

# Adult Quarterly

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SUMMER QUARTER

## God's Care for His Chosen Nation

**Quarterly Aim: By the conclusion of this quarter the students will understand the importance of God's perpetual care for His people Israel.**

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LESSON 1, June 1, 2003

## Great Faithful Men

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will have learned that this special nation was chosen by God and established by the faithful patriarchs.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Romans 9:4, 5.

Background Scripture: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:7, 8; 26:2-5; 28:1-4; 32:24-32; 50:15-21.

Devotional Reading: God's Choice, Deuteronomy 7:6-9.

### Introduction

The subject of study for this series of lessons is one that comes off the front page of the daily newspaper. Almost every issue gives some news about the nation of Israel. Often it is about some violent terrorist attack. Israel also has enemies other than those who violently attack. Some attacks are words fighting against the sovereignty of the nation of Israel. They declare that Israel has no right of self-defense.

The Bible has much to say about the place of these people in the heart of God. In the Law Moses sang of God's seeking the nation of Israel to make it His very own. "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10). The Lord issued a warning to the nations of the earth to refrain from harming Israel. "For he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). This phrase the apple of his eye spoke of the dark part of the eye. It indicated that the nation of Israel was in the center of God's vision. Nothing could happen to the nation without God's knowing what was taking place. He loves His chosen nation.

The lessons in this quarterly remind everyone of the special place that Israel holds in the mind of God. His preservation and protection of this nation has been clearly revealed throughout history. These lessons will take the students through the various stages of history and show that God was always there to draw His chosen nation unto Himself. This study will show the spiritual heritage that Israel had in its forefathers.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ A Nation's Foundation—Abraham  
Everything must have a beginning. The nation of Israel is no exception. There was a time when Hebrews did not exist. Then the time came when they began existence. That beginning came in the person of Abraham. He was the first Hebrew (Gen. 14:13). Those who descended from him were also called Hebrews (Gen. 39:14). He was the foundation of this nation.

Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:28). When he became an adult, his father decided to take the family to the land of Canaan (verse 31). They got as far as the village of Haran. Abraham's father decided to settle there. After Terah died, God spoke to Abraham and called him to travel to a land that He would give to Abraham and his descendants. This call of God became the signal event in Abraham's life. God separated him and his descendants from all the people of the earth as His own.

This call to separation began with a marvelous covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). There were seven main points to this covenant. God promised that Abraham's descendants would become a great nation. God promised to bless him and give him a great name in the earth. (The name of Abraham holds a special place in three prominent religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. God really did make the name of Abraham great.) God also promised that Abraham and his descendants would be a blessing in the world. (The nature of the government of our country has proven this to be true. It is based strongly on the teachings of the Bible, which came through the Jews.) Then God gave a special statement of promise and warning. God will bless those who favor Israel and will curse those who fight against Israel. (See Matthew 25:31-46.) Every nation that has favored and supported the nation of Israel has in turn been blessed. Those nations that have turned away from Israel have suffered greatly for their actions. The final part of God's covenant with Abraham was that, through

his descendants, He would bless all the nations of the earth. Jesus Christ fulfilled this when He provided salvation for all people. He met the demands of the righteous God and paid the price for sin. In this way the nation of Israel has blessed the entire world.

About eight years later, after Abraham had rescued Lot from enemy kings, God confirmed the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:18). On this occasion He added possession of the land of Canaan to the promises. The generally accepted date for that was about 1918 BC. This means that God gave ownership of Palestine to Abraham and his descendants almost four thousand years ago. While they have not always lived in the land, God wrote their title deed in Heaven. God will maintain His promise even if people choose to fight against it.

God confirmed His covenant with Abraham when he had reached the age of ninety-nine years (Gen. 17:5-8). Ishmael had been born about thirteen years earlier. Abraham wanted him to be the son whom God had promised. God assured him this was not the son of promise. Sarah would bear Abraham a son. At their advanced age, God confirmed His promise to Abraham. This promise included the fact that Abraham would be the father of many nations. Many kings would come through his line. The covenant made those many years before was an everlasting covenant and their possession of Palestine would also continue. The security of this covenant was the eternal character of God.

For all of those years, God cared for and protected Abraham. Sometimes life was difficult, but God promised to be with him and help him. As He helped and protected Abraham, He would also help and protect Abraham's descendants, the people of Israel.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ A Nation Flourishing— Isaac and Jacob

God did not stop blessing the tribe of people who would become His chosen nation. God extended His great promises to the descendants of Abraham. As generations progressed, the number of people in the tribe increased.

God had promised Abraham a son. Isaac was the fulfillment of this promise. Before the birth of Isaac, Abraham wanted God to accept others of his household. Those were mere substitutes and were not the fulfillment of God's promise. When the son of

promise finally came, God willingly passed the covenant on to this next generation. Soon after the death of Abraham, God came to Isaac and confirmed the covenant with him (Gen. 25:5). The promise of blessing from God now became the hope of Isaac. This promise came to Isaac at a difficult time. The land in which he dwelt faced a time of drought. Often the inhabitants would travel to the fertile delta of Egypt to live during times like this. God promised that if Isaac would remain in the land of promise, He would take care of him. God provided for his nation and caused it to grow stronger.

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. These two sons had little in common. Esau was the older and loved to hunt. Jacob cared more for his father's flocks. The older should have received the special blessings of the family, but Jacob tricked Esau out of that blessing and birthright. As a result, the covenant made with Abraham now transferred to Jacob. The promises of God's blessings were for Jacob and his descendants. Isaac spoke of this blessing when he sent Jacob out into the world. "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham" (Gen. 28:3, 4). All that God promised Abraham now passed to the next generation. This would be the generation that would really begin the formation of the promised nation.

Jacob had twelve sons. These sons would someday form the tribes of the nation of Israel. His family went through difficult times, but God was always there to protect them. God caused the efforts of Jacob to prosper so that, when he returned to the land of promise, he was a wealthy man. God caused his chosen people to flourish into a strong family. This strong family would soon begin its transition into becoming a nation.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ A Nation Forming—Joseph

One of the sons of Jacob was Joseph. He was the favorite and most faithful of his father's sons. These two factors caused his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery. He arrived in Egypt as nothing more than a purchased possession. God did not leave him in that position.

On two separate occasions Joseph arose from being a menial slave to becoming the steward of households. First, this hap-

pened in the household of Potiphar. Joseph faithfully served his Egyptian master. God blessed him. He gained the trust of Potiphar and became the household steward. Everything in the house was under the control of Joseph. Because of the lies of Potiphar's wife, Joseph was accused of a crime and was thrown into prison. Joseph gained the trust of his jailer and rose through the ranks. The jailer placed the other prisoners under the control of Joseph. This enabled him to meet one who would one day help him. Great things would happen because of the blessings of God on Joseph.

Joseph had the opportunity to help Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. He preserved the nation; yet, the preservation of Egypt was not what God had in mind. The brothers of Joseph had sold him for a profit. They cared little about what happened to him. They intended evil by their actions. God had something better in mind. Notice Joseph's words as he related the story to his brothers in later years. "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20). God knew all along the need to preserve His people. He set things in order so that they could live when many others died.

Because of Joseph, the nation of Israel continued its life. God provided help at the proper time. God is always in control of history. God set the stage for the formation of a great nation.

### Conclusion

Even through the darkest times, God brought His chosen nation through the trials. What other people has a heritage like the people of Israel? They can trace their line of existence to the first Hebrew. This is an unbroken line of almost four thousand years. This preservation continued even though for almost two thousand years the people of Israel were scattered throughout the world. No nation has maintained its identity without having a land in which to dwell; yet, Israel has done exactly that. How could it be? Only the preserving hand of God could bring about such an event as this. God began this nation by making a covenant with Abraham. This covenant passed on to his descendants. God will continue to keep His Word to the nation of Israel.

## God's Faithfulness to the Nation

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will understand the power of God in His deliverance of His people from Egypt and His love for them in His teaching them in the wilderness.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Psalm 107:1-8.  
Background Scripture: Exodus 12:21-28; 14:13-31; 16:14-22; 17:5-7; Numbers 21:5-9; Deuteronomy 9:9-11.  
Devotional Reading: Moses, God's Man, Deuteronomy 34:10-12.

### Introduction

How did Israel become such an enduring nation? Many would think that circumstances conspired to bring about this nation; yet, looking realistically at the ability of any nation to maintain existence through so many years under such trying circumstances, one must conclude that more than coincidence allowed its continuance. A higher power preserved the nation of Israel. That power is the God of Heaven. He kept His promise to the patriarchs of old.

The previous lesson ended with Joseph in Egypt. God placed him there to prepare a place of safety during a terrible drought. God brought His people out of Canaan to receive sustenance during the years to follow (Ex. 1:5). From these seventy people, a nation arose numbering between two and three million. Conditions of safety soon changed and the pharaoh began using them as slave labor.

This lesson focuses on God's deliverance of the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage. This set the stage for their for-

mation into a great nation. Even the forty years spent wandering in the wilderness served the purpose of producing a people after God's heart. He wanted to provide for them and teach them the importance of depending on Him. His blessings on them for forty years should awaken every child of God today to the loving care that God expresses toward His children. As God cared for His people in the wilderness, He also cares for us today.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Passover  
The years of bondage were finally over. The time had come for the people of God to leave the land of slavery. This could not happen easily. God had the plan and the strength to carry out His plan.

God called Moses to lead His people out of bondage. Though uncertain of himself, Moses agreed to the call. He went before Pharaoh and demanded freedom for the people of God. Pharaoh refused to let them depart. God began to exert His influence over Egypt through plagues. The first nine showed God's authority over all nature. Events took place that had (and still have) no earthly explanation. The Egyptians knew this was above the abilities of man or their false gods. Even their priests once declared, "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). Through all these events, Pharaoh continued to harden his heart and refused to let the people of God depart from bondage.

This refusal prompted one last plague from God. This would institute the celebration of Passover for the Israelites. This plague was the most calamitous of all. It would bring about the expulsion of the Jews from their slavery. God pronounced the death of all the firstborn of Egypt. God warned His people what they must do to keep this judgment from affecting them as well. God required them to slay a lamb of the first year. They were to strike the blood on the lintel and doorposts of their houses. God said that when He saw the blood, He would pass over the door, and the Destroyer would not enter the house. The indication was clear. If a person, whether Jew or Egyptian, refused to follow the demand of God, the firstborn of that house would die. God pronounced judgment but also provided a way to escape the promised death. All a person had to do was follow the directions from God.

God set a feast to commemorate that night of judgment on Egypt. The people were to take the lamb that had been slain

and prepare it in a certain manner. Then the family would eat that lamb in celebration of the deliverance of God. This celebration was for the people from that time forward. "And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever" (Ex. 12:24). The time would come when the children did not directly remember the events of that night. They would ask why they had to celebrate in such a peculiar fashion. God told the people that they would use that celebration as a teaching tool to remind the families of God's willingness to deliver them from bondage (Ex. 12:26-28).

These people had been in bondage for four hundred years. That was all this generation had known; yet, God brought them out of slavery so that they could form the nation that He had promised their ancestor, Abraham. God had delivered them. Now He would make of them a great nation.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Protection

Soon after the Israelites left the land of Egypt, they faced a great trial. On their trip they had come to the Red Sea. They were at a place where the sea was before them, mountains were on each side of them and the army of Egypt was behind them. They were trapped and had no means of escape. What could these people do now?

The Israelites had not arrived at that place accidentally. God brought them to that place so that they would have greater faith in Him. When they saw the enemy behind them, they began to panic. They had no idea what to do. God already knew how He would handle the situation. Moses stood before the people and delivered a message of hope and challenge. "Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Ex. 14:13). God had already delivered them from a similar circumstance in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh had refused to release them; yet, here they were marching away from the land. The army's coming against them did not mean that God had abandoned them. They needed to stand where they were and see what God would do for them.

