

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Master of Sacred Theology Thesis

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-1-1977

The Confirmation Manual for Instruction in the Word

Edward Koehler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/stm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Koehler, Edward, "The Confirmation Manual for Instruction in the Word" (1977). *Master of Sacred Theology Thesis*. 375.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/stm/375>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Sacred Theology Thesis by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

188757

A CONFIRMATION MANUAL FOR INSTRUCTION
IN THE WORD

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by
Edward John Koehler

May 1977

Approved by:

Kenneth H. Winkler
Advisor

Richard S. Hamm
Reader

4-28-2000
X

BV
4070
C69
M3
1977
no. 2

188757

| | | |
|---------|-----------------------|-----|
| IV | TABLE OF CONTENTS | 129 |
| V | LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | 134 |
| VI | INTRODUCTION | 137 |
| VII | RELATION IN GENERAL | 141 |
| VIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 145 |
| IX | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 149 |
| X | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 153 |
| XI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 157 |
| XII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 161 |
| XIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 165 |
| XIV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 169 |
| XV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 173 |
| XVI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 177 |
| XVII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 181 |
| XVIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 185 |
| XIX | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 189 |
| XX | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 193 |
| XXI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 197 |
| XXII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 201 |
| XXIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 205 |
| XXIV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 209 |
| XXV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 213 |
| XXVI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 217 |
| XXVII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 221 |
| XXVIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 225 |
| XXIX | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 229 |
| XXX | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 233 |
| XXXI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 237 |
| XXXII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 241 |
| XXXIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 245 |
| XXXIV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 249 |
| XXXV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 253 |
| XXXVI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 257 |
| XXXVII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 261 |
| XXXVIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 265 |
| XXXIX | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 269 |
| XL | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 273 |
| XLI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 277 |
| XLII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 281 |
| XLIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 285 |
| XLIV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 289 |
| XLV | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 293 |
| XLVI | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 297 |
| XLVII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 301 |
| XLVIII | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 305 |
| XLIX | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 309 |
| L | THE CRITICAL METHOD | 313 |

SHORT TITLE

A CONFIRMATION MANUAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS | vi |
| INTRODUCTION. | 1 |
| I. RELIGION IN GENERAL. | 11 |
| II. THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION | 17 |
| III. THE BIBLE. | 23 |
| IV. THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE BIBLICAL WORLD AND THE JORDAN RIVER SYSTEM. | 30 |
| V. GENESIS: THE CREATION. | 37 |
| VI. GENESIS: CAIN AND ABEL, NOAH AND THE TOWER OF BABEL | 43 |
| VII. GENESIS: ABRAHAM | 50 |
| VIII. GENESIS: ISAAC AND JACOB | 55 |
| IX. GENESIS: JOSEPH. | 62 |
| X. EXODUS: MOSES LEADS ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT. | 68 |
| XI. EXODUS: ISRAEL IS BLESSED WITH GOD'S LAW | 74 |
| XII. EXODUS AND LEVITICUS: THE LAW, SACRIFICES, AND THE TABERNACLE | 79 |
| XIII. NUMBERS: FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS | 86 |
| XIV. DEUTERONOMY: MOSES' LAST DAYS. | 92 |
| XV. JOSHUA: GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISE. | 97 |
| XVI. JUDGES: THE RESCUERS AND RASCALS OF ISRAEL | 103 |
| XVII. RUTH AND 1 SAMUEL: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA. | 108 |

CONCORDIA SEMINARY LIBRARY
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| XVIII. | 1 SAMUEL: DAVID, A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART. | 114 |
| XIX. | 2 SAMUEL: DAVID AND HIS GREATER SON. | 122 |
| XX. | KINGS AND CHRONICLES: THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL. | 129 |
| XXI. | KINGS AND CHRONICLES: THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH | 139 |
| XXII. | EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER: THE REMNANT OF GOD'S PEOPLE RETURN TO JERUSALEM. | 147 |
| XXIII. | JOB AND PSALMS: THE PATIENCE OF JOB AND THE BEAUTY OF THE PSALMS | 156 |
| XXIV. | PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, AND SONG OF SOLOMON: THE WISDOM, FEAR, AND LOVE OF GOD | 163 |
| XXV. | ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, AND LAMENTATIONS: WEEPING OVER THINGS PRESENT, REJOICING OVER THINGS TO COME. | 170 |
| XXVI. | EZEKIEL AND DANIEL: TWO PROPHETS IN EXILE. | 184 |
| XXVII. | HOSEA, JOEL, AMOS, AND OBADIAH: LOVE AND JUSTICE | 195 |
| XXVIII. | JONAH, MICAH, NAHUM, HABAKKUK, AND ZEPHANIAH: JUDGMENT AND MERCY. | 205 |
| XXIX. | HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, AND MALACHI: RETURN AND RESTORATION | 214 |
| XXX. | THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS | 221 |
| | | |
| | APPENDIX A: PROCEDURAL SUMMARY. | 236 |
| | APPENDIX B: OBJECTIVES OF CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTION. | 242 |
| | APPENDIX C: SUGGESTED CHAPTERS OF THE BIBLE | 244 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY. | 246 |

| | | |
|-----|--|-------|
| 114 | 1 SAMUEL: DAVID, A WISE AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART | XVIII |
| 115 | 2 SAMUEL: DAVID AND HIS GREATER SON | XIX |
| 119 | KINGS AND CHRONICLES: THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL | XX |
| 119 | KINGS AND CHRONICLES: THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH | XXI |
| 147 | ESTHER: ESTHER AND PARTS OF THE NARRATIVE OF GOD'S PEOPLE RETURN TO JERUSALEM | XXII |
| 156 | JOB AND PSALMS: THE NARRATIVE OF JOB AND THE BEAUTY OF THE PSALMS | XXIII |
| | PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, AND SONG OF SOLOMON | XXIV |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 170 | 1. The Ancient World | 32 |
| 184 | 2. The Land of Canaan. | 32 |
| 192 | 3. The Holy Land, East to West | 35 |
| 202 | 4. The Jordan River System, North to South | 35 |
| 208 | 5. The Tabernacle. | 84 |
| 214 | 6. The Twelve Tribes of Israel in the Wilderness | 88 |
| 231 | APPENDIX A: PROPHETIC SUMMARY | 92 |
| 241 | APPENDIX B: OBJECTIVES OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION | 97 |
| 244 | APPENDIX C: SUGGESTED CHAPTERS OF THE BIBLE | 101 |
| 248 | BIBLIOGRAPHY | 101 |

INTRODUCTION

This thesis contains a proposed course of instruction in the Word of God for catechumens of the Lutheran Church. It presents the Old Testament as a self-contained unit of study primarily for pupils twelve to fourteen years old. Ultimately, the course is designed to include the New Testament as the basis for a second year of study. The aim of the course is to help the student understand and apply the basic teachings of the Christian faith. The Bible is used as the source-book, and Martin Luther's Small Catechism is used as a supplement to guide the pupil toward a systematic understanding of what is studied in the Bible.

Each lesson draws attention to the unique character and purpose of the Bible along with that of its Author. In a general way the language, arrangement, and content of each Old Testament book will be covered with opportunities provided for discussion, application, and memorization. Of particular concern will be God's plan of salvation, His promises, and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The need for this kind of an approach arose only after teaching catechumens for a number of years in a congregational setting. Out of this practical experience came

the discovery that pupils spent an altogether disproportionate amount of time studying something about the Bible and that little time remained for actually getting into the Bible.

One authority of confirmation practice in the Lutheran Church has written: "The heart of confirmation lies in the instruction in the Word . . ."¹ This confirmation manual attempts to move the pupil into that Word. The student reads and studies the Word of God directly and not secondhand. The importance of this fact cannot be over-emphasized, particularly when there seems to be an increasing illiteracy with regard to the Word of God.

The real confirmation takes place in the confirmation of faith by the Word, for through the Word God continues to confirm the faith begun in Baptism and nurtured by the home and the church.²

Basically, the theme and interpretation of each Old Testament book will make up the individual chapters in this manual. It is assumed that the objectives of confirmation have been studied and understood.³ In essence the objectives point out that the instructor confirms no one. God does this by His Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

¹Arthur C. Repp, Confirmation in the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 177.

²Ibid.

³See Appendix B, "Objectives of Confirmation Instruction," pp. 242-3.

Therefore, in using the Word of God, this manual will stress the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as the appointed means of grace. Through these means the objectives are realized. Under the Word of God the life of the catechumen "grow[s] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."⁴ His attitudes and behavior are changed and shaped by God according to His will and plan.

Another part of this manual is the memorization of selected verses from the Bible. They will be drawn from the context of the book under study. In this way the scriptural verse will not be understood in isolation from its source. It will be less of a proof-text and more of an integral part of the living Word. Each lesson also contains those sections of the catechism considered relevant to the theme of the lesson. In this way the catechism underscores and supports what they have studied. Obviously there will be differing degrees of emphasis depending upon the views held by different teachers.

In preparing this confirmation manual every chapter of the Bible was thoroughly studied in order to discover the major themes and events of God's revelation. This effort was as exciting as it was rewarding, and it is to be hoped that

⁴2 Peter 3:18 (RSV). (RSV = Revised Standard Version) Unless otherwise indicated all quotations from the Bible will be taken from the Revised Standard Version.

the pupils will find this to be true in their own study. One of the early Patriarchs of the Church, John Chrysostom, is quoted as referring to the Scriptures in this way: ". . . they are not ordinary utterances, but the expression of the Holy Spirit Himself, . . . nothing in the sacred Scriptures is superfluous or insignificant . . ." ⁵

Jesus once said: "You search the scriptures [the Old Testament], because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39). These words were spoken to the debators and doubters of Jesus' day, and so they have meaning for today. In fact, people of all ages have searched for eternal life. However, that life cannot be found apart from Jesus Christ. The Scriptures bear witness to this truth. They point to Christ as the only Savior of the world.

Eternal life is not to be equated simply with a belief in the Bible. The Pharisees of Jesus' day tried that approach. They knew and treasured their Old Testament, and consequently assumed that eternal life belonged to them. Yet Jesus tells them that in turning away from Him they were turning away from eternal life. Thus it can be stated that God's Word without Christ, who is the Incarnate Word, reduces the Bible to a set of principles or morals and effectively seals off God's purpose in giving us His Word.

⁵Frederick W. Danker, Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study, 3d ed., sl. rev. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), p. 17.

The main emphasis of this manual centers on prophecy and fulfillment, promise and reality in Jesus Christ. While the words on a page in a book dare not become a replacement for Christ, a god all its own; neither should believing in Christ ever be taken as liberty or license to dismiss the words on a page in a book. They are, after all, the inspired Word of God. With this constantly in mind, and that Word as the source and norm of faith and life, this manual has been prepared.

It is to be hoped that the pupil who uses this manual will approach his studying and reading of the Bible with trust and confidence. In this way he will be confirmed in the faith begun in him by Baptism. Ultimately, his new and growing life in Christ will be strengthened through partaking of the Body of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

The Christian faith does not belong to the Lutheran Church. However, it is desirable in a Lutheran Church that pupils, nurtured under its wing, should develop a loyalty to the Lutheran emphasis and understanding of that faith. Coupled with this is the readiness on the part of such pupils to apply the Word of God to all of life, and that they be able both to examine themselves and to witness to their Lord.

This course of instruction is designed to allow for a minimum of thirty study sessions in one year. Each class session should last for approximately two hours. This

period of time also may be spread out over the course of a week. Final arrangements ought to be agreed upon by the pastor, parents, and pupils in consultation with one another. One year of study is required for the Old Testament, and another year for the New Testament. This structure makes it possible for a small congregation to combine both junior and senior levels into one class. It is suggested, however, that two teachers be involved, each one taking a separate class.

Normally, the Old Testament materials would be studied in the first year and the New Testament in the second year. Combining the two levels into one class means that every other year the entering juniors will be studying the New Testament materials first. For that reason, a suitable introduction to each year of study ought to be included so that the pupils may begin their course of instruction profitably in either the New or Old Testament.

The question may arise: "Is this instruction manual necessary?" It is a legitimate query, especially in view of the excellent materials provided by Concordia Publishing House and other sources. One of the most recent examples is the "Concordia Catechism Series," prepared by the Board of Parish Education of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Another fine effort is entitled Studies in Lutheran Doctrine,⁶ which explains the six chief parts of Luther's

⁶Paul F. Keller, Studies in Lutheran Doctrine

Small Catechism. The junior catechism Growing in Christ⁷ also makes use of a variety of methods in the teaching of God's Word. These catechisms attempt to involve the total life of the pupil as it is lived in the home and in the community. Various activities are suggested in order to provide a greater educational experience than merely sitting through a class session.

It is to be noted, however, that the majority of the materials provided by The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod have been published before 1960. That is one of the reasons why this confirmation manual has been prepared. It may be difficult to improve upon the multi-colored, graphic designs of existing catechetical helps, but each pastor and teacher finds it necessary to adapt to changing times. Materials become dated and revisions have to be made. In, addition, it often seems that no one particular workbook or manual can satisfy fully the needs both of the pupil and the teacher. This is an indication of the need for continuing improvement and growth in the field of confirmation instruction.

Another reason for preparing this manual can best be understood in the light of this statement:

(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960).

⁷Growing in Christ: An Exposition of Luther's Small Catechism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953).

. . . many catechism workbooks and tests have been produced either as independent helps or as aids to be used with an existing text. Filmstrips and other teaching aids have been welcomed by pastors, though the use sometimes made of these tools may leave much to be desired.

Unfortunately the number of books providing better theological content for the instruction have been few, though the educational helps themselves have often provided some fresh doctrinal insights.⁸

This manual aims at supplying theological content. It is true that while pedagogical techniques may vary from teacher to teacher the theological content remains basically the same. In other words, the message stays the same, but the method and application changes. For this reason, more attention is often given to techniques rather than to the content of the message. This manual, therefore, attempts to take a fresh look at the content of each book in the Old Testament. The doctrines derived from Scripture need to be seen in their context. Perhaps something has been overlooked in the assumption that it is difficult to make an improvement upon the theological content of existing confirmation manuals. It is hoped that through this investigation the message will be more thoroughly grounded in Scripture and therefore more immediate and memorable. The New Testament, of course, would also come alive and benefit under such scrutiny.

Obviously there will be weaknesses no matter which approach is used in communicating the Christian faith. In this case, while many theological and educational works have

⁸Repp, p. 152.

been studied, the approach is somewhat unique; unique in the sense that no one to my knowledge has used the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible as the basic outline for a confirmation manual. This thesis, then, will serve as a model in demonstrating the workability of such a plan. Succeeding with the Old Testament will make the more familiar books of the New Testament a much easier task.

Ordinarily, in many confirmation classes, only isolated incidents and stories from the Old Testament are studied. Under such conditions the Old Testament is in danger of becoming a closed book when it should be the foundation-stone for understanding the New Testament. In this thesis, the books of the Old Testament will be taken up for study, one by one, as they appear. Sometimes several books are combined into one lesson, while the lengthier and more important books are used as the basis for several lessons. Generally, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible will be used in this manual. The King James Version of the Bible will also be used if it can add something to the lesson in terms of greater clarity and beauty of expression, or simply because it more faithfully reproduces the meaning of the text.

The creative nature of this task makes it probable that certain theological interpretations and emphases will be given little attention or else overlooked entirely. This is not to deny their validity or importance. It simply

points out the limitations of one man working on what he sees to be the task. The views expressed will be documented wherever possible. However, since this is a manual for instruction in the Word, the Word of God in its intended sense will serve as the major source of each lesson.

Finally, it is imperative that the teacher select key chapters of each book of the Bible under study and assign them as reading material prior to each lesson. A list of suggested chapters for each lesson can be found in Appendix C of this thesis. The instructor may wish to alter or change the suggested list to suit his purposes. In any event, the Word of God remains the teacher's ultimate tool; or, more appropriately, the teacher is the Holy Spirit's tool with God's Word the common ground.

I. RELIGION IN GENERAL

Religion

There are many different religions in the world. If you look up the word "religion" in the dictionary you will discover that it has many meanings. It can be a belief in one God or many gods. Religion is also the practice of one's belief. It includes many different kinds of religious rites and ceremonies. Briefly, it is any system of faith and worship, which leads a person to obedience, reverence, and service.

All human beings are religious. They worship and serve something or someone. They may bow down to an idol made out of wood and stone, or they may worship and serve themselves. They may even worship an idol made out of steel, chrome, and plastic with wheels on it. Some religious people still worship their ancestors, or they may regard animals and volcanoes as sacred. Other religious people practice self-denial by forbidding themselves alcoholic drinks or certain foods. They may encourage the practice of punishing one's own body. They may require costly and painful sacrifices to prove their sincerity. They do all this in order to please their gods. Somehow they have come to the conclusion that their gods are angry with them, and that they will be punished if they do not behave in a certain way.

People get these ideas about God from what they feel inside themselves. This inner voice is sometimes called a conscience. Others describe it as a built-in system of values. These values or standards are taught by parents and society, sometimes without being aware that such teaching is taking place. For example, the tone of one's voice or the look on one's face can say a great deal without a word being spoken. The result is that people often feel guilty. They are also unhappy when they break the rules or fail to live up to certain standards and values. We say that they have violated or sinned against their conscience. Therefore, to satisfy the demands of conscience, all kinds of religious systems and ceremonies have been invented. They are supposed to help people get rid of their guilt and make them feel happy and good again.

