to be “like the beasts.” Those are similes.
- There are also similes of action. For example, in Psalm 59:6, we read about people who “snarl like dogs.” In Psalm 92:12, we read that the righteous “flourish like a palm tree” and “grow like a cedar.” In 1 Peter 2:2, we read that believers should crave pure spiritual milk like newborn babies.
- Most metaphors and similes make good sense without going to great lengths to explain them. The main thing in interpreting them is to try to determine in what way two items are like each other. If God is called a rock or is said to be like a rock, it is necessary to figure out what the characteristics of a rock are that can in some way be applied to God.

#### 3. HYPERBOLE (hi • PER • buh • lee): An inflated or exaggerated statement used as a figure of speech.

- Whenever Bible writers use hyperbole, it is obvious that they are not trying to mislead us or make us believe something which is not true. Hyperbole is easily recognized and is rarely or never misleading.
- For example, in Genesis 22:17 God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. This statement is obviously not to be interpreted literally. There are trillions of stars in the sky and grains of sand on the seashore. What God is telling Abraham is that his descendants would some day be so many that they could not be counted.

#### 4. IDIOMS (ID • ee • ums): Expressions which cannot be understood from the literal meaning of the words used.

- In idioms, simple and familiar words are put together in a very unusual way. There are hundreds of such expressions in almost every language. For example, in English we say that someone is “tickled to death,” “tied up at the office,” “getting cold feet,” or “bent out of shape.” People who are not familiar with these expressions may find them hard to understand, but they are readily understood by most of us. The context usually determines whether an expression is to be interpreted literally or not.
- The following are some idioms used in the Bible: “You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:24). “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?” (Jeremiah 12:5). “If men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:31).
- Idioms and other figures of speech can be used very effectively to illustrate or emphasize a certain point. However, they should not be used as the primary basis for a doctrinal teaching or as a moral guideline.

## 5. PERSONIFICATION: Ascribing personal, human characteristics or actions to things which are not actually persons.

- a. The Bible contains many delightful examples of personification. For example, rivers and trees clap their hands (Psalm 98:8; Isaiah 55:12); wisdom builds a house, prepares food, sets her table, and sends out her maids (Proverbs 9:1-3; also see Proverbs 8:1-36); the skies “pour forth speech” (Psalm 19:2); and the sun “knows when to go down” (Psalm 104:19). Personification is generally used most widely in the poetic sections of the Bible.
- b. Personification is generally easy to recognize and easy to interpret.

## PARABLES AND ALLEGORIES

Parables and allegories are stories in which ordinary language and situations are used to teach a spiritual or moral truth.

1. The basic difference between a parable and an allegory is this: in an allegory, each character, object or activity usually stands for something specific. Parables usually teach just one main truth; the details in a parable simply help fill out the story or make it more interesting. See, for example, the allegory in Judges 9:7-15 and the parables in Luke 15:1-10.
2. Jesus frequently taught the people in parables (Mark 4:33-34). His parables usually revealed something about God and His kingdom—the nature of His Kingdom, the importance of His Kingdom, the extent of His Kingdom, and life in His Kingdom (see, for example, Matthew 13:1-54).
3. When interpreting a parable, it is important to look for the main teaching of the parable without giving a specific meaning to every detail in the story. Though Jesus did sometimes give a specific meaning to some details in His parables (as in Matthew 13:18-23), it is usually better not to do so unless there are obvious and compelling reasons why you should.
4. When a parable is not explained in the Bible itself, it is very important to make sure that your interpretation is fully consistent with the direct and clear teachings of the rest of the Bible.
5. On occasion, a true historical event may also serve as an allegory (Galatians 4:21-31), but this is rare. In general, you should guard against the temptation to allegorize true stories and make them teach something which they really do not intend to teach.

## TYPES AND SYMBOLS

Types and symbols are persons, events or things which represent or foreshadow a spiritual reality.

1. Differences between types and symbols.
  - a. A type actually existed in history while a symbol may or may not be historical.

- b. Old Testament types always have reference to New Testament realities, while symbols may have reference to spiritual realities of any time.
  - c. Types refer to a single, specific reality while symbols may refer to general spiritual truths.

### 2. Examples of types in the Old Testament:

- a. A person. Melchizedek (a king and a priest) was a type of Christ (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:1-3).
- b. An event. The lifting up of the bronze serpent in the wilderness was a type of Christ’s being lifted up on the cross (Numbers 21:8-9; John 3:14-15).
- c. A thing. The Passover lamb was a type of Christ (Exodus 12:3-6; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

### 3. Examples of symbols in the Bible.

- a. An event. The working of yeast in dough is like the expanding influence of sin in human life (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).
- b. A thing. The pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud were symbols of the presence of God among His people (Exodus 13:21-22)

### 4. General notes on types and symbols.

- a. A type has no significance by itself. It gets its significance from the spiritual reality which it represents. By itself, it is only a shadow (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).
- b. It is easy to “allegorize” or spiritualize Old Testament stories or events and see them as types of Christ when they really are not. Be cautious about claiming that some thing or someone in the Old Testament is a type or symbol of Christ unless there is good biblical support for it.

## UNUSUAL EXPRESSIONS

Unusual expressions are expressions which seem easy to understand but which present problems when interpreted literally.

1. The Bible has a number of expressions that cause us to stop and wonder. For example, Jesus said that we must hate our father and our mother and even our own lives if we want to be His disciples (Luke 14:26).
2. Whenever you encounter an unusual teaching or expression like this, try to understand what the expression meant to the first hearers or readers. They obviously knew that Jesus did not mean that we must hate those closest to us. That would be in direct contradiction to His repeated command that we love one another. So what did Jesus mean? He meant that absolutely nothing may come

between us and our love for Him—not even those people that are closest and dearest to us. The people who first heard Jesus speak must surely have understood that.

3. When figurative language is used, seeming opposites may both be true. For example, Psalm 18:11 says that God makes darkness His secret place, while 1 Timothy 6:16 teaches us that God dwells in unapproachable light. When these statements are understood in context, both are seen to be true.

## WORDS TO WATCH

1. One of the Hebrew words for God in the Old Testament is printed in some English Bibles as **LORD** (in small capital letters). This same Hebrew word is translated in some other Bibles as Jehovah or Yahweh. It is helpful to know that the word “**LORD**” and the word “Lord” are two different names or titles for God. See, for example, Genesis 18:26-27 and Numbers 14:17-18.
2. The words “**son of**” or “**father of**” or “**begat**” do not always refer to a literal son or father. They may also refer to a more distant ancestor or descendant. See, for example, Matthew 1:1. The writers who use these words or expressions are simply using a form of expression which was familiar to the first readers.
3. The same English word in the Bible may represent different Hebrew or Greek words. It isn’t necessary for everyone to study Greek or Hebrew in order to understand the Bible, but it is important to remember that a familiar word may have different meanings depending on the context.
4. Words such as “**always**,” “**never**,” “**forever**,” “**everyone**,” “**all**,” “**everywhere**,” etc. must be interpreted with great care. Sometimes they are to be interpreted literally, but at other times their meaning is limited or defined by the context in which they are found. See, for example, Mark 1:5: “The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.” See also Colossians 1:23: “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.”

## UNUSUALLY STRONG STATEMENTS

Sometimes the Bible uses very strong statements which, though true, do not present all sides of a situation. These statements can easily be misunderstood if they are not studied in context

1. For example, in Genesis 45:8 Joseph says to his brothers, “It was not you who sent me here, but God.” Actually, Joseph’s brothers did send him to Egypt (Genesis 37:26-28), but God was the One who was in control.
2. In Acts 23:1, Paul declared that he had fulfilled his duty to God “in all good conscience to this day.” In 1 Timothy 1:13-16, he describes himself as “a blasphemer, a persecutor, a violent man” and “the worst of sinners.” See also Exodus 16:8; Deuteronomy 5:2-3; 1 John 3:18. If a particular statement seems too

strong or “absolute,” study it in the light of other relevant Scriptures to understand its proper meaning. Remember that the Bible never contradicts itself.

## BIBLICAL NUMBERS

1. Certain numbers, such as three, four, seven, ten, and twelve (and their multiples such as 1,000 or 144,000) often seem to have special significance in the Bible. “Three,” for example, is considered to have special reference to God (the Holy Trinity). “Four” is often associated with the earth (four winds, four corners, four directions, four seasons). “Seven” is the number of completion or wholeness or perfection. “Ten” may refer to totality or a full number. “Twelve” is often associated with the people of God (twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve foundations for the New Jerusalem, twelve gates of pearl, twenty-four elders).
2. It is important to recognize the possible significance of these numbers. However, be very careful not to give the numbers more significance than they should have. Never build a doctrine or moral guideline solely on the basis of numbers or patterns of numbers. And be especially cautious about so-called “secret” or “hidden” number patterns which can only be discovered by unusual methods of study and interpretation. There is no suggestion in the Bible itself that God has included such “patterns” in the Scriptures.
3. There are certain prophetic passages in the Bible (such as Daniel chapter nine and some passages in the book of Revelation) where the numbers definitely seem to have special significance. However, the exact meaning of these numbers is often debatable and may not become totally clear until after the prophecies are fulfilled.

## QUESTIONS: COMMUNICATING CREATIVELY

1. A. What is an anthropomorphism?

**An anthropomorphism is a description of God or His activities in human terms.**

- B. There are many more anthropomorphisms in the Old Testament than there are in the New Testament. Why do you think this is so?

**Various reasons might be suggested. Among them are the following:**

- **The Old Testament contains much more poetic literature and prophetic writing than the New Testament does. Figures of speech are common in both poetic and prophetic writing.**



- **The revelation given in the Old Testament was at an earlier stage than that in the New Testament God had not yet fully revealed Himself as a pure Spirit of infinite perfections who existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**
- **The thought world of the people in the Old Testament may have been more attuned to the figures of speech used in Old Testament revelation.**
- **God became incarnate in Jesus Christ and thus actually dwelt among men. The Old Testament figures of speech were less appropriate at this point.**

2. Thoughtfully evaluate the following statement: “We should interpret everything the Bible says about God in light of the fact that He is basically just like us—only much greater than we are.”

**This is NOT TRUE. God is not basically like us. Though we are made in His image and thus “like” Him in some ways, He is infinitely greater than we are in every way. He is uncreated, eternal, spiritual, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, perfect, holy, and incapable of sin of any kind. Isaiah 40, Psalm 8 and various other passages indicate that God is exalted far above His creation in every way.**

**We must therefore interpret anthropomorphisms and everything else the Bible says about God in the light of His uniqueness rather than in the light of those ways in which we are in some way “like” Him.**

**Note to mentors: Some students may contend that God is indeed like us since we are made in His image and likeness. However, it’s important that they also understand the absolute uniqueness of God and make that their starting point.**

3. List the anthropomorphisms found in each of the following passages and then indicate what you think each one means. Follow the example.

EXAMPLE: Psalm 91:4.  
 Anthropomorphism: God covers us with his feathers.  
 Meaning: God provides us with His protection.

A. Psalm 18:8  
 Anthropomorphism: **“Smoke rose from His nostrils,” “fire came from His mouth,” “burning coals blazed out of it”**  
 Meaning: **God directed His righteous and holy anger against His enemies and destroyed them.**

- B. Psalm 18:14  
 Anthropomorphism: **“He shot his arrows”**  
 Meaning: **God directed His divine power against the enemy, doing whatever was necessary to defeat and destroy them.**
- C. Isaiah 59:1  
 Anthropomorphism: **“The arm of the Lord is not too short,” “His ear [is not] too dull to hear”**  
 Meaning: **God’s power is not limited. God hears His people when they cry out to Him.**
- D. Genesis 11:5  
 Anthropomorphism: **“The Lord came down to see the city”**  
 Meaning: **God focused His special attention on what was happening at the Tower of Babel. It is possible, though not likely, that God also assumed a human form to survey the scene (cf. Genesis 18).**

4. A. What is a simile?

**In a simile one thing is said to be LIKE something else.**

B. What is a metaphor?

**In a metaphor one thing is actually CALLED something else.**

5. Each of the following passages contains a metaphor. Read each passage, identify the metaphor, and then indicate what you think it means. Follow the example.

EXAMPLE: Psalm 91:4.  
 Metaphor: God is a shield.  
 Meaning: God protects us from harm and danger.

**Note to mentors: A student’s interpretation of a metaphor may be very acceptable even if it differs somewhat from the interpretation suggested below.**

A. Psalm 18:46  
 Metaphor: **“God is my ROCK”**  
 Meaning: **God is my immovable source of strength, safety and security.**

- B. John 10:7  
Metaphor: **“I am the GATE for the sheep”**  
Meaning: **No one can get to the Father (or receive salvation) unless he goes through Jesus (or has faith in Jesus).**
- C. John 6:35  
Metaphor: **“I am the BREAD of life”**  
Meaning: **Jesus is the spiritual food which everyone needs for salvation. Those who believe and trust in Him will never be spiritually hungry.**
- D. Proverbs 18:10  
Metaphor: **“The name of the LORD is a strong TOWER”**  
Meaning: **The “name” of the Lord stands for all that He is. Everyone who trusts in Him will find safety and security in Him.**
6. Identify the similes in each of the following passages and explain what you think they mean.
- A. Psalm 103:13  
Simile: **“AS a father has compassion on his children”**  
Meaning: **God has compassion on his “spiritual” children just as an earthly father has compassion on His natural children.**
- B. 1 Thessalonians 2:7  
Simile: **“we were gentle among you LIKE a mother”**  
Meaning: **Paul treated the Thessalonians with as much love and care and gentleness as a mother shows to her children.**
- C. 1 Peter 5:8  
Simile: **“the devil prowls around LIKE a roaring lion”**  
Meaning: **Satan seeks to destroy anyone he can, prowling around like a hungry lion looking for his prey.**
- D. Hosea 5:14  
Simile: **“I will be LIKE a lion to Ephraim, LIKE a great lion to Judah”**  
Meaning: **God will punish and destroy His disobedient people as a lion destroys its prey.**
7. What is the basic difference between a parable and an allegory?

**Both parables and allegories use stories or life situations to teach spiritual or moral truths. In a parable, however, there is usually one primary lesson or truth being taught and the details of the story are used to help fill out the story or**

**make it more interesting. In an allegory, everything in the story usually has some specific and intended meaning.**

8. Read the following parables and indicate what you think the main message is of each one.

**Note to mentors: Students may have a slightly different slant on the meaning of the parables referred to here. That’s fine. However, their understanding should at least be consistent with the interpretation given below.**

- A. Matthew 13:45-46—**Gaining entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven is more important than anything else in the world. A person should willingly give up anything and everything that could stand in the way of his entrance into that kingdom.**
- B. Mark 4:30-32—**The Kingdom of God was seemingly very insignificant in the days of Jesus (especially when compared with the great Roman empire or the kingdoms of the past). However, some day the power and influence of the Kingdom of God would spread throughout the entire world and would be far greater than any other kingdom, providing refuge and security for all of its citizens.**
- C. Luke 12:16-21—**Greed and covetousness are exceedingly dangerous, causing a person to focus on temporal and material things while neglecting eternal, spiritual values. It is far more important to be rich spiritually than to be rich materially.**
- D. Luke 18:9-14—**Self-righteousness will effectively keep a person out of the Kingdom of God. Genuine humility, sorrow for sin, and true repentance will lead to acceptance by God, no matter how serious or grievous one’s sins may have been.**
- E. Luke 10:27-37—**God expects us to show love and compassion to anyone we encounter who is in need, even if we would normally consider this person to be an “enemy” or “unworthy” because of race, background, or other factors.**
9. A. What is the difference between a type and a symbol in the Bible?

**There are three differences between types and symbols in the Bible.**

**(1) A type actually existed in history while a symbol may or may not be historical.**

- (2) Old Testament types always have reference to New Testament realities, while symbols may have reference to spiritual realities of any time.  
 (3) Types refer to a single, specific reality while symbols may refer to general spiritual truths.

B. Give three examples of a symbol in the Bible and indicate where each is found.

### SAMPLE

Students will obviously choose a variety of types and symbols. Some will probably identify many things or persons in the Old Testament as symbols or types of New Testament realities even when the relationship is either remote or clearly questionable. Be “generous” in responding to their selections, though do not hesitate to point out that we should be careful not to call something a type or symbol unless there is clearly a good biblical reason to do so. If your student is not able to come up with examples of his own, you may mention the following.

Symbol: Yeast in dough is a symbol of sin working in our lives.

Reference: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Symbol: The pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud were symbols of God’s presence among His people in the Old Testament.

Reference: Exodus 13:21-22

Symbol: The 12 stones of remembrance taken from the Jordan River were a reminder of God’s presence and protection.

Reference: Joshua 4:3-7

C. Give three examples of a type in the Bible and indicate where each is found.

### SAMPLE

Among answers which may be given are the following. Students may also suggest other valid answers.

Type: Adam is a type of Christ, the second Adam.

Reference: Romans 5:14

Type: Melchizedek is a type of Christ as high priest.

Reference: Hebrews 7:11-28

Type: The Passover lamb was a type of Christ.

Reference: Exodus 12:3-6; 1 Corinthians 5:7

10. A. Describe what is meant by hyperbole.

**A HYPERBOLE is an inflated or exaggerated statement used as a figure of speech.**

B. Each of the following passages contains a statement which may be considered a hyperbole. In each passage indicate (a) what the hyperbole is and (b) what you think it means.

**Note to mentors: A student’s explanations need not be exactly the same as those presented here. In some instances a student may even provide insights which go beyond those expressed here!**

1. John 21:25

a. “even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

b. Jesus said and did so many things of lasting significance and importance that it’s almost impossible to describe and explain them all.

2. Amos 2:9

a. “the Amorite . . . was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks.”

b. The Amorite was much taller and much stronger than ordinary men, so his destruction by God was very significant. (The specific reference here is to Sihon, the powerful king of the Amorites, whose death was often referred to in the Old Testament.)

3. 1 Kings 4:20

a. “as numerous as the sand on the seashore.”

b. The people of Judah and Israel at this time were extremely numerous. This was a sign of God’s special favor and blessing.

11. What do you think Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 23:24, “You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel”?

**The Pharisees were extremely picky about relatively minor things, obeying their own detailed laws in every respect. At the same time, they neglected the really major things God wanted them to be concerned about, such as justice, mercy and love.**



12. A. What is meant by personification?

**Personification is the ascription of personal, human characteristics or actions to things which are not actually persons.**

B. Write out three instances or examples of personification in the Bible and indicate where they are found.

**SAMPLE**

**Students may present a variety of examples here—either those taken from the lesson notes or, if they are creative and diligent, others which they find on their own. You will likely have to “check out” each one they present to verify the reference and the appropriateness of their selection.**

13. Matthew 10:34 is a “strong statement.” Read it in context. What do you think it means? (Remember Luke 2:14; John 16:33; Romans 5:1)

**Jesus said (in this passage) that he did not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword. At other points, however, the Bible indicates that Jesus did come to bring peace. His coming to earth brought God’s peace to men (Luke 2:14); He promised to give His peace to those who followed Him in this troubled world (John 6:33); and Paul indicates that believers find peace with God through putting their faith in Him (Romans 5:1).**

**However, Jesus did not come to earth to make peace between the Jews and their political enemies-as many people had expected or hoped the Messiah would do. Rather, He came to make peace between men and God. Those who trusted and believed in Him would truly find peace with God and receive the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. However, many of those who became followers of Christ would, in so doing, become enemies of family and former friends. Many believers would even have to give their lives (some at the point of the sword) for Christ’s sake.**

14. Try to find one or more examples of EACH of the following in the Bible. (Do NOT use any of the examples referred to in the lesson.) Explain each one and indicate where each one is found in the Bible.

**SAMPLE**

**Mentors will have to verify each of the items listed by their students. Check out the references and determine whether each of the items selected is appropriate.**

15. In Psalm 51:16 we read that God does not delight in sacrifice or take pleasure in burnt offerings. Yet, God commanded His people to bring sacrifices and offer burnt offerings (Leviticus 1 through 6). What do you think the Psalm writer meant?

**David, the Psalm writer, knew very well that God had commanded His people to bring sacrifices and offer burnt offerings. However, he also knew that the sacrifices and offerings did not mean anything UNLESS they were expressions of genuine repentance and sorrow for sin along with sincere gratitude for God’s forgiving grace. Without faith and repentance, the sacrifices were empty and meaningless—and God had no use for them.**

16. Some numbers in the Bible seem to have special significance at times, especially when they are used in the Book of Revelation or other unusual passages. Indicate what special significance or “association” the following numbers may have in the Bible.

- a. “Three” is often associated with **GOD (or the TRINITY)**.
- b. “Four” is often associated with **THE EARTH (or MANKIND)**.
- c. “Seven” is the number of **COMPLETENESS** or **WHOLENESS** or **PERFECTION**.
- d. “Twelve” is often associated with the **THE PEOPLE OF GOD**.

17. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said that he would “always” be with us. In Titus 1:12, we read that “Cretans are always liars.” Do you think the word “always” means the same thing in each of these passages? Please explain your answer.

**NO. Jesus will truly be with His people ALWAYS. He will never leave them or forsake them under any circumstances. The “always” in Titus 1:12 refers to the habitual way of life of the Cretans and to their general and deserved reputation for being liars. That does not mean, however, that they never told the truth under any circumstances.**

18. The word “faith” occurs in each of the following passages. Write out in one sentence what you think “faith” means in each of these passages.

- A. Jude 3—**“Faith” refers to the sum total of the truths accepted and believed by Christians.**
- B. Romans 14:2—**“Faith” refers to someone’s personal belief as to what is right and what is wrong.**
- C. Ephesians 2:8—**“Faith” refers to a person’s trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.**
- D. 2 Corinthians 5:7—**“Faith” refers to our belief in God and His promises even though we do not fully understand what is taking place in our lives or in our world.**

19. Evaluate each of the following sentences:

- A. “Since the Bible is the Word of God, we should take everything in it very literally.”

**Though the Bible is the Word of God, there are many statements in the Bible which were never intended to be taken literally. Truth can be expressed by way of parables, allegories and other figures of speech just as well as by statements that are to be interpreted literally. The accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible’s statements does not depend on the particular form in which they are presented.**

- B. “Since there are at least some things in the Bible which we should not take literally, everyone can decide for himself/herself what is to be taken literally and what is not.”

**It’s true that serious Bible students may differ at times on what is to be interpreted literally and what isn’t. However, it is not true that everyone can arbitrarily decide for himself/herself what is to be interpreted literally and what isn’t. There are certain guidelines of interpretation which everyone should follow. Included among those guidelines are the following:**

**(1) In general, a biblical statement should be understood literally unless there are clear and compelling reasons why it should not be taken literally.**

**(2) Some statements are clearly symbolic or hyperbolic and would present an untruth if taken literally.**

**(3) Some statements, especially those in the poetic literature, are readily identified as similes or metaphors or other figures of speech which were never intended to be taken literally.**

**(4) Some statements would contradict other clear teachings in the Bible if they were interpreted with strict literalness. For example, most anthropomorphisms would fit in this category.**

20. Put a **YES** in front of the following statements which should be interpreted literally and a **NO** in front of those which should not. Then give the reason for your answer.

- A. **YES** “You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.” Psalm 86:5  
Reason: **God is indeed a good and forgiving God and does abound in love to all who call on Him. This is consistent with all other biblical teaching.**

- B. **YES** “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” Psalm 119:9

Reason: **The Bible is consistent in its teaching that the Scriptures help us live a pure and godly life which is honoring to the Lord.**

- C. **NO** “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1

Reason: **Isaiah is clearly not referring here to the purchase of material commodities. The context makes it clear that he is referring to spiritual gifts from God which nourish, strengthen and sustain our spiritual lives. Wine and milk are symbolic of those spiritual gifts.**

- D. **NO** “Death has climbed in through our windows. . .” Jeremiah 9:21

Reason: **Death is here personified and is presented as an enemy that stealthily climbs into a house by way of the windows (rather than walking in through the door). Death is obviously not a person who (which) can climb through windows. The figure of speech used here indicates that death was “creeping up” on people, taking away even children and young men, and bringing much sorrow and wailing among the people.**

- E. **NO** “Whoever believes in me . . . streams of living water will flow from within him.” John 7:38

Reason: **The “streams of living water” refer to the spiritual blessings which will “flow out” to others from those who believe in Jesus. These blessings will come as a fresh stream of water to spiritually thirsty people.**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. The use of anthropomorphisms seems to bring God “down” to our level. Why do you think the Bible uses so many anthropomorphisms when it refers to God or His activities?

**Though God is infinitely exalted above us and is essentially “spiritual” (without a body), He is also “like” us in various ways. In order to help us believe and understand God’s genuine concern for our world, His love for us, His hatred of sin, His justice, His mercy and His compassion, He reveals Himself to us in such a way that we can more readily comprehend these truths about Himself.**

**Perhaps God’s communicating with us may be compared to a mother trying to communicate with her baby. She uses expressions, actions, and words which help the baby (or toddler) “understand,” even though the child’s level of comprehension is always very limited. So it is with God. In order to make**

**Himself known to us, He “speaks” a language that we can understand—at least, to an extent.**

2. Jesus often spoke in parables and often used many other figures of speech. Why do you think He did this? Would it not have been much simpler and clearer if He had used “ordinary” language which everyone could understand?

**Jesus used parables for several reasons. First of all, “stories” often communicate truths more effectively than “straight” teaching. This is especially true in certain cultures where people are more “orally oriented.” Second, stories are often easier to remember than other kinds of teaching. Third, Jesus’ stories “hid” some things from those who were too spiritually dull to understand while revealing them to others who were more prepared to receive them. Fourth, stories often serve to provoke some insightful thinking and to precipitate some interesting discussion. Fifth, stories can communicate “hard” truths which might never be “heard” if they were presented in a non-story form.**

3. What would you say to someone who believes that the real “key” to understanding the Bible is figuring out hidden or secret patterns of numbers (or letters) in the Bible?

**God has revealed His Word to us in language that is readily understandable by the average listener or reader. Though there are some things in the Bible which are “hard to understand” and other things which are presented in highly symbolic fashion, there is never any hint or suggestion in the Bible that we should try to figure out “secret” patterns of numbers or letters. Neither Jesus Himself nor any of the New Testament writers ever interpreted the Old Testament by means of “secret” or hidden patterns, nor did they suggest that we should seek such patterns on our own.**

**Moreover, if there really are “secret patterns” in the Bible, then almost all readers throughout history have missed them. That means that only a relatively few readers have the privilege of really “understanding” the hidden depths of the Bible. Was that really God’s intention in giving the Bible as He did?**

**It should also be noted that it is quite possible to use different “patterns” of numbers or letters (different, that is, from the widely publicized ones) to produce quite different results. There are several examples of this which should cause everyone to be extremely wary of those who claim to find “significant treasures” through their novel methods of study and interpretation.**

**Finally, the alleged “secret patterns” in the Bible never reveal any significant truth that we cannot learn through a faithful, Spirit-guided reading of the Bible**

**in the ordinary way. Do not be allured or misled by those who play “the numbers game” (even though some of them may mean well).**

4. Write a brief paragraph about faithfulness, obedience, love or pride using a variety of figures of speech.

### **SAMPLE**

**For questions 4 and 5, creative students will likely enjoy this assignment. Some, however, may have difficulty with it. Since this assignment comes at the end of a fairly long lesson, some students may have run out of energy or enthusiasm. If your student does not produce anything meaningful here, it might be appropriate to suggest that he give it another try before he proceeds to the next lesson. As always, use your good judgment concerning the best way to proceed. Also, please share with us any examples of creative writing which we in turn may share with other students or mentors.**

5. Write a parable or an allegory on fruit-bearing, kindness, trust or jealousy.



## LESSON 5: Understanding Old Testament History

The Old Testament gives us fascinating accounts of personal struggles, great battles, wonderful miracles, disappointing failures and marvelous victories. Most likely you will not be able to remember everything you read. God doesn't expect you to! He wants you to read His Word with joy and delight. He wants you to understand His marvelous plan of salvation and the riches of His grace. He wants you to learn how to live a life that is pleasing to Him. As you study this lesson, therefore, first get the big picture clear in your mind. After that becomes clear to you, you can then try to learn how each individual person or story fits into the overall picture.

### 10 GUIDELINES FOR READING THE OLD TESTAMENT

#### 1. Read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament.

Do take the Old Testament very seriously, but do not look upon it as God's final word on a subject. Remember the progressive nature of God's revelation and the gradual unfolding of divine truth in the Bible. (See Lesson 8 for a more extensive consideration of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.)

#### 2. Read each story and event in the Old Testament as a unique and significant part of God's plan of salvation.

The Old Testament does not give us a series of unconnected stories about interesting things that took place in the past. Rather, each book, each story, and each event contributes something to the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. Always try to understand how each story or event fits as part of the big picture.

#### 3. Read each book in its historical context.

By understanding the times and circumstances under which a book was written, you will better understand its focus and message. The book of Deuteronomy, for example, represents God's message to His people just before they entered the Promised Land. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah reflect a situation after the Jews returned home from exile.

#### 4. Read historical events in the Old Testament as part of salvation history.

The Old Testament does not give us a history of the world or even a complete history of any particular nation. Rather, it tells us about God's plan of salvation as this plan was worked out in history through His chosen people. Many things that we might find interesting or informative are not included in the Bible because they do not serve a special role in salvation history. Other events which we might consider to be rather insignificant are included in great detail precisely because they do serve such a role.

#### 5. Do not regard Old Testament persons simply as moral examples for us to follow or avoid. Rather, see them as people through whom God was working out His plan of redemption.

We can obviously learn much from the obedience and successes as well as from the disobedience and failures of persons in the Old Testament. However, we should first of all see them in the light of their place in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation.

#### 6. Seek to discover the special perspective and purpose of each writer.

Each author, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, selected exactly those materials which best served his own purpose for writing. For example, the books of Kings and the books of Chronicles both tell us about the history of the Israelites. However, the books of

Chronicles were written after the exile and give us more of a "religious" or priestly review of Israel's history. By knowing the time and purpose of a book's writing, you will better understand the author's message.

#### 7. Do not be surprised at the many stories of moral failure in the Old Testament.

The Bible does not try to hide the failures and sins of God's people or their leaders. Rather, their weaknesses and failures point out the power of sin and the need everyone has for the mercy and grace of God.

#### 8. Read some of the Psalms and prophets along with the Old Testament historical sections.

The Psalms often give us a deep insight into the minds and hearts of the people about whom we read in the historical books. The prophets often give us an insight into God's view of the events recorded in those books.

#### 9. Remember God's missionary purpose in choosing the nation of Israel as His special people.

God did not choose the Israelites primarily for their own benefit. His purpose was to bless all the nations of the world through them. Therefore, the obedience, trust and faithfulness of the Jews—as well as their frequent disobedience and unfaithfulness—always affected the rest of the world as well as themselves.

#### 10. Do not become side-tracked by things which interfere with your understanding of the big picture.

Everything in the Bible is there for a good purpose. However, not everything is of equal value or importance. Do not spend too much of your study time on things which are less important or hard to understand if they take away from your ability to understand or appreciate the total picture. You can get back to the "other things" after you have the total picture clearly in mind.

## THE BIG PICTURE: A SUMMARY OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

### Creation and the Fall

After God created the heavens and the earth, He made a man and woman to rule over the earth in His name. However, they disobeyed God and went their own way, bringing pain and sorrow and death into human life. God promised that He would some day redeem mankind and the world from the curse of sin (Genesis 3:15), but He also let sin run its terrible course (Genesis 4-5). Sin soon spread to every area of life. Genesis 6:5 says, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

In response to man's wickedness, God sent a great flood to destroy the world, sparing only righteous Noah along with his family and two of every kind of living creature (Genesis 6-8). After the flood, God placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of His covenant promise never again to destroy the entire world with a flood. But people did not change their ways. They again began to multiply and again increased in wickedness. In pride they built a tower which they thought would reach to the heavens. In response, God confused their languages and scattered the people over the face of the earth (Genesis 9-11).

### Abraham and the Covenant of Grace

After the repeated failures of people to live as God wanted them to, God determined to work out His plan of salvation through just one man (Abram, later called Abraham) and his descendants (Genesis 12:1). God did not choose these people because of their

attractiveness or goodness, but only because He chose in mercy to love them and to work out His own sovereign purpose and plan through them (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). God made a Covenant of Grace with them, promising to bless them and also promising to bless the entire world through them (Genesis 12:3 and 17:1-8). That promise to bless the entire world was fulfilled hundreds of years later through Jesus Christ, Abraham's greatest descendant (Galatians 3:16).

From Genesis 12 to the end of the Old Testament, almost everything is in some way related to God's chosen people (the descendants of Abraham). These people are usually referred to in the first part of the Old Testament as Israelites and in the latter part as Jews.

### **The Israelites in Egypt**

About 300 years after God made His covenant with Abraham, Abraham's descendants went down to live in Egypt in order to escape a famine. Here a great grandson of Abraham named Joseph became a famous ruler over all the people of Egypt. It was here that the Israelites grew into a great nation (Genesis 37-50).

However, many years after Joseph died, a new ruler (Pharaoh) came to power in Egypt. He made slaves of the Israelites and made life very difficult for them (Exodus 1). God saw the suffering of His people and determined to free them from their slavery. He promised to bring them back to the land of Canaan, the land He had originally promised to give Abraham as a homeland for his descendants (Exodus 6:3-8). By now it was 400 years since Joseph first went down to Egypt!

### **The Exodus From Egypt**

To lead His people out of Egypt, God chose an Israelite named Moses and his brother Aaron. To punish the Egyptians and to demonstrate that he was far greater than any of their own gods, God sent 10 devastating plagues on the land. The plagues destroyed their crops and their cattle and made life very difficult for them. The Egyptians couldn't wait for the Israelites to leave! On the night the Israelites left Egypt, God commanded them to kill an unblemished lamb, to sprinkle its blood on the doorframes of their houses, and to eat the lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. On that very night, God sent an angel of death to destroy all the firstborn throughout the land of Egypt. However, He spared the Israelites whose dwellings were "protected" by the blood of the lamb. This event, called the Passover, was to serve throughout Israel's history as a sign of God's redemption of His people from the slavery of Egypt and also from the slavery of sin (Exodus 12).

### **The Sinai Covenant**

On their way from Egypt to Canaan, the Israelites encamped at a place in the desert near Mount Sinai. Here God made a covenant with them. He called them His own treasured possession, promised to bless them if they were obedient and gave them the privilege and responsibility of serving Him as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:3-6).

In order that they might live as the holy nation God wanted them to be, God gave them the Ten Commandments and many other laws to govern every aspect of their lives as His chosen people (Exodus 20-40 and the book of Leviticus). Only by being the kind of people God wanted them to be could they receive God's blessings for themselves and be a blessing to the nations around them.

### **Wandering in the Wilderness**

The Israelites soon broke God's laws and their promises to Him. They complained constantly about their circumstances and failed to trust God's promises. As a result, God sentenced them to spend 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Throughout these 40 years, the people repeatedly disobeyed God and suffered the consequences of

their disobedience. At the same time, God continued to show them His mercy and compassion. He miraculously provided them with food and water and everything else they needed throughout their time in the wilderness (the book of Numbers).

After forty years of living in the wilderness, the Israelites finally got ready to enter the land of Canaan—the "Promised Land." Before they entered the Promised Land, however, God gave the new generation of Israelites His laws as He prepared them for their new home. God promised blessings on those who would serve and obey Him and punishment on those who would not. These laws are found in the book of Deuteronomy (which means "second law").

### **The Conquest of Canaan**

Moses led the people of Israel throughout their years of wandering in the desert. However, at one point Moses failed to represent God faithfully in the presence of His people. As a result, God did not permit Moses to lead the Israelites into Canaan. Instead, He chose Joshua, Moses' assistant, to lead them. The book of Joshua tells how the Israelites conquered the sinful nations living in Canaan at the time and how they gradually established themselves in their new homeland.

### **Life in the Promised Land**

When the Israelites trusted and obeyed God, He blessed them in many wonderful ways. He blessed them in their work, in their homes and in their battles. As long as they continued to trust and obey their God, they never suffered from hunger, defeat, sickness or poverty. They also enjoyed special spiritual blessings from God—forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, and the delight of doing what pleased Him (the book of Joshua).

### **The Period of the Judges**

However, in their prosperity and pride, the people often forgot God. In envy of their neighbors, they sometimes served their neighbors' gods. In their desire to enjoy their neighbors' sinful pleasures, they often followed in their neighbors' ways. As a result, God often let them suffer at the hands of the nations around them. When the people finally repented and cried out to God to save them, He sent military leaders called judges who delivered them from their enemies. These judges also served as political leaders, though they never had the authority or prestige of a king and rarely served as leaders over the entire country. The book of Judges tells the story of this dreadful time in the life of God's people when "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). Even in this time of disobedience and lawlessness, however, there were some people who continued to serve and trust God (the book of Ruth).

### **Israel's First King**

Samuel was Israel's last and best judge. During his day, however, the people began to clamor to have a king like all the nations around them. God finally let the rebellious people have their way. God told Samuel to anoint young Saul of the tribe of Benjamin as Israel's first king.

Saul was chosen by God Himself to be His representative among the people, ruling over them in His name. He was also expected to live before the people as an example of trust in God, courage in the face of opposition, and unfailing obedience to God's laws. Saul, however, failed in every respect. As a result, God took the kingship away from Saul and permitted none of his descendants to reign as king after him (1 Samuel).

### **Israel's Greatest King**

After Saul's great failure, God chose a young shepherd named David to be Israel's second king. David was the greatest king Israel ever had. Though he was guilty of some terrible moral failures, he never lost his faith in God. He established the rule of God in the land, extended Israel's boundaries, and defeated their enemies. God promised David that he would never fail to have a king among his descendants. He even promised him



that one of his descendants would reign as King forever. That King was Jesus Christ. (The story of Saul and David is told in 1 and 2 Samuel and in 1 Chronicles.)

**King Solomon and the Temple**

Following the death of David, his son Solomon became king. Solomon was the richest and wisest of Israel’s kings. In his early years, he built a beautiful temple for the worship of God. However, in his later years, Solomon began to worship the gods of his many wives. As a result, God told him that his kingdom would be divided and that the house of David would rule over only 2 of the 12 tribes of Israel in the future. The story of Solomon is found in 1 Kings.

