

Baptist Training Course

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For Sponsors of Junior High, Young People and Adult

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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.

LESSON CONTENTS

June

- 1—Great Faithful Men2
- 8—God's Faithfulness to the Nation6
- 15—The Promised Land10
- 22—Disobedient to God14
- 29—A Mighty Kingdom18

July

- 6—The Northern Kingdom22
- 13—The Southern Kingdom26
- 20—Home Again31
- 27—The Jews in Jesus' Day35

August

- 3—A Jewish Church38
- 10—The Jews and the Gospel42
- 17—The Nation Scattered45
- 24—Israel Today49
- 31—Israel in the Future53

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Great Faithful Men

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

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

God chose the nation of Israel to be a nation that witnessed. God intended Israel to be "an holy people" and "a special people." *Holy* means "sacred, ceremonially or morally pure." God intended the nation of Israel to be a nation of holy ones, separated unto God and obviously different from the other nations of the world. Malachi 1:11 states, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts." *Special* means "jewel or treasure." God planned for the Israelites to point others to the Lord.

The basis of God's choice rested in His own good pleasure. Israel was not the most populous nation. Israel was the nation in which God received much delight. He loves the people of Israel with an unending love. Jeremiah 31:3 states, "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with

lovingkindness have I drawn thee." God will continue to love the nation of Israel in eternity to come.

The promise of God's love for the people of Israel rested in His covenant with them. God's "oath" involved His sworn promise that He would bless them. Genesis 12:2 states, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee." This everlasting covenant assures God's continuing special relationship with the nation of Israel.

God is determined to bless the nation of Israel for His name's sake. Numbers 6:27 states, "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." God placed His name in association with the Israelites. They had an obligation to honor God's name by obeying God's commands. God's choice of the people of Israel resulted in having both great blessings and great responsibilities.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Romans 9:4, 5. The Israelites had many special provisions that marked them as God's chosen nation. God adopted the people of Israel. "Adoption" is the legal action by which one is placed as a

son. Their adoption gave them a special relationship with God that included several covenants.

The Abrahamic Covenant gave Israel a land grant. Genesis 12:7 states, "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. (See Genesis 15:18.) God commanded Abraham to leave his country, his family and his father's house and follow the Lord into the land that He would show him. This same covenant was restated with Isaac and Jacob. God gave the land of Canaan to Israel.

The Davidic Covenant gave the nation of Israel an eternal kingdom. A "kingdom" is a political state. God promised a government in Israel ruled by a king with a lineage from David. First Kings 8:25 states, "Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel." In the one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth, Jesus Christ the Son of God and the Son of David will sit on the throne in Israel.

The law that God gave Israel is sometimes called the Mosaic Covenant. At Mount Sinai, the people of Israel accepted the words of the covenant as stated in the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel promised to keep them. God would reward their obedience to the commands that He had given in the Law and constantly care for the people of Israel's prosperity and victory over their enemies. The Old Testament or Old Covenant is an inspired, historical account of the Israelites' unsuccessful efforts to keep God's Law.

The service of the Tabernacle gave Israel God's authorization for true worship. God demanded that His nation of witness be separated from the idolatrous

worship of the other nations. (See Deuteronomy 29:18; 13:6-11.) As long as Israel remained separated from false worship, it had a strong witness and influence before other nations.

The promises of God assured the people of Israel of God's continuing care, provision and protection. Genesis 22:17 states, "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." God made His covenant by His promise and later amplified it or explained it as He chose.

God determined to receive glory from the nation of Israel. First Chronicles 16:24 states, "Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations." As long as the Israelites fulfilled God's purpose as a separated, obedient people who continued to worship in the truth, they gave God glory. When they disobeyed God by participating in false worship, they shamed God's holy name instead of giving Him the glory He deserves. Psalm 4:2 states, "O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah." Israel existed as a nation for the purpose of giving God glory.

Israel had some faithful men called patriarchs who were outstanding examples for the rest of the nation and for succeeding generations of Israelites. Some of the early patriarchs included Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. These faithful men learned how to live for God and how to be good examples.

God provided a covenant of salvation through the nation of Israel when He sent His Son Jesus into the world as Savior. (See Genesis 22:18.) The covenant of salvation is a covenant that bestows everlasting life. (See John 3:14, 15.)

Jesus' virgin birth placed Him in the nation of Israel.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12:1-3. God gave the Abrahamic Covenant before the nation of Israel existed. God promised, "I will make of thee a great nation." God refused to form a nation in the idolatrous city of Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness and he began to follow the Lord's commands. God's commands demanded a total separation from his home, family, birthplace and false worship. God's promises were all that Abram had to rely upon as he left to start a new life in an unknown destination.

Genesis 15:18. God set the boundaries for Israel. God's land grant for Israel included parts of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, western Iraq, part of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan. Israel has never controlled all the land God gave it. During the one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth, Israel will possess all the land God gave it.

Genesis 17:7, 8. God gave Abraham an everlasting covenant. This covenant required God to form the nation of Israel, to bless Abraham's descendants and to give the land of Canaan to Israel. God promised direction for the nation, provision and protection for the nation and His guarantee of success in the military operations required to invade, conquer and defend the land God promised Israel. God promised to be Israel's God always.

Genesis 26:2-5. God's blessings for the Israelites were conditional. They had both great privileges and great responsibilities. Canaan was their home and their place of worship and service to the Lord. They were commanded not to abandon the place of blessing. They were warned

not to disobey God. God expected the Israelites to follow Abraham's faithful example. Genesis 26:5 states, "Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

Genesis 28:1-4. Isaac commanded his son Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman. God's concern about this mixed marriage involved idolatrous worship. (See Judges 2:12, 17, 19.) Solomon's many marriages led him to build altars, to erect temples and to participate in idolatrous worship. Jacob was to seek a wife from among his Uncle Laban's family. God's way for the people of Israel was not easy or convenient, but they were required to obey the Lord. Jacob was faithful to obey God's command concerning his marriage.

Genesis 32:24-32. Jacob wrestled all night with the Lord. God changed his name to Israel. *Israel* means "prince of God or having power with God." After this experience with the Lord, Jacob's stubborn will was crushed. He never walked the same again. *Peniel* means "the face of God." Jacob could look on the Lord and live because the Lord took upon Himself the form of a man during the nocturnal encounter with Jacob. These temporary pre-incarnation appearances of Jesus are called Theophanies.

Genesis 50:15-21. Joseph's example of being faithful to forgive casts him as a type of Jesus Christ. Joseph came to his own brothers and they rejected him, sold him into slavery and told his father that he was dead. Jesus suffered the same shameful treatment by the Jews, His kinsmen according to the flesh. John 1:11 states, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Joseph's forgiveness freed his brothers from fear, promised them provision needed for their survival and a dwelling place in

Egypt, gave them great comfort and included words of kindness.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

God's plan for the people of Israel is yet to be completed. The land that God gave Israel remains a hotspot of hatred and violence. Israel continues as a nation solely by the grace and protection of the Lord. Except for God's protection, Israel would have ceased to exist in 1948 shortly after it became recognized as an independent nation. God's plan for Israel included a nation, a kingdom, a land, a Temple, true worship, a kingly line, a divine standard for its life-style and many promises of blessings. God used faithful men like the patriarchs to lead their families and their nation according to God's plan.

The word *patriarch* means "the head of the family." Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph served in the special capacity of spiritual leaders in true worship and separation from false worship and as righteous examples for their families to follow. Abraham led his family to the place of blessing in Canaan. He was so faithful that he became known as the friend of God. Isaac was a type of Christ in his submission and obedience to his father's will. (See Genesis 22.) Jacob learned to pray to God and to depend on the Lord for help, safety, assurance, peace, comfort and strength wherever he was. Joseph suffered innocently at the hands of his brothers but lived to be a blessing to them by the forgiveness that he freely offered them. The good traits of these faithful patriarchs will help build strong families in this present generation.

God's promises to Israel give assurance to all who trust in God. The

covenant of salvation is secure for those in Christ as an everlasting covenant. The child of God observes the way God kept all His promises to Israel and gains confidence that God will keep His promises to His children. Romans 15:8 states, "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers." *Confirm* means "to establish or to fulfill." God's promises continue to provide comfort to children of God at all times, in all places and in all circumstances.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

God still chooses to work through men and women who are willing to be great examples of faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. God's people today have an obligation to follow the examples of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph in the things that pleased God. They learned by success and by failure, by obedience and by disobedience and by learning anew the value of faithfulness to true worship and separation from false worship. The principles of obedience, faithfulness, submission and repentance will build great examples today.

God has not rejected the nation of Israel. He will fulfill every promise He made to it. If children of the Lord want to be on the Lord's side in times of political turmoil, they should be sure to be the nation of Israel's friend. God still promises to treat people according to the way they treat the Israelites. Genesis 12:3 states, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee."

God's Faithfulness to the Nation

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Moses, God's Man, Deuteronomy 34:10-12.

Moses, the prophet of God, accomplished a great work. Jesus spoke of "Moses and all the prophets" (Luke 24:27). God's faithfulness to the people of Israel included providing a leader capable of guiding them out of Egypt. Moses understood his heritage and how he was to live. Hebrews 11:24, 25 states, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Moses knew his heritage among the people of God and preserved his usefulness by making choices that pleased God.

Moses, the miracle worker, had a reputation as the man of God. First Chronicles 23:14 states, "Now concerning Moses the man of God, his sons were named of the tribe of Levi." Moses was a mighty man before God enabled him to perform miracles. Acts 7:22 states, "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." God gave Moses miracle-

working power to convince everyone that he was God's man doing God's will according to God's Word.

Moses, the man of God, brought terror to the Egyptians. He was God's faithful man for the work of leading the nation of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Hebrews 11:27 states, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Moses endured in the work of leading the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage by his great faith in the Lord.

God also used Moses as His man inspired to write the first five books of the Bible. Acts 15:21 states, "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." Moses followed God's will and God's way as he led the Israelites out of Egypt.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Psalm 107:1-8. God showed His faithfulness to the nation of Israel in many ways. God faithfully showed mercy to Israel (verse 1). God faithfully redeemed the people of Israel from every enemy and returned them to their land

(verses 2, 3). God faithfully provided for the people of Israel in the wilderness (verses 4-6). God faithfully led the nation of Israel out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan (verse 7). God's faithfulness and wonderful works toward the Israelites and the world originated in His innate goodness (verse 8).

God proved Himself faithful by showing mercy to Israel. *Mercy* means "kindness, reproof and favor." God extended His mercy to the Israelites when they escaped from Egyptian bondage by the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. God showed His mercy to the people of Israel by providing food and water for them in the wilderness wanderings. God showed His mercy by refusing to totally destroy the nation when it disobeyed Him. God showed His mercy on the Israelites by limiting His wrath when they lusted after evil things. God revealed His mercy by correcting them when they turned to idolatry. God showed His mercy by teaching the nation that He would not accept fornication. God proved His mercy by providing the brass serpent as a means of cure when the Israelites tempted Christ. God showed His mercy by destroying those who murmured against the Lord. These examples of God's dealings with the nation of Israel reveal that God is a merciful God.

God proved His faithfulness to the people of Israel by redeeming them from the power of the enemy and returning them to their land. When Jacob or Israel and his family left Canaan in famine and moved into Egypt to live, God brought them out after about four hundred thirty years. When the Assyrians took the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom called Israel into captivity, God brought them back home. When the Babylonians conquered the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom, Judah, and deported some to live in captivity, God delivered a rem-

nant. When the Jews were dispersed among all the nations of the world about AD 70, God caused a regathering to begin about the beginning of the twentieth century. This regathering gained momentum after the nation regained its national existence and it is still occurring today. In the Tribulation Period when the Israelites flee from the wrath of the anti-Christ to a place in the wilderness that God prepares for them, the Lord will bring a remnant safely into the land of Israel for His one thousand year reign on the earth. Israel's existence as a nation remains a testimony to the faithfulness of God to redeem it from the hand of the enemy.

God's faithful provisions for the people of Israel in the wilderness included all of their needs. God gave them manna to eat, water out of the rock to drink and shoes and clothes that would not wear out. God heard every cry that the people of Israel made to Him and fulfilled their needs faithfully.

God's faithfulness included a new dwelling place for the nation of Israel. When the people left Egypt, they were freed slaves. When they entered Canaan, they had about two experiences with warfare. God enabled Israel to successfully conquer a land that was populated by giants and at least six powerful Canaanite nations. God gave them a divine land grant, houses already built, crops already harvested and grain silos already filled. God proved Himself faithful to the nation of Israel in every way.