Natural Religion

These religions have many names, but they are all of the same type. We shall call them "natural religions." It is natural for a person to think that he can please God and earn his way into favor with God. He wants to do something on his own to make himself right with God. He is driven to it because the law of God is written in his heart.⁹ People feel guilty when they do not follow that law. Therefore they want to do something to make it up to

⁹Rom. 2:15.

God and make God love them. However, doing a good deed may make them feel better, but it does not change their relationship with God. This change cannot be accomplished by "doing what comes naturally."

People who make up their own religion also make up their own rules. Sometimes these rules are very difficult and strict. The natural result is that people feel they have offended God. They also decide that if they do not do something to make it up to God they will be punished. The problem is that they never know if they have done enough to please God. In other words, they do not really know how to get right with God on His terms. That is why we need the revealed religion of the Bible. It tells us that there is nothing we can do to get right with God. Instead, the Bible points us to what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ.

People also get certain ideas about God from what they see around them. They gaze in wonder at the stars and study the effect that the sun and moon have upon the earth. They realize that the world and the universe around them could not have come into existence by accident. They see in nature the power of the atom and the elements. They may experience the force of a tornado or feel the ripping cataclysm of an earthquake. They may even watch in horrible fascination while a flood, irresistible in its progress, tears away at houses and landmarks, leaving debris and a

scarred earth in its wake. At other times they may experience the gentle rain, the warm sun, and cooling breezes. They become confused. Sometimes the God they see in nature is kind and at other times cruel.

With this in mind, it is easy to understand how superstition came to play a large part in man-made religions. The leaders of these religions invented a god for every power and activity in life. They had a god for farmers and hunters, a god for war and fertility, a god to protect them from lightning, and a god to shield them from disease. They prayed to these gods, worshiped, and served them. There were also priests and priestesses to enforce the rules of such religions and to govern all ceremonies and sacrifices. These religions made slaves of people. Their life was often a living nightmare. The outstanding characteristic of such religions was fear.

Revealed Religion

The revealed religion of the Bible tells us that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into this sinful world to put us right with God. It was something we could not do by ourselves. Those who followed a natural religion were in the habit of offering all kinds of costly sacrifices to please God. Sometimes they even sacrificed their own children. However, the revealed religion of the Bible tells us that there is nothing we can sacrifice or give up to make ourselves right with God. Instead, it tells us that God

sacrificed Himself for us in the person of Jesus Christ. He did what we could not do for ourselves. He did it because He loved us and did not want to see us perish in our sins.

The Bible reveals to us God's grace, that is, His undeserved kindness. It tells us that God became one of us in Jesus Christ. It tells us that He took our place under the curse and punishment of the law. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). In Him we know what God is like and how He feels about us. This religion had to be revealed to us because we could never have figured it out for ourselves.

Finally, compare the many gods of natural religion to the one God of revealed religion. The lessons to follow will help you make this comparison. They will show you that God wants to set people free from sin and fear. He wants people to be free from slavery to man-made gods and man-made religions. In His Son, Jesus Christ, there is now peace and harmony instead of chaos and confusion. Instead of a broken relationship with God there is a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Review Questions and Comments

1. Write out a short definition of religion.
2. "Let your conscience be your guide." Is this true?
3. All people have a natural knowledge of God. Where does this knowledge come from? To help you answer this question, look up the following verses in your Bible: Rom. 2:14-15; Ps. 19:1; and Acts 17:16-34.
4. Why is not a natural knowledge of God enough?
5. Where do we find the revealed knowledge and will of God?
6. Why cannot a person find out by himself how God feels about people? To help you on this question, look up 1 Cor. 2:9-10,14; Eph. 2:1; 4:1; and Acts 26:13-18.
7. Can you mention some modern-day idols that people worship and serve?
8. What are some sacrifices people make in their attempt to please God?
9. Revealed religion tells us that God did something to make us acceptable to Him. What is it?
10. Do you think that people who do not believe in anything will fall for everything?

Memory Work

1. Small Catechism,¹⁰ p. 39; questions 1-6.
2. Catechism, p. 46; question 24
3. Deut. 6:4-5
4. Ps. 118:8
5. Prov. 3:5-6

¹⁰A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943). The word Catechism will be used in all future references to this work.

II. THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

A Revealed Religion

The Christian religion is a revealed religion. The word "revealed" means to make something known that was not known before. For example, the world of nature and our conscience may tell us that there is a God, but it does not tell us who God is. This has to be revealed. If God did not tell us, we would never find out. Certainly, the wonder and power of God's plan of salvation is something man could never have invented.

In the last lesson we discovered that people get ideas about God from what they feel inside themselves, and from what they see in the world around them. All kinds of religions have been invented to give expression to these ideas. We call them "natural religions" because people were following their instincts and doing what comes naturally.

The Christian religion, however, did not come naturally. It has come from God. He has revealed Himself to us in the Bible. He tells us what He has done and what He is still doing. He teaches us how to live here on earth, and how to get where He is. In order that we might live with Him, He once came to live with us. He did more than just live here; He died here--on Calvary. His perfect life and

His suffering and death was for our sakes--for our sins. His coming back to life again from the dead promises life for those who, once dead in sin, now put their trust in Him. He means life for us now and forever. Of course, we are talking about Jesus Christ, God's own Son. The Christian religion takes its name from Him. He shows us God and fully reveals how God feels about us. He tells us that God is love. In fact, He is God!

A Revealed God

Jesus Christ was alive with the Father and the Spirit before He was born of Mary. He existed before the world began. He is without beginning and without end. There is a great deal of information about God in the Bible. Some of it we can understand, but there are also mysteries revealed there, which are beyond understanding. They can be known only by faith.

. . . Said a minister to a certain doubter, "Do you mean that you do not believe that the Trinity is taught in the Bible?" "I do not know about that," was the reply. "It may be in the Bible, but I know I cannot get it into my head." The minister pondered for a moment, and then asked him: "What is the size of your hat?" "Six and seven-eighths," said the skeptic; "why do you ask?" "I was wondering," responded the minister, "how you expect to get Almighty God into six and seven-eighths."¹¹

There is only one God. "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am

¹¹Oswald Riess, "Instructor's Manual: What Does the Bible Say?" Part I, Detroit, 1945, p. 16. (Mimeographed)

the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god'" (Is. 44:6). The first commandment tells us: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). In fact, the Bible begins with the words: "In the beginning God. . ." (Gen. 1:1). The Bible does not try to prove the existence of God. It simply tells us that God is. He always was and He always will be God. Some may insist that there is no God, but such a statement does not prove anything. It does not make God go away or disappear. Instead it makes this judgment necessary: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, . . ." (Ps. 14:1).

God tells us that He is our Father. He wants us to be a part of His family, but when sin entered the world it separated man from God. However, sin did not put an end to His care for us. In fact, the Father loved us so much that He sent His Son into a rebellious and disobedient world to be its Savior. He created us, and now in Jesus Christ we have been recreated. The blessings of Christ's redemption are given to us in Baptism, and we become part of His family again. The power of the Holy Spirit keeps us in His family. The Holy Spirit, who is also God, proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26). He sanctifies us, that is, He makes us holy by bringing us to faith in Christ and keeping us in that faith.

The Trinity

The Bible clearly teaches that the Father is God; that Jesus Christ is God; and that the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there is only one God. To describe this mystery of three-in-one, we say that He is the Triune God. The sun in the sky can serve as an illustration of this truth. The sun has form and mass, but it also produces heat and light. Someone may say that the sun is huge. Another person may describe the sun as very bright, and still another may say that it is hot. All three people are telling the truth. They are all describing that one single ball of fire in our sky. In a similar way, we say that there is only one God, and yet there are three Persons in God. Each Person is God, and yet there are not three gods, but one God. We confess this important truth every Sunday in the creed.

You will be given an opportunity to "search the scriptures" in order to discover more about God in the exercise that follows this lesson. However, we need more than knowledge about God. We need to know God as a living reality in our lives and put our trust in Him. In order to believe in God as our Father who sent Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin and death, we need the Holy Spirit. Then, as the catechism tells us, we shall fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

We fear God above all things when with our whole heart we revere Him as the highest Being, honor Him with our lives, and avoid what displeases Him.

We love God above all things when with our whole heart we cling to Him as to our God and gladly devote our lives to His service.

We trust in God above all things when with our whole heart we commit our lives to His keeping and rely upon Him for help in every need.¹²

Review Questions and Comments

1. What does the word "revealed" mean?
2. Why is the Christian religion a revealed religion?
3. Nature and conscience can tell us that there is a God, but what are they unable to tell us?
4. Has God told us everything about Himself in the Bible?
5. Read John 4:7-26 in your Bible, and put down a description of God in one word.
6. In the following exercise, look up the Old Testament references and put down a word or phrase that describes God. There may be several words to describe God in the passages given, but pick the best one. For example, 2 Peter 3:8 tells us that ". . . with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Here you may describe God as "timeless" or "eternal."
 - a. Ex. 3:14
 - b. Deut. 32:1-4
 - c. 1 Kings 8:27
 - d. Ps. 90:1-2
 - e. Ps. 115:1-9
 - f. Prov. 15:3
 - g. Is. 6:3
 - h. Is. 44:6
 - i. Is. 55:6-11
 - j. Mal. 3:6

¹²Catechism, pp. 52-53.

Memory Work

1. Gen. 17:1b
2. 1 John 4:8
3. John 3:16
4. Ps. 145:8-9
5. Catechism, p. 5, "The First Commandment"
6. Catechism, pp. 47-49; questions 25-26
7. Catechism, pp. 50-51; questions 28-29

III. THE BIBLE

The Holy Bible

The Bible is God's Word. We call it "holy" because it comes from God. He chose the men He wanted, and through them He revealed His will. He did not do this all at once, but over a period of approximately sixteen hundred years. The first man God chose was Moses. He wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. The last man God chose was the disciple John. He wrote the book of Revelation around the year A.D. 100. Altogether God chose about forty different men to write the sixty-six books we call "The Holy Bible."

A Testament (Covenant) is Like an Agreement

The Bible has two "testaments." We may also call them "covenants" or "agreements." However, God's agreement with people is not like the ordinary agreements people make with each other. God does not come half way or offer only half a blessing while we supply the other half. He comes all the way with all the blessings and gifts of His grace that we need to keep the agreement.

The Old Testament is called "old" not only because it was written before Christ came, but also because it contains a special agreement and promise that God made with His people Israel. The New Testament is called "new" not only

because it was written after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also because it contains the new agreement and fulfilled promises that God intends for all people.

Animals were once used as sacrifices for sin. However, the blood of animals, like lambs and goats, would be shed no longer. That was part of the Old Testament. Instead, the New Testament is signed and sealed in the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. He sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world. Every time people attend Holy Communion they remember Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."¹³

We are going to study carefully both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. God gave us the Bible in order that we might come to know Him and the salvation He has prepared for us in Christ. He does not want anyone to perish everlastingly. "[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Hearing, reading, and studying God's Word can produce and strengthen faith. "Belief, you see, can only come from hearing the message, and the message is the word of Christ."¹⁴

¹³Luke 22:20 (KJV). (KJV = King James Version.)

¹⁴Rom. 10:17 (Phillips). (Phillips = A Modern Paraphrase of the New Testament)

The apostle Paul tells us that the message of the Gospel of Christ "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16, KJV).

Jesus Christ is the Central, Unifying
Force of the Bible

The heart and center of both the Old and New Testaments is Jesus Christ. If you do not find Him there, you have missed the whole point and purpose of God in giving us the Bible. Martin Luther describes the Old Testament in this manner: "Here you will find the swaddling-clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, . . . Simple and little are the swaddling-clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, that lies in them"¹⁵ The Old Testament has also been called "the cradle of Christ."

The promise of Christ's coming goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. In fact, over three hundred promises of a Savior can be found in the books of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi. You cannot read Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22, for example, without realizing that it describes the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Keep in mind, also, that these things were written centuries before they happened.

The Old Testament sets the stage for Christ's appearance. Like a jigsaw puzzle, all the pieces gradually

¹⁵Martin Luther, Works of Martin Luther, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1932), 6:368.

fall into place. With Christ born in Bethlehem, suddenly, all of the puzzle is complete. The plan of God for our salvation is fully revealed in Christ. He unites the whole Bible and makes it one Book. This should not be surprising, because the Bible really has only one Author--God. It is an exciting story to learn how the Bible was finally put together and how it has been preserved for us even to this day.

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. It looks like this: . . . $\text{בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ}$. It means from right to left: "In the beginning God created . . ." The New Testament was written in the Greek language. It looks like this: $\text{Ἀμήν, ἔρχου Κύριε Ἰησοῦ}$. These words are found in the last chapter of the Bible and they mean: "Amen, come Lord Jesus."

Today the Bible has been translated into well over one thousand languages. In the English language there are many different versions, such as the King James Version (1611); the Revised Standard Version (1952); the New English Bible (1961); and Good News for Modern Man (1966). There is also a translation of the Bible produced by William F. Beck, of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, entitled: The Holy Bible--An American Translation (1975).

How We Are to Approach the Bible

The early manuscripts that make up our Bible did not have chapter or verse divisions. These were added later so that it would be easier for people to read and study the Bible. For example, if we want to find two important verses, which tell us about the Bible's origin, turn to 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. Such references tell us the name of the book, the chapter, and the verse. It saves time, and everyone can read it together.

Now, let us find out what the verses say. The former verse tells us that "All scripture is inspired by God. . . ." The latter reference explains that "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." That is why we approach the Bible with reverence and special respect. God is speaking to us, and we dare not take His Word lightly. In faith and with devotion, read and study your Bible. In this way the Spirit of God will strengthen your faith and open your heart and understanding.

God used certain men as His instruments to write down the very words He wanted recorded. God did not ignore each man's human personality and style of writing. He simply led them by His Holy Spirit so that the words they wrote were free from error. Of course, some people delight in finding contradictions or supposed errors in the Bible.

How different their approach would be if they understood more about the Bible and how it came to us.

There are problems, to be sure, but the reasons for finding fault with the Bible often rests with people themselves. For example, the story is told of a student of astronomy who once came to his professor telling him that he had found a new spot on the sun. The professor then pointed out to the student that it was only a speck of dust on the lens of the telescope. In other words, the kind of tools we use in searching the Scriptures can lead us astray just as easily as a lack of trust in the God who gave us the Scriptures.

It is true that there are many things in the Bible difficult to understand. This should not discourage us from reading it. Rather, we ought to be encouraged to continue studying the Scriptures because of God's promise to us. The Holy Spirit will lead us to the truth, and guide us to newer and higher levels of spiritual understanding and maturity. The important things we need to know and believe in order to be saved and live as a thankful child of God are plainly written. They are easy to understand, even for a child. Paul told the young man, Timothy, that "from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15, KJV).

Review Questions and Comments

1. The word "Bible" means "book." It is one book, containing a library of books. How many books are there in the Old Testament? How many books are there in the New Testament? How many altogether?
2. Approximately, how many men did God choose to put His Word into writing? How many years did it take to write the Bible? What languages were used in the writing of the Bible?
3. Why is the Old Testament called old?
4. Why is the New Testament called new?
5. Who or what is the heart and center of the Bible?
6. What purpose did God have in giving us the Bible?
7. If the Bible is easy to understand, how come everyone is not a Christian?

Memory Work

1. Catechism, pp. 40-42; questions 7-13
2. Ps. 119:105
3. John 20:31

IV. THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE BIBLICAL WORLD AND THE JORDAN RIVER SYSTEM

Geography

The geography of the Holy Land is important to the student of the Bible because it was the land of God's chosen people Israel. The great men and women of God lived and loved, labored and died in this land. Our Savior spent His earthly life in this land. The disciples of Jesus began their ministry in this land, and the Church was born in this land.

The land of Israel was originally called the Land of Canaan. We are told in Genesis that Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran. From there, God called him to the Land of Canaan, and promised to give the land to him and his descendents.

Israel lies on the same latitude as Florida or Southern California. The land was a highway between the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was the battle ground of the ancient empire builders, and to this day threatens to be the battle ground of world powers.

The Holy Land is approximately 160 miles long and 60 miles wide. The Israelites were accustomed to saying that their land stretched from "Dan to Beersheba." It is a very small country, containing 10,000 square miles.

That means it is less than the size of Switzerland and 2,000 square miles smaller than Vancouver Island. Nova Scotia is twice as large, and Newfoundland is four times as large as Israel. Speaking from personal experience, travelling in Israel today is unlike anything you can experience in the United States or Canada. Around every corner you seem to run into history. In the hill country of Judea, covering sixty miles by rent-a-car can take you as long as three hours.

The Bible described this country as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). Jerusalem is the center of Israel's life, past and present. It is on a latitude similar to that of Dallas, Texas. So great was Israel's love for Jerusalem and their homeland that the Psalmist wrote: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5-6). Such a strong sentiment has both ancient and modern significance. For example, the new State of Israel was formed in 1948, inspiring renewed interest in the land and its capital city of Jerusalem.

As we begin studying the events that take place in the Bible we will be referring to certain countries, cities, rivers, and towns. The following maps will prove helpful in locating these areas.