**The Division of the Kingdom**

After the death of Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was divided into two parts. The kingdom in the north was made up of 10 tribes and was called Israel. The kingdom in the south was made up of two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and took the name Judah. All the kings who ruled over Judah were direct descendants of King David. The kings who ruled over Israel came from many different tribes.

The relationship between Israel and Judah over the years was very unstable. Sometimes they were friends and allies. Often they were enemies. Religiously, the people of Judah were generally much better than the people of Israel. Some of Judah’s kings were honest and God fearing. Not one of Israel’s kings was! The people of Judah continued to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, while the kings of Israel set up idols and altars in their own country, thus leading their people away from the proper worship of God.

**The Kingdom of Israel**

About 200 years after the 10 tribes of Israel were established as a separate kingdom, they were invaded and conquered by the Assyrians. Many of the Israelites were taken into captivity to Assyria and never returned. The Assyrians brought foreigners to live in their place. These foreigners intermarried with the Israelites who were left in the land, producing a mixed race of people known later as the Samaritans. Israel as a separate kingdom was finished.

**The Kingdom of Judah**

About 135 years after Israel fell to the Assyrians, Judah fell to the Babylonians. The Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and burned the city of Jerusalem along with the beautiful temple Solomon had built. They also killed many of the people, taking the king and some other leaders captive to Babylon. Among the captives were the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel (who actually were taken to Babylon before the final fall of Jerusalem). The book of Lamentations, written by the prophet Jeremiah, describes the depth of feeling that overcame the people when their city and temple were destroyed. The story of the rise and fall of Israel and Judah is told in 1 and 2 Kings and in 2 Chronicles.

**The First Return from Exile**

After the Jews spent 70 years in exile in Babylon, God raised up the Persians under King Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians. God also moved the heart of King Cyrus to permit the Jews to go back to their homeland. The people returned home under the leadership of Jeshua, a priest, and Zerubbabel, their new governor. About 20 years after the people returned to Jerusalem, they built a new temple to replace the one the Babylonians had destroyed (the book of Ezra).

**The Jews Who Stayed in Persia**

About 15 years after the new temple was built, a young Jewish girl by the name of Esther became queen of Persia. Through her beauty and devotion to God she was able to save the

Jews from destruction (the book of Esther).

**The Second Return from Exile**

Twenty-five years after Esther became queen of Persia, a second group of exiles went back to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra, a priest and an expert in the laws of Moses. Ezra taught the people the Word of God and called them to repentance because of their many sins—especially their intermarriage with the non-Jewish people of the land. About 12 years later, Nehemiah, a Jewish official in the kingdom of Persia, got permission to go back to Jerusalem to help the returned exiles rebuild the walls of the city (the books of Ezra and Nehemiah).

**The End of the Old Testament Period**

The Old Testament ends with the Jews back in the Promised Land waiting for the coming of their Messiah. They waited for more than 400 years! At times, they lived at peace with their neighbors. At other times, they suffered persecution and opposition. For about 150 years, they achieved independence from direct control by foreign governments, but they never again had a true king of their own. There would not be a true prophet among them again until the coming of John the Baptist whom God appointed to prepare the way for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah and King, Jesus Christ.

**TIMELINE OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY**

<u>Persons or Events</u>	<u>Approximate Dates</u>
Abraham	2100 B.C.
Moses	1450 B.C.
King David	1010 B.C.
Division of Jews into Judah and Israel	930 B.C.
Fall of Israel to the Assyrians	722 B.C.
Fall of Judah to the Babylonians	586 B.C.
Rebuilding of the Temple	516 B.C.
Malachi (last book of Old Testament)	400 B.C.

Note: For a more extensive timeline, see the Course Introduction booklet.

**QUESTIONS: UNDERSTANDING OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY**

1. A. Which of the following statements is more correct? Circle 1 or 2.

1. Everything in the Bible is inspired by God and therefore of equal value to us.

② Though everything in the Bible is inspired by God, some parts are of more value to us than others.
- B. Give the reason for your answer above.

**According to 2 Timothy 3:16, all Scripture is inspired by God. However, not every part of Scripture is of equal value to us. There are many parts of the Bible which we rarely read, some parts which we don’t understand very well,**



other parts which are no longer directly applicable to our lives today and some which were particularly relevant for a specific time and place but not of direct value or significance for us today.

It is true, of course, that every part of the Bible has its God-determined place. But just as in our bodies or our cars or houses or in many other areas, not every thing is of equal value or importance, so it is with the Bible. Acknowledging this keeps us from the necessity of trying to demonstrate that every verse in the books of Numbers and Leviticus is of equal value or importance as John 3:16 or Romans 8:28.

2. A. When studying the Bible, why is it helpful to know WHEN an event took place or when a message was given?

**By knowing when an event takes place or a message is given, we are able to place it contextually in the history of redemption. We will know what came before it and what went after it. We will learn whether it is an earlier or later revelation of God on a specific subject. We will be able to understand better the specific focus or emphasis of the speaker or the significance of the event. For example, the story of Achan in Joshua 7 can be understood only if we understand the events that led up to it. Similarly, we will be able to understand the story of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6 only if we understand God's earlier teachings concerning the Ark of the Covenant. Also, many of the Psalms and prophetic writings are fully understood only in their historical context.**

- B. What was the situation when Deuteronomy was written?

**The book of Deuteronomy describes the situation when Israel was about to enter the Promised Land after wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. The name Deuteronomy means "second law" and refers specifically to the giving of the law a second time—this time to people who were either very young or not yet living at the time when the law was first given at Mt. Sinai.**

- C. What was the situation when the book of Judges was written?

**The book of Judges describes a time in Israel's history when everyone was "doing what was right in his own eyes." For the most part, the land of Canaan had been conquered, but there were still many enemies around who were eager and ready to conquer and oppress the people of God. The people frequently departed from God, falling into idolatry and disobedience and, as a result, suffered at the hands of the nations around them. Then, when they repented and cried out to God for deliverance, God raised up a leader, called a judge, who defeated their enemies and introduced a period of peace and**

**prosperity. After a time, however, the people again became disobedient and the old pattern of oppression returned. During the time of the judges there was no king over the whole land, so the judges usually ruled only over a part of the land and over only some of the people.**

- D. What was the situation when Daniel was written?

**Daniel was written while the Jews were living in exile in Babylon. Daniel and some of his friends had risen to a position of influence and responsibility in the government of the Babylonians. Daniel later became a trusted official in the government of the king of Persia.**

3. A. Circle the three statements below which are NOT true.

- ① The Old Testament gives us very little information about God's plan of redemption.
- 2. God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His special people so that they might become a blessing to the rest of the world.
- ③ The Old Testament usually tries to hide the sins of its heroes.
- 4. Some Psalms give us a deeper insight into the minds and hearts of the people we read about in the historical books of the Old Testament.
- ⑤ God chose Abraham and His descendants to work out His plan of salvation because they were much better than most other people of their day.

- B. Indicate why these three above statements are false.

- 1. Statement # 1 is false because: **the Old Testament clearly lays the foundation of God's plan of redemption and in various ways foreshadows it by sacrifice, type, prophecy and symbol.**
- 2. Statement # 3 is false because: **the Old Testament frequently exposes the sins of even its greatest heroes, such as Abraham, Jacob and David. The Bible makes no effort to make people appear more holy than they actually are.**
- 3. Statement # 5 is false because: **Abraham and his descendants were no better than most others. Abraham's ancestors were idol worshipers (Joshua 24:2,15) and his descendants were more often disobedient than not. (See also 4. A.)**

4. A. Why is it helpful to know something about the Old Testament when you are studying the New Testament?

**There are several reasons why a knowledge of the Old Testament is helpful for understanding the New Testament. Among them are the following:**

**(1) Many of the people mentioned in the New Testament are described much more fully in the Old Testament.**

**(2) The Old Testament gives us the historical background or origin of many events that had continuing significance in the New Testament. For example, the Old Testament gives us the story of the creation of the world, the institution of marriage, man’s fall into sin, the giving of God’s laws, the origin of the covenants, God’s judgments on the sins of His people (the flood, the wilderness wanderings, the exile) and the sins of the nations (Egypt, Canaan, Assyria, Babylon and others).**

**(3) The Old Testament helps us understand the life and ministry of Christ whose coming was prophesied and whose significance was foreshadowed in the Old Testament.**

**(4) The Old Testament contains a number of prophecies which were partially fulfilled in the New Testament but which await complete fulfillment in the future.**

- B. List three specific passages in the New Testament which would be difficult for you to understand without a knowledge of the Old Testament.

**SAMPLE**

**Students will likely select a variety of passages here. Included will probably be some things referred to (directly or indirectly) in the answer given to A above. Allow for a degree of latitude in student answers, but correct those answers which appear to you to be incorrect. For example, we would find it difficult to understand Romans 5:12-19 without having the Old Testament, but we could understand Hebrews 11:3 (to a significant degree) without having the Old Testament.**

5. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? “The main goal we should have in reading the Old Testament is to find some good examples to follow and some bad examples to stay away from.” Please explain your answer.

**DISAGREE. It is certainly true that we can and should learn from some of the examples of the Old Testament—both from those which are good and from those which are not (1 Corinthians 10:6- 11; Hebrews 4:11; Hebrews 11; 2 Peter 2:6). However, the main purpose of the Old Testament is not to give us “moral” lessons but rather to tell us about God, man, creation, the fall and the development of God’s plan of salvation. (See John 5:29; Luke 24:27, 44-46; Romans 4; Galatians 3:6-29; the Epistle to the Hebrews, and other passages.)**

**Old Testament characters and stories derive their significance as moral examples from their place in the history of redemption.**

6. Place the following events in chronological order. Place a number from 1 to 7 in front of each one.

- 3 The 10 Plagues in Egypt
- 4 Giving of the 10 Commandments
- 1 The Flood
- 6 Building of Solomon’s Temple
- 7 The Fall of Jerusalem
- 2 The Covenant with Abraham
- 5 The Fall of Jericho

7. God chose the people of Israel to be a blessing to the rest of the world.
- A. Write out three texts which clearly teach this truth and give the reference where the text is found.

**SAMPLE**

**Among the texts which teach this truth are the following: Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8. If students choose other texts, check them for accuracy and relevance.**

- B. How was this purpose ultimately fulfilled? (See Galatians 3:16)

**This purpose was fulfilled in Jesus Christ who came to this earth as the “seed” of Abraham (Galatians 3:8,16) and died on the cross for the sins of the world (John 1:29). This message was to be proclaimed to the entire world (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20).**

8. Describe what happened on the night of the first Passover celebration (Exodus 12).
- A. What happened to the Egyptians on the night of the Passover?

**All the first born males of Egypt died—including the firstborn of men and animals.**

- B. 1. What did the people of Israel have to do in order to make sure that the angel of death would “pass over” their homes?

**The Israelites had to take a year-old male lamb without blemish, kill it and**

**sprinkle the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they ate the lambs.**

2. What did this symbolize?

**Their actions that night symbolized the death of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who shed His blood for all those who trust and believe in Him. Jesus is our Passover Lamb, and we are saved from eternal death by His blood.**

C. 1. What did the people of Israel eat on the night of the first Passover?

**They ate the lamb that was killed, unleavened bread and bitter herbs.**

2. Why did they eat these specific foods that night?

**The lamb was part of the sacrifice made for them and which God permitted them to eat for their sustenance. The unleavened bread symbolized the fact that the Israelites left Egypt in haste and did not have time to let their bread rise. The bitter herbs represented their bitter years of bondage in Egypt.**

D. What did the Egyptians give to the people of Israel before they left Egypt?

**The Egyptians gave the Israelites clothing, articles of silver and gold and whatever else they asked for.**

9. There were often many years between the time a promise was given and the time it was fulfilled. Fill in the blanks below.

- A. There were about 2,000 (or 2,100) years between Abraham and Jesus.
- B. The descendants of Jacob lived in Egypt for about 400 (or 430) years.
- C. The Israelites who left Egypt spent 40 years in the wilderness.
- D. The Jews taken to Babylon spent about 70 years in captivity.
- E. There were about 400 years between the Old and New Testaments.

10. A. What great promise did God give to the people of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6?

**God said, "If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession . . . you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."**

B. AFTER God gave this promise to His people, he gave them a set of laws. What was God's purpose in giving them these laws?

**God gave them His laws so that they would obey Him and serve Him. By faithfully keeping His laws they would enjoy fellowship with God and would meet the condition God stated when He made His (conditional) promises to them. Also, by keeping God's laws, they would not only be blessed themselves but they would also be able to fulfill their purpose of being a blessing to the nations around them.**

11. A. How long did the Israelites spend in the wilderness before they entered the promised land of Canaan?

**40 years**

B. Why did the Israelites have to spend all this time in the wilderness?

**Because of their LACK OF FAITH and their DISOBEDIENCE. When the Israelites first had the opportunity to go into the land of Canaan, they became afraid because of the giants and fortified cities in Canaan. They did not have FAITH that God would give them the victory over the Canaanites, even though He promised that He would. The Israelites were also DISOBEDIENT. They frequently disobeyed God and complained against Him.**

12. Did the following pairs of people know each other? Write "Yes" on the line if they did, and "No" if they didn't.

- A. NO Noah and Moses
- B. NO Solomon and Samuel
- C. YES Hezekiah and Isaiah
- D. NO Abraham and David
- E. NO Joseph and Daniel

13. Read Psalms 105, 106 and 107. These Psalms deal with many specific stories in the life of God's Old Testament people. List five specific stories referred to in these Psalms, indicate the passage where the stories are referred to in the Psalm, and then indicate where these stories are found in the Old Testament.

EXAMPLE: Story: God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants.  
Location in Psalm: Psalm 105:8-11  
Location in Old Testament: Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-7



**SAMPLE**

**Note to mentors: Since there are many historical incidents referred to in these three Psalms, students will likely not all choose the same ones. Included, for example, are miracles and wonders, the covenant with Abraham, the promise of the land of Canaan, the protection of the people in Canaan, the famine in the time of Joseph, Joseph's imprisonment in Egypt, Joseph's becoming ruler of Egypt, Jacob's moving to Egypt, the 10 plagues, the exodus from Egypt, etc. You will have to check out on your own the accuracy of your students' selections, though this should not be difficult or time-consuming if they are accurate in providing the appropriate biblical references as required.**

14. David was considered to be Israel's greatest king.

A. What work was David doing before he was anointed as king?

**David was a shepherd taking care of his father's sheep.**

B. What promises did God give him (2 Samuel 7:12-16)?

**God promised David that God would establish his kingdom, that his offspring would build a temple for the Lord, that the throne of his offspring's kingdom would be established forever, that God's love would not be taken away from him and that David's house and kingdom and throne would be established forever.**

C. Choose four significant events in the life of David and give the specific biblical reference where we read about them.

**SAMPLE**

**Note to mentors: Various events will be selected by students. Check the accuracy of their references. Among the selections which will probably be made by most students are David's killing of Goliath and his relationship with Bathsheba. It will be interesting to see which incidents students select. Their choices may give you an insight into the kinds of things they think are important.**

D. Which of David's sons became king after him?

**Solomon, a son of Bathsheba, became king after David.**

E. Who was David's greatest descendant?

**Jesus Christ was David's greatest descendant.**

15. After the death of Solomon, Abraham's descendants were divided into two separate kingdoms: Israel in the North and Judah in the South.

A. Which kingdom continued the line of King David?

**The Kingdom of Judah**

B. Which of the two kingdoms was generally more obedient and God-fearing?

**The Kingdom of Judah**

C. Describe the relationship between the two kingdoms.

**The two kingdoms sometimes were at peace with one another and cooperated with each other, but they were also frequently at odds with one another. At times they even fought one another. The kingdom of Judah was much smaller in terms of number of tribes (2 tribes vs. 10 for Israel), but it was generally just as strong as Israel because Judah often had God-fearing kings, which Israel never had.**

D. How much longer did the kingdom of Judah last than the kingdom of Israel?

**About 135 years, the exact time depending on the date given for the destruction of Jerusalem (586 or 587 B.C.) and the date for the fall of Samaria (722 or 721 B.C.)**

E. Why did God permit His chosen people (the people of Israel and Judah) to be carried off into captivity in a foreign land?

**The people were exceedingly wicked. They continually turned away from God, worshiped idols, shed innocent blood, neglected justice and mercy and failed to serve and honor God in the way He had commanded. Israel was chosen to be a holy people, a light to the nations and a faithful servant of God. When they were no longer fulfilling the purpose for which they were chosen, God punished them and drove them out of the promised land, just as He had driven out the wicked Canaanites many years before. See, for example, 2 Kings 23:26-27; 24:1-4; 24:19-20 and the book of Lamentations.**

16. Place the following stories in chronological order. Place a number from 1 to 7 in front of each one.

- |          |                                |          |                              |
|----------|--------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| <u>4</u> | David and Goliath              | <u>6</u> | Daniel and his three friends |
| <u>3</u> | Samson and Delilah             | <u>7</u> | Queen Esther and the king    |
| <u>2</u> | Joseph and his brothers        | <u>1</u> | Abraham and Sarah            |
| <u>5</u> | Solomon and the Queen of Sheba |          |                              |

17. Name the person who was:

- A. Israel’s first king: **Saul**
- B. Israel’s wisest and richest king: **Solomon**
- C. The king who built the Temple: **Solomon**
- D. The Jewish girl who became Queen of Persia: **Esther**
- E. The Babylonian king who destroyed Jerusalem: **Nebuchadnezzar**
- F. The Persian king who permitted the Jews to return home: **Cyrus (Darius or Artaxerxes)**

18. A. What role did Ezra play in the life of God’s people in the Old Testament?

**Ezra led a second group of exiles back from the land of captivity to their homeland. This event took place about 80 years after the return of the first group from exile. Ezra served as a spiritual leader of the people—both as a priest and as a scribe, taught the people God’s Word, and led them in words and deeds of repentance. He probably wrote the books of Chronicles as well as the book that bears his name and the book of Nehemiah.**

B. What role did Nehemiah play in the life of God’s people?

**Nehemiah and Ezra were contemporaries, though Nehemiah came to Judah about 12 years later than Ezra. Nehemiah left an important position as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in Persia so that he might return to the land of Judah and lead the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He also instituted some much-needed spiritual reforms. Nehemiah became governor over the people of Judah on two separate occasions. When he was appointed governor for a second term, he found that the people had gone back to some of their old sins so he once again promoted a spiritual renewal among the people. Nehemiah is known as a man of courage, integrity,**

**perseverance and prayer.**

C. What are some of the most important differences between the books of Kings and the books of Chronicles?

**The books of Chronicles were apparently written after the Jews returned from captivity while the books of Kings were written before. Chronicles begins with some rather extensive genealogical lists which are not found in the books of Kings. Chronicles highlights the religious history of the Jews, placing much emphasis on the temple, worship and the priests. Chronicles also places less emphasis on the sins and failures of the Jewish leaders, focusing more on their positive and exemplary deeds.**

19. Describe the political and spiritual situation in Israel at the end of the Old Testament. Include in your paragraph answers to the following questions. Was there a new temple? Was the city of Jerusalem rebuilt? Did the Jews have political freedom? Did they have spiritual freedom? Did they have their own king? Were they faithfully worshiping God or did they still serve idols?

**Note to mentors: Students will answer this question in different ways. They need not include everything mentioned in the following paragraphs, but what they do write should be accurate and appropriate.**

**At the end of the Old Testament, many of the Jews are back in their homeland, though the greater part of them never returned from exile. There is a new temple where sacrifices are being offered, the priesthood has been restored, and the city of Jerusalem has been rebuilt. The people are free to worship God as they choose. They no longer are serving idols as they did before the exile, even though their worship of God is not as faithful and strong as it should be. Their Scriptures are very important to them and leaders known as scribes or teachers of the law exercise a strong and positive influence over the people.**

**Politically, the Jews no longer have their own king. They are free in many ways to live as they choose, but they continue to live under the domination of foreign leaders from one country or another. They no longer are an independent kingdom free from foreign control.**

20. Why does a good understanding of the New Testament help us interpret the Old Testament properly?

**Many things in the Old Testament can be understood fully only in the light of God’s revelation in the New Testament. The Old Testament does not represent the final word of God on many matters of great importance to Christians.**

Though we can learn much from the Old Testament, the Old Testament period was a time of types and “shadows” (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; Hebrews 10:1) and not God’s final word. The book of Hebrews demonstrates repeatedly that Jesus and the blessings which He brought are so much BETTER than the Old Testament types and shadows, so the shadows should be seen in light of the “reality” which casts the shadows. (See the book of Hebrews.)

Also, the New Testament represents the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies—prophecies which could not be fully understood until their fulfillment. The New Testament also enables us to understand the reason why God could and did act graciously toward His people in Old Testament times, forgiving their sins and transgressions, even though no adequate “payment” had yet been made for those sins. (See Acts 14:16; 17:30; Romans 3:25.)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- 1. List three of your favorite PEOPLE or favorite STORIES from the Old Testament and tell why they are special to you.

SAMPLE

It should be interesting to see what stories are mentioned. You might first wish to make out your own list and see how it compares with the lists of your students!

- 2. List some things that you would not know about God and His plans and purposes if you did NOT have the Old Testament.

**Note to mentors:** Many different answers will likely be given here. If a student does not mention the following things, you might choose to supplement his/her own answer with some of the items listed here.

- A. The “details” of the creation story, especially the creation of both man and woman in God’s own image.
- B. The “details” of the fall of man into sin.
- C. After the fall, God’s announcement of grace (Genesis 3:15) before His pronouncement of punishment (Genesis 3:16-19).
- D. God’s great anger against sin and His punishment of the wicked. The New Testament speaks clearly about the final judgment of the wicked, but it

does not have nearly as many “demonstrations” of God’s judgment as the Old Testament does.

- E. The incredible mercy and patience of God in dealing with His wayward covenant people. There are many outstanding examples of this in the Old Testament.
  - F. The power and might of God demonstrated in His rule over all the nations and His defeat of various powerful nations. Such victories over nations are not found in the New Testament, except for the final victories described in the book of Revelation.
  - G. God’s perfect knowledge of the future, demonstrated by prophecies made hundreds of years before they were fulfilled.
  - H. God’s willingness to withhold punishment when people repented. (Consider, for example, the story of Jonah and Nineveh as well as various others.)
  - I. God’s great concern for the poor and alien as demonstrated in the giving of many specific laws. The New Testament has far fewer specific laws in this regard, though there are many indications of God’s concern for the poor. See, for example, the Gospel of Luke and its emphasis on the compassion of Jesus.
  - J. The origin and calling of the Jewish people.
- 3. Why do you think the Old Testament gives us so many stories of failure, disobedience and sin?

There may be several good reasons for this. Among them are the following:

- A. The Bible clearly demonstrates the “sinfulness of sin.” Temptation and sin are never to be trifled with. The power of sin is great and its consequences are dreadful.
- B. The Bible makes clear that even the “best” are not good enough. Everyone is a sinner in need of salvation.
- C. The Bible is very realistic. It deals with life as it is, not with some mythical heroes who are beyond the reach of temptation, sin and failure.
- D. Jesus’ sinlessness stands out dramatically against the failures of the best mankind has to offer.



**E. The failures of people in the Bible provide us with both warning and encouragement: warning, because we know that no one is so strong that he cannot fall; and encouragement because we see how God is willing to forgive even the “worst of sinners.”**

4. List four stories of God’s grace or mercy in the Old Testament which stand out in your mind. Briefly describe each story and indicate where each is found.

### **SAMPLE**

**Your student’s choice of people or stories may well tell you something about his/her own pilgrimage and his/her understanding of the grace and mercy and power of God. Try to provide him/her with some kind of encouragement concerning his/her choices.**

5. Do you enjoy reading the Old Testament as much as you do the New Testament? Please explain your answer.

**Once again, your students’ response here will probably be quite enlightening—and certainly interesting. You might wish to share with your students your own answer to this question! That might prove both enlightening and interesting to them!**

## **LESSON 6: Understanding the Prophetic Books**

### **THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY**

**Read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament.**

When many people hear the word “prophecy,” they immediately think about something that is going to happen in the future. And that isn’t totally wrong. The biblical prophets did often write about the future. However, foretelling the future was not the heart of a prophet’s ministry. The primary function of a biblical prophet was to bring the Word of God to people.

Sometimes the message from God was a word about the past. Often it was a statement about the present. At times it was a message about the future. But it was always the Word of God—a word of punishment or promise, a message of caution or concern, a proclamation of judgment or blessing.

The prophets condemned people for their disobedience, called them to repentance, pleaded with them to forsake their sins, urged them to return to God, provided them with guidance for their lives and encouraged them to live the way God wanted them to live. They joyfully promised forgiveness and blessing for those who repented, and they sternly pronounced judgment on those who didn’t. They also foretold a time when God would fulfill all His promises to His people, bringing about a time of glory and joy in a new world of righteousness and peace.

### **THE FOCUS OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY**

**The focus of prophecy in the Bible is on God’s loving plan:**

- (1) to redeem people from their sins through the Messiah, Jesus Christ
- (2) to establish a Kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace and
- (3) to punish all those who continue to resist and oppose Him.

The prophets made it very clear that God was perfectly in control of everything that happened in this world. They also gave believers the comfort and assurance that God would bring all things to their divinely appointed end—in His own way and time. Though many individuals and kingdoms might set themselves up against God, God’s plan and purposes would always prevail.

### **THE LANGUAGE OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY**

1. The prophets often wrote in very ordinary language, using ordinary words and ordinary grammar that was easy for the people to understand. At other times they used poetic language, figurative language or symbolic language. Even this language was often easy for the people to understand. However, there were many times when a prophet’s message was not fully understood until the time when it was fulfilled. Who could ever have imagined, for example, that Isaiah 53:5-6 would be fulfilled the way it was!
2. On some occasions, a prophet spoke of a future event as if it had already happened. In Isaiah 53, for example, Isaiah presents the Messiah as the Lamb of God who was slain as the sacrifice for our sins. Actually, however, Jesus’ death on the cross would

not take place until 700 years later! By writing as he did, Isaiah indicated that from God’s eternal viewpoint Christ’s sacrifice for sins had already been made. His death had already taken place. That’s why Old Testament believers could have their sins forgiven—because in God’s “timeless” plan, Christ was already crucified for the sins of the world. This same truth is expressed in Revelation 13:8 where Jesus is described as “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”

- 3. The prophets sometimes drew a single picture of coming events without making it clear that these events would be separated by a long period of time. This is sometimes called the “prophetic perspective.” Their writing in this way has often been compared to someone who sees a whole mountain range without realizing that many of the mountain peaks are separated from each other by many miles.

A good example of the “prophetic perspective” is found in the prophets’ description of the blessings associated with the coming of the long-promised Messiah. They described the blessings of the Messianic age without giving a precise and detailed time table of the Messiah’s life. Events that would take place at the Messiah’s first coming were not always clearly separated from those that would take place at His second coming.

THE FULFILLMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

1. The MANNER of Fulfillment

- a. **Literal** fulfillment.

Many Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled very literally. Among those were prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish captivity in Babylon, the punishment and destruction of various nations, the life and death of Jesus Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and many others.

- b. **Figurative** or symbolic fulfillment.

Some prophecies were fulfilled figuratively. For example, Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16 all refer to the great “stone” that would appear in the future. From Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:6-8 we learn that the “stone” referred to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

- c. **Spiritual** fulfillment.

Some prophecies were fulfilled spiritually. For example, Amos 9:11 refers to the restoration of “David’s fallen tent.” According to Acts 15:16-17, this prophecy finds a spiritual fulfillment when believing Gentiles are included with believing Jews among the people of God.

- d. **Conditional** fulfillment.

Some prophecies were not fulfilled because the promises were conditional. For example, in Jonah 3:2-10, Jonah promised that God would destroy the city, but the people repented, and God spared them. See 2 Chronicles 7:14 and Jeremiah 18:7-10 for additional examples.

2. The TIME of Fulfillment

- a. Some prophecies were fulfilled **very soon** after they were spoken or written.  
Example: Isaiah 37:33-37: the destruction of the Assyrian army.
- b. Some prophecies were fulfilled **later in Old Testament** times.  
Example: Isaiah 47: the fall of Babylon

- c. Many prophecies were fulfilled **in the life of Christ**.

For example:

OLD TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT	SUBJECT
Micah 5:2	Luke 2:4-7	Christ’s birth in Bethlehem
Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:18, 22-23	Christ’s virgin birth
Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18	The slaughter of the children
Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:13-15	Christ’s call out of Egypt
Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:12-16	His ministry in Galilee
Isaiah 53:3	John 1:11; Luke 4:29	His rejection
Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-11	His triumphal entry
Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:15	His betrayal for money
Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 26:62-63	His silence when accused
Isaiah 50:6	Mark 14:65	His being mocked
Isaiah 53:4-5	Matthew 8:16-17	His suffering for others
Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38	His death among sinners
Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60	His burial with the rich

- d. Some prophecies will be fulfilled **in the future**. For example, Isaiah 11:6-9, Isaiah 35:1-10 and Isaiah 65:17-25 refer to the new heavens and the new earth and to the coming blessings of the Messiah’s kingdom. These prophecies still await fulfillment.
- e. Some prophecies have a **dual fulfillment**. That is, they may be fulfilled on one level in the Old Testament and on a higher level in the life of Christ or in the future kingdom. Or, they may have an initial fulfillment at Christ’s first coming and a greater fulfillment when Christ comes again. For example, the Kingdom of God did already come to earth in the life and ministry of Jesus, but His Kingdom will not come in all its power and glory until Jesus comes again.

THE INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

The following 10 guidelines will help you as you seek to understand the predictive sections of the Old Testament prophecies.

- 1. Interpret each prophecy literally unless it is obvious from the context or from other passages of Scripture that the literal sense is not appropriate.
- 2. Try to understand each prophecy as the first readers would have understood it. Learn about the time the people lived, the circumstances under which they lived, and the main focus of the prophet’s message.
- 3. Interpret Scripture by Scripture! Study how New Testament writers refer to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Note that sometimes the prophecies are stated very clearly and are fulfilled literally and exactly. At other times the prophecies are stated less precisely or are fulfilled figuratively or spiritually.
- 4. Be content to leave some prophecies unexplained. Many Old Testament prophecies were not understood until they were fulfilled. Many others were fulfilled in ways that could not have been anticipated. Some still-unfulfilled prophecies will not be fully

- understood until they are fulfilled.
5. Seek to determine whether there are any implied or expressed conditions concerning the fulfillment of a prophecy. For example, Jonah prophesied that the city of Nineveh was going to be destroyed within 40 days (Jonah 3:4). However, God did not destroy Nineveh within 40 days because the people repented and turned away from their sin (Jonah 3:10).
  6. Recognize the use of figures of speech and interpret them appropriately. See, for example, Jeremiah 3:1-2, 6-10, 14 where God is called Israel's husband and Israel's worship of idols is therefore considered to be adultery.
  7. Note that some historical cities or places may have both a literal and a symbolic significance. For example, Sodom, Egypt, Babylon, Mount Zion and Jerusalem are all well-known historical sites but each one is also given symbolic significance in the Bible.
  8. Remember that a prophecy may be partially fulfilled at one time and then fulfilled more completely at a much later time.
  9. Do not be dogmatic about the interpretation of passages on which Christians disagree. This is particularly true of prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled. Always seek the leading of the Holy Spirit as you study and continue to maintain an attitude of humility and a willingness to learn from others.
  10. Do not become so involved in trying to map out details of the future that you fail to get a present blessing from your study. Always seek to discover truths which you can apply to your own life now—whatever may happen in the future.

TIMES OF THE PROPHETS

Note: The following list of dates will help you understand the approximate time in which the prophets ministered and the order in which they appeared. Though some of the dates given below are debatable, most of them are reasonably accurate.

PROPHET	DATE	PROPHET	DATE
Elijah	875-850 B.C.	Zephaniah	640-620 B.C.
Elisha	850-800 B.C.	Jeremiah	626-586 B.C.
Joel	835 B.C. (or much later)	Habakkuk	610-586 B.C.
Jonah	790-750 B.C.	Obadiah	586 B.C. (or much earlier)
Amos	775-750 B.C.	Daniel	605-535 B.C.
Hosea	760-720 B.C.	Ezekiel	592-570 B.C.
Isaiah	740-685 B.C.	Haggai	520-516 B.C.
Micah	740-700 B.C.	Zechariah	520-516 B.C.
Nahum	650-610 B.C.	Malachi	450-400 B.C.

1. **Elijah** and **Elisha** were great prophets during the reign of some of the earlier kings (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13). Both Elijah and Elisha performed many notable miracles, but neither one wrote any of the books of the Old Testament. They boldly and courageously condemned the sins of both the kings and the people and called them away from idolatry and back to the worship of the one true God.
2. **Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah** (and possibly **Joel**) all lived before the fall of the kingdom of Israel.
3. **Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk** (and possibly **Obadiah**) lived between the fall of Israel and the fall of the kingdom of Judah.
4. **Daniel** and **Ezekiel** lived and prophesied for the most part after the fall of Judah, during the period of the exile. Both of them lived in captivity.
5. **Haggai** and **Zechariah** lived after the Jews returned from exile.
6. **Malachi** lived after the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt. He was the last prophet until the coming of John the Baptist.

MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

**Joel**—describes a terrible plague of locusts but says God’s coming judgment is going to be much worse. Joel also speaks of a coming great day of blessing when God’s Spirit would be poured out on all people and Judah would be restored.

**Jonah**—God calls Jonah to prophesy to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Jonah doesn’t want to go, so he tries to run away from God. In the process, Jonah is thrown into the sea, swallowed by a huge fish, repents, and is set free. Later he goes and preaches to the people of Nineveh, telling them that God was going to destroy their city. Nineveh repents and is spared from destruction. Jonah is very angry about this turn of events, but God uses Jonah’s anger to teach him about His own mercy.

**Amos**—prophesies judgment on several of Israel’s neighbors and then pronounces judgment on Israel itself because of its many sins. Israel is guilty of injustice, lack of concern for the poor, idolatry, immorality and corruption. Amos sees several visions of judgment, but he also foretells the ultimate restoration of Israel.

**Hosea**—marries a woman who is unfaithful to him. Her conduct is a symbol of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. Though God did punish His people, He also still loved them and ultimately promised to forgive them and take them back again as His “bride.”

**Isaiah**—writes about God’s judgment on both Israel and Judah. He also refers to the destruction of Assyria and Babylon and other enemies of God’s people. He relates God’s plans and promises for His people, giving many prophecies about the coming Messiah (Jesus Christ). In the second half of his book, Isaiah brings words of comfort, describes the glory and majesty of Israel’s God, prophesies the return of the captives to their homeland, describes the Messiah who will come to save and bless His people and



refers to God’s eventual creation of a new heaven and new earth.

**Micah**—prophesies to both Israel and Judah, stressing the need for justice and for peace. He refers to the coming of their Messiah and King, telling of His birthplace in Bethlehem. He presents God as One who hates sin but who is also exceptionally gracious and forgiving.

**Nahum**—foretells the destruction of Nineveh, the vicious and unrepentant capital of the Assyrian Empire.

**Zephaniah**—warns Judah that the people and their city will be destroyed if they do not repent. Judgment is going to be both a punishment and a means of purifying them. God will bless His people again later.

**Jeremiah**—prophesies to Judah, highlighting the sins of both the people and their leaders. He foretells the captivity of the Jews in Babylon but promises that they will return after 70 years. He also prophesies against various foreign nations. He writes about a new covenant that God is going to establish, a covenant through which He will fulfill His earlier covenant promise to Abraham to make his descendants a blessing to the whole world.

**Habakkuk**—questions God’s ways since the wicked seemingly are not punished. When God does punish His people, He uses the Babylonians who are even more wicked than the Jews. Habakkuk is challenged to live by faith and to wait for God to carry out His just judgments. In the end Habakkuk rejoices in God his Savior as he focuses on God rather than on his questions and problems.

**Obadiah**—foretells the destruction of Edom which had shown no mercy for the people of Israel in their time of trial. Israel will eventually be restored.

**Daniel**—The book of Daniel tells about the faithfulness of Daniel and his three friends while they were in captivity. The latter part of the book tells about Daniel’s unusual visions of future events. The book of Daniel demonstrates that God knows, controls and directs all things—past, present and future.

**Ezekiel**—prophesies to the Jewish captives in exile while he is a captive himself, telling them why they were taken captive. He prophesies judgment against various foreign nations but gives a message of hope to the exiles—even though they are not as responsive to his message as they should have been. Ezekiel concludes his prophecy with an extensive discussion of the “new” temple in Jerusalem where God will dwell among His people.

**Haggai**—writes to the people who have returned from exile, encouraging them to complete the rebuilding of the temple.

**Zechariah**—writes to the people who have returned from exile. He stresses the importance of holiness, urges the people to confess and forsake their sins, and encourages them to complete the rebuilding of the temple. He sees seven visions in

which he describes God’s judgment on Israel’s enemies, His blessings for Jerusalem, and hope for God’s people—all connected with the coming of Israel’s Messiah.

**Malachi**—rebukes the priests and the people for their sins and unfaithfulness in worship and in their daily lives. He praises the few who are faithful. He also foretells the day when the Lord Himself will come to them and warns them to be prepared for His coming.

## QUESTIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

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1. A. Evaluate the following statement: “The primary task of an Old Testament prophet was to foretell what was going to happen in the future.”

**This statement is not true. The primary task of an Old Testament prophet was to bring the word of the Lord to the people. This might include a word concerning future events, but even more often that word included a message directed to the contemporary situation of those who heard it. In general, the work of the prophet was to say, in one form or another, “Thus says the Lord.”**

- B. Describe in general terms some of the things the prophets wrote about. (See the section on the NATURE of biblical prophecy.)

**The prophets condemned people for their disobedience, called them to repentance, pleaded with them to forsake their sins, urged them to return to God, provided them with guidance for their lives and encouraged them to live the way God wanted them to live. They promised forgiveness for those who repented and pronounced judgment on those who didn’t. They foretold a time when God would fulfill all His promises to His people, bringing about a time of glory and joy in a new world of righteousness and peace. All these promises would be fulfilled in and through the coming Messiah. The prophets also made it clear that God was in total control of everything that happened in the world and that He would ultimately bring all things to their divinely appointed end.**

2. According to the lesson notes, what was the FOCUS of biblical prophecy?

**The focus of biblical prophecy is on God’s plan (1) to redeem people from their sins through the coming Messiah, (2) to establish a kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace, and (3) to punish all who continued to resist or oppose Him. They also made it very clear that God was in perfect control of everything that happened in the world and provided believers with the comfort and assurance that God would bring all things to their divinely appointed end—in His own way and time.**

3. Read each of the following passages and indicate whether the prophet here is primarily PROCLAIMING God’s Word for the people of his day or PREDICTING what will happen in the future. Follow the example.