God sent an angel to stand between His people and their enemies. The Egyptians could not press any closer. Then God told Moses to stretch his hands over the waters. As he did so, the wind began to blow and the waters separated. God opened a path for them to follow. This could not have been a small opening in the water. It was a massive area that was wider than a

superhighway. This great mass of people passed through the sea on dry land in a relatively short period of time. Had this been the end of the story, the Israelites could still have rejoiced over the goodness of God. He could have closed the waters and had a large separation between the people of Israel and the army of Egypt. Instead, He let the chariots follow Israel into the sea. When they were in the midst of the sea, God took the wheels off the chariots and stranded the army there. Then Moses stretched out his hands once again and the waters returned to their former place. The vast army of Pharaoh was quickly destroyed.

Why was this necessary? As long as the army existed in Egypt, the people of Israel might have worries. When they saw the dead bodies of their enemies washed up on shore, they knew the enemy was no longer a threat. They had confidence as they progressed on their way.

God showed how much He cared for this nation by His willingness to protect them against their enemy. The same promise is made to the children of God today. We know that God is in control of every situation. He will help His children through the difficulties of life.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Provision  
Now the people of Israel were in the wilderness. They had left behind their former life. It was on the other side of the Red Sea. There was no turning back now. The problem was that there was no earthly way they could have provisions for this great number of people. How would they survive?

God lovingly provided for their every need. They did not have the vegetables that they had back in Egypt, but God gave them something better (Ex. 16:15). His provision of food was manna. He promised that each morning, six days each week, He would send manna to them. They were to gather the necessary amount each day for six days. They were not to store up for the next day during the week. This showed that they trusted the Lord to provide for them on a daily basis. On Friday, they were to gather twice as much because the manna would not come on the Sabbath. Again this was to prove their trust in God.

Were they always faithful to follow the command of God concerning the manna? At the beginning, some did not trust that God would send the manna the next day (verse 20). They gathered much more than they needed. During the night what was

left bred worms and began to stink. Why was this such an important matter? They failed to trust God. He promised to meet their needs on a daily basis. Moses reminded them to gather twice as much on that Friday. Some did not gather the additional amount for the Sabbath. Instead, they went out on the Sabbath to gather (Ex. 16:27, 28). God was angry at their rebellious hearts. They needed to remember the promises of God and trust Him to do what He said.

God provided water for the congregation. They traveled through a wilderness place. There was not sufficient water for such a large number of people; yet, God provided this need as well. He had Moses strike the rock and water gushed out (Ex. 17:6). This was not some small stream that trickled out of the rock. It was a mighty river that poured enough water for the needs of two million people and all their cattle and sheep. God never begrudgingly provides for His people. He abundantly gives what is needed.

God gave the people of Israel the leadership they needed. A large mass of people would naturally be unruly. God did not leave the people without leadership. Moses cared for them and helped them as he could. When they rebelled against God and faced terrible chastisement, Moses prayed for them and often found favor with God. He was the proper man for the job. God blessed the Israelites with good leadership.

God would never call His people to leave a place without providing for their needs on the way. This is as true today as it was then. God will continue to bless when His people seek to follow His will.

### Conclusion

Looking at the evidence in this lesson, a person can easily see the providence of God in the Israelites' departure from Egyptian bondage. By His mighty hand God delivered them from bondage. He protected them when enemies got in the way. He provided for their needs while in the wilderness. God was gracious and abundant in His help for the people of Israel. They were the people of God, and He was always there to help them.

We also can have like confidence in God. We are His children. As our loving heavenly Father, He daily meets our needs. Times will come when we fail, and He must discipline us. Even that is an evidence of His great love. We can know that God cares enough to faithfully care for His own.

## The Promised Land

**LESSON AIM**

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will explain how God gave His people victory in possessing Canaan.

**SCRIPTURES TO READ**

Text: Joshua 1:2-4.

Background Scripture: Joshua 3:11-17; 6:12-20; 10:7-14; 14:6-12; 20:1-9; 24:14-18.

Devotional Reading: Be Strong, Joshua 1:5-9.

### Introduction

The people of Israel wandered through the wilderness for forty years. This time of travels came about because of their rebellion. God had brought them to the land of promise after a relatively brief time. He called upon them to enter and conquer the land. The people felt they did not have the power to overcome the mighty warriors who dwelled in Canaan. God had promised to fight for them; yet, the people refused. As a result, God sentenced them to remain in the wilderness forty years. Every person over twenty years of age at the time of the rebellion would die in the wilderness. The only exceptions to that rule were Caleb and Joshua. These two men stated their belief that with God's help, they could conquer any enemy who might stand in their way. They would enter Canaan.

Along the way, Moses also had a time of rebellion. God declared he also would not enter the Promised Land. The people arrived at the border of Canaan after their forty years of wandering. Moses had died and God had appointed a new leader. Joshua would be in charge of leading the people of God into the Promised Land. God spoke to Joshua encouraging him

to be a courageous leader. God instructed him to begin the process of conquering the new homeland of Israel.

The focus of this lesson is the victory that God granted the Israelites as they endeavored to possess Canaan. He had promised His help many years before. Now the people would see the fulfillment of that wonderful promise.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Coming into the Land

At long last the desired day had arrived. The people of Israel had anticipated it for forty years. Now the time was swiftly approaching when they could finally enter the Promised Land. What would take place on that day?

The people of Israel approached the Jordan River during the harvest season. The biblical record states that this was the time of annual flooding. The people came to a river that was far more than a muddy stream. It was a raging torrent. No way could they attempt to cross at this time of year. Undoubtedly, some of the congregation thought they would have to wait until the floods subsided and they could ford the river at some point. These were not the directions that the Lord gave. Once again He wanted to assure them of His mighty power. His instructions to His people were to go forward.

The people prepared for their normal march. The priests carried the Ark of the Covenant and walked toward the Jordan River. The people observed to see what would happen. God had told them to step in the water and the river would open for them (Joshua 3:13). The priests stepped toward the river, but the waters remained the same. They flowed ferociously down the riverbed. They stepped closer, but the river continued to flow. They reached the river's brink and put the first foot in the water. Immediately the river stopped its flow. The upper portion of the river reacted as though it had reached a dam. The water "stood and rose up upon an heap" (verse 16). The priests carried the ark to the midst of the river and stood there while the entire congregation crossed on dry ground (verse 17). After the people had fully crossed the Jordan, the priests followed. When their feet reached the point above the flood waters, the river returned to its course and flowed as before (Joshua 4:18). God had provided a miraculous entrance to the Promised Land.

One other event was important to this crossing. While the people crossed the Jordan River, God commanded each tribe to

bring a large stone from the midst of the riverbed. With these stones the people were to construct a memorial of this marvelous event (verse 7). These stones would remind the people of the marvelous blessings of God on His chosen nation. Their hearts would return to a trust in Him.

Coming into the land in such a marvelous way would give confidence to the people. They had been a slave nation for four hundred years. They followed their bondage by wandering in the wilderness for forty years. They had been completely dependent on God. Now they would have to trust Him to help them conquer the Promised Land. Their miraculous entrance assured them of God's presence with them.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Conquest of the Land

The nation of Israel had finally arrived in its land of promise. God had preserved its people through the years of bondage. He had successfully led them through the wilderness and had provided for their every need. Now they were to embark on a new task. They were to conquer the land and make it their own. God had promised to help them even during the time of conquest. How would He manifest Himself to them?

At the place where the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River was a fortified city, Jericho. This city was an impregnable fortress to a nomadic people who were not trained nor equipped for siege warfare. To overcome that city would assuredly take the hand of God.

God gave Joshua instructions on the conquest of Jericho. He was to march the people around the city one time every day for six days. Seven priests blew trumpets as they marched around the city. The people were to remain completely silent. Can you imagine what the people thought? To lay siege to a city simply by walking around it seems ridiculous; yet, they followed the instructions precisely. On the seventh day God commanded the people to march around Jericho seven times. When they completed the seventh circuit, the priests gave a special sound and all the people shouted. Think of the roar that arose from the throats of six hundred thousand soldiers. When the trumpets blasted and the congregation shouted, the walls of Jericho fell down flat (Joshua 6:20). The people ran upon the city in great victory. What had been an impossible task for man became a reality because of the power of God.

Soon after that, the Israelites faced the combined armies of five Amorite kings (Joshua 10:5-7). God commanded Joshua to lead the army of Israel against this enemy. God promised great victory for His people. When the battle ensued, God fought on the side of the Israelites. He cast great hailstones on the Amorites. God killed more with His hailstones than the Israelites did with the sword (verse 11). The day drew to a close, but the battle was not over. Many of the enemies of the Israelites still lived. Joshua asked the Lord to prolong the day so that they could continue their defeat of the Amorites. God stopped the sun, and the battle continued until the defeat was complete (verses 12-14). God worked on behalf of His chosen nation.

The battle for the land was long and difficult. Without God it would have been impossible. He helped them defeat the enemy. He “sent the hornet” (Joshua 24:12) driving the armies of Canaan away from Israel. They had victory because of the mighty hand of God.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Contract in the Land

In the years prior to the conquest of the land, God had made certain promises to the people of Israel. These were in addition to the promise of victory in the land. Sometimes the promises were to individuals and sometimes to the nation in general. God kept each of the promises. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness” (2 Peter 3:9).

He kept his promise to Caleb. Caleb had been one of two spies that brought the good report back to the people of Israel. Joshua and Caleb declared they believed God would grant them victory. Because of Caleb’s faithfulness, God promised that he would possess the land he had viewed while on the reconnaissance mission. Now the people of Israel had conquered the Promised Land. Caleb came to Joshua reminding him of the promise of God (Joshua 14:6, 9-11). His statements were interesting. He said that he was eighty-five and was as strong now as when Moses sent him on the spy mission. This strength he attributed to the blessings of God. He knew he could conquer the land that he had viewed because he knew God would be with him. Though he would be required to fight and defeat the Anakim (giants), he would have victory. Joshua approved the request and Caleb received the land that God had promised him.

Another part of the contract between God and His people dealt with legal matters. The cities of refuge were set aside for a special purpose. If a person accidentally caused the death of another person, he could flee to a city of refuge and plead his case there. If they found the death had been accidental instead of premeditated, the person was allowed to remain in the city of refuge. If he was rejected, then the avenger of blood could find him and execute judgment on him. These cities were scattered throughout the geographic area of Israel. This was so that a person would not have too far to flee to find a place of safety. Even in these small areas, God kept His promise of safety for His people.

God's promises have always been steadfast and sure. When He says something, it comes to pass. This is because He is God. A mere man may not keep his word. He might fully intend to do so, but circumstances might hinder him from the completion of his promise. God is not that way. Nothing can hinder Him from accomplishing what He has promised. He kept His word to the Israelites. He will do so today.

### Conclusion

This era of the national history of the people of Israel concluded with a marvelous statement from Joshua. He had led the people for many years. He brought them into Canaan and supervised the conquest of the land. Now he approached the end of his life. He was almost a hundred twenty years of age. He reminded the people of the many blessings of God. Now Joshua challenged them to remain true to God. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). Because it was God who had helped them, it would seem logical that they would continue to serve Him. The people declared, "God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods" (verse 16).

The same challenge goes out to the children of God today. Make a choice of whom you will serve. Will you serve the gods of this world—materialism, popularity or recreation? Will you serve the God who saved you? May each of us declare with Joshua that, "as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

## Disobedient to God

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will understand that God was long-suffering in raising up judges to deal with the people of Israel during times of spiritual depression.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Judges 2:16-19.

Background Scripture: Judges 4:1-24; 7:16-22; 11:30-40;  
15:14-20; 16:16-21; 19:20-30; 21:25.

Devotional Reading: A Merciful God, Nehemiah 9:26-31.

### Introduction

The subject under discussion in this lesson is the time of the judges. This was a peculiar time in the national life of the people of Israel. They had experienced their time of national bondage. The Lord had delivered them from slavery and brought them through the wilderness and planted them in their land of promise. They could never have conquered their new homeland without the mighty hand of God. God's plan for His nation was for the people to follow Him. Their form of government was a theocracy. This means God rules. That was exactly what God wanted. The problem was that the people were more concerned with their own desires than with the will of God.