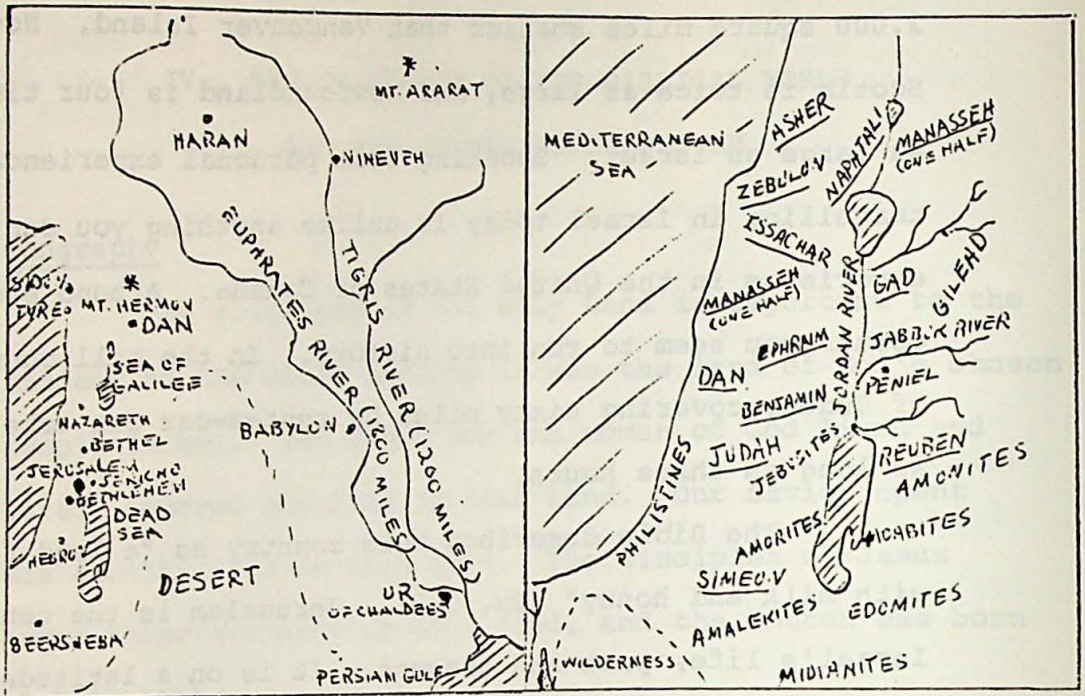


Fig. 1. The Ancient World

Fig. 2. The Land of Canaan

The Jordan River System

The Jordan River is small in comparison with the 1,800 mile length of the Euphrates River, and the 4,000 mile length of the Nile River. If the Jordan River ran a straight course its distance would amount to 85 miles, but it twists back and forth so often that it actually covers about 200 miles by the time it empties into the Dead Sea.

There is no other river which throughout the greater part of its course runs below sea level. Its most northerly source is about 1,700 feet above sea level. . . . The name Jordan signifies "descender." . . . In its comparatively short course the Jordan plunges over 27 major rapids and drops a total of 3,000 feet, passes through

two lakes and disappears in a third. It is from 80 to 180 feet wide and from 3 to 12 feet deep, but may reach a width of 500 feet in its lower course during flood stage.¹⁶

Snow-capped Mount Hermon feeds the Jordan by the Waters of Merom. In Joshua 11:5-7, we are told that Joshua defeated the Kings of Canaan by the Waters of Merom. You can see Mount Hermon from the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee. Having heard of the Sea of Galilee since childhood, you can imagine the excitement this writer felt in seeing that scene stretched out before his eyes. Like the Jordan River in which Jesus was baptized, the Sea of Galilee is associated with many biblical events. There Peter and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were in the business of catching fish. Jesus grew up nearby, in Nazareth. Later in his life, Jesus lived in Capernaum, situated on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

There are still many varieties of fish in the Sea of Galilee. In fact, modern methods make it possible to catch fish there by night and by day. Surrounding the Sea of Galilee are high cliffs, the most famous being the Golan Heights. In the winter, which is a rainy season, sudden and violent storms are common because of the cooler air sweeping down upon the warm waters of the Sea of Galilee. Several times experienced fishermen like Peter and John were caught

¹⁶Alfred M. Rehwinkel, "New Testament World," 3d rev. ed., 3 vols., St. Louis, 1950, 1:38. (Mimeographed)

in these sudden storms. On one occasion Jesus was on board, and we are told that He lifted up His voice and calmed the winds and the sea (Mark 4:39).

The Sea of Galilee also has been called the Sea of Chinnereth or Kinneret, a word meaning "harp." The Sea of Galilee is shaped like a harp. It also is referred to in the Bible as the Sea of Tiberius, after a ruling Roman Caesar. No matter what name is used, it is a place so beautiful that an old tradition speaks of God creating this spot last, using all of His experience to make it particularly beautiful. Even Jesus, after His resurrection, returned to the Sea of Galilee for a final visit before His Ascension into heaven.

The Dead Sea area is surrounded by mountains. On the eastern shore are the purple-looking Mountains of Moab. From such heights Moses was able to view the Promised Land before his death. To the west are the cliffs where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. Nearby is an oasis called En-Gedi where David hid in a cave from King Saul. Then there is Masada. Masada is a fortress-like mountain near the Negev desert in the midst of the wilderness hills. It rises abruptly 1,500 feet into the air. King Herod built a city on top of Masada, complete with palaces and an extensive water supply system. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it became the final defensive position of the Jews against Rome. The famous

Tenth Roman Legion under Flavius Silva eventually conquered Masada, but discovered that the last 960 defenders had committed suicide. They preferred to die as free men rather than to live as slaves.

The Dead Sea has no outlet, and is so salty that fish cannot live in its waters. Swimmers literally float on its surface. In fact, this writer was unable to sink even with heavy rocks in his hands. It is estimated that every day 6,000,000 tons of water evaporate from the Dead Sea, creating an oppressively hot and humid atmosphere. Sodom and Gomorrah were once situated on the southern shore of the Dead Sea. In order to gain a perspective of the Holy Land, the following maps will show the chief geographical characteristics of the land along with the size of its mountains and lakes.

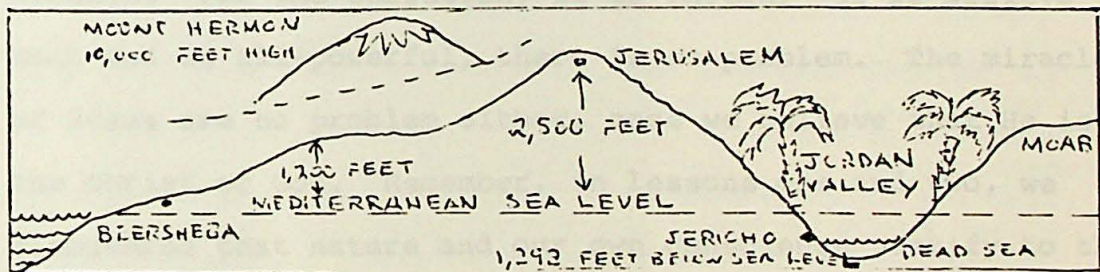


Fig. 3. The Holy Land, East to West

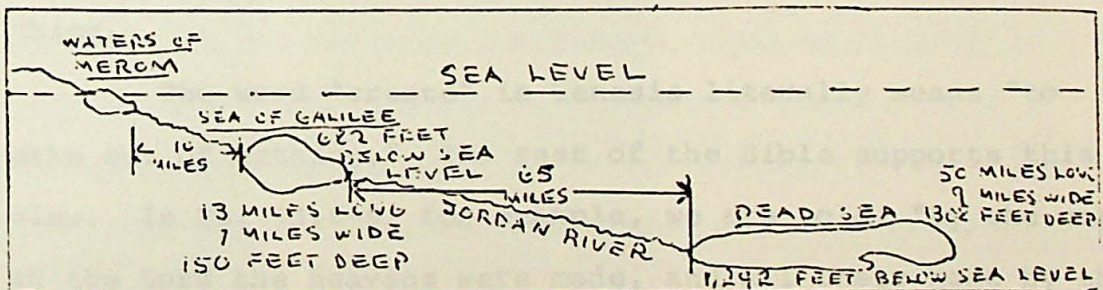


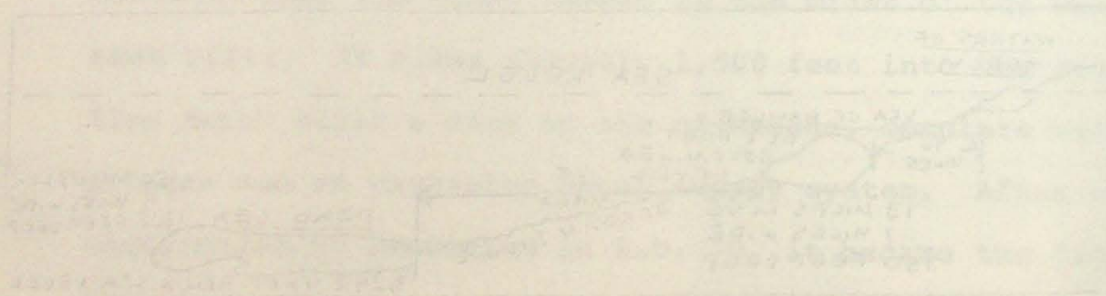
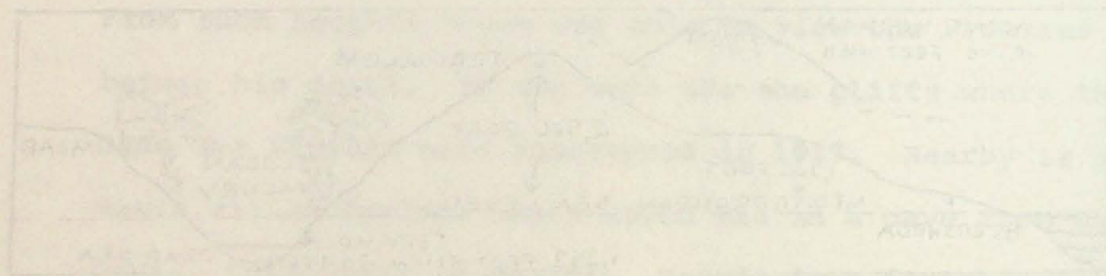
Fig. 4. The Jordan River System, North to South

Review Questions and Comments

1. Why is it important to know something about the geography of the Holy Land?
2. Describe some of the important events in the Bible that are associated with the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, and the Dead Sea.

Memory Work

1. Ps. 139:14
2. Catechism, pp. 90-91, "The First Article"



V. GENESIS: THE CREATION

Creation

The word "Genesis" means "coming into being, beginning, origin." In the book of Genesis we have the history of the beginning of the world and its people. Genesis tells us that God made the universe. God describes His work of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis. We would like to know more, but this is all He has told us.

Entire books can be written to describe a new invention or the step by step procedure in some kind of construction project. However, God only uses about eight hundred words to describe the entire process of creation in Genesis. For the Christian, it is enough. If we believe that God is all-powerful, there is no problem. The miracles of Jesus are no problem either, once we believe that He is the Christ of God. Remember, in lessons one and two, we discovered that nature and our own conscience testify to the power of God and His wisdom as the Creator of every living thing.

The word "create" in Genesis literally means "to make out of nothing." The rest of the Bible supports this view. In Ps. 33:6-9, for example, we are told: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be;

he commanded, and it stood forth." This is similar to what Genesis tells us: "And God said, . . . And it was so" (Gen. 1:9). The New Testament explains: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3, KJV).

Theory of Evolution

Evolution tells us that all things have evolved or developed over many millions of years according to natural laws. This leaves God out of the picture, and is therefore unacceptable. There are many different theories of evolution, but they are just that--theories. Some of them deal with the subject of changes occurring within a certain species over many thousands of years. Changes do occur, within a species, but one species does not change into another species. God made everything "after its kind" (Gen. 1:21).

Evolution also calls for limitless change so that one-celled organisms can eventually become complex creatures. Obviously, these evolutionists begin with the idea that there is no God. Therefore, they must find some explanation for man's presence in the universe, even if they have to make a good guess at it. Evidence has been deliberately manufactured in some cases, such as the one dealing with Piltown Man.

The magnificent variety and beauty in nature gives testimony to God as Creator. All that He has made points out to us the wisdom and the glory of God.

The bodies of animals often show evidences that support creation and tend to disprove evolution. The eye of an octopus and the eye of man are very similar; yet no one suggests that any close ancestral relationship exists between the two. That such similar organs could have developed by chance in completely different animal kinds is absurd.¹⁷

It has been suggested that evolution is a fairytale for adults.

The Christian should be careful not to say more than the Bible itself says. He also should be prepared never to say less. In a sermon on Genesis, Martin Luther states:

I have often said that whoever would study Holy Scripture should be sure to see to it that he stays with the simple words as long as he can and by no means depart from them unless an article of faith compels him to understand them differently. For of this we must be certain: no simpler speech has been heard on earth than what God has spoken.

Therefore when Moses writes that God created heaven and earth and whatever is in them in six days, then let this remain six days, and do not venture to devise any comment that six days were one day. But if you cannot understand how this could have been done in six days, then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are. For you should deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind that God Himself is saying what is recorded. But since God is speaking, it is not fitting for you wantonly to turn His Word in the direction you wish to go.¹⁸

¹⁷Harold G. Coffin, "Evolution or Creation?" Liberty, September-October 1975, p. 13.

¹⁸Ewald M. Plass, ed., What Luther Says: An Anthology, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1:93-94.

Man in the Image of God

Do not be in doubt about these truths: God created the universe, and God created man. God knows, because God was the only One there at the time. Adam and Eve were real people, made in the image of God.

Matthew Henry, in writing of Eve's creation, says:

. . . the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.¹⁹

Adam and Eve were not cave people, mentally and morally inferior to modern man. They were once perfect in all respects, in knowledge as well as in holiness. It has been said that if Adam and Eve were to walk into our modern world we would look upon them as gods. According to evolution man has been getting better and better, ascending in an ever-upward spiral. The facts seem to indicate that ever since sin came into the world man has been descending morally and spiritually. The progress of our modern era has been in the fields of exploration, invention, and technology rather than in the realm of the spirit. Horoscope readings and astrology charts are a retreat into superstition. Perhaps these things indicate the tremendous hunger people have for spiritual reality. The image of God, however, cannot be restored to us apart from Christ.

¹⁹Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the

As you read Genesis, notice how closely the great men of faith walked with God and how much they trusted in Him. This is the proper relationship of man to God. He is our Father. He made us and continues to provide all that is needed for the preservation of life. He does this not because we are worthy or deserving of it, but because He is our Father and knows that we are dependent on Him, whether we realize it or not. Trusting in Him, let us daily thank Him with our hands and hearts, our lips and lives.

Review Questions and Comments

1. What does the word "create" mean, and how are we to understand it?
2. Read Genesis 1-3 and list the blessings and powers God gave man.
3. Is there any difference between you and an animal?
4. Man was made in the image of God. Does this mean that man looked like God? What does the catechism say about the image of God?
5. Be ready to discuss the question of creation and evolution.
6. What happened when sin came into the world?
7. Do we still hide from God today?
8. What is meant by the words: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19)?
9. Read Genesis 3:15 and be prepared to describe the persons mentioned in this verse, particularly the phrase that refers to the woman's seed.

Memory Work

1. Catechism, pp. 86-89; questions 91-99
2. Catechism, pp. 96-97; questions 112-15
3. Rom. 5:12
4. 1 Cor. 15:21-22

WHOLE BIBLE

Whole Bible, 6 vols., (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907, 1920).

VI. GENESIS: CAIN AND ABEL, NOAH
AND THE TOWER OF BABEL

Cain and Abel

Adam and Eve no longer possessed the image of God. The Bible tells us that their children were now born in the likeness of Adam. Sin had entered God's perfect world, and the results of sin can be seen in Cain, Adam's first son. Cain may have been considered by his parents to be "the seed of the woman" who would crush Satan and his work in man and in the world. Instead, Cain becomes Satan's tool. Notice how his jealousy turned to anger, anger to hatred, and hatred to murder. God had warned him that sin was crouching like a tiger on his doorstep, ready to spring (Gen. 4:7). He was to overcome that tiger-like quality of sin and master it. He failed, but he has a lot of company.

Cain also refused to take responsibility for his actions. When questioned, he said he did not know where his brother was. Then, like Adam and Eve who tried to excuse themselves, he said innocently: "Am I my brother's keeper" (Gen. 4:9)? Jesus answered this question for us in Luke 10:29-37. A well-known hymn tells us: "Abel's blood

for vengeance pleaded to the skies; but the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries."²⁰

Cain fled from the presence of the Lord toward the East. People often wonder where Cain found a wife. Obviously, if Eve was "the mother of all living," or "the mother of every father's family" (Gen. 3:20), then Cain married one of the daughters of Eve. There is a tradition that says Adam and Eve had thirty-three sons and twenty-seven daughters. No one can be sure. All that Gen. 5:4 tells us is that after their third son, Seth, was born, they had "sons and daughters." Many of them, like Cain, became wanderers and fugitives in the earth (Gen. 4:14). In listing family trees, notice that only the important male descendents are reported and very few women. There are exceptions, as we shall see, because Christ was to be born of "the seed of the woman."

Adam lived 930 years. By the time he died, no doubt there were many thousands of people on the earth. The long life Adam enjoyed was the result of God's will. Some people feel that disease-bearing germs may have been slow to catch up with man. Others believe that sin may not have worked its full power over man and the earth for many centuries. In Gen. 6:3 we are told that God limited man's life to a

²⁰"Glory Be to Jesus," The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 158, v. 3.

shorter period of time. In David's day, the average life-span was three score and ten, that is, seventy years.

Noah

With an increase in the earth's population came the increase of man's wickedness. Here again we see the true result of Adam's disobedience. It affected everyone. Gen. 6:5 tells us: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Therefore God decided to bring a flood upon the earth and destroy what He had made, but "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8, KJV). Noah was a just and good man. He walked with God, like Enoch before him. In Gen. 5:24 we are told that Enoch was taken to be with God without experiencing death as we know it.