God intended that Israel would be a nation of witness to lead the world in praising the Lord for His faithfulness, His goodness and His wonderful works. Israel failed miserably as a nation of witness when it committed spiritual adultery by participating in idolatry and sexual immorality with the nations around it. Its lack of purity destroyed its influ-

ence as a nation of witness for God who had faithfully loved and cared for it.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Exodus 12:21-28. God gave Moses the instructions that the people of Israel needed to survive the night of the Passover. God could not forgive sin except on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Hence, the term *Passover*. God determined to pass over the sins of all those who would look ahead by faith to the coming Messiah Jesus Christ, repent of their sinful condition and picture His death as the Lamb of God by applying the blood as commanded. The Passover was a perpetual ordinance and memorial of God's faithfulness toward the people of Israel.

Exodus 14:13-31. God proved His faithfulness to the people of Israel by dividing the Red Sea so they could cross on dry ground. God fought for the Israelites when the Egyptian army pursued them into the midst of the Red Sea. God permitted the Israelites to reach the other side in safety. God destroyed Pharaoh and the Egyptian army by permitting the wall of water on either side to collapse on them. Moses' rod was the rod of God, used to show the people the power and presence of their faithful God.

Exodus 16:14-22. God faithfully provided food when the Israelites suffered famine conditions in the wilderness wanderings. God's provisions of grace enabled them to have a sufficiency each day for that day. Second Corinthians 12:9 states, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The manna that the people of Israel picked up each day except the Sabbath reminded them

of the faithfulness of their God to provide for their needs.

Exodus 17:5-7. God provided water from the rock when the Israelites suffered in the desert in the wilderness wanderings. Moses used the rod of God to strike the rock as God had commanded. This striking of the rock pictured the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Rock of Ages. When the rock was struck, God provided millions of gallons of water. Jesus compared salvation to living water. (See John 4:10, 11.) Jesus spoke of the indwelling Holy Spirit as a continual source of joy in the child of God as a river of living waters. (See John 7:38.) God's faithfulness to all people rests on the basis of Jesus Christ.

Numbers 21:5-9. God proved His faithfulness to the people of Israel by destroying those who murmured against the Lord. After He sent fiery serpents with fatal poison to bite the people, He had Moses prepare a means of cure. The brass serpent on the pole pictured Jesus Christ, the only cure for the sins of men. (See John 3:14.) The people of Israel had to first admit they were sinners, then look by faith to the serpent of brass placed where all the people of Israel could see it. God's faithfulness provided a cure as every person who looked also lived.

Deuteronomy 9:9-11. God gave Moses the two tables of stone upon which He had faithfully recorded His covenant with the people of Israel. The tables of stone were the words of God recorded by the finger of God. On these tables of stone God listed the things that He expected the Israelites to do and the commands they were to obey. God explained the significance of the commands to Moses during his forty days upon Mount Sinai while he fasted and communed with the Lord.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

God's faithfulness to the nation of Israel proved Him to be a God who keeps His promises. God kept His promise to Abraham. Genesis 12:2, 3 states, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, God has kept all of His promises. God's people in every age and from every nation can rely on the faithfulness of God to keep His promises.

God's faithfulness to the people of Israel proves that God's power is sufficient to achieve His plans. Up to this point in their history, God has a perfect record of preserving the nation of Israel through more than about four thousand years of their history. Genesis 17:7 states, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." God's ability to preserve the people of Israel according to His Word gives confidence to the child of God that He is able to preserve him eternally. Romans 8:38, 39 states, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (See also John 3:16; John 10:28-30.) God's power enables Him to sustain everlasting covenants.

God's faithfulness to the people of Israel and to His people today should cause them to be great witnesses for the Lord. Psalm 107:2 states, "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he

hath redeemed." God's people should praise the Lord with thanksgiving, with true worship, with a holy witness, with a ready testimony of His goodness and with the confidence of people who have called upon the Lord in every distress in life. Psalm 107:6 states, "Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses." (See 1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 46:1.) It is a sin for God's people to keep quiet about God's faithfulness to save, to keep, to hear and to answer prayers.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

God led the people of Israel by the right way (Psalm 107:7). God led them by His Word. He gave them His commandments. He gave them the right pattern for the Tabernacle, for true worship in that age and for the way to build a life that God would approve. God has included these same kinds of patterns for His people in the present. There is a pattern for true worship (John 4:24). There is a pattern for a godly life. (See 1 Timothy 4:12.) God faithfully led the Israelites in right paths and seeks to lead His people today in the paths of righteousness. (See Psalm 23:3.)

God still faithfully guides His people. God guided the people of Israel by His presence in the pillar of cloud and in the pillar of fire. God guides His people today by His presence within His children. First Corinthians 2:10, 11 states, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." The work of the Holy Spirit leads, guides, directs, convicts, convinces and comforts God's people.

The Promised Land

Lesson 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.

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

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Be Strong, Joshua 1:5-9.

Joshua needed God's assurance to be a strong spiritual leader when Israel entered Canaan. God gave Joshua His promise to help him be strong. *Be strong* means "to seize, to fasten upon, to be courageous and to conquer." God promised Joshua, "I will be with thee." As if that were not enough, God also promised, "I will not fail thee." Then God assured Joshua, "I will not forsake thee." The promises of God are the words of God who cannot lie. He will faithfully perform and execute every promise He has made. Joshua continued to trust the Lord to keep His promises. God's people and God's leaders in every generation need to rely on God's promises to be strong.

Joshua needed to be a strong military leader. God promised, "Unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them" (Joshua 1:6). God guaranteed Israel's military success. The difference between winning and losing had nothing to do with the skills of the armies, the number of the soldiers or of the wisdom of the military leaders. God made the

difference in conquering Canaan. The Lord proved Himself to be on Israel's side again and again as it conquered city after city throughout the land. Joshua's strength as a military leader rested on the basis of God being on his side.

Joshua needed to be a strong political leader. God's laws had to be the foundation of a godly society for Israel. Its prosperity as a nation depended on its willingness to obey God's laws. God's laws included His eternal moral principles, true worship and separation from false worship. The people of Israel needed the Word of God in their hearts, in their families and in their worship. Joshua needed to remind the people of Israel often that the way of success was the path of obedience to God. When God's people go forth to do God's will according to God's Word, success is sure.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Joshua 1:2-4. Joshua replaced Moses as the leader for the nation of Israel. Moses had trained forty years to serve the Lord in bringing the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Moses led them for forty years of wilderness wan-

derings. Hebrews 3:5 states, "And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after." He had faithfully followed God's commands except one time when he struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock. This disobedience cost Moses the opportunity to enter the land of Canaan. His disobedience destroyed the picture that Jesus, the Rock, would be smitten once for all. Hebrews 10:10 states, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Disobedience disqualifies leaders for God's people. God demands leaders that will follow Him and obey His commands.

The people of Israel had become a great multitude. Conservative estimates number the children of Israel at about two million. Exodus 12:37, 38 states, "And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle." If each of the six hundred thousand men had only one wife and only two children, then the total would be about two million four hundred thousand. God promised Jacob that this nation of Israel would be a great nation in population. Genesis 32:12 states, "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." During the four hundred thirty years of the Egyptian bondage, the seventy members of the family of Jacob became the nation of Israel. God led His people Israel out of Egypt so that He could lead them into Canaan.

The land that God gave Israel had specific boundaries. Genesis 15:18 states, "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the

river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." The physical boundaries for the land of Israel were the Mediterranean Sea to the west, the Nile River to the southwest, the wilderness lands to the southeast, the northern territory as far as Lebanon and the eastern land as far as the Euphrates River. These countries include all that the nation of Israel now holds, as well as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, part of Egypt, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the disputed territory, part of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and western Iraq. This territory would make Israel one of the largest countries in territory and the richest country in wealth. The oil-producing lands of the Middle East reside within the borders of the land grant that God gave Israel. With the water resources of the one thousand year reign of Christ, the land of Israel will be a fruitful land able to feed the world. God gave His choice blessings to the people of Israel when He promised them the land of Canaan.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Joshua 3:11-17. God so arranged the entrance of the people of Israel into Canaan that they arrived from a different direction than one might expect. From Egypt, the typical journey would be in a northwesterly direction across the desert and into the southernmost part of modern Israel. After the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites arrived at Canaan at the right place to cross the Jordan River from an easterly direction. They proceeded almost due west to cut the land in half by their military victories. God brought the nation of Israel across the flooded Jordan River as easily as He had divided the Red Sea.

Joshua 6:12-20. God gave specific instructions for Joshua to give to the people of Israel. They marched when God said to march. After six days, there

were no results. On the seventh day, God commanded the people to march seven times around the city, to shout and to blow the trumpet. Their obedience to follow God's plan even when it did not make any sense to them insured the victory. Great victories and sure successes come when God's people have the good sense to do what God commands them to do.

Joshua 10:7-14. God promised the people of Israel a victory at Gilgal. This was the place of their first camp after crossing the Jordan River on their entrance into the land. *Gilgal* means "wheel" or "rolled away." After sin in the camp and the defeat at Ai, the people of Israel had reason to fear. Their opponents included five kings of the Amorites that had banded together to defeat them. God promised them a great victory. God fought the battle for the people. He went before them to bring confusion to the enemy. He assisted them by casting "down great stones from heaven upon them" (Joshua 10:11). God used His mighty power to give the people of Israel the victory.

Joshua 14:6-12. After the east to west military campaign that cut the country in half, the nation of Israel had the opportunity to defeat the strongholds of opposition in the northern and southern halves of Canaan tribe by tribe. One strong pocket of resistance involved a mountain where a tribe of giants lived. Eighty-five-year-old Caleb still had the faith in God to claim the mountain for his family an inheritance in Israel. He said, "If so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said" (Joshua 14:12).

Joshua 20:1-9. God provided six cities of refuge for those who were guilty of involuntary manslaughter. The six cities of refuge were Kedesh, Shechem,

Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth and Golan. *Kedesh* means "sacred place, sanctuary." *Shechem* means "a shoulder or ridge." *Hebron* means "association, community, alliance." *Bezer* means "gold defence, or an inaccessible spot." *Ramoth* means "heights." *Golan* means "captive." The cities of refuge gave a picture revealing God as their refuge. (See Psalm 18:1-3.)

Joshua 24:14-18. Joshua approached the end of his leadership and of his life with an important message for the people of Israel. He urged them to worship the Lord in sincerity and in truth. (See John 4:24.) He reminded the Israelites that their separation from false worship would help them stay in God's will. Their commitment to separation from false worship signified they remembered how the Lord their God had done mighty works in bringing them out of Egypt and giving them a home in the land of Canaan.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

The Israeli strategy of the 1990's involved trading land for peace. Israel desires peace so much that it has traded away land that is necessary to its defense. The Palestinians' control of land so close to Jerusalem is a threat to Israel's national defense. A bomber could walk into the city, plant his bomb and then walk out of the city into Palestinian territory. The Israelites are in the land because God brought them back to the land. The people do not have faith in God. One rabbi is reported to have said that they would gladly accept the head of the United Nations as the messiahship if it would only give Israel peace. The nation of Israel still needs the God of their fathers.

God's people in every age need the promises of God to help them in fearful times. God's promises to Joshua are relevant for the leaders of God's people

today. God's promises are necessary for teenagers who need God's strength for the spiritual victory of overcoming peer pressure to obey God in the face of strong moral and spiritual temptations. His promises include "I will be with thee," "I will not fail thee" and "I will not forsake thee." God's promises equip God's people in any troubling situation.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The people of Israel won many great victories in the military campaign to conquer the land of Canaan. These great victories were the result of God being on their side, God's instructions being followed faithfully and God's people moving ahead at God's command. These three things continue to be the recipe for

spiritual victories. Romans 8:31 states, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" God's powerful presence with the Israelites should convince even the most skeptical believer that victory comes by doing God's will God's way.

God's people need victory in conquering themselves. First Corinthians 9:27 states, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." God proved at the cross that He is able to conquer every enemy. Colossians 1:18 states, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." God has the power to help His people bring themselves into submission to His will.

Disobedient to God

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

A Merciful God, Nehemiah 9:26-31.

God's great mercy may be better understood when one considers those who receive His offer. *Mercy* may be defined as "tender compassion, great love or to cherish." God cherished Israel, loved the people so much and had so much tender compassion for them that He repeatedly offered His mercy to them. The Israelites disobeyed, rebelled, turned their backs on, provoked and continued to choose to do evil. They preferred to disobey God's commandments and to refuse God's righteous standards of judgments. They were a stiff-necked and hard-hearted people.