A phrase describes the mindset of the people of that era. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). This statement echoed a warning from Moses when he instructed the Jews before they entered the Promised Land. He told them that when they entered Canaan, they were to follow the demands of God. They were to destroy every vestige of false religion from the cities of the Canaanites. God would

establish a special place for His name and worship. Moses said, “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes” (Deut. 12:8). The time came when they would not consider the difference between right and wrong. They simply did everything that came to their hearts.

The time of the judges strongly resembles the present age. Biblical standards of morality are considered to be antiquated. No one wants to follow the dictates of an ancient religion. The warning issued to the nation of Israel should be considered today. If it was wrong for people in that day to do only what was “right in their own eyes,” it is still wrong today. God’s standards have not and will not change.

This lesson will focus on God’s reaction to a people who were constantly rebelling against Him. This will show how far above us God really is. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9).

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Rebellion of Israel

Israel was a nation with the greatest of opportunities. Though the people sprang from slavery, the power of God delivered them and brought them to their own land. He drove out the inhabitants of the land. Now the Israelites only had to worship God. One would think that these people could easily follow the Lord and do what He demanded, but they were a rebellious people.

The lesson Text gives a brief summary of the entire book. The verses leading up to the Text tell what the people did in relation to God. A generation rose up who had not directly seen the power of God as He delivered the people and brought them into the Promised Land. The parents had undoubtedly told the younger generation all God had done. The new generation simply chose to forget the blessings of God. Instead, they looked at the people living around them. God had commanded the Israelites to drive out all the inhabitants of the land. They had failed in this task. The younger generation saw the gods of the Canaanites and chose to forsake God for those false gods. In particular they served the gods Baalim and Ashtaroth (Judges 2:13). Because of their rebellion, God caused the enemies of the people of Israel to oppress them. When God sent judges to deliver them again, they would ultimately rebel again and be pun-

ished by God another time. This happened on numerous occasions. They should have learned, but they did not.

The rebellion of the people was so great that even those who were sent as judges were often rebellious as well. One example of this attitude was Jephthah. God used Jephthah to overcome the Ammonites. He made a vow to God that he would sacrifice whatever came out of his house upon his return. This would of necessity be someone rather than something. People dwelled in the house, not animals. In essence he promised God that he would sacrifice one of his servants if he were victorious. While that was a common practice among the heathen living around the Israelites, it should never have been a practice among God's people. The sins of the world had so influenced Jephthah that he made a rash, ungodly vow.

Another example of rebellion is Samson. God gave Samson to barren parents. God called him a Nazirite from birth. This included three things. First, he could not have his hair cut during the time of the vow (Samson's lifetime). Second, he could drink no strong drink during the time of the vow. Third, he could not touch a dead body during the time of the vow. A Nazirite was to be separated unto God. Samson's life was far different than what it should have been. He was not pure and separated. He went to prostitutes on numerous occasions. He often consumed strong drink. On at least one occasion he took food (honey) from the carcass of a lion that he had killed. These were common practices for this man who should have been separated to God. His rebellion came to its fruition when he fell in love with a prostitute. She tricked him into revealing the source of his great strength. He lost his hair and his power from God (Judges 16:20). A man who had great power because of God became a helpless slave because of his rebellion.

The prime characteristic of the people of Israel during the time of the judges was that of rebellion. On numerous occasions, they chose to turn away from God and serve false gods. This always brought judgment. God always keeps His promise, even the promise to chastise.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Return to God

The pattern of that age repeated time after time. Rebellion against God produced judgment in the form of oppression. The enemies of the Israelites came against them and placed them in

positions of servitude. What they had went to feed their enemies.

After enduring the ravages of oppression, the people of God would ultimately return to the One who granted them existence in the first place. They called upon the Lord to remember them. He always heard their prayer. When the people returned to God, He responded by sending judges to deliver them. God loves His people and always wants to help them.

This happens even today. Sometimes God's people today rebel against the demands and desires of their heavenly Father. This might happen when we know the commands of God for His churches. We know our churches cannot grow unless we are willing to carry out the Great Commission by going to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know this is true, but sometimes we refuse to do it. Remember the admonition of James. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Just knowing what is right is not enough. We must perform the will of God for our lives. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). When we rebel against God by refusing to keep His commandments, we face the prospect of chastisement. When that discipline comes, we should return to God in repentance. He will graciously forgive our rebellion and will bless us once again.

The church at Ephesus faced this prospect. When Jesus sent His letter to this church, He told how it had left its first love (Rev. 2:4). This was direct rebellion against God. His instructions to the people were to remember, repent and do (Rev. 2:5). Remember where they were before their rebellion. Repent of their sin. Do the important first works of the church. This was their call to return to the Lord.

The people of Israel needed to return to the Lord after their rebellion. Staying where they were would result in further discipline from God. Returning to God would produce the desired results. God would bless if they would only return to Him.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Restoration by God

What had the people of Israel done up to this point? They rebelled against the Lord. They failed to recognize that Jehovah God is the only God in the universe. All others are false gods. Because of their rebellion, God allowed their enemies to be victorious over them. The people of God faced times of servitude and tribute to other kings. The hardships ultimately brought

the hearts of the people back to Jehovah God. They repented of their sins and God forgave them. What came next?

Every time the people repented of their sins, God forgave them and sent judges to deliver and restore them. These judges came from many different sources. One judge was a woman. This was peculiar because the judges were to be military leaders. Judge Deborah called upon Barak to aid her in this work. God granted them victory, and the Israelites were restored to freedom.

Another judge was Gideon. He was a fearful farmer. God called him when he was hiding from the Midianites. God's words to Gideon were, "The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour" (Judges 6:12); yet, God used this timid, fearful man to lead a small force of three hundred against an army as numerous as a grasshopper swarm. Victory came, not because of the valor of Gideon, but because of the might of God.

God is extremely patient with His children. If we would stop and examine our own lives and see that God blesses in spite of our many faults, we would begin to understand the long-suffering character of God. We never deserve these magnificent blessings; yet, God gives them anyway. Though we rebel over and over, God continues to forgive and restore every time we repent. We should quickly learn not to give in to sin. God will be there to forgive us when we repent.

### Conclusion

The time of the judges is especially significant for today. Conditions and attitudes that prevailed in that time are quite prominent today. Rebellious hearts abound everywhere. Selfish attitudes predominate. Many people do what is right in their own eyes. As a result, they tend to get into trouble. The Word of God is true. It promises that everyone who rebels against God will face chastisement. This comes from the loving character of our God. Notice this promise of God: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). God would never bother to chasten anyone that He did not love. He is a loving Father. He proved it in the days of the judges. He did not allow difficult times to come because He was angry. The Israelites needed to be disciplined so that they would learn not to follow false gods. God's love demands nurturing discipline. When people repent, He forgives and restores them. He is truly a loving, long-suffering God.

## A Mighty Kingdom

LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will understand that God made the nation of Israel a nation of power and influence.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Samuel 7:8-16.

Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:32-51; 2 Samuel 1:19-27; 5:1-12; 11:1-27; 1 Kings 8:15-21; 10:4-7, 14-29.

Devotional Reading: God, the True King, 1 Kings 8:56-61.

### Introduction

The previous lesson dealt with the time of the judges. These were men that God used to deliver a repentant people after a time of rebellion. God brought chastisement on those who rebelled through their enemies. When the Israelites repented, God would send them a judge to bring them out of their troubles. God wanted to be the ruler of the nation of Israel.

The time came when the people in general rebelled against God. They decided they needed a king to be like all the nations around them (1 Sam. 8:19, 20). They knew what God wanted. They simply did not care. God reluctantly gave in to their request and gave them a king after their own hearts. Saul was a man among men. He was tall, strong and used to hard work. Surely, he would be the ideal leader for the nation. The problem was that, while Saul had all the physical characteristics, he had nothing within that would qualify him to be a good leader. He was selfish, short-sighted and cruel. He cared nothing for the nation or God. Saul always put his own wants in the mixture. The first problem he had was when God sent him against the Philistines. He needed to wait on Samuel to offer a sacrifice

unto the Lord requesting His help in the upcoming battle. Samuel was late in arriving. Rather than waiting on the Lord, Saul decided to offer the sacrifice. Saul rebelled against the commandments of God by usurping priestly authority (1 Sam. 13:11-14). Later God called upon him to destroy the Amalekites. When Samuel arrived after the battle, he heard the sound of sheep and cows. Samuel asked Saul if he had fulfilled the command of God. Saul claimed he had done exactly what God wanted him to do. He had not only taken many of the flocks of the enemies (which God had commanded him to destroy) but had also spared the life of the enemy King Agag. His actions were in rebellion against God (1 Sam. 15:14-23).

God had given the people a king who met their standards. He had led them into rebellion. Now God would give them a king after His own heart. He would show how God would bless the nation when their king desired to follow God's will. That king was none other than David. Under him Israel became a nation of power and influence.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The Character of David  
David's background helped to equip him to be the proper man for the job of leading the nation of God. His character helped him depend on God and directed him toward having a servant's heart.

His character was clearly in evidence in the matter of his battle with Goliath. David was the youngest son of Jesse. While his brothers went to fight in the army of Saul, David remained at home watching his father's sheep. This helped him prepare for battles to come. He had the responsibility of protecting the sheep even against savage animals. He killed a lion and a bear that were threatening the sheep (1 Sam. 17:34-36). The army of Saul was arrayed for war against the Philistines. This enemy had a champion that they sent out to battle the champion of the Israelites. The enemy champion was none other than Goliath, a giant who was over nine feet tall. He was so strong his coat of armor weighed about one hundred fifty-seven pounds. David came to the camp on an errand from his father. He heard the challenges of Goliath and was angry that no one would answer. He determined to go against the giant. He refused to take armor and weapons. His reason was simple. Jehovah "will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). As

David ran out to the battle, Goliath made fun of the unarmed youngster coming against him. David answered, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied" (1 Sam. 17:45). David had victory on that day because he depended on the Lord.

The heart of David continued to follow the heart of God. The Lord's description of this man was that he was a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). Well before he became king, David's heart longed after God. Psalm 90 described the greatness of God as He reveals Himself through the creation. David wrote that Psalm while he was still watching his father's sheep.

Though David was a good man, he was human. He was a natural sinner like every son of Adam. After he became king, his heart was turned toward a beautiful married woman. When it appeared the sin would become public, David devised a scheme to hide his transgression. He had the husband of Bath-sheba killed. Here is a man who committed adultery, tried to hide it through deceit and ultimately caused the murder of a man; yet, God cared enough about him to confront him with his sin. He had to be punished for his transgression. This discipline did not come because of God's anger but because of His love. He wanted to bring David back to a right relationship. The heart of David was such that he repented of his sin and returned to God.

David was not a perfect man. No man born of Adam has ever fit that standard. Though he was not perfect, he did desire to follow God. That alone made him a fit candidate for being the leader of God's people.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ The Covenant with David

The covenant between God and David did not come early in his life. Instead, it came after he had proven himself a good king and had shown his desire to honor God in all things. David spoke of his desire to build a permanent house of worship for God. Up to that time, the Tabernacle was the place where sacrifices were offered. David wanted God to have a permanent structure that would be the most beautiful building in the world. He expressed that desire and God made a special covenant with him. This covenant had certain promises in it.

First, God promised David that while David would not be allowed to build the Temple, his son would be granted that priv-

ilege. The reason was that David had been a king of war. This was necessary so that Israel could be established as a powerful kingdom. David's leadership gave Israel peace on every side. David's son would have a peaceful kingdom. The desire of David's heart concerning a house for God would be granted. It would just have to wait one generation.