Noah, his wife, three sons, and their wives were to be spared from the flood. The destruction worked by the flood belongs to many histories of ancient peoples. Even the American Indians told tales of a world-wide flood. Archeological findings also point out the possibility that a great flood once covered the earth. We are told in Gen. 7:11 that "all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of heaven were opened." Experts tell us that the earth's surface is three-tenths land and seven-tenths water. The average depth of the ocean is twelve

thousand feet. It is estimated that if the seas ever overflowed the continental ridges, the earth would be covered by at least one and a half miles of water.

Facts and statistics, of course, can be used to suit almost any purpose. We are not trying to prove the flood. We simply point out that it happened, and that Jesus considered Noah and the flood to be historical (Matt. 24:37-39). The most important statement in the Bible is not that the flood covered the earth, nor that a great fish prepared by God swallowed Jonah, but that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The whole Bible was written to bring us to know and to believe this truth. Without this truth, the Bible means very little. You may know everything else and believe everything else, but without Christ and faith in Him, you have missed the main purpose of the Bible. After all, Jesus died and rose again to conquer the sin and death that Adam brought into the world. Adam disobeyed. Jesus obeyed. Sin overcame Adam. Jesus overcame sin. In Adam we die. In Christ we live. In Adam paradise was lost. In Christ paradise was regained.

The Tower of Babel

Human pride and the spirit of rebellion against God prompted the building of the tower of Babel after the flood. Their stated purpose was to "make a name for ourselves" (Gen. 11:4). Here again we see what sin has done to man.

We call it "original" or "inherited" sin. The Bible tells us that "every imagination of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Man's thoughts and desires are wrong at their source. Basically, sin is not simply this wrong action or that evil thought. It is me, totally and completely me, in my nature. Insofar as the things of God are concerned, man is totally corrupt and depraved. He has been born that way. Parents notice the symptoms of inherited sin even in their apparently innocent children. From a very early age children can be selfish, disobedient, stubborn, and angry. Notice also that a child does not have to be taught to do evil. He learns that all by himself.

No one can bring peace to a world full of hatred, violence, and war simply by political and economic action nor through education. A basic change has to take place within the individual, and that change God alone can accomplish. Some people feel that if only God would get rid of the devil, then there would be peace, harmony, and happiness. However, to get rid of all evil you would have to eliminate not only the devil but also every man, woman, and child. God almost did it that way once by a flood. He promised not to do it that way again. Instead He sent a man, His own Son, into the world to destroy the root and source of sin. Now, by believing in Jesus Christ who is

both God and man, there is forgiveness for sin, power to overcome sin, and freedom from the curse of sin.

In the next lesson you will discover that Abraham, though he lived two thousand years before Christ, believed in Him. This faith in the promised Messiah meant Abraham's salvation. It is also our salvation to believe in Him and His suffering, death, and resurrection on our behalf. Believing in Christ two thousand years before He was born is not any different than believing in Him two thousand years after He was born. They both require faith.

Review Questions and Comments

1. Read Genesis 4-11 and explain the elements that each of the events recorded have in common.
2. Why was Abel's sacrifice acceptable to God? Check also Hebrews 11:1-4 and 1 John 3:11-12.
3. What were God's feelings toward man at the time of Noah?
4. Do you think that an awareness of the difference between good and evil is a problem in our day?
5. If a cubit is eighteen inches, give the measurements of the ark?
6. How many pairs of animals and birds that could be used for food were taken into the ark?
7. God made a covenant with Noah. He has also made a covenant with us in Baptism. Can you mention some similarities between our baptism and the flood?
8. The building of the tower of Babel was an example of human pride and rebellion. Can you see these things operating in our world? in yourself? What is the solution?

Memory Work

1. Catechism, p. 67, "The Fifth Commandment"
2. Catechism, p. 178, "The Significance of Baptizing with Water"
3. Gen. 8:21b
4. 1 John 3:15

VII. GENESIS: ABRAHAM

The Promise of a Messiah

The promise recorded in Gen. 3:15 was taken out of paradise by our first parents. The promise was handed down through the descendents of Seth, Adam's third son. This promise was their comfort and strength in the troubles that came upon them. It was said of Noah, the son of Lamech, that he "shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands" (Gen. 5:29, KJV). The name Noah means "comforter." This word has special meaning, particularly when we think of the coming Christ and of the Holy Spirit. After the great flood, Noah's son, Shem, carried on the promise of a Messiah. Now we come to Abraham. It is significant to note that about two thousand years of human history have passed.

The Promise to Abraham

Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees, and later in Haran.²¹ Very few people knew the true God. The lesson of the flood had been forgotten. In fact, Joshua 24:2 tells us that "Terah, the father of Abraham . . . served other gods." God wanted Abraham to leave his home. In Gen. 12:1, God

²¹See map on "The Ancient World," p. 32.

tells Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Abraham obeyed God and, in faith, left everything to go into a strange land. God led him to the Promised Land, the Land of Canaan. The four great promises that God gave Abraham are repeated over and over again in Genesis. In essence, they are: (1) Abraham would have many descendants and great blessings; (2) these descendants would own the land in which Abraham lived as a stranger; (3) through Abraham and his descendants God would bless the world; and (4) one of Abraham's descendants would be a special blessing for the whole world. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul makes this very clear: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16, KJV).

These four promises were made when Abraham did not have any children. At such a time God told Abraham: "'Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned [counted] it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:5-6). The New Testament also tells us the same thing. It was Abraham's faith and not his works, many and great though they were, that saved him. The name Abraham means "father of a great multitude or many nations." His name used to be Abram

until God changed it (Gen. 17:5). God also changed his wife's name. He said: "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her" (Gen. 17:15-16).

The Test of Abraham's Faith

When God promised Abraham a son, he laughed with rejoicing (Gen. 17:17), but Sarah laughed with doubt (Gen. 18:12). She was ninety years old and her husband one hundred years old, but it happened just as God had said. The visiting angels said to Sarah: "Is anything too hard for the Lord" (Gen. 18:14)? When the child was born, his name was called Isaac, which means "laughter."

The most difficult moment in Abraham's life must have been when God tested his faith. He was to take his only son, the son whom he loved with all his heart, and slay him. If such a thing was carried out, how could Abraham have "many descendents?" Nevertheless, his father tied Isaac up and placed him on an altar, and not once are we told that he protested his father's actions. Abraham's heart must have ached with grief, but as much as Abraham loved his son, he loved God even more. He obeyed God. What a tremendous example of faith for all time and for all people. Abraham obeyed God believing that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19, KJV). Someway, somehow

God would keep His promise and give Abraham many descendants. They would be as many in number as the stars of heaven and the sand upon the seashore. Thus, just as Abraham was about to carry out God's command and slay Isaac, an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven saying: "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen. 22: 12).

Review Questions and Comments

1. Where did Abraham live before he came to Canaan?
2. How old was Abraham when he left for Canaan?
3. List the four promises God made to Abraham.
4. In the fourth promise we have something of special importance. What is it that God promised?
5. What saved Abraham according to Gen. 15:6 and Gal. 3: 6-9?
6. What did God command Abraham to do as a token of the covenant?
7. Why did Abraham and his nephew, Lot, separate?
8. In Genesis 14 we see Abraham as (a) a herdsman, (b) a warrior, or (c) a king.
9. How would you describe Abraham's attitude in Gen. 14:23?
10. Under what conditions was God willing to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah?
11. How many times did Abraham pray to God for the welfare of Sodom and Gomorrah? Does this say anything to you about your country?
12. Why was Isaac precious to Abraham and Sarah?

- 13. Someone else's only son was going to be sacrificed in the same place where Abraham went to slay Isaac. What was the name of this person?

Memory Work

- 1. Memorize the four promises that God gave to Abraham.
- 2. Gen. 22:18
- 3. Gal. 3:9
- 4. Gal. 3:29
- 5. Catechism, p. 81, "The Close of the Commandments"

611 10000 1111111111

VIII. GENESIS: ISAAC AND JACOB

Isaac Marries Rebekah

Sarah was dead and Abraham was old. Their son, Isaac, was to carry on the family line from which would come the Messiah. Abraham, therefore, did not want his son to marry a Canaanite woman because of their false gods. In those days parents arranged for the marriage of their children. Abraham sent his servant on a journey to the land of his forefathers to find a wife for Isaac. Isaac stayed at home even though he was forty years old at the time. God led the servant to choose Rebekah. The Bible says that she "was very fair to look upon" (Gen. 24:16). She was willing to accept marriage with Isaac, sight unseen.

In the culture of that day, marriage was entered into upon the consent of the parents and their children, with the emphasis upon the agreement of the parents. Today the emphasis is upon one's own individual choice. A good question for discussion is whether a young person is able to choose a husband or wife wisely without consulting parents or seeking their approval.

In reading this story notice that prayer was not neglected in the choosing of a wife for Isaac. In fact,

just before Rebekah arrived, the Bible tells us that "Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there were camels coming" (Gen. 24:63). We are also told that Isaac loved Rebekah. A good marriage needs that, but it needs much, much more.

The Birth of Twins

Isaac was married twenty years before he had any children. As in the case of Abraham, how would God keep His promise to make their descendents like the stars of heaven in multitude, especially if Isaac did not have a son? We are told that Isaac prayed for his wife, and God answered him. So the question is not "could God," but "how would God" keep His promise to Abraham? Rebekah did not have long to wait. She gave birth not to one son, but two--twins! Their names were Esau and Jacob. These names said something about the nature of the two boys.²²

Isaac loved Esau, a man of the fields and the hunt. Rebekah loved Jacob, a man of gentler pursuits. In His wisdom, God had determined that the oldest son, born a few minutes before his brother, would serve the youngest. The Bible tells us that God loved Jacob rather than Esau.²³ Part of the reason can be seen in the way Esau regarded his birthright. He despised it. He considered it worthless,

²²Gen. 25:21-27

²³Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:12-16

and sold it for a simple meal because he was tired and hungry. He figured that the spiritual blessings belonging to the birthright were of no value. He could not spend them or eat them. In the same way, many people today would rather be rich in things than to be rich toward God. They would rather be filled with bread than with the Bread of Life.

God had plans for the son of Isaac. He meant to carry out His plans all the way up until the day the Savior would be born, with or without Esau. The great spiritual blessings intended for all the nations of the earth would be seen in all their glory when Christ arrived. Esau did not look forward in faith to that day like Abraham. Therefore, he was not to be the son to help in carrying out this plan of God.

Meanwhile, Jacob wanted the blessings and the privileges of the firstborn. He valued it, and even helped his mother deceive both Esau and his father to get it. Esau was furious when he discovered that his brother had not only taken away the birthright, but also the blessing of his father. The Bible tells us that Esau hated his brother and, like the hunter and aggressive man he was, took comfort in a plan to kill his brother after his father was dead (Gen. 27: 41-42).

Jacob's Flight and Return

On Jacob's journey to his uncle Laban's home, he had a dream at Bethel. It was a vision of heaven coming down to touch the earth. In the midst of the angels, the Lord stood and spoke to Jacob, saying:

I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 28:13-14, KJV).

This dream of heaven coming down to touch the earth came true when Jesus, the Star of Jacob,²⁴ was born.

God provided for Jacob and promised to be with him everywhere he went and in everything he did. This certainly can be seen in the twenty years he worked for his uncle Laban. Read carefully the account of how many times Laban tried to deceive Jacob, and how it always turned out in Jacob's favor (Gen. 29-30). Isaac must have been very happy to learn of Jacob's marriage to one of his own people. He had warned Jacob, just like his father had warned him: "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women" (Gen. 28:1). Esau disregarded this advice. Jacob, however, soon took another wife. This situation created a great deal of trouble, and Jacob made it worse by loving one of his

²⁴Num. 24:17

children more than the others. The same thing happened when Jacob and Esau were boys. Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. The end result of such favoritism reached a climax in the story of Joseph and his brother, the subject of the next lesson. It is good to know that God does not play that game. He "shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34).

Jacob decides to go home after twenty years in Haran. God's angels were with him when he left his father, and now on his way home "the angels of God met him" (Gen. 32:1). Surprisingly, Isaac was still alive and Esau was waiting. Would Esau still have hatred in his heart toward his brother? Notice how carefully Jacob plans the long-delayed meeting in Genesis 32-33, especially when Jacob sees Esau coming toward him with four hundred men.

The account of Jacob wrestling with God in human form by the River Jabbok is a marvellous example of faith and courage. At that river Jacob had his name changed. "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). The name Israel means "a prince of God." At dawn, when the struggle was over, Jacob called the place "Peniel," meaning "a champion of God."²⁵

²⁵See map on "The Land of Canaan," p. 32.

Jacob may have been quick to take advantage of people and of situations, but he was also determined and persistent in his faith. He is a good example for us, particularly in those dark and difficult days when things seem against us. Like Jacob, may we learn to wrestle with God in prayer, talking to God, and making known to Him our desire to remain His true children. At the same time be sure to read and study His Word, the place of meeting where God makes Himself known to us. Then you will really know what to pray for, and heaven will again come down to touch the earth for you.

Review Questions and Comments

1. What did God promise Isaac in Gen. 26:4?
2. What did God promise Jacob in Gen. 28:14?
3. Why did Esau sell his birthright?
4. How can people "sell their soul" today?
5. Why did not Isaac know that Jacob was taking the place of Esau?
6. Describe the events that took place at Bethel.
7. Describe the terms of service that Jacob gave Laban.
8. How can parents avoid showing favoritism? Does God play favorites?

Memory Work

1. Gen. 28:17b
2. Gen. 29:20
3. Gen. 31:49

4. Gen. 32:10a
5. Memorize the twelve sons of Jacob, Gen. 35:23-36
6. Catechism, p. 28, "To Husbands, To Wives, To Parents"

IX. GENESIS: JOSEPH

Joseph and His Brothers

The life of Joseph is a human drama without equal in literature. The story begins when Joseph is singled out by his father for special favors. Joseph was the firstborn son of Rachel, the favorite wife of Jacob. The Bible tells us that "Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than any other of his children" (Gen. 37:3). Joseph was a kind of take-charge person, and in his innocence he was painfully honest. For example, he kept his father informed about the evil behavior of his brothers. He also talked freely about his dreams of being a ruler not only over his brothers, but also over his father and mother. Jacob helped to feed the jealousy and hatred of his sons by presenting Joseph with a coat of many colors. As a result, his brothers "hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him" (Gen. 37:4).

One day the brothers saw Joseph coming to them across a field. They scoffed: "Here comes this dreamer" (Gen. 37:19). They despised Joseph so much that they decided to kill him right then and there. Reuben came to his rescue. He warned them not to shed any blood. Instead, they threw Joseph into a deep hole. Reuben intended to help Joseph escape. However, before he could carry out

his plan, the brothers decided to sell Joseph as a slave to a passing Ishmaelite caravan for twenty pieces of silver. They returned home and deceived their father by showing him Joseph's torn and bloody coat. Jacob thinks that his son has been devoured by some wild beast.

Joseph in Egypt

God had important plans for Joseph. He did not stop the evil plans of men against Joseph, but He used them to bring about something good. Joseph believed, even in his misfortune, that God was with him. In a strange, godless country Joseph kept the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As a slave, he decided to be the best slave anyone had ever seen. He worked hard for his master Potiphar. Soon he was promoted to a high and responsible position. Then, because he chose to follow God's way of life, he was thrown into prison. Once more Joseph worked his way up into a position of trust.

Some people may ask themselves in the idiom of our day: "Why didn't Joseph give up? Why did he make things so hard for himself? His parents weren't around. No one seemed to care what happened to him, so why didn't Joseph look out only for himself? Why didn't he live a life of pleasure and go along with the crowd or play around with sex?" The answer: he did not want to sin against God. He loved God above all things, even more than his own life.

The person who wants to follow God's way of life is going to find it difficult. For example, you might see others getting ahead in life by fair means or foul. At such a time you might be tempted to follow the easy path in order to keep up with others. Perhaps you will try to make a success of your life by being dishonest. You might see others getting all the breaks because they flatter the right people and earn their favor. However, Joseph's life shows us that God takes care of those who trust in Him and stay faithful to Him no matter what the cost.

Joseph never stopped being considerate of others even though they seldom returned the favor. As an example, read about how Joseph helped Pharoah's butler while in prison. God also gave Joseph the power to interpret Pharoah's dreams. Finally, after thirteen years of slavery Joseph became the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Joseph Shows Himself Alive

A famine in the Land of Canaan brought Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy food. Of course, the brothers did not recognize Joseph. He treated his brothers roughly and pretended that he could not understand their language. In all the strange things that were happening to them, the brothers came to this conclusion: "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us and we would not listen; therefore is this distress come upon us" (Gen. 42:21).

Joseph worked out a plan to make sure that his younger brother, Benjamin, would be brought to Egypt. He wanted to test his brother's love and loyalty and, in addition, he yearned to see Benjamin again. It is a fascinating story to read. Jacob did not want to let Benjamin go to Egypt. His beloved wife, Rachel, had died giving birth to Benjamin, and he suspected that what happened to Joseph might happen to his youngest son. He did not trust Benjamin's half-brothers. Meanwhile, Joseph found it difficult to hide his true identity. On two separate occasions he had to leave their presence to weep. He wept in the knowledge that his brothers had repented for what they had done to him, and he wept for the joy of seeing Benjamin.

The guilt of what they had done to Joseph weighed heavily on the hearts and minds of the brothers for thirteen years. The most touching scene is the one where Joseph finally tells them who he is. He says:

I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . . So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:4-8).