God's mercy offered the people of Israel many opportunities to get right with the Lord. God wrote His Law in their consciences and on tables of stone, sent prophets and sent leaders capable of delivering them out of the hands of their enemies. The Israelites still continued to choose to do evil. God's many opportunities to extend mercy to the people became testimonies against them. God extends His mercy to the unworthy and to the undeserving.

God's mercy was expressed in His longsuffering with the people of Israel. His forbearance stretched to the limits to continue to offer mercy, yet "would they not give ear" (Neh. 9:30). God remembered His covenant with them. He could have totally destroyed them for their wickedness. God kept a remnant and never completely forsook them. God proved Himself to be "a gracious and merciful God" (Neh. 9:31).

Those who strive to be Christlike will be merciful. Matthew 5:7 states, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." God grants wisdom to His children who seek it to be merciful. James 3:17 states, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Judges 2:16-19. Israel's history in the times of the judges was a time of great disobedience. Israel went through a continuing cycle from revival to disobedience to backsliding to military oppression to repentance to God's raising up a deliverer to victory in battle to peace.

The period of revival was often a very few years. It seemed each generation repeated the same mistakes of the former. God continued to work with the Israelites to bring them back into His will. God's plan for them was for them to be a nation of witness before the world. Exodus 19:5, 6 states, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Israel's great disobedience in the time of the judges involved transgressing the plain terms of its covenant with the Lord.

The judges were leaders in Israel who served faithfully between the time of Joshua and the beginning of the reign of King Saul. Judges 17:6 states, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (See Judges 18:1; 19:1; 21:25.) There was no cohesiveness in the nation. Each tribe and each family in Israel served their own selfish interests. They gave no thought to what might become of their nation if they failed to work together. Unity seemed beyond their grasp as they faced divisions and jealousies among the tribes. When the people of Israel cried out to God for relief from the oppression of the Canaanite nations around them, God sent a judge to lead them back to serve God and to free them from the rule of the enemies. After a short period of faithfulness to the Lord, they soon turned away from Him after the judge died.

The spiritual adultery that the people of Israel chose to practice enabled them to be more like the nations around them. God wanted Israel to stand apart as a different nation that served God and chose to worship Him in truth. Even though God had blessed the Israelites richly by bringing them safely into the land of

Canaan, they forgot and forsook God at every temptation. They participated in the false worship of the idolatrous nations around them. God's plan for His people is to be separated from false worship. Second Corinthians 6:16, 17 states, "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." God hates spiritual adultery.

The enemy nations saw the Israelites as an easy target. Although one nation, they had yet to learn how to work together for the common good. At every opportunity, the Canaanite nations around them sought to conquer a portion of their territory and even to make slaves of some of the Israelites taken captive. Only God's intervention preserved the nation, the people and their control over the land God had given them.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Judges 4:1-24. After the judge Ehud died, the Israelites turned away from the Lord. The next judge, Deborah, the prophetess, urged Barak to be a man of courage and faith to obey God in fighting the Canaanite king Jabin. God also used the woman Jael to help complete the victory by killing general Sisera. Israel prospered as long as it was faithful to obey God.

Judges 7:16-22. Gideon served as a judge during the time when the Israelites were oppressed by the Midianites. The Midianite army numbered so many that they were called a host. *Host* means "a temporary and protective enclosure for a tribe or army." God gave instructions for only three hundred soldiers to fight with

the unusual weapons of trumpets, pitchers and lamps. God gave a great victory.

Judges 11:30-40. The judge Jephthah served the people of Israel when the Ammonites fought against them. God gave a great victory. Jephthah made a foolish vow as if he could bargain with God for the victory. He promised to offer as a sacrifice whatever came to meet him as he returned. His daughter appeared first. Jephthah “did with her according to his vow which he had vowed” (Judges 11:39).

Judges 15:14-20. Samson served as a judge in Israel when the Philistines fought against it. God intervened mightily on Israel’s behalf as He had with the other judges. Samson used the donkey’s jawbone to kill one thousand Philistines. Samson served as a judge for a period of twenty years. His great victories came when he obeyed God, and his great defeats came when he disobeyed God.

Judges 16:16-21. Samson’s weakness was women. He thought he loved Delilah more than he did obeying God. She revealed his secret to the Philistines. A man shaved Samson’s head. Shaving his head broke his Nazirite vow unto God. After capturing Samson, the Philistines put out his eyes. As with any person who destroys his influence for God, Samson could not rebuild his influence any faster than his hair could grow.

Judges 19:20-30. The great wickedness of Israel is revealed in an incident in Israel. The Israelites sought to commit homosexual immorality with a stranger that accepted lodging for the night. The wicked men sexually abused the host’s concubine all night. After she died at the door of his house, the host divided her body into twelve pieces and sent one portion to each tribe. They concluded, “There was no such deed done nor seen” (Judges 19:30). Israel had become a

wicked, immoral, lawless and violent nation.

Judges 21:25. Israel had no national leadership. The judges usually served a tribe or a few tribes. They were regional leaders. During the time of the judges, Israel’s disobedience is seen because “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). This verse is the key to understanding the disobedience in Israel in the time of the judges.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Without a leader, Israel rebelled against God and turned to false worship. The cycle Israel experienced went from revival to disobedience to backsliding to chastisement to repentance to living by faith to victory to peace and is common to human nature. The present generation follows the same cycle through life. While Israel experienced military oppression, God’s chastisement on His erring children got their attention. Following repentance, children of God return to a life of faith and experience victories when led by the Holy Spirit. The peace and joy that children of God know in obeying God and following Holy Spirit leadership is revival. When God’s people rebel against God in their hearts, disobedience and backsliding is sure to follow.

False worship is also a great problem today. God’s people are to worship Him in truth as a peculiar people. Church members lose their saltiness when they participate, attend or approve false worship. There is no profit in false worship. False teachers and false preachers have different goals. Second Peter 2:1, 2 states, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Those who are careless in the matter of false worship will soon find themselves outside the boundaries of truth.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The Bible reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the men and women God chooses to use. Some judges such as Othniel were courageous and full of faith. Others such as Jephthah and Gideon were weak in faith and needed many words of encouragement before undertaking the challenge that God had given them. Samson let temptations of the flesh hinder him from using his full potential in God's service. He wasted years, spent time pursuing the wrong kind of women, gave himself to vengeance and died after sin had ruined his life. Deborah proved to be one of the

most courageous of the judges. These leaders were more or less what God wanted them to be according to their devotion to God at any given moment.

God's idea for judges seemed to be to raise up a man or a woman when needed to serve as a great leader for His people Israel. Exodus 18:21 states, "Able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers." God's leaders need to be those who will not respect "persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous" (Deut. 16:19). God's leaders must do "no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty" (Lev. 19:15). God needs men and women to be great leaders according to these standards in every generation.

A Mighty Kingdom

Lesson 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.

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

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

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

God promised great things to the people of Israel. The Israelites knew that none of God's many promises had failed. They knew His promise to be with them. Although they often failed, disobeyed and rebelled against God, God had promised never to leave or to forsake them. During the time of Moses, Joshua and the judges, God led the nation as king.

God is the true king. He encourages His people to turn their hearts unto Him. He is unlike politicians who promise much and deliver little. He is unlike politicians who live by their own wicked standards. God's commandments, statutes and judgments are righteous principles. Any nation that honors God as the true king will be blessed. Psalm 33:12 states, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance."

God is the true king over Israel. He has committed Himself to "maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: that all the people of the

earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:59, 60). He promised to bless the Israelites as the descendants of Abraham. Genesis 12:3 states, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." God's servants should always be found on Israel's side because that is the Lord's side.

God is the true king over all. God's words of truth go forth unto all the earth. His message of salvation is proclaimed to the uttermost parts of the earth. All who seek to honor God as the true king will "walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments" (1 Kings 8:61). Proverbs 14:34, 35 states, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame." God rules over the wise and the unwise.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

2 Samuel 7:8-16. God determined to make Israel a mighty kingdom. He had provided a choice land, a large population to fill the land, a perfect set of laws to govern the people and some great

leaders to use to accomplish His purpose in Israel. God's two greatest kings over Israel in the past were David and Solomon. Jesus Christ will be the greatest future King over Israel in His one thousand year reign. Israel has become such a mighty force today that the whole world watches it.

God placed the Israelites in Canaan. God had a definite place for His people Israel. God promised them a choice land. Originally referred to as Canaan, the land that flowed with milk and honey later came to be known as Palestine. God set the boundaries. (See Genesis 15:18.) The land of Canaan included everything between the great kingdoms of Egypt and the great empires of the region of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. God put His nation center stage, confident of His ability to make a greater kingdom than any the world had ever seen.

God exalted David from an humble beginning to greatness. God trained David in much the same manner as He had Moses. Both had served as shepherds. Both had personal experiences in the king's court. Neither was born a king. God moved David from the sheepcote to the palace. The "sheepcote" is a place of habitation. The place where sheep dwell is the fold or stable. Ezekiel 34:14, 15 states, "I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD." God took David from his house and caused him to dwell with the sheep in the pastures. Wherever God led, David found it to be a pleasant place. When David became king over Israel, he enjoyed serving God as long as he obeyed.

God's mighty kingdom needed a king and a dynasty that would rule by faith in

God. David became the first of these kings in the dynasty that God promised. God stripped the kingdom of Israel away from Saul as a result of his disobedience. He was the people's choice. David was God's choice. First Samuel 13:14 states, "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee." David was a man after God's own heart. Although a sinner, David proved to be of tender heart when convicted of his sins. He was always ready to repent and seek God's forgiveness. God determined that "my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:15, 16). Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this promise that David would never lack for a son to rule over Israel.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 17:32-51. David had experienced victory in battle before he faced Goliath. He realized his victories were by the Lord's blessing and power. He trusted God to give him victory against Goliath as he had in every previous battle. God did not disappoint him. The victory over Goliath freed the Israelites from Philistine oppression.

2 Samuel 1:19-27. The deaths of Saul and Jonathan brought great sorrow to David. David placed great respect upon Saul's position as king because he was God's anointed. (See 1 Chronicles 16:22.) The death of Saul made it possible for David to assume his role as the God-appointed king over the nation of Israel.

2 Samuel 5:1-12. At the age of thirty, David began to reign over Israel. The people of Israel made a covenant before the Lord to follow David. He reigned for forty years. Israel became a great nation under David's astute leadership. David realized that he had become a great king because God was with him. David knew that the Lord had "exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake" (2 Sam. 5:12).

2 Samuel 11:1-27. David was not a perfect king. His sins are thoroughly exposed in the biblical record. David committed adultery with Bath-sheba, plotted Uriah's murder, married Bath-sheba and rejoiced over the birth of their son. The Bible states, "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Sam. 11:27).

1 Kings 8:15-21. David's son Solomon rehearsed God's blessings on the kingdom of Israel. Solomon knew his father David was the God-appointed king over Israel. Although David desired to build the Temple, God forbade him. God promised that David would have a son to build the Lord's Temple. Solomon recognized that his achievements were due to the blessings and favor of the Lord. God used David and Solomon to accomplish His purpose of making the nation of Israel into a mighty kingdom.

1 Kings 10:4-7, 14-29. The famous Queen of Sheba recognized the kingdom of Israel as the greatest in the world. Israel had the wisest king. Israel knew great prosperity. The Queen of Sheba gave glory to God. She said, "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice" (1 Kings 10:9). The wealth and military strength of Israel during Solomon's reign was unmatched.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

God's presence made Israel a mighty kingdom. He said, "I was with thee" (2 Sam. 7:9). God's presence enables a nation to be exalted by righteousness. As long as the Israelites honored God's presence by following His righteous standards, they were a godly nation and a mighty kingdom.

God's power made Israel a mighty kingdom. God "cut off" all Israel's enemies. (See 2 Samuel 7:9.) The history of Israel is rife with examples of God confounding its enemies. Even when Israel has faced enemies with superior forces and firepower, God has protected it.

God's place for Israel makes it a mighty kingdom. The land of Israel is a strategic land. It has been perhaps the most fought-over piece of real estate in the world. It lies between two continents. It is rich in natural resources. With God's blessings of water, the land has the capacity to feed the world. The wealth of minerals in it is worth a fantastic fortune. The oil supplies so desperately needed today lie mostly in the land that God gave Israel, although it is not under its control.

God's promise to Israel makes it a mighty kingdom. Any nation is no greater than its king, president or governmental leaders. God promised great things to Israel. Many men have made great promises to get others to follow them. God, the true king over Israel, has the power to keep every promise He made to the nation.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Israel is God's chosen nation. Like Israel, any nation may quit following God. All nations that refuse to obey God will not long continue. Psalm 144:15 states, "Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD." *Happy* means

“blessed, well off or prosperous.” The reverse is equally true. When any nation forsakes God, its blessings, the well-being of its nation and prosperity evaporate.