EXAMPLE: Daniel 12:1-3	<u>PREDICTING</u>
A. Nahum 1:2-6	<u>PROCLAIMING</u>
B. Amos 3:14-15	<u>PREDICTING</u>
C. Jeremiah 30:1-3	<u>PREDICTING</u>
D. Joel 2:28-32	<u>PREDICTING</u>
E. Ezekiel 33:10-11	<u>PROCLAIMING</u>

4. 1 Peter 1:10-12 indicates that there were times when the Old Testament prophets did not fully understand their own prophecies. Give three examples of prophecies which you think they might not have understood and indicate where they are found.

SAMPLE

**Note to mentors: Since many different answers can be given here, and since the answers given will reflect a student’s judgment, each mentor will have to evaluate each student’s answers individually. Allow for a wide range of responses, but make sure that each suggested answer is at least plausible. When you do disagree with a student’s answer, you may wish to provide your own perspective on his/her presentation, showing where and why you differ from him/her.**

5. A. Which one of the Old Testament prophets spoke most clearly and most often about the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah?

Isaiah

B. List four passages from this prophet which refer to the coming Messiah.

SAMPLE

Among the prophecies which might be suggested here are the following:

**Note to mentors: If a student takes all four of his texts from Isaiah 53, you may wish to suggest a few of the other passages listed below.**

- (1) The virgin birth of the Messiah. Isaiah 7:14
- (2) The child who would be the Mighty God and Everlasting Father. Isaiah 9:6-7
- (3) The shoot from the stump of Jesse. Isaiah 11:1-9
- (4) The servant of the Lord. Isaiah 42:1-4

(5) The suffering and death of the coming Messiah. Isaiah 52:13-53:12  
(6) The ministry and service of the Messiah in the Spirit. Isaiah 61:1-11

6. Write the name of the prophet who predicted the following events in Christ’s life. Also give the exact reference where the prophecy is found. Follow the example.

Example: Christ’s virgin birth	<u>ISAIAH</u>	<u>Isaiah 7:14</u>
A. His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver	<u>ZECHARIAH</u>	<u>Zechariah 11:12</u>
B. His being called out of Egypt	<u>HOSEA</u>	<u>Hosea 11:1</u>
C. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem	<u>ZECHARIAH</u>	<u>Zechariah 9:9</u>
D. His birth in Bethlehem	<u>MICAH</u>	<u>Micah 5:2</u>
E. The slaughter of the children	<u>JEREMIAH</u>	<u>Jeremiah 31:15</u>

7. The prophet Daniel clearly showed that God is totally in control of all that happens in this world—the past, the present, and the future. He was given the ability to interpret the dreams of kings and was also given visions directly by God.

A. Where was Daniel living when he saw his visions and interpreted the dreams?

Daniel was living in captivity in Babylon and probably in Persia.

B. Name three of the kings under whom Daniel served during his life.

**Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus, Darius (Note: These names are all mentioned in the book of Daniel, though the exact identification of Darius is still disputed.)**

C. Briefly describe two of the dreams Daniel interpreted or the visions he saw. Give the reference where they are described and briefly explain what they meant.

SAMPLE

Among the dreams or visions which might be selected are the following:

- (1) Daniel 2:31-45 Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a huge statue of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. Refers to four secular kingdoms (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome) and the eternal kingdom to be established by the Jewish Messiah.
- (2) Daniel 4:9-17 Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great tree. Refers to the coming fall of Nebuchadnezzar and his living as an animal for seven years.

(3) Daniel 5:5-28 Belshazzar sees the handwriting on the wall (not a dream or vision). Refers to the coming death of Belshazzar and the destruction of the Babylonian kingdom by the Medes and Persians.

(4) Daniel 7:1-14 Daniel's dream or vision of four beasts. The meaning of Daniel's dream/vision is comparable to that of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the huge statue.

(5) Daniel 8:1-14 Daniel's vision of a ram and a goat. Refers to the coming of the Medes and Persians and their ultimate destruction.

(6) Daniel 9:20-27 Daniel has a "revelation" from the angel Gabriel regarding "seventy sevens." Refers to the coming Messiah and a "time frame" for His appearance.

(7) Daniel 10:1-20 Daniel's terrifying vision of an unusual man and a coming great conflict. Refers to what will happen to God's people in the future.

(8) Daniel 11:1-45 Daniel's "revelation" about the Kings of the South and the Kings of the North. Refers to coming wars in the Middle East and Egypt and an invasion of the land of Israel by a king of the North.

(9) Daniel 12:1-13 Daniel's "revelation" about a time of great tribulation and ultimate resurrection and blessing. Refers to the coming persecution of God's people and to their future resurrection and blessedness

8. A. Why is it usually helpful to know the approximate time in which a prophet lived?

The situation in Israel changed dramatically from one time to another. At times the people were obedient, happy and prosperous. At other times they were disobedient, idolatrous and very godless. Sometimes they were ruled by good kings, sometimes by evil kings. At times they suffered from their enemies or from other judgments of God. There were also times when they were disobedient and materially prosperous. By understanding the "times" in which a prophet lived, the reader is better able to understand the prophet's message and perspective.

The reader should always seek to determine whether a prophet lived before or after the exile, since that significantly affected his perspective and his prophecies.

B. What was the general situation in Israel when Amos lived?

At the time of Amos, both the Israelites and the surrounding nations were living godless lives. Israel was prosperous materially, but the people were steeped in sins of injustice, lack of concern for the poor, idolatry, immorality and corruption.

C. What is the main message of the book of Amos?

Amos first prophesied judgment on Israel's neighbors and then pronounced judgment on Israel itself because of the sins of the people. Amos also foretold the restoration of Israel in the future.

9. Behind each prophet's name, write down the name of the city, country or people to whom he prophesied. Follow the example.

Example: Jonah NINEVEH

- A. Obadiah EDOM
- B. Nahum NINEVEH
- C. Malachi ISRAEL (the priests and people who lived in Israel after exile)
- D. Jeremiah JUDAH (the southern kingdom)
- E. Hosea ISRAEL (the northern kingdom)

10. A. Which Old Testament prophet foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost?

JOEL

B. Indicate the specific reference (book, chapter, verses) which refers to the Spirit's coming.

Joel 2:28-32

C. Write out the passage you cited in "B" above.

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

D. Cite the passage in the New Testament where this prophecy was fulfilled. (Simply refer to the book, chapter and verses.)

Acts 2:1-4, 17-21



11. A. What is meant by the “prophetic perspective”?

**When the prophets spoke about the future, they did not always indicate (nor did they always understand) that their prophecies might not be fulfilled in one specific period of time. Some of their prophecies would be fulfilled in two or three different time periods which might be separated from each other by many years.**

B. Give two examples of a prophecy which was fulfilled in two or more “stages.”

**SAMPLE**

**Evaluate carefully the suggestions students make here. They might legitimately refer to such prophecies as a virgin birth (which might have had a certain degree of fulfillment in the days of Isaiah), the coming of Christ as Savior, Lord and Judge, the coming Kingdom (which came already when Christ was on earth but will come in a much fuller and more glorious way in the future), times of judgment (already in history and then again at the end of history), the destruction of God’s enemies, periods of prosperity and adversity, persecution and tribulation, the new temple, etc.**

12. In which of the prophetic books do you find the following?

A. The Valley of Dry Bones	<u>EZEKIEL</u>
B. The Plague of Locusts	<u>JOEL (or AMOS)</u>
C. The Basket of Ripe Fruit	<u>AMOS</u>
D. The Vision of the New Temple	<u>EZEKIEL</u>
E. The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees	<u>ZECHARIAH</u>

13. Which of the following prophets lived earlier? Follow the example.

Example: Elisha or Daniel      ELISHA

A. Haggai or Habakkuk	<u>HABAKKUK</u>
B. Jonah or Jeremiah	<u>JONAH</u>
C. Zephaniah or Zechariah	<u>ZEPHANIAH</u>
D. Micah or Malachi	<u>MICAH</u>
E. Ezekiel or Elijah	<u>ELIJAH</u>

14. A. Summarize the events of the book of Hosea in two or three sentences.

**Hosea was told by God to marry a woman (Gomer) who was (or who became) a prostitute. She bore him three children, each of whom had a**

**symbolic name. God told Hosea to find Gomer and take her back as his wife, which he does.**

B. What is the basic spiritual message of the book of Hosea?

**Israel, God’s “bride,” had been living in spiritual adultery so God pronounced judgment on her for her disobedience and arrogance. However, in spite of Israel’s great wickedness and unfaithfulness, God continued to love His people and assured them that He would take them back again if they repented. If they didn’t repent, the people would be expelled from their land. The book ends with God’s gracious call to His people to return to Him and enjoy His forgiveness and fellowship.**

15. A. What is the main message of the book of Nahum?

**Nahum foretold the destruction of the evil city of Nineveh and described some of the methods to be used by the people who were going to destroy them. At the same time, there was a message of peace and comfort for the people of Israel who would be strengthened and encouraged by the knowledge that this powerful enemy of God’s people was finally going to be destroyed.**

B. Give examples of two verses or passages from the book of Nahum that support your answer to part A.

**Students’ answers will vary depending on the way they summarized the message of Nahum. The verses they provided should support their answer to part A. If the student has answered the first question incorrectly, provide the answer given above and point them to Nahum 1:12-13, 2:2 or 3:18-19.**

16. Read the following passages, and indicate whether the prophecy was fulfilled in Old Testament times OR when Christ was on earth OR whether it will still be fulfilled in the future.

Example: Micah 5:2      In the days of Christ

A. Isaiah 65:17-25	<u>In the future</u>
B. Jeremiah 25:8-11	<u>In the Old Testament times</u>
C. Zechariah 9:9	<u>In the days of Christ</u>
D. Isaiah 7:14	<u>In the days of Christ</u>
E. Amos 2:4-5	<u>In the Old Testament times</u>

17. A. Which two prophets encouraged the Jews to rebuild the temple after the exile?

1. **Haggai**
2. **Zechariah**

B. Cite two specific passages in the writing of each of these two prophets which refer to the rebuilding of the temple. (Give chapter and verse(s).)

1. **Haggai 1:14; 2:7-9, 15, 18**
2. **Zechariah 1:16; 4:9; 6:12-15; 8:9**

18. A. Which of the following statements best presents the conclusion of Habakkuk? Circle 1 or 2 or 3.

- ① We can rejoice in God already now even though we do not fully understand all His ways.
2. When we finally understand God's ways, we will rejoice in Him.
3. Since we cannot understand God's ways, we can never rejoice in this world.

B. Write out those verses from Habakkuk which support your interpretation.

**Students may select a number of different passages, but the one which clearly stands out in this connection is Habakkuk 3:17-19. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights."**

19. Give two examples of unconditional prophecies in the Old Testament. (These are prophecies that would be fulfilled no matter what anyone said or did.)

For each one give:

- (1) the name of the prophet who made the prophecy
- (2) the prophecy itself
- (3) the Scripture reference where the prophecy is recorded
- (4) the Scripture reference where the prophecy was fulfilled (Do not use examples from lesson notes.)

## SAMPLE

**Note to mentors: There are many unconditional prophecies in the Old Testament—especially those regarding the coming of the Messiah: His suffering, death, ministry and resurrection. There are some prophecies where the condition is not expressed but where a condition is obviously present (for example, Jonah's prophecy the destruction of Nineveh within the next 40 days). Make sure the prophecies the student selects are truly unconditional.**

20. A. According to Deuteronomy 18:21-22, how would people be able to distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet?

**The prophecies of a true prophet would be fulfilled; the prophecies of false prophets would not.**

B. List three prophecies in the Bible which have not yet been fulfilled. Also give book, chapter, and verse where these prophecies are found in the Bible.

## SAMPLE

**Note to mentors: Prophecies which are yet unfulfilled include those which refer to the end of the world, the final tribulation, the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, the coming of the Messiah in power and glory, the final establishment of the Kingdom of God, the new heavens and the new earth, the final punishment of the wicked, and possibly others.**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Since the Old Testament prophets wrote so long ago, how can they be of any benefit to us today?

**There are many things we can learn from the prophets. Among them are the following:**

- (a) The prophets clearly teach us about God's judgment, His mercy, and other dimensions of His "character."**
- (b) The prophets' warnings to people of old are still important for people living today. Specifics may have changed, but principles remain.**
- (c) The prophets teach us some significant truths about God's redemptive plan.**
- (d) The prophets demonstrate God's omniscience and omnipotence and His control over all the affairs of the world.**
- (e) The prophets demonstrate that God is fully aware of and in control of the**

**future as well as the present and the past.**

**(f) The prophets clearly demonstrate God's special love for His people.**

2. Which of the Old Testament prophets is your personal favorite? Please explain why this prophet is special to you.

**You may be surprised at the answers of some of your students. If you are so inclined, you might briefly explain which prophet is a favorite of yours—and indicate why. Your students might be surprised (and blessed) by your answer!**

3. How would you evaluate the following statement? *"It is impossible to understand any prophecy until after it has been fulfilled."* What are some of the problems and dangers involved in attempting to interpret prophecy today?

**Students may also suggest other things which are equally valid and important. Among the problems or dangers involved are the following:**

**(1) We may easily spend more time trying to determine what is going to happen in the future than we do in learning and applying what has already happened.**

**(2) Wrong interpretations can easily lead to disillusionment and frustration when history demonstrates that those interpretations are wrong. This is particularly true of those interpretations which state with certainty when Christ is going to return.**

**(3) Wrong interpretations may lead us to try to "help" fulfill certain prophecies while neglecting some clear, specific teachings of Scripture. For example, in the past some people thought it was acceptable to malign or persecute Jews to "help fulfill" the words of the Jews in the days of Christ who said, "Let His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). Today there is the danger that people neglect the rights of non-Jews as they try to make sure that the Jews occupy all the territory they believe has been promised to them.**

**(4) We may needlessly fear what we believe is going to happen when our beliefs regarding the future are actually very wide of the mark.**

**(5) We may cause others to lose confidence in the Scriptures because our widely-proclaimed predictions do not come to pass.**

**(6) We may fail to meet our present obligations or fail to take advantage of present opportunities because we believe that the end of all things is at hand when it really isn't.**

4. Write down four of the most interesting or helpful things you learned as you studied this lesson on the Old Testament prophets.

### **SAMPLE**

**Students' responses will be interesting and should be instructive. They may help you see, for example, whether they are more interested in isolated specifics or in general principles. You may also be able to determine whether they are more interested in the prophets' proclamation (forthtelling) or in his predictions (foretelling). You should probably not draw any strong and definite conclusions from your "analysis" of their response, but you might gain a bit of insight into how they approach Scripture at this point in their spiritual journey.**

5. True Old Testament prophets never made up their messages (2 Peter 1:20-21). It is impossible, therefore, to know what message God would give us through His prophets if they were living today. However, you may have some ideas as to what God MIGHT say through a prophet if he were living today. Thoughtfully write at least two paragraphs as if you were one of God's prophets today.

**Read thoughtfully the "prophetic insights" of your students. It should be very interesting to see what they concentrate on. For example, they might focus on events related to the second coming of Christ, they might be strong on judging the sins and shortcomings of their contemporaries, they might choose to bring a message of comfort and hope and forgiveness, they might venture to "foretell" some historical events that will be happening as history nears its end, they might simply repeat things already found in the Bible, or they might come up with something new, creative and persuasive of their own. Please be sure to share with us any "prophecies" that seem particularly interesting or insightful.**



## LESSON 7: Understanding the Wisdom Literature

“Wisdom Literature” is a term used to refer to the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms. These writings all deal with various practical matters related to the meaning of life, the purpose of life and the best and right way to live in God’s world. All of them are written in a poetic style.

Poetry is also used in many other Old Testament books, including the Song of Solomon, the book of Lamentations, various sections of the prophets and historical books and the rest of the Psalms. Their focus is usually on matters of the heart, on daily living, on a personal relationship with God. They deal with problems, questions, difficulties and trials as well as with love, joy, gratitude and praise. They sometimes deal with historical situations or doctrinal concerns, but when they do, they almost always do so from a very practical or personal point of view, reflecting the faith or the feelings of the writer.

### THE BASIC MESSAGE OF THE POETIC BOOKS

#### 1. Job

The book of Job tells the dramatic story of a godly and righteous man who wrestles with intense suffering and loss. Satan afflicts him, his wife taunts him, his friends misunderstand him, and both his wife and friends misrepresent the God in whom he trusts. Job struggles hard to understand the ways of God as he declares his personal innocence. God has great praise for Job’s integrity, but He also challenges and reprimands him for some of the things he says. For Job’s friends, God has only condemnation and judgment. Job humbly confesses his own foolish statements about God, prays for his friends and submits himself to God. God is eventually glorified in Job’s life, and Job is brought out of his intense suffering and loss into a place of exceptional blessing and prosperity.

#### 2. Psalms

The Book of Psalms is sometimes called the believers’ praise book. It contains 150 poetic writings written by several different authors over a period of many centuries. Many of these poems are songs of praise to God for His miracles, majesty, mercy and might. Other Psalms reflect the joy, sorrow, perplexity, fear, confidence, anger, trust or gratitude of the writers. Throughout the Psalms, God is seen as sovereign, holy, exalted, merciful, forgiving, loving and just. The God of Israel is the only true God who creates, governs and controls all things, directing everything to its appointed end.

#### 3. Proverbs

The book of Proverbs presents a variety of wise sayings and guidelines for almost every area of life. They describe what is wise and what is foolish in such areas as marriage

and family, work and leisure, social concerns and personal relationships. God is seen as the ultimate source of wisdom. Keeping His laws and doing His will is seen as the pathway to happiness, contentment and success. Failure to follow His ways results in frustration, failure and ruin.

#### 4. Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes describes the emptiness of life without God. Neither wealth nor pleasure nor human wisdom can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart apart from God. The earlier in life a person learns this truth and the more it influences every area of his life, the more meaningful and contented his life will be.

#### 5. The Song of Songs

The Song of Songs, also called the Song of Solomon, deals candidly, seriously and playfully with the tender and passionate love between a man and a woman. Though some interpret the book as a description of Christ’s love for His church-bride, the primary emphasis of the author seems to be on the various dimensions of the human love relationship.

#### 6. Lamentations

Lamentations presents the soulful lament of a faithful servant of God over the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord. The author (likely the prophet Jeremiah) describes his own extreme sorrow as well as that of his people. At the same time he also acknowledges the justice of the Lord in giving them the punishment they so clearly deserved. Yet, in the midst of his lament, he also praises God for His great faithfulness and mercy in daily sustaining and blessing them.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL POETRY

#### 1. Parallelism

Poetry in the Bible is much different from the poetry we usually think of with its rhythm, rhyme and metered lines. Biblical poetry is characterized by what is known as “parallelism.” There are at least three distinct types of parallelism.

- a. Synonymous: In synonymous parallelism, the second line or verse basically repeats the message of the first one.

Example: “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Psalm 119:105

- b. Antithetic: In antithetic parallelism, the second line basically presents a contrast to the first line.

Example: “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.” Proverbs 10:4

- c. Synthetic: In synthetic parallelism, each new line of the poem adds something to the main thought expressed in the first line.

Example: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.” Psalm 1:1

## 2. Acrostic Poems

In acrostic (uh•CROSS•tick) poems, each successive line or verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For example, if the poem were written in English, the first line would begin with the letter “a,” the second line with “b,” the third line with “c,” etc. In some acrostic poems there are several verses that begin with the same letter before going on to the next one.

Example: Probably the finest example of acrostic poetry in the Bible is found in Psalm 119. This Psalm has 22 sections of 8 verses each. Each verse in a section begins with the same Hebrew letter. Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the Psalm has 22 sections.

## 3. Imprecatory Psalms

Imprecatory (IM • pruh • ka • tor • ee) psalms are psalms in which the writers call down imprecations or divine curses on their enemies. Included are Psalms 35, 58, 59, 69, 109, 140 and others.

FOUR THINGS should be noted as you seek to interpret the imprecatory psalms.

- a. The enemies who are being cursed or judged are usually not just personal enemies but enemies of God, of His people, of His servants or of His purposes. The authors have such an intense concern for the honor of God and His cause in the world that they cannot tolerate those who openly oppose or revile Him.
- b. The language used in these Psalms is often figurative. The strong feelings of the authors sometimes find vivid expression in strong and colorful language which is not always to be interpreted literally.
- c. The writers sometimes pour out their negative feelings in their poetry while actually treating their enemies with greater restraint. David, for example, wrote very strong words about his (and God’s) enemy Saul, but he acted with restraint and even kindness when dealing with Saul in person.
- d. The imprecatory psalms are not presented as guidelines for us to follow when dealing with people who are “personal enemies.” We should indeed hate the works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11), but we should leave vengeance and punishment in the hands of the Lord. God calls us to return good for evil and to pray for our enemies so that they may be converted and turn from their evil ways (Romans 12:9-21).

# 10 GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING POETIC LITERATURE

**Guideline 1.** Remember that many statements in the poetic literature reflect the

author’s current views and feelings and do not always represent a message from the Lord. We should not assume, for example, that a Psalmist’s expressions of fear, doubt, perplexity and anger are always appropriate or approved by God. Nor should we assume that they are presented as models for us to follow. At the same time, we can learn from them that we may sincerely come to God with all of our own doubts, fears and concerns, trusting that He is ready and willing to hear us, no matter how we feel.

**Guideline 2.** Do not attempt to establish a doctrine or moral guideline on the basis of some unique or picturesque statement in the poetic sections. Biblical poetry is full of bold, colorful images expressing the intense feelings, vivid emotions and active imaginations of the authors. The reader who remembers this will be careful not to take all these poetic statements literally.

**Guideline 3.** Recognize the figures of speech being used in a poem and interpret them in accordance with the guidelines presented in Lesson 4. For example, Psalm 33:7 states that God “gathers the waters of the sea into jars” and “puts the deep into storehouses.” In Psalm 44:23 the Psalmist calls on God to awake from His sleep. These are typical of many statements that clearly are not to be taken literally.

**Guideline 4.** Do not take a poetic statement and treat it as a scientific or historical statement. For example, in Psalm 33:6 we read that God created the heavens “by the breath of His mouth.” In Isaiah 45:12 we read that God’s “hand stretched out the heavens.” Both of these passages clearly teach that God is the Creator of the universe, but both refer to creation poetically rather than scientifically.

**Guideline 5.** The book of Proverbs contains a wonderful collection of wise sayings and guidelines for living. By reading Proverbs we can learn what will usually happen when we live as God wants us to. However, the proverbs should not be seen as divine promises or as absolute guarantees of what will always happen when we live uprightly. For example, though a gentle answer usually turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1), there are times when it doesn’t. Training a child in the way he should go will usually produce very positive results (Proverbs 22:6), but there are exceptions. The exceptions do not take away from the truth of the proverbs, but they do demonstrate that they are guidelines rather than guarantees.

**Guideline 6.** Many sayings in Ecclesiastes show the emptiness of life when a person does not have a living relationship with God. One should therefore not take isolated statements in Ecclesiastes and interpret them as a definite word from the Lord on the subject. Everything in the book must be interpreted in the light of the Bible’s teachings as a whole. Always remember that the Bible is its own best interpreter.

**Guideline 7.** The Song of Solomon presents a wonderful and delightful perspective on the love between a man and a woman. If this book is also seen as a poetic description of Christ’s love for His bride, it provides some wonderful insights into the depths of our Redeemer’s love for us. However, the basic or fundamental teaching of the book appears to be on the excitement, mystery, joy and delight of one of God’s greatest

blessings: the pure love between a man and a woman.

**Guideline 8.** Though the book of Job can teach us much about the ways of God with His people, the book must be read with great discernment. For example, there is much error mixed with truth in the speeches of both Job and his friends—particularly in the speeches of his friends. Before accepting a statement from one of these speeches as a word from the Lord, evaluate it carefully in the light of clear teachings in other books of the Bible.

**Guideline 9.** Remember that the poetical books often reflect the situation of the covenant people of Israel in Old Testament times. This will help explain the occasional strong emphasis on material and physical blessings, a writer’s approach to his enemies, a national (rather than universal) perspective and various other matters. Once again, it is important to remember that “the Old is by the New explained.”

**Guideline 10.** Read the poetic writings of Scripture with a sense of freedom. Delight in the powerful images created by the writers. Reflect on the greatness and mercies of the Lord. Rejoice in the wonders of His creative wisdom and power. Let the power of poetic words energize your mind, enlarge your vision, and stimulate your own creative spirit.

QUESTIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE WISDOM LITERATURE

1. A. What is meant by the wisdom literature of the Old Testament?

**Wisdom literature is the term used to describe those Old Testament books which are written in Hebrew poetic style and deal with various practical matters related to the meaning of life, the purpose of life and the best and right way to live in God’s world.**

B. Which Old Testament books are usually included among the wisdom literature?

**Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and some Psalms**

2. Poetry in the Bible is characterized by what is known as parallelism. Below are four examples of parallelism. On the line after each one, write what kind of parallelism is involved: synonymous, antithetic or synthetic.

A. “He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.” Proverbs 28:26  
Kind of parallelism: ANTITHETIC

B. “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.” Proverbs 27:23

Kind of parallelism: SYNONYMOUS

C. “At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay.  
At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead.” Judges 5:27  
Kind of parallelism: SYNTHETIC

D. “He brought His people out like a flock;  
he led them like sheep through the desert.” Psalm 78:52  
Kind of parallelism: SYNTHETIC OR SYNONYMOUS

3. A. What are acrostic poems?

**Acrostic poems are those in which each successive line or verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.**

B. Using your own creativity, rewrite Psalm 1 in your own words as an acrostic poem. (If you wish, you may use just one sentence for each verse.)

**There obviously will be many different ways in which to rewrite Psalm 1 in an acrostic format. Creative students should enjoy this assignment. However, since this will be a new type of assignment for most students, you should not expect too many examples of great literary art. In order to be “acceptable” each poem should at least follow the acrostic format with the six verses beginning with the letters A through F. Also, the basic message of each verse of the Psalm should be retained.**

4. Everything written in the Psalms accurately represents the feelings or the situation of the writer at the time he wrote. However, some of the statements describe the author’s temporary feelings and are not always true or valid.

Read each one of the following statements and then indicate which ones are always valid and which ones represent the author’s temporary feelings. Circle “Always true” or “Temporary” after each sentence. Then give the reason for your answer. Follow the example.

EXAMPLE: “I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.” Psalm 38:6

Always true Temporary

Reason: David, the author, wasn’t always sad and discouraged. We know from other psalms that he was often victorious, joyful and full of praise.



A. "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways." Psalm 128:1

Always true Temporary

Reason: **God always blesses those who trust and obey Him.**

B. "I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me." Psalm 59:4

Always true Temporary

Reason: **The writer is going through difficult times where he is being attacked by those to whom he has done no harm. His life was not always lived this way.**

C. "In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me." Psalm 86:7

Always true Temporary

Reason: **God always hears the prayers of those who humbly and earnestly seek Him, and He answers them in one way or another.**

D. "You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you." Psalm 69:5

Always true Temporary

Reason: **God always knows everything about us.**

5. Use three or four descriptive adjectives to describe the primary feelings of the writers in each of the following psalms.

**Note to mentors: Allow some freedom for differences here, since students may interpret the Psalms in somewhat different ways. It is more important to determine what students see in these psalms than to have them give "correct" answers.**

A. Psalm 42—**Sad, Discouraged, Confused**  
(Some might also find the author to be courageous and confident.)

B. Psalm 73—**Confused, Repentant, Confident**  
(A case could be made for various other words also, depending on what parts of the psalm are emphasized.)

C. Psalm 51—**Repentant, Confident**

**(The Psalmist was also courageous in his public repentance and joyful in the assurance of forgiveness.)**

D. Psalm 23—**Joyful, Confident, Trusting**

6. A. What are "imprecatory psalms"?

**Imprecatory psalms are psalms in which the writers call down imprecations or divine curses on their enemies.**

B. List four things we should bear in mind as we seek to interpret these psalms.

1. **The enemies being cursed or judged are usually not (just) personal enemies but enemies of God, His people, His servants or His purposes. The writers have such a deep concern for God and His honor and cause that they cannot tolerate those who openly oppose or revile Him.**

2. **The language used in these psalms is often figurative and should not be understood literally.**

3. **The writers often write in very strong terms while actually treating their enemies with restraint.**

4. **These psalms are not intended to serve as guidelines for us when dealing with our personal "enemies."**

7. Explain in "non-poetic" language what each of the following statements means.

A. "Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy." Psalm 98:8

**This verse is an example of personification—ascribing personal characteristics to non-persons. Possible paraphrase: "Let the flowing of the rivers sound like the clapping of hands in praise to God and let the mountains rise in grandeur and beauty to reflect the glory and majesty of their Creator."**

B. "My tongue is the pen of a skillful writer." Psalm 45:1

**Possible Paraphrase: "I can communicate as well through my speaking as a skillful writer can by his writing."**

- C. “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.” Psalm 1:3

**Possible paraphrase: “The person who delights in God and in His Word will always be fed and nourished spiritually, so that he will continue to bear spiritual fruit at all times and will not wither or dry up in his spiritual life.”**

8. How would you describe the basic message of the book of Job?

**The book of Job deals with the mystery of the suffering of “innocent” people who seek to live in faithfulness to their God. The book reveals the sovereignty of God in all of life, showing how both the good things and bad things of life are totally under His control and ultimately lead both to His glory and to the good of those who continue to trust Him—even when they cannot understand Him or figure out what He is doing.**

9. The book of Job includes some statements by Job’s friends which highly displeased the Lord. (See Job 42:7.) Read the following passages in the light of Job 1:1 and 1:8 and then indicate how the speakers misrepresented things.

- A. Job 8:20—**The speaker (Bildad) wrongly assumed that Job was guilty of great sin and that he was suffering because of his wrongdoing.**
- B. Job 11:13-15—**The speaker (Zophar) wrongly assumed that Job needed to repent of His wrongdoing and that he would find relief if he confessed his sin before God.**
- C. Job 22:2-11—**The speaker (Eliphaz) accused Job of a great number of specific sins and confidently concluded that Job’s troubles could all be traced back to those sins.**

10. A. Describe briefly what happened to Job after his time of suffering was over. See Job 42:10-17.

**Job was personally vindicated by God Himself, was blessed with a new family of sons and daughters, received twice as many material goods as he had had before and lived for many years.**

- B. Do you think every Christian who suffers greatly will end up as Job did? Please give the reason for your answer.

**No. God promises that He will work out all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28) and He assures us that nothing can ever separate**

**us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). However, He does not promise that all those who suffer will end up with material things or other earthly blessings.**

11. Thoughtfully evaluate the following statement: “The book of Proverbs contains a list of divine guarantees or promises which will always come to pass when our lives are pleasing to God.”

**Proverbs is a book of guidelines or principles which show how God wants us to live. The author clearly teaches that those who do live according to the precepts and principles of “wisdom” presented in this book may normally expect God’s blessing on their lives and endeavors. However, the proverbs in this book should not be looked upon as absolute promises or guarantees. There are various examples of “good” people in the Old Testament (such as Job and Joseph) who do not always receive the blessings they might have expected and there are other examples of unrighteous people who seemed to enjoy many of the blessings promised in Proverbs to those who are living God’s way.**

12. Explain what you think each of the following proverbs means.

- A. Proverbs 22:6—**Those who prayerfully bring up their children in the ways of God will find that their children usually end up living for God—even when they are no longer under their parental authority.**
- B. Proverbs 20:17—**At first a person may delight in the “taste” of things which he has acquired by dishonest means of one kind or another. Later, however, these things will become a source of discomfort and regret to him which will be as unpleasant as a mouthful of gravel.**
- C. Proverbs 14:12—**A person may convince himself that what he is doing is acceptable in the sight of God but later find out, to his deep regret, that his chosen path has led him away from God and that it ends in eternal death and separation from God.**
- D. Proverbs 15:31—**A person will be considered truly wise if he is willing to listen to someone who wants to help him straighten out his life and therefore comes right out and tells him what is wrong in his life.**

13. A. What is the main teaching of Proverbs 5?

**Proverbs 5 presents a strong warning against sexual immorality and especially against adultery.**

- B. What do you think is meant by Proverbs 5:11?

**Proverbs 5:13 refers to the negative physical affects of dissolute and immoral living. In today’s context, we might include the devastation often caused by STDs (sexually transmitted diseases).**

C. What do you think is meant by Proverbs 5:15?

**Proverbs 5:15 speaks of satisfying one’s sexual desires by “drinking” only from one well or cistern—namely that of your own spouse.**

14. A. What two basic interpretations have been given to the Song of Songs?

- 1. **The Song is a poem about the love between a man and a woman.**
- 2. **The Song is a poem about Christ’s love for His church-bride.**

B. Which of these two interpretations do you think is most likely correct?

**The lesson suggests that it is more likely a poem about the love between a man and a woman (see Song of Songs section on page 122), but be sensitive to your student’s response.**

C. Please give the reason for your answer.

**Students’ responses will be interesting and instructive. Read attentively! Note: There may still be some readers of the Song who believe that it has no place in the Bible because of its explicit statements at various points. Those who feel this way simply fail to understand or appreciate the beauty and wonder and delights of married love as God ordained it.**

**It may be helpful to remind your students that human love is a wonderful gift of God to be appreciated, guarded, enjoyed, and expressed in ways that please Him. It’s important for all readers to recognize that. Readers must learn how to distinguish love from lust, appreciating the former in all its riches while fleeing from the latter (1 Corinthians 7:2-5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). They must know that everything God made is good and that nothing is to be despised or rejected because of possible or real perversions (1 Timothy 4:3-5). Believers are also to remember that “to the pure all things are pure” (Titus 1:15).**

**If some of your students find it hard to accept the Song as appropriate in Scripture, recognize that this may well reflect some dimensions of their upbringing or their previous way of life. Respond to them lovingly and kindly, but do not let them forget that human love, including its physical dimensions, is truly a gift of God.**

15. Find five passages in the wisdom literature where figures of speech are used which should not be interpreted literally. (You may select anthropomorphisms, hyperbole, similes, metaphors or personification. Do not make more than two selections from any one book.) First give the biblical reference, then write out the figure of speech, then give your interpretation of it.

EXAMPLE: Reference: Song of Songs 4:2  
Figure of Speech: “Your teeth are like a flock of sheep. . . . Each has its twin.”  
Meaning: Your teeth are beautiful, white, where each upper tooth has a perfectly matching lower tooth.

**SAMPLE**

**This assignment gives students the opportunity to do some “creative roaming” through the wisdom literature. Do not quickly consider any “interpretation” wrong unless it is obviously very wide of the mark.**

16. What is the main theme of the book of Ecclesiastes?

**Neither riches nor pleasures nor knowledge nor fame can ultimately satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. Only GOD can do that. The earlier in life one learns this and the more consistently he lives by this truth, the more meaningful and contented his life will be.**

17. Explain each of the following passages:

A. Ecclesiastes 7:1

**Good perfume is costly and valuable, but a good name is of far more worth. One should spare no cost to gain and maintain a reputation as a person of integrity, uprightness, and wisdom. This is more important than all the honors or riches or pleasures represented by “costly perfume.” A person who is just born faces numberless hardships, disappointments and trials and does not know how they will all end. When a person of integrity (the person with a “good name”) dies, he gets beyond the reach of all struggles, toils and sorrows—and in that sense the day of his death is good.**

B. Ecclesiastes 10:1

**Perfume is good, useful and valuable. However, even one dead fly in a bottle of perfume may cause the perfume to lose its fragrance and, consequently, its value and usefulness. In the same way, a person can lose a hard-won**



**reputation for wisdom and honor through only one stupid mistake or foolish action. So, watch how you live!**

C. Ecclesiastes 11:1

**Give generously to others in need and do not hold back. In due time you will receive back as much as you have given—and probably more. (It may be, however, that what the person “receives” back is not the same thing he gave. He may possibly receive a financial return on his giving, but his blessings may also come in other forms even more important or valuable than money or things.)**

18. Read each of the following verses and the WRONG interpretation given to them.

Then do two things:

- (1) Tell why the interpretation is wrong.
- (2) Cite one or more Scripture passages that support your position.

A. Ecclesiastes 3:19—“This teaches that there is absolutely no difference between men and animals.”

1. This interpretation is WRONG because:

**This verse is referring to the earthly mortal bodies of both men and animals. The difference between men and animals is that men have an immortal soul that will spend eternity in either heaven or hell and animals do not.**

2. The following Scriptures show that this interpretation is wrong:

**In Genesis 1:28, we read that it was God’s desire that man “rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Psalm 8:5-8 states that God created man a little lower than the heavenly beings, and that all of God’s creation (animals included) are under man.**

B. Psalm 101:2—“This passage teaches that it is possible to live a sinless life.”

1. This interpretation is WRONG because:

**The writer of this psalm is not stating that he is sinless, but rather that he resolves, intends and desires to live a life free from deliberate and intentional violation of God’s laws. We know that it is impossible for humans to live a sinless life; only Jesus was able to do that.**

2. The following Scriptures show that this interpretation is wrong:

**David was the author of this psalm. This is the same David who wrote Psalm 51 and Psalm 32! He knew very well that he was not sinless. Cf: also such well-known passages as Romans 3:10-12, Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:8 and Ecclesiastes 7:20.**

C. Job 22:3—“This passage teaches that it doesn’t matter to God whether we obey Him or not.”

1. This interpretation is WRONG because:

**The person speaking here is Eliphaz who totally misunderstood both Job and God. He was convinced that Job was guilty of many sins that he had not confessed and repented of. He also seemed to misunderstand God’s delight in the ways of those who seek to please Him and live for Him.**

2. The following Scriptures show that this interpretation is wrong:

**Already in Job 1:8 we read that God is pleased with Job whom He regarded as a blameless and upright man in His sight. Psalm 15 also speaks of those who may dwell in God’s sanctuary because they lead a blameless life. In Zephaniah 3:17 we read of the special delight God takes in His people. See also 1 Kings 10:9; Psalm 18:19; 37:23; 147:11, etc.**

D. Psalm 58:6-8—“This passage teaches that we should seek to get revenge on our enemies whenever and however we can.”

1. This interpretation is WRONG because:

**This psalm is one of the imprecatory psalms. David calls on God to judge and punish the evil rulers of his day who pursue injustice, violence and lies. These are not primarily personal enemies of David, and he is not personally taking matters into his own hands. David is calling on God to punish the wicked and to preserve and reward the righteous who have suffered at their hands.**

2. The following Scriptures show that this interpretation is wrong:

**Believers are told to pray for their personal enemies and to seek to do them good (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:20-21). See also Proverbs 25:21; Exodus 23:4-5; Luke 6:27-31. Vengeance belongs to the Lord, not to us (Romans 12:17-19; Deuteronomy 32:35).**

- E. Proverbs 21:14—“This passage teaches us that it’s wise and proper for us to bribe people who may be able to help us.”