Joseph summed up the events of his life by saying: "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Jacob and All His Family Come to Live in Egypt

When Joseph's brothers told their father that he was still alive and acting as the Prime Minister of Egypt, the Bible tells us that Jacob "did not believe them" (Gen. 45:26). Finally, when they showed him all the things Joseph had sent with them, he said: "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive; I will go and see him before I die" (Gen. 45:28). God assured Jacob: "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes" (Gen. 46:3-4).

Israel was to be in Egypt approximately four hundred years. The rulers of Egypt eventually forgot about what Joseph had done for their country, and they made Jacob's descendents slaves. However, before Joseph died he saw the children of his sons and their children. He reminded his brothers: "God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). He requested his descendents to take his bones with them when they left, so that he might be buried in the Land of Promise.

Review Questions and Comments

1. Why did Joseph's brothers hate him? Was their hatred reasonable? Is any hatred reasonable?

2. How old was Joseph when he was sold as a slave?
How old was Joseph when he became ruler in Egypt?
3. In the plot to kill Joseph, who advised against this action and why?
4. How did the brothers explain Joseph's disappearance to their father?
5. What is meant by the words: "Joseph was a goodly person and well favored" (Gen. 39:6, KJV); (a) that he was a good man and did his work well; (b) that his master favored him and made him foreman; or (c) that he was a handsome and healthy young man.
6. What did Joseph say when Potiphar's wife tried to tempt Joseph?
7. What did Joseph do in the face of temptations: (a) run away quickly; (b) explain that she might get pregnant; (c) make sure they would not get caught; or (d) take steps to prevent venereal disease.
8. Why did not Joseph reveal himself to his brothers from the beginning?
9. Who pleaded for Benjamin's life?
10. What did Pharaoh's dreams mean, and how did Joseph figure them out?
11. Name the two sons born to Joseph.
12. What purpose did God have in sending Joseph to Egypt? What purpose did God have in bringing the whole household of Jacob to Egypt?

Memory Work

1. Catechism, pp. 97-99; questions 116-19
2. Catechism, pp. 69-72; "The Sixth Commandment" and questions 61-65
3. Gen. 50:20
4. Gen. 39:9b
5. Rom. 8:28

X. EXODUS: MOSES LEADS ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT

Four Hundred Years Later

The word "Exodus" means "going out" or "departure." An "exit" sign over a doorway in a public building tells a person where to get out in case of trouble. In a different way, Israel was in trouble. The Egyptians had made slaves of them. The rulers of Egypt had forgotten all about Joseph and how God had blessed them through Joseph's leadership. As the book of Exodus opens, four hundred years have passed. People can forget a great deal in four hundred years, but not God.

God made a promise to Abraham that He would make a great nation out of his descendents, and give them the Land of Canaan as their own. God remembers and keeps His promises. He wanted the people of Israel to know that and trust in Him. God will act, but in His own way and in His own time. Remember how God worked in blessing Joseph? That took time. It would take time in Israel's case as well, but they had given up hope. They were resigned to being slaves in a foreign land. We are told that "the descendents of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7).

The Egyptians were afraid of so many powerful slaves. There seemed to be more Israelites than Egyptians. The Israelites were also stronger and healthier because they did all the work. It is interesting to note that Egypt at this time was at the height of its power. The position of Egypt as one of the great world powers of that day faded when Israel left for the Land of Promise. Egypt wanted to keep the Israelites as slaves, but they did not want them to have any power. They decided to weaken them by making them work harder, but that only made them stronger. The rulers then decreed that every male child should be put to death, but one child escaped--Moses! Centuries later all the male children of Bethlehem were put to death, but one escaped--Jesus!

Moses' Call

In the second chapter of Exodus you will read about the escape of Moses and how he became the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. The real mother of Moses became his nurse, with a little help from his sister Miriam. It is probable that Moses' mother carefully taught her son about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It was not very long before Moses got into trouble because of his double identity. It happened when he saw an Egyptian slavemaster beating one of the Hebrews, one of his own kind. Moses killed the slavemaster and had to flee for

his life. He fled not only from the Egyptians, but also from his own people who did not want his help.

Moses spent forty years in the palace and forty years in the wilderness. In everything that happened to him God was leading Moses and preparing him to be the leader of His people Israel. We are told in Acts 7:22 that "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds." He would make a good leader, but Moses did not think so. He tried to excuse himself from God's call. Read how God called Moses at the burning bush, a bush that appeared to be on fire and yet it was not consumed.

Moses Before Pharaoh

God gave Moses the ability to perform signs and wonders so that both the Egyptians and the children of Israel would believe that God had sent him. The time had come for Israel to leave Egypt and make their pilgrimage to the Land of Promise. Everything was ready, but Pharaoh refused to let them go. He made them work harder than ever, but the birth of freedom would not die so easily. The birth of the Old Testament Church would not be delayed much longer. Ten plagues descended upon Egypt to seal God's intentions. In every plague, except the last one, Pharaoh refused to acknowledge that God meant what He said through His servant Moses and his brother Aaron.

None of these plagues harmed the children of Israel who lived in the Land of Goshen.

The Passover and Departure

The Israelites were to take one of their best lambs and roast it. It was to be a lamb without blemish and less than a year old. They were to eat this Passover lamb with unleavened bread, that is, bread without yeast. The bitter herbs that went along with the meal were to remind them of the bitterness of their slavery in Egypt. Some of the blood of the lamb was to be smeared on the door frames of their homes so that the Angel of Death would pass over their homes. Meanwhile, the firstborn of Egypt died, both man and beast.

This Passover meal was to be repeated every year. It is still celebrated today by the Jewish people close to the Christian celebration of Easter. In fact, the date of Easter is linked to the Passover, occurring on the first Sunday after the full moon following the Spring Equinox. The Passover festival takes on new meaning with the shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God, smeared on the wooden beams of Calvary's cross. The New Testament informs us that "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Passover celebration was to remind the Israelites that God delivered them out of slavery in Egypt, and that He kept His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In Genesis we learned that Jesus was to be "the seed of the woman" and "a descendent of Abraham." In the Passover celebration we see a picture of Jesus as "the lamb without blemish," the sinless one who would die like the Passover lamb. The Bible tells us that we have been redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:19). Jesus would die to deliver all people from the slavery of sin. He would rise again in order to make it possible for people to enter the Promised Land of heaven.

It was during the Passover meal, before Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, that He began what we celebrate today as the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood (1 Cor. 11:23-25, KJV).

The new Israel, which we call the Church, is made up of those who believe in Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ in the world. They are the true children of Abraham, not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense.²⁶

In the final chapters of this lesson you will read about the six hundred thousand men, not counting women and children, who left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). They took Egyptian

²⁶Rom. 9:7-8; Gal. 3:7-9,29

gold and jewelry with them as part-payment for the hundreds of years of slave labor. When they came to the Red Sea God protected them by a mighty, stretched-out arm. "Stand still," Moses said, "and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. 14:13, KJV). It looked like a dead-end street, especially when Pharoah changed his mind again and sent the army after Israel to bring them back. It was Pharoah's last mistake.

Review Questions and Comments

1. List the different methods used by Pharoah in order to keep the children of Israel from multiplying.
2. List the excuses Moses gave God at the burning bush. Do you notice any similarities in our efforts to avoid God and our responsibility?
3. List the ten plagues that God sent upon Egypt.
4. List the ways that the Passover meal pointed forward to Jesus.
5. List the ways in which God protected Israel from the army of Egypt by the Red Sea.

Memory Work

1. Catechism, p. 194; "What the Lord's Supper is"
2. Catechism, pp. 193-95; questions 296-300
3. Ex. 2:24
4. Ex. 14:31

XI. EXODUS: ISRAEL IS BLESSED WITH GOD'S LAW

Thanksgiving

The children of Israel praised God for saving them from the Egyptians. Moses and his sister, Miriam, put this great event into a song that was on everyone's lips and in everyone's heart: "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (Ex. 15:1-2).

The Test

The journey through the wilderness toward the Land of Promise now begins. Immediately there is trouble. They are lacking fresh water for the hundreds of thousands of people and the cattle. They were also concerned about the food. God was testing them to see whether they would trust in Him to provide. If God had delivered them from Egypt in such a marvellous manner, surely He could deliver them from hunger and thirst. The important question was whether or not Israel would hunger and thirst after the living God and seek Him in all their ways.

A month and a half passes without serious trouble. It was not to last, for "the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the

wilderness" (Ex. 16:2). They complained and even wished that they "had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full" (Ex. 16:3). They accused Moses and Aaron of bringing them out of Egypt so that they would die in the wilderness. Moses quickly reminded them that "your murmurings are not against us but against the Lord" (Ex. 16:8). How quickly they had forgotten Him.

God's Provision

God had not forgotten them. He again showed them His glory by sending low-flying quail over their camp in the evening. In the morning they found bread. At first they did not know what it was. They said: "Manna," which means, "What is it?" Moses said to them: "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat" (Ex. 16:15). They called it "Manna" from that day forward.

They were to gather only enough for their family for one day. It is estimated that two million pounds of this heavenly manna was needed every day. If anyone in his greed gathered more than a day's supply, it spoiled. Of course, some of them tried to do it in spite of Moses' warning. On Friday, however, they were to gather twice as much as they needed in order to last them over the Sabbath Day, Saturday. It was the day of rest. Miraculously, this two-day supply did not spoil. Also, Moses told them that no

manna would appear on Saturday. Nevertheless, some of them had to find out for themselves. They found nothing except God's rebuke: "How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws" (Ex. 16:28)?

The children of Israel had a long way to go and much to learn if they were to become an orderly and disciplined people. They were used to being slaves. It was somehow a burden for them to be free and to be responsible only to God and His servant Moses. They found it difficult to trust anyone, but they found it easy to complain. They took out their anger on Moses who came before the Lord and said: "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me" (Ex. 17:4). God silenced their complaints about a lack of fresh water by providing water for them out of a rock at Horeb.

God also helped Moses by providing him with a wise father-in-law whose name was Jethro, a Midianite. He noticed that Moses was in the habit of hearing and settling all the grievances of the children of Israel, and so he said: "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to perform it alone" (Ex. 18:17-18). Moses therefore appointed judges, rulers, and captains over the people. Moses heard only the difficult cases, while the smaller complaints were placed into the hands of other leaders. It was the beginning of an effective political organization.

The Blessings of the Law

The people of Israel came to Mount Sinai three months after leaving Egypt. An important event was to take place at Sinai. God's people were going to receive a set of laws. If these laws were kept, the society in which they lived would be a happy one. They were going to dwell in their own land, and God did not want them running around there and acting like savages. They were to be a blessing to the whole world. Other nations would learn from them how to live in peace and prosperity, and how to govern fairly and justly. The giving of the Ten Commandments is described in Exodus 19-20. The rest of the chapters in Exodus tell us about other laws which were given in order to regulate the conduct of God's people. The laws regarding the Sabbath Day and worship in the tabernacle, soon to be built, are of particular interest.

The people of Israel were to have "no other gods" except the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was the hinge which would open the door for them to God's blessing. Part of that blessing was in the process of coming true, for they were on their way to the land promised to Abraham. They were also in possession of a set of laws that would continue to be a blessing to them and to the whole world. However, that one special blessing, that one particular descendent of Abraham, the Messiah, was still far off in the future.

Review Questions and Comments

1. How many kinds of hunger are there?
2. What did the manna in the wilderness taste like: Was it natural food?
3. What complaint did the children of Israel bring against Moses and Aaron? Does this say anything about the complaints people bring against their own country and its leaders?
4. Describe the political and social organization suggested by Jethro.
5. If the most important purpose of God's law is to show us our sinfulness, why do we call the law good and holy?
6. Which commandment is the most important and why?

Memory Work

1. Catechism, pp. 42-45; questions 14-23
2. Ex. 19:6a
3. Ps. 145:15-16
4. The Lutheran Hymnal, "Savior, I Follow On," v. 2

XII. EXODUS AND LEVITICUS: THE LAW, SACRIFICES,
AND THE TABERNACLE

Moses on the Mountain

The children of Israel camped before Mount Sinai for a year. Moses went up the mountain to meet with God several times. The first time he was given two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. These commandments formed the heart of the law. Surrounding these laws were detailed explanations of what to do in case of murder, kidnapping, crop damage, accidents, leprosy, and so forth. He also received instructions regarding the treatment of strangers, widows, and orphans.

In Leviticus a high standard of morality and cleanliness was expected of God's people. God wanted Israel to learn obedience as a way of preparing them for the coming Messiah. When Christ came these preparatory laws were done away with, such as eating only certain kinds of meat, and laws dealing with the Sabbath Day, along with ceremonial and political matters. The apostle Paul states: "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16-17). Laws and

ceremonies were a pale reflection of the reality ushered in by Christ who fulfills and completes them.

Idolatry Below the Mountain

It took so long for Moses to come down from the mountain that the people below the mountain got restless. They told Aaron: "Up, make us gods, who shall go before us" (Ex. 32:1). They did not know what had happened to Moses. Without his leadership they quickly turned back to their old ways. They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. No doubt they had learned about this type of idolatry in Egypt. As a result of their disobedience God was angry enough to destroy them all and start over again. Moses was also upset. When he came down from Mount Sinai and saw the ugly scene before him he smashed the stone tablets in anger. He ground up the golden calf into powder, mixed it with water, and made the people drink it.

The very first commandment, the foundation of all the commandments, had been broken in an obvious manner. Their lack of respect and reverence for God did not go unpunished. However, Moses asks forgiveness for the people, pleading for them, even to the point of declaring himself willing to have his name blotted out of God's Book, if only God would spare them (Ex. 32:32). He asks God to remember His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later, God gave Moses two more tablets of stone to replace those that were broken.

The awesome power and glory of God affected Moses, the leaders, and the people in different ways. God revealed only as much of Himself and His glory as they were able to bear. God told Moses: "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Ex. 33:20). The full revelation of God's glory and power has been reserved until we see Him in heaven. As sinful human beings we could not look upon God in all His holiness and survive. Someday, however, we shall see Him "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Major Feasts and Sacrifices

The laws given to Moses called for three annual feasts. "Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God" (Ex. 23:17). The three feasts are: (1) the Feast of Passover, during which a lamb was slain, roasted, and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They were to recall how the Angel of Death "passed over" their homes, and also the crossing of the Red Sea; (2) the Feast of Harvest or Day of Firstfruits, a time when the fruits of the first crops were to be given as an offering to God. God told Moses: "None shall appear before me emptyhanded" (Ex. 23:15). Christians today bring their offerings when they come before God in worship. These offerings, according to the New Testament, were to be the firstfruits and not the left-overs. This Old Testament feast was also called "the Feast of Weeks" or "Pentecost," because it was usually fifty days after the Passover when

the first crops were harvested; (3) the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering, which was the last harvest of the year. It took place in the Fall. The word "tabernacle" comes from the custom they had of dwelling in small booths during the celebration. They would meditate there and thank God for His blessings upon their labors.

The weekly Sabbath was held in addition to these special feasts. Also, every morning and evening of the week they were to offer up a lamb on the altar. "It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak there to you" (Ex. 29:42). Think of it, the red coals and smoke of sacrifice went on every day and night without ceasing. There were also "Burnt Offerings," given as an act of dedication; "Trespass" or "Sin Offerings," given on account of specific sin; and "Peace Offerings," given in recognition of unmerited blessings, in payment of a vow, or a freewill offering expressing love for God.

All sacrifices had one thing in common--blood was shed. Of course, the blood of animals could not take away sin, but God looked upon them as if they could. He accepted them. We can see that these sacrifices were only a shadow of that perfect sacrifice of Christ, who shed His blood to take away sin once and for all.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement was an important day. It occurred just before the Feast of Tabernacles in the Fall. Today it is known as "Yom Kippur." On this day, the sins of the nation were removed. The high priest would take incense and the blood of a bull into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle it on the covering of the Ark of the Covenant and on the floor. This completed the atonement of the priesthood. Then he would take two goats and slay one of them as a sin offering, sprinkling the blood in the same manner as before. The high priest would then take the remaining goat, called a scapegoat, and place his hand on its head and confess the sins of the people. It was then sent out into the wilderness to die, symbolically loaded down with the sins of the people upon its head.

This act of atonement presents to us a picture of Jesus. He also went outside the camp of Israel to die at the hands of the Romans. Jesus was led outside of the city walls of Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world. The entrance of the high priest into the most holy place of the tabernacle once a year was a foreshadowing of the entrance of Jesus into heaven as our great High Priest. He shed His blood for our sins once and for all, obtaining salvation for us. "He entered once for all into the Holy Place,

taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12).

The Tabernacle

The measurements of the tabernacle pictured in Figure 5 gives us an idea of its size and arrangement. The tribe of Levi served both as priests and helpers for the tabernacle. They were responsible for all ceremonies and sacrifices. They also moved the tabernacle from place to place during the wilderness wanderings. They received their living from the offerings brought by the people. The Levites were to be given no land as an inheritance in the Land of Promise. They possessed certain cities, but the service of God was to be their special calling in life. God was to be their possession and their joy. Pastors today are similar in some respects in that they too are supported by the offerings of the people. They are also set aside for their special calling within the priesthood of all believers.