The godly nation must learn from Israel's mistakes. Israel wanted to be like other nations. False worship is one of the indications that a godly nation has begun to crumble. Other signs of the downfall of a nation include shedding innocent blood, legalizing sin and the failure of the justice system to mete out justice. Any nation that makes these same mis-

takes as Israel will pay the penalty God has prescribed.

God kept His promise to Israel. Genesis 12:2 states, “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.” God has exalted Israel to the status of the greatest nation in the world and He will do so again in the future. The name *Israel* means “to rule as God.” Israel has been a blessing to all nations and to all families through Jesus Christ, the only Savior.

Have you placed  your literature order?

The Northern Kingdom

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

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

The phrase *the day of the Lord* was used by Amos to indicate a time when God's wrath in judgment would come upon the world. God the Father has appointed the day of the Lord as the responsibility of Jesus Christ. John 5:27 states, "And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." The day of the Lord will be a dark day, a dreaded day for the world.

The day of the Lord will be a time of great spiritual darkness for any in rebellion against God. It applies to Jew and Gentile. The people of Israel rebelled against God and rejected Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The Gentiles have rebelled against God and have mistreated God's chosen nation Israel. The day of the Lord will accomplish the defeat of the rebellious.

The day of the Lord will be a time of judgment. Isaiah 13:6, 9 states, "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. . . . Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of

it" (verse 9). This great judgment will obviously be by the hand of God. (See Jeremiah 46:10.) In that day, God will bring terror to the hearts of sinners.

The day of the Lord will be a day of restoration. Isaiah 14:1 states, "For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob." God will remember His covenant with the people of Israel. He will regather them, restore them as a mighty kingdom and rejoice with them in the land He gave them—after they turn to Him.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

2 Kings 17:7-12. God described the sins of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The people sinned against the Lord by forsaking true worship, by embracing false worship and by participating in pagan practices connected with false worship. In short, the Israelites were indistinguishable from the heathen around them. They failed to be the witness that God had intended them to be. These sins demanded God's judgment upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel forsook the Lord. God had done many wonderful works for the people of Israel in bringing them out of Egypt. God proved His strength to be greater than the idols of the Egyptians. He had greater power than Pharaoh. He defeated and destroyed the Egyptian army. He conquered great geographical obstacles such as the Red Sea, the desert and the Jordan River in flood stage. He proved superior in might to the Canaanite nations in the land. God was great enough to preserve and protect the nation of Israel in the midst of their enemies. Israel had every reason to love its God, to worship its God in truth and to be faithful to obey Him. The Northern Kingdom chose to turn away from God.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel committed spiritual adultery. It tolerated, accepted and embraced false worship. These sins were called the "sins of Jeroboam" and the "way of Jeroboam." (See I Kings 14:16; 16:19; 22:52, 53.) First Kings 13:33, 34 states, "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth." God hated the way of false worship and repeatedly brought judgment upon His people Israel when they turned to it.

Jeroboam was the king of the ten tribes that were referred to as the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This included all of Israel except the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Jeroboam set up two golden calves, established his own priesthood and served as a priest at his own altar. He opposed the reuniting of the twelve tribes and waged war on the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The participation in sexual immorality with their idolatrous, neighboring nations caused Israel to be an unholy nation. God had charged them, "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 20:7). Israel took pleasure in false worship and in fornication. It ignored God's direct command. God said, "Ye shall not do this thing" (2 Kings 17:12). Their stubborn disobedience resulted in the downfall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Northern Kingdom went into captivity at the hands of the Assyrian empire.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 8:18-20. Israel had God's blessings, God's power and God's covenant to insure its prosperity as long as it obeyed God. God promised sure judgment upon the nation if it turned to false worship. God explained the penalty for turning to false worship. He said, "Ye shall surely perish" (Deut. 8:19). God did not treat the Israelites differently than any other nation that turned to false worship.

1 Kings 12:25-33. Jeroboam hated the thought of the nation of Israel's being reunited. His plan to hinder the two kingdoms from becoming one involved establishing false worship as a convenient alternative to true worship in Jerusalem. The locations of the altars of the two golden calves were at Bethel in the south and at Dan in the north. This made it seem unnecessary to make the trip to Jerusalem for true worship.

1 Kings 16:28-34. The wicked King Ahab walked in the "sins of Jeroboam." He participated in the worship of Baal. Ahab set up an idol and an altar and established a place for the worship of Baal in Samaria. Ahab married the vile Jezebel. Jezebel came from a family that

loved false worship. Her father, Ethbaal, was named after the false god Baal.

1 Kings 18:25-41. Elijah stood against the practice of the worship of Baal. He challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest. After hours of pleading, crying and cutting themselves, their idol god did not answer them. After Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord, he worshipped the Lord. He soaked the altar, prayed and asked God to show the people of Israel His great power. After fire from Heaven consumed the water and the sacrifice, the people concluded, "The LORD, he is the God" (1 Kings 18:39).

2 Kings 6:24—7:20. The people of Israel's disobedience in the matter of false worship caused a famine in the land so bad that the people turned to cannibalism. The king blamed the prophet Elisha. Elisha predicted God would end the famine the next day. God confounded the host of the Syrians; they fled, and the Israelites had their supplies for the food they needed.

2 Kings 17:3-6, 22, 23. The repeated turn to false worship finally led God to administer necessary judgment against the Northern Kingdom of Israel. God permitted Hoshea king of Assyria to defeat the Northern Kingdom and to carry them into captivity into Assyria. God's reason for this catastrophic judgment was "Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam" (2 Kings 17:22). False worship resulted in its defeat.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

False worship still brings God's judgment. The result of God's people participating in false worship is defeated lives and a loss of identity. God cannot bless His people when they disobey Him in the matter of false worship. His principle still is, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of

conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15, 16). God demands separation from false worship. Second Corinthians 6:16, 17 states, "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." Those who participate in false worship will suffer God's judgment.

The turn to false worship comes in the same progression that it did for the Israelites. The progression involves toleration, acceptance and then embracing false worship. Satan's strategy is to make false worship appear as good as or more convenient than true worship. John 4:24 states, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Although false worship is very popular, God still gets "glory in the church by Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:21).

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

When the Israelites intermarried with idolatrous people, they turned to false worship. Marriages of mixed religious backgrounds cause God's people to love pagan religious practices and to speak like the heathen. Nehemiah 13:23, 24 states, "In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." This was the condition of the Jews that did not go into captivity. Those that returned from captivity were saddened to discover such a sad state of affairs. They had lost their heritage as the people of God, their identity as the peo-

ple of God and their influence as the people of God.

False worship still results in God's people losing their heritage in true worship, their identity as church members in New Testament churches and their influence before the world. Faithfulness to true worship and loyalty to the doctrines of the truth found in the Bible demand

God's people to refuse to compromise with false worship. In the last days, many will turn away from the true worship to false worship. (See 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:3, 4.) God seeks New Testament churches to continue to be faithful in "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20).

The Southern Kingdom

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

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

Habakkuk's hope lay in the Lord. He was a prophet from a priestly family of the tribe of Levi. He wrote this song of praise to God and gave it "To the chief singer on my stringed instruments" (verse 19). Habakkuk rejoiced in the Lord as a child of God. He adored the God of His salvation. *Rejoice* means "to jump for joy or to triumph." *Joy* means "to spin around with gladness." Habakkuk had the same assurance that the apostle Paul had. Second Timothy 1:12 states, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Every person who knows that he is saved has cause for rejoicing in the Lord.

Harvest, flocks and herds could fail to produce. Famine, drought or pestilence could reduce an expected harvest to nothing. Crops could wither in the field. Flocks and herds could die of hunger or thirst. Every expectation of man in earthly things could fail. Habakkuk was as

faithful as Job to worship God in the difficult times as well as the good times. Job 1:20, 21 states, "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." When earthly hopes failed, Habakkuk still trusted in the Lord.

God will never fail those who trust in Him. Habakkuk realized that God was his strength. David said, "I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies" (Psalm 18:1-3).

EXAMINING THE TEXT

2 Chronicles 30:6-9. The Southern Kingdom of Israel was called Judah. It was composed of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Judah had not obeyed God. Second Chronicles 30:5 states, "So they established a decree to make procla-

mation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.”

Judah needed to turn back to God. God's invitation to revival that He made to the people of Israel in Solomon's day was still available. Second Chronicles 7:14 states, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” Judah had refused to admit its need of revival. God sent Judah one more invitation to turn back to God through the prophet Habakkuk.

Judah's warning included God's judgment on the Northern Kingdom of Israel for the same sins. When the people sinned against God, He permitted them to go into captivity in Assyria. *Trepassed* means “to act treacherously or to cover up.” *Desolation* means “waste or ruin.” While the Northern Kingdom had been mostly stripped of its population, the land lay desolate. It was a stark reminder of the power that God used in judging the sinfulness of His people. Judah had not yet learned the principle that sin does not lead to happiness. Numbers 32:23 states, “But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.” Judah could be certain that God meant exactly what He said. The people could be sure that God's judgment would come as He promised. The Northern Kingdom experienced it. The Southern Kingdom could have avoided going into captivity if it had listened to God's warning from His prophet Habakkuk.

Judah stiffened its neck at the Lord's invitation to turn back to Him. *Stiff-necked* means “to be dense or to be more

fiercely opposed.” It stiffened its resistance to the will of God. Judah had quit going to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. When the Northern Kingdom quit coming to Jerusalem to worship, it had already turned to idolatry. Judah repeated the same mistakes that the Northern Kingdom had already made. The people quit responding to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They resisted the will of God. They disobeyed God by neglecting to observe the Passover according to the instructions that God had given in His Word. They preferred the idol temples to the sanctuary that God had made holy by His presence. Judah faced “the fierceness of his wrath” (2 Chron. 30:8). *Fierceness* refers to a burning or blazing anger, sore displeasure or great fury. *Wrath* means “to be so angry that one breathes very fast.” God was incensed because Judah would not face its sinful condition and turn back to Him.

Judah's repentance would have turned God's wrath away. *Turn away* means “to cause to retreat or to go back.” Repentance involves a change of heart, mind, attitude and action that comes when God's people realize how they have strayed. Repentance brings rescue, recovery, revival, deliverance, refreshing and relief. Rather than repent, the people of Judah chose to experience God's wrath.

Habakkuk warned the people of Judah that the enemy could come again into the land of Israel. The Southern Kingdom was in danger of being led away captive. The Lord stood between Judah and certain defeat by its enemies. Repentance would have resulted in victory over sin and over its enemies. The lack of repentance resulted in God's turning His face of protection away from the people so that the enemies of Judah could overcome them. Repentance stirs up the grace and mercy of God. *Gra-*

cious means “to show kindness or to give favor.” *Merciful* means “full of compassion or to love tenderly.” The people of Judah had been given every chance to turn back to God and had stubbornly refused. Babylonian captivity for seventy years was the result of Judah’s disobedience.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 18:1-7. God blessed King Hezekiah with victory over the Assyrians. The people of Judah had a reprieve from the Lord if they chose to turn back to God. Hezekiah instituted several much-needed reforms. He did things that were “right in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 18:3). His reforms included destroying the groves and the images used in idol worship. He also destroyed the serpent of brass that the people of Judah had begun to use as an idol. Hezekiah had so much faith in the Lord that there were “none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him” (2 Kings 18:5). Hezekiah honored God with his obedience. God honored Hezekiah with great prosperity.

2 Chronicles 10:6-19. Rehoboam followed the advice of the young men and put a heavier burden of taxation upon the people. His heart was not tender for the people. Ahijah the prophet had predicted that the kingdom of Israel would be divided with Jeroboam receiving ten tribes and two tribes deciding to follow Rehoboam. The kingdom divided as God had revealed through the words of the prophet Ahijah. Rehoboam’s foolish plan backfired. His officer who went to receive the taxes was stoned to death. The unbearable burden of heavy taxation ripped apart the kingdom of Israel when ten tribes rebelled against Rehoboam.

2 Chronicles 24:1-14. Joash instituted needed repairs to the house of the

Lord. The Temple was in disrepair. The holy Temple vessels had been used in the worship of Baal. The people rejoiced in giving to the Lord for the purpose of repairing the Temple. The offering was abundant. Workmen were hired, the Temple was repaired and new vessels of gold and silver were made for the Temple. Joash’s trusted advisor was Jehoiada the priest. Jehoiada’s name means “God knows.” He was a faithful priest that had the courage to teach and to preach the truth even though idolatry was overwhelmingly popular.