1. This interpretation is WRONG because:

**A bribe may well enable a person to get some immediate and temporary benefits. Because of that, the person who has the resources to bribe others may look upon his ability as a “charm” which will get him whatever he wants. However, a bribe which causes a person to act unfairly or unjustly can never receive the Lord’s approval.**

2. The following Scriptures show that this interpretation is wrong:

**Proverbs 16:25 teaches: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Scripture has many references to the fact that God opposes the giving of bribes. For example: Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19; Psalm 15:5; Proverbs 15:27; 17:23; Ecclesiastes 7:7; Isaiah 33:15.**

19. A. Who is the likely author of the book of Lamentations?

**The prophet Jeremiah.**

- B. When and why was this book written?

**This book presents the deep lament of a faithful servant of God over the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord. Jeremiah wrote this book after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Not only was the temple destroyed and the city burned, but the people suffered terribly. The precious things in the temple which had been dedicated to God were now in the idol-worshipping hands of their enemies. Jeremiah readily acknowledges that all this punishment, though heavy, was certainly deserved. God had warned his people through His prophets over and over again, but they continued to disobey Him.**

- C. What is the basic message of the book?

**Jeremiah remembers the faithfulness and mercy and love of God, and that brought him hope.**

- D. In the middle of the book of Lamentations, the author finds reason for hope in the midst of his extremely sad circumstances. What is the reason for his hope? See Lamentations 3:22-23.

**He expressed his hope and confidence in the beautiful and well-known words of Lamentations 3:22-23: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”**

20. The lesson notes remind us that “The poetical books often reflect the special situation of God’s covenant people in Old Testament times.” Why is it important to remember this when we are interpreting the poetical books?

**It’s important to remember the situation of the writers of the poetical literature—just as it’s important to remember the situation of all the other writers of the Bible. The covenant people of the Old Testament people were unique. Their relationship to God was special. The promises they received were unusual. We must be careful not to identify the situation in our own country (whatever country that may be) or in our own lives with that of the Israelites. There are many promises and laws and commands which were given specifically to Israel. Among the special promises were those regarding health, long life, a homeland, freedom from war and everything else that God promised to the people when they were faithful to Him and obeyed Him. He continually intervened on their behalf, casting out other nations from Canaan so that His people might live there, frequently performed outstanding miracles in their behalf, kept them from illness, gave them manna from heaven, water from the rock and many other blessings. God does indeed promise to bless New Testament believers also, but our situation today is not to be identified with that of the organized theocratic community that occupied such a special relationship to God in Old Testament times.**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. The Psalms continue to remain a favorite book for many Christians—even though most of the Psalms were written nearly 3,000 years ago. What is it about the Psalms that makes them so deeply loved and appreciated?

**The Psalms represent the deepest and most sincere feelings of the people of God as they go through life. We can all identify with the Psalmists at one point or another—probably at most points! We, like the Psalmists, also experience joy, sorrow, disappointment, frustration, fear, delight, the need for repentance and the blessing of forgiveness.**

**The Psalms also help us see that we may share all our concerns with God—our doubts and our fears, our pains and our problems—and be sure that He is willing to listen. And finally, the Psalms form a wonderful book of praise for the**

**believer. Those who are not able to make up praise songs of their own can joyfully and confidently praise God with the inspired words of Scripture.**

2. List three of your favorite psalms and indicate why each one is special to you.

**SAMPLE**

**It should be a joy to read your students answers here. If appropriate, you might also wish to share with them some favorite psalms of your own.**

3. The books of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and the Song of Songs all provide very interesting and challenging reading. Do you believe it is possible to learn the way of salvation from these books? Please explain your answer carefully.

**These books certainly do not explicitly teach the way of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. What these books may well do, however, is to produce in a person's heart a strong desire to experience the very best God gives to those who humbly seek Him in repentance, faith and trust. When someone seeks the Lord with all his heart, God may graciously respond by providing this person with a greater knowledge of Himself through His revelation in the New Testament Scriptures—or in some other way that will lead him to salvation.**

4. Make up three proverbs of your own which reflect some biblical truths as well as your own experience.

**SAMPLE**

**Many students may produce some very meaningful and creative proverbs. If you read any that seem especially meaningful to you, please share them with the Crossroads office so that the office in turn may share them with others!**

5. Write a brief poem of praise or thanksgiving in the biblical style of synthetic parallelism. It need not be long, but it should be an expression of your own heart.

**Again, please share with us any poems that are especially noteworthy.**

# LESSON 8: The Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments

Some people choose not to read the Old Testament very often. They say it is too difficult to understand or too old to be relevant. But that's not true. Without the Old Testament, it is impossible to fully understand the New Testament. The Old Testament tells us about man's creation, his fall into sin, the giving of God's laws and the promise of redemption. It describes God's choice of Abraham and his descendants to receive His blessing so that they might become a channel of blessing to the rest of the world. And it gives many signs and prophecies that point to the coming of Jesus. Together the Old and New Testaments form one continuous story. As one familiar saying puts it: **The New is in the Old contained, the Old is by the New explained.**

## THE UNITY BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

It is only when we understand the unity and continuity of the two Testaments that we can appreciate and understand the differences between them. Though the differences are significant, the unity is fundamental.

Note the following important elements which are the same in both Testaments:

- 1. Both Testaments** teach that God is a God of holiness, justice, mercy and love. (Exodus 34:6-7; John 3:16-18)
- 2. Both Testaments** teach that God is sovereign in salvation and history.(Deuteronomy 4:32-38; Psalm 115:3; Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:28-39)
- 3. Both Testaments** teach that people are saved only by God's love and grace and not through human works or effort. (Deuteronomy 6:7-9; Ephesians 2:8-10)
- 4. Both Testaments** teach that people are saved through their faith in the work and promises of God. (Galatians 3:6; Romans 5:1)
- 5. Both Testaments** have Christ as their main focus. (Luke 24:44; John 5:39; John 20:30-31)
- 6. Both Testaments** teach the same fundamental moral law: love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40)
- 7. Both Testaments** require God's people to be holy and obedient. (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15-16)
- 8. Both Testaments** emphasize the importance and value of prayer. (2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 7:7-8)



9. **Both Testaments** teach that God’s chosen people are to be a blessing to the nations of the world. (Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28:19-20)
10. **Both Testaments** teach that spiritual blessings are more important than material blessings. (Psalm 49; Matthew 6:31-32; 1 Timothy 6:17-19)

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

In spite of the many things that are the same in the Old and New Testaments, there are also some significant differences between them. In the Old Testament there are types, shadows, promises and preparation (Hebrews 1:1, 8:1-6). In the New Testament there is reality, fulfillment and completion—in Christ (John 5:39; Luke 4:44; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1-4).

None of those differences, however, represents a change in God or in His plan of redemption. God does not change. His plan of redemption does not change. However, God unfolded that plan gradually and revealed His truth progressively. Each person was responsible for responding in faith and obedience to the revelation he had received. Those who trusted and obeyed God were blessed. Those who did not were punished.

Consider the following differences between the Old and New Testaments:

1. **In the Old Testament**, the primary emphasis is on God’s chosen people, the Jews, who were organized as a political kingdom (Exodus 19:3-6).  
**In the New Testament** (after the Gospels), the primary emphasis is on God’s chosen people in Christ, including both Jews and Gentiles, who are organized as the church (Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:3-4; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).
2. **In the Old Testament**, many of the laws and requirements are relevant only for a specific people, time and place (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:13-23).  
**In the New Testament**, most of the laws and requirements are relevant for all people, times and places (Matthew 28:19-20).
3. **In the Old Testament**, the sign of God’s covenant with His people is circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14).  
**In the New Testament**, the sign of God’s covenant promise is baptism, and circumcision is no longer required (Galatians 5:6; Colossians 2:11-12; Romans 6:3-4).
4. **In the Old Testament**, the people of Israel annually celebrate the Passover as a memorial of their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 12:14, 31-50; Deuteronomy 16:1, 5-7).  
**In the New Testament**, Jesus is the “Passover Lamb” (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7).
5. **In the Old Testament**, God often promises His people earthly blessings in addition to spiritual ones—health, wealth, children, land and a long life (Genesis 26:13; Deuteronomy 6:2, 10-11; 28:1-7; 2 Chronicles 1:12; 9:22; 32:27; Proverbs 10:22).

**In the New Testament**, there is less emphasis on material blessings and a greater emphasis on self-sacrifice, service and laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 14:26-27, 33; 1 Timothy 6:6-10).

6. **In the Old Testament**, God’s people often achieve great victories through fighting, wars and physical battles (The books of Joshua, Samuel and Kings).

**In the New Testament**, the primary enemies of God’s people are spiritual—and spiritual weapons are used to fight spiritual battles (Ephesians 6:11-18).

7. **In the Old Testament**, there is a strong emphasis on obeying God by keeping His written laws (Deuteronomy 4:2, 40; 5:10, 29; 7:9; 13:4; 28:1-2; etc.).

**In the New Testament**, there is a strong emphasis on obeying God by following the leading of His Holy Spirit who lives in the hearts of believers (Romans 8:1-11; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:30-32; 5:15-18).

8. **In the Old Testament**, there is a strong emphasis on sacrifice and worship at the temple (The books of Exodus and Leviticus).

**In the New Testament**, blood sacrifices are no longer required because of Christ’s perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 9 and 10:1-18) and God’s people themselves become the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:19-22).

9. **In the Old Testament**, God’s people depend on priests to assist them in their worship and sacrifice (Exodus 28-30; the book of Leviticus; Hebrews 7:23-28).

**In the New Testament**, all believers become priests who offer sacrifices of confession, thanksgiving, praise and obedience to God without any human intermediary (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 10:19-23; 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5).

10. **In the Old Testament**, there is relatively little emphasis on life after death.

**In the New Testament**, unbelievers are strongly warned of the terrifying judgments that await them (Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 16:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 14:11; 20:15), while believers are to look forward with anticipation to the wonderful future being prepared for them (John 14:1-3; Romans 8:17-21; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-8; Philippians 1:21-23; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 21 and 22).

Note: It is important to note that these differences between the two testaments are not “opposites.” Rather, the New Testament represents a fulfillment of the promises and types of the Old Testament and thus places a greater emphasis on the spiritual blessings believers have in Christ—both in this life and in the life to come.

## LAW AND GRACE IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

One of the most significant questions people have when studying the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is this:

Doesn't the Old Testament teach that salvation comes by keeping the law while the New Testament teaches that salvation is by grace?

The answer to that important question is an emphatic "No!"

It is true that the Old Testament strongly emphasizes the importance of obeying God's laws. Perfect obedience to those laws would have brought man salvation and peace. However, ever since the fall of man, no one has been able to render that perfect obedience (Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12; Romans 11:6). Salvation, therefore, has always come only through God's grace. There was no other way for anyone to be saved in Old Testament times, and there is no other way for people to be saved today (Acts 15:9-11; Galatians 2:15-16; 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Consider carefully the following biblical teachings on law and grace:

#### **1. God's LAW was given many years AFTER His promises of GRACE.**

God pronounced His promises of grace (Genesis 3:15; Romans 4:13) hundreds of years before He gave His people His laws (Exodus, Leviticus and elsewhere). He delivered His people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 20:1) before He gave them the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17). God delivered them solely because of His grace promised to Abraham already hundreds of years earlier (Galatians 3:17-18) and not because of anything they had done. This deliverance of His people from earthly bondage is a picture of the way God frees His people from the bondage and penalty of sin—totally by His grace.

#### **2. God's law was given to His people as a GIFT of grace.**

By giving the people His law, God gave them a gift which He gave to no one else (Psalm 147:19-20). To have His law was a privilege and a blessing (Exodus 19:5-6). The law taught them how they might do what pleased the Lord. Only by pleasing Him would they receive the special blessings He promised to those who obey Him.

#### **3. God's law brought BLESSINGS to those who lived by His grace.**

God graciously promised that obedience to His law would bring rewards (Psalm 19:11). Those who kept His law would enjoy the gift of peace (Psalm 119:165). Walking in His ways would bring life and joy (Psalm 1:1-3). Those who did what God required of them would be considered "righteous" or "blameless" in His sight (Psalm 101:2; Proverbs 11:20; Luke 1:6; Titus 1:6). However, it was only God's grace that enabled anyone to keep His law and thus gain the rewards He promised (Psalm 51:10-13; Psalm 119:29-32). By nature every man lives under the wrath of God (Ephesians 2:1-3).

#### **4. God's law helped people see their great NEED for His grace.**

God required His people to be holy in every situation and in every way (Leviticus 11:44-45). He demanded perfection because He Himself is perfect (Matthew 5:48). However, no one was able to render the perfect obedience and love that God required (Romans 3:20). Consequently, the law taught people their absolute need for God's forgiving grace. In this way the law became a teacher to lead people to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

#### **5. God's law helped people see the LIMITS of His grace.**

God's grace and mercy are limitless for those who repent of their sins and trust in Him for forgiveness and salvation. However, the law by itself can only condemn, not save (Deuteronomy 27:26; John 3:18; Galatians 3:10; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23). Without grace, the law is both frightening and oppressive.

#### **6. God's law helped people understand the WIDENESS of His grace.**

The laws God gave His people in the Old Testament covered almost every dimension of their lives. By giving them such detailed laws, God showed that He cared about absolutely everything they did. By His grace He would protect, prosper and keep them in every area of their lives if they fully trusted and obeyed Him (Deuteronomy 28:1-13).

#### **7. God's law helped people understand the GREATNESS of His grace.**

If the laws helped people understand the greatness of their sins, these laws also helped them understand the greatness of God's grace that would cover all those sins. Only those who understood the greatness of their sin could appreciate the greatness of God's mercy and grace (Psalm 51; Psalm 103:8-12).

#### **8. God's law helped people understand the WONDER of His grace.**

God demonstrated His grace by sending His Son Jesus Christ to obey all His laws on our behalf (Matthew 5:17; 1 Peter 2:22). Christ, also paid the penalty which sinners deserved for breaking those laws (Romans 5:6-8; Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus thus demonstrated how exceedingly wonderful and deep God's grace is for those who put their faith in Him (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7; 2:8-10; 1 Timothy 1:14).

#### **9. God's law led people to long for the FREEDOM they can have through grace.**

The Old Testament laws, though a gift from God, placed a heavy burden on those who received them (Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:1). Grace frees believers from that condemnation (Romans 8:1-5) and frees them also from the burden of obeying the vast system of Old Testament laws (Romans 8:2; Galatians 3:25; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:13-22).

#### **10. God's law provided a GUIDE FOR LIVING for all who were saved by grace.**

Believers are still required to obey the moral law of God expressed in the summary of the law (Matthew 22:37-39; 1 John 3:11). They are also required to obey other laws or commands which God has given His people in the New Testament (such as those found in Romans 12; Ephesians 4 and 5; 1 John 3:21-24; 1 John 5:2-3 and many other places). Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, obedience to God's law is both possible and rewarded (Psalm 51:10-13; 119:97-104; Romans 8:4-9; Galatians 5:13-18, 22-25; Titus 3:3-8; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:3-8; Jude 24).

### **MORAL STANDARDS IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS**

Another significant question concerns the relationship between the moral standards in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament.



Are God's standards absolute? Or do they change from one situation or time to another? What does the Bible say?

The basic answer to that question is this: God's fundamental standards regarding right and wrong have never changed. His standards are absolute. However, the specific application of those standards may vary somewhat from one situation to another. Moreover, God's response to man's failure to live up to His standards may vary from one time to another.

Consider the following statements concerning moral standards:

**1. God's fundamental moral laws for mankind have always been the same:**

- a. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
- b. Love your neighbor as yourself. Every other law in the Bible is built upon the foundation of these two basic laws (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40).

**2. Such things as lying, stealing, adultery, idolatry and murder did not become "wrong" only when God gave a specific law concerning them.** They were always wrong because they are contrary to God's fundamental law of love—whether that law is written down or not. Even those who do not have the written law still may have the basic requirements of the law written on their hearts and conscience (Romans 2:14-15).

**3. In both Old and New Testaments, God required His people to obey Him from the heart and not simply to keep His laws externally or formally.** External obedience was no more pleasing to God in Old Testament times (Psalm 51:15-17; Isaiah 1:10-15; Isaiah 29:13) than it was in the New Testament (Matthew 5 through 7; Matthew 23:15-28). Jesus' teaching on this subject was very much needed in His day, but it was not new. He simply stated afresh what God had always intended when He gave His law.

**4. In both the Old and New Testaments, God's holiness and honor are of greater importance than man's professed freedom or "right" to happiness.** Therefore, God sometimes honored those who in righteous anger defended His honor, even though it involved the taking of a human life (for example, Numbers 25:6-13; Psalm 106:30; Acts 5:1-11).

(Note: these examples are not presented in the Bible as guidelines for our actions today, but they do help us understand the extreme importance of God's honor and holiness.)

**5. In the Old Testament, there are certain "creation patterns" which were later formulated into specific laws.** For example, the commandment to keep one day in seven "holy" (separate and distinct from the others) was based on the creation pattern of God's six days of labor and one day of rest (Exodus 20:8-11). Specifics on how to observe this day of rest vary from the Old Testament to the New Testament, but the "principle" of a rest day is based on a creation pattern which does not change.

**6. In the Old Testament, God sometimes required the Israelites to completely destroy their enemies (for example, Deuteronomy 7:2-5, 16, 24), while in the New Testament, believers are told to pray for their enemies and treat them with kindness (Matthew 5:39-44; Romans 12:17-21).** This, however, does not represent a change in God's standards. The Israelites were required to destroy their enemies because those enemies served as continual threats to the Israelites' own holiness and their worship of God at a time when they themselves were often very weak. Moreover, when they destroyed those enemies, they were not seeking personal revenge but were simply acting as God's agents in cleansing the land from pollution and sin (Joshua 11:18-20). Though the New Testament speaks relatively little of the earthly destruction of God's enemies, it emphasizes their eternal destruction in even more graphic and frightening terms.

**7. In the Old Testament, God's people who were victorious in battle were often permitted to take the spoils of victory for themselves (Numbers 31:9-12; Deuteronomy 20:14-15).** In the New Testament believers are warned against the dangers of riches (Matthew 19:23-24; Luke 12:15; 1 Timothy 6:9-10) and are told that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). It's important to remember, however, that on many occasions in the Old Testament, the people were not permitted to take the spoils of victory for themselves (for example, Joshua 6:18-19). When they were permitted to do so, it was primarily a matter of beginning to use in God's service those things which had been used before in the worship and service of foreign gods. It's also important to remember that the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, makes very clear the deceitfulness of riches (for example, Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 and Psalm 49) and the importance and blessedness of giving (for example, Deuteronomy 16:17; Isaiah 58:7, 10; Exodus 35:22; Exodus 36:5).

**8. In the Old Testament (see Deuteronomy 24:1-4, for example), God sometimes tolerated behavior (such as polygamy and divorce) which is prohibited in the New Testament.** Jesus made it very clear, however, that divorce was always contrary to God's will, even though He tolerated it for a time and under certain circumstances because of the hardness of the people's hearts (Matthew 19:3-9). Paul also made it clear that God's ideal for marriage was that each husband have but one wife (1 Timothy 3:2, 12). God's standards had not changed, even though God did not always punish those in Old Testament times who violated them.

**9. In the Old Testament there was the familiar law of "an eye for an eye" and a "tooth for a tooth" (Leviticus 24:19-20).** In the New Testament, believers are told to love their enemies, do good to those who do hurt them and pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:39-41; 5:44; Romans 12:19).

The Old Testament law, however, was not designed to indulge a personal desire to "get even," but rather was intended to promote justice and fairness and to eliminate vindictive retaliation, something very common in the cultures of the day. It's interesting to note that we have no specific examples in the Bible where the law of



retaliation was actually carried out. Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that in Romans 12:19-20 Paul quotes from an Old Testament passage (Proverbs 25:21-22) when warning against revenge or vindictiveness. Other Old Testament passages which he might have cited in this context are Exodus 23:4 and Proverbs 24:17. God never encouraged or tolerated personal revenge.

**10. In both the Old and New Testaments, God always required perfect obedience from the heart because He is a holy God who cannot tolerate evil (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15-16; Hebrews 12:14).** In the New Testament, the specific laws regarding holiness are fewer than in the Old Testament, but the requirements may be even greater (see, for example, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7). Though no one is able to meet God's standard perfectly, in both the Old and New Testaments it is God's Holy Spirit who helps believers understand and do His will (Psalm 51:10-12; Romans 8:5, 9, 13).

**QUESTIONS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENTS**

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1. Please indicate which of the following statements are true and which ones are false. Circle T (True) or F (False)
- A. ☐ F The fundamental moral law of God is the same in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
  - B. T ☐ F The way of salvation in Old Testament times was much different from the way of salvation in New Testament times.
  - C. T ☐ F Every law God gave in the Old Testament times is still valid today.
  - D. ☐ T ☐ F In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized the importance of serving God from the heart and not simply externally.
  - E. T ☐ ☐ F In the Old Testament, God never expected His people Israel to be concerned about the rest of the people in the world.
  - F. ☐ T ☐ F Since Jesus gave His life on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, believers no longer have to offer animal sacrifices.
  - G. T ☐ ☐ F The sign of God's Covenant of Grace is the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament.
  - H. ☐ T ☐ F There is more emphasis on life after death in the New Testament than in the Old Testament.
  - I. T ☐ ☐ F In Old Testament times, God's laws made it difficult for the people to understand and appreciate the wonder and greatness of God's grace.

- J. T ☐ ☐ F People who are saved by God's grace do not have to be concerned about holiness and obedience.
2. Six of the statements in # 1 are False. For each of these statements, indicate WHY the statement is not true.
- A. Statement   B   is false because: **God has always saved people by grace through faith—whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament.**
  - B. Statement   C   is false because: **many laws given in the Old Testament were intended only for the people living before the time of Christ.**
  - C. Statement   E   is false because: **God chose Israel as His people so that they might be a blessing to the rest of the world.**
  - D. Statement   G   is false because: **the sign of the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament was circumcision while the sign of this Covenant in the New Testament is baptism.**
  - E. Statement   I   is false because: **God's laws made it very easy to understand and appreciate God's grace. The people were constantly violating God's laws and knew that the only way to be accepted by God was through His grace.**
  - F. Statement   J   is false because: **those who are saved by grace MUST pursue holiness and MUST obey God and they also WANT to.**
3. List five important elements which are the SAME in both Old Testament and New Testament.
- Do NOT include any of the items listed in Question 1.
- A. **Both teach that God is a God of holiness, justice, mercy and love.**
  - B. **Both teach that God is sovereign in salvation and history.**
  - C. **Both have Christ as their main focus.**
  - D. **Both emphasize the importance and value of prayer.**
  - E. **Both teach that spiritual blessings are more important than material blessings.**
4. List FIVE important differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- Do NOT include any of the items referred to in Question 1.
- A. **In the Old Testament, the primary emphasis is on God's chosen people, the Jews, whereas in the New Testament, the primary emphasis is on God's chosen people in Christ, including both Jews and Gentiles.**
  - B. **In the Old Testament, the people of Israel annually celebrate the Passover as a memorial of their deliverance from Egypt, whereas in the New Testament, people celebrate the Lord's Supper in memory of Jesus as the**

**Passover Lamb who delivers His people from sin.**

- C. **In the Old Testament, God's people often achieve great victories through fighting and war, whereas in the New Testament, the primary enemies of God's people are spiritual who are defeated only by spiritual weapons.**
- D. **In the Old Testament, there is a strong emphasis on obeying God by keeping His written laws, whereas in the New Testament, there is a strong emphasis on obeying God by following the leading of the Holy Spirit.**
- E. **In the Old Testament, God often promises His people earthly blessings in addition to spiritual ones—health, wealth, children, land and a long life. In the New Testament, there is less emphasis on material blessings and a greater emphasis on self-sacrifice, service and laying up treasures in heaven.**

**\*\* Additional Answer\*\* In the Old Testament, God's people depend on priests to assist them in worship and sacrifice, whereas in the New Testament, all believers become priests who offer sacrifices of confession, thanksgiving, praise and obedience directly to God.**

- 5. A. What are the two fundamental laws of God which never change?
  - 1. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.**
  - 2. **Love your neighbor as yourself.**
- B. Where are these laws found in the Old Testament?

**Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18**
- C. Where are these laws found in the New Testament?

**Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31**
- 6. When God made a Covenant of Grace with Abraham, He gave him a SIGN of that covenant.
  - A. 1. What was that sign? **The sign was circumcision.**
  - 2. Where do we first read about this sign in Genesis?

**We first read about this in Genesis 17:9-14.**
  - B. What would happen to those Jewish men who neglected or refused to take this sign seriously? (See Genesis 17:14; Exodus 4:24-26; Joshua 5:2-9.)

**Those who neglected to take the sign of the covenant seriously would be cut off from God's people and might even be put to death.**
  - C. What was the spiritual significance of this sign? (See Deuteronomy 10:16; Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11.)

**Circumcision was a sign of spiritual cleansing, the removal of sin, renewing the heart (repentance and conversion) and putting off the sinful nature.**

- D. Does God still require His people to be circumcised as a sign of their covenant relationship to Him? (See Galatians 5:6; 6:15; Colossians 2:11).

**No.**

- E. 1. What is the present sign of God's covenant with His people?

**Baptism is the new covenant sign.**
- 2. What does this new sign signify? (See Colossians 2:11-12; Acts 2:38, 41; Acts 16:15; 16:33; Romans 6:3-4.)

**Baptism signifies essentially the same thing that circumcision did—cleansing, renewal, washing away sin, receiving a new life. Baptism has the added symbolism of dying and rising with Jesus Christ.**
- F. Why do you think God changed the sign of His covenant?

**There may be at least three reasons why the covenant sign was changed.**

  - (1) **In the Old Testament the covenant sign was given only to males. Under the new covenant in Christ, the old distinction between male and female is no longer relevant (Galatians 3:28).**
  - (2) **In the Old Testament, there was a strong emphasis on the shedding of blood. After Christ shed His blood for us, blood sacrifices and bloody signs are no longer needed or appropriate.**
  - (3) **In the Old Testament, there was a much stronger emphasis on the formation of the people of God by natural descent. In this context, the physical sign of circumcision was highly appropriate since the covenant sign itself was always involved in the procreation of new members of the family of God.**
- 7. Read Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.
  - A. What phrase or idea is repeated in each of these verses?

**"Through you (or, through your offspring) all nations on earth will be blessed."**
  - B. Why do you think these words were repeated so often?

**These words were given three times to Abraham, once to his son Isaac and once to Jacob. They were also repeated in the New Testament in Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:8. God never wanted the Jews to forget two things:**

    - (1) **He would indeed continue to bless them so that the entire world would eventually be blessed through them. Even when times were difficult and the people might wonder what was going to happen to them, God reminded them of His promise to keep them and bless them.**
    - (2) **God also never wanted them to forget that, though they were His chosen**

**people, He chose them so that they might be a blessing to others. The Jews tended to forget that, remembering only their privileges and not their obligations. As a result, they often looked down upon the Gentiles with derision and scorn.**

- C. In the light of these passages, evaluate the following statement: "After God chose the Jews to be His own special people, He no longer was concerned with the rest of the world, and He didn't expect the Jews to be concerned with others either."

**This statement is obviously not true. Though some of the Jews may indeed have felt that they were the only objects of God's love and concern, God Himself always had a world-wide redemptive purpose. The Jews were MEANS to the fulfillment of that purpose; their own salvation was never the primary END of God's redemptive plan.**

8. Read each of the following passages and indicate whether the law given in the passage was intended to be permanent or intended only for a certain time and place. Write either Permanent or Temporary in front of each passage.

- A. Permanent Exodus 20:15  
B. Permanent Deuteronomy 5:18  
C. Permanent Deuteronomy 6:5  
D. Permanent Leviticus 19:18  
E. Temporary Leviticus 20:25  
F. Temporary Leviticus 11:39  
G. Temporary Leviticus 4:4  
H. Permanent Exodus 20:13  
I. Temporary Leviticus 2:11  
J. Permanent Leviticus 19:4

9. A. Read Exodus 20:2. Did God give the Ten Commandments to His people while they were still in slavery in Egypt or after they were freed from slavery?

**AFTER. God gave the law after He delivered His people from slavery.**

- B. What does this (your answer above) teach us about the relationship between law and grace in the Old Testament?

**This is another indication that keeping God's law was not intended as a way to EARN grace or MERIT salvation. Deliverance from slavery in Egypt is a symbol of deliverance from the slavery of sin. Grace came before the law did. Salvation and deliverance are GIFTS of God's grace.**

- C. Read Galatians 3:17-18. Which came first: God's covenant promise to Abraham or the giving of the law through Moses?

**THE PROMISE came first. Paul makes a big point of this in Galatians 3. The law did not come until hundreds of years after God gave His covenant promise to Abraham.**

- D. What do you think Galatians 3:17-18 teaches us about the relationship between law and grace?

**This again demonstrates clearly that grace PRECEDES law. This same pattern exists throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example, in the epistles (such as Romans, Galatians and Ephesians), we generally find a fairly extensive presentation of God's wonderful grace in salvation before we find the "practical" sections emphasizing how God wants us to live. (Note how this same pattern is found in the Heidelberg Catechism where the discussion of the Ten Commandments FOLLOWS the section on God's gracious plan of redemption. Note also how already in Genesis 3:15 God gave His promise of salvation before He announced the punishment that would follow from the disobedience of Adam and Eve.)**

10. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Old Testament law (Matthew 5:17), but He was often accused of breaking the law (for example, John 5:10, 18; 9:16). How would you explain this? Was Jesus a law keeper or a law breaker?

**Jesus was a law keeper! However, He went beyond the letter of the law and revealed God's basic intention and purpose in giving the law. As a result, He did not always keep the law according to the interpretation devised by the religious teachers of the day. Nor did He observe all the laws that they had made. Consequently, they accused Him of being a law breaker, while in God's eyes He clearly was the only One who ever kept the law perfectly (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5; 1 Peter 2:22)!**

11. A. List some Old Testament Psalms which teach that God "lived" in the temple in Jerusalem in Old Testament times.

**Psalms 11:4; 27:4; 65:4; 84:1-4**

- B. List some New Testament passages which teach that believers are now the "temple" of God.

**1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:21-22**

- C. What is the practical significance of the fact that believers are now the "temple" of God?

**Believers are to live lives of personal holiness in every respect, since God now dwells within them. They must carefully guard body and mind and spirit against anything that would defile the "temple of the Lord." At the same time,**



**they may rejoice in knowing that God is not only “near” them but within them. He is there to provide comfort, courage, strength and spiritual power so that they may live meaningful and fruitful lives that are pleasing to Him.**

12. In what way did God’s law help people see their NEED for His grace? Include some Scripture passages in your answer.

**In the Old Testament, God required the people to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5) and to love their neighbors as themselves (Leviticus 19:18). In addition God gave His people laws which covered virtually every aspect of their lives—physical, material and spiritual. See the explicit and extensive laws, for example, in Exodus and Leviticus. There was a prescribed ritual or activity for every aspect of their worship life. There were stipulations concerning sin offerings and guilt offerings and burnt offerings of various kinds. The people were constantly reminded that God expected them to obey Him in EVERYTHING and in every way.**

**As a result of all of this, the people became conscious of the fact that they continually fell short of being the kind of people God wanted them to be (Psalm 51:1-5). Moreover, they could never “make up” one day what they failed to do earlier, since God required full obedience all of the time. They could never “earn” some kind of merit which could be applied to past failures. The only possible way for them to be at peace with God and to have their transgressions forgiven was to humbly repent of their sins and plead in faith for God’s GRACE (Psalm 51:16-17).**

**Both the Psalmists and the prophets therefore highly extol the grace of God in many places (e.g., Psalm 86:15-16; 103:8-18; Micah 7:18-19; Isaiah 55:7). That was man’s only hope then—and it is our only hope now.**

13. Explain what is meant by the following statement: “God’s law helped people see the LIMITS of His grace.” Include some Scripture passages in your answer.

**God was exceedingly gracious to those who humbly confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness. However, God also indicated very clearly that those who continued to sin WITHOUT confessing those sins and without being truly sorry for them and sincerely asking for His grace and mercy would suffer the consequences of their sin—both in this life and in the life to come.**

**In Exodus 23:7 we read, “I will not acquit the guilty.” In Exodus 34:6-7, after God reveals Himself as a compassionate and gracious God, the Scripture adds, “Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.” Deuteronomy 28 describes the blessings which God will give to those who love and obey Him but also reveals the severe punishments which will come on those who do not (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Psalm 73:18-19, 27 describes the final destiny of those who are far from God. And many, many other passages in the Old Testament also indicate the “limits” of God’s grace.**

14. List three Old Testament passages and three New Testament passages which help us understand the GREATNESS of God’s grace. You may include parables, psalms, specific statements, stories of forgiveness or whatever you choose.

### **SAMPLE**

**Since there are so many appropriate verses and stories and statements which could be given here, it seems unnecessary to list any specifics from either the Old Testament or New Testament as examples. Each mentor will have to evaluate the answers given by his/her students. If you feel a student’s answers are weak, you may wish to present some favorite verses or stories of your own.**

15. A. According to Romans 1:18-20, why do people have no excuse if they fail to worship and honor God?

**People have no excuse if they fail to worship and honor God since God has revealed Himself to everyone everywhere through His activity in the natural world. All people should know that the God who created the world is not to be found within the creation itself. God has revealed His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—through the things He has made. People who give their ultimate allegiance to things which God has made are regarded as fools (vs. 22).**

- B. According to Romans 2:14-15, why are people guilty of violating God’s law even if they have never read or heard the law?

**Romans 2:14-15 indicates that God has created all men with a conscience that helps them know what God requires of them. Though they do not have the specifics of the law as God’s people did in Old Testament times, they have an inborn awareness of God’s fundamental standards concerning what is right and what is wrong.**

16. If believers are saved by God’s grace and not by their works of obedience, why do we still have so many laws or guidelines for Christian living in the New Testament?

**When we are saved by God’s grace, it will be our heartfelt desire to live a life of gratitude and thanksgiving to God for His salvation. The “laws” or guidelines which God gives us in the New Testament help us know what pleases God and what doesn’t. Besides, even though we are saved and have the Holy Spirit living within us, we still have to wrestle with the “old nature” which has not been completely eradicated. We are therefore repeatedly urged, in one way or another, to live “according to the Spirit” and not “according to the flesh” (Romans 8:5-14). In Ephesians 4:22-24 we are told to “put off the old self” and to “put on the new self.” In Colossians 3:1-17 believers are urged to “put to death what belongs to your earthly nature,” to “set your hearts on things above” where Christ is, and to “set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”**

**Regrettably, the temptation to sin will remain with us in one way or another as long as we live. By having the commands and guidelines which God presents in the New Testament, we have additional light for our pathway and a lamp for our feet.**

17. A. What did the Old Testament teach about marriage in Genesis 2:24?

**Genesis 2:24 teaches that a man should leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife. Though this passage does not explicitly teach that marriage is to be a lifelong union, it certainly is implied. And Jesus, in Matthew 19:6, made explicit what Genesis 2:24 implied.**

- B. What provisions were made for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4?

**Deuteronomy 24:1-4 regulates the practice of divorce in such a way that a man could not arbitrarily dismiss his wife and simply walk away from her without giving her some kind of “legal protection” (a certificate of divorce).**

- C. Why were these provisions made?

**God “tolerated” divorce only because of the hardness of men’s hearts (Matthew 19:8). The men referred to in Deuteronomy 24 were apparently callously divorcing their wives without any regard to their wives’ future well-being. The regulation of Deuteronomy 24, therefore, apparently represented a measure of “improvement” on the existing situation.**

- D. What did Jesus teach about marriage in Matthew 19:3-9?

**Jesus indicated clearly that the practice of divorce, however carefully regulated, was contrary to God’s initial (and continuing) intention concerning marriage. He taught that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.**

- E. In the light of all the teachings above, how would you evaluate the following statement? “Our standards on marriage and divorce today should not be any stricter than those found in the Old Testament.”

**Jesus clearly taught us how God wants us to regard the marriage relationship. From the beginning, God intended that marriages should be permanent. Nothing has ever changed that. Our view of marriage and divorce should not be based on the temporary provisions God made to regulate a bad situation at one point in the Old Testament. Rather, our views and our practice should be based on God’s clear pattern established with the very first marriage.**

18. Read Romans 8:5-9 and summarize in your own words the teaching of this passage.

**Those who follow their sinful nature set their minds on what this sinful nature desires. This mind is hostile to God, cannot please God and leads to death.**

**Those who live in accordance with the leading of the Holy Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires—and this leads to life and peace.**

19. A. In Old Testament times, only the priests were permitted to offer sacrifices in the temple. Which chapters in the book of Exodus refer to the priests, their garments, their duties and the sacrifices to be offered?

**Exodus 20:24-26; 23:14-19; 28:1-42; 29:1-46; 30:1-10; 30:17-33; 39:1-30.**

**Note to mentors: The passages in Exodus 20 and 23 refer to sacrifices, but there is not yet any reference to the priests. As a mentor, you will probably have to provide some flexibility in evaluating your students’ answers. Some students may also choose to include the references in Exodus to the tabernacle (where the sacrifices are to be offered) and also to some of the furniture in the tabernacle.**

- B. In Old Testament times, only one person was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies in the temple where the Ark of the Covenant was kept (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:6-8).