Second, God promised David that his lineage would continue. His son would follow as king of Israel. Saul had wanted one of his descendants to sit on the throne but was refused because of his rebellion. David had been a king who desired God's will to be accomplished in the kingdom. He would be granted a dynasty. This would not be a short-term dynasty, but a permanent line. "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16). We know that David's line continued for many years. But when the nation was taken captive by Babylon, David's descendants no longer sat on the throne. How would God's covenant with David continue? His promise was more than just having an earthly king to sit on some throne. The promise was the continuation of the prophecy Jacob made on his deathbed. He said, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come" (Gen. 49:10). This was a promise of the coming Messiah. That One, the Son of God, would sit on an eternal throne and would rule forever. He would be a descendant of David and would fulfill the promise of this covenant.

What began with David will continue because the promises of God are sure (2 Peter 3:9). His promises are "great and precious" (2 Peter 1:4). His covenant with David must continue. He will have One to sit on the throne forever and ever.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Continuance of David's Line

Did God's promise to David continue? The next generation was also special to God. Solomon had the opportunity to continue the work of his father.

Solomon set his mind to build the house of God. He wanted to construct a building that would show the glory of the one true God. The Temple was built of the finest, most beautiful materials. The woods used in the construction were the best of the day. Most of the interior of the structure was covered with fine gold.

The exterior was of white stone. It would gleam in the sunshine. The Temple was a beautiful building.

When he dedicated the Temple as the house of God, Solomon offered a marvelous prayer of praise. He thanked God for allowing him to complete his father's vision. "And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake" (1 Kings 8:20). Solomon gave all the glory to the God of Heaven.

God appeared to Solomon again and offered him the same contract He had made with David. The line was to continue on and it could be Solomon's line of David that would be that permanent line. He had a definite choice to make. He should serve the Lord as did David his father. If he refused to do so, then the nation would be wrested from the hand of his descendants. Solomon needed to follow the Lord.

### Conclusion

God's promise to David could never be broken. He declared that the royal line would continue forever. That took place in the birth of Jesus Christ. His physical lineage went back to David through His mother, Mary. His legal lineage went back to David through His adoptive father, Joseph. Jesus will establish His throne in the city of David and will rule and reign forever. He will fulfill the covenant of David.

The promise made to Solomon was conditional. "If thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, . . . There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel" (2 Chron. 7:17, 18). Solomon rebelled against the Lord and brought about terrible circumstances for the nation. His son, Rehoboam, would be responsible for the division of Israel. Only two tribes remained faithful to the rightful line. Why did this take place? It happened because of the rebellion of Solomon.

Sin has consequences. Too many people refuse to see this fact. They think they can do as they please and suffer no consequences. God will judge. If you sin against Him, He will hold you responsible. Can you see this great promise of God? He wants to bless us. When we rebel, we deserve His discipline. Be careful to do what God wants you to do in your life.

Have you placed  your literature order?

## The Northern Kingdom

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss reasons why God was patient with His people for a long time then poured out judgment upon them.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Kings 17:7-12.

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:18-20; 1 Kings 12:25-33; 16:28-34; 18:25-41; 2 Kings 6:24—7:20; 17:3-6, 22, 23.

Devotional Reading: The Day of the Lord, Amos 5:16-20.

### Introduction

God's intention for the nation was for it to be composed of strong, God-fearing people who were willing to follow the will of their Creator. The descendants of Jacob (named Israel by God) went down into Egypt. They grew in number. The Egyptians feared the strength of these foreigners so they put them in bondage. Then God decided to bring them out of bondage. God protected them through their journey until they came to the land of promise. He continued to help them, and the people of Israel conquered the land. Through the years, God sent judges to them to protect them and direct their activities. The people decided they needed a king so that they could be like the nations around them. The first king was exactly what they wanted in a leader, but he was not what God wanted. God chose David as the proper ruler. He brought the nation from weakness to being the strongest nation on the earth at that time. David gave the throne to his son, Solomon.

Solomon's son was Rehoboam. When he came to power, the people came to him requesting a reduction of taxes. The people

felt they had done their share and asked for relief. Rehoboam cared little for his subjects and replied that he would make the taxes of his father seem small (1 Kings 12:10-14). The northern tribes, led by Jeroboam, rebelled and established their own nation called Israel. From that time onward, the southern two tribes were known as Judah.

The tribes that rebelled against the line of David did not cease to be the people of God. They were still descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Northern Kingdom drifted from the God who had established them in the Promised Land. God remained patient with them and dealt with them for many years before bringing chastisement upon them.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Corruption of the Northern Kingdom

The tribes who left the line of David rebelled in at least two ways. This rebellion separated them from God by their own choice.

They rebelled from a political standpoint. God had determined the lineage of David to be the proper family from which kings should be chosen. Though Rehoboam was not a particularly spiritual man and cared little for God, he still was the proper king. The rebellion of the northern tribes was a rebellion against God's choice of a kingly line. They compounded their error by selecting as their new king a man who was in total revolt against God.

Jeroboam rebelled against God by establishing a new religion. He built two golden calves. He placed one in the city of Beth-el and the other in Dan. His declaration showed his rebellious heart. "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). Jeroboam had no concern about the safety or ease of his subjects. If the people returned to Jerusalem to worship, they would ultimately return to the line of David. He wanted to protect his position so that he could establish this new religion. The people of the Northern Kingdom quickly embraced their new religion.

God had established one kingdom. His goal was for that united nation to be a shining light for the whole world. As a result, the heathen should have been able to see God by watching the people of Israel. Instead, civil war broke out. Both parties had hearts and attitudes which disagreed with God. Rehoboam

rejected positive, godly advice. Jeroboam led God's people into idolatry and rebellion that brought about division.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Caution to the Northern Kingdom  
Though the Northern Kingdom had rebelled against God, He never stopped loving the people. He showed His concern by sending prophets with His messages of warning. The messages were always a call to repentance.

One of the clearest warnings came during the ministry of Elijah. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were devout in Baal worship. They built a marvelous temple for his worship. Jezebel personally supported four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of the groves (1 Kings 18:19). Elijah issued a challenge to these false prophets. They could have their full complement of prophets, and he would stand alone for God. The false prophets gladly accepted the challenge.

Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to go first. They chose their sacrifice and arrayed it upon the altar. Their rituals should have produced a response from their god. They cried out to Baal from morning (6:00 a.m) until noon. There was no response. Elijah began to make fun of their failure. (See 1 Kings 18:27.) They began cutting ritual marks on their bodies and let their own blood run over the sacrifice. This continued until about three o'clock in the afternoon; yet, Baal never answered.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah had repaired the broken altar. He dug a trench around it which would contain several gallons of water. He laid the wood and sacrifice upon the altar. He then instructed those around to bring four barrels of water and pour them over the sacrifice. He told them to do it a second and third time. The water soaked the sacrifice and wood and filled the trench around the altar. Elijah then quietly prayed to God. "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:36, 37). Immediately, God responded by sending fire to burn the sacrifice. God's fire was so intense that it burned the sacrifice and wood, consumed the stones and lapped up the water in the trench. There could be no doubt that this really was the only God of Heaven.

God also warned the Israelites by attacks which took place. One such attack was from Syria, which came against the capital city of Samaria and besieged it. Food became scarce. The king walked along the wall waiting for the next attack. A woman approached him. She and another woman had agreed to eat their newborn sons. This attack was further warning from God. He called the people to repent.

Why did God send warnings to the Northern Kingdom? The people needed to hear the message of God. The warnings were given but were always ignored.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Chastisement of the Northern Kingdom

The conquest of Canaan had taken place over a period of about twenty-five years (from 1405-1382 BC). Now over six hundred years had passed. The people of Israel had seen the power of God over those many centuries; yet, the Northern Kingdom never returned to God. Because of this, He would fulfill His promise of chastisement on those who rebelled (Deut. 8:18-20). Assyria would attack them and take them captive.

Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, attacked Samaria and besieged it for three years. In 721 BC the attack was finished. Shalmaneser was so successful that he took the king of Israel bound into captivity. The population of the Northern Kingdom departed from the land of Canaan. Assyria placed the people in foreign lands where they spent years in captivity. God brought judgment upon this nation because of its rebellion against His purpose and plan.

### Conclusion

The Israelites conquered the Promised Land in approximately 1382 BC. Their first king came to power in 1043 BC. The first three kings lasted forty years each. Then the division of the nation came in 931 BC. The Northern Kingdom lasted for over two hundred years. In all that time, not one king really turned to the Lord in repentance. It was not that God did not care. Had He not cared, He would never have sent His prophets to warn the people. God cared, but the people did not. Their rebellion was complete, and they paid for it with their national existence.

## The Southern Kingdom

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will know the struggles of Judah to remain true to God and its ultimate fall because of corruption.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Chronicles 30:6-9.

Background Scripture: 2 Kings 18:1-7; 2 Chronicles 10:6-19; 24:1-14; 34:8-17; 36:15-21; Jeremiah 25:9-12.

Devotional Reading: The Hope of Habakkuk, Habakkuk 3:17-19.

### Introduction

The history of the Southern Kingdom of Judah mirrored that of the Northern Kingdom. They both had the same roots. The separate history of this branch of the people of God began in 931 BC. That was when Solomon died and his son came to power. The people of the nation rightfully requested an easing of their tax burden. Rehoboam had the good advice of his father's counselors, but he rejected their sound advice. He told the people he would do the opposite of their request. He would raise their tax burden. Because of his silly decree, the nation went through civil war and divided.

Fallible humans led the Southern Kingdom. A total of twenty rulers (nineteen men and one woman) reigned over Judah. Only eight of these rulers could be considered good kings. The Bible introduced each king with a judgment of his reign. If he followed the Lord, "he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD" (2 Chron. 29:2). Those kings tried to bring the people back to God. This did not mean the king was perfect in his actions. Even these godly kings had moments when they were

wrong in their assessment of situations; yet, in general they did what God wanted them to do.

This lesson will focus on the struggles that Judah had in its attempt to be a godly nation. The struggle of Judah greatly parallels the struggles of the United States of America. This nation was founded under the principle of a loving Creator. The national motto is "In God we trust." The Pledge of Allegiance declares that we are one nation under God. We claim to be a great Christian nation. An examination of Judah can remind people today of the importance of returning to the God of the Bible. He can make this nation strong. Without God's help we have little hope of remaining in a position of leadership.

The focus of this lesson will be how the godly kings of Judah tried to keep the direction of the kingdom toward God. The wicked kings took the nation away from God. Then godly kings would come to power and try to return the nation to God.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Repaired the House of God  
Joash became king following about twenty years of evil rulers. The three rulers who preceded him were extremely wicked and cared nothing about the worship of Jehovah God. The ruler immediately before Joash was Queen Athaliah. She was so evil that she killed her own grandchildren. She was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The house of God had fallen into disrepair.

Joash came to the throne when he was only seven years of age (2 Chron. 24:1). His advisor was the godly priest Jehoiada. He helped the king make good decisions. Joash grew in age and in spiritual desire. He saw the house of God in disrepair. He gathered the priests and all the Levites and gave instructions on how funds would be raised to restore the Temple. The reaction showed the importance of good leadership. As soon as provisions were made for a collection to be received for the repair of the Temple, all the people rejoiced and brought their gifts to the work of God (verses 8-10). The offerings came in abundance. The beautiful structure that had become so shabby was restored to its beauty once again.

What does that mean to people today? The analogy is clear. God has blessed each church with a place to meet. Sometimes we take for granted what we have. We begin to neglect the care for the church building. It is not intentional, but it happens.

The paint begins to look shabby and the building is poorly maintained. We should carefully examine our church houses. If they are in need of repair, we should correct any problems. His house should receive greater care than our houses. We should respect the place that we have dedicated to the worship of the King of kings.

Joash cared about the Temple of God. He wanted it repaired so that the people would desire to go there. In doing this he helped to draw the people back to God.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Returned to a Worship of God

Hezekiah was one of the godliest kings to reign in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:3). He followed one of the most wicked kings to reign over Judah, Ahaz. Ahaz plundered the Temple and used its furniture in the worship of his idol god. He sacrificed his own children to Molech in the valley of Hinnom. The people of Judah followed the depraved leadership of Ahaz. When Hezekiah came to power, he had a difficult task before him.