2 Chronicles 34:8-17. Josiah led the people of Judah in a time of revival. The house of the Lord had become little more than a pile of rubbish. They needed “to repair and amend the house: even to the artificers and builders gave they it, to buy hewn stone, and timber for couplings, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed” (2 Chron. 34:10, 11). According to King Josiah’s command, everything was set in order including the instruments and music. In the rubbish, the book of God was found. Josiah realized that Judah had not obeyed the Lord’s commands.

2 Chronicles 36:15-21. The wicked King Zedekiah refused God’s compassionate offers to turn back to God. His servants “mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets” (2 Chron. 36:16). Under King Zedekiah, Judah sinned away its opportunity to turn back to God. Finally, “the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:16). God allowed the people of Judah to suffer defeat at the hands of the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. The Temple was destroyed, the Temple vessels carried off to Babylon and men and women, both old and young, died by the sword. Some lived to be transported to Babylon as

slaves. God promised that Babylonian captivity would last seventy years.

Jeremiah 25:9-12. God utterly destroyed the Southern Kingdom. When the cup of their disobedience was full, God's mighty judgment made Judah "an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations" (Jer. 25:9). The desolation was so complete that in all the kingdom there was no sound of rejoicing. Wedding celebrations were a thing of the past, the millstones were still and the light of a candle no longer pierced the darkness of the land. God knew that the Babylonians would be excessively cruel to the people of Judah. When the seventy years of captivity were finished, God determined to punish Babylon for its abusive treatment of the people of Judah.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

God offers every nation the opportunity to turn to God or to turn back to God. God's preachers of truth send forth the messages of the Lord emphasizing the need of revival and repentance. Ezekiel 33:11 states, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" God deals with nations today as He did in the Old Testament. He is able to exalt a godly nation and to bring destruction upon an ungodly nation. The sins of ungodly nations demand God's judgment if there is no repentance or revival.

The account of the rebellious, stiff-necked and hard-hearted disobedience of nations in the Old Testament is found in the Bible for a warning to the wise. First Corinthians 10:6-11 states, "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as

they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." Lusting after evil things, false worship, sexual immorality, provoking God and murmuring against God remains the path of sure judgment from God on any nation.

God's nature and character reveal Him to be a God of grace and mercy. First Timothy 2:3, 4 states, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Habakkuk's hope in the Lord should be the hope of every nation, every national leader and every citizen of every country. Psalm 33:18 states, "Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." Those who fear the Lord will turn to God and trust in His mercy.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

God's great love for the people of Israel led Him to send prophets to call them to repentance. Jeremiah explained the situation clearly. Jeremiah 6:16 states, "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." God's offer went forth with His great love. God seeks people to hear and accept the truths of His Word, but He will force no one to accept it.

The remnant or minority of people faithful to God in any country will be distressed and vexed by the ungodly behavior of the wicked. Joshua and Caleb were the only two of their whole generation who obeyed God. Judah had those who were guilty of false worship and those who were faithful in true worship. Those who were faithful in true worship died by the sword or went into

captivity the same as the wicked. One life lived for God according to truth does make a difference. Even though one will not be popular with the worldly minded people when taking a stand for God's will or God's way, God will not permit a godly influence and witness to go forth in vain. It is vitally important that God's faithful remnant in any nation continue to live for Him.

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Home Again

Lesson 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.

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

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

God's Faithfulness, Isaiah 40:28-31.

God's unlimited power reveals His faithfulness. The attributes of God identify the Lord as the one true God. He is eternal. Genesis 21:33 states, "And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God." God the Creator established and faithfully continues to sustain His creation. God has faithfully communicated His existence to mankind through His creation. Romans 1:20 states, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." God's unlimited power enables Him to be the source of strength for those who seek Him.

God's faithfulness to strengthen those who seek Him indicates there is no shortage of His power. God "fainteth not." *Fainteth* means "to tire, as a bird would after a long flight." God is never weary. *Weary* means "to gasp for breath or to be exhausted." God never fails to understand what is needed. God's understanding cannot be limited. He knows every-

thing about every person. God's "understanding" refers to His wisdom and intelligence. First Kings 8:39 states, "Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)." Although God knows the needs even before His children pray, He faithfully hears and answers their requests.

God's faithfulness to give needed strength will supply the young, old, healthy, unhealthy, rich and poor. Those who "wait upon the Lord" for the needed strength will not be disappointed.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Nehemiah 1:5-11. The Israelites' possession of the land God had given them rested upon the condition of their obedience in keeping the covenant of the Lord. (See Nehemiah 1:5.) Deuteronomy 28:1, 2 states, "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these bless-

ings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God." God's covenant with Israel was an everlasting covenant. Therefore, the people of Israel could not destroy the covenant by their sins, but they did destroy their ability to enjoy the blessings of the covenant.

Nehemiah prayed for his nation Israel. (See Nehemiah 1:6, 7.) He confessed their sins nationally. He admitted his family's guilt and his own guilt before God. In accordance with God's answer to the prayer that Solomon prayed, the confession of sinfulness opened the way for God to forgive the people of Israel. Second Chronicles 7:14 states, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." God heard Nehemiah's prayer of repentance and granted the Israelites forgiveness.

Nehemiah did not try to belittle the many and serious transgressions against God's commandments. (See Nehemiah 1:8.) Deuteronomy 28:15 states, "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee." One of God's sure promises of His punishment for Israel's sins involved its removal from the land and defeat by its enemies. Deuteronomy 28:25 states, "The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth." God's commandments are nonnegotiable. Every command of the Lord must be obeyed.

God promised His faithfulness to return the Jews to the land He had given

them when they turned back to Him. (See Nehemiah 1:9.) God was equally able to strip the Israelites from the land and place them on foreign soil as He was to free them from Babylonian captivity and return them to the land of Canaan. Nehemiah had great faith in God's power to move the kings of the earth to do whatever it took to bring the people of Israel back into the land God had given them. Daniel 1:1, 2 "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand." After seventy years of captivity in Babylon, God determined it was time to use His power to bring Israel back to its land.

Nehemiah sought God's help through prayer on the basis of His covenant with Israel. (See Nehemiah 1:10, 11.) Nehemiah did not plead for the Israelites as worthy of God's help. He did not ask for God's power to free them because they deserved God's help. Nehemiah had only one basis for seeking God's help for Israel. He knew that God had redeemed the people of Israel and made a covenant with them for a purpose. He knew God would honor His covenant with Israel. He had faith that God would answer his prayer. God had promised, "Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (2 Chron. 7:15, 16). Nehemiah asked God to give the king an open mind to understand the desires of Nehemiah's heart concerning his people and his homeland. Nehemiah did not pray alone. All the people of Israel that feared God and desired His blessings prayed for the return of the captives. God was "attentive" to their prayers as Nehemiah requested. (See

Nehemiah 1:6.) *Attentive* means “to hearken to, to mark well, to regard with favor or to be inclined to hear.” God faithfully heard and answered their prayers.

BACKGROUND STUDY

Ezra 1:1-4. God gave Cyrus the desire to fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the return of Israelite captives and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus gave God the glory for his being king over all the earth. Proverbs 8:15 states, “By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.” King Cyrus gave Ezra the authority to begin gathering a group of workers to go back to Israel. Ezra also had the authority to collect the gold, silver, beasts of burden and other materials necessary to complete the task of rebuilding the Temple.

Nehemiah 4:4-9. Nehemiah went back to Israel with a group of Israelite captives for the purpose of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. The Israelite workers built the wall in the midst of great opposition. They continued to work in spite of the opposition. Their prayers to God requested the Lord reward the evildoers with a just recompense. Nehemiah led the people in a great work for two reasons. One, God was with them. Two, the people had a mind to work. Nehemiah and his faithful men worked, watched and prayed.

Nehemiah 8:8—9:3. Nehemiah and the people gathered for worship. The emphasis of their worship was the reading, hearing and understanding of the Word of God. The people of Israel properly responded to God's Word by mourning over sin. Nehemiah, Ezra and others encouraged the people to rejoice in the Lord. They said, “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). As the people continued to worship and receive the

Word of God, they began to experience a great gladness. Israel experienced a true revival as the people gathered to worship, heard the Word of God, fasted, prayed and confessed their sins to God.

Isaiah 44:28—45:7. God used Cyrus as a king that showed special favor to Israel. God exalted Cyrus for the purpose of using him to set the captives free and to rebuild the Temple. Cyrus served as the king that God chose to rule. God gave Cyrus a personal promise concerning His ability to bless Cyrus if he obeyed the Lord. God protected Cyrus from his enemies, granted his kingdom victory over the enemies and blessed him for his goodness to the people of Israel. God wanted Israel to know “that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:6). God put an end to their idolatry.

Daniel 6:10-15. God used the faithful Israelite captives to give a mighty witness to the Babylonians. They knew Daniel gave thanks to God at least three times a day. He prayed toward Jerusalem, indicating it was a place of God's favor for Israel. Jerusalem also was a place for which the Israelite had a special love. Daniel had been in captivity for many years by this time. Under different kings and different laws, Daniel continued to be a faithful Jew who lived to obey God.

Haggai 1:3-7. When the work of rebuilding the house of God halted, God sent the prophet Haggai with a powerful message. The returning Israelites were busy building their own houses, going on with their own lives and were so busy that they had no time for God or for doing His will. God had provided a way for the captives to return to Israel, but not for their own comfort. The Israelites returned to the land for the purpose of being a nation that witnessed for the

Lord. To fulfill that purpose, the house of God had to be rebuilt.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

The providence of God is God's continuing care, provision and preservation. The providence of God for Israel required that God care for His people in Babylon in order to bring them back into the land of Israel as a godly nation. While in Babylon, the Israelites survived by the provisions God had made. God gave the captives good jobs, good families and a good life even though they were in bondage to the Babylonians. God also gave the Israelites a love for their heritage and for their homeland. God preserved the Israelites throughout the seventy years of captivity so that at His time He could bring them back into the land of Israel. The Lord's covenant with Israel was completely fulfilled by the providence of God.

The providence of God includes the idea that the government leaders of the world do not rise to power by blind chance. Romans 13:1 states, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." The people of Israel suffered through the cruelty of Nebuchadnezzar and the drunken rages of Belshazzar. God removed each of those kings from power and exalted Darius and Cyrus. Each king and kingdom served the purpose for which God used them. Each king and kingdom had the free choice concerning what they would or would not do. The providence of God used kings and kingdoms to bring the people of Israel back to God and back to their land.

The providence of God still works in the kingdoms of the world to achieve God's purposes. When one considers

wicked and immoral rulers, faith must overrule fear. Those who have faith in the providence of God continue to prove themselves faithful, holy witnesses during times when the wicked are in power. The people of God may rest assured that God has not forgotten them or failed them during the dark days of political, social and economic turmoil. The providence of God continues to give His people of Israel and those of all nations the opportunity to turn to the Lord.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The providence of God continues to protect, to provide for and to defend the nation of Israel. When God led the Russian Jews to pioneer a return to Israel, He sheltered them under the British Empire. When Israel became a sovereign nation in 1948, God preserved them. Israel has won many astounding battles and many victories over enemy forces of superior numbers from 1948 until the present. Israel still has enemies that would destroy the nation if God removed His protection. The Middle East conflict continues to rage. Those who recognize the Lord's hand in the affairs of men realize that God's providence still favors Israel.

The providence of God continues to work on behalf of His children. All saved people may be assured of the providence of God at work in their lives. When children of God face difficult situations, remember that man's knowledge is at best imperfect. God has a perfect knowledge of what He intends to accomplish by the suffering, affliction or chastisement of His children. The providence of God is unlimited in power. There can be no coincidence, no accident and no fortunate event if one has faith in the providence of God to care for His children.

The Jews in Jesus' Day

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

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

God sent His Son Jesus into the world for a divinely appointed mission. Hebrews 1:1, 2 states, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." Jesus came with the words of salvation for the Jews and for the whole world. God's order was salvation for the Jews first. Romans 1:16 states, "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." Jesus came to personally offer God's salvation to the Jews.

The Jews were appropriately called "His own" according to the flesh. Jesus was born of the house of David and of the tribe of Judah from the nation of Israel as the promise of God stated. Micah 5:2 states, "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrath, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Bethlehem was the city of David. Jesus' mother, Mary, was a Jew, a descendant of David. Jesus was the virgin-born Son of God by means of the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary and causing her to conceive. God had a covenant with David that he would have a son to reign on His throne. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise will be when Jesus reigns for one thousand years on the earth.