1. Who was this person? **The High Priest**

2. How often might he enter the Holy of Holies? **Once a year**

3. On what day might he enter the Holy of Holies? **On the Day of Atonement**

- C. When Jesus died on the cross, the thick veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). What did this symbolize? (See Hebrews 9 and 10.)

**The tearing of the veil symbolized that the way is now “open” into the presence of God. Jesus has opened the way for us. We need no longer go through any other intermediary (such as an earthly priest) or fear to enter into God’s presence. We now boldly enter into His presence through the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19-22).**

- D. After Jesus made His perfect sacrifice on the cross for our sins, all believers become “priests.”

1. List two New Testament passages which refer to the “priesthood” of believers.

a. **1 Peter 2:5, 9**

b. **Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6**

2. What kind of “sacrifices” are believers now expected to offer? (See Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5, 9).

**Believers are to offer their bodies as living sacrifices (in loving service to God), present sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, perform good works, share with others and offer spiritual sacrifices.**

20. A. Read Matthew 5:20. What do you think Jesus meant when He spoke those words?

**The Pharisees were “righteous before the law” in the sense that they sincerely sought to obey (externally, at least) every law of God and every other law prescribed by their leaders. As a Pharisee, Paul also lived in good conscience before God and man (Acts 24:16, 26:5) and achieved a righteousness equal to that of any other Pharisee (Philippians 3:6). However, the Pharisees were often “good on the outside but rotten on the inside” (Matthew 23:23-28). Jesus made it clear that the only ones who would be fit for the kingdom of heaven would be those with pure hearts, humble spirits and Spirit-given life. Ultimately, no one will be able to enter the kingdom of heaven on the basis of what he does. Only those who are born again by the Holy Spirit will be able to enter the kingdom of heaven (John 3:5-7; Romans 3:21-22).**

B. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:23. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote these verses?

**Paul is writing in these passages about Christian liberty—that is, liberty to make personal choices in those areas where God has not given specific commands or guidelines or prohibitions. Paul obviously did not mean that murder, adultery, lying and stealing were permissible for him. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, immediately before what he writes in verse 12, Paul lists the kinds of sins that will keep people from the kingdom of God. So, the “liberty” Paul referred to involves only those things where God has not spoken directly.**

**And, even in the areas of Christian liberty, Paul acknowledges that there are many things which he “might” do but which he would not do because they would not help him and they might hurt others. These things are not “beneficial.” They do not help to build up the body of Christ or promote His work in this world.**

**Believers must therefore look beyond rules and regulations to determine what is most pleasing to their Lord and what will be most beneficial for the coming of His kingdom. Our main desire should not be to exercise our God-given liberty for our own personal enjoyment but rather to build up ourselves and others in the Christian faith (Romans 14:13-23).**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? *“It’s a great blessing to have and to know God’s Law.”*

Please explain your answer.

**AGREE. It is clearly a blessing to have and know the Word of God (including the**

**law of God). The Israelites, for example, were regarded as specially blessed to have God’s law in Old Testament times (Psalm 147:19-20; Romans 3:1-2). It is not a blessing, of course, to try to earn salvation by keeping God’s law, but it is a blessing to know how God wants us to live. In His grace God has promised blessings upon those who live according to His law, and He has given us His Holy Spirit to make the required obedience increasingly possible. Faithful and obedient believers, therefore, are able to enjoy special blessings which someone who is not walking with the Lord in obedience cannot experience. (Recall the blessings for which the writer of Psalm 119 gave thanks in connection with his having and knowing the laws of God.) Those who live according to God’s law enjoy special fellowship with their Lord, bring praise and honor to the Lord, experience special blessing from the Lord and will usually also find their lives to be much more fruitful for the cause of the Lord.**

2. Evaluate the following statement in the light of Mark 9:41; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; and Ephesians 6:8.

*“Since salvation is purely a gift of God’s grace, it will not matter in the long run whether we obey God’s laws or not.”*

**Anyone who is truly saved is given new life and a new heart through the work of the Holy Spirit. He is therefore said to be “born again” and is a new creation in Christ Jesus (John 3:3-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17). As a born again believer, he will have new desires and new goals in life. He will seek to please God and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who is indifferent to holiness, careless about obedience and devoid of love for God cannot claim to be a true child of God.**

**Moreover, God promises rewards in the coming life to those who follow Him, obey Him and serve Him in this life. These are rewards of grace rather than of merit, but they have eternal significance. It matters very much, therefore, whether we obey God’s laws or whether we don’t.**

**Note to mentors: Though you probably will not want to get into an extensive discussion of this subject at this point, it is important to remember that every New Testament passage that refers to Judgment Day indicates that rewards will be based on how we lived. See not only the verses already referred to in this question, but see also such passages as Matthew 25:14-30 and 31-46; Revelation 20:11-13; John 5:28-29; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; and 3:4-5, 12, 21.**

3. How would you respond to someone who says, *“The Old Testament contains many promises of earthly blessings to those who love and obey God. Since the blessings God gave His people in the New Testament are even greater than those in the Old*



*Testament, we certainly may expect to have at least as many earthly blessings today as Old Testament believers did”?*

Please give the reasons for your answer. Include some Scripture passages to support your position.

**DISAGREE.** This question is rather challenging, since it is true that New Testament believers do have even greater blessings and promises than people in the Old Testament do. However, we must recall that the Old Testament places far more emphasis on blessings in this life than the New Testament does while the New Testament places much more emphasis on the blessings which will be ours in the life to come.

The Old Testament people of God were promised a secure and fruitful land, health, material prosperity, safety, peace and a long life if they trusted and obeyed God. In the New Testament, on the contrary, the believer is told that he will likely have to face persecution, opposition and hardship on this earth if he faithfully follows the Lord. See, for example, Matthew 5:11; 10:17; 10:39; 24:9; Luke 21:12; John 15:20, 16:33; Acts 5:41; 9:16; 14:22; 20:23; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 4:7-11; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-16; 5:10, and others.

This does not mean, of course, that the New Testament believer will not have many blessings in this life, too. He often will. However, he has to be prepared for opposition and hardship which might come just because he is faithfully following his Lord. That kind of situation was much less common in Old Testament times, though some of God’s prophets did also suffer rejection and persecution simply because they were being faithful to the Lord.

4. Do you believe it was more difficult to live according to God’s standards in Old Testament times or after Jesus came? Give some examples or Scripture verses to explain or support your answer.

**It has never been easy to live according to God’s standards! It wasn’t easy in Old Testament times; it wasn’t easy in New Testament times; and it isn’t easy today. Each era has its own unique challenges and temptations. Besides, by nature we are inclined to live our own way rather than God’s way.**

**We know that in Old Testament times there were far more specific laws which God’s people had to obey than there are for New Testament believers. For example, we no longer live under the civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, and the people of God no longer form a political kingdom with all its specific rules and regulations. However, God’s standards for New Testament believers are certainly in no way lower than His standards in the Old Testament.**

**Jesus pointed out that God requires that we be perfect even as He is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Peter reminds us that we must be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15). And Hebrews 12:14 teaches us that without holiness no one will see the Lord.**

In general, God’s basic requirement was the same in the Old Testament as in the New Testament—namely, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The biggest single difference between the Old Testament believer and the New Testament believer is that New Testament believers are personally and continually indwelt by the Holy Spirit! They also have seen (or read about) the perfect example of their Savior—an example which Old Testament believers never had. In addition, they have the added incentive provided by the New Testament descriptions of the joys and blessings and glory that await them after this life. We who are living today also have the great advantage of centuries of Christian influence behind us. We know (or can learn) what the Spirit has done in the world throughout history and can therefore be very confident that holy, joyful and fruitful living are truly possible—even under the worst of circumstances.

So, given these truths, it would seem “easier” to live according to God’s standards during the New Testament era than before. However, there really is no “right” answer to this question, since the situation and circumstances of every person are different.

**Note to mentors:** Many students might approach this question from a totally different perspective. For example, they may cite all the temptations which are constantly bombarding us from all sides and they may also refer to the general negative attitude of many people in our society toward the Bible, the church and the things of God. There is no longer a general “consensus” concerning what is right and wrong and we no longer have the “pressures” of society to help us conform to that which we all agree is right. Do not be quick to criticize the answers of your students, though you may wish to share with them some things which they have forgotten and which you think are important to remember.

5. How would you respond to the following argument?

*“The more we know about God and His laws, the greater our responsibility is. Therefore, it is better not to tell people about God and the Bible, since we simply increase their responsibility . . . and also their punishment if they do not obey.”*

**It certainly is true that the more we have and the more we know about God and His will for our lives, the greater our responsibility is. The conclusion drawn from this, however, is not valid. It is only by knowing God and His Son Jesus**

**Christ that we can have eternal life. Also, it is only by knowing God's will for our lives that we can have the joy of living in fellowship with God. Further, only by trusting Christ can we be filled with the Holy Spirit and manifest the fruit of the Spirit. Also, only by knowing and doing the will of God can we enjoy the rewards which He graciously promises to those who obey Him and love Him.**

**Moreover, Christ has commanded us to bring the message of the Gospel to the entire world, so we would be disobedient if we did not do so. It is in obedience to His command and out of love for the lost that we bring the message of salvation as Christ has told us to. If there are some who choose not to believe our message after we have lovingly and prayerfully presented it to them, the responsibility for their unbelief is theirs, not ours.**

## LESSON 9: Understanding the Gospels and Acts

By the time Jesus was born, the situation in the land of Israel was dramatically different from what it had been during Old Testament times. New groups of religious leaders were prominent, new customs were being practiced and a new nation of foreigners was ruling over the Jews.

### BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENTS

#### 1. Religious Developments

- a. While the Jews were in exile, they no longer had the temple as a place of worship and sacrifice. This represented a tremendous change for the people, since the temple had been the primary center of all their religious activities. With the end of temple worship and the prominence of the priests in their religious life, the Jews' written Scriptures became very precious to them. Those Scriptures were virtually all they had left of their religious heritage. Of special importance to them were the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses, which formed the foundation and core of all their religious studies. Young Jewish men diligently studied these Scriptures under the guidance of religious teachers called rabbis.
- b. Since the temple no longer existed, the Jewish leaders established synagogues in various places where the people could worship God, fellowship together, and hear God's Word read and explained. It was also at the synagogues where the official instruction of the young men usually took place.
- c. The Jewish religious leaders developed extensive commentaries on the Old Testament, especially on the books of Moses. They also added many new laws of their own to the ones God had given at Mt. Sinai. A group of men called scribes or teachers of the law became recognized as "experts" in interpreting these laws and applying them to the lives of the people.

#### 2. Political Developments

For many years the Jews lived under the authority of foreign rulers. However, in the year 165 B.C. they gained a period of relative independence under courageous leaders popularly known as the Maccabees. Their first major victory resulted in the cleansing and rededication of the temple after it had been desecrated by foreigners. This event is referred to in the Bible as the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22) and is still commemorated by Jews today during their Hanukkah celebration. The people cherished their freedom under the Maccabees (and their successors), but that freedom did not bring them either stability or peace. After little more than 100 years of independence, the Jews were conquered by the Romans.

# LIFE UNDER THE ROMANS

## 1. The Political Situation

At the time Jesus was born, Herod the Great was ruling as king over the land of Israel (Palestine). Herod had been appointed as king by the Romans in 37 B.C. His primary job was to keep the Jews under control without unduly irritating them. Herod was a jealous and insecure ruler, ruthless, cruel and paranoid. Most of the Jews hated being under Roman control, but there was little they could do about it. There were always many Roman soldiers around to make sure the Jews did not get out of control.

## 2. The Religious Situation

Though the Romans exercised complete political authority, they gave the Jews much freedom and authority in religious matters. Herod also enlarged the Jewish temple so that it became an impressive and beautiful place of worship. He let the Jews have their own governing body of 71 persons called the Council or Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin, headed by the high priest, could make and enforce almost any laws they wished regarding the religious life of the Jews. They could even punish and imprison people for violating their laws. However, the Romans would not permit them to put anyone to death without their permission.

## 3. Taxation

Everyone had to pay taxes to the Roman emperor (called Caesar), but the Romans were wise enough to have Jews do the collecting for them. These Jewish tax-collectors were often very wealthy. Most of the Jews despised them. Two well-known tax collectors in the New Testament are Matthew (Matthew 9:9-12) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9), both of whom became followers of Jesus.

## 4. Political Leaders

King Herod the Great died about two years after Jesus was born. After his death, his son Archelaus ruled in the area of Judea where Jerusalem and Bethlehem were located (Matthew 2:22). Another son, Herod Antipas, took over in the north where Nazareth and the cities of Galilee were located. It was Herod Antipas who put John the Baptist in prison and who later beheaded him (Matthew 14:1-12). This same Herod also briefly put Jesus on trial when he (Herod) was visiting in Jerusalem (Luke 23:7-12). During the time of Jesus' public ministry, Pontius Pilate (not part of Herod's family) served as the Roman governor over Judea. It was Pilate who gave the order for Jesus to be crucified (Luke 23:13-25; Acts 4:27).

King Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, tried to please the Jews by putting the apostle James to death (Acts 12:1-2). He also wanted to kill Peter, but Peter miraculously escaped from prison with the help of an angel (Acts 12:2-19). Several years later, Agrippa's son, King Herod Agrippa II, presided over the trial of the apostle Paul in Caesarea at the request of the Roman governor Festus (Acts 25:13-26:32). Though neither Agrippa nor Festus believed that Paul deserved death or imprisonment,

they agreed that they should honor Paul's appeal to be tried in the court of the emperor, Caesar. Thus, Paul was sent as a prisoner to Rome.

For two whole years Paul lived as a prisoner in a rented house in Rome awaiting trial (Acts 28:30-31). He apparently was released for a time, then imprisoned again, and, according to tradition, was finally put to death by one of the Roman emperors. (See Philemon verse 22; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 16-17.)

# LEADERS AMONG THE JEWS

1. The Zealots were a group of religiously-motivated Jews who strongly opposed domination by any foreigners. They tried to overthrow the Romans by force and did whatever they could to harass and oppose them. One of Jesus' disciples was known as Simon the Zealot (Matthew 10:4).

2. The Sadducees were religious leaders who tried to work in harmony with the Romans. They were generally wealthy, worldly and very liberal in their religious beliefs. They did not believe in angels, demons or the resurrection of the dead. They accepted the authority of the first five books of the Old Testament, but rejected the rest. They were very eager to hold high positions of honor and authority and were often able to gain the high priest's office from the Romans.

3. The Pharisees were the primary religious leaders of the people. They were very strict in their interpretation and observance of the law and tried to make sure that everyone else was, too. They were often proud and self-righteous, but most of them took their religious faith very seriously. They were enemies of the Sadducees but cooperated with them in opposing Jesus.

4. The Scribes were considered "experts" in the law who spoke with authority and were usually highly regarded by the people. Many scribes were priests, but scribes came also from many other backgrounds and occupations.

# LONGINGS AND EXPECTATIONS

By the time Jesus was born, the Jews were eagerly looking for the coming of their promised Messiah. They longed for the golden age of peace and prosperity which their prophets had written about. They longed for someone to overthrow the Romans and establish a truly Jewish kingdom. Their longings were intense and their expectations were high. So when John the Baptist came and announced that the Kingdom of God was coming soon, all the people went out to John and listened eagerly to everything he had to say (Matthew 3:1-6).

# THE WRITTEN RECORD OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

1. As the number of eyewitnesses of Jesus' life became smaller, it became increasingly important to develop an accurate written account of His life. Matthew, Mark, Luke and



John were chosen by the Holy Spirit to write separate accounts of Jesus' life. Mark's account was likely written first, while John's was apparently written last. Though the exact dates of writing are uncertain, Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and John seems to have written several years afterwards.

2. The Gospel accounts tell us many things about the life of Jesus, but they are not biographies. One-third to one-half of each account is devoted to just the last week in Jesus' life! Each writer could have written many more things about Jesus, but they chose to write only those things that were directly relevant for their specific purpose. (See John 20:30 and 21:25.)

## A COMPARISON OF THE FOUR GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

### 1. Matthew

- a. Matthew wrote for his fellow Jews to demonstrate that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah, Savior, and King (Matthew 1:21; 2:2; 2:4). He carefully traces Jesus' human ancestry back to David and Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17), describes Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament laws (Matthew 5:17-18) and shows how He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies (Matthew 1:22-23; 2:5-6, etc.).
- b. Matthew demonstrates that Jesus was a king, but clearly not an earthly king. Jesus did not try to extend His Kingdom by force, but rather through teaching and example (Matthew 5-7). He did not use His power to destroy His enemies, but rather to do works of mercy and love (Matthew 8 and 9). He did not promise His followers positions of earthly prominence, but called them to sacrifice and service (Matthew 10:32-39). He taught the people in parables which revealed the truth to some but hid it from others (Matthew 13).
- c. Matthew shows how Jesus always used His kingly power and authority as a servant rather than as a master (Matthew 14-20). Near the end of His life, He entered Jerusalem as a king but did not try to establish an earthly kingdom (Matthew 21:1-11). Rather, He promised to establish an eternal kingdom of power and glory when He returns to earth in the future (Matthew 24:30-31).
- d. Matthew reveals how Jesus died as a king (Matthew 27:37-43), but rose again with kingly authority over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). Because He was given this authority, He commissioned His followers to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them all that He had commanded.

### 2. Mark

- a. Mark, a Jew, wrote especially for non-Jewish Christians who were unfamiliar with Old Testament laws, customs, and prophecies. Though Mark himself was not one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, he probably got much of his information about Jesus from someone who was—the apostle Peter.

- b. Mark presents no earthly genealogy of Jesus but introduces Him at the very beginning as the Son of God (Mark 1:1). Throughout his account, Mark demonstrates Jesus' divine Sonship, presenting a fast-paced account of the things He did. Mark gives us only a few of Jesus' parables but describes more of His miracles than any of the other Gospel writers.
- c. Mark also stresses Jesus' humanness and servanthood. He writes that the major purpose of Jesus' coming was "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
- d. Mark concludes his testimony concerning the divine Sonship of Jesus by quoting the Roman soldier who was at Jesus' side when He died. "Surely," the soldier said, "this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). Mark is the only Gospel writer who includes this quote—one that ties in directly with his opening statement about Jesus.

### 3. Luke

- a. As a non-Jewish follower of Jesus, Luke wrote primarily for the Gentiles. He traces Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam, the father of the human race, rather than just to Abraham, the father of the Jews (Luke 3:23-38).
- b. As a historian, Luke gives an orderly account of Jesus' life from His conception to His ascension (Luke 1:1-4; 24:50-51).
- c. As a physician, Luke emphasizes Jesus' concern for the sick (Luke 4:38-40), the poor (Luke 6:20-21), the outcast (Luke 5:12-13) and the rejected (Luke 5:30-31; 15:2). He also shows Jesus' special concern for women (Luke 1 and 2; 7:36-50; 10:38-42) and for children (Luke 9:47-48; 18:16-17; 23:28).
- d. As a theologian, Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man who achieves His victories through love and self-sacrificing service. He also places great emphasis on prayer (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 11:1-13; 18:1-14), the lost (Luke 15:1-32; 19:10) and the work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15, 35; 3:22; 4:1, 34; 10:21; 11:13; 12:12).
- e. Though many of the things Luke writes about can be found also in Matthew and Mark, about half of his material is unique to him.

### 4. John

- a. John wrote His account of the Gospel for the entire world. John strongly emphasizes the theological significance of Jesus' person and work.
- b. From the very beginning, John emphasizes that Jesus is not only the Son of God but also God the Son, the eternal Word of God, the Creator of the universe, man's only Savior (John 1:1-18).
- c. John strongly emphasizes such concepts as love, light, life, and faith. He includes seven great "I AM" statements of Jesus (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1) and gives us several of Jesus' long discourses which are not found anywhere else (John 3:1-21; 4:4-26; 5:19-47; 6:26-59; 8:12-59; 10:1-21; 10:22-38; 12:20-50; 13:31-14:31; 15:1-16:33; 17:1-26).

- d. John makes his purpose for writing very clear in John 20:31: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”
- e. About 90% of John’s material is not found in the other Gospels.

THE HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

- 1. Luke wrote about the history of the early church in his Acts of the Apostles. Acts is a continuation of Luke’s Gospel account in which he described “all that Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1-2).
- 2. Sometimes the book of Acts is referred to as the Acts of the Holy Spirit because everything the apostles accomplished was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit changed the disciples from weak, fearful, uneducated men into courageous, knowledgeable and powerful witnesses. On Pentecost Day they preached with boldness and power and in Christ’s name began to do many mighty miracles (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 4:29-31).
- 3. One of the most powerful demonstrations of the presence of the Holy Spirit was found in the changed lives of the early believers. No longer were they fearful, jealous or hungry for status and power. Each day they met for teaching, worship and fellowship, sharing their possessions with those in need and bringing praise and thanksgiving to God (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-35).
- 4. The history of the early church is outlined in Acts 1:8. There Jesus foretells the future spread of the Gospel in the city of Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.
  - a. Acts 1-7 The church in Jerusalem grows in numbers and in power.
  - b. Acts 8 The Gospel comes to Samaria.
  - c. Acts 9 Paul is converted and called to ministry.
  - d. Acts 10-11 Peter brings the Gospel to the Gentiles.
  - e. Acts 12 James is killed; Peter is imprisoned and miraculously freed.
  - f. Acts 13-14 Paul and Barnabas go out as missionaries to the Gentiles.
  - g. Acts 15 The church meets in Jerusalem to discuss important issues.
  - h. Acts 16-24 Paul and his companions make further missionary journeys.
  - i. Acts 25-27 Paul is tried before Jewish and Roman authorities.
  - j. Acts 28 Paul preaches the Gospel as a prisoner in Rome.
- 5. Shortly before He died, Jesus foretold that Jerusalem would again be destroyed. Though the Bible itself does not describe Jerusalem’s fall, we learn from other writers that the Zealots led a rebellion of the Jews against the Romans in the year A.D. 67. This led to Jerusalem’s spectacular fall in the year A.D. 70. The Jewish people suffered

intensely. Six hundred thousand people were killed. The temple was desecrated and burned. The city was destroyed. The high priesthood and Sanhedrin were abolished. All remaining Jews were banished from the city. The Romans decreed that any Jews who tried to return would be put to death.

6. The growth of the church in the first century was absolutely amazing. Though there were no modern means of travel or communication, the Gospel spread throughout much of the world in less than 50 years (Colossians 1:6, 23). Truly, Jesus’ promise of Acts 1:8 was fulfilled in a wonderful way: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

**Guideline 1:** When reading New Testament history, always remember to read everything in the light of Jesus’ primary reason for coming—to save His people from their sins and to establish the Kingdom of God. Though Jesus’ teaching and miracles were obviously a very significant part of His ministry, few of His miracles and little of His teaching would likely have been remembered if it were not for His saving death and resurrection.

**Guideline 2:** Though there are various differences among the four Gospel accounts, do not spend too much time focusing on the differences. Simply remember that each author writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and provides us with unique insights into the Gospel story. Remember, there is only one Gospel!

**Guideline 3:** Interpret the unique elements of each Gospel account in the light of the author’s purpose or focus. This difference in focus will usually account for most differences in emphasis and will also account for differences in each writer’s selection of materials.

**Guideline 4:** Recognize that the Gospel writers sometimes grouped together sayings of Jesus which may not all have been spoken at the same time. See, for example, Matthew 13, Matthew 23 and Luke 16. These sayings are grouped together because they deal with the same general subject—not because they were all spoken on the same occasion.

**Guideline 5:** Do not assume that events which are recorded right after each other necessarily happened immediately after each other. For example, in his Gospel account, Luke moves directly from the first night after Jesus’ resurrection to the account of Jesus’ ascension into heaven (Luke 24:49-50). However, as Luke himself tells us in the book of Acts (see Acts 1:3), 40 days actually passed between Jesus’ resurrection and His ascension. That fact, however, was simply not relevant for Luke’s Gospel account.

**Guideline 6:** Since Mark and Luke wrote for non-Jews, they occasionally used words or concepts which would be more intelligible to their Gentile readers. They also sometimes

explained things which non-Jewish readers might not know or understand. See, for example, Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:3-4; 7:34; 12:18. This helps to account for some of the differences between their writings and that of Matthew who wrote for the Jews.

**Guideline 7:** It is sometimes helpful to “fill out” a particular story in one of the Gospel accounts with details from the other accounts. For example, each of the Gospel writers gives us information about the crucifixion of Jesus which is not found in the other accounts. Also, the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany is told in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and John 12, but each writer provides details which the others do not have.

**Guideline 8:** Remember that New Testament writers do not always give us the exact words of people who are “quoted.” At times, they may simply paraphrase or summarize what someone said. When they do this, they give an accurate and trustworthy account of what was said, but they choose to emphasize that part of the speaker’s message which was most important for their purpose.

**Guideline 9:** When reading the book of Acts, note how the ministry of Peter is emphasized in the first part of the book (chapters 1 to 5 and 10 to 12) in fulfillment of Matthew 16:18-19 while the ministry of Paul is emphasized in the latter part of Acts (chapters 13 to 28) in fulfillment of Acts 9:15-16. Though Peter received a special vision regarding Gentiles (Acts 10), he spent most of his time ministering to Jews. Paul, though often going to Jews first on his missionary journeys, spent most of his time as a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Galatians 2:8-9).

**Guideline 10:** Do not be overly surprised at or concerned about the rather abrupt ending of the book of Acts. The Bible is clearly not as much concerned about what happened to Peter and Paul as it is about the overall progress of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church continued to grow, even though its leaders often became martyrs for their faith.

## QUESTIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

1. Please indicate which of the following statements are true and which ones are false. Circle T (True) or F (False)
- A. T ☐ F ☒ When the Jews lost their temple and all that it meant to them, they also began to lose interest in their Scriptures.
  - B. ☒ T ☐ F For most of the period between the Old Testament and New Testament, the Jews lived under the authority of foreign rulers.
  - C. T ☐ F ☒ The Jews were very careful never to add any laws of their own beyond the laws God first gave to Moses.
  - D. T ☐ F ☒ The situation in Israel in Jesus’ day was basically the same as it was in the days of King David except that the Jews had no king of their own.

- E. ☒ T ☐ F Most of the Jewish people in Jesus’ day were longing for the establishment of a truly Jewish kingdom again.
- F. T ☐ F ☒ King Herod was hated by the Jews because he destroyed their temple.
- G. ☒ T ☐ F The Jews had much freedom and authority in religious matters while they lived under King Herod.
- H. ☒ T ☐ F The Romans would not permit the Jews to put anyone to death without the permission of the Roman rulers.
- I. T ☐ F ☒ Since the Romans did not want to offend the Jews, they excused the Jews from paying taxes to the Roman government.
- J. T ☐ F ☒ The Feast of Dedication referred to in John 10:22 was associated with the dedication of the temple built by King Solomon.

2. Six of the statements in # 1 are False. For each of these statements, indicate WHY the statement is not true.
- A. Statement   **A**   is false because: **the Jews placed even more emphasis on their Scriptures when they lost their temple and all that it meant to them.**
  - B. Statement   **C**   is false because: **the Jews added many laws of their own to the ones God had given them through Moses.**
  - C. Statement   **D**   is false because: **many changes were made in Israel since the days of David. For example, in Jesus’ day there were synagogues as centers of worship and instruction, the Jews had little power and the people were eagerly awaiting their Messiah.**
  - D. Statement   **F**   is false because: **Herod actually expanded and beautified the temple for the Jews.**
  - E. Statement   **I**   is false because: **the Jews were required to pay taxes to the Roman government—and the tax laws were enforced.**
  - F. Statement   **J**   is false because: **the Feast of Dedication referred to here was the feast of Hanukkah, celebrating the cleansing of the temple under the Maccabees.**
3. The New Testament does not mention the Maccabees, but they were very important in Jewish history.
- A. Who were the Maccabees?

**The Maccabees were Jewish “freedom fighters” who led the Jews in overcoming their enemies and established a period of relative independence which lasted for more than 100 years.**



B. When did they live?

**The Maccabees gained their independence around 165 B.C.**

C. What was their first major victory?

**Their first major victory resulted in the cleansing and rededication of the temple after it had been desecrated by foreigners. This event was celebrated in the time of Jesus as the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22). It is still celebrated by Jews today in their annual Hanukkah celebration.**

D. How long did they “rule” in Israel?

**The Maccabees “ruled” in Israel for about 100 years.**

E. Who finally defeated them and took over authority in Israel?

**They were eventually defeated by the Romans who subjected them to the government of Rome.**

4. The synagogue is frequently mentioned in the New Testament.

A. What is a synagogue?

**The synagogue was a place where the Jews were able to worship God together, fellowship together, hear God’s Word read and explained and teach their young men in the Jewish faith.**

B. When and why were synagogues first formed?

**Synagogues were first formed when the Jews were in exile and no longer had the temple as a central place of corporate worship and instruction.**

C. List some of the events in Jesus’ life which took place in a synagogue.

1. Luke 4:16-28—**Jesus preached in the synagogue in Nazareth, revealing Himself as the Messiah who was foretold in Isaiah.**
2. Mark 1:21-28—**Jesus taught in a synagogue in Capernaum as one who had authority and also cast out an evil spirit from a man.**
3. Mark 3:1-8—**Jesus healed a man with a withered hand.**
4. Luke 13:10-14—**Jesus healed a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years.**

5. The Sanhedrin is referred to frequently in the book of Acts and is also occasionally referred to in the Gospel accounts.

A. What is the Sanhedrin?

**The Sanhedrin, also known as the Council, was the Jewish governing body in Israel. It was composed of 71 persons.**

B. Who served as the leader of the Sanhedrin?

**The High Priest was the leader of the Sanhedrin.**

C. How much authority did the Sanhedrin have?

**The Sanhedrin could make and enforce almost any laws they wished regarding the religious life of the Jews and could even punish and imprison people for violating their laws. However, they were not permitted to put anyone to death.**

D. What role did the Sanhedrin play in the death of Jesus?

**The Sanhedrin officially condemned Jesus as a blasphemer and pronounced that He was therefore worthy of the death penalty. The Sanhedrin then delivered Jesus over to the Roman governor Pilate who gave the necessary approval to put Jesus to death.**

E. What role did the Sanhedrin play in the life of the early church?

**The Sanhedrin strongly opposed the church and persecuted some of the early Christian leaders such as Steven, Peter, James, Paul and others. Before Paul’s conversion, he was given permission by the Sanhedrin to persecute Jews both in the land of Israel and even beyond its borders.**

6. A. How would you describe King Herod the Great, the king who was ruling over Israel when Jesus was born?

**Herod the Great was jealous, insecure, ruthless, cruel, and paranoid. At the same time, he tried to gain the favor of the Jews by beautifying and enlarging their temple. He also gave the Jews considerable freedom in their “religious” life.**

- B. The Herod family tree can be very confusing, since there are several Herods mentioned in the New Testament. Indicate which one of the Herods was involved in each of the following incidents: Herod Agrippa I, Herod Agrippa II, Herod Antipas, or Herod the Great.
1. Herod the Great The killing of the babies in Bethlehem
  2. Herod Antipas The beheading of John the Baptist
  3. Herod Antipas The trial of Jesus
  4. Herod Agrippa I The killing of the apostle James
  5. Herod Agrippa I The imprisonment of Peter
  6. Herod Agrippa II The trial of Paul
7. The Pharisees and Sadducees both opposed Jesus during His ministry, but they also frequently opposed to each other. Which of the following statements describe the Pharisees and which describe the Sadducees? Write either Pharisees or Sadducees on the line in front of each statement.
- A. Pharisees They were the primary religious leaders of the people.
  - B. Sadducees They did not believe in angels, demons or the resurrection.
  - C. Sadducees They often worked in harmony with the Romans.
  - D. Sadducees They accepted the authority of only the five books of Moses.
  - E. Sadducees They were generally wealthy and worldly.
  - F. Pharisees They were very strict in obeying all Old Testament laws.
8. In order to understand the Jews' response to Jesus during His lifetime, it is necessary to understand their intense longings and expectations regarding the coming Messiah. Describe those longings.
- The Jews were looking for a political savior who would defeat their enemies, the Romans, and establish a Jewish kingdom of peace and prosperity. They earnestly longed for the coming of the Messiah about whom their prophets had written, seeing in him someone who would establish a truly "golden age" for the Jewish people.**
9. A. Explain what is meant by the following statement: "Though all four Gospel accounts tell us about the life of Jesus, these accounts are not biographies."

**A biography is a systematic account of the events of a person's life from birth to death, including his ancestral background, birth, early years, the formative events in his life and an account of the significant events in every period of his life. The Gospel accounts skip most of Jesus' life from his birth to the age of 30 and focus a large share of their attention on just the last week in Jesus' life.**

- B. Which two Gospel accounts tell us about the birth of Jesus?  
**Matthew and Luke**
- C. What does the Bible tell us about the life of Jesus between the time He was 2 years old and the time He was 30?  
**Only two incidents.**  
**(1) Jesus returned from Egypt with His parents and went to live in Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23).**  
**(2) As a 12-year-old, Jesus went to the temple with His parents and stayed behind to talk to the Jewish leaders—to the consternation of His parents (Luke 2:41-52).**
- D. How many chapters of each of the Gospel accounts are devoted to the period of time from Palm Sunday to Easter morning?
1. Matthew: 8 (Matthew 21–28)
  2. Mark: 6 (Mark 11–16)
  3. Luke: 6 (Luke 19–24)
  4. John: 9 (John 12–20)
10. Guideline 3 stresses the importance of understanding the primary focus or purpose of an author when interpreting his writing. Indicate what you consider to be the primary focus of each of the Gospel writers.
- A. Matthew—**Matthew wrote for his fellow Jews to demonstrate that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah, Savior and King. The kingship of Jesus was very important to Matthew, but he emphasized that Jesus was a servant king, not an earthly king.**

- B. Mark—**Mark wrote for non-Jewish Christians, emphasizing that Jesus is the Son of God. He described more of Jesus’ miracles than any of the other writers, but at the same time he also stressed Jesus’ humanness and servanthood.**
- C. Luke—**Luke wrote primarily for the Gentiles, giving an orderly account of Jesus’ life from conception to ascension. He emphasized Jesus’ concern for the sick, poor, outcast, rejected and lost. He also highlighted Jesus’ special concern for women and children. He presents Jesus as the Son of Man who achieved His victories through love and self-sacrificing service.**
- D. John—**John wrote for the entire world, emphasizing that Jesus is God the Son, the eternal Word, the Creator of the universe and man’s only Savior.**

11. Read the accounts of the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13.

- A. What difference is there in the order of the three temptations in these two accounts?

**In both accounts, the temptation to turn stones into bread comes first. However, in Matthew’s account the temptation to bow down to Satan comes last whereas in Luke’s account it comes as the second temptation. Matthew’s second temptation is Luke’s third.**

- B. How would you explain this difference? (See especially Guideline 5.)

**We are not sure why the three temptations are presented in a different order in the two accounts. Matthew may well have presented the order in which the events occurred, since he uses the word “then” after each of the first two temptations and Luke doesn’t. However, we cannot be sure of that. Nor does it matter. If Matthew did not present the temptations in the order in which they occurred, he may have regarded Satan’s temptation to have Jesus bow down to him as the most significant of the temptations and therefore structured his account to emphasize it. (Remember that Matthew emphasized the kingship of Jesus). If Luke was the one who did not present the actual order, he may have ended with the temptation regarding God’s protection, since he emphasized Jesus’ love and care for those in need. Both accounts include the same temptations, however, and the difference in order does not in any way affect the significance of the temptations themselves.**

12. The Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have many things in common, but there are also many differences among them. In front of each of the following statements, write the name of the author who is identified with that statement.

- A. Matthew He writes primarily for the Jews.
- B. Luke He traces Jesus’ ancestry back to Adam.
- C. Mark (or John) He begins by presenting Jesus as the Son of God.
- D. Matthew He emphasizes that Jesus is a King.
- E. Luke He describes Jesus’ concern for the sick, poor and outcast.
- F. John He includes seven great “I Am” statements of Jesus.
- G. Luke He writes primarily for Gentiles since he himself is a Gentile.
- H. John He emphasizes that Jesus is God the Son, the eternal Word.
- I. Mark He includes more of Jesus’ miracles than any of the others.
- J. John He focuses on the importance of believing in Jesus.

13. Guideline 8 indicates that the New Testament writers do not always give us the exact words of people who are speaking in their account of events. List one place in either the Gospels or Acts where you think the writer is summarizing the speech or emphasizing a different part of what a speaker said in a different passage or account. Then give the reason why you think they are providing a summary or emphasizing something different.