Hezekiah began his reign with a call to the people. He showed his commitment to God by destroying all the idols and removing all the high places. The people had even perverted the brazen serpent making it a god. Hezekiah broke it also. He wanted nothing to stand between the people and God. With all the hindrances out of the way, the people should have turned to Jehovah and worshiped only Him.

Hezekiah was not content with calling the people of Judah to worship Jehovah. He extended his call to the people of the Northern Kingdom, Israel (lesson Text). He wanted all Jews to join in the celebration of the Passover. This was the great day of remembrance of the Exodus. If the people celebrated Passover, they would celebrate the God who delivered them from bondage. This would turn the minds of the people back to God.

Because of his commitment to God, Hezekiah was greatly blessed. The king of Assyria had brought Judah under tribute. God granted Hezekiah and Judah the power to gain freedom. This happened because the people returned to worship God.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Read the Word of God

Josiah was the finest king to reign in Judah (2 Chron. 34:1, 2). He followed almost sixty years of ungodly rulers. Josiah

came to power when he was only eight years of age. At the age of sixteen, he committed his life to pursuing God. He tore down all idols, false altars and shrines. He stopped the sacrificing of children to false gods. He executed all false priests and prophets. When he was twenty, Josiah set about repairing the house of God. There he discovered the books of Moses. This set the direction for his reign from that point onward.

Josiah led the nation in a time of revival. It is important to see that revival came when the Word of God was restored to its rightful place of honor. When people neglect the Word of God, revival will not come. We live in an age when the Word of God is greatly neglected. Churches wonder why lives are not changing and people are not being saved. Josiah led the nation in reading the Bible. This was not just a limited service. It included the entire nation. He used the Levites in reaching out to the people. He understood the importance of reading and learning the Word of God.

Josiah had spiritual goals for the people of God. He wanted them to focus on God. He wanted them to read the Word of God. He wanted them to worship God.

### Conclusion

The nation of Judah soon returned to its wicked way. This displeased God. The time for judgment was soon to come.

Jeremiah prophesied the punishment of Judah. He told them it would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:11). God had been patient with these people. Some of their rulers had attempted to keep the nation true to God; yet, repeatedly they forsook God and went to idol gods. Time for judgment was upon them. Nebuchadnezzar and the nation of Babylon came upon Jerusalem and Judah and conquered them. Waves of captives were taken north. Finally, in 586 BC, Judah no longer had a king. God's judgment had begun.

Did this mean the people of Israel had ceased to exist? No, they were to remain in captivity for seventy years. God's promise was that they would someday return to their homeland. God did not stop loving them. He merely wanted them to be faithful to Him.



## Home Again

LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss how God's providence brought the people of Israel back to their land.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Nehemiah 1:5-11.  
Background Scripture: Ezra 1:1-4; Nehemiah 4:4-9; 8:8—9:3; Isaiah 44:28—45:7; Daniel 6:10-15; Haggai 1:3-7.  
Devotional Reading: God's Faithfulness, Isaiah 40:28-31.

### Introduction

Israel was a nation that often strayed from the path set by God. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob became a nation because God brought them out of Egyptian bondage. He preserved them through the wilderness journey and established them in the Promised Land. He even drove out their enemies. This people who had been so blessed by God continually rebelled against Him. The time of the judges was full of times of rebellion, repentance and forgiveness. This continued into the time of the kings. The people were so rebellious that they chose not to follow King David's line. The nation divided into the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah. Both of these nations continued their rebellious pattern. Judah had a few godly kings, but it still rebelled against God. In 721 BC, Israel fell to Assyria and was taken captive. In 586 BC, Judah fell to Babylon and was taken captive. Jeremiah the prophet prophesied that Judah's captivity would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11). God's Word came to pass exactly as prophesied.

This lesson will focus on the return to Palestine. Those were difficult years for the people of God. The majority of the people

became content to dwell in the land of their captivity. They built houses and lived many years there. When the time came for them to go back “home,” they balked at the suggestion. The nation had the same attitude when leaving Egypt. After God delivered them, they often remembered their days in Egypt with great fondness. Now the seventy years were over and God prepared a king to allow their return. Their reaction was not met with great delight. God had determined they would return. Their response to God’s decree was important.

The lesson Text gives the attitude of one great man. Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer (Neh. 1:11). This was a position of great respect and honor. The king trusted his cupbearer. He communed with him even when he had little contact with other people. The cupbearer had the ear of the king; yet, Nehemiah was not content. He desired the advancement of his people and his God.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Repentance

Remember Nehemiah’s lofty position. He was almost unassailable; yet, he was not a happy man. His mind was on the people of God who had begun their return to Jerusalem. They were in dreadful condition. Nehemiah offered a great prayer to God.

One great aspect of Nehemiah’s prayer was the repentance it offered. “We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses” (verse 7). He went on to remind God of His promise of judgment on His people when they rebel against Him (verse 9; Deut. 4:25-27). Nehemiah did not try to hide the Israelite’s rebellion. God knew it and so did Nehemiah. What was interesting about this confession was his identification with the generation that rebelled. Nehemiah had probably not even been born when the captivity took place; yet, he spoke of the sins of that generation as his own. He was humbly in tune with God’s will for the people of Israel. He knew that they should repent and he wanted to be a part of it. He confessed that the people had rebelled against God and needed to return to Him.

Repentance is difficult for most people. It is difficult because it demands an admission of guilt. Too many people think they need not admit guilt when repenting. How can a person repent without admitting wrong? To receive forgiveness, a person must acknowledge his failure before God, must willingly turn from

that sin and must come before God. The members of the church at Thessalonica repented. Paul described it specifically—“how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). This is the formula for repentance and forgiveness.

After their seventy years of captivity the people of Israel began their return to the Promised Land by repenting of their sins. When God had forgiven them, they could look back to the land of promise.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Return

The return of the Jews to their homeland came in stages. Even before the time of captivity began, God gave a prophecy about their return. He spoke of the king who would arise and allow them this blessing. Isaiah spoke of a man named Cyrus who was to be a shepherd for God. He would allow the people of God to return to their homeland. Cyrus came to power a century and a half after God gave this prophecy. At the time of the prophecy, his kingdom (the Medo-Persian empire) was a second-rate people; yet, God knew by name the man who would begin the return. Paul said, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). God’s promise through Isaiah began in the first year of the reign of Cyrus. “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up” (2 Chron. 36:22, 23).

God’s promise had been clear. If the people rebelled against Him, they would receive punishment. God would scatter them to other nations. Both Israel and Judah rebelled against God and were scattered among foreign people. God also promised that if they repented, He would return them to their land. God always keeps His promises.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Rebuilding

The rebuilding was also accomplished in various stages. When the Jews arrived in Jerusalem, they first built houses to dwell in. This took some time and apparently expended much

energy. Haggai indicated the people completed the first stage of rebuilding their houses but then neglected to do the actual work for which they had returned—rebuilding the Temple. His admonition to them was to “consider your ways” (Haggai 1:5, 7).

Some years later Ezra went to Jerusalem to encourage the people to complete their work. Under his leadership, the Temple worship was introduced once again. They had completed the rebuilding of the Temple. Though it was not as magnificent as the Temple built by Solomon, the people rejoiced at the sight.

Even later, Nehemiah went to Jerusalem. Much work had been accomplished, but the city was left defenseless against attack. His purpose was to rebuild the wall so that the people could live and worship in safety. Again, God’s hand was in his return. Nehemiah led the people to complete the rebuilding of the wall. It took only fifty-two days to take the wall from rubble to a secure defense against attack (Neh. 6:15). How was this possible? God’s hand was in the rebuilding and the people had a mind to work (Neh. 4:6).

The rebuilding was not completed overnight. Some estimates give a period of about a hundred forty years from start to finish. Did it take so long because God was unable to bring it about quicker? No, God was not at fault. The people returned to do the work but only completed part of it. When the people had a mind to work, they accomplished great things because God was on their side.

### Conclusion

All that was done in the return of the Israelites to the Promised Land was accomplished by the mighty hand of God. From the first decree going forth from Cyrus to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah under the reign of Artaxerxes, everything was completed by the providence of God. Why should a king allow a foreign power to restore its place of worship? Why should another king allow a foreign power to rebuild its capital city and its defenses? These things could only come at the decree of God. God kept all His promises. Israel repented of its sins. The people returned to God. He promised He would restore them if this took place.

## The Jews in Jesus' Day

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will have learned how God sent His Son to His own people and how they rejected Him.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Matthew 23:37-39.

Background Scripture: Matthew 22:23-32; 23:13-34; John 3:1-6; 4:5-22; 19:14-22; Romans 1:1-4.

Devotional Reading: Sent to His Own, John 1:11-13.

### Introduction

From the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem until the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, about four hundred years had passed. During those years, God sent no inspired message to His people. Many important, historic events took place during those years. The Jews returned to their homeland during the years of the Medo-Persian empire. The next major empire was Greece under the control of Alexander the Great. Then the Roman empire came to world dominance. The Israelites were never satisfied under the domination of any outside power. After all, they were Jews and all others were Gentiles. They often rebelled and suffered greatly during those years. At a time when the people should have been anticipating the coming of the Messiah, most people went on in life as though nothing would change.

The years of captivity had caused the people of Israel to finally forsake their inclination to fall into idolatry. They accepted that they had only one God and His name was Jehovah. They would not fall into the trap of accepting false gods anymore.

Instead, they became proud of their religious faith and basically trusted in themselves.

In this lesson we will examine some conditions faced by Jesus as He began His earthly ministry. This will be accomplished by looking at the various prominent groups mentioned in the Gospels. This can alert us to beware of religious trends that focus on man's efforts and accomplishments rather than the work of God.

Jesus loved the people of His day. The lesson Text revealed a broken heart as He looked over the city of Jerusalem. He knew these people had a great need in their lives. They needed a personal relationship with God. He also knew that relationship could only come through trusting in God's plan of salvation. A young man came to Jesus asking how he could gain eternal life (Matt. 19:16-22). He had been religious all his life, but he recognized a deep-seated spiritual need. He also knew that only Jesus could help him. Jesus wanted to help all people.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The Sadducees

One religious group that held much power in Jerusalem was the Sadducees. They were often in control of the high priesthood and lorded their authority over the people.

The Sadducees were a religious people who really believed in nothing spiritual. They felt that their Jewish heritage was all a matter of political influence. They did not believe in angels, miracles or anything they could not explain using natural laws. They believed that the spirit of man perished at death. Their belief system was in great conflict with the teachings of Jesus. On many occasions Jesus tried to bring them back to the truth.

At one time, Sadducee leaders approached Jesus with a question. (See Matthew 22:23-32.) Their questions were intended to trick Jesus. They proposed a problem. A man (one of seven brothers) married a woman but had no offspring. He died. According to the Law, his brother should marry the woman and raise up a child in the name of the brother. The second brother married the woman but had no children. He also died. All seven brothers married the woman and died without having children. The Sadducees asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Jesus answered that they really did not understand the Bible at all. He declared that in the resurrection there is no marriage. "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and

the God of Jacob.” Jesus interpreted it for them. “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:32).

The Sadducees had little to encourage people to join with them. Their’s was a religion with no future and no hope. Jesus defeated their false beliefs.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ The Pharisees

The Pharisees formed the sect with the greatest number of people. They also held the greatest influence on the general population. Their belief system was quite conservative. They believed in the eternal spirit of man, angels, miracles and the resurrection from death. They thought a person was justified by conformity to the Law. Because they felt they earned salvation by their own good works, the Pharisees were a proud people. They held the common people in great scorn (John 7:49). They practiced external cleanliness without worrying about the inner man. They believed in keeping the written Law. They also accepted the traditions. They placed as much emphasis on these traditions as they did the written Law.