He preached to the Jews, and He wept for the Jews of Jerusalem. (See Matthew 23:37.) John 5:43 states, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." Jesus came to His own people the Jews, and they demanded His crucifixion.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Matthew 23:37-39. The Jews responded to Jesus as they had responded to the prophets. Acts 10:43 states, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Because the Jews had rejected the message of Jesus Christ as preached by the prophets, it is not surprising that they rejected the Lord. The prophets received persecution. The people of Israel wanted to stone Moses. Jezebel threatened to kill

Elijah. Elisha was mocked. Jeremiah was imprisoned in the dungeon. Hebrews 11:36, 37 states, "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." The Jews treated Jesus in the same manner that they had treated the other messengers from God.

Jesus expressed God's tenderness toward the nation of Israel in His weeping. He said, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). The Jews made their decision by a willful rejection of Jesus Christ. Matthew 27:25 states, "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." The Israelites rejected God's Son and God's loving offer of forgiveness for their sins.

The desolation of Israel as a Jewish state came as a result of its rejection of Jesus Christ as its Lord and Messiah. After a forty-year period of testing, the Roman army came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The people were killed or removed from the land. The land of Israel became a wilderness habitation of wild beasts. Jesus' prophecy concerning the destruction of the Temple was fulfilled. Matthew 24:2 states, "And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." The desolation of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, the dispersion of the Jewish people and the dissolution of Israel as a Jewish political state completed God's judgment on Israel for the rejection of Jesus Christ, its Messiah.

Jesus Christ will be accepted by the Jews when He comes back to the earth. The nation will turn to God in one day.

(See Isaiah 66:5-12.) During the time of Jacob's trouble, many of the Jews will turn to God. Jeremiah 30:7 states, "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." The Jews will turn to the One their forefathers rejected. Jesus Christ will fight for Israel at the Battle of Armageddon. The Jews will gladly serve under Him during His one thousand year reign on the earth.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 22:23-32. The Sadducees rejected Jesus' teaching on the doctrine of the resurrection. They presented a hypothetical case that they considered an unanswerable argument against the idea of a resurrection. Jesus rebuked their error and their ignorance of the Scriptures. God will dwell with His living, resurrected and redeemed people forever.

Matthew 23:13-34. The Pharisees rejected Jesus. They loved their traditions more than God. The unbelieving Pharisees opposed Jesus and led others to become "twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15). Jesus prophesied that the Pharisees would treat Him as their forefathers had treated the prophets.

John 3:1-6. Jesus explained to Nicodemus how the Jews should receive Him. Even though the Pharisees were religious leaders, Jesus wanted them to know that they were religious sinners in need of a Savior. They were religious but lost. Many people love religion but have never trusted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

John 4:5-22. Jesus witnessed to the woman of Samaria at the well. He identified Himself as the Savior and the Messiah who could offer the living water. Jesus explained that salvation was of the Jews. He urged her to accept Him as a

Jewish man who was also the Son of God and the Messiah.

John 19:14-22. Jesus' crucifixion identified Him as the King of the Jews. The Jews rejected Jesus as their King. They professed a love for caesar and a hatred for Jesus. They were offended and protested when Pilate put a sign on the cross that stated, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19).

Romans 1:1-4. The Jews of Jesus' day had all the proof they needed to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They had the testimony of the Old Testament prophets. They had the lineage of Jesus of the family of David. They had His mighty works that declared Him to be the Almighty God. They also were aware of His resurrection. God gave the Jews of Jesus' day every proof necessary to convince even those people who were most skeptical.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Jesus suffered many things including the rejection by His own people. He had been identified as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Although the Jews looked for an earthly king to establish an earthly kingdom, Jesus came on a divinely appointed mission to offer the Jews and the world eternal life. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He came as a servant to do the Father's will. Matthew 20:28 states, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (See Luke 19:10.) Jesus emphasized the truth that He must suffer and die. Matthew 16:21 states, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the

elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Jesus knew that His own people would reject Him.

Many people reject Jesus today. Some are religious. Some are nonreligious. Most of the Jews still reject Jesus. People of all nations reject Jesus. Even though many people continue to reject Him, it is still true that He will save those who will receive Him. John 1:12, 13 states, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." God still sorrows when any person rejects Him.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Paul preached to Jews that they might receive Christ. Romans 10:1 states, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." His burden for unbelievers led him to preach and to witness to everyone he met. Romans 1:16 states, "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." Jesus is the Savior whom the world still needs! First Timothy 1:15 states, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Paul became a great soul-winner because he had a tremendous burden for the salvation of all men.

New Testament churches send forth the message of the same Christ whom the Jews rejected. Church members should have a greater burden for unbelievers. God's people should pray for the lost individually. Pray for unbelievers specifically by name. Although many unbelievers still reject Christ, some will be saved if God's faithful people continue to share Christ with others.

A Jewish Church

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

To the Jews First, Romans 1:14-17.

Paul received Christ on the terms of this same gospel when he met the Lord on the road to Damascus. Paul recognized that those who had received the gospel had a debt to those who had not yet received it. He said, "I am debtor" (verse 14). *Debtor* means "an ower, indebted." First Timothy 1:15 states, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The gospel is a debt that can only be paid by sharing Christ with others. Paul was always ready to preach Christ to anyone who would listen.

Paul preached Christ to the Jews first. Romans 1:16 states, "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." No soul-winner is ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

Ashamed means "to feel disgraced." Paul was proud to claim Christ as his personal Savior. He had a great burden for the Jews to be saved. Romans 9:1-3 states, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness

in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Paul knew that every Jew who would receive Christ in salvation would experience the power of God to change his life.

God sent the gospel to the Jews first for several reasons. God had a covenant with the people of Israel. God had promised the Messiah to them. God intended to use the Israelites as a nation of witness before the world. From saved and scripturally baptized Jews, Jesus would call out the ones who would become His church. Jesus commissioned the Jewish church which He established during His personal ministry to carry the gospel to the world.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Acts 2:22-24. The church that Jesus established during His personal ministry continued to do His work after His resurrection and ascension. When the day of Pentecost came, Peter preached a great message concerning Jesus Christ. (See Acts 2:14.) Christ commissioned New Testament churches to "Go ye therefore,

The woman at the well had marveled that a Jewish man would speak to her. Jesus revealed Himself to her as a Jewish man, a prophet and then as the Messiah. After she was saved, she immediately went to proclaim Jesus the Messiah to the Samaritans. Through Jesus, "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

Acts 11:16-20. Peter explained to the church at Jerusalem concerning the will of the Lord to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. The Jewish church recognized that the gospel of Christ was for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. Although the church at Antioch in Syria began as primarily a Jewish church, there were some Gentile members. The church at Antioch became the great missionary church that God used to spread the gospel as far as Europe.

Acts 13:46-52. Everywhere Paul and Barnabas preached, they first shared the gospel with the Jews. The Jews rejected their message. The Gentiles opened their hearts to the gospel of Christ. The preaching of the gospel of Christ had an open door in the region around Antioch of Pisidia. Although there was great opposition from the unbelieving Jews, a church was established.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-20. There were several Jewish churches in Judea. It should be noted that *churches* indicate every New Testament church was a local, visible, called-out, organized, authorized assembly of scripturally baptized believers gathered into one body for the purpose of doing the work of the Great Commission. At first, there was a firm resolve among the Jews not to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The church at Thessalonica was a predominantly Gentile church in which God was doing a great work. Paul rejoiced in their labors for the Lord.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Although the Jews viewed the Messiah as theirs and theirs alone, the early Jewish churches learned that God wanted the gospel preached to every person in the world. When Jesus commissioned His church in Jerusalem, He gave it a mandate to carry the gospel to the whole world. Mark 16:15 states, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Messiah for all nations and all people of the world.

Christ taught His disciples the importance of sharing the gospel with everyone. He witnessed to the Samaritan woman. (See John 4.) The disciples did not understand why Jesus spoke to the woman. John 4:27 states, "And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman." They wondered but did not ask Jesus, "What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?" God had to overcome the prejudice of the Jewish church members. God did not intend that their preaching of the gospel should be selective. The Bible plainly teaches "all men" and "whosoever will." (See John 1:7; John 12:32; Acts 17:30; Romans 10:13; Revelation 22:17.)

As a soul-winner, Paul witnessed to all men. Acts 20:26 states, "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men." Church members will give an account to God for their faithfulness in sharing the gospel with all people.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

When the Jewish church members at Jerusalem failed to go forth with the gospel into all the world, God sent them on their way. Acts 8:4 states, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." The

Jewish church members were scattered over the Roman empire. God gave the Jewish church members a burden for preaching the gospel in every place to every person.

Peter had to learn the same lesson. Peter had the experience of the vision of the clean and unclean animals in the great sheet lowered from Heaven. (See Acts 10:9-17.) Acts 10:28 states, "And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common

or unclean." Peter learned to go where God led him and to share the gospel with everyone.

God gave Philip a burden for the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch. (See Acts 8.) Philip explained the gospel to the eunuch and he was saved. After Philip preached to the Samaritans and reported the many who were saved there, God directed him to the Ethiopian. Philip had learned the truth that everyone needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. God still directs His churches and church members to share the gospel with everyone.

Jews and the Gospel

Lesson Text: Acts 13:44-47.

Background Scripture: Acts 1:8, 14, 22; 2:11, 21-24, 37-41; 3:19-21; 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.

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

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

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

Matthew 10 gives the account of the limited commission. Jesus gave the limited commission to His churches for a training exercise. Every church member should be trained in sharing the gospel of Christ with others. Jesus gave them special power to do miracles to confirm their message. Jesus empowered them to affirm the truth of their message by the undeniable evidence of healing the sick, curing the lepers, raising the dead and casting out devils. After the Bible was completed about AD 100, the inspired Word of God confirmed the message of the truth of the gospel of Christ. There was no more need for the miracles. (See 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.) Jesus commanded the charter members of His church to "go, preach" (Matt. 10:7). Going forth to preach the gospel remains the work that Christ commissioned His churches to do.

Jesus specifically excluded the Samaritans and the Gentiles from the limited commission. He said, "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6). The preaching of the gospel must begin in the location where

God's people are. The unbelieving Jews needed the gospel of Christ. After the gospel had been preached, the church members faced several different responses. Some were saved. Some rejected the message. Some scoffed. Some hated and persecuted the church members. Once the church members were equipped with the experience of sharing the gospel with their own people, they would have the experience necessary to carry the gospel to the world.

Jesus considered the work of soul-winning as the great priority. He said, "The workman is worthy of his meat" (Matt. 10:10). Every church member should labor diligently to share the gospel with others. Each church member should ask himself, What kind of workman am I?

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Acts 13:44-47. The Jews had been scattered throughout the Roman empire. (See Acts 8:1-4.) A large contingent of Jews settled in Antioch of Pisidia. Paul preached, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38). The Jews in Antioch of Pisidia mostly rejected the

gospel, although many were saved. Paul understood that the preaching of the gospel would have limited results among the Jews. Romans 11:25 states, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." God had a reason why the gospel was preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Everywhere Paul preached, he first preached to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. (See Romans 1:16.)

The unbelieving Jews opposed and rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:18 states, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." God intended the Jews to share in the joys of the gospel of Christ. Their rejection did not hinder His purpose. God gave almost all of the books of the Bible, the Messiah and the New Testament church as an institution to the Jews first. After the Jews see the error of their ways, they will turn to Christ. (See Jeremiah 31:6, 7, 11.) Israel's prosperity or poverty always depends on its attitude toward the Lord.

God made a covenant with the people of Israel. They received the message of the prophets concerning Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah. Acts 10:43 states, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Even though they had heard the message of the Old Testament prophets repeatedly, they refused to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah whom God had promised.

Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in the order that God had given them. Acts 13:46 states, "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." The Jews were jealous of Paul and Barnabas. They were "filled with envy" (verse 45). "Envy" is the heat of passion as against an enemy, malice, indignation and jealousy. They spoke against the truth Paul preached. They attempted to contradict the simple message of the gospel. *Contradicting* means "opposing." *Blaspheming* means "to vilify, to defame or to revile." Although the gospel is for every person, each has the right to reject the salvation that God offers in Jesus Christ.

Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel according to the command of God. They said, "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). New Testament churches still have the responsibility to preach the gospel to every person.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Acts 1:8, 14, 22. God commanded the Jewish church Jesus established to go to all the world and preach the gospel.

Acts 2:11, 21-24, 37-41. Peter preached, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (verse 21). Three thousand were saved and received scriptural baptism.