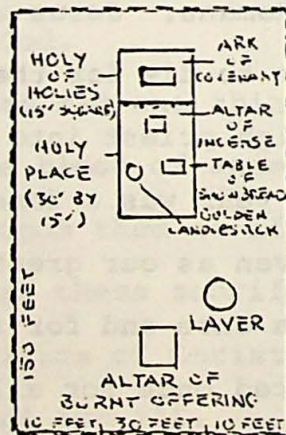


Fig. 5 The Tabernacle

Review Questions and Comments

1. Are all the laws that God gave Moses still in effect today?
2. We are told that "nature abhors a vacuum." Is this true in a spiritual sense?
3. Why may we not see God "face to face" now?
4. Describe the attitude of Moses toward the people of Israel.
5. List and describe the three major feasts, the three kinds of offerings, and the Day of Atonement.
6. Describe the significance of the Holy of Holies.
7. In what way is every Christian set aside for special service to God?

Memory Work

1. Lev. 26:2
2. Heb. 9:22
3. Heb. 10:25
4. Catechism, pp. 82-84; questions 79-86
5. Catechism, pp. 25-26; "What the Hearers Owe to Their Pastor"

XIII. NUMBERS: FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

The Tabernacle Completed

God in His glory visited the tabernacle in the wilderness. There He chose to appear to His people and speak to Moses. It was the meeting place between God and the congregation of Israel. The tabernacle had been constructed according to God's instructions. The materials had been donated by the people, rich and poor alike. "They came, every one whose heart stirred him, and every one whose spirit moved him" (Ex. 35:21). In fact, they brought more than was needed. Moses had to command the people to stop bringing any more offerings (Ex. 36:5-7). What a marvellous example to guide us in our giving of offerings. Believing in Christ and what He has done for us should make our hearts more than willing to give to the Lord's work and serve Him.

The skill and talents of the people were used in building the tabernacle--sewing, engraving, cutting precious stones, carpentry work, fashioning the metal containers, the golden candlesticks and cherubim. The cost of the tabernacle, conservatively estimated, was well over a million dollars.

Aaron, the high priest, and his sons were consecrated and set aside for the priesthood. The people of the

tribe of Levi were appointed to take care of the tabernacle and its services. The glory of the Lord settled upon the tabernacle at its completion in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The children of Israel camped around the tabernacle and remained there as long as God's glory was present. However, "when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys" (Ex. 40:36).

The Tribes Organize

The tribes of Israel were organized into groups, and only the fighting men of each tribe over twenty years of age were numbered (Num. 1:20). Hence the name of this book--Numbers. The tribe of Levi was divided into three parts, named after the three sons of Levi. They surrounded the tabernacle with Moses, Aaron, and their sons at the entrance. Each tribe was to pitch their tents under their own banner. When they moved, the tribe of Judah led the way. The basic organization and numerical strength of each tribe can be found in Figure 6.

Israel no longer was an undisciplined mob. They were now organized and ready to enter the Promised Land. However they still had the habit of murmuring against God. Once more they yearn for the fleshpots of Egypt, the fish and "cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic" (Num. 11:5). They were tired of manna and wanted meat. God gave them meat [quail] in such abundance that

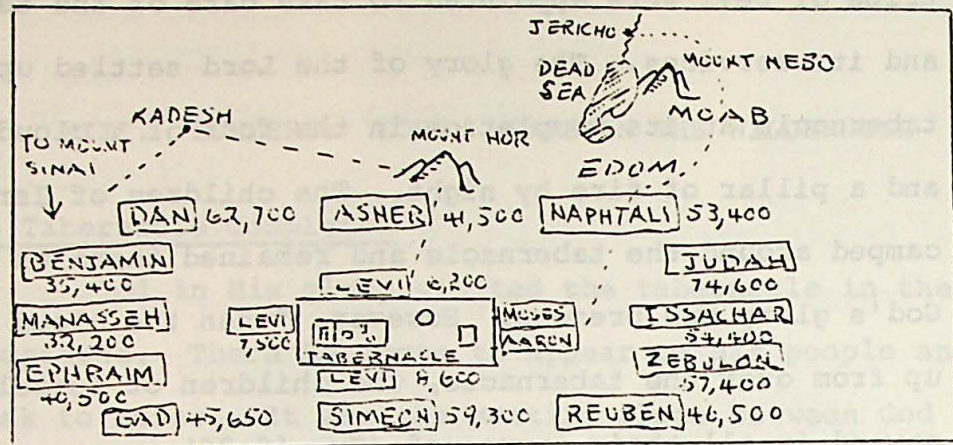


Fig. 6. The Twelve Tribes of Israel in the Wilderness

they were to eat it "a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wept before him, saying, 'Why did we come forth out of Egypt'" (Num. 11:20)? Aaron and Miriam also were not above making serious mistakes. They spoke against Moses because they were unhappy with his choice of a bride. They also wanted a greater share of the glory and recognition that seemed to belong only to Moses. God set the record straight, calling Moses "very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Immediately, as if to prove this character reference, Moses pleaded with God on behalf of his sister Miriam.

On to the Promised Land

The Israelites marched north about one hundred and fifty miles to the borders of the Land of Promise. There they waited for a report from the scouting party. It was made up of twelve men, one from each tribe. They were sent to "see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many" (Num. 13:18). The majority reported that the people were too strong and their cities too well fortified. They concluded that they could not take the land. Caleb of tribe of Judah and Joshua of the tribe of Ephraim courageously reported: "Let us go up at once and occupy it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30).

Reversal and Rebellion

The children of Israel did not want to go forward into the Land of Promise. In their cowardice they said: "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt" (Num. 14:4). They did not trust God, but tested His patience ten times. As a result, the Lord said to Moses: "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them" (Num. 14:11)? Moses pleaded for Israel again, but God declared of the rebels that their "bodies shall fall in this wilderness" (Num. 14:29). The chance to seize their opportunity and go forward in the name of the Lord has

passed. They were condemned now to wander in the wilderness for forty years until every last one of the six hundred thousand men over twenty years old were dead. Only faithful Caleb and Joshua were to be spared because in faith they had wanted to claim God's promise immediately.

There were other set-backs. For example, one of Levi's descendents, Korah, thought that Moses was too high and mighty. He organized a rebellion with the help of two hundred and fifty leaders in Israel. This pattern of opposition continued. Even Moses disobeyed God at the Waters of Meribah. He struck the rock rather than simply speaking to it as God had commanded. Perhaps Moses was trying to take the credit for producing water out of the rock, or at least to make it appear less supernatural.

During one of the many rebellions, poisonous snakes entered the camp of Israel and many perished. God said to Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (Num. 21:8). This incident pointed forward to what Christ would do for those who look to Him in faith. He would deliver them from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The "seed of the woman" would destroy the serpent's power. In the New Testament we are reminded: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Review Questions and Comments

1. Where did the gold and jewels to build the tabernacle come from?
2. How did the Israelites know when to move? Lacking a pillar of fire or cloud, how do we know when to move, where to work, or who to marry?
3. How many men of war were there in Israel?
4. What happened to Miriam when she spoke against Moses?
5. Why did not the children of Israel enter the Promised Land immediately?
6. What are your impressions of life in the wilderness? Would you have enjoyed living at that time under the Old Covenant? Are there any temptations involved in living under the New Covenant?
7. What do the words of Balaam mean in Num. 24:15-19?
8. What did the fiery serpent on a pole foreshadow?
9. Why do we have a record of the things that happened to Israel in the wilderness?

Memory Work

1. Num. 6:23b-26
2. John 3:14-17
3. Catechism, pp. 26-27, "Of Civil Government"
4. Catechism, pp. 27-28, "Of Subjects"

XIV. DEUTERONOMY: MOSES' LAST DAYS

Waiting Five Hundred Years

Five hundred years have passed since the time of Abraham. It is now 1500 B.C., and the children of Israel are denied entrance into the Land of Promise. They did not trust God and go forward. God therefore turned them back to wander in the wilderness. As the book of Deuteronomy opens, their wandering days are over. They stand once more on the threshold of the Promised Land. God said to Moses: "This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you" (Deut. 2:25).

The people over twenty years of age who had doubted God when He first wanted to bring them into the Promised Land are all dead.

Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest (Ps. 95:8-11, KJV).

Moses and Aaron were not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their disobedience at the Waters of Meribah. Aaron died and was buried on Mount Hor. Miriam had preceded

him in death and was buried in Kadesh. Moses was allowed to view the Land of Promise from the heights of Mount Nebo in Moab before he died. It is also called Mount Pisgah. Joshua would lead Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

The Greatness of Moses

Moses died at the age of one hundred and twenty. At that age "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deut. 34:7). It would be difficult for Joshua to take the place of Moses, for we are told that "there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). Jesus would be like Moses, as Moses himself prophesied: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren--him you shall heed" (Deut. 18:15). In the New Testament, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses appeared with this prophet, and a voice proclaimed about this prophet, Jesus Christ: "Listen to him" (Matt. 17:5). Jesus would fulfill the demands of the law given to Moses. Israel had failed to hear and obey, but Jesus would succeed.

A Review of the Law Given on Mount Sinai

The word "Deuteronomy" literally means "a repetition of the law." Repeating the law of God was necessary because after forty years a new generation had come to maturity. Most of them were not at Mount Sinai or, if they were present,

they were small children. Thus, in Deuteronomy, you have a summarized form of the laws given in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

In three speeches, Moses reminds the Israelites of their rebellion against God, of their fear and discouragement, and of the Covenant God made with them:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7:6-8).

God loved Israel and showed His love for them in countless ways. God also demanded and expected obedience. The blessings of obedience are reviewed by Moses as well as the disaster of idolatry. "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name. You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who are round about you" (Deut. 6:13-14). Disobedience to God's laws only results in unhappiness. Moses told them:

You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell, these forty years. Know then in your

heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. . . . For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey (Deut. 8:2-8).

The Promised Land is God's Gift

God made it clear that their inheritance of the Land of Promise was a gift.

Know therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day you came out of the land of Egypt, until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord (Deut. 9:6-7).

Man deserves nothing at the hand of God because of his sin and disobedience. Nevertheless God's love is so great that He keeps His promise even though we have broken ours. We therefore cannot earn God's love or favor. The forgiveness of our sins and the Promised Land of heaven are ours only because of His grace and mercy. We cannot make God love us. His love is a gift in the same sense as heaven is a gift. These gifts are made possible because of the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ. God asks us to believe Him, to trust in Him, to repent of our sins and place our complete confidence in Christ alone. He paid the debt of our sin at the cost of His own life. He suffered the penalty our sin deserved. He perfectly kept the laws of God that we cannot keep. He obeyed where we have disobeyed. Only in Christ, therefore, are we acceptable to God.

Review Questions and Comments

1. What does the word "Deuteronomy" mean?
2. What would insure Israel's long and happy life in the Promised Land?
3. Describe some of the warnings God gave the children of Israel. Look up Deut. 6:14-15; 7:25; 12:2-3; 8:19-20.
4. What would happen according to Deuteronomy 28 if Israel would not keep God's law?
5. Describe some of the ways in which we can rebel against God and also cooperate with God.
6. Why and how were the nations living in the Land of Canaan to be driven out according to Deut. 7:22; 9:4-5?
7. What four things does God require according to Deut. 10:12?
8. In what ways would Jesus be a prophet like Moses? In what ways would He be different from Moses?
9. Would Joshua need the kind of encouragement given in Deut. 31:6? Is there any encouragement for us in God's Word when we fail to live up to God's expectations?
10. What kind of man was Joshua according to Deut. 34:9? In Christ, does the Word of God tell us what kind of people we should be, or does it tell us what kind of people we are?

Memory Work

1. Deut. 4:29
2. Deut. 6:4-7
3. Deut. 33:27a
4. Catechism, p. 162, "The Fifth Petition"
5. Catechism, pp. 162-63, questions 231-34

XV. JOSHUA: GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISE

Moses' Successor

The mantle of leadership was draped over Joshua's shoulders after the death of Moses. God promised Joshua: "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you, or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). God would keep that promise. He once promised Abraham that his descendents would someday own the land in which he was a stranger. God was now making that promise come true through Joshua. Joshua was to be strong and courageous in his leadership, reminding the people not to forsake the covenant and law of God. It would not be an easy task, but there was no other way for Israel to prosper as a nation.

The name "Joshua" is the Old Testament word for the name "Jesus" in the New Testament. The name means "Savior." As Joshua led God's people into the Promised Land, saving them from their enemies, so Jesus leads us to the Promised Land of heaven, saving us from our enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

Crossing the Jordan

Joshua sent two scouts ahead of the Israelites before they went across the Jordan River. They were kept in

hiding by the harlot, Rahab, whose home was built into the wall of the city. For this service she asked that her life be spared, along with those of her father's house. She successfully kept Israel's scouts from being discovered, even though a thorough search was made for them. Eventually the spies brought back the news that the people of Jericho were afraid of Israel. Forty years previous, it had been Israel that had been afraid.

Joshua assembled the hosts of Israel for the invasion. He sent the Levites ahead, carrying the sacred "Ark of the Covenant" into the waters of the Jordan. As soon as their feet touched the water "the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap" (Joshua 3:16). This was a miracle, that is, something contrary to the laws of nature. However, the God who created the universe and the laws governing nature was certainly capable of suspending those laws. He wanted Israel to remember this incident. Therefore a stone monument was built to mark the event and the site. Twelve rocks were piled together, one rock for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the future, when any of their children asked about that pile of stones, they would tell the miraculous story of how God brought them into the Land of Promise.

The Wall Comes Tumbling Down

Jericho was sealed up and "none went out, and none came in" (Joshua 6:1). It must have appeared ridiculous

for the armies of Israel to march around the city in an orderly manner for six days. At the same time, you can well imagine the uneasiness of the men on the walls of Jericho. They watched this sight waiting in fear for the moment of attack. A few sleepless nights must have added to their anxiety. On the seventh day the Israelites marched around the city seven times in complete silence. Upon completion of the last circuit seven priests in front of the Ark of the Covenant blew the trumpets. At this signal the people shouted. It must have been a blood-curdling sound to the dazed and weary defenders of the city. At the sound, according to the sacred record, "the wall fell down flat" (Joshua 6:20).

Joshua's Fame

The news of Israel's victory quickly spread to the other tribes living in Canaan. These tribes had to be conquered before Israel could take possession of the land. It took about twenty-five years to do it. The job was to be done thoroughly. God did not want His chosen people mingling with, or marrying, the inhabitants of Canaan. The many false gods of Canaan would be a corrupting influence upon Israel.

The kings of Canaan, meanwhile, joined their forces in order to build an army strong enough to fight the dreaded Israelites. It proved to be of no use, for the armies of Israel had a wise battle commander in Joshua. For example,

an interesting battle plan was carried out against the city and king of Ai. Joshua was careful to tell Israel in victory: "It is the Lord your God who has fought for you" (Joshua 23:3).

The Gibeonites in the land knew they were not powerful enough to resist the armies of Israel, and so they craftily led Joshua to believe that they were not one of the tribes of Canaan. They did this in order that Joshua would not destroy them like the others. When their trick was discovered it was too late, because a promise had been made. Nevertheless the Gibeonites were drafted to become "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Joshua 9:27). The Gibeonites were quite happy to accept this alternative to death.

Inheriting the Land

The last half of the book of Joshua deals with the division of the conquered land into twelve parts.

The Lord gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers; and having taken possession of it, they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers; not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass (Joshua 21:43-45).

The rest and peace in the land would continue so long as the people of Israel continued to follow this set of priorities:

Take good care to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you,

to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave to him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul (Joshua 22:5).

God reminded the people:

I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwell therein; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards which you did not plant. Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve (Joshua 24:13-15).

Joshua responded: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). The people then echoed their response: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods" (Joshua 24:16). They promised: "The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey" (Joshua 24:24). The people re-dedicated themselves as God's chosen people under the covenant. Now Joshua's work was done. He did not disappoint God's selection of him as Moses' successor.

Review Questions and Comments

1. What makes a nation prosperous? Describe some ideas of prosperity.
2. How did Rahab help Israel? What do we learn about Rahab, or Rachab, according to Matt. 1:5?
3. Describe some differences between the crossing of the Jordan River and the crossing of the Red Sea.
4. What was one reason why the Israelites crossed the Jordan in such a miraculous manner according to Joshua 3:7?

5. Describe two things that happened after Israel crossed the Jordan? Look up Joshua 4:1-7 and 5:12.
6. After each of the following statements, list the ways in which they can be taken to apply to us: (a) Israel had no permanent home in the wilderness; (b) the goal of Israel was to enter the Promised Land; (c) Joshua led Israel over the Jordan safely to the other side; (d) Joshua defeated Israel's enemies.
7. The word "achan" means "trouble." What trouble did he get into according to Joshua 7?
8. What event in Joshua 10 describes the power of God?
9. Israel chose to serve and obey the Lord. Can we, by our own will and power, choose to serve and obey the Lord?
10. What promise was kept according to Joshua 24:32?

Memory Work

1. Joshua 1:7
2. Joshua 24:15
3. Heb. 12:6
4. Catechism, p. 53, "The Second Commandment"
5. Catechism, pp. 53-58, questions 34-44
6. Catechism, p. 152, "The Introduction"
7. Catechism, pp. 152-53; questions 215-18

XVI. JUDGES: THE RESCUERS AND RASCALS OF ISRAEL

After Joshua

The children of Israel have taken possession of the Land of Canaan as the book of Judges begins. It is their land now. Almost one thousand years have passed since God first promised Abraham that the land in which he was a stranger would belong to his descendents. God keeps His promises. However the Land of Canaan was not completely conquered. There were still pockets of resistance, but this situation was not Israel's greatest problem. The greatest problem was within. They were their own worst enemy. We read that after Joshua's death "there arose another generation . . . who did not know the Lord or the work which he had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10).