Jesus had many dealings with the Pharisees. They were much more vocal than were the Sadducees. They were constantly attacking Jesus and His followers. On one occasion Jesus spoke at length of the emptiness of the Pharisees’ teachings. (See Matthew 23:13-34.) He accused the Pharisees of placing strict laws on the common people, but they refused to keep those laws themselves (verse 13). They loved to make prayers and perform religious rituals to be seen of men (verse 14; Matt. 6:1, 5, 16). They placed more importance on material matters than on spiritual (Matt. 23:23). Jesus summed up the attitude of the Pharisees by saying they would strain out gnats but allow large objects (as a camel) to remain in the drinking water (verse 24). They loved to wash the outside of the vessel (body) but cared nothing about what was on the inside. Jesus was showing them the fallacy of their pride. Jesus told them that they were defiled (ceremonially unclean) by what came out of their hearts.

The Pharisees were religious but were full of pride. They had not trusted in God to help them. They trusted in their own efforts to produce salvation. They were proud but wrong.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Samaritans

The Samaritans were a group of people bitterly despised by the common Jew. The reason for this hatred was the history of

the Samaritan people. When Assyria took the Northern Kingdom captive, they left a few Jews in the land. The Assyrians would often remove natives from their homeland and transplant other nationalities there. The Gentiles intermarried with the Jews. When the foreigners moved into Canaan, they brought their idols with them. Lions soon attacked them. They thought this happened because they did not honor the god of the land. They requested priests of God to point them toward a proper worship. The foreigners mixed their old worship with thoughts about Jehovah. They accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as inspired but rejected all other Old Testament writings. When the returning captives rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans wanted a temple. They built theirs on Mount Gerizim and declared that was where Moses had instructed the people to worship. That was why the woman at the well said that her forefathers went to that mountain to worship while the Jews went to Jerusalem.

The mixed background of the Samaritans along with the perverted religion caused great hostility between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus was willing to tell the Samaritans how they could be saved. Why would He do that? Jesus looked at the hearts of men rather than the skin.

### Conclusion

Jesus came to the world when there was great confusion. He did not try to sort out their differences. Instead, He simply told them the way of life. The Jews rejected Him and called for His crucifixion. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). Even while hanging on the cross, Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). He loved each person who nailed Him to the cross.

Jesus paid the price for the sins of every person. He went to the cross that He "should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

What was so special about Jesus? Was it that He lived a good life? Was it that He was helpful and forgiving? No, what set Jesus apart from every other person who has lived is that He is more than mere man. He is the only begotten Son of God. This was proven when He rose from death after three days. His resurrection declared His deity. This eternal Son of God offers life to all people.

## A Jewish Church

LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will understand that God sent His Son to organize the first church of Jewish believers and gave it the duty to carry the gospel to all men.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Acts 2:22-24.

Background Scripture: John 1:43-50; 4:23-29; Acts 11:16-20; 13:46-52; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-20.

Devotional Reading: To the Jew First, Romans 1:14-17.

### Introduction

The previous lesson dealt with some of the religious and social groups in the days of Jesus. The nation was wrapped up in religious activity. The problem was that their religion was not practical. It taught many restrictions but had little to help the people. They muddled through life with little hope for the future.

There entered a man who began preaching a different kind of message. Though some accused him of being the Messiah, he boldly declared there was One greater than he who would soon come on the scene. The man who began this preaching ministry was John the Baptist. His ministry had been foretold in the Old Testament. "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa. 40:3). This forerunner of the Messiah would come with a ministry as bold and powerful as the prophet Elijah (Malachi 4:5). John the Baptist had a ministry that produced great results. God used John to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

Jesus came for a specific ministry as well. He had purchased our salvation by offering Himself as the sacrifice for sins. Isaiah also foretold this work (Isa. 53). In addition to this work, Jesus established an organization through which the entire world would be reached with the gospel. John reached out to the Jewish population. Many people came to hear him preach. Many who heard were changed by the message of repentance he proclaimed. Those who were saved submitted to the baptism of John. The Lord used this prepared material as the foundation for His church. Because the material prepared was Jewish in nature, the church He established was a Jewish church. Did He intend it to stay Jewish? Was His mind also toward the Gentiles?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Establishing His Church  
Because God commissioned John to prepare material for the work of the Messiah and because the material he prepared was Jewish, the church the Lord established was a Jewish congregation. This fact was clear and is important.

Soon after His own baptism, Jesus went to the shores of the Sea of Galilee for the purpose of calling out certain men for a great work. There He spoke to four men requesting them to leave their present occupation and become followers of Him and become fishers of men (Matt. 4:18-22). The call to become “fishers of men” was an interesting description of responsibility because these four men—Peter, Andrew, James and John—were fishermen by trade. Others would soon be added to this small congregation. The number of leaders in this church was twelve. These apostles remained the leaders of the church for many years to come.

As Jesus continued the work of preaching and teaching, His primary focus was on the people of Israel. He sent out His disciples in groups of two. His instructions to them were clear. “But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6). This did not mean that God had no concern for lost Gentiles. He showed this even in the Old Testament. God made provision for Gentiles to come under the teaching of the Law. They had to follow the principles of the Law, but they could enter and worship with the Jews. God had concern for all people. Jesus’ ministry would not be solely with Jews, but His focus was initially on the chosen nation of God. Part of the reason for

this was their history. It was to the Jews that the Old Testament had been given. They were the ones who should have been expecting the Messiah to arrive. They had the fuller revelation and had the greater opportunity to be saved. It was through those people that the church was established.

During the ministry of Jesus thousands received the opportunity to be saved. Those who walked with Christ were Jews. These people comprised the church. They were the ones who had been saved, baptized and were fellowshiping with Jesus and the other disciples. This early church was a Jewish church.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Extending the Gospel

Though the church Jesus established was a Jewish congregation, He never intended salvation to be exclusively for Jews. Even during His personal ministry He took opportunities to minister to those who were not Jews.

On one occasion Jesus returned from the south (around Jerusalem) to Galilee (John 4:3-7). The quickest way to make that trip was through the region of Samaria. Most devout Jews took the long way around because they wanted no contact with the Samaritans. Jesus went through that region and even stopped for water and food. While sitting by a well outside the city of Sychar, He saw a woman coming to get water. He began a conversation with her to help her realize her spiritual need. She realized how bizarre that conversation was (verse 9). Jesus continued to speak of spiritual matters. His discussion focused on the real need of the woman. She had arrived at the well expecting nothing more than to draw water. She only realized this physical need. Jesus began drawing her attention away from the physical and pointed her toward the spiritual need. He confronted her with the fact that the water at that well would only satisfy for a brief time. He offered her water that would be like an artesian spring that would last for an eternity. At the conclusion of their exchange, the woman realized she was lost and received Jesus as Savior. She ran into the city telling everyone she met about the Messiah. Many Samaritans were saved on that occasion. Jesus wanted all people to be saved.

On another occasion a Gentile woman (a Canaanite) came to Jesus requesting Him to heal her daughter (Matt. 15:22). The disciples were quite upset at her request and asked Jesus to send her away. He spoke to her in discouraging words. "I am not

sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (verse 24). She continued to beg Him to help her daughter. He went further to discourage her. It was not proper to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs. To describe her as a dog was degrading. She replied that even the dogs got the crumbs off the table. She really was not concerned with the dignity of the situation. She was concerned about her afflicted child. Her statement of faith prompted Jesus to help her. He declared that her faith was great (verse 28). He asserted that her faith far exceeded what He had seen in the nation of Israel. Jesus helped this Gentile woman with her great need.

These works of Christ in reaching out to Gentile people prepared the church for when it would have the responsibility to reach out to the entire world. Though that work would produce times of controversy in the church, the members had been given the proper example to follow. Jesus loves all the world.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Example to Gentile Churches

The Jewish church members had a religious heritage the Gentiles did not possess. The Jews had a word of revelation in the Old Testament. They knew the one true God of Heaven. It was a small step for them to receive the Son of God and follow Him. On the other hand, Gentiles had no such heritage. Most of the Gentile world was polytheistic. They worshiped everything they saw. Think of how the people of Athens were. Paul looked at the people and saw that they were “too superstitious” (Acts 17:22). They had gods from all over the world. In case they missed some god somewhere, they had an altar dedicated “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (verse 23). Gentile people were controlled by superstition.

As Paul and others reached out to the Gentiles, churches grew from those who were saved and baptized. Because they had no heritage upon which to base their worship, they looked back to the church established by Jesus. They looked to the church at Jerusalem for help and counsel. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica declaring it had become followers of the churches of Judea (1 Thess. 2:14). The church at Jerusalem had begun the outreach to the world. Because of the members of that first church, numerous congregations were throughout the empire. We can take that a step farther. Because of the work of that first church, congregations have spread throughout the

world. For almost twenty centuries, churches have followed the example set by the first church that Jesus established. Churches continue to reach out to areas in need of the gospel.

Everyone needs an example to follow. On the job a person learns a new task by following the example of the instructor. In school a person learns new information by listening to the one before him. In church work we learn by seeing what has gone before. The first church was Jewish, but it has taught us how to reach out to all people. We should follow that example.

### Conclusion

The church Jesus established during His personal, earthly ministry had been the material prepared by John the Baptist. He called them out to follow Him and learn how to conduct their own business. This church learned quickly. When God empowered them on the day of Pentecost, they set about to accomplish the work that Jesus had given them. They began to reach out to the world. This work has continued now for almost two thousand years. We can learn by looking to the church Jesus established. The members were not perfect, but they tried their best to do God's work.

Remember that until some time had passed, no Gentile was admitted to it. Because it was located in the city of Jerusalem, this was natural. The general population of Jerusalem was Jewish, so the members who joined the church would also be Jewish. Persecution soon drove many of that congregation out of Jerusalem. They went to other villages and cities and preached the gospel. Gentiles also heard the gospel and were saved. God placed His approval on these Gentile converts and soon mixed churches (Jews and Gentile) and Gentile congregations came into existence. This was the will of God.

The challenge for churches today is as clear as it was in that day. There is a need for God's people to reach out to lost people in every culture. We cannot think that every culture is wrong but ours is not. We must reach people where they are. This was the example that Christ and the early church set. We should follow this positive, godly example. Will we take this challenge? Will we reach out to our world with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

## The Jews and the Gospel

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will explain why the gospel was given to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Acts 13:44-47.

Background Scripture: Acts 1:8, 14, 22; 2:11, 22-24, 37-41; 3:10-21; 4:12, 13, 24, 32, 33; 5:31-33, 40-42; 6:7; 8:4, 26-39; 9:6, 15-17, 27-29; 10:21, 22, 34-48; 11:18; 13:1-4; 18:4-6; 26:19, 20; 28:25-28.

Devotional Reading: The House of Israel, Matthew 10:5-7.

### Introduction

The relation of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles is one that has perplexed people since the days of Christ. We live in a time when the vast majority of those who have received Jesus as Savior are Gentiles. We think of the Jewish nation as an untapped mission field because so many have rejected Jesus.

In this lesson we will look to the spiritual heritage that Israel has. Then we will see why the gospel began to be preached primarily to the Jews. Finally, we will see the move of mission work from being primarily Jewish in focus to reaching out principally to Gentiles.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Their Heritage

The first Hebrew was Abraham (Gen. 14:13). God called him to travel where directed. This was the beginning of a marvelous journey for the chosen nation of God.

An important part of God's call to Abraham was the covenant made between the two parties. It was a covenant of blood. (Genesis 15:7-21 describes the affirmation of the covenant of

blood between God and Abraham.) God told Abraham to offer a certain sacrifice. The animals were killed but not burned. Abraham set watch over these sacrifices. He did not allow the vultures to defile them. The night came and Abraham fell asleep. God spoke with Abraham and assured him the covenant was valid. While Abraham slept, God walked through the various sacrifices made. Normally, both parties of a contract would walk together through the bodies. The covenant that God made with Abraham had its strength and security in God, not Abraham. This covenant would never fail.