Acts 3:19-21. Peter preached to the Jews that they must repent and be saved through Jesus Christ. Peter and the others were arrested for preaching Christ.

Acts 4:12, 13, 24, 32, 33. Peter continued to affirm to those who arrested him that Jesus is the only Savior. The church had a united witness concerning the gospel of Christ.

Acts 5:31-33, 40-42. Because the Jews were convicted in their hearts, they conspired to murder them. The church members kept on preaching Jesus.

Acts 6:7. A great number of Jewish priests accepted Christ as their Savior.

Acts 8:4. The Jewish church members preached the gospel everywhere.

Acts 9:6, 15-17, 27-29. God used Saul of Tarsus as "a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). The Grecian Jews wanted to murder Saul for preaching the gospel.

Acts 10:21, 22, 34-48. Peter learned that the gospel was not only for the Jews but also for all the world. He preached about how the Jews had crucified the Lord.

Acts 11:18. The Jewish church members at Jerusalem matured to the point that they could glorify God for the salvation of the Gentiles.

Acts 13:1-4. The church at Antioch sent out Saul, a Jewish missionary.

Acts 18:4-6. Paul was burdened in his heart to witness to the Jews. They rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acts 26:19, 20. Paul preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Acts 28:25-28. The Jews disagreed concerning the gospel of Christ. Some wanted to hear more; some did not. Some Jews closed their eyes, ears and hearts to the gospel.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

The majority of them would reject Christ as the Messiah with the same vehemence as the Jews in the Text. Jesus wept over the Jews, prayed for their salvation and condemned their unbelief. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21). Some of the Jews

drove Jesus out of their country. "And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (Mark 5:17). The Bible predicted Jesus would come "unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

The Jews still reject the Messiah Jesus Christ. They will turn to a false messiah even though God warned them against that choice. Matthew 24:24 states, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." The Bible predicts the Jews will accept the coming anti-Christ as their messiah. "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43).

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Just as many Jews rejected the gospel, there is much rejection today. God expects His servants in His churches to continue to preach, to witness, to go and to tell others about Christ even though many will not accept the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Rejection is no excuse for deserting the task of soul-winning. Daniel 12:3 states, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Church members are not accountable for the number of rejections, only for those they did not tell.

Although it is politically incorrect for religious groups to proselyte those of other religious persuasion, God still expects His people to preach the gospel to the Jews. How many church members have ever shared the gospel with a Jew? The gospel of Jesus Christ is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

The Nation Scattered

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

An Everlasting Love, Jeremiah 31:1-3.

God chose to love the people of Israel with an everlasting love. The covenant God made with Abraham had eternal promises. Genesis 12:2 states, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." The people of Israel tested God's commitment to love them by provoking Him with their grumbling, unbelief and murmuring in the wilderness, by turning to idolatry in the land of Canaan and by their desire to be like the other nations. Through it all, God continued to be faithful to His commitment to love the Israelites forever.

God drew them unto Himself with acts of love and kindness. God gave the people of Israel freedom from bondage, rest in the wilderness, a home in Canaan, victory over all the enemy nations and peace in their land when they obeyed God. God made them a mighty nation, a prosperous nation and a feared nation. Psalm 36:7 states, "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." The Israelites had

to learn the lesson over and over that they could put their trust in God.

God punished them with His wrath, but they continued to find grace in His eyes. Their disobedience demanded God's punishment. Although He chastised them sorely, He never went so far as to totally destroy the nation. He always delivered a remnant. God's grace provided a place of plenty and a place of protection for the fledgling nation in time of famine. Exodus 33:13, 14 states, "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." The people of Israel's true rest will only come from God.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Deuteronomy 28:64-67. God judged Israel and punished the nation for its disobedience. Idolatry was the reason for its captivity. When God's people get involved with false worship, it is disobedience to God. God does not, cannot and will not tolerate His people's joining in

with false worship. Deuteronomy 28:20 states, "The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me." Because the people of Israel had forsaken God in true worship, they would be scattered into a foreign land where they would suffer for their sins. Deuteronomy 28:63 states, "And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it." God kept His promises to Israel concerning the blessings and curses found in this chapter.

God promised that Israel would have no rest. About forty years after the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God stripped the nation of Israel from the land and destroyed its rest for centuries to come. The people of Israel wandered on foreign soil. They were persecuted, hated and driven from place to place. They always sought rest but found no permanent rest. Wickedness and disobedience to God will never bring rest. Jeremiah 45:3 states, "Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest." God's rest is for those who will follow Him. The psalmist spoke of the wonderful rest of those who follow the Lord when he said, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:2). God blesses His obedient children with rest. (See Matthew 11:28-30.)

God promised that the Israelites would have no peace. Isaiah 48:22 states, "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked." Wicked thoughts, wicked

actions and wicked ways rob God's people of the peace God wants them to enjoy. Isaiah 59:8 states, "The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace." There is no peace like the peace that God gives His people.

God predicted every Jew scattered abroad would fear for his life. Deuteronomy 4:10 states, "I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children." Because the Jews willfully refused to fear God, He determined to give them a reason to fear. The Jews who were scattered abroad were constantly in fear for their lives.

God predicted the Jews who were scattered abroad would have no hope before their eyes. The people who had again and again made their choices by sight rather than by faith looked for hope by what their eyes could see. Finally, the Jews will decide that the only way of hope will be to turn to God.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 4:26-29. God had witnesses in Heaven and earth concerning His covenant with the people of Israel. Their obedience to the commands of the Lord, separation from false worship and faithfulness to true worship were God's requirements for remaining in the land and enjoying God's blessings. God predicted they would forsake Him, turn to idols and be scattered abroad. He also promised to preserve a remnant.

Matthew 23:37—24:2. The Israelites repeatedly rejected the message of the prophets and often killed them. God made many pleas for the people of Israel to turn to Him, but they refused. As a result, the house of Israel became deso-

late. *Desolate* means “a desert, wasteland or wilderness.” For about eighteen hundred years, it was so. This prophecy began to be fulfilled with the destruction of the Temple about AD 70.

Luke 21:20-24. The Roman armies did surround, besiege and conquer the city of Jerusalem. The years of the Jewish dispersion were “days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:22). Even in the Assyrian captivity and in the Babylonian captivity, the people of Israel had never before suffered as they did after they rejected Jesus. God’s punishment on the Jews will end at the same time that the time of the Gentiles will be fulfilled.

Acts 13:14-16, 45. Paul found Jews scattered in almost every place he went on his missionary journeys. In some places, there were enough Jews that a synagogue was established. Paul read the Word of God in the synagogues. Some Jews believed what Paul preached, but many of them “spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” (Acts 13:45).

Acts 17:1-9. Paul sought out the Jews in every place. He went to the synagogue of the Jews, “as his manner was.” *Manner* means “custom or habit.” Paul made it a habit to preach and to witness to the Jews. Some believed, but a great number continued to work in opposition to Paul.

James 1:1. James wrote his letter to the Jews who were scattered over the Roman empire. He was a Jew inspired of God to write to the Jews. He affectionately referred to his people as “the twelve tribes.” *Scattered abroad* comes from the Greek word that means “dispersion.” Many Jews resided in Gentile lands around the world during the dispersion.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

When the people of Israel refused to turn from the worship according to the old covenant to the worship of the new covenant in Jesus Christ, they left God with no alternative but to punish them and to destroy the things that had to do with the worship of the old covenant. The Temple was destroyed. They continued to reject Jesus, His way and sound doctrine. They chose to love their traditions and the commandments of the Pharisees more than the Word of God. When ordinances and rituals mean more to people than obeying God’s Word from the heart, there can be no escape from God’s displeasure.

God’s people in every generation must be assured that God’s promises will be kept. These promises may be blessings for obedience or punishments for disobedience. Every prophecy that God made concerning the people of Israel that could be fulfilled up until this present time has come to pass. All the other promises relating to them will occur according to God’s timetable.

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the Jews fled and sought refuge all across the Roman empire. Some settled in Asia Minor. Some traveled as far as Europe. Some went to the pagan lands of Babylon and Persia. Presently, Jews may be found in many countries throughout the world.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

From the time of the destruction of the Temple until the present, the two great desires of the Jews have been to return to their homeland and to rebuild the Temple. The Israelites have always been a people that even in captivity or dispersion knew their history and heritage. The people of Israel cherish the distinct identity that God has given them. They continue to observe customs and

rituals thousands of years old handed down from their forefathers. They have carefully preserved their heritage and rituals in all the lands where the dispersion has taken them.

After becoming aware of God's judgment meted out impartially to the nation of Israel, it behooves people of every nation to consider the importance of knowing God, obeying His command-

ments, praising Him in true worship and remaining separated from any unclean thing. Psalm 33:14 states, "From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth." Every ungodly nation will suffer God's punishment. Godly nations will be blessed by the Lord. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Psalm 33:12).

Israel Today

Lesson 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.

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Paul's Prayer, Romans 10:1-3.

The people of Israel still need the Lord. Paul's prayer for them should be the prayer of God's people today. Paul had a great burden to see his countrymen come to know the Lord as their personal Savior. It was both his "heart's desire and prayer to God" (Rom. 10:1). *Desire* means "pleasure, purpose, wish or what seems good." *Prayer* means "a petition, request, plea or supplication." Paul knew that it would be good if more Jews came to know Jesus as their Savior. He continued to make their need of salvation a persistent, passionate and pointed plea to God. God's people need the same burden and the same commitment to pray for the salvation of unbelievers.

Many of the Jews are religious but lost. They have great religious zeal. They faithfully perform rites and ceremonies that they believe are important. "Zeal" is heat, fervency of mind or enthusiasm. *Knowledge* means "full discernment, recognition or acknowledgement." The Jews as a nation have never recognized or acknowledged Jesus Christ as the only way to God. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man

cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The Jews are still trying to come to God according to their own way.

The Jews will never know the Lord until they submit to His plan of salvation. God's standard of righteousness can only be found in Jesus Christ. Man's righteousnesses are as "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). Salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5, 6). Good works and keeping the law that God gave the people of Israel will not save. Jesus is the only Savior. Acts 4:12 states, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Romans 11:25. Although it is a mystery to some, God has revealed the truth about Israel's stubborn rejection of Jesus. God knew that the nation of Israel would reject His Son Jesus. He planned for it before it occurred. God's pre-planning concerning the people of Israel

enforces the biblical teaching concerning “whosoever will” and the free moral agency of all men. God did not force them to do His will. He will not force anyone to be saved. Every Jew and every Gentile has the opportunity to do what God says or to reject it.

Some had difficulty reconciling God’s treatment of the Israelites with the fact that they were His chosen people. Deuteronomy 32:10 states, “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.” Many did not understand God’s long-term plan for Israel. *Mystery* means “secret or silence on a subject.” God revealed His long-term plan for Israel to Paul so that he might share it with others.

The people of Israel are suffering from a temporary blindness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Satan has the ability to work among Jews and Gentiles. Second Corinthians 4:4 states, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” Satan encouraged the people of Israel to reject God’s Son Jesus. God promised that they would be blinded after they rejected Christ. Deuteronomy 28:28 states, “The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart.” *Blindness* means “a film over the eyes or to cover with hide, skin or leather.” The term may refer to a literal, physical blindness or to a spiritual blindness. The Israelites suffer from a spiritual blindness.

God put blinders on the nation of Israel after it stubbornly refused to accept Jesus. Paul explained this blindness in his letter to the church at Ephesus. Ephesians 4:18 states, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the igno-

rance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” After Pharaoh hardened his heart, God hardened it. After the people of Israel rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah and crucified Him, God blinded their understanding. God put a time limit on their blindness. When the time of the Gentiles has been fulfilled, the blindness of the Jews will be completed. At that time, they will see Jesus the Messiah as their only hope and the people will turn to God.

The times of the Gentiles must be fulfilled. The time of the Gentiles is commonly understood to have begun with the Babylonian captivity. Luke 21:24 states, “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” *Trodden down* means “to trample down, to trample underfoot or to make a path.” It will conclude with the defeat of the Gentile world kingdom under the rule of the anti-Christ. The anti-Christ’s kingdom will be a revived Roman empire. During the time of the blindness of the nation of Israel and the supremacy of the Gentile nations over it, God is seeking the salvation of the Gentiles. Early in the times of the Gentiles, the Gentiles often received the gospel gladly, followed the Lord’s example in scriptural baptism and faithfully served the Lord in His churches.