Times of prosperity and peace can be a burden as well as a blessing. Israel was making it a burden. They were not teaching their children about the wonderful works of God. Instead "the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers" (Judg. 2:11-12). They served the false gods of the Canaanites and intermarried with them. As a result God allowed their enemies to plague them constantly in small but brutal wars. Often

God would send a Spirit-filled judge to rescue them from their enemies.

Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them (Judg. 2:18).

The Judges

Israel did not have a king like the other nations. Israel did not need one, because God was to be their king and ruler. When Israel called upon the Lord they were given a rescuer. At other times they were led by rascals.

Listed below are a few of these rescuers and rascals.

Some of their exploits are rather gory and unpleasant, but the Bible describes real people living in a real world.

1. Ehud, a left-handed rescuer of Israel, who personally took an eighteen inch dagger and stuck it into Eglon's belly--a very fat man who was the king of Moab. This action began Israel's defeat of the oppressive Moabites.
2. Deborah, who led the fight against the king of Canaan with the help of Barak her captain. Another woman, Jael, drove a tent-peg through the head of Sisera, captain of the enemy army, as he lay sleeping in her tent.
3. Gideon, who was called by an angel to lead the fight against the Midianites. Gideon's army numbered 32,000 men. God told him that the army was too large. He wanted Israel to know that the size of their army would

not bring them victory, but He and His blessing alone. Gideon then told those with a family, or those who were afraid, to go home. An exodus of 22,000 men took place. Eventually there were only 300 soldiers left. These men were divided into three companies. The attack was to take place at night. The strategy was to throw the sleeping Midianites into a panic by smashing clay pitchers, by blowing trumpets, and by the dancing appearance of flaming torches on the hillsides all around the Midianite camp. The plan worked. Gideon waited while the Midianites ran through the darkness in all directions. In the confusion the Midianites killed each other. At the right time Gideon's men attacked. Needless to say, the Midianites were thoroughly routed. As a result the men of Israel asked Gideon: "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also" (Judg. 8:22). Gideon answered them firmly and correctly: "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you" (Judg. 8:23).

4. Abimelech, a son of Gideon through one of his many wives, was one of the rascals. He carried out a plan to kill seventy of Gideon's sons so that there would be no rival standing between him and the throne. He succeeded in murdering them all except the youngest son. This is a story of how a person who sows the wind, reaps the whirlwind. In other words, if you make trouble you

receive trouble. Abimelech met his end when a woman in a tower dropped part of a millstone on top of his head, breaking his skull. As he was dying, Abimelech asked a young man to slay him by the sword quickly so that no one could say that he had been killed by a woman.

5. Jephthah, the son of a harlot, was rejected by his people. Nevertheless he was chosen by God to be the conqueror of the Ammonites.

6. Samson, a colorful and famous figure, and yet the most tragic rescuer of Israel. He fought against the Philistines singlehandedly, but a woman by the name of Delilah was his undoing.

An Unsettled Peace

The history recorded in the book of Judges appears to be a series of good times and bad. The people of Israel time and again would turn to the Lord, acknowledging their sins, and just as often forget the Lord. They fought against their enemies and defeated them. However, years later, these same enemies would return to haunt Israel. They were instruments in the hand of God to punish Israel for their stubbornness and idolatry.

The tribes of Israel even fought amongst themselves. The tribe of Benjamin, for example, was almost completely destroyed by the other tribes for their terrible conduct as recorded in Judges 19-20. Perhaps the last verse in the

book of Judges tells the reason why they turned away from God and worshiped other gods: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). In contemporary language, "they were doing their own thing."

Review Questions and Comments

1. The time of the judges in Israel covers approximately how many years? Look up Acts 13:20.
2. Why were not the nations surrounding Israel conquered according to Judg. 2:18-23?
3. Describe the main events in the life of Gideon.
4. Gideon asked a rather modern question in Judg. 6:13. How would you have answered it?
5. If a person is in trouble during most of his life, would you say it is because he is a greater sinner than others?
6. Describe the main events in the life of Samson.
7. Would you say that Samson's life was a comedy of errors, a tragedy, or a success story?
8. Is it true that so long as a person does not hurt anyone else, what he does with his life is strictly between himself and God?

Memory Work

1. Ps. 50:15
2. Ps. 103:13
3. Catechism, p. 164, "The Sixth Petition"
4. Catechism, pp. 164-66, questions 235-39
5. Catechism, p. 29, "To the Young in General"

XVII. RUTH AND 1 SAMUEL: THE BEGINNING

OF A NEW ERA

God's Timetable

The promise and plan of God was to send a Messiah. We have briefly traced God's timetable from Abraham in 2000 B.C. to Moses in 1500 B.C., and through the 450 year period of the judges. The next important date centers around 1000 B.C., the golden age of Israel. This age began to dawn with Ruth, the wife of Boaz, who gave birth to Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of David.

Bethlehem

The book of Ruth begins and ends in Bethlehem of Judah. A man by the name of Elimelech lives there with his wife Naomi and their two sons. However a famine forces them to journey south-eastward to the country of Moab. The two sons eventually marry Moabite women whose names are Ruth and Orpah. Ten years later Naomi is left alone. Her husband and sons die. She is without comfort or family, except for two daughters-in-law. Naomi decides to return home to Bethlehem where she has relatives. Ruth wants to go with her despite Naomi's plea that she remain with her own people. In one of the most moving passages of the book, Ruth tells Naomi:

Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me (Ruth 1:16-17, KJV).

Ruth takes care of Naomi in Bethlehem by picking up stalks of wheat left behind by harvesters in the field.

This practice is called gleaning. Ruth gleaned in a field owned by one of Naomi's relatives. His name was Boaz. It wasn't long before Boaz noticed Ruth's beauty and untiring devotion. Boaz asks his workers not to molest her nor chase her away, but to make her task easier. As a result, in one day, Ruth was able to gather enough to make a bushel of wheat. A beautiful romance develops between Boaz and Ruth with a little help from Naomi. Finally Boaz marries Ruth.

It is interesting to note that Boaz was the son of Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. Ruth also was not an Israelite. She was from Moab, a tribe descended from Lot (Gen. 19:37). Ruth's importance in biblical history stems from the fact that her great grandchild was king David. This is significant because Jesus would be a descendent of David's family.

David would also live in Bethlehem. He was a shepherd boy, the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse. David must have known well the hills of Bethlehem where later the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus to the

awe-struck shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night in those same hills. How beautifully and carefully God carries out His plans.

The Gentiles are Included in God's Plan of Salvation

Ruth was the great grandmother of David the king, and one of David's descendents would be the King of kings! The fact that Ruth, like Rahab before her, was not an Israelite reminds us that Gentiles too can be called God's people. Jesus would be born as the Savior of both Jew and Gentile. In fact, those wise men from the East who worshiped the newborn King were Gentiles.

The birth of Jesus was also the beginning of a new era. We call it the New Testament Era. Under the New Covenant we are told that the New Israel of God is for people from all nations. Membership in the New Israel is not restricted to a certain kind of people or a chosen race. Those who believe in Jesus as the Christ are part of God's family and kingdom. You are a part of this New Israel, the Church, by baptism and faith in Jesus Christ. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7, KJV). Rejoice and be glad in your great heritage.

Hannah and Her Son, Eli and His Two Sons

The time of the judges in Israel is now at an end. It had been a time of retreat and defeat for Israel because

of their idolatry . Many times God used the heathen nations on all sides of Israel to punish them. In the midst of all this confusion and despair it is good to hear about people like Ruth and Hannah.

Hannah was the mother of the great prophet Samuel. She prayed earnestly that God would grant her a son. She also promised to give her son back to the Lord. Like Hannah, your parents consider you a precious gift of God. They realize that you have been given to them on loan, and that you are to be brought up to know and reverence the Lord. This is the way it was with Hannah. She kept her promise and left her young son with Eli the priest. Samuel soon was to become a special servant of the Lord.

Eli rejoiced in Samuel, but his own sons were a source of sorrow and grief. The Bible tells us that Eli's sons were children of Belial (the devil), and they did not know the Lord. Certainly Eli loved his sons, but he did not love them wisely. He knew their wickedness, but "he did not restrain them" (1 Sam. 3:13). Finally, when they used the Ark of the Covenant as a kind of good-luck charm in battle, they were killed. Eli was ninety-eight years old at the time and quite heavy. He somehow fell off his chair and broke his neck when he heard the bad news. He was in a state of shock. It was not because his sons were dead. He knew they were heading for disaster. Instead, he was

particularly grieved because the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines.

Samuel Anoints the First King

Samuel was called by God as a child. In fact, God called to Samuel four times in one night. Samuel had gone to Eli three times, not realizing that the Lord was calling him. Eli told him that if he heard his name called again, he was to answer: "Speak, Lord: for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:10, KJV).

Samuel soon would speak for the Lord, and he would do so with sincerity and singlemindedness. Before the time of Samuel "the word of the Lord was rare . . . there was no frequent vision" (1 Sam. 3:1). Samuel anointed Saul as Israel's first king, only to remove him later at God's command. Previously God had been Israel's King, but Israel wanted to be like their neighbors and have a man they could see as king. This lack of faith grieved Samuel, but God told him: "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7).

Review Questions and Comments

1. Why did Elimelech leave Bethlehem?
2. Whom did the sons of Elimelech marry?
3. How many widows returned to Bethlehem and why?
4. Mara is a word that means "bitter." Why did Naomi suggest that her name be called Mara?

5. What did Ruth do to support her mother-in-law?
6. How was Ruth related to king David? Does this have any significance in God's plan of salvation?
7. What is the difference between the Old Israel and the New Israel?
8. Describe Hannah's problem, and how she solved it? Does this have anything to say about your problems?
9. What were the names of the two sons of Eli? How did they prove themselves to be "sons of Belial"?
10. What happened to Eli and why?
11. Explain what happened to the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of Dagon? Look up 1 Sam. 4-6.
12. How many times did God call Samuel in the night? Does God speak to you? Where? Is it true that some people do not hear God because He is silent, or because they are too busy talking to listen?

Memory Work

1. Ruth 1:16-17
2. Ruth 2:12
3. 1 Sam. 3:13
4. Catechism, p. 64, "The Fourth Commandment"
5. Catechism, pp. 64-66, questions 55-58

XVIII. 1 SAMUEL: DAVID, A MAN

AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

From a Theocracy to a Monarchy

The word "theocracy" means "ruled by God." Israel's government was a theocracy, but a change takes place under the prophet Samuel. Samuel acted as judge, priest, and military commander until he anointed Saul to be the first king. Israel's form of government now becomes a "monarchy," that is, "ruled by a king."

One of the big problems Samuel faced was idolatry. The Israelites continued to be influenced by the false gods of Canaan. We are told that the names of these gods were Ashtaroth and Baal.

The danger to Israel was immense. The more we know of Canaanite paganism the clearer this becomes. Here was a paganism of the most degrading sort. Its gods and goddesses--Baal, Astarte, Asherah, Anat, and the rest--represented for the most part those forces and functions of nature which have to do with fertility.²⁷

Temples and shrines were built to worship these gods, usually in a wooded area. Prostitution and sexual sins were a part of this worship.

²⁷John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 52.

The First King

Samuel was not happy that Israel wanted a king to rule over them. He wanted them to be ruled directly by God. He warned them that a king would make extra demands upon them. A king would need taxes, servants, and a professional army. Israel got their way, and a man by the name of Saul from the tribe of Benjamin was chosen to be the first king. He was a tall and handsome young man. At first he was humble, but success soon went to his head. He defeated the Ammonites and immediately prepared for another campaign. Saul could not wait for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice to God. Instead he showed his self-importance by doing it himself.

In the battle against the Amalekites God had commanded: "I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have" (1 Sam. 15:2-3). Saul, however, spared the best flocks of sheep and the finest herds of cattle. He also captured the enemy king and brought him back as a trophy of war. When Samuel found out he told Saul: "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king" (1 Sam. 15:23).

Saul tried to excuse himself by saying that he intended to use the animals as a sacrifice to God for

victory. Samuel told him that "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). When Samuel turned to leave, Saul took hold of his robe with such a strong grip that the robe was torn. Samuel used this as an object lesson for Saul: "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you" (1 Sam. 15:28). That person was David.

David Anointed King

God directed Samuel to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem of Judah. There he would find the next king. God would indicate which son of Jesse He wanted. When the oldest son was presented, Samuel thought he would be the one. God told Samuel: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). After seven sons had passed in front of Samuel, he asked: "Are all your sons here" (1 Sam. 16:11)? Jesse replied that his youngest son was out keeping the sheep. David was called to the house. The Bible says of him: "Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome" (1 Sam. 16:12). When Samuel anointed David with oil to be the next king, "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13).

The Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul. He became moody, depressed, and troubled. David was summoned to soothe the king because he was an excellent musician and had a fine voice. David was called "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1). David used his familiarity with the troubles and joys of being a shepherd to write the twenty-third Psalm. Some people feel that being one of God's chosen people means that you will not have troubles and sorrows, but David's experience tells us that there will be many trials. Nevertheless, as both shepherd and king, David's life shows us that God's presence and peace remain. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4).

David is described as a man of exceptional courage. He was experienced in combat. As a youth David had killed a bear and a lion while protecting his father's sheep. He was physically attractive and endowed with that aura people today call charisma. He conducted himself wisely and spoke seriously and sensibly. He was a deeply committed and religious young man.

It therefore bothered David to hear a person like Goliath of the Philistines curse the God of Israel. David witnessed the scene while visiting his brothers in the army. He also heard Goliath challenge any man to meet him in combat. David was surprised that no one could be found to

accept the challenge. In a decision that was to change his life, David volunteered to fight the giant. He believed that the God who had delivered him from the paw of the lion would deliver him from this "uncircumcized" Philistine. David was given Saul's personal armor to wear, but it was too heavy for him. He felt awkward in it and unable to move freely. He therefore went out to meet Goliath armed with a slingshot and five smooth stones taken from a brook in the Valley of Elah. The slingshot was a deadly weapon in the hands of an expert. For example, in Judges 20:16 we read of seven hundred lefthanded men who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

Goliath bellowed when he saw David: "'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods" (1 Sam. 17:43). He said he would feed David's flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. David replied in confidence: "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Sam. 17:45). The Philistines would learn soon that there was a God in Israel.

Goliath was a giant who stood 9 feet, 9 inches tall. His spear weighed 21 pounds and the armor shielding his chest tipped the scales at 180 pounds. Nevertheless David found his weak spot and dropped him to the ground with one shot to the forehead. He then took Goliath's own sword

and lopped off his head. David triumphed, not because of his skill and strength, but because God was with him. David honored God by using whatever skill and strength he had to the glory of God. David expressed his confidence in this way: "Yea, by thee I can crush a troop; and by my God I can leap over a wall. This God--his way is perfect; the promise of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him" (Ps. 18:29-30).

Saul's Jealousy and Death

David became a popular hero in Israel. Songs were written about him. One of them contained these words: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). Saul now looked upon David as a threat to the throne. He thought to himself: "What more can he have but the kingdom" (1 Sam. 18:8)? Saul tried to kill David with a javelin in his house on two separate occasions. Nevertheless Saul's son, Jonathan, was David's best friend. In fact, Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David. It is not surprising that Saul considered David a rival in all that he held dear.

It was not long before David had to flee from the king's presence. Saul immediately pursued David. He hunted him like an animal and tried to kill him. He failed each time. However David had several opportunities to kill Saul, but he refused to lay a hand upon him because he was

God's anointed king. David left it up to God to judge.

He did not take such matters into his own hands.

Saul went from bad to worse. Early in his rule, Saul had driven all sorcerers out of Israel in accordance with God's command. However he now goes to see a sorcerer, the witch of Endor, because God had departed from him. Soon thereafter Saul and his three sons were slain in a battle with the Philistines. When David heard the news of that fateful battle on Mount Gilboa, he said in sorrow: "Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places! How are the mighty fallen" (2 Sam. 1:19)!

Review Questions and Comments

1. Explain the difference between a theocracy and a monarchy.
2. What are some of the dangers a good man faces when success crowns his efforts?
3. Explain what is meant by the phrase: "To obey is better than sacrifice."
4. Explain some of the early influences in David's life that prepared him to be king.
5. Why do you think David was so confident when he went out to face Goliath?
6. What would have happened if Goliath was victorious over David?
7. Mention some of the "Goliath's" you must face in your life.
8. Jonathan loved David like his own soul. Would Jonathan have had a good reason for disliking David?
9. Why did not David take advantage of his opportunities to kill Saul? What does David's attitude say to you?

Memory Work

1. 1 Sam. 15:22
2. 1 Sam. 16:7
3. Rom. 8:31b-32
4. Catechism, p. 166, "The Seventh Petition"
5. Catechism, pp. 167-68, questions 240-41

XIX. 2 SAMUEL: DAVID AND HIS GREATER SON

David Settles Accounts

Saul had been David's enemy. He had hunted and hounded David. Some might suppose that David would have been happy enough to dance on Saul's grave. He had an opportunity to do so when an Amalekite brought news of king Saul's death. The messenger assumed that David would be happy, and so he made the mistake of taking credit for Saul's death. He thought that he would be rewarded and he was. David had him executed because he dared to kill the Lord's anointed king. David had no way of knowing at the time that the messenger was telling a lie. David acted like a king. He was decisive and just. He was also compassionate. For example, he showed kindness to Saul's relatives, especially to Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. David heard that he was crippled and invited him to live in the palace.