This covenant had many important points (Gen. 12:1-3). It included such things as a promise of land. The landmass God promised Abraham and his descendants included all of Palestine and much area around it (Gen. 15:18). The covenant also included a promise and a warning. God said that all who blessed Israel would receive a blessing from God. He also warned that all who cursed Israel would receive a curse from God. Every nation that supported the nation of Israel prospered and was blessed. Every nation that sought to harm Israel soon found failure. Still another part of this covenant was God's promise to make Israel a great nation. Israel remains at the center of almost every newscast today. It is an influential and important nation.

The single most important part of God's covenant with Abraham was the promise of a special blessing to come. "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:3). This promise was fulfilled in the Messiah. This is a reference to Jesus, the Son of God. Israel was under the protective hand of God because it was through this special people that the Savior of all mankind would come. Jesus, this promised descendant of Abraham, purchased salvation for all people.

One would assume that, with such a heritage as this, the Jewish people would quickly embrace the Messiah when He arrived. Sadly, this was not the case. Though they claimed to be awaiting the Messiah, too many Jews never realized who He was when He came.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Their Rejection

The rejection of the Messiah started early in His earthly ministry. Most of the Jews were expecting a military leader to deliver them from Roman rule. When Jesus began preaching, He

never encouraged rebellion against Rome. Instead, He taught people to pay taxes and to obey the laws of the land. The religious leaders did not agree and began seeking ways to defeat this man. They cried out to the governor to crucify this one who claimed to be their king. "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). The ones who were looking for a military leader to deliver them from the reign of Caesar declared their devotion to Caesar. They rejected their Messiah.

Their rejection continued as the disciples spread the gospel to other places. In the city of Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue. (See the lesson Text.) The Jews heard them preach about Jesus being the Messiah. People began responding to the message of salvation. Others were moved with envy. They turned against Paul and accused him of lying. They were so vehement in their opposition that they contradicted themselves and even blasphemed God. Paul looked at them and declared, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Since they had so vehemently opposed the preaching of the gospel, Paul considered them to have finally rejected the message of salvation. He announced he would now go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel to them.

Did this mean that no Jews could be saved after that point? Jesus saves every person who trusts in Him as Savior. It does not matter whether a person is Jew or Gentile. Paul showed this by continuing to reach out to the Jews in almost every city he entered. Writing to the church at Rome, Paul stated his desire to reach his native people with the gospel (Rom. 10:1). Why would he continue to preach the gospel to people who had no opportunity to be saved?

The rejection by the majority of the Jews put the nation in a terrible state. Paul wrote to the church at Rome that the natural branch of Israel was broken off so that the wild branch (the Gentiles) could be grafted in.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Transferal

It was never in God's mind to restrict salvation to the Jews. He desires all people to be saved. Jesus showed this during His earthly ministry. (See John 4:7-29 and Matthew 15:22-28.) The

transferral of the gospel to the Gentiles was most clearly shown in the book of Acts.

Early in the history of the church, the people suffered persecution. They were quickly scattered from Jerusalem. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). No matter where they went, they told people how to be saved. Philip had the opportunity to speak to an Ethiopian eunuch. This conversation began because of God's direction. The Ethiopian trusted Jesus and was saved. Peter also had an opportunity to speak to one who needed Christ. Cornelius was a Roman soldier. He had devoutly studied the Old Testament and desired to know more. God called Peter to go to this Gentile and preach to him "words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts 11:14).

God used Paul mightily in reaching out to the Gentiles. His call to ministry reflected God's desire to reach the Gentiles. "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15). He related this calling in the court of King Agrippa. After sharing God's purpose for his ministry, he said, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:19, 20). While Paul always retained his love for his countrymen, he also had an immense concern for all people everywhere. He wanted to reach all people with the gospel.

The Word of God did not change and state that whatever Gentile will call on the Lord will be saved. The Bible still says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

### Conclusion

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). How thankful are you that the gospel has been extended to the Gentiles? If the gospel were only for Jews, then I would still be lost. The gospel might have been to the Jews first, but thankfully it is also to the Gentiles.

## The Nation Scattered

LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will explain that, while God judged the nation of Israel by scattering it and allowing it to be persecuted, He preserved its existence among the nations.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Deuteronomy 28:64-67.

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:26-29; Matthew 23:37—24:2; Luke 21:20-24; Acts 13:14-16, 45; 17:1-9; James 1:1.

Devotional Reading: An Everlasting Love, Jeremiah 31:1-3.

### Introduction

The Old Testament contains a description of Israel that is vivid. This descriptive phrase is the apple of the eye. It is found at least five times in the Old Testament. The “apple” referred to the pupil of the eye. In this dark portion of the eye, a person can see a reflection of himself. Possibly because of this the people of that day thought the pupil to be the window to the inner man. It came to mean that which a person would hold as precious. In each of those descriptions of Israel, the Scriptures portray the nation as precious to God. It is “the apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8).

Since Israel is so precious to God, why must there be a lesson dealing with the scattering of this nation? One of the primary characteristics of God is His holiness. Such a holy God cannot excuse ungodliness or rebellion. Israel had been the recipient of God’s Law. In spite of this, the people of Israel had been in a constant state of rebellion. In spite of constant discipline and punishment, they frequently turned away from God to idols.

Though the nation was “the apple of his eye,” God must seek to draw it back to Himself.

This lesson will give the background of God’s warning of a national scattering. The warning went all the way back to the Law itself. Many times the people of Israel faced temporary times of discipline through bouts of oppression and captivity. During His earthly ministry Jesus predicted one more dispersion. That one would last centuries. God had warned this would take place. Now He would carry out His promise. Thankfully, the dispersion was not the end of the story. God continues to hold the nation in the palm of His hand. He never has and never will completely forsake Israel as His chosen nation.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ God’s Promise of Discipline

People often think the Law consisted of God’s telling the people of Israel what to do. While much of the Law dealt with what Israel should do or not do, a portion of the Law dealt with what would happen if the nation failed to keep God’s commands.

The lesson Text asserted that if the Israelites turned away from God, He would quickly forsake them and would bring harsh judgment against them. A portion of this judgment would come in the form of a scattering. The nations around them would attack and take them captive. In the foreign lands they would seek to serve the false gods of the conquering nations. Their lives would not be easy and they would have no rest. Because they had left God, He would stop His protection of them.

Discipline such as this happened often in their history. During the time of the judges, many nations oppressed them. The people turned away from God and did everything their degenerate hearts desired. God brought those enemy nations against them for persecution. Then the kings came to power. After one hundred twenty years the nation divided. Both nations were rebellious. The northern ten tribes continually forgot the Lord. God brought Assyria against them and much of the population was taken into captivity. Over one hundred years later, the Southern Kingdom also rebelled against God. Babylon came against Judah and took it captive in a series of three raids. Now the entire nation was in captivity. This lasted for seventy years.

The interesting thing about God’s warning of discipline and dispersion was His promise to the people if they would return

to Him. "But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. 4:29). God said He would never utterly forsake His people. If they would only call upon His name, He would answer their prayers. During the time of the judges discipline came many times. Each time the people returned to worship the Lord. Each time they called out to God, He heard their plea and answered their prayer. He restored them to freedom. Even when the people of Israel and Judah had entered captivity to foreign powers, they had the opportunity to repent and receive forgiveness. They finally called out to God and He allowed their return. God promised to be available to His people wherever they might be.

All of God's promises are sure. He had promised to discipline and scatter His people when they rebelled. God also promised to hear their cry when they repented of their sin and returned to Him.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus' Prediction of  
Destruction and Dispersion

By the time Jesus came to earth for His ministry, the people of Israel had been back in their homeland for about five hundred years. Though they were home, they were under the authority of another foreign power. This was not acceptable to the Jewish people. They felt that when the Messiah came, He would deliver them from this bondage.

Jesus had particular words to say about the rebellion of the people and the promised dispersion by God. On one occasion the disciples approached Jesus with the beauty and majesty of the Temple. They felt it must endure for all time. His answer to their observation was that the time would come when not even one stone of the Temple would be left on the other. They could not understand such a declaration. They came to Jesus with a series of questions. "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3). Their thoughts were clear. Surely, the world must end before the Temple could fall. They could not know what would soon come to the city of Jerusalem; yet, Jesus warned them of what was to come. The armies would surround Jerusalem and bring great desolation upon it (Luke 21:20). The people would flee from the city and the land. Their dispersion would last for many generations. Jesus called it "the times of

the Gentiles” (verse 24). During those many years, Jerusalem and the Temple would be under the control of Gentile nations. When would these events occur?

Less than forty years in their future, the Roman general Titus brought his armies against Jerusalem. To prepare for the siege against Jerusalem, Titus ordered his men to tear down all fences, houses and gardens to level the approaches to the city. They even cut down all fruit trees in the area so the valleys could be made flat. The siege was so severe that many of the people in Jerusalem died of starvation. The battle caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands. (Tacitus, a Roman historian, estimated around six hundred thousand. Josephus, a Jewish historian, estimated the number to be around 1.1 million.) As Titus surveyed the destruction, he saw valleys full of dead bodies. The Temple was burned and the stones pried apart because of rumors stating the stones had been mortared together by gold. The prediction offered by Jesus proved itself true. (Much of this information came from “Works of Josephus, Vol. 1, pages 363, 364, 413.)

The predictions made by Jesus during His earthly ministry had no less validity than did the declarations of the Law. His statements held the force of the omniscient God. He knew the dispersion of Israel was coming.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ God's Preservation  
Through the Years

Though the nation of Israel scattered from Jerusalem and Judea, it always retained its identity. No other nation has ever achieved such a feat. The vast empire of Rome fell and its people did not retain their national identity. The Hittites mentioned in the Bible were a strong force in their day. When God determined their overthrow, their identity vanished. They became so unknown that most historians doubted their existence until quite recently; yet, Israel has always retained a national identity.

The book of Acts relates that Jews lived in many places in the Roman empire. In those places, the Jews remained distinct. Paul traveled to many different cities on his missionary tours. In most cities the Jews lived and established their practice of worship. Paul entered a city and found where the Jews met for worship. They were always a separate people. This happened in

Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14), Iconium (Acts 14:1), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1) and many other places.

This difference has remained through all their history. Europe had clusters of Jews in prominent cities. Gentile people often blamed the Jews for whatever problems arose. This tendency came to fruition in the work of Hitler. He blamed the Jews for all the troubles of Germany and desired to bring about their ultimate destruction. Though he used all the power at his disposal to annihilate the Jewish race, God brought them through this terrible holocaust. The horrors perpetrated against God's people ultimately caused one of their greatest desires to happen. The Jewish people returned to the Promised Land and established a Jewish state. The nation of Israel once again occupied at least a portion of God's promise to it.

The book of Romans mentioned that Israel as a nation would be cut off and a Gentile branch grafted in (Romans 11). That was Paul's way of describing the dispersion of Israel and God's punishment for its rejection of the Messiah; yet, Paul never said that the branch cut off would be ultimately destroyed. He declared that if a wild branch (Gentiles) could be grafted to the root, how difficult would it be for the natural branch to be grafted back again? (See Romans 11:24.)

### Conclusion

Has God judged Israel in time past? Even a brief examination of the Scriptures shows that God brought swift and severe judgment upon this nation. The people of Israel were a rebellious people. The Law had warned them not to rebel against God or to find other gods to serve. If they did, they would face persecution or captivity. Just the words were not enough for the people. They had to test God to see if He would do what He said. They found out that God always keeps His word. If He promised judgment, then severe discipline would come.

Though God brought judgment upon them, He never completely forsook them. They remained His chosen people. All His promises to them were important. He had promised to preserve them. If He kept His word concerning judgment, then He must also keep His word concerning blessings. He will never let the Jewish people cease from existence.

## Israel Today

LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss whether the nation of Israel is the fulfillment of God's promise to regather His people.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Romans 11:25.  
Background Scripture: Psalm 122:1-9; Isaiah 2:1-5; Hosea 3:4, 5; Luke 24:20-24; Acts 15:14-18; Romans 10:18-21.  
Devotional Reading: Paul's Prayer for Israel, Romans 10:1-3.