**SAMPLE**

**If your student does not come up with any meaningful suggestions of his/her own, you may suggest the following general statements.**

**Some (perhaps many) of the conversations which are recorded may be summarized or abbreviated rather than presented word for word. For instance, compare Matthew 12:3-8 to Mark 2:25-28.**

**Whenever the Gospels present slightly different accounts of the same event (such as the parables of Jesus), it is quite probable that either one or both of them may be presenting a paraphrase or summary of some of the statements made. For instance, compare Mark 4:30-32 to Luke 13:18-21 and Matthew 4:19 to John 1:39.**

**Some (or most) of the sermons presented in Acts are probably abbreviated or summarized, since most of them can be read or spoken in just a few minutes. For instance, compare Joel 2:28-32 to Acts 2:17-21.**



**Note to mentors: Please be sure that students do not get the idea that the “quoted” statements in the Bible are not trustworthy. They are. They all are! However, it’s important for them to recognize that if there is a slight difference between two accounts that does not mean that one of them is inaccurate. The Holy Spirit so superintended the writing of each author that we have in the Bible the very words which the Spirit wanted us to have. However, in some instances those words may represent an accurate paraphrase or summary of what was said.**

14. John includes many things in his Gospel account which are not found elsewhere.
- A. Approximately how much of John’s material is not found in the other Gospels?  
**About 90%.**
- B. John gives us several long discourses of Jesus which are not found anywhere else. Describe what He teaches in any two of them.  
**SAMPLE**  
**Students will make a choice between the ones that are presented in the notes. Simply check their presentations for accuracy.**
- C. Summarize what John teaches us about Jesus Christ.  
**John teaches that Jesus is not only the Son of God but also God the Son, the eternal Word of God, the Creator of the universe, the Light of the world, the Bread of life, man’s only Savior.**
- D. List the seven great “I Am” statements of Jesus found in John’s Gospel and give the reference for each one.
1. I am . . . **the Bread of Life**  
Reference: **John 6:35**
  2. I am . . . **the Light of the World**  
Reference: **John 8:12**
  3. I am . . . **the Gate for the Sheep**  
Reference: **John 10:7**
  4. I am . . . **the Good Shepherd**

Reference: **John 10:11**

5. I am . . . **the Resurrection and the Life**

Reference: **John 11:25**

6. I am . . . **the Way and the Truth and the Life**

Reference: **John 14:6**

7. I am . . . **the True Vine**

Reference: **John 15:1**

15. Questions on the book of Acts.
- A. Who is the author of the Book of Acts? **Luke**
- B. Describe in two or three sentences what the Book of Acts is about.  
**The book of Acts gives us a continuation of Luke’s earlier Gospel account in which he described all that Jesus began to do and to teach. Acts gives us a brief history of the early church, beginning with the ascension of Jesus, going on to the story of Pentecost, following that with the ministry of the apostles in and around Jerusalem, and then describing the church’s missionary outreach to many nations of the world, ending with Paul’s ministry in Rome.**
- C. Who is the dominant disciple in the first half of Acts? **Peter**
- D. Who is the dominant disciple in the second half of Acts? **Paul**
- E. Why is the book of Acts sometimes referred to as “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”?  
**Everything which the apostles and other believers accomplished in their ministry was done in the power of the Holy Spirit who had been poured out upon the church on the day of Pentecost.**
16. A. What great promise did Jesus give His disciples before He ascended into heaven? See Acts 1:8.  
**“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

B. When and how was this promise fulfilled?

**This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost and in the events which followed. After Pentecost, the Spirit led, guided and directed the church, enabled the apostles to perform great signs and wonders, equipped people for ministry, brought many people to conversion and changed the disciples into courageous, knowledgeable and powerful witnesses.**

C. Paul’s first missionary journey is described in Acts 13 and 14.

1. Who went with Paul on this journey? **Barnabas**

2. Which church sent out Paul and his companion?

**The church at Antioch in Syria. (Remember, there are two Antiochs.)**

3. What cities did they visit on this journey?

**They visited Seleucia, Salamis and Paphos (in Cyprus), Perga, Antioch (in Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and Attalia. (Note: Pamphylia and Pisidia were provinces, not cities.)**

4. What were some of the highlights of Paul’s first missionary journey?

**In Paphos, Elymas the sorcerer was blinded and the proconsul was converted. In Perga, many Jews, converts to Judaism, and Gentiles were converted. Paul and Barnabas were enabled to perform many miracles, but they also suffered rejection and persecution. In Lystra, Paul healed a lame man, leading to the attempted “worship” of Paul and Barnabas. Later persecution arose and Paul was stoned and left for dead. In Derbe, many people were won to the Lord. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and reported to the sending church the wonderful things God had done through them.**

17. A. Each of the following incidents is very interesting to us, but only two of them are actually described in the book of Acts.

The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70

The martyrdom of Peter

The martyrdom of Paul

The martyrdom of James

The martyrdom of Stephen

The martyrdom of Christians in the Colosseum in Rome

List the two that are described in Acts and indicate in which chapter each story is recorded.

1. **The martyrdom of James. Acts 12**

2. **The martyrdom of Stephen. Acts 7**

B. List four other acts of persecution which are described in Acts.

**SAMPLE**

**Various incidents will be presented by your students. Mentors will have to check out each one for accuracy. (Note: There are incidents of persecution or references to persecution in most of the chapters in Acts after Pentecost!)**

18. A. What do the following passages teach us about Paul’s desire to go to Rome? Acts 19:21; Romans 1:10-11; Romans 15:23-24

**Paul had a very strong desire to go to Rome and apparently had this desire for a long time before he was able to get there.**

B. What finally made it possible for Paul to get to Rome? See Acts 23:11; 25:10-12; and 27:24.

**Paul finally got to Rome as a “prisoner” of the Roman government. The Romans had “rescued” Paul when the Jews were trying to kill him, but Paul still had to defend himself in a Roman court of law against the accusations of the Jews. When it appeared that he might not be able to get a safe and fair trial in Jerusalem or Caesarea, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard in the highest courts in Rome. The authorities granted his request and sent him off as a prisoner to Rome.**

C. How did Paul spend his time while in Rome? See Acts 28:16-20, 30-31.

**Paul was able to live by himself in a rented home, though under Roman guard and apparently chained (Acts 28:20). For two years he boldly preached to the leaders of the Jews and to everyone else who came to see Him.**

19. Indicate the chapter in Acts in which each of the following incidents is recorded.

- A. Chapter   2  : The coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.
- B. Chapter   9  : The conversion of Saul (Paul).
- C. Chapter  13 : The sending out of the first missionaries from Antioch.
- D. Chapter  15 : The great church council in Jerusalem.
- E. Chapter  10 : The visit of Peter to the home of the gentile Cornelius.
- F. Chapter   4 : The “trial” of Peter and the others before the Sanhedrin.
- G. Chapter  16 : The first convert in Europe (Philippi).
- H. Chapter   3 : The healing of the lame man at the temple gate.
- I. Chapter  12 : The escape of Peter from prison.
- J. Chapter  17 : The ministry of Paul in Athens.

20. In Matthew 24 Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem.

- A. In what year was Jerusalem destroyed? **A.D. 70**
- B. Who destroyed it? **The Romans**
- C. Describe some of the things that happened when Jerusalem was destroyed (see Item 5 in the “History of the Early Church” section of the lesson notes).

**There was great suffering on the part of the Jews, the temple was desecrated and burned, the city was destroyed, the Sanhedrin and High Priesthood were abolished, hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed, and thousands of the remaining Jews were taken captive. (About 65 years later, a Roman city was built on the site of Jerusalem and for two centuries Jews were banned from entering the city.)**

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- 1. Why do you think the Gospel writers devoted such a large percentage of their writing to the last week of Jesus’ life while telling us almost nothing about his life between the ages of 2 and 30?  
**Without the death and resurrection of Jesus—the highlights of Jesus’ last week on earth—all of Jesus’ teaching and preaching would have been of minimal significance. Jesus came to earth to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark**

**10:45) and to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). It was especially during the last week of His life that these things were accomplished. During His last week Jesus also did a great deal of preaching, teaching the disciples many things which were of great importance for their future life and ministry. Many of these things would not have been understood earlier in Jesus’ life.**

- 2. If you had a friend who knew little or nothing about Jesus, which of the four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) would you recommend as the place to start learning about Him? Please give the reason for your answer.  
**Various answers will likely be given here. It is interesting that the church, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, placed Matthew first in the New Testament. However, for many years churches and evangelists stressed that the Gospel according to John was the best place to start reading about Christ. Campus Crusade for Christ has chosen the Gospel of Luke as the basis for its popular film on the life of Jesus. Mark’s Gospel is a rather fast-paced account of Jesus’ life as the Son of God, an account very well suited to our fast-paced western society. There is clearly no “right” place to start. It should be interesting, however, to read your students’ responses.**
- 3. Matthew strongly emphasizes the kingship of Jesus. Acts describes the ascension of Jesus into heaven where He presently reigns as King. What is the practical significance for your own life that Jesus is truly Lord of lords and King of kings today?

**Students who have been recently converted may well emphasize that they are now consciously and deliberately and faithfully serving a new Lord and Master. Some may also emphasize that they are comforted, strengthened, encouraged and challenged by the fact that Jesus is Lord over all. They may find much joy in knowing that “things are not what they seem to be on the surface.” Jesus is truly directing all things to their divinely appointed end and HE is in charge—no matter what others may think or say or do.**

**Remember that many of your students may be living under very difficult circumstances and may be surrounded by people who do not believe, do not care and do not intend to change. For many of these “neighbors,” there is no master but self. Some may be enslaved to an addiction of one kind or another. Others may feel that the real king in life is money, fame, pleasure or personal power. For many others, life may seem to be totally out of control. It’s wonderful if your students can find encouragement, hope and incentive to live and witness for Christ from their knowledge that their Lord is truly Lord of lords and King of kings.**



4. In the early church, the Gospel spread very rapidly throughout many parts of the world. What do you think is the reason for that rapid spread? Is there anything we can learn from early church history for our own situation today?

**In the early church, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit were taken very seriously. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit on believers and said that He would empower them for ministry. Obviously, He did! There was a fresh enthusiasm for the Gospel, no one was yet jaded, the Gospel was still “first generation” news. It was new, exciting and powerful, bringing about wonderful changes in the lives of multitudes of people. People were willing and ready to sacrifice their material possessions as well as their personal comfort for the sake of the Gospel. There were also many miracles being performed, giving the Gospel message credence and presenting a significant challenge to unbelievers. Enthusiasm was high, love flowed freely. The church was vibrantly alive!**

**We can learn many things from all of this, though comfortable Christians do not seem to learn these things quickly or easily. Your students, however, may well respond to this question with creativity and fresh enthusiasm as new converts often do.**

5. Pentecost was a life-changing experience for the early Christian believers.

- A. Describe some of the changes that took place in the lives of Jesus’ followers after Pentecost.

**They were changed from being weak, fearful, uneducated men into courageous, knowledgeable and powerful witnesses.**

- B. Have those same changes taken place in your own life? If they have, how have these changes manifested themselves in your life? If they haven’t yet taken place, do you expect that they will take place some day?

**Students’ answers should give you a real insight into their present thinking, their desires and goals and their understanding of the Christian faith. Learn from them, encourage them and rejoice with everyone who has received, wants to receive or expects to receive special blessings from the Spirit so that he also may serve Christ with enthusiasm, fruitfulness and joy.**

# LESSON 10: Understanding the Epistles

One-third of the New Testament consists of epistles, or formal letters, written by various apostles. Some of the letters were written to individuals, some to churches and others to larger groups of believers. Some letters are short; others are quite long. Some focus on matters related to daily living; some concentrate more on doctrinal or theological teachings. Some are very personal; some are more general. Each letter is intended as a Spirit-given guideline to show believers what to believe and how to live.

## THE REASON FOR THE EPISTLES

At the time the first New Testament letters were written, almost all the teaching done in the churches was still being done by word of mouth. The Gospel accounts had not yet been written, and the church had no written records to guide and instruct new believers. Also, false teachings were starting to creep into the churches and many people were being led astray. Many Jewish Christians, for example, wanted believers to live according to all the Old Testament laws. Others tried to introduce Greek philosophical ideas that were contrary to the Gospel. It was necessary, therefore, to defend and explain the Christian faith over against these heretical teachings.

Also, some believers were being persecuted as they stood firm for their faith in Christ. They needed a message of hope and encouragement. Others needed to learn how to defend their faith against the attacks of unbelievers. Most of the New Testament letters, therefore, were written to instruct, challenge, correct, stimulate or encourage new believers.

## THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS (EPISTLES)

Although the epistles make up only one-third of the New Testament, they number 21 separate letters out of the total of 27 New Testament books. Thirteen of the letters were written by Paul, three by John (who also wrote the Gospel according to John and the Book of Revelation), two by Peter, one each by Jude and James, brothers of Jesus, and one by the unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Paul usually made it very clear that he was not writing simply on his own—he wrote as an apostle who was called by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Some of the other writers also stated clearly that they were writing as servants or apostles of Christ (see James 1:1; Jude 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1, 21; 1 John 1:3).

## THE TIME OF THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

It is not possible to date all the New Testament epistles with certainty, but most of them

can be dated with reasonable accuracy. We know, for example, that Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus were written near the end of his life since Paul refers to his imprisonment and to his anticipated martyrdom. We also know that Paul wrote several of his letters while he was a prisoner. Since we know the approximate dates of his imprisonment, we can also date the epistles that were written during that time.

**The following dates and places are considered fairly accurate.**

<u>EPISTLE</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>PLACE OF WRITING</u>
Galatians	A.D. 49	Antioch
James	A.D. 49	Jerusalem
1 Thessalonians	A.D. 51	Corinth
2 Thessalonians	A.D. 51-52	Corinth
1 Corinthians	A.D. 55	Ephesus
Romans	A.D. 57	Corinth
2 Corinthians	A.D. 55-57	Macedonia
Ephesians	A.D. 60	Rome
Colossians	A.D. 60	Rome
Philemon	A.D. 60	Rome
Philippians	A.D. 61	Rome
1 Peter	A.D. 62-64	Rome (?)
1 Timothy	A.D. 64	Rome or Macedonia
Titus	A.D. 64	Rome or Macedonia
Jude	A.D. 65	Unknown
2 Timothy	A.D. 66-67	Rome
2 Peter	A.D. 67	Rome (?)
Hebrews	A.D. 68	Unknown
1 John	A.D. 85-90	Ephesus
2 John	A.D. 90	Ephesus
3 John	A.D. 90	Ephesus

## THE ORDER OF THE EPISTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Paul’s epistles are placed first in the “epistles section” of the New Testament and all 13 of his letters are grouped together. The epistles are not placed in the order in which they were written nor in the order of their “importance,” though some regard Paul’s letter to the Romans as the most significant doctrinal epistle in the New Testament. Rather, Paul’s epistles are arranged for the most part in order of their length, with Romans being the longest and Philemon the shortest.

The other epistles follow no particular order, though Hebrews is the longest of the non-Pauline epistles and the letters of John and Jude are among the shortest.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

**Romans** can be divided into four main sections. First, Paul demonstrates that everyone,

including both Jews and Gentiles, is sinful and needs to be saved, but there is no way man can save himself (Romans 1:1-3:20). Second, he describes God's plan of salvation, a plan which does not depend on anything man can do, but on God's perfect work of redemption in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-8:39). In this section Paul also emphasizes the significance of baptism, the personal struggles of the believer and their wonderful victory in Christ. Third, in chapters 9 through 11 he describes God's sovereign plan of election, involving both Jews and Gentiles. Fourth, he discusses the practical significance of God's redemptive plan for the life of the church and the individual believer (Romans 12-16).

**1 Corinthians** deals primarily with problems and concerns raised by the church at Corinth. Paul discusses the "offense" of the cross, divisions in the church, his own mission, the judgment to come, moral problems in the church, problems with lawsuits, marriage, Christian liberty, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, Christian love, the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of believers.

**2 Corinthians** presents Paul's most personal message concerning himself. He describes his sufferings, hardships, trials and struggles. He defends his own ministry and apostleship, relates some of the blessings on his ministry and describes some causes for thanksgiving and joy. Though personally experiencing weakness and suffering, he writes expectantly about the coming blessings of heaven. He writes more powerfully here than anywhere else about the importance, necessity and joy of generous giving. He includes a section on his "unanswered" prayers, his exceptional heavenly "vision," and his confidence in God's grace. Paul expresses concerns for his readers and warns them not to not fall away into sinful living.

**Galatians** speaks of Paul's own call to be an apostle after he had lived for years in opposition to the Gospel. He writes in depth about questions of law and grace, demonstrating that salvation is purely a gift of grace through faith. He discusses the freedom believers have in Christ and their position in Christ as children of Abraham and sons of God. He emphasizes the oneness of believers in Christ, so that the main distinction among people is no longer between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, or men and women, but between believers and unbelievers. He also discusses various matters related to Christian living, includes a wonderful passage about the fruit of the Spirit, and urges his readers to live lives of goodness, kindness and helpfulness.

**Ephesians** begins with Paul's description of the wonderful blessings believers have in Christ. He emphasizes several key doctrines such as salvation by grace through faith, the sinfulness of man's human nature, divine election, the role of good works and the unity of all believers in Christ. He presents the church as a holy temple in the Lord, as the body of Christ in which Jews and Gentiles are united together and as the holy bride of Christ. He also discusses such practical matters as the family, holy living, prayer and spiritual warfare.

**Philippians** was written to the believers in Philippi while Paul was in prison. In spite of his circumstances he emphasizes his joy, personal assurance, thanksgiving, love and the

hope of glory. He also writes a classic passage on the human and divine natures of Christ, urging his readers to have in themselves the humble mind of their Lord. He emphasizes prayer, contentment and unity and expresses his sure confidence that God will meet all his needs in Christ Jesus.

**Colossians** is a companion epistle to Ephesians, covering many of the same subjects, emphasizing that true wisdom is found only in Christ. It also emphasizes the deity of Christ and His position over the church and over all creation. It has a beautiful section on Christian living in the power of Christ's resurrection.

**1 Thessalonians** was likely written quite early. Paul expresses his joy because of their faith and love and also shares his concern for their spiritual well-being. He exhorts his readers to live lives of holiness and sexual purity, urges them to love one another, comforts those who have lost loved ones and discusses the second coming of Christ.

**2 Thessalonians** expresses Paul's thanks for his readers, encourages them to persevere, discusses the events which will precede the coming of the Lord, asks them to pray for himself and commands them to work faithfully in their daily lives.

**1 Timothy** is one of Paul's last letters. It was written to encourage young Timothy to be faithful and disciplined in his ministry. Paul discusses his own spiritual pilgrimage, provides warnings against false teachers, gives instructions about worship and lists various qualifications for elders and deacons in the church. The letter also deals with the position of women in the church, widows and slaves. It concludes with a strong section on the responsibilities of the wealthy and the dangers of riches.

**2 Timothy** contains one of the strongest statements in the Bible about the way God inspired the writers of the Bible through His Spirit, calling Scripture "God-breathed." In this letter, Paul again encourages Timothy to be faithful in his life and ministry, warns about the evils that will be coming in the last days and expresses his strong, personal faith in the face of his coming martyrdom.

**Titus** was written to encourage this young disciple in his ministry on the island of Crete. Paul gives instructions to the older men, to the older women, to young men and to slaves. He encourages Titus to be obedient to authorities and to do what is good through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Philemon** was written to a slave holder concerning his runaway slave Onesimus. Onesimus had become a Christian while he was with Paul in Rome and Paul is now sending him back to his master asking for leniency and grace.

**Hebrews** was written by an unknown author. The key word in the epistle is the word "better," demonstrating how Jesus, God's Son, is better than all the types and shadows of the Old Covenant. In chapter 11 the author presents a great chapter on faith and the Old Testament heroes of faith. In the last two chapters he discusses various practical dimensions of the Christian life, such as discipline, worship, love, marriage, praise, obedience and trust.



**James** deals with such practical issues as temptations, trials, obedience, good works, the control of the tongue, true wisdom, submission to God, foolish pride, unjust riches, patience in the face of suffering and praying in faith.

**1 Peter** gives the reader a solid basis for future hope because of God’s mercy and Christ’s resurrection. Peter challenges his readers to live lives of holiness, to submit to proper authority and to bear patiently with affliction. He provides practical teaching for husbands and wives, elders and church leaders and young and older believers. He urges his readers to stand firm in resisting evil, leaving their concerns with the One who lovingly cares for them.

**2 Peter** provides a strong challenge to full-orbed Christian living, making one’s election sure. He refers to the divine origin of Scripture and warns against false teachers who will surely be punished. He also urges readers to live lives of holiness and fear as they await the day of Christ’s return. He foretells the fiery destruction of the present earth and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

**1 John** emphasizes the importance of the fact that Jesus Christ lived on earth as a true human being, stresses the necessity of walking in truth and light, and warns the readers against worldliness and false teachers. John writes about the blessings of being children of God and urges believers to genuinely love one another even as God loves us. He discusses the victory of those who believe in Christ and the assurance they may have of their salvation in Him.

**2 John** is a very brief letter urging people to consistently walk in truth and love, refusing fellowship with those who do not so walk.

**3 John** expresses the writer’s joy in seeing his readers walk in faithfulness, urges believers to assist those who bring the Gospel and warns against those who falsely claim positions of leadership in the church.

**Jude** was written to urge his readers to “contend for the faith,” reminding them of God’s judgment on godless men in the past. He ends with a sterling message of confidence in the Lord’s power to keep them from falling.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER AS YOU READ THE EPISTLES

Many of the teachings or emphases in the epistles become more readily understandable when you remember the background of each writer and the time and circumstances when each epistle was written. Consider, for example, the following:

1. Because Paul had personally experienced the futility of trying to earn salvation through his “good works,” he frequently and strongly emphasizes the impossibility of being saved in this way. In several of his writings (such as Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and others), he lays great emphasis on the foundational teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith.
2. Paul never forgot his early years when he was a persecutor of Christians and a strong opponent of the Gospel. Though he knew he was wonderfully forgiven, he

remembered where he began. 1 Timothy 1:12-16 was written late in his life, but it contains his strongest statement on the sinfulness of his early years as a persecutor of the church.

3. Because Paul knew that he would never have turned to Christ on his own, he strongly emphasizes God’s wonderful grace in sovereignly choosing him to salvation and ministry (for example, Ephesians 1:4; 1 Timothy 1:13-14; Galatians 1:13-15; Romans 8:29-30; Romans 9:14-16). Though Paul’s theology is not based on his experience, it is strongly and consistently confirmed by that experience.
4. Paul’s theology was strongly rooted in the Old Testament. Not only was he brought up as a Jew and a Pharisee, but he was a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” extremely zealous for everything Jewish (Philippians 3:4-6). This Jewishness is reflected in his frequent references to the Old Testament and provides the foundation for his God-centered theology.
5. In most of his epistles, Paul begins with some strong doctrinal teachings which then serve as a foundation for the practical teachings which conclude his letters. This pattern is very clear, for example, in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and Colossians.
6. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is unknown. Many possible authors have been suggested, including Paul. Whoever wrote it was obviously well-versed in the teachings of the Old Testament. No epistle emphasizes more clearly the perfect sacrifice of Jesus as our atoning sacrifice and His past and continuing work as our perfect high priest. Understanding Hebrews is made much easier when one has a good understanding of the Old Testament.
7. James was a leader in the Jerusalem church who wrote one of the first New Testament epistles. He was very likely the brother of Jesus and was noted for his practical wisdom and his concern for practical Christian living (see Acts 15:13-21).
8. There are significant differences between 1 Peter and 2 Peter in style, word choice and emphasis. One of the letters may have been written somewhat later than the other under totally different circumstances or with the help of an assistant (see 1 Peter 5:12). The second letter contains some of the strongest New Testament language on the destruction of the present earth (2 Peter 3). In both epistles Peter strongly emphasizes the solid hope of believers and the importance of living lives of holiness and obedience in anticipation of Christ’s return.
9. John writes as an eyewitness, friend and disciple of Jesus (1 John 1:1-4). His first two epistles are written as an old man to those whom he describes as his “children.” His third letter is personal and deals with personal matters. In his first letter John emphasizes some of the same themes that he emphasized in his account of the Gospel: God’s great love, our love for one another, faith, assurance, light and life.
10. Jude was likely another brother of Jesus. If so, he knew what it was like to live for many years as an unbeliever (John 7:5). He was himself not an apostle of Jesus, but

had great respect for those who were (Jude 17). Though Jude issues strong warnings against falling away from the faith and the punishment that awaits unbelievers, he ends his letter with one of the most beautiful doxologies in the entire New Testament.

QUESTIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE EPISTLES

1. The Epistles form about one-third of the New Testament.

A. Explain what an epistle is.

The epistles were letters written by various apostles to individuals, churches or larger groups of believers, providing them with guidance, encouragement and instruction.

B. Give three reasons why the epistles were written.

- 1. The church still had no written records to guide and instruct new believers.
- 2. False teachings were starting to creep into the churches and many people were being led astray.
- 3. Many Christians were being persecuted and needed encouragement.

C. Who wrote most of the New Testament epistles? Paul

D. How many epistles did he write?

13 (if he wrote Hebrews also, 14)

E. Who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews?

We don't know, though many persons, including Paul, have been suggested

2. A. Which of the epistles were likely or possibly written in Rome?

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 2 Timothy  
Perhaps 1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, 2 Peter

B. Which epistles were written in Ephesus?

1 Corinthians, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John

C. Which epistles were written in Corinth?

1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Romans

3. Indicate, in each instance, which of the two epistles listed was written earlier.

A. Galatians Galatians or Hebrews

B. 1 Thessalonians 1 Corinthians or 1 Thessalonians

C. 1 Timothy 1 Timothy or 1 John

D. James Hebrews or James

E. Romans Romans or 2 Timothy

4. How would you summarize Paul's message in Romans 3:21-24?

Everyone is a sinner before God and falls short of what God wants him to be. The law could not make a person righteous, but it did testify to the righteousness which comes from God in His grace to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

5. Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

A. What does Paul teach about good works in Ephesians 2:9?

We cannot be saved by our good works, so no one can boast.

B. What does he teach about good works in Ephesians 2:10?

We who are saved are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

C. Why do you think Paul emphasized the truths of Ephesians 2:8-10 so strongly? See Philippians 3:3-9 to help you prepare your answer.

At one point in his life Paul was very confident that he could do all that was necessary on his own in order to be saved. He stressed the doing of good works and living a life of obedience. After his conversion, he realized that his works were absolutely worthless as far as meriting salvation was concerned.

**At the same time, Paul wanted believers to know that good works are very important as “fruits” of salvation. God has given us new life in Christ Jesus and has created us for doing those good works which glorify God and benefit others. Not only does God require that we perform good works—he also enables us to do them.**

6. Read the following passages from Paul’s letter to the Romans, and answer the questions based on each passage.

A. Romans 4:3, 18 and 20-22. Why was Abraham considered righteous before God?

**Abraham was considered righteous before God because of his faith. God had given Abraham some wonderful promises and Abraham believed what God promised him—even though the promises would not be fulfilled for a long time.**

B. Romans 5:1-8

1. How are we justified before God?

**We are justified before God through faith in Jesus Christ (and His substitutionary atonement).**

2. How is it possible to rejoice in our sufferings?

**We can rejoice in our sufferings because suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character and character produces a hope which does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts though the Holy Spirit whom He has given us.**

3. How did God demonstrate His love for us?

**God demonstrated His love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners and spiritually powerless.**

C. Romans 8:5-7

1. How does Paul contrast the mind of sinful man with the mind controlled by the Holy Spirit?

**By nature, everyone has a sinful mind. This mind is set on pursuing evil desires which, when pursued, lead to death. This mind is hostile to God,**

**does not and cannot obey God’s law, and cannot please God. The mind controlled by the Holy Spirit is set on the things which the Holy Spirit wants in our lives. Following the Spirit’s leading brings life and peace.**

D. Romans 8:26-28

1. What great promise is given in verse 26?

**The Holy Spirit prays for us, interceding for us with groans that words cannot express.**

2. What great promise is given in verse 28?

**God works in all things for the spiritual good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose. Verse 29 indicates that the goal of this all is that we might “be conformed to the likeness of His Son,” that is, that we might increasingly become like Jesus.**

7. List five problems or concerns which Paul addresses in his first letter to the Corinthians. Choose from chapter 1:10-17 and chapters 3, 5-9, 11, 12, 14. Express each concern in one or two sentences.

**SAMPLE**

**Any of the following answers will be appropriate:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1. Divisions in the church</b>      | <b>2. Immorality in the church</b>               |
| <b>3. Lawsuits among believers</b>     | <b>4. Marriage and singleness</b>                |
| <b>5. Food sacrificed to idols</b>     | <b>6. The rights of an apostle</b>               |
| <b>7. The role of women in worship</b> | <b>8. Proper observance of the Lord’s Supper</b> |
| <b>9. Spiritual gifts</b>              | <b>10. Prophecy and speaking in tongues</b>      |

8. Where does Paul treat each of the following subjects in his second letter to the Corinthian church? Indicate the chapter and verses.

A. Paul’s sufferings, trials and struggles

2 Corinthians: **6:3-12**

B. The future blessings of heaven

2 Corinthians: **4:16–5:10**



C. The importance and joy of giving

2 Corinthians: **8:1-15; 9:1-15**

D. Paul's "unanswered" prayer

2 Corinthians: **12:1-10**

E. The glory of the new covenant

2 Corinthians: **3:7-18**

9. Summarize the main teaching of Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

**In his letter to the Galatians Paul emphasizes that salvation is purely a gift of grace which believers receive through faith apart from the works of the law. Believers in Christ are free from the burdens of Old Testament law but, through the Holy Spirit, produce wonderful spiritual fruit to the glory of God.**

10. What does Paul teach about God's eternal purpose and plan in the following passages?

A. Ephesians 1:4

**God chose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in His sight.**

B. Ephesians 1:5

**God predestined us in love to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.**

C. Ephesians 1:11

**We were chosen in Christ, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.**

D. Ephesians 1:12

**The purpose of God's choosing us was that we (all believers) might live for the praise of His glory.**

11. Read Ephesians 4:17-24. Summarize Paul's teaching in this passage in three or four sentences.

**Note to mentors: The following paragraph is one possible way of summarizing Paul's teaching in these verses. Students may well choose other words which will fairly present what Paul is teaching.**

**Believers should no longer live as unbelievers do who have no understanding of the ways of God and who are separated from Him through their spiritual ignorance. They do whatever they please, having abandoned themselves to impurity and unholiness. Believers, on the contrary, are created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness and therefore should put off their old way of life and be made new in the attitude of their minds.**

12. A. All but one of the following words or ideas are emphasized in Paul's letter to the Philippians. Circle the **ONE** which is not emphasized here.

Marriage Joy Assurance Humility Prayer Thanksgiving  
Contentment

B. Indicate the chapter(s) and verse(s) where each of the ideas in "A" above is emphasized in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

1. **Joy: Philippians 1:4, 18, 25, 26; 2:2, 17-18, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10**
2. **Assurance: Philippians 1:6, 12-14, 19-25; 3:7-10, 20-21; 4:13, 19**
3. **Humility: Philippians 2:1-11**
4. **Prayer: Philippians 1:4, 9; 4:6**
5. **Thanksgiving: Philippians 1:3; 4:6, 10-16**
6. **Contentment: Philippians 2:14; 4:11-12, 17**

13. Read Colossians 1:15-23 and write out five specific teachings which are found in these verses. Also, give the reference where each teaching is found.

**SAMPLE**

**This is an exceptionally rich passage doctrinally. Among the many things which may be chosen by students are the following:**

- A. Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).**
- B. Christ is the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15).**
- C. All things were created by Christ and for Christ (Colossians 1:16).**

- D. Christ is before all things and all things hold together in Him (Colossians 1:17).
- E. Christ is the head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18).
- F. Christ is the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18).
- G. Christ must have the supremacy in everything (Colossians 1:18).
- H. God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Christ (Colossians 1:19).
- I. God was pleased to reconcile all things to Himself through Christ by making peace through His blood shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20).
- J. The readers were alienated from God at one time and were enemies of God because of their evil behavior (Colossians 1:21).
- K. The readers are now reconciled to God through Christ's death (Colossians 1:22).
- L. God's purpose in reconciling believers is to make them holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:22).
- M. Believers will be holy in God's sight and free from accusation only if they continue in their faith (Colossians 1:23).
- N. The Gospel has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and Paul is a servant of that Gospel (Colossians 1:23).

14. Timothy was Paul's close friend and companion on his missionary journeys. Paul's second letter to Timothy may be the last epistle he wrote.

- A. Write out the well-known verse in 2 Timothy 3 that describes God's inspiration of Scripture.

**“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” 2 Timothy 3:16**

- B. In 2 Timothy 4:6 Paul refers to his coming death (departure). How does he describe his life in vs. 7?

**Paul indicates that his life has been a “fight” (against the powers of evil and darkness), but he also states that he has fought a good fight, has finished the race and has kept the faith.**

- C. How does Paul describe what awaits him after death (vs. 8)?

**After death there will be for Paul a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to Him.**

15. Listed below are ten subjects. Write the name of the epistle in which you will find the best discussion of each subject. Choose from the following epistles: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter.

- A. 1 Corinthians human love

- B. Philemon leniency for a runaway slave

- C. Romans justification by faith

- D. Hebrews the priesthood of Jesus

- E. James control of our tongues

- F. 2 Peter the second coming of Christ and the new earth

- G. 1 Corinthians the resurrection of believers

- H. Hebrews the great heroes of faith

- I. 1 Timothy (or James) the danger of riches

- J. 1 Timothy elders and deacons

16. The Epistle to the Hebrews contains three important sentences which include the word “without.” Write out the three sentences and explain the significance of each one.

- A. Hebrews 9:22

**“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Hebrews 9:22**

**In the Old Testament, God's people were required to offer animal sacrifices for their sins and transgressions. Thus, the “shedding of blood” was required for forgiveness. Blood was also sprinkled on the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. A blood sacrifice was also associated with the establishment of the covenant. All these blood sacrifices pointed forward to the death of the Lamb of God who shed His blood for the sins of the world. Without His sacrifice, no forgiveness would be possible.**

- B. Hebrews 11:6

**“Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Hebrews 11:6**

**It is only by believing in God and in His promises that one can find salvation. Salvation is a gift of God and can only be received by those who truly and humbly receive by faith what God provides for them and offers them. It is impossible to earn or merit salvation, and it is equally impossible to receive**

salvation if one doubts the reality of God or the sincerity of His offer or the sufficiency of what God has done for him in Christ.

C. Hebrews 12:14

“Without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14

**In chapter 12 the author emphasizes the value and importance of discipline in the Christian life. Believers should throw off everything that hinders them and run with perseverance the race marked out for them. They should not easily give up in their spiritual struggles nor hang on to any bitterness or miss the grace of God in any other way (12:15). Living a holy life is a prerequisite for attaining the bliss and joy of heaven.**

17. According to Hebrews 10:11-14, why is Christ’s sacrifice “better” than the sacrifices offered by the Old Testament priests?

- 1. Christ’s sacrifice needed to be offered only once for all time whereas Old Testament sacrifices needed to be offered over and over again.**
- 2. Christ’s sacrifice could actually take away sins; Old Testament sacrifices could not.**
- 3. Christ’s one sacrifice made believers perfect forever; Old Testament sacrifices could never do that.**
- 4. Christ’s perfect sacrifice earned for Him the right to sit down at the right hand of God with His work completed; no Old Testament sacrifice could ever do that.**

18. Peter was a member of “the inner circle” of Jesus’ disciples.

A. What truths does Peter emphasize in both of his epistles?

**In both of his epistles Peter strongly emphasizes the solid hope of believers and the importance of living lives of holiness and obedience in anticipation of Christ’s return.**

B. What are some differences between Peter’s two epistles?

**In his first letter, Peter provides much teaching not found in his second letter: practical teaching for husbands and wives, elders and church leaders, younger and older believers. He also emphasizes the importance of submitting to those in authority and bearing patiently with affliction. In his second letter he emphasizes the divine origin of the Scriptures and warns against false teachers who will surely be punished. He also foretells the**

**fiery destruction of the present earth and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.**

**Not only are many of the ideas different in the two epistles, however. There is also a significant difference in the style of writing and in the choice of words used.**

C. How would you account for these differences between the two epistles?

**It’s quite possible that Peter may have written the second letter much later than the first one and under much different circumstances. It is also possible that one of the letters was written by an assistant (called an amanuensis) whose writing gifts and style may have been quite different from those of Peter the fisherman.**

19. The apostle John is often known as “the beloved disciple” of Jesus.

A. Which five books of the New Testament did he write?

**John wrote the Gospel account that bears his name, the three epistles known as 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation.**

B. How does John refer to himself or describe himself in 1 John 1:1-4?

**John describes himself as one who actually saw and touched the Christ about whom he writes. John was an “eye and ear” witness who had first hand experience with the things about which he wrote.**

C. What similarities are there between John’s first letter and his Gospel account?

**In both writings John emphasized the following themes: God’s great love, our love for one another, faith, personal assurance, light and life. In both writings he also wrote as one who had a close relationship with the person about whom he wrote.**

D. According to 1 John 5:13-20, what six things may believers know?

1. Verse 13: **We may know that we have eternal life.**

2. Verse 15: **We know that God hears us when we pray and we know that we have what we asked of Him.**



3. Verse 18: **We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin because he is kept safe and cannot be touched by the evil one.**
4. Verse 19: **We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.**
5. Verse 20a: **We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding.**
6. Verse 20b: **We may know Him Who is true, even Jesus Christ, Who is the true God and eternal life.**
20. Jude was probably a brother of Jesus who came to believe in Him after His resurrection.
- A. What was the main theme or purpose of Jude's writing? See Jude verse 3.
- Jude wrote to urge his readers "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."**
- B. Why did Jude feel he had to write about this? (Jude verse 4)
- Heresies were creeping into the church by way of some godless men who secretly slipped in among the believers. These people changed the grace of God into a license for immorality and denied Jesus Christ as our only Sovereign Lord.**
- C. What message of encouragement and perseverance did Jude give in verses 20-23?
- Jude urged his readers to build themselves up in the faith, to pray in the Holy Spirit, to keep themselves in God's love as they waited for Christ to bring them to eternal life, to be merciful to those who doubted, to save others from the fire, to hate anything that was in the least tainted by evil.**
- D. Write out the beautiful doxology that concludes Jude's letter (Verses 24-25).
- "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen."**

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. At times a strong distinction is made between "doctrinal" teachings and "practical" teachings. For example, the first 11 chapters of Romans present many "doctrinal" matters, while chapters 12 through 16 deal with various "practical" issues. Do you believe "doctrine" is also practical? Please explain your answer.

**Doctrinal teachings are definitely very "practical" since they teach us how God wants us to think about Himself, Jesus, salvation, our world, ourselves and the relationship He maintains to us and our world.**

**Also, it is by believing the redemptive doctrinal teachings of the Bible that we come to know the way of salvation. That is eminently practical indeed!**

**In addition, doctrinal truths form the basis or foundation for all of our "practical" beliefs. When these foundational truths are cut away through negligence or unbelief, the moral guidelines soon lose their authority and effectiveness.**

2. Please evaluate the following statement: "A person will be able to understand the epistles better if he has some knowledge of the Old Testament." Give some specific examples to support your position.

**This is certainly true. Although the epistles are not as "historical" as the Gospel accounts and the book of Acts, the epistles often refer to or relate to people, events, places and teachings mentioned in the Old Testament. For example, the epistles contain references to David, Abraham, Moses, the prophets, Israel, the Psalms, election, law, creation, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, priests, the temple, sacrifices, worship, etc. A person who is not familiar with these will have much more difficulty understanding the New Testament.**

**Also, the Old Testament contains many references to coming events related to the Messiah and the Messianic age, some of which are still not fulfilled. Knowledge of the Old Testament clearly helps the reader better understand the epistles which may refer to them or elaborate on them.**

3. All of the epistles are interesting, significant and important. However, many people have one or two epistles which are very "special" to them. If there is any epistle which is special to you, please indicate which one it is and why it means so much to you. (If you don't have any "favorite" epistles, choose a few favorite passages from the epistles and indicate why they are special to you.)