In the end of the time of the Gentiles, the Gentiles also will mostly reject Jesus Christ. They will turn to the anti-Christ instead of the Christ. (See Daniel 2:36-44.) The Bible declares that there will be four Gentile world kingdoms beginning with Babylon. These four kingdoms are the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman empires. Then God will set up His own kingdom on the earth with Jesus Christ ruling on the throne in Jerusalem. Jesus will reign on the earth

for one thousand years and then reign eternally in the Heaven ages to come.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Psalms 122:1-9. This psalm brings rejoicing to the Jew as he thinks about Jerusalem and the Temple. David took great pleasure in approaching the house of God to worship the Lord. Zechariah prophesied of a time when future generations of Jews will look forward to the same pleasures that David enjoyed. Zechariah 8:21 states, "And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also." Until then, those who are saved may pray for peace for Israel.

Isaiah 2:1-5. God's future plans for Israel include a throne in Jerusalem, a Temple in Jerusalem and the Lord Jesus on the throne. The time period of peace in Jerusalem will be the one thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. The millennial reign of Christ will be after the times of the Gentiles has been completed. Christ will rule in righteousness. The weapons of war will be turned into agricultural tools. Israel will become the agricultural supplier for the world.

Hosea 3:4, 5. The present condition of the people of Israel in the dispersion leaves them without a king. They have no Temple sacrifices today. They have plans to rebuild the Temple but await the opportunity to do so. It has been reported that the Jews have traced the ancestry of the priests, are collecting funds, are making the implements necessary for Temple service and for sacrifices and are preparing the vestures for the priests. When they are in Israel in peace and in the way of the Lord, the Israelites will truly be regathered.

Luke 24:20-24. The resurrected Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the eternal

God, the Rock of Ages and the righteous Branch will be the One to whom the nation of Israel will turn in coming days. John 19:37 states, "And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced." When He walked among the Jews, they saw Him, but they knew Him not. When He comes again, He will walk among them, and they will know Him as their Messiah.

Acts 15:14-18. During the time of the dispersion, the Jews were trodden down by the Gentiles. This is also true today. God is working a mighty work among the Gentiles as He takes "out of them a people for his name" (verse 14). The Old Testament prophets predicted the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of the Temple sacrifices. By the time the millennial Temple will have been built, God will have preserved a believing remnant of Jews and will have Gentiles of all nations among His followers. God knew from the beginning His purpose for Israel. He will achieve it fully and completely.

Romans 10:18-21. The people of Israel heard the words of the prophets but rejected them. Their gospel message was the same message that God sent forth into all the earth. The people's rejection of God, of God's plan of salvation and of Jesus the Messiah caused God to use a Gentile nation to punish them. The Israelites came to the point of God's judgment by an enemy nation because they had been "a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:21). *Disobedient* means "willful, perverse or unbelieving." *Gainsaying* means "disputing, denying, contradicting and answering again."

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

The people of Israel have hope today due to God's covenant even though they

are in the land in unbelief. God kept His promise to return the people of Israel to their land. Isaiah 11:11, 12 states, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." At the turn of the twentieth century, the land of Israel had Jews pioneering homesteads for the first time in centuries. Although Israel is a nation today, and Jews are going back from all over the world, they have yet to turn to God. They will be forced to flee from the wrath of the anti-Christ.

God seeks the people of Israel who will turn to Him, choose to love Him and delight in obeying Him. A true regathering cannot occur until the people of Israel gather in the land accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Ezekiel 11:17 states, "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel." When that day comes, the Jews will realize the One who their forefathers crucified is the Messiah for whom they have waited so long. Ezekiel 11:19, 20 states, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God." God's purpose for the nation of Israel has still not been achieved at the present.

The Middle East is a hotspot that will only get hotter until Jesus settles the

Middle East problem. Unbelief continues to hinder the Israelites from enjoying the full blessings God has promised them. They have traded land for peace. They are searching for direction. They have no truly great leader. When the people of Israel turn to God, they will be the leading nation for the whole world to watch.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Israel is still under God's protection. On May 14, 1948, Israel had to defend against the onslaught of several neighboring Arab nations. Egypt, Jordan and Syria fought against Israel in hopes of eradicating the Jewish state on the same day it had been reborn politically. After the battles of that day ended, Israel had more territory than when the fighting began. The same thing occurred again in the Six Day War in June, 1967. They defeated the same enemy nations. Israel had gained much more territory. It now controlled the West Bank and the Golan Heights. God intended for the world to see and understand that He had put Israel back into its land.

Israel has been fulfilling prophecies since regaining the land. Isaiah 41:19 states, "I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together." The people planted trees in many places, including rocky hillsides where they had to drill the rock. Israel today is truly a fruitful land by means of irrigation. Amos 9:14 states, "And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them." The people of Israel are back in the land with God's blessing.

Israel in the Future

Lesson Text: Zechariah 12:8-10.

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

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.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

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

Israel will turn back to God. The people of Israel will flee from the wrath of the anti-Christ during the latter half of the Tribulation Period. God will provide a refuge for them. He will be their Rock. The anti-Christ will not be able to destroy the Jews completely. Jesus will return in time to fight and win the Battle of Armageddon.

The people of Israel will be cleansed from all their acts of disobedience, false worship and immorality. Before the Lord's return, Israel will have a time of national repentance. It will not be a holiday set aside for that purpose. It will be a time when the spiritual blindness in Israel will be suddenly removed. The nation will clearly see its sinful condition and its need of Jesus Christ the Messiah and Savior.

God will give the people of Israel tender hearts to know and do God's will. After many of the Jews are saved, they will never again prove to be a disobedient, a stubborn or a hard-hearted people. In the past, the Israelites had stony hearts toward God. Matthew 23:37 states, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou

that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" They spurned God's tender mercies. In the future, the people of Israel will have tender hearts filled with love for God and the desire to please Him.

The people of Israel will dwell in peace and prosperity in the land that God gave them. Jesus Christ will be their King. The world will look to Israel as God's nation of witness. All the nations will have the opportunity to follow God if they choose. Everyone will know that Jesus Christ is the God of Israel. Never before and not until the millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth will the people of Israel enjoy peace, prosperity and all the territory that God has given them.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Zechariah 12:8-10. Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled at the end of the latter half of the Tribulation Period. When the anti-Christ breaks his covenant with the Jews at the midpoint of the Tribulation, He will turn against them with all his fury. The Jews will flee

to God's refuge in the wilderness. They will hide in the rock. Isaiah 42:11 states, "Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains." Then the Jews will turn to Jesus, the Rock of Ages. After the nation is reborn spiritually in a day, the Lord will return to earth and the Battle of Armageddon will occur. Isaiah 42:13 states, "The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies." The fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy will bring about the end of the Tribulation Period.

God will defend the people of Israel. God will keep His covenant to protect them. Jesus Christ will make a personal appearance to save the people of Israel from annihilation. Isaiah 63:1 states, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Jesus Christ will come swiftly to preserve a remnant of the nation of Israel. Jeremiah 49:22 states, "Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread his wings over Bozrah: and at that day shall the heart of the mighty men of Edom be as the heart of a woman in her pangs." Israel's existence will remain secure as long as God is its defender.

The angel of the Lord will go before Israel. The phrase *angel of the Lord* at times refers to temporary manifestations of the Lord Jesus in visible form. At other times, it refers to an angel sent by God. When the angel of the Lord came to Hagar, the context makes it clear it was the Lord. (See Genesis 16:13.) The Bible makes it clear there are occasions when the "angel of the LORD" and the Lord have a conversation. Second Samuel

24:16 states, "And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite." In each Scripture where the "angel of the LORD" is mentioned, if the context does not definitely identify the person as the Lord, then it is an angel. In the prophecy of Zechariah, the "angel of the LORD" is an angel. Zechariah 1:12 states, "Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" The "angel of the LORD" symbolized God's presence and God's protection with His people. The Israelites will have God's presence with them as He protects and defends them.

God will destroy all the nations that fight against Israel. God promised He will "destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem" (Zech. 12:9). This will honor His commitment to the covenant He made with Abraham. Genesis 12:3 states, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." God will be the great shield of protection for His people of Israel.

The people of Israel will repent. God's grace comes to show sinners the need for repentance. The people of Israel at this time are still in unbelief. When God removes their spiritual blindness, they will realize that they are guilty of the blood of Jesus. "Repentance" is a change of mind, heart and attitude away from sin and toward God. Second Corinthians 7:9, 10 states, "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner,

that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." Their godly sorrow will result in true repentance.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 11:1-9. The seven spirits reveal that Jesus Christ the eternal God is totally equipped to do the Father's will. He will be an earthly King reigning in Jerusalem on the throne of David, His ancestor according to the flesh. He is called the righteous Branch. Jesus will judge and rule in righteousness. He will be able to defeat the wicked with the "breath of his lips" (Isa. 11:4). After Jesus has set up His kingdom in righteousness, the animal kingdom and the human race will be at peace.

Ezekiel 37:1-14, 21-25. Ezekiel's vision in the valley of dry bones places the Israelites in the land in unbelief. When the people of Israel turn to God, the nation will come to life as it never has before. God will "put my spirit in you, and ye shall live" (Ezek. 37:14). At that time, God will restore the divided kingdom into one ruled by one king. Israel will never choose to turn away from God to false worship any more. The Israelites will "be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 37:23). Jesus Christ will rule as the Son of David.

Daniel 9:27. The anti-Christ will at first seem to be the answer for the Middle East conflict and the savior the Jews have been seeking. He will make a seven year peace treaty with the Israelites. The people of Israel will be able to build the Temple during the Tribulation Period and return to offering their animal sacrifices. After three and one-half years, the anti-Christ will betray the Jews and break his covenant. He will stop the sac-

rifices and defile their Temple. The last three and one-half years of the Tribulation will be the consummation when God's cup of wrath will be poured out completely on the people of Israel, the desolate nation.

Romans 11:13-21. The people of Israel will be cast aside while God sends the gospel to the rest of the world. They will not be cast aside forever. This time period comes between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel. In this interval, the church age will last until the New Testament churches fail to serve their purpose in the world. Then God will turn back to Israel. He will prepare to spare a remnant of the people. Israel is the natural branch. When it turns to God in faith at the end of the Tribulation Period, God will finish His plans for Israel on this earth during the Millennium.

2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4. The anti-Christ will come on the world scene after a time of falling away. It will be a time of great spiritual ignorance. The anti-Christ will be identified as the "man of sin." He will be Satan's man to accomplish Satan's work. He is also called the "son of perdition." *Perdition* means "damnation, destruction or spiritual loss." The anti-Christ will achieve Satan's desire. (See Isaiah 14:13, 14.) He will try to take Christ's place by sitting "in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

Revelation 7:3-8. God will preserve a righteous remnant of Israel. The coming judgments would be so devastating that the people of Israel could be totally destroyed if God did not take steps to preserve some. God set aside twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, a total of one hundred forty-four thousand Jews. It may be noted that the twelve tribes are named differently at other references. Some believe there is

special significance to the tribe of Dan's being left off this list. It was the tribe that first went into idolatry. Some think the anti-Christ will be from the tribe of Dan. (See Daniel 11:37.)

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Israel's hope has always been God. The people of Israel face a terrible time called the "time of Jacob's trouble." Jeremiah 30:7, 8 states, "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him." The seventieth week of Daniel will be the seven year Tribulation Period. It will include an awful time of judgment and persecution for Israel. Matthew 24:21, 22 states, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Daniel referred to this time as a "time of trouble" (Dan. 12:1). Jesus Christ will come to the earth to fight for the people of Israel.

God promised to love the people of Israel forever. Jeremiah 31:3, 4 states, "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry." Although Israel's history leaves a trail of sins, rebellion, stubbornness, unbelief, false worship and disobedience, God will keep every promise He made concerning Israel.

The Bible student may be assured that all of God's promises will be kept at God's right time. Every child of God can depend on the Lord to honor His Word faithfully. In these last days, perilous times have come. Second Timothy 3:1 states, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." Perilous times must be faced by faith in God who always keeps His promises.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Jesus Christ will come back to this earth as He promised. Acts 1:11 states, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Each Jew who will repent and trust Jesus Christ will be saved. They will come to recognize Jesus as the true Messiah. He will fight for the Israelites. He will defeat their enemies. They will turn to God and worship the Lord Jesus. They will "look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son" (Zech. 12:10.) Finally, the Jews will understand that their Redeemer offered His own blood as the means of their salvation. Hebrews 9:13, 14 states, "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The people of Israel will exalt and worship Christ one day.

The Jews are not the only ones who are blind to the gospel of Christ. The sins of every person of every nation sent Jesus to the cross. Every person is represented by his sins at the cross of Christ. Jesus calls, draws and pleads with unbelievers to repent, trust Him and ask for God's salvation.