### Introduction

The subject under discussion in this lesson is controversial for today's generation. With all the conflicts in the Middle East, one might wonder what attitude people should have toward the nation of Israel. Most Islamic nations have a bitter hatred of the people of Israel. They claim to be the rightful inhabitants and owners of what we call the Promised Land. The Islamic influence is swiftly growing. Other nations have been supportive of the nation of Israel. Sad to say, some of these supportive countries have begun to waver in their backing of God's chosen nation. The acceptance of Israel has greatly diminished worldwide.

The Bible described accurately what would happen with the nation of Israel. God warned Israel that, if the people rebelled against the Law, they would go into captivity. God promised that, if they would repent and return to God, He would forgive them and bring them to their land again. God also warned that, if the people rejected their Messiah, they would be rejected for a time and the gospel would go to the Gentile people. When Jesus came to earth, the majority of the Jews rejected Him

(John 1:11). In AD 70, the Roman general Titus destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish people scattered throughout the world. For about nineteen hundred years, they remained scattered. In 1948 the nation of Israel once again came into existence. Is this the fulfillment of biblical prophecy? This lesson will answer this question and will lay the groundwork for the future of Israel.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Prophecies from the Old Testament

The Old Testament gave most of the history of the nation of Israel. It was written by and for Jewish people. One of its purposes was to instruct the people on what was ahead for them nationally.

The Old Testament also promised a rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. Isaiah promised that the time would come when the city of God would be built on the top of a mountain. (Read this prophecy in Isaiah 2:1-5.) When he received that prophecy, Jerusalem still existed. For it to be rebuilt, it would first be completely destroyed. During the years of Babylonian and Persian captivity, Jerusalem was never completely destroyed. That ultimate destruction came at the hands of General Titus. The rebuilding must come some time after that great destruction and the dispersion of the nation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah indicated that, when Jerusalem was rebuilt, it would become the center of world events. While Jerusalem is not presently the capital of the world's government, it is the center of attention throughout the globe. Events that take place in the nation of Israel are front-page news everywhere. Jerusalem has become the center of world attention.

Most of the Old Testament prophecies relating to the rebuilding of Jerusalem point to the millennial reign of Christ. Even Isaiah's words point to the ending of war and bloodshed. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4). Hosea joined in declaring this great promise for the future. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king" (Hosea 3:5). The nation as a whole will not turn to Jesus as the Messiah ("David their king") until just prior to the millennial reign of Christ.

God has not forsaken the people of Israel. We would do well to remember that and do our best to bless them (Gen. 12:3).

2. \_\_\_\_\_

## Paul's Teachings in the New Testament

Paul was a man of God who always maintained a love for Israel. His prayer and desire was for its salvation (Rom. 10:1). He knew the people had some understanding of who God was, but they did not have a perfect knowledge. He tried to help them by sharing the gospel with every person he found.

When writing to the church at Rome, Paul discussed the past, present and future of the nation of Israel. (This is found in Romans 9-11. Chapter 9 describes Israel's past election as the chosen nation of God. Chapter 10 describes Israel's present rejection because of their rebellion against God and their rejection of the Messiah. Chapter 11 describes Israel's future restoration because of the faithfulness of God.) Remember that the church in Rome was primarily a Gentile congregation. Why would Paul write to them about these matters? Apparently some in the congregation (and probably in other churches as well) had decided they had taken Israel's place as the chosen people of God. After all, Israel had rejected the Messiah. Surely, God was rejecting Israel and would substitute those who were keeping His commands. Paul's discussion clarified these matters.

Paul used an illustration from the growing of olive trees. It appeared that God had turned His back on Israel. Paul used the illustration that the natural olive branch appeared to be broken off and wild branches grafted in (Rom. 11:17). He warned the Gentile Christians not to boast of their position because they were receiving nourishment from the natural root. They were built on a Jewish foundation. The natural branches were broken off because of unbelief (verse 20). This should not have been a source of pride, but of sorrow. No one should rejoice because the Jews rejected their Messiah and were for a time broken off. Paul declared that, if God could graft in the wild branch ("contrary to nature"), He surely could graft back in the natural branch of Israel (verse 24). When the proper time comes, He will call them back and they will answer.

Paul's concern for Israel showed in the way he conducted his ministry. God had called him as the apostle to the Gentiles; yet, everywhere he went, he sought out the Jews and tried to convince them that Jesus was their Messiah. His love for the Jews was so strong that he would have made the ultimate sacrifice to

bring about their salvation (Rom. 9:1-3). Paul encouraged the people of his day to continue their love for God's chosen nation.

### Conclusion

This lesson has shown God's plan for the Israelites, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the nation in preparation for end-time events. Prophets in the Old Testament foretold the rebuilding of Jerusalem. They indicated the people would return to their homeland and would once again have their own government. In the New Testament, Paul taught that the nation of Israel might be broken off for a time, but God would certainly graft it back to the natural olive tree. This should encourage us in two ways.

First, every nation should be careful how it treats Israel. The promise and warning of God is still true. "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Gen. 12:3). This does not mean that every action the nation of Israel takes will be good or proper. This does not mean we must approve ungodly decisions made by that government. What it means is that we should be supportive of the people of Israel at all times. God has blessed every nation that has blessed Israel. Every nation will support Israel if it expects the blessings of God.

Second, Christians should try to reach Jews for Jesus Christ. The reason for this is simple. Whether Jew or Gentile, everyone without Christ is lost and on his way to hell. We should not restrict our compassion for the lost to lost Gentiles. Jesus is the only way to salvation. Though many in the world today teach that each religion is valid and the sincere practice of any religion is the way to Heaven, Jesus remains the only way to eternal life.

Reaching Jews for Christ is a little more difficult than reaching Gentiles. Jews only have the background of the Old Testament. They reject that their Messiah has already come. We must be familiar enough with Scripture, especially the Old Testament, to convince them that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah.

God has begun the work of regathering His people. They have a homeland now. Though millions have returned to Palestine, many more millions have not returned. The ultimate fulfillment of the regathering of the Israelites will take place during the millennial reign of Christ.

## Israel in the Future

### LESSON AIM

By the conclusion of this lesson the students will know that God's concern for the nation of Israel will be revealed by events not yet come to pass.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Zechariah 12:8-10.

Background Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-9; Ezekiel 37:1-14, 21-25; Daniel 9:27; Romans 12:13-21; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4; Revelation 7:3-8.

Devotional Reading: God's Promise, Ezekiel 36:24-28.

### Introduction

The lessons of this quarterly have dealt with the history of the people of Israel. From the call of their patriarch, Abraham, God has watched over them. What other people have survived two thousand years of national dispersion? This could only come by the protective and loving hand of God.

This lesson will probe into the future of the chosen nation of God. We will travel from the horrors of the Tribulation to the time of Israel's national repentance. From there we will travel to their glorious future in the millennial kingdom and beyond into the eternal ages.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Tribulation Distress  
Israel's neighbors have a deep hatred for its existence. They do everything they can to bring about the decease of this nation. Though times look bleak for Israel now, things will actually get far worse.

As the Tribulation Period begins, Israel will receive a political boost. A man who will gain great influence on the world's

political stage will offer a peace treaty to Israel. He will offer this war-torn nation seven years of total peace. The nation will be able to begin the Old Testament pattern of religious worship once again. The people will rebuild their Temple and will have the opportunity to reinstitute animal sacrifices.

This wonderful peace will continue for about three and a half years. As this first half of the Tribulation Period draws to a close, the anti-Christ will break his promise to these people. He will enter the Holy of Holies and will declare himself to be the god of the Israelites. Daniel said this will happen at the midpoint of the final “week” (the period of seven years we call the Tribulation). (This is found in Daniel 9:27.) He called it “the abomination that maketh desolate” (Dan. 11:31; 12:11). Jesus also referred to that time. He warned the Jews that, when they see “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet,” they should flee for their lives (Matt. 24:15). What will have been a peaceful situation quickly will turn into a time of persecution and death.

These trying times will be the severest and harshest conditions the people of Israel will have ever faced. Jeremiah called those days “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). Their former ally, the anti-Christ, will have become their fiercest opponent. He will mercilessly attack the people of Israel and will seek its annihilation. Even then, God’s loving hand will remain on the Israelites. He will prepare a safe place for them to flee (Rev. 12:13-17).

Why does God continue to protect the Israelites? He continues to help them because He always keeps His promises. He chose the descendants of Abraham to be His chosen nation.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ National Repentance

The previous lesson discussed briefly the illustration Paul gave. He compared Israel to a natural olive branch. With its rejection of the Messiah, Paul said that God broke off the natural branch and grafted in a wild branch that was contrary to nature. This wild branch refers to the Gentiles. The conclusion of the illustration asserted that God had not finally rejected the Israelites as His people. He will at some point graft them back into the tree and they will be a part of the olive tree once again. When will that time come?

The Israelites will face terrible times during the final three and a half years of the Tribulation Period. Most nations will join the anti-Christ in seeking the extermination of Israel. Though God's protective hand will be on the Israelites, times will be difficult.

God had warned the Jews that when they rebelled against Him, He would bring swift discipline upon them. This happened many times. Some foreign power would come against them and harshly afflict them. In their sorrow, they would return to God and call upon Him for help. He would forgive their sins and would deliver them from their oppression. The harshness of their oppression drew them back to God. These future events are God's final attempt to draw His people back to the desired relationship with Him. The Israelites will recognize the identity of Jesus Christ and will repent of their sin of rejection. As a nation, Israel will return to God and will be saved. The lesson Text speaks of this. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him" (Zech. 12:10). That is the beginning of great things for the nation of Israel.

In the vision of dry bones, Ezekiel saw a valley filled with human bones that had been baked dry by the sun. God told him to prophesy to the bones. They began to come together into skeletal forms. Then muscles and organs began to form over the bones. Skin covered the bodies, but they were lifeless. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the winds. The winds came and filled the bodies with breath and they stood on their feet. God told Ezekiel this was the time when the people of Israel would remember their God. Their national repentance would bring spiritual life to the people of God.

Though the people of Israel have been hundreds of years in their rejection of the Messiah, the time will come when they will finally receive Him. The ultimate fulfillment of this restoration will come in the ages to follow the Tribulation Period.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Glory Ahead**  
What is ahead for Israel? God has promised certain things to Israel that the nation has never fully realized. God will take care of these matters in the age to follow the Tribulation.

Israel will be the prominent nation during the millennial kingdom of Christ. In God's interpretation of the vision of the dry bones, He promised that Israel would come together as one

nation. This has not taken place since the days of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. The nation was divided into northern and southern kingdoms; yet, in the millennial kingdom, Israel will be reunited and will have only one king.

Included also in this will be the fulfillment of God's land promise. The Israelites have never fully occupied the entire landmass promised to them. During the time of the millennial kingdom, they will realize this promise. "And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant" (Ezek. 37:25). This great land area will be needed because of the growth that Israel anticipates during the one thousand years of prosperity.

Jesus will sit upon the throne of David and will rule with a rod of iron. He will allow no rebellion. Even conditions in the animal world will be dramatically changed. Natural enemies will dwell together (Isa. 11:6-8). Kingdoms will not enter into war. The entire world will have peace because of the knowledge of Jehovah (verse 9).

The people of Israel have a marvelous future ahead. This will come because of the wondrous promises of God.

### Conclusion

We now conclude a study that has taken us through many thousands of years. We began by looking at the initial call of Abraham. His descendants would become the chosen nation of God. The people of Israel had an interesting and varied history. At times they followed closely the commands of God. At other times they rebelled against Him. When they rebelled, God sent punishment upon them. When they repented, He forgave them.

The high point of the history of Israel was also its low point. The "fullness of time" came and the Messiah was born. This had been the desire of the nation for its entire history; yet, when He arrived, they rejected Him (John 1:11). Their rejection brought about the sacrifice for sins. Jesus purchased salvation for every person. Though salvation was offered, the people as a whole rejected the opportunity. Israel once again received the punishment from God. They were scattered throughout the world.

Israel has a future that will ultimately be bright. The time will come when it will repent on a national level. Then God will return to the people of Israel and save them.