**A student's selection of favorite epistles or favorite passages in the epistles should be very interesting and, once again, probably enlightening. You may also wish to share with your student some favorite passages of your own. That would surely be interesting—and probably enlightening to— him/her!**

4. If the apostles were living today, which subjects do you think they would emphasize in their writings? Please give the reason for your answer.

**With all the things that have taken place in society in recent years, it should not surprise you if your student's response will reflect the very things you read about in your newspaper and news magazines or the subjects often referred to on television. For example, students may focus on crime, sexual morality, war, greed, dishonesty and the like. Other students, however, may be more sensitive to some of the doctrinal aberrations which have received a lot of attention lately, including the rise of new religious cults and sects and the teachings and practices of some of the old ones.**

5. Write a brief epistle to the churches in one of today's major cities as you believe Paul or Peter might write it if they were here today.

**Students' presentations here will likely reflect some of the things which are currently on their own hearts and minds. Their "epistles" may therefore give you a good insight into where they are on their spiritual journeys. Be encouraging if you possibly can—even if their honest endeavors may prove to be less than creative or inspiring.**

**Please share with the Crossroads office some "epistles" which you think are particularly perceptive or well-written.**

## LESSON 11: Understanding the Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation was written by the apostle John while he was in exile on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. John likely wrote Revelation near the end of the first century at a time of great persecution in the church. Some scholars, however, believe that he may have written it during another period of persecution some time before the fall of Jerusalem.

The book of Revelation is not only the last book in the Bible, it is also the most unusual book in the Bible. It overflows with symbols and images that are, in many instances, "out of this world." And because of its uniqueness, many people regard it as the most difficult book of the Bible to understand. At the same time, many see it as the most fascinating book in the Bible as it portrays the future of mankind in vivid, colorful and dramatic language.

### THE NATURE OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

#### APOCALYPTIC (uh • PAH • ka • LIP • tik) LITERATURE:

**The word "Apocalypse" itself simply means "Revelation."**

- a. The book of Revelation is one example in the Bible of apocalyptic literature. Other apocalyptic writings are found in some of the Old Testament books such as Daniel. **Apocalyptic writings reveal or unveil the future (or the present) by using highly pictorial and symbolical images, visions, characters and actions.** The book of Revelation is therefore sometimes called "The Apocalypse," which is the title of the book in the Greek Bible.
- b. **The language in apocalyptic writings is usually colorful, bold, arresting and unforgettable.** The writings often describe great battles or conflicts which exist or will develop between the powers of good and the powers of evil in the world. The powers of evil sometimes achieve dramatic victories, but good (God) always triumphs gloriously in the end when all evil is overcome and destroyed for ever.
- c. **Apocalyptic literature not only unveils the future but also "lifts the curtain" from what is happening throughout history.** It demonstrates that the primary conflict in this world is not between peoples or nations but between the kingdom of light (the kingdom of God) and the kingdom of darkness (the kingdom of Satan). In various dramatic ways it reveals that the primary movers behind many things that take place on the earth are not mere men but the spiritual powers of the kingdom of darkness.
- d. **At first it may seem strange that apocalyptic literature is said to "reveal" or "unveil" the future, since the images and symbols used often seem to hide more than they reveal.** However, the first readers of this literature were usually not as perplexed about these images and symbols as we are.

# THE REASON FOR APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Question    A significant question concerning apocalyptic writing in the Bible is this:  
***Why did John and Daniel use the apocalyptic style of writing at all? Why didn't they use plain and ordinary language whose meaning no one could possibly miss?***

Answer       The answer to that question may be debatable, but there are at least three or four very good reasons which can be suggested.

**Reason 1.** The writers did not want everyone to understand what they were writing! Daniel wrote his book while he was in captivity. John wrote while he was in exile. Both of them wrote about the conflict between good and evil which would ultimately end in the destruction of evil. At the time they wrote, most of the rulers were on the side of evil. It would have been unwise for the writers to mention these rulers or their countries by name since that could easily have aroused more intense opposition or greater persecution of believers. At the same time, most believers themselves would know what the message was all about so they could be comforted and encouraged by it.

**Reason 2.** The conflict between good and evil was not limited to the time or circumstances of the first readers. It is a conflict which continues to go on until the end of history. By using apocalyptic language, the writers were able to reach a much broader group of readers—people who would be living in many different times, places, and situations where the conflict would take place.

**Reason 3.** The apocalyptic style of writing usually includes an element of mystery. Since there is much about the future (as well as the present!) which we do not fully understand, the apocalyptic style seems to be an appropriate way of conveying divine mysteries which will not be fully resolved until the end of time when all prophecies will have been fulfilled.

**Reason 4.** God desires not only to instruct our minds but also to stimulate our imaginations, so that all our powers of thought are gripped and stirred by His revelation.

## FOUR BASIC APPROACHES TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Note: Though there are many different interpretations of the book of Revelation, there are four basic approaches which generally determine how one looks at the specifics in the book.

### Approach 1. The Idealist View

According to this view, the book of Revelation describes in general terms the conflict between good and evil in this world. It does not refer to any specific historical events but graphically and dramatically portrays some dimensions of the conflict and its final outcome when good triumphs over evil.

### Approach 2. The Preterist View

According to this view, the first 18 chapters of the book describe what was happening during the time of the author or what was going to happen shortly after the book was written (Revelation 1:1, 3; 3:11). The last four chapters describe what will happen at the end of history when Christ returns.

### Approach 3. The Futurist View

According to this view, Revelation primarily describes what will happen in the future. Chapters 1-3 describe the early church, but the specific churches mentioned in these chapters are also symbolic of seven successive periods in church history. Chapters 4-18 describe what will happen on earth after Christ returns to earth for His church and takes them to heaven for a seven year period. Chapter 19 describes the glorious victory of Christ over His enemies when He returns. Chapter 20 describes the 1,000-year reign of Christ with His people on this earth (the millennium). Chapters 21 and 22 describe the eternal future. Futurists generally interpret the numbers in Revelation literally whenever possible.

### Approach 4. The Historicist View

According to this view, most of the book of Revelation describes the unfolding of church history between the first and second comings of Christ while the last two chapters describe the new heavens and the new earth. Historicists believe that many of the events presented in Revelation can be readily identified, though there is often considerable debate concerning specifics.

Some historicists find two major divisions in the book, chapters 1-11 and 12-22. Those who hold this view usually teach that the first section deals primarily with the history of the people of Israel while the second section deals primarily with the progress of the Gospel in the Gentile world.

Another group of historicists teach that Revelation does not give us a continuous account of church history from Christ's ascension to His return but rather gives us seven parallel accounts of that period. According to this view, each of the parallel accounts gives us a general overview of the entire period of church history while emphasizing a different aspect of that history. Each successive account also gives us additional details about the end of history, ending with a glorious description of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation 21 and 22. This view is called "progressive parallelism."

Most interpreters who hold to the historicist view believe that many of the numbers used in Revelation are to be understood symbolically rather than literally.

## THREE BASIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MILLENNIUM

Note: Revelation 20 describes a thousand year period (called a millennium) in which some dramatic events will take place. Scholars differ greatly on their interpretation of this thousand year period. There are three main interpretations which should be noted. (Described in Revelation 20)



**Interpretation 1. The Premillennial View**

Though there are several different versions of the premillennial view, most of them agree on the following: Christ will return to earth before (“pre” means “before”) the millennium begins. He will raise up all believers who have died and take them, along with all living believers, back to heaven with Him. This event is called “the rapture.” In heaven these believers will form Christ’s bride and will celebrate with Him a glorious wedding banquet. During this time of celebration in heaven (usually considered to be from three-and-a-half to seven years), there will be great chaos and tribulation on earth. However, there will also be a great increase in the number of believers. After the tribulation period is over, Christ will return to earth with His bride. He will destroy His enemies, set up an earthly kingdom, and will reign with believers on earth for one thousand wonderful years of peace and blessing. This premillennial view is held by most futurists.

**Interpretation 2. The Postmillennial View**

According to this view, Christ will return to reign on earth after (“post” means “after”) a glorious period of time in which the Gospel will be spread to the ends of the earth and most people in the world will be positively influenced by Christianity. This wonderful period of time is symbolically referred to as a millennium, but the exact period of time involved is neither known nor important.

**Interpretation 3. The Amillennial view**

According to this view, the thousand years of Revelation 20 refer to a long, indefinite period of time between the first and second comings of Christ. During this time Christ rules over the universe from His position in heaven. The “thousand years” is not taken literally (the “A” in amillennial means “no” or “not”) but is regarded as a symbolic number just as many of the other numbers and images in Revelation are. During the “thousand year” period, the Gospel will be preached to the entire world and people of every nation, tribe, people and language will be saved (Matthew 28:20; Mark 14:9; Revelation 5:9-10). Satan is bound during this time (Revelation 20:3) in the sense that he will not be able to stop the world-wide spread of the Gospel. Believers rule with Christ during this period as they spiritually “sit with Christ in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 2:6) and exercise His authority on earth by honoring Him in every area of life, maintaining a faithful testimony, and authoritatively proclaiming the Gospel of Christ (Revelation 1:6; 5:10). The amillennial view is held by many or most historicists.

The differences between the three positions are very significant. All positions have their very strong defenders. However, all agree that the Father has already given Christ full authority in heaven and on earth. All agree also on the necessity and importance of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 1:19-21; Acts 1:8).

**10 GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

**Guideline 1. Remember that biblical prophecies are often not understood fully or completely until after they are fulfilled (1 Peter 1:10-12).**

Do not be unduly discouraged or surprised if there are things in the book of Revelation that you do not fully understand.

**Guideline 2. Try to understand the basic or fundamental message of the book before getting overly involved in the interpretation of details or specifics.**

Once you have gained an understanding of the basic message, interpret the details and specifics in the light of that message.

**Guideline 3. Do not become rigid or dogmatic in your interpretation.**

Over the years, many interpreters have confidently made predictions about the future or have confidently given interpretations of certain passages, only to be proven wrong by later historical events. Humility is a great virtue when interpreting the book of Revelation!

**Guideline 4. Remember that the author wrote this book in order to comfort and encourage believers while strongly and persistently warning unbelievers.**

Any interpretation of Revelation which leaves believers fearful or afraid or which leaves unbelievers unconcerned and unmoved is on the wrong track.

**Guideline 5. Since apocalyptic literature consistently uses a variety of out-of-the-ordinary figures and images, the interpreter should usually look beyond the literal words used to the truth or message they symbolize or represent.**

For example, the dragon represents Satan, the beasts refer to powerful earthly rulers under Satan’s control, horns are symbols of power and authority, the sea is a source of evil, bowls of wrath signify judgments, trumpets are used for divine announcements, gold and precious stones portray that which is beautiful and wonderful, Babylon stands for organized human life in opposition to the Gospel, etc.

**Guideline 6. Many of the numbers used in Revelation appear to be symbolic and should be interpreted with great care.**

A literal interpretation of these numbers should not immediately be rejected, but neither should it necessarily be emphasized. This is particularly true of those numbers, such as three, four, seven, ten, and twelve (and their multiples) which often are used symbolically in the Bible. One should be particularly careful not to use the numbers in Revelation to develop a system of interpretation which claims to provide “special insights” into the meaning of the Bible.

**Guideline 7. Remember that the book of Revelation was written to provide comfort and encouragement for the people who first read it (Revelation 1:3; 3:11; 21:1-5; 22:1-5, 12, 17, 20) as well as for persecuted believers in every generation.**

Even though it does clearly refer to a number of events which are still in the future, it was not intended primarily to meet the needs of those who would be living in the final few years of human history.

**Guideline 8. It is not necessary to understand everything in Revelation before one can derive a blessing from it (Revelation 1:3).**

There are many things in the book which provide comfort, assurance, confidence and hope no matter which approach one takes to the book as a whole or how one interprets the specifics in the book.

**Guideline 9. Revelation should not be looked upon as the key to the interpretation of the rest of the Bible.**

Rather, Revelation should be read and interpreted in the light of the Bible as a whole. Its symbolic presentations should be interpreted in light of passages which are less symbolic and its extraordinary figures, expressions and events should be interpreted in light of passages which are more ordinary and straightforward.

**Guideline 10. Do not try to find in Revelation an exact blueprint of end-time events.**

Though Revelation does tell us about a number of specific things which are going to happen in the future, it does not present them in a way that permits us to write an exact account of history in advance. In that regard, Revelation parallels the Old Testament. The Old Testament writers provided much information about the coming Messiah, but they did not give that information in such a way that anyone could have predicted exactly what would happen when the Messiah finally arrived.

## 10 SIGNIFICANT TEACHINGS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

**Teaching 1. Revelation gives us God’s view of history—both the past and the future.**

It assures us that God is not taken by surprise, that He is not helpless in the face of evil, and that He sovereignly rules and governs over all things—no matter what may have taken place in the past or what will still take place in the future. Revelation 1:1-2; 4:1-11

**Teaching 2. Revelation shows that Jesus Christ is presently reigning in heaven as the victorious Lamb of God at the right hand of His Father.**

The entire heavenly host of saints and angels are continually praising Him, giving Him the honor and glory that He deserves. Revelation 1:12-18; 5:9-14

**Teaching 3. Revelation emphasizes the importance and blessedness of remaining faithful to the Lord.**

Faithfulness may result in persecution or trials in this life, but it will ultimately result in great blessing in the life to come. Revelation 2:5; 2:10; 3:5-6; 3:10-12; 3:21

**Teaching 4. Revelation reveals that nothing can take place upon the earth without the permission and control of Jesus Christ.**

Only He can break open the “seals” of the scroll that reveal what is to come. Revelation 5:9; 6:1-12

**Teaching 5. Revelation provides tremendous encouragement for all believers who are suffering for their faith.**

God assures them that He has not forsaken or forgotten them. He will surely be with them in their sufferings and will eventually give them an eternity of blessedness and joy in His presence. Revelation 7:9-18

**Teaching 6. Revelation assures us that God takes very seriously the prayers of His people.**

Though it may sometimes seem that prayers are unanswered, history does not move forward without God taking those prayers fully into account. Revelation 8:1-5

**Teaching 7. Revelation teaches that the powers of evil are strong, clever, unceasingly active and extremely dangerous.**

No one should ever take lightly the power of temptation, the lure of evil or the strength of the enemy. Revelation 13:3-8, 11-17

**Teaching 8. Revelation teaches that Jesus Christ will soon return to this earth to judge and punish the unbelieving and unrepentant world and reward those who have trusted and obeyed Him. Revelation 1:7; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7, 20**

Those who are redeemed by His sacrifice will be beyond number and will come from every nation, language, people and tribe. Revelation 5:9; 7:9

**Teaching 9. Revelation presents an unmistakably clear warning to all who deny or forsake or disbelieve in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The penalties awaiting unbelievers are as unimaginably terrible as the blessings awaiting believers are unimaginably glorious. Revelation 14:9-11; 20:15; 21:8

**Teaching 10. Revelation teaches that God will ultimately be victorious over all the forces of evil.**

At the end of the present age He will create a glorious new heaven and earth in which believers will live forever with Him and the Lord Jesus in perfect righteousness and joy. Revelation 21:1-5; 22:1-7

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Though there is much disagreement regarding the interpretation of many things in the book of Revelation, there are many things on which virtually all Christians agree. Revelation clearly pictures a time of great persecution for God’s people, a great and wonderful victory for Christ and His followers, an awesome judgment on unbelievers and a glorious new heaven and earth in which righteousness will dwell. The redeemed people of God will form a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language (Revelation 5:9; 5:11; 7:9-10). Together these believers will live with their Lord in perfect peace and joy forever (Revelation 21 and 22).

## QUESTIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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1. The book of Revelation is a good example of apocalyptic literature.

A. What does the word “apocalypse” mean?

**The word apocalypse means “revelation.”**

B. What are some characteristics of apocalyptic literature?

**Apocalyptic writings reveal or unveil the future (or the present) by using highly symbolical images, visions, characters and actions. The language used is usually colorful, bold, arresting and unforgettable. The writings often describe great battles or conflicts which exist or which will develop between the powers of good and the powers of evil in the world. The powers of evil sometimes achieve dramatic victories, but good (God) always triumphs in the end when evil is overcome and destroyed forever.**

C. Which Old Testament books also contain apocalyptic writings?

**Both Daniel and Ezekiel contain apocalyptic writings. (Note: the lesson notes mention only the book of Daniel in this regard).**

D. How does apocalyptic literature “lift the curtain” from what is happening in our own day and help us understand what happens throughout all of history?

**Apocalyptic literature helps us see that the primary conflict in this world is not between people or nations (as important as these may be) but between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Apocalyptic writers reveal in dramatic ways that the primary movers behind much that happens on earth are not mere men but spiritual powers from either the Kingdom of Light or the kingdom of darkness.**

2. List four reasons why John may have chosen to use the apocalyptic style of writing rather than a more “ordinary” style of writing.

A. **The writers did not want everyone to understand what they were writing. At the time they wrote, most of the rulers were on the side of evil, so it would have been dangerous and unwise for the writers to mention these rulers or their countries by name.**

B. **Since the conflict between good and evil continues to go on throughout history, the writers may reach a much broader group of readers by using apocalyptic language.**

C. **Apocalyptic writing usually includes an element of mystery. This style is very appropriate for conveying divine mysteries which will not be fully understood until the end of time when all prophecies have been fulfilled.**

D. **God desires not only to instruct our minds but also to stimulate our imagination so that all our powers are gripped and stirred by His revelation.**

3. There are four basic approaches to the book of Revelation which people have used as they “interpret” this book.

A. Describe the idealist approach.

**Idealist: Revelation describes the conflict between good and evil in this world in general terms without referring to any specific historical events. It graphically and dramatically portrays some dimensions of the conflict and presents the final triumph of good over evil.**

B. Describe the preterist approach.

**Preterist: The first 18 chapters of Revelation describe early church history (at the time of the author or shortly thereafter) while the last 4 chapters describe what will happen at the end of history.**

C. Describe the futurist approach.

**Futurist: Chapters 1-3 describe the early church, but the churches mentioned in these chapters are also symbolic of 7 successive periods of church history. Chapters 4-18 describe what will happen on earth after Christ comes to earth and takes His church to heaven for a 7-year period. Chapter 19 describes Christ’s victory over His enemies when He returns after the 7-year period. Chapter 20 describes the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth with His people. Chapters 21 and 22 describe the eternal future.**

D. Describe the historicist approach.

**Historicist: Most of the book describes the unfolding of church history between the first and second comings of Christ while the last two chapters describe the new heavens and the new earth. Revelation describes many specific events in church history which can be at least tentatively identified**



4. Answer the following questions in the light of your present understanding of the book of Revelation.

A. Indicate which of the four approaches to Revelation you presently like the most. Then indicate why you prefer this approach.

**Note to mentors: Since this question deals only with “preferences,” no position should be considered “wrong.” However, if a student advances some very shallow arguments for a particular position, you might point this out to him/her.**

**Students will choose a variety of positions for a variety of reasons. Quite possibly many of your students will have been exposed most extensively to the futurist position since much of current evangelicalism is premillennial. There are intriguing books, articles, movies and videos which imaginatively and dramatically portray this position.**

**On the other hand, some students may be “turned off” by some of the excesses of this kind of presentation and prefer one of the other positions. It is not likely that many of them will opt for the preterist approach, even though there are some strong and able proponents of this position.**

B. Indicate which of the four approaches to Revelation you presently like the least. Then indicate why you do not like this approach.

**See notes in #4A above.**

5. Each of the following statements is false. Please explain what makes them false.

A. “According to the preterist view of Revelation, the description of the locust plague in chapter 9 quite probably describes either the spread of communism in the 20th century or the horrors of World War II.”

**This is false because the preterists teach that Revelation describes early church history and not later history.**

B. “According to the idealist view, Revelation 20 describes a period of 1,000 years when Jesus Christ will rule over the nations from His throne in Jerusalem.”

**This is false because idealists teach that Revelation does not describe specific events in history.**

C. “According to the futurist view, in Revelation 13 the beast out of the sea refers to the Roman Emperor Nero who put both Peter and Paul to death.”

**This is false because futurists teach that chapters 4 through 18 describe events that have not yet taken place.**

D. “According to the historicist view, Revelation 18 is probably a symbolic picture of the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D.”

**This is false because most historicists teach that Revelation 18 describes events that took place after the writing of Revelation, not before.**

6. Revelation opens with the words, “The revelation of Jesus Christ . . .”

A. What names or titles are given to Jesus in the following passages?

1. Revelation 1:5      **The faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth**

2. Revelation 1:17      **The first and the last**

3. Revelation 3:14      **The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation**

4. Revelation 5:5      **The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David**

5. Revelation 19:11      **Faithful and True**

B. In Revelation 22:13 the same title is given to Jesus as is given in Revelation 1:8 to God the Father.

1. What is that title?

**The Alpha and the Omega (These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, so they are sometimes translated as “The Beginning and the End.”)**

2. What does this title teach us about Jesus?

**Since Jesus shares this title with the Father, He is one with the Father.**

7. Revelation 1:12-16 gives us a picture of Jesus in glory.

- A. Do you think this picture should be taken literally? Please give the reason for your answer.

**Yes and No. What John describes was surely a true representation of what he actually saw. In that sense we are to take the picture literally. However, what John saw was a symbolic, not literal, presentation of Jesus in His power and glory. The book of Revelation is full of apocalyptic-style images which are intended to give a powerful overall impression—not a literal picture. The vision John saw was not intended to tell us how Jesus presently “looks” any more than Revelation 4:2-3 is intended to give us a literal picture of how God “looks.”**

- B. What personal benefit do you derive from this picture of Jesus in Revelation 1?

**This picture should do at least two things.**

- 1. It should give us comfort and encouragement, knowing that Jesus is powerful, glorious and in control of all that is happening in the churches. He is no longer suffering, weak, forsaken or living in the humiliation of the cross. (Note to mentors: it might be appropriate in some situations for you to point out to students the difference between this image of Christ and the image found in so many churches where Christ is still presented as being on the cross in suffering and weakness.)**
- 2. It should humble us and give us a sense of awe whenever we think of Christ. John was so overwhelmed by this vision of Christ that he fell at Christ’s feet in fear as though dead (Revelation 1:17). Christ does not want us to be afraid, but the picture of Christ in Revelation 1 should make us think of Christ with appropriate reverence and with an awareness of His majesty.**

8. List some passages in Revelation which emphasize how important it is and also how blessed it is for believers to remain faithful to the Lord.

### **SAMPLE**

#### **(1) Reference: Revelation 2:5 and 7**

**The Message: “Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. . . . To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”**

#### **(2) Reference: Revelation 2:10**

**The Message: “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

#### **(3) Reference: Revelation 2:25-26**

**The Message: “Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.”**

#### **(4) Reference: Revelation 3:3 and 5**

**The Message: “Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent . . . He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and His angels.”**

9. In Revelation 4, John sees a vision of God in heaven.

- A. How is God pictured or presented in this vision?

**God was pictured as sitting on a throne. He had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and a rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.**

- B. Who do you think the 24 elders represent?

**Note to mentors: Since Questions B and C ask for the student’s opinion, you should not consider any answer “wrong.” However, if an answer seems to have little or no justification at all, you might point this out.**

**The 24 elders may represent the fullness of believers of both the Old and New Testaments, since 12 (and its multiples) often seem to represent the people of God. Consider, for example, the 12 tribes in the Old Testament and the 12 disciples in the New Testament.**

- C. In your understanding, who or what do the “four living creatures” represent?

**The “four living creatures” may represent the fullness of God’s creation, all of which was created for the purpose of glorifying Him and demonstrating His majesty and glory.**

- D. According to Revelation 4:11, why is God worthy to receive glory and honor?

**God is worthy to receive glory and honor because He is the Creator of all things.**

10. A. In Revelation 5:5, Jesus is referred to as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah.” However, in verse 6 John doesn’t see a Lion. What does he see?

**John sees a Lamb who (which) was slain.**

- B. According to Revelation 5:9, why was the Lamb worthy to take the scroll and open its seals?

**The Lamb is worthy because He was slain and with His blood purchased men for God from all people and nations.**

- C. In John’s vision, who gave praise and honor to the Lamb? See Revelation 5:13

**Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea brought praise and honor to the Lamb.**

- D. In chapters 5 through 7, there are 13 references to Jesus as the Lamb and only one reference to Jesus as the Lion. Why do you think this description of Jesus as a LAMB is so important? See also Revelation 13:8.

**It was as the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world that Jesus became a victor and conqueror. He achieved His position through His suffering and death—not through overpowering conquest. Throughout history, it is the message of Christ the slain and risen Lamb which brings salvation. Likewise, Christ’s servants throughout history win spiritual battles through suffering and service, not as overpowering lions. The time of judgment is still future. Then the Lamb will also be seen as the Lion who defeats and destroys all those who have opposed the Kingdom of God.**

11. The book of Revelation contains many unusual images or expressions. However, some of these ideas or expressions are also found already in the Old Testament. Compare, for example, the following passages and indicate what image or idea is contained in both passages.

- A. Isaiah 25:8 and Revelation 21:4

**God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of His people and there will be no more death.**

- B. Isaiah 34:4 and Revelation 6:13-14

**The stars of the heaven will be dissolved (or fall to the earth) like shriveled figs and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll.**

- C. Genesis 3:22-24 and Revelation 22:1-2

**The tree of life.**

- D. Daniel 7:3-8 and Revelation 13:1-8, 11-17

**Awesome beasts with great power, various heads and crowns or horns.**

- E. Zechariah 4:1-3 and Revelation 11:4

**Two olive trees and a golden lampstand (or two).**

12. Select five items (figures, images, stories) from the book of Revelation which you believe should NOT be interpreted literally. Give the reference (chapter and verse), the item involved, and the reason why you think it should not be interpreted literally.

### **SAMPLE**

**Since the selection of appropriate items here is so wide and varied, it would not be particularly helpful to present five items of our own choosing. Mentors will simply have to check out each reference presented and evaluate their students’ responses.**

13. A. Read Revelation 13:7. Then indicate why you would agree or disagree with the following statement.

*“Though Satan is strong, God will never let him win any victories over His people.”*

**The student should DISAGREE. Though God is indeed strong and in control of all things, He nevertheless lets Satan win many victories in this life—even over His own people at times. However, Satan’s victories, though significant, are never final. He might indeed win individual skirmishes now and then (even quite often), but the final victory belongs to the Lord and to His people.**

- B. Give three specific stories or situations in the Bible which illustrate or prove your position.

Include a brief account of the story and indicate where it is found in the Bible.



## SAMPLE

**Note to mentors: Many examples could be given here. The first two given are examples of believers who fell into grievous sin but ultimately recovered and won the final victory. The third presents the glorious future of those who are put to death for the sake of Christ. Students may choose to present some situations where the ultimate outcome is less positive or unknown.**

- (1) Peter denied Christ three times, as Jesus had foretold (Luke 22:31-32, 54-62) but he was also restored to fellowship and service (John 21:15-19).**
  - (2) David sinned grievously against God through his activities with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11) but was restored in his relationship God and used greatly by God (Psalm 51 and 1 Kings 15:5).**
  - (3) Many of the early believers were persecuted and even put to death for the sake of their testimony (e.g., Stephen, Acts 7:54-60). However, Revelation 7:9-17 describes the great blessedness of those who die for Christ.**
14. Revelation 20 describes a remarkable period of 1,000 years. This period is commonly referred to as the millennium (after the Latin: mille—meaning one thousand, and annum meaning year).
- A. Briefly describe the amillennial understanding of the millennium.
- The amillennialists teach that Revelation 20 describes the situation between Christ’s ascension and His return to earth at the end of history. The 1,000 years are not to be taken literally but describe the entire period when Christ rules over all from His position in heaven.**
- B. Briefly describe the premillennial understanding of the millennium.
- The premillennialists teach that Christ will return to earth from heaven at some point in the future and will reign on earth from Jerusalem for a literal period of 1,000 years. This will be a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity for all who are living at that time.**
- C. Briefly describe the postmillennial understanding of the millennium.
- The postmillennialists teach that the 1,000 years refer to an extended period of time (of uncertain duration) during which the influence of Christianity will greatly increase so that the whole world is largely Christianized before Christ returns.**

15. Which of the three millennial positions do you believe is most correct? Please give the reasons for your answer.

**From our perspective, it would be good if students preferred the amillennial position. However, many of them may have read or heard a lot about the premillennial position and believe that it is the only “biblical” position. Don’t argue with their choice, but you may indicate what your own choice is—especially if it differs from theirs. It would also not be inappropriate to indicate briefly why you hold the position you do, especially since the lesson notes themselves do not argue strongly for one position over another.**

16. Select four passages from the book of Revelation which you believe provide comfort and encouragement for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Give the specific reference along with a brief statement why this passage is a source of comfort or encouragement.

## SAMPLE

**What may serve as a source of comfort and encouragement for one person may be less helpful for someone else. Therefore, many different passages will likely be presented here. Mentors will have to check out each reference given and respond appropriately. If you have some favorite passages of your own, it would be helpful to share them with your students.**

17. Please evaluate the following statement. “Since Revelation is the final book in the New Testament, we should regard it as the key to the interpretation of the rest of the Bible.”

**The fact that Revelation is the last book in the New Testament does NOT make it a key to the interpretation of the rest of the Bible. It is a highly unusual book, full of symbols and images which are often difficult to understand or interpret with certainty. Actually, many things in Revelation may well have to be interpreted in the light of other teachings in the Bible which are simpler, clearer and less debatable.**

**We might also note, however, that various chapters or shorter passages in Revelation DO provide comfort and encouragement for those who are suffering affliction or persecution of one kind or another. More than any other book, Revelation “lifts the veil” from some of life’s mysteries, giving us the assurance that justice and truth and righteousness WILL ultimately prevail.**

18. List three passages in the book of Revelation which serve as stern warnings to those who do not believe in Jesus. Give the reference and summarize the message.

**SAMPLE**

**(1) Reference: Revelation 21:8**

**Message: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”**

**(2) Reference: Revelation 22:15**

**Message: “Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”**

**(3) Reference: Revelation 18:6-24**

**Message: Summary: This passage describes the awful punishment that is coming upon God’s enemies and the enemies of His people—enemies depicted here as the city of Babylon the Great.**

19. Read Revelation 5:9-10 and 7:9-10.

- A. What do these passages teach us about the number of those who will be saved?

**So many people will be saved that they cannot even be counted.**

- B. What do these passages teach us about the diversity of those who are saved?

**People will be saved from every nation, tribe, people and language.**

- C. What do these passages teach us about the blessings they will receive?

**Among other things, they will be standing before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb, wearing white robes, holding palm branches and bringing loud praise to God. They will serve God as priests and reign (as kings) on earth.**

20. The book of Revelation is unique in various respects. One unique element is the special blessing pronounced at the beginning of the book and the special invitation and warning presented at the end.

- A. What blessing is pronounced in Revelation 1:3?

**“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are**

**those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”**

- B. What wonderful invitation is given in Revelation 22:17.

**“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”**

- C. What warning is given in Revelation 22:18-19?

**“If anyone adds anything (to the words of the prophecy of this book), God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”**

**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

1. If someone is not yet sure about committing his life to Christ, would you urge him to read the book of Revelation—or would you suggest that he not read it for a while? Please explain your answer.

**A number of good answers can be given to this question. Since some people find Revelation to be frightening and confusing, they might suggest that it would be better for an unbeliever to stay away from it for awhile. On the other hand, some readers of Revelation have been jolted into doing some sober thinking which prompts them to ask some serious questions. There is obviously no single “right” answer to the question. Once again, we must carefully evaluate every situation on its own merits and then pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit to see what we should do.**

2. List three of your favorite chapters or passages in the book of Revelation and indicate what you like about each of these passages.

**SAMPLE**

**Read with interest! Perhaps you might wish to share with your students some chapters or passages in Revelation which are especially meaningful to you.**

3. Do you think a person’s view of the millennium will make a practical difference in how he lives? Please think this through carefully before writing your answer.

The initial response from some students might be that it doesn't make any difference at all. From their perspective, this might be one of those "doctrines" that has no practical significance. But that clearly isn't the case. Consider, for example, the following:

Most of those who hold to the premillennial position (especially those who believe the rapture will occur before the millennium begins) strongly emphasize the imminence of Christ's return. That gives a sense of urgency to their lives, an eagerness to share the Gospel with as many people as possible.

Some premillennialists (not all of them) tend to minimize the significance of the cultural mandate since they have less appreciation for Christ's present Lordship over all of life. As a result, they may minimize the responsibilities we have to be God's vicegerents over the earth, seeking to bring every thought and endeavor captive to Christ and under His Lordship.

Some amillennialists (not all of them) may emphasize Christ's Lordship over everything so strongly that they neglect the urgency of fulfilling the Great Commission.

The number of postmillennialists appears to be relatively small today, but those who hold to the postmillennial position want to see the Lordship of Christ emphasized in all areas of life while also emphasizing the importance of fulfilling the Great Commission. However, they seem to minimize or neglect the biblical teachings concerning the increasing lawlessness and godlessness of mankind before Christ returns. They may therefore be promoting and expecting the "Christianization" of the world before Christ returns in a way that is totally unrealistic.

In their answers, students may also cite other things—simple or profound—which are important in their own lives in regard to the millennium. It should be interesting to read their answers. Do not consider their answers "wrong" unless they haven't seriously considered the possible implications of the different positions.

4. A. Do you EXPECT Christ to return in your lifetime? Why or why not?

**Student answers will vary.**

- B. Are you looking forward to the return of Christ or do you hope that He will not return yet for quite some time? Please give the reason for your answer.

Every believer should be looking forward to the return of Christ. However, be very considerate of those who want a number of things to happen before He returns—especially those who sincerely want to have the opportunity to share their faith with lost loved ones, serve others for a time in the name of Christ, make the Gospel known in regions where it has not yet come, etc. Others whose incarceration time is getting very short may desperately want to see their loved ones again. That's quite natural and appropriate. However, do try to help all of your students look for and long for and even hasten the coming again of our Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12).

5. No one knows exactly what the new heavens and the new earth will be like, but many people have their own ideas. Read Revelation 21 and 22 again and then write a paragraph or two (or more) on what YOU think life will be like in "heaven" or the "New Jerusalem."

Many people long for heaven but have fairly shallow ideas as to what heaven is going to be like. Some think of heaven primarily in terms of "enjoying things" which they have not had time for while they were on earth. Others see heaven primarily in terms of physical and material delights with relatively little thought of Jesus.

Since none of us can even begin to imagine what the full joys and glories of heaven will be like (see, for example, Romans 8:18-21; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4), it would be presumptuous of us to claim to have knowledge which we don't have. At the same time, we should make sure that both we and our students do not envision a heaven where Jesus plays only a minor role. Of one thing we may be sure: It's impossible to have a biblical heaven without Jesus at the center of it.

As a mentor, you need not try to "correct" your students' ideas of what the new heavens and the new earth will be like unless they give Jesus a minor role in it. Read again Revelation 22:1-5 and rejoice!



## LESSON 12: Putting It All Together: A Theological Perspective

This lesson provides a theological perspective on the plan of redemption revealed in the Bible. You will find here a repetition of some elements mentioned earlier, a number of things that are new, some additional Scripture references and a summary of the theological elements studied in the first 11 lessons.

### CREATION AND THE FALL

When God first made man, man was holy and righteous, free from sin and able to enjoy the wonders and beauties of God's creation (Genesis 1:26-29). God wanted him to stay that way. However, man chose to go his own way instead of God's way. He listened to Satan, disobeyed God and suffered the consequences of his disobedience (Genesis 3:1-19). In His righteous judgment, God declared that man would die because of his sin (Genesis 2:17), but in His infinite mercy He also promised that some day He would send him a Savior (Genesis 3:15).

As a result of the fall, man became sinful at the very core of his being. His heart was no longer right with God, and everything he did became polluted by his sinful nature (Ephesians 2:1-3). As man continued to sink deeper and deeper into sin (Genesis 6:5-6), God determined to destroy the entire world with a flood. However, God spared Noah, a righteous man, along with his entire family (Genesis 6-8).

### THE COVENANT OF NATURE

After the flood, God made a covenant (sometimes called the Covenant of Nature) with Noah and his descendants and all creatures on the earth. He promised that He would never again destroy the entire world with a flood as He had just done. He also placed a rainbow in the sky as a visible sign and reminder of that promise (Genesis 9:8-17). God gave no conditions for the fulfillment of the covenant—He simply promised what He would do and has never failed to do what He promised.

### THE TOWER OF BABEL

Within a fairly short time, however, the world again became corrupt and people became arrogant and proud. They tried to build a city with a tower which would reach to the heavens so they could make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the earth. As a result, God confused their language, destroyed their plans and scattered them across the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11:1-9).

### THE COVENANT OF GRACE

After man's repeated failure to live God's way, God sovereignly chose one man out of the entire human race, a man named Abram (later changed to Abraham), and made a

covenant with him. God promised Abraham that He would richly bless him, make him into a great nation and bless all peoples of the earth through him (Genesis 12:1-3).

God also promised Abraham that His covenant would be an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:7-8) and that He would give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan (Israel) as an everlasting possession (Genesis 12:7; 15:7; 17:8).

The fundamental promise which lay behind all these promises was God's unprecedented promise that He would be the God of Abraham and his descendants throughout their generations (Genesis 17:7). Since Abraham had done nothing to deserve all these blessings and was completely unworthy of them (Joshua 24:2), God's covenant with him was truly a covenant of GRACE.

### THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

God determined that the sign of His covenant with Abraham would be both memorable and appropriate. It was to be the sign of circumcision, a sign which Abraham and all his male descendants would always carry with them in their own flesh. Circumcision symbolized the removal of sin and pollution at the very source of life. It was therefore particularly appropriate for a covenant which God promised would continue from one generation to another (Genesis 17:9-14; Acts 7:8; Colossians 2:11).

### THE REQUIREMENTS AND FULFILLMENT OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

God not only gave Abraham a promise, but He also required two things from him if the promise was to be fulfilled. Those two requirements were faith and obedience. Abraham had to believe that God would surely do all that He had promised, and he had to obey Him by circumcising all the males in his household.

Though Abraham was already 75 years old when God called him, and though he still had no child, he believed everything God had promised and did all that God had commanded (Hebrews 11:8). Through his faith he was counted by God as righteous and through his faith he also became the father of all who would later believe (Romans 4:3, 4:11-25).

God fulfilled His promises to Abraham in wonderful ways. Abraham was personally blessed with great wealth (Genesis 13:2), he became the father of a child when fatherhood seemed impossible (Hebrews 11:11-12), his descendants became the great nation of Israel (the Jews), and eventually Jesus Christ, the Savior, was born of a virgin in his family line (Matthew 1:1, 18).

### THE SINAI COVENANT (THE OLD COVENANT)

When Abraham's descendants were later formed into the nation of Israel, God rescued them from their slavery in Egypt, promising them a homeland of their own (the land of Israel, the "Promised Land"). On their way to their new homeland, God met with them at

Mt. Sinai and established a covenant with them (Exodus 19:1-6). God said that He would bless them, that He would be their God and that He would make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6).

God also announced a condition for the fulfillment of these covenant promises: obedience to all His laws and commands (Exodus 19:5). And this obedience had to be a true obedience from the heart, an obedience grounded in faith and love and not simply external conformity to the law (see Isaiah 29:13).

The laws and regulations of the covenant covered virtually every area of life: civil affairs, personal matters and worship (Exodus and Leviticus). The purpose of the covenant laws was to help God’s people live as He wanted them to live and to help them make appropriate sacrifices for their failures and disobedience. Whenever they trusted and obeyed Him, He would richly bless them and they in turn would be able to fulfill the purpose for which He had chosen them (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

The covenant of Sinai also showed the people how totally unable they were to keep God’s law perfectly. It thus pointed ahead to the coming of the perfect Savior, Jesus Christ, who would not only obey the law in their behalf (Matthew 5:17) but would also eventually give His life as a once-for-all sacrifice to pay the penalty for their failures and disobedience (Galatians 3:13, 24; Hebrews 10:11-14).

## FAILURE UNDER THE OLDER COVENANT

Regrettably, the people of Israel who so quickly said they would obey God in everything (Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7) began to disobey Him in almost every area of their lives. Worst of all, they turned aside from the worship of God and turned to the worship of idols (Exodus 32:1). Though God said He would be a “husband” to Israel, they often gave their allegiance to other “gods” and thus committed what the Bible calls spiritual adultery (Jeremiah 3:12-14). There seemed to be a continuous cycle of disobedience followed by punishment, repentance, forgiveness, blessing and disobedience again (Jeremiah 3:21-25; Jeremiah 4:1-2). Throughout the centuries of their existence as a nation, Israel repeatedly broke the covenant God had made with them, with the result that He let them be taken away as captives into the foreign lands of Assyria and Babylon (Jeremiah 22:8-9; 52:3; Lamentations 1:1-5).

## THE NEW COVENANT

Already hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah foretold that God would some day establish a new covenant with His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This new covenant would come in fulfillment of God’s promises under the Covenant of Grace and take the place of the Sinai Covenant in the lives of His people (Hebrews 8:13; 7:18; Galatians 3:10). The Sinai Covenant therefore came to be called the “old covenant” (Hebrews 8:6) or “first covenant” (Hebrews 9:1,15).

**God made the “new covenant” (or “new testament”) with His people through Jesus Christ,** His Son (Hebrews 9:15-22; 12:24). Just as the old covenant was confirmed with the blood of animal sacrifices (Exodus 24:5-8), so the new covenant was

established in the blood of the perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28; John 1:29). All those who trust in Jesus for salvation are members of this new covenant and are called children of God (John 1:12-13). As God’s children, they are given the privilege of enjoying all the wonderful promises and blessings of the “New Covenant” in Christ (Romans 8:15-17).

Under the old covenant God wrote His laws on tablets of stone. Under the New Covenant He puts His laws in people’s minds and writes them on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10-11). He also gives them the Holy Spirit who creates in them a desire to do God’s will and enables them to live a life of spiritual fruitfulness (Romans 8:2-9; Galatians 5:22-24). Believers who live under the new covenant do not trust and obey God simply because of a fear of punishment—or out of a sense of duty. Rather, they trust and obey Him because of a Spirit-created desire in their hearts to love and serve the One who has saved them.

## SIGNS OF THE NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST

Just as God gave signs of His earlier covenants, so He gave signs of the New Covenant in Christ. Bloody signs, such as circumcision and the Passover, were replaced by non-bloody signs, such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:23-26). Signs which were limited before (such as circumcision) gave place to signs which included the entire covenant community where all believers are one in Christ without regard to gender or race or status (Galatians 3:26-28).

## BELIEVERS AND ABRAHAM

Because of their faith, believers are considered “children of Abraham,” the father of all believers (Romans 4:9-16). As such, they are also heirs to all the spiritual blessings God promised under the Covenant of Grace (Galatians 3:7-9, 14, 29). Among those blessings is God’s promise to be the God of the children of believing parents (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39; 1 Corinthians 7:14). Many believers therefore administer the sign of baptism to their children just as male children received the sign of circumcision in Old Testament times.

Believers, like Abraham, enjoy a living relationship with God apart from the law. They do not live under the laws of the old Sinai Covenant any more than Abraham did (Galatians 3:17-18). Believers are still obligated to obey God’s moral law (Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 13:8-10) and other commandments God has given in the New Testament (1 John 4:7-8; 5:2-3; Revelation 14:12), but they are free from the system of laws and penalties given to Israel (Colossians 2:13-18). Once the laws and rituals of the Old Covenant were fulfilled in Christ, they are no longer binding on those who put their faith and trust in Him (Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:8-10).

## THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

When God’s Son was born in “the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4), He was given the personal name Jesus which means Savior (Matthew 1:21). Over the years He was also given many other names or titles, such as Son of Man, Son of God, Lord, Master and



Teacher. One name given Him, however, is more closely associated with Jesus than any others—the name Christ (Matthew 1:16).

Originally, “Christ” was more of a title than a personal name. “Christos” is a Greek word which means anointed one. It has exactly the same meaning as the Hebrew word Messiah. Jesus was called the Christ because He was anointed by the Holy Spirit to fulfill all Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah (Matthew 3:16; Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:38).

## THE MINISTRY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

During His lifetime, Jesus perfectly observed all the laws of the Old Covenant on behalf of His people. He also fulfilled all the Old Covenant promises regarding the coming Messiah (Matthew 5:17-18; Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15; 10:1). After living a life in which He demonstrated the presence and the power of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17, 23; 12:28), He gave up His life on the cross as a perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people (Romans 5:8-11; Galatians 3:13). After three days He rose again, as predicted, and returned to heaven to assume a place of power and authority at the right hand of His Father (1 Corinthians 15:4; Ephesians 1:19-22).

## THE REJECTION OF JESUS AS THE MESSIAH

During Jesus’ lifetime, most of the Jewish people did not fully remember or understand all the things the Old Testament said about the coming Messiah. They remembered only those parts which told of His power and glory and forgot the ones that described His suffering and death (Isaiah 53:1-10; Luke 24:25-26, 44-47). They wanted a Messiah who would deliver them from foreign domination, not from the dominion of sin. They wanted an earthly kingdom, not a spiritual one. As a result, they were unable to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and were not interested in the kingdom about which He spoke—a kingdom that is “not of this world” (Luke 19:10; John 18:36-37).

But there were also other reasons why the Jewish leaders opposed Jesus. Jesus made claims for Himself which they were not willing to accept. He said He was the Son of God sent from the Father in heaven (John 5:17-24, 36-40). He said He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He claimed that He and the Father are one (John 10:30). He also dared to criticize the religious leaders and claimed that they were leading the people astray (Matthew 23:1-36).

For all those reasons, Jesus was rejected by the people He came to save and was finally put to death on a cross. It was not until after He rose again and sent the Holy Spirit from heaven that people began to understand who He was and the significance of what He had said and done (Acts 2:22-37).

## THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before Jesus left His disciples, He promised to send them the Holy Spirit from heaven Who would lead and guide them into all truth and empower them for fruitful ministry (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8).

Fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers in power just as Jesus had promised (Acts 2:1-4). It was the day of Pentecost. In the Old Testament, the Feast of Pentecost (also called the Feast of Harvest) was observed as a day of rejoicing and thanksgiving for the first fruits of the grain harvest (Deuteronomy 16:9-10). In the New Testament, the coming of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of a spiritual harvest as thousands of people came to believe in Jesus Christ as the long-awaited Messiah (Acts 2:41).

After Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus began to proclaim the Gospel with new power and work mighty miracles in His name. Eyes were opened and hearts were broken in humility and repentance as people began to realize that they had crucified their own Messiah. Thousands were converted under the Spirit-inspired preaching. Many lives were dramatically changed. Many others were healed (Acts 2-5). Even many Jewish priests became “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

## THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Throughout the first years after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, the church continued to grow through the testimony and preaching of both apostles and ordinary believers (Acts 8:1, 4). Great emphasis was placed on the resurrection of Jesus—both in the writing and speaking of the Apostles (Acts 2:31; 4:2; 4:33; 17:18; 23:6; Romans 1:4; 6:5; Philippians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 1:3; 3:21). Christ’s resurrection was seen as the foundation of Christian faith and the anchor of Christian hope. If Christ had not been raised, there would be no hope, no forgiveness and no future resurrection for those who died. Preaching would be useless and Christian living would be impossible (1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Colossians 3:1-4).

By the time Jerusalem was destroyed in the year A.D. 70, the Gospel had effectively reached the ends of the then known world (Romans 1:8; Colossians 1:6, 23). Though the spread of the Gospel was often accompanied by severe persecution (Acts 8:1; 13:50; 14:19; 14:22; 16:22-23; 20:23), the church continued to grow both in numbers and in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:31; 13:48-49).

## THE RETURN OF CHRIST (THE SECOND COMING)

Shortly before Jesus returned to heaven, He assured His followers that He would someday return again to earth (John 14:2, 28; Matthew 16:27). When the time came for His ascension, angels appeared to Jesus’ disciples and told them that He would come back again in the same way He had gone into heaven (Acts 1:11). When Christ does come back, He will come in power rather than in weakness, in glory rather than in obscurity. He will raise to life all those who have died and will judge the world in righteousness. He will punish those who did not believe in Him and will bless with incredible glory those who did. Believers who have died before Jesus returns will be caught up in the clouds with believers who are still alive to meet Jesus in the air. And so they will all be with their Lord in glory forever (1Thessalonians 4:14-18).



THE FINAL WORD

The book of Revelation is Jesus’ final written message to believers (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:18-20). He speaks as the glorified Son of Man who reigns in power and glory and controls all things from His exalted position in heaven (Revelation 1:12-18). Though tribulation and persecution will continue until He returns (Revelation 7:13-14; 13:4-7), He is in total control of all that happens on the earth (Revelation 1:17-18; 5:1-9, 13). His people will participate in His ultimate and complete victory over all the powers of evil and will share with Him in blessing beyond description and in glory without end (Revelation 21 and 22). Truly, He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the victorious Lion of the tribe of Judah—and He will reign with His people forever and ever (Revelation 1:17-18; 5:5; 19:16; 21:5).

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE THEOLOGICALLY

- Guideline 1.** Read the Bible as a record of God’s revelation to man and man’s response to that revelation. Do not read it simply as a record of man’s search for God.
- Guideline 2.** Recognize the story of creation in Genesis as the solid foundation on which everything else in the Bible rests. If there is no Creator, there is no Law-Giver, no absolute truth, no firm basis for punishments or rewards and no Savior.
- Guideline 3.** Read the Bible in light of its three main themes of sin, salvation and service (or guilt, grace and gratitude). By keeping these themes in mind, it is usually possible to see how every idea, every person and every event finds a meaningful place in the Bible.
- Guideline 4.** Read the Bible in the light of God’s wonderful promise to bless all people on earth through Abraham (Genesis 12:3). Note how frequently this theme is repeated in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New (Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8). Note also how many Old Testament writers were conscious of God’s saving interest in the world beyond themselves (for example, Psalm 22:27; 24:1; 33:8; 47:1-2, 47:7-9; 117:1-2 and many other passages).
- Guideline 5.** Remember that the Bible is God-centered, not man-centered. Though man is fully responsible for His actions and responses, God takes the initiative in salvation just as He did in creation. In your reading and study, take careful note of God’s sovereign work in redemption at every point along the way.
- Guideline 6.** Read the “sin and failure” stories in the Bible in the light of God’s judgment and grace. Such stories are not presented to discourage us—and certainly not to entertain us. Rather they serve as warnings of the depths of human depravity when unchecked by grace and as demonstrations of the incredible riches of God’s grace which forgives even the worst of repentant sinners.
- Guideline 7.** Do not dwell too much on what man is by nature (Ephesians 2:1-3), but find the encouragement and blessing that comes from seeing what believers are by

- grace! Recognize how God makes it possible for believers to live victoriously already in this life. Focus on such passages as Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 2:4-5; Philippians 2:12-13; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 13:20-21; 2 Peter 1:3-4.
- Guideline 8.** Note the broad scope of salvation in the Bible. Salvation is not simply a matter of saving “souls” but always involves the whole person. Just as the original creation involved man’s entire being—body, mind, soul and spirit—salvation does, too! There is no part of man and no area of life which is to be left “unredeemed” (Matthew 22:37-38; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).
- Guideline 9.** Be careful not to confine God to some kind of theological box constructed out of your own limited understanding. Let God be God! Leave room for His freedom. Leave room for His grace. Understand everything as well as you can, but remember that God’s thoughts are far higher than our thoughts and His ways much higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9; Romans 11:33-36).
- Guideline 10.** Recognize that God’s plan of salvation encompasses more than simply human beings. Though lost angels will apparently not be saved (Hebrews 2:16) and many people will not share in Christ’s victory (Revelation 21:8), creation as a whole is to be totally renewed (Acts 3:21; Matthew 19:28) or re-created (Isaiah 66:22; Revelation 21:1). The deeds of believers will in some sense “follow them” (Revelation 14:13), the “kings of the earth will bring their splendor” into the New Jerusalem, and “the glory and honor of the nations” will also be brought into it (Revelation 21:24, 26). Though Satan has sought to ruin and destroy everything God has made, God will renew or re-create it! As you read the Scriptures, do not focus on the temporary defeats but rather rejoice in the ultimate victory.
- perplexed about these images and symbols as we are.
- QUESTIONS: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
- 
1. Creation and the Fall
- A. How would you describe man *before* he fell into sin?
- Before the Fall, man was holy, righteous, free from sin and able to continue living that way. He was also able to enjoy fully the wonders and beauties of God’s creation—a creation still unaffected by the curse of sin.**
- B. How would you describe man *after* he fell into sin?
- After the Fall, man still retained the image of God but lost his innocence, his holiness and his ability to live in perfect harmony with God’s will. He became sinful at the core of his being so that everything he did was polluted by his**

**sinful nature. Also, the world around him came under the curse of sin so man had to work hard to earn a living through the sweat of his brow. He also became subject to suffering, sickness and all the other results of sin.**

2. After God destroyed the world with a flood, He established the “covenant of nature.”

A. With whom did God make this covenant? (Genesis 9:8-10, 12, 17)

**God made the covenant with Noah and his descendants and with every living creature upon the earth.**

B. What was God’s covenant promise? (Genesis 9:11)

**God said that there would never again be a flood to destroy the earth.**

C. What sign did God give of this promise? (Genesis 9:12-17)

**God placed a rainbow in the sky as the sign of His covenant promise.**

D. What was the significance or meaning of this sign? (Genesis 9:12-17)

**God said that whenever He saw the rainbow, He would remember His covenant promise (an anthropomorphism to assure Noah that God would not forget).**

E. Was this a “conditional” or an “unconditional” covenant? That is, was there a condition or requirement associated with this covenant or not? (See the lesson notes.)

**Unconditional. God simply promised that the world would never be destroyed again with a flood. No conditions of faithfulness or obedience on man’s part were stated.**

3. Beginning in Genesis 12, God works out His redemptive plan through just one person—Abram (Abraham) and his descendants. With Abraham, God established a covenant which is known as the Covenant of Grace. See Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15 and Genesis 17.

A. What was the basic or fundamental promise of this covenant? (Genesis 17:7)

**God promised that He would be the God of Abraham and the God of his descendants after him for (all) the generations to come.**

B. What additional promises did God gave to Abraham? (Genesis 17:8; 12:1-3)

**God also told Abraham that He would give him and his descendants the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. Further, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, to make his name great, to bless him and make him a blessing, to bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him and to bless all peoples on earth through him (and his descendants).**

C. How and when were all these promises to Abraham fulfilled? (See the lesson notes.)

**Abraham became the father of Isaac and of Ishmael (as well as several others). Their descendants multiplied greatly over the years. The special child of promise was Isaac, through whom most of the other promises were fulfilled. Abraham’s descendants (the Jews or Israelites) became very numerous; they received the land of Canaan as their inheritance; God provided for them in many exceptional and even miraculous ways; God destroyed the enemies that opposed them and blessed those who helped them; and He made Abraham very rich in cattle and earthly possessions. The greatest promise of all (to bless all nations through him) was fulfilled in Abraham’s descendant Jesus Christ, who became the Savior of the world.**

D. Why was Abraham’s name changed from Abram to Abraham?

**Abram means “exalted father.” This was the name he had before he had any children. Since God promised to make him the father of many nations (though he was still childless at the time), his name was changed to Abraham, meaning “father of a multitude.”**

E. Why do you think this covenant is called the “Covenant of Grace”?

**This is a Covenant of GRACE because neither Abraham nor any of his descendants ever merited any of the blessings they received. Every promise and every blessing was a gift of God’s free and wonderful grace.**

4. A. When God promised Abraham many spiritual and material blessings, how did Abraham respond? (See Romans 4:18-22.)

**Abraham believed everything God had said even though he himself never lived to see the fulfillment of all the promises God had made.**

B. What do the following passages teach about God’s response to Abraham’s faith: Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Romans 4:22; Galatians 3:6?

**God credited Abraham's faith to him as righteousness. That is, Abraham was accounted as righteous by God because of his faith.**

- C. Why are Christians called "children of Abraham"? (See Galatians 3:26-29.)

**Believers are children of Abraham because they, like him, are saved by grace and receive God's wonderful blessings through their faith. They inherit all the spiritual blessings promised to Abraham as his spiritual heirs.**

5. After Abraham's descendants were formed into the nation of Israel, God established a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 19-24)

- A. How many years passed between the time God established the Covenant of Grace and the time He established the Covenant at Mt. Sinai? (Galatians 3:17)

**According to Paul, 430 years had passed between the covenant with Abraham and the giving of the law. However, some students may be aware that the time period that elapsed was closer to 600 years. Paul's statement was based on tradition at the time he wrote Galatians. The point is that, for hundreds of years, God's people had relied solely on God's covenant of grace regarding His promised inheritance.**

- B. What great promises did God give to Israel at Mt. Sinai? (Exodus 19:5-6)

**God promised Israel that they, out of all the nations of the earth, would be His treasured possession. They would be for God a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**

- C. What condition did God set for the fulfillment of His covenant promises? (Exodus 19:5)

**The condition: "Obey Me fully and keep My covenant."**

- D. In what two ways did the Covenant of Sinai point ahead to Jesus Christ? (See the lesson notes.)

1. **Jesus Christ would perfectly obey the law on behalf of His people.**
2. **Jesus would give His life as a once-for-all sacrifice to pay the penalty for the people's failures and disobedience.**

6. A. When God spoke to the people of Israel through Moses after He gave the promises of Exodus 19:5-6, how did they respond? (See Exodus 19:7-8.)

**The people all responded together: "We will do everything the Lord has said."**

- B. How did the Israelites respond when God spoke to Moses from the mountain? (See Exodus 20:18-19.)

**The people were terrified and said to Moses: "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."**

- C. Later, after the covenant had been confirmed and Moses again brought God's words to the people, how did they respond? (See Exodus 24:3-7.)

**The people responded with one voice: "Everything the Lord has said we will do." And a bit later they said: "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."**

- D. How would you account for the difference in the people's response in Exodus 20 and their response in Exodus 19 and 24?

**In Exodus 20 the people not only heard Moses speak to them but they also saw the thunder and lightning and heard the loud trumpet blast and saw the mountain in smoke. All of these things were special signs of the awesome presence of God. These signs were not present when Moses spoke to them on the other occasions. When they made their commitment to "obey everything God commanded" they did so without the full realization of the seriousness of God's commands, the awesomeness of His presence, or their total inability to be the kind of people God wanted them to be.**

- E. In reality, how did the people of Israel respond to God's law in their lives? Select two or three Scripture passages to support your answer.

**Regrettably, the Israelites repeatedly failed to do what they had promised. See, for example, the terrible things that took place during the time of the Judges when "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). Also, the period of the kings (especially in Israel) was a time of continuous disobedience and unfaithfulness (Isaiah 1:21-23; Lamentations 1:8; and many other passages).**

7. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 we read that God would some day establish a new covenant with the people of Israel.

- A. When was this promise fulfilled? (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 9:15)



**This promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ who, through His death (and resurrection) established the new covenant “in His blood.”**

- B. What wonderful promises are included in the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:10-12)?

**God said: “I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be My people . . . they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”**

- C. 1. What does Hebrews 8:13 teach about the Old Covenant?

**The first covenant has been made obsolete; it is aging and will soon disappear.**

2. Which covenant is referred to here by the “first” or Old Covenant: The Covenant of Nature, the Covenant of Grace, or the Covenant of Sinai?

#### **The Covenant of Sinai**

8. A. What do you think it means that God’s Son was born “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4)?

**“The fullness of time” was the time when everything was ready for Christ’s coming. Everything that needed to precede His coming had taken place. This was the exact time, which God had determined beforehand for the coming of Christ into the world.**

**Some people also point to the expectation and longing of the Jews for their long-awaited Messiah, the Roman peace in the world at the time, the universal language which made the spread of the Gospel easier, the relative safety and ease of travel and the need in Israel (and throughout the world) for a message from God after a long period without any true prophets.**

- B. Why was Jesus given the name (or title) Christ?

**The name Christ means Anointed One or Messiah. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit to fulfill all Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah.**

- C. Briefly summarize the ministry of Jesus as the Messiah.

**Christ perfectly fulfilled all the laws of the Old Covenant in behalf of His people and fulfilled all Old Testament promises concerning the coming**

**Messiah. In His life He demonstrated the presence and power of the Kingdom of God and ultimately gave up His life on a cross as a perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people. After three days He rose again and returned to heaven to assume a place of power and authority at the right hand of His Father.**

9. List three differences between life under the New Covenant in Christ and the Old Covenant of Sinai.

#### **SAMPLE**

**Note to mentors: Students will probably choose three of the following items, though a few of them may also come up with some other appropriate ideas.**

- (1) Under the New Covenant, believers no longer live under the laws of the Old Sinai Covenant with its obligations, burdens and penalties.**
- (2) Under the New Covenant, both men and women receive the sign of the covenant whereas in the Old Covenant only males received the covenant sign.**
- (3) Under the New Covenant, God’s laws are written on the hearts of believers, whereas in the Old Covenant the laws were written on stone.**
- (4) Under the New Covenant, believers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to help them live the kind of life God wants them to live.**
- (5) Under the New Covenant, believers do not simply trust and obey God because of a fear of punishment or out of a sense of duty but because of a Spirit-created desire to love and serve the One who has saved them. (Many Old Testament believers also served God out of love and gratitude, but many of the laws were a genuine burden to them also. See Acts 15:10.)**

10. Though many Jewish people, including some priests, pharisees and other leaders, believed in Jesus after Pentecost, most of the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus during His lifetime. List four reasons why they rejected Him. (See the lesson notes.)

- A. **They wanted a Messiah who would deliver them from foreign domination, not from the dominion of sin. They wanted an earthly kingdom.**
- B. **They did not fully remember or understand the things said in the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah. They remembered those parts which told of His power and glory but forgot those which described His suffering and death.**
- C. **Jesus made claims concerning Himself which they were not willing to accept such as His claim to be one with the Father and the only way to the Father.**

D. **He criticized the religious leaders and claimed that they were leading the people astray.**

11. According to Acts 1:1-11, after His resurrection, Jesus returned to His Father in heaven.

A. How long did Jesus stay on earth after His resurrection? (Acts 1:3)

**40 days**

B. What “position” did Jesus receive when He returned to heaven? (Ephesians 1:20-21; Mark 16:19; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 5:12-13)

**Jesus was given a position of honor, power and glory at the right hand of His Father in heaven. He was given authority over all powers in heaven and on earth and was made ruler over all things in behalf of His people. He now reigns in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords and someday everyone will recognize and acknowledge His authority and Lordship.**

C. What is Jesus presently doing in heaven?

1. John 14:2—**Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for His people.**

2. Ephesians 1:22-23—**Jesus is ruling over all things on behalf of His people.**

3. Hebrews 7:25—**Jesus is continually interceding before the Father on behalf of His people.**

4. Hebrews 9:24—**Jesus is appearing before God with His perfect sacrifice on behalf of His people.**

12. Before Jesus returned to heaven, He promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to them.

A. List four specific things the Holy Spirit would do when He came. See John 14:26; John 15:26; and John 16:7-14.

1. **He would teach the disciples everything Jesus had taught them and remind them of everything He had said to them.**

2. **He would testify about Jesus as the Spirit of truth.**

3. **He would convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and**

**judgment.**

4. **He would guide the disciples into all the truth, telling them about things to come.**

B. What happened when the Holy Spirit descended on the people who had gathered together on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:2-4)?

**A sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where the believers were sitting. Fire-like tongues separated and came to rest on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.**

C. What changes were made in the disciples when they were filled with the Holy Spirit? (See lesson notes and the book of Acts.)

**The disciples were changed from fearful and questioning followers of Christ into powerful, bold witnesses who worked mighty miracles in His name. Thousands of people were converted under their Spirit-inspired preaching and many people were healed from their infirmities and diseases.**

13. The Growth of the Church

A. How many people were converted and baptized on Pentecost Sunday? (Acts 2)

**About 3,000**

B. What does Acts 6:7 teach us about the growth of the church?

**The number of disciples (believers, followers of Christ) increased rapidly. Even many priests became obedient to the Christian faith.**

C. Why did the disciples make the resurrection of Christ such an important part of their speaking and writing? (See the lesson notes.)

**Everything depended on the resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrection, Christ would simply have been another good teacher and example and an unfortunate martyr for His own cause. Paul made very clear how important the resurrection was in 1 Corinthians 15 where he indicated that without the resurrection we would have no forgiveness, no salvation and no hope. There have been many fine teachers throughout history and many of these have lived lives of commendable holiness and service. Many have even become**

**selfless martyrs in behalf of their cause. Only Jesus, however, of all the great teachers of the world, died in our place and arose again from death in triumph and victory.**

- D. How widespread was the preaching of the Gospel by the time Jerusalem was destroyed? (See Romans 1:8; Colossians 1:6; Colossians 1:23.)

**Paul indicated that the Christian faith was known “all over the world” and that the Gospel had been proclaimed “to every creature under heaven” by the time he wrote his epistles. By this he must have meant that the Gospel had gone to both Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slave and free, rich and poor, high and low, in every known country in that part of the world. Most (or all) of the large cities in his day had heard the Word of God and churches were being established everywhere. Given the limited means of communication available to the early believers and the small number of believers who were living when Christ left this earth, this growth of the church was truly amazing. It could only be accounted for by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.**

14. Many things will take place on earth BEFORE Jesus returns from heaven. List four of them and give the reference where they are found. (See Matthew 24)

#### **SAMPLE**

**Note to mentors: Many things could be mentioned here including the following: the destruction of Jerusalem, the rise of false Christs who would lead many people astray, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, persecution and opposition, apostasy and coldness of heart, false prophets who would deceive many, an increase in wickedness, signs in the heavens, AND the preaching of the Gospel to all nations. Some people also point to the return of the Jews to their homeland as an important sign pointing to the return of Christ. This point, however, is not explicit in Matthew 24 and is debated by many.**

**Check your students’ answers for accuracy. Also, if they do not include Matthew 24:14 as one of their four items, do point this verse out to them, since the preaching of the Gospel to all nations is the one key sign which will point to the coming of Christ. When the nations all hear about the Gospel of the Kingdom, THEN the end will come.**

15. Many things will happen WHEN Jesus returns from heaven. List four of them, indicating both what will take place and where the Bible tells us about it.

#### **SAMPLE**

**Note: Among the things that will happen when Christ returns, the following items may be mentioned. Other things may also be mentioned, but everyone should include at least a reference to the resurrection, the judgment and the final destination of the saved and the lost.**

**(A) There will be signs of various kinds in the heavens as Christ returns to earth with hosts of angels and with the saints who have already been with Him. Reference: 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16; Matthew 25:31**

**(B) Every eye will see Christ and “all the people of the earth will mourn because of Him.” Reference: Revelation 1:7**

**(C) All those who have died will be raised to life. Reference: 1 Thessalonians 4:16; John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

**(D) There will be a judgment of all peoples. Reference: 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 10:42; Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:11-13**

**(E) There will be a separation of people into two groups—the saved and the lost. Reference: Matthew 25:31-33**

**(F) Believers will be taken to be with the Lord forever and unbelievers will be banished from His presence forever. Reference: 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:15**

16. Why is the story of creation in Genesis so important for a theological understanding of the Bible?

#### **SAMPLE**

**The story of creation in Genesis tells us about the origin of man, the purpose of man, the nature of man, and the task of man. Almost everything else in the Bible is based upon these truths. Man is the noblest of all God’s creatures and was assigned to have dominion over all the rest of God’s creation. Man was created in the image of God and from that derives his special worth and significance. Because God created man, God also has ultimate authority over man and has the right to set absolute standards for how He wants him to live in His world. Man’s creativity and ability are derived from His relationship to God and he will realize his full potential only when God is at the center of His life and when fellowship with God is the ultimate goal of his life. Jesus, God incarnate, became man in order to redeem man, the highest of all God’s creations.**

**Because man was made for God’s glory, God went to almost unbelievable lengths to save His “masterpiece” of creation from the ruin which man had inflicted upon Himself. God will not give His glory to another.**

17. The Jews were God’s chosen people and they never forgot it. However, the Psalmists also remembered that God was also to be honored among the nations of the world. Write out five passages in the Psalms that refer to “the nations” or “the peoples” of the world as praising or honoring God. Also give the exact reference where each one is found.



SAMPLE

Each of the following Psalm references refers in one way or another to “all nations” or “all peoples” of the earth. All nations will hear about the Lord or bring praise to the Lord or be subject to the Lord. Most students will likely choose from among these verses. Check their references and quotations for accuracy.

Psalm 2:8  
Psalm 9:11  
Psalm 18:49  
Psalm 22:27  
Psalm 45:17  
Psalm 46:10  
Psalm 67:2-5  
Psalm 96:7-10  
Psalm 102:15  
Psalm 108:3-5  
Psalm 117:1

18. A. Evaluate the following statement: “The Bible would probably be a more effective book if it didn’t have so many stories of moral failure.”

**Though some stories of sin and failure in the Bible are very distressing, the Bible’s authenticity and veracity are generally underlined rather than undermined by the failure of its heroes. The Bible is an honest account of what has happened in the world. People do not have to doubt whether the stories of forgiveness are true, since the stories concern those whose sins are honestly and forthrightly recounted in the same Scriptures. Further, the Bible’s account accentuates man’s need for redemption, since there is none righteous, not even one!**

- B. Believers must continue to wrestle with sin and temptation as long as they live. However, they do not have to live in fear of constant failure, since God makes it possible for them to live victoriously as His children. Write out four texts from the New Testament which teach us about spiritual victory. Give the reference for each one.

SAMPLE

**A wide variety of passages will likely be selected here. Mentors must simply check out each of the four passages that students suggest. If you feel that your students’ choices are not particularly well-chosen, you may wish to present some favorite passages of your own.**

19. Indicate which of the following statements are true and which are false. Circle T or F.

- A. T ☐ F ☒ The book of Acts ends with the story of the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70.  
B. ☒ T ☐ F The three themes of sin, salvation and service help us understand the

fundamental or basic message of Scripture.

- C. T ☐ F ☒ The Bible can best be understood as a record of man’s search for God.  
D. T ☐ F ☒ The story of creation in Genesis is of relatively minor significance for the rest of the Bible and can be disregarded without significant loss.  
E. T ☐ F ☒ It is obvious throughout most of the Old Testament that God had a great interest in Israel but very little interest in the rest of the world.  
F. ☒ T ☐ F God not only took the initiative in the work of creation, He also always takes the first step in the work of salvation.  
G. ☒ T ☐ F Jesus is ultimately in control of all that happens on the earth, even though it may not seem like it.  
H. ☒ T ☐ F Good works are not the grounds for our salvation but they do follow from salvation.  
I. T ☐ F ☒ God is only interested in saving “souls” since the rest of creation is going to be destroyed and will have no future significance.  
J. ☒ T ☐ F God will someday create a new heaven and a new earth in which believers will live forever with their Savior in glory.

20. There are five false statements in number 19 above. Rewrite those five statements in such a way that they become TRUE.

- A. **Statement A. The book of Acts ends with the story of Paul in his own rented house in Rome where he preached boldly and without hindrance.**  
B. **Statement C. The Bible can best be understood as a record of God’s revelation to man.**  
C. **Statement D. The story of creation in Genesis is fundamental for understanding the rest of the Bible.**  
D. **Statement E. In the Old Testament God always had a great interest in all the nations of the world and He therefore blessed the Jewish people in such a way that they could be a blessing to the rest of the world.**  
E. **Statement I. God’s desire and intention is to save the “whole” person—body, mind and spirit—and also to save the whole world. He is therefore going to bring the glory and honor of the nations into the New Jerusalem.**

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Please list some ways in which this course on hermeneutics has helped you in your study and understanding and appreciation of the Bible.

**Please use your students’ responses here to encourage them and to give them further direction in their studies. If there are students who have done their work exceptionally well, do not hesitate to praise them for it. If there are those who have not done their work very well, encourage them to improve in those areas**

**where their weaknesses are most apparent. At the same time, provide whatever encouragement is appropriate. Also, please share with the Crossroads office student responses which will be encouraging to the rest of us!**

2. In Revelation 14:13 we read that the deeds of believers will “follow them.” In Revelation 21:24-26 we read that kings “will bring their splendor into the New Jerusalem” and “the glory and honor of the nations” will also be brought into it. What do you think this all means? What is the practical significance of all of this for your own life?

**The exact meaning of these verses may well be debated by commentators, but there are at least two things that seem quite obvious. The first is that how we live our lives is very significant to God. He is clearly not willing simply to save “souls” while letting the rest of us and the rest of the world be captured by the devil. He has created us for Himself and He wants all of our devotion and all the fruits of our physical and mental labors to glorify Him.**

**Secondly, there will be some continuing significance in what we do on this earth. We may not understand just how God will “preserve” the best of our earthly efforts and accomplishments, but apparently He will. We know that this present earth will be burned up and laid bare (2 Peter 3:10-15) but somehow there will be a way in which God will use the burning fire (as it were) to purify the works of our hands and minds and preserve them for the new heavens and earth which He will create. Just as our bodies return to the dust, they will somehow be resurrected in glory (1 Corinthians 15). So, too, apparently, the “glory and honor” of the nations will be “resurrected” from the destroying fire in such a way that they become a part of the new world to be created.**

**All of this is tremendously important for us. First of all, we must make very sure that we ourselves are saved. If we are not, we will not even have a place in the New Jerusalem at all. But secondly, we know that if we truly belong to Christ, our labor in the Lord will not be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Our works will follow us (Revelation 14:13), and because of His marvelous grace, God will reward those labors to His glory (2 Timothy 4:7-8).**

3. Do you believe that God still has a special role for the Jewish people to play in coming years? Or, do you believe that there is no longer any distinction between Jews and Gentiles as far as God is concerned?

**Students will likely differ on this point considerably. Some will contend that God is now finished with the Jews as a nation (1 Thessalonians 2:14-17) while others will contend that there will be a mass conversion of the Jews in the future (Romans 11:25-31). Many contemporary writers and speakers strongly emphasize that the return of the Jews to Palestine in 1947-48 and the establishment of Israel as an independent nation again are clear signs that God is beginning to fulfill all His “old” promises to His “chosen people.”**

**The lesson notes don’t cover this subject in any significant way, so this question is posed primarily to see what kind of thinking students may have been doing on this particular issue. The question may also get some students to do some serious thinking on this lively subject and make them more alert to**

**many of the things which are being spoken and written about it as we focus on the beginning of a new millennium.**

4. Now that you have come to know God better through your study of the Bible, how has your attitude towards Him changed? For example, do you regard Him with greater awe and reverence? Do you fear Him because you understand how holy and righteous He is? Do you love Him more because you know how much He has done for you? Do you regard Him as a close Friend? Do you want to serve Him more than you did before? Do you believe He really cares about you?

**We sincerely hope that our students have done much more than simply accumulate information and store up knowledge as they have pursued the Crossroads courses. Information and knowledge can be very helpful and important, but the goal of all our courses is that students may develop a closer walk with God, loving Him more, serving Him better and understanding His Word more fully.**

**Please share with the Crossroads office those answers which can be a blessing to the Crossroads staff and to those who support us through their gifts and prayers.**

5. If you had time and space to share only 10 Bible verses with someone who is not a believer, which verses would you choose? Please write out the verses you select and give the reference where they are found. Also, please explain why you selected these particular verses.

### **SAMPLE**

**Your reading of these verses should be a real treat! There’s nothing for you to grade or mark or correct. You simply can read and learn in a new way what’s important to the students with whom you have been working for so many weeks—and, in some cases, for months and years.**

**It would be very interesting for the Crossroads office to know whether there is any kind of pattern in our students’ responses. For example, do they choose verses which we have highlighted in our lessons? Do they focus on the “sola” passages? Are they oriented toward “practical” passages which teach them how God wants them to live? Or do they lean toward more “doctrinal” passages which teach them about the God and Savior whom they have come to love and serve? However, though it would be interesting to know this, it would also be rather cumbersome to find it out.**

**As always, encourage your students in every appropriate way. And again, you may also choose to share with them some favorite texts of your own. They would likely appreciate very much what is important to you—and many of them would be richly blessed by this special demonstration of your love and concern for them.**



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