David Becomes King

The captain of Saul's army did not want David to be king. His name was Abner. He made Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, the king over Israel. David was made king over the southern province of Judah. The Bible says: "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David;

and David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker" (2 Sam. 3:1). After both Abner and Ishbosheth had been slain under tragic circumstances David was made king over all of Israel. The land was united once again.

David was 30 years old when he became king. He reigned 7 years in Hebron and 33 years in Jerusalem. He brought Israel to its pinnacle of glory. The year is approximately 1000 B.C. David conquered the last of Israel's enemies, and finally captured the stronghold of Jerusalem, Mount Zion. He made Jerusalem the capital city. There was peace in the land and the nations surrounding Israel paid tribute money in order to keep things peaceful. The nation of Israel stretched from the Euphrates River and Damascus in the north to Edom and Egypt in the south.

Israel was the most powerful nation on earth. With this in mind it can be understood why so many people in Jesus' day were mistaken in their beliefs about the Messiah, the Son of David. They expected Him to be a powerful king like David. They wanted the armies of Rome driven out of their country. They wanted David's Son to be a political and military savior in order that Israel might regain its former position of power and glory.

David's Victories and Defeats

God's Word says: "The Lord gave victory to David wherever he went" (2 Sam. 8:6). David was particularly

pleased to bring the holy Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. He was so happy that he danced before the Ark with joyous abandon. This spectacle displeased his wife Michal. She did not understand and lived to regret her actions and words. David planned to build a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem--a temple! However God had something to say about David's plans: "You may not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood" (1 Chron. 28:3). His son, Solomon, would build it. Solomon was the second son of David and Bathsheba. The very mention of her name reminds us of David's sin of adultery and murder.

It all started "at the time when kings go forth to battle" (2 Sam. 11:1). David sent his army into battle while he remained at home in Jerusalem. With time on his hands he happened to be walking on the roof of his palace. From that height he saw a woman bathing. Her name was Bathsheba. The truth of the proverb, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop," was demonstrated by the way David took her as his own. Bathsheba became pregnant. David tried to maneuver her soldier-husband, Uriah the Hittite, into thinking that the child belonged to him. To that end Uriah was called home from active duty, but he would not sleep with his wife. He did not want the luxury of ease while his friends in the army had to fight. As a loyal soldier Uriah camped outside of David's house. David even tried to get

Uriah drunk enough to go home but he remained there at David's doorstep.

David decided to resolve this unhappy situation in a most un gallant manner. He gave orders to his captain Joab to put Uriah in the front line of battle. The main force was ordered to retreat when the battle was at its height. Uriah was killed. Indirectly David had personally murdered him in order to cover up his adultery and make Bathsheba his legal wife. This secret sin of David was soon to result in open punishment. First of all the child that was born of this adulterous union died.

David would not acknowledge his sin nor repent of it. After a year had passed, God sent the prophet Nathan to David. He told David this story:

"There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his morsel, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (2 Sam. 12:1-6).

It must have shocked David to hear Nathan say simply and directly: "You are the man" (2 Sam. 12:7). David finally realized the enormity of his sin against man and God. He repented and Nathan assured him of God's forgiveness.

Nathan also told David that family trouble and violence would be a part of his household. The most striking example of this trouble came when David's son, Absalom, organized an army of men who wanted him to become king. They forced David to flee from Jerusalem. Later Absalom had to flee for his life when the tide of battle turned against him. David ordered his general, Joab, to spare his son's life. However Joab found Absalom hanging from an oak tree and immediately threw three javelins through his heart. The rebellion was over, but David wept for his son. He wished that he could have died in his place. Through all his trials, sins, and sorrows David found God to be merciful, and God found David to be still "a man after his [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14).

David's Greater Son

David's great son was Solomon, but David's greater son was Jesus. Jesus was "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (Rev. 5:5). God promised David that his son Solomon "shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Sam. 7:13). Solomon became the next king of Israel, and he did build the beautiful temple in Jerusalem. However Solomon would not rule "forever." Obviously the word "forever" leads us to look into the future to Jesus who was born of the virgin Mary. His rule would last forever, and "of his kingdom there will

be no end" (Luke 1:33). Jesus would be conceived or started in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit. Truly He was "the seed of the woman" promised to our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

Mary was of the house and ancestry of David. Jesus, the Son of David, would set up a kingdom that would last forever. He was David's greater Son. His kingdom would not be political but spiritual. The old kingdom of Israel would be replaced by the kingdom of the New Israel, God's Church. In this kingdom God would be enthroned and rule in the hearts and minds of those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Review Questions and Comments

1. Israel's golden age is dated around 1000 B.C. List a few things that made this age different from Israel's past.
2. How long did David rule as king?
3. Why was not David allowed to build the temple?
4. Who led David's army?
5. What commandments of God were broken by David besides those dealing with murder and adultery?
6. What punishment was pronounced upon David by Nathan? Does God still punish every sin?
7. Can you explain why a sin against another person is first of all a sin against God? Explain the difference between man's punishment and God's?
8. How did Absalom steal "the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Sam. 15:6)?
9. What promise was made to David concerning Solomon and his kingdom?

10. Who belongs to God's kingdom on earth? Where is God's kingdom to be found? Is it a kingdom of power, glory, or grace?

Memory Work

1. 2 Sam. 23:2-3
2. Ps. 32:1-2, 5
3. Ps. 51:11-12
4. Catechism, p. 79, "The Tenth Commandment"
5. Catechism, pp. 79-81, questions 74-78

XX. KINGS AND CHRONICLES: THE NORTHERN

KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

Solomon's Wisdom and Wealth

Solomon became king in the midst of a struggle for the throne. He survived by following good advice, by swift action in eliminating all opposition, and by setting up an efficient organization. David charged Solomon on his deathbed: "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man" (1 Kings 2:2). God promised Solomon any gift that he desired, and to illustrate what kind of man he was, he said: "Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9). God was pleased that Solomon did not ask for a long life, riches, or other material blessings that He gave him both wealth and honor in addition to wisdom (2 Chron. 1:11-12).

Solomon organized his kingdom into twelve districts (1 Kings 4:7). He enforced the peace by establishing military outposts throughout the land. They also served to ensure that tax and tribute money would not be withheld (1 Kings 9:15-21). "Solomon also had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen"

(1 Kings 4:26). Trade and commerce were not limited to overland routes, because "Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom" (1 Kings 9:26).

Wealth poured into Solomon's kingdom from all directions. "The king made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stone" (2 Chron. 1:15). In one year we are told that Solomon received 666 talents of gold (1 Kings 10:14). There can be little certainty about the worth of such a sum, but it is estimated that it amounted to at least twenty million dollars. This figure does not include the wealth derived from import and export taxes (1 Kings 10:15).

The news of Solomon's wealth and wisdom spread far and wide. The Queen of Sheba came to see if the reports she heard were true. After finding out for herself, she said: "The half was not told me" (1 Kings 10:7). She left a personal gift for Solomon valued in the millions of dollars. The range of Solomon's wisdom is described in this account:

He also uttered three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from the kings of the earth (1 Kings 4:32-34).

The Temple

David planned for the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. He gathered vast quantities of material, but he was not allowed to build the temple. This task was given to Solomon. He began by organizing a labor force of 180,000 men, and placed 3,300 foremen and superintendents over them (1 Kings 5:13-16). "When the house was built it was with stone prepared at the quarry; so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple, while it was being built" (1 Kings 6:7). It has been estimated that the cost of building the temple was five billion dollars (1 Chronicles 29). It was built on a scale twice the size of the tabernacle, and it faced East. Solomon fulfilled David's request that the temple "must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands" (1 Chron. 22:5). It was.

In dedicating the temple 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed as a peace offering (1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron. 7:5). In addition, there were countless burnt offerings and meal offerings. The glory of the Lord filled the temple in the form of a bright cloud during the dedication. This mysterious manifestation of God's glory also appeared on Mount Sinai and had descended upon the tabernacle. In the New Testament we discover that a bright cloud appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration where Moses and

Elijah talked with Jesus. Solomon expressed the wonder of God's glory in these words: "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built" (1 Kings 8:27)!

The temple and adjoining palace had taken twenty years to build (1 Kings 9:10). The temple remained standing approximately four hundred years, until 586 B.C. However the purpose of its existence had been forgotten by the people of Israel long before that date. As a result, five years after Solomon's death the treasures of the temple and palace were carried away by Shishak of Egypt (1 Kings 14:25-26).

The Divided Kingdom

The seeds of Israel's downfall were sown by Solomon. He foolishly demonstrated his importance by gathering together a harem of seven hundred wives and three hundred mistresses (1 Kings 11:3). He formed political alliances with many foreign nations and sealed such friendships through marriage. God repeatedly warned Israel that foreign women would "turn away your heart after their gods" (1 Kings 11:2). The Bible tells us that when Solomon was old his wives did exactly that. In fact, he even built places of worship for many false gods and served them (1 Kings 11:5-8). The most hideous practice of all was associated with a god called 'olech. Human sacrifices were required

in the service of this false god. As a result of idolatry the power and the glory of the kingdom of Israel came to an end. It did not happen during Solomon's lifetime because God decided: "For the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son" (1 Kings 11:12).

The nation of Israel originally was made up of twelve united tribes. It was divided into two parts after Solomon's death. One part was made up of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, forming the southern kingdom of Judah. This kingdom was ruled by Solomon's son Rehoboam. The other ten tribes united to form the northern kingdom of Israel under the leadership of Jeroboam I. They had rebelled against Rehoboam because he gave every indication of continuing in the lavish ways of his father. The tax burden had been heavy under Solomon, but his son threatened to increase that load (1 Kings 12:14). Consequently, civil war broke out and continued off and on for two hundred years.

The northern kingdom of Israel drifted into the worship of golden calves under Jeroboam. He did not want people in his kingdom travelling to Jerusalem in Judah for worship, and so he set up two worship centers of his own in the cities of Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:26-33).

Neither in the Northern nor in the Southern Kingdom did the kings worthily accomplish their mission in religious matters. Certain isolated kings were pious, strove for the advancement of spiritual life and heeded

prophetic advice, yet they won no lasting results. The next king would relapse into the wicked ways of his grandfather.²⁸

The northern kingdom of Israel had a total of nineteen kings, and all of them served false gods. Many of them died violent deaths in their struggle to rule. Some of them were assassinated. One of them by the name of Zimri burned the palace down around his head after ruling for seven days. Each king seemed to increase the wickedness of the previous king. Jehu, for example, was like an avenging angel. He ruthlessly tried to wipe out the worship of Baal in Israel. He enjoyed slaughtering people almost as much as he enjoyed recklessly driving his chariot (2 Kings 9:20). He butchered all the priests and worshipers of Baal. He also beheaded the seventy sons of former king Ahab so that no one would challenge his throne (2 Kings 10). King Ahab's wife was thrown from a window and trampled to death under the hoofs of his horse. After the dogs had finished their work, all that was left to bury was a skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands. Her name was Jezebel. The circumstances of her death had been prophesied by Elijah (1 Kings 21:23). Ahab's fate was similar (1 Kings 21:17-22; 2 Kings 9:35-37). As for Jehu, he "was

²⁸Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1955), p. 29.

not careful to walk in the law of the Lord the God of Israel with all his heart; he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin" (2 Kings 10:31).

Elijah and Elisha

Ahab was the worst king the northern kingdom produced (1 Kings 16:30). "There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited" (1 Kings 21:25). As an example of their wickedness, Ahab allowed Jezebel to seize Naboth's vineyard. Ahab therefore caused the disgrace and death of an innocent man. He also persecuted the prophets, particularly Elijah. Nevertheless Elijah attempted to turn the northern kingdom of Israel from its wickedness, but without success. He caused the rains to cease in Israel for over three years by the command and power of God. He also demonstrated God's power by raising a widow's son from death, and in an exciting contest, exposed and overcame the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

On one occasion Elijah became so discouraged in his work that he imagined himself to be the only faithful servant of God left in Israel. God assured him that there were still seven thousand people in Israel who had not bowed down to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). God preserves true and faithful followers in every age. Elijah reminds us of John the Baptist who is referred to as the second Elijah (Matt. 11:14). John the Baptist also became discouraged (Matt. 11:2-3).

He dressed in the same manner as Elijah. We are told that Elijah "wore a garment of hair-cloth, with a girdle of leather about his loins" (2 Kings 1:8).

At the end of his life on earth Elijah was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind without experiencing death as we know it. His successor, Elisha, witnessed the scene. He exclaimed in wonder: "'My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' And he saw him no more" (2 Kings 2:12). Elisha had asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit and was granted it in order to continue Elijah's great work.

Elisha left the scene of Elijah's translation into heaven and immediately crossed the Jordan River by using the cloak of Elijah to part the waters (2 Kings 2:14). Like Elijah he also raised a widow's son from death. He helped a Syrian nobleman find a cure for his leprosy. The man's name was Naaman who said in response to his healing: "There is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

On one notable occasion Elisha's enemies tried to capture him. They surrounded him with horsemen and chariots, but Elisha told his servant: "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). The servant could not see anyone until Elisha prayed: "O Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. . . . and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of

fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17). We ought to remember in discouragement and trial that God has many ways of helping which are not obvious to reason, sense, or sight. "Even after his death some life-force remained in his body,"²⁹ for when a dead man was thrown into Elisha's tomb and "touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood on his feet" (2 Kings 13:21).

What Began in Glory Ends in Ruin

The days of the northern kingdom of Israel were numbered. The nations of Syria and Assyria grew stronger and threatened to conquer Israel. For example, Syria attempted to starve Samaria into submission. The famine became so great that the inhabitants of the city even resorted to cannibalism (2 Kings 6:28-29). Finally, the Assyrians under Shalmaneser conquered the northern kingdom and carried the ten tribes into captivity. Eventually they were scattered over the face of the earth. Never again would these ten tribes become a nation.

The northern kingdom of Israel survived as a nation for approximately two hundred years. They broke their covenant relationship with God and as a result they were broken (2 Kings 18:9-12). The nation came to an end

²⁹Matthew Black, gen. ed., Peake's Commentary on the Bible (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 352.

in 722 B.C. All that remained was the southern kingdom of Judah. God preserved it so that His promise of a Savior would come true. Jesus was to be born of the tribe of Judah and the house of David. However the southern kingdom would not escape God's correction. He raised up the Babylonians to carry Judah into captivity. He did this in order to lead them to repentance and to purify them. Despite Judah's captivity God's plan was going to be carried out. A remnant would survive.

Review Questions and Comments

1. Describe the wisdom of Solomon in the incident recorded for us in 1 Kings 3:16-28.
2. If wisdom can be called the correct application of knowledge and experience, what does this say about your plans for an education? Is it enough to want an education just so that you can earn more money? How can your plans to fulfill your life become side-tracked?
3. Why did God divide the united nation of Israel into two parts? Why did the northern kingdom end up in ruin?
4. Choose one of the nineteen kings of the northern kingdom and summarize the events of his life.
5. Choose one of the prophets God sent to Israel and describe his work.

Memory Work

1. 1 Kings 8:27
2. 2 Chron. 1:11-12
3. Catechism, p. 59, "The Third Commandment"
4. Catechism, pp. 59-63, questions 45-51

XXI. KINGS AND CHRONICLES: THE SOUTHERN
KINGDOM OF JUDAH

Israel and Judah Part Company

The twelve tribes of Israel separated into two nations during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Immediately he attempted to reunite Israel by force, but God said: "You shall not go up or fight against your brethren. Return every man to his home, for this thing is from me" (2 Chron. 11:4). The covenant blessings were in danger of being cut off altogether because of their unfaithfulness.

Israel had become a great nation, true to God's promise, but they had little happiness or peace. Their greatness and glory faded when the covenant was ignored. God's blessings, His presence, and power ought to have resulted in their obedience. Instead there was disobedience. Therefore God was going to allow the temple to be plundered and the people scattered. "In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to the Lord, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen" (2 Chron. 12:2-3). The inner decay that began under Solomon now reaps its bitter harvest.

The Worst of the Kings of Judah

God's people wanted a king to rule over them. Their wish was granted, but these kings began looking to other nations instead of to God for help. They made friends with these nations, signed treaties, and inter-married with them. Not only did these friendships often rebound, but they also resulted in the importing of false gods. They copied the abominable practices of the heathen (2 Kings 16:3).

King Ahaz, for example, saw that God seemed to be with the Syrians, so he worshiped the gods of Syria. "He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, 'Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.' But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chron. 28:23). He closed down the house of God and burned incense on foreign altars that were built all over Jerusalem and throughout the cities of Judah.

The people of the northern kingdom often fought amongst themselves, but they fought especially against Judah. King Ahaz therefore looked to the Assyrians for help (2 Kings 16:7). When the Assyrians came they "afflicted him instead of strengthening him" (2 Chron. 28:20). Syria also continued to harass the southern kingdom of Judah. Meanwhile Ahaz continued to serve other gods even to the point of human sacrifices (2 Chron. 28:3).

Prophets like Micah and Isaiah were active in reminding kings like Ahaz that nothing short of a complete reformation and reliance upon the God of the covenant could save them. The message of the prophets fell on deaf ears.

One of the worst kings of Judah was Manasseh. He began to rule at the age of twelve. Human sacrifices and witchcraft became a part of his religion. "He burned his son as an offering, and practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards" (2 Kings 21:6). One generation would begin reforms, but the next generation would slip back into idolatry. Manasseh even placed a carved image of an idol in the temple (2 Chron. 33:7). The Bible says that "Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed" (2 Chron. 33:9). Later, when he was captured and afflicted by the Assyrians, he humbled himself before God. However it was too late for his son Amon or for the people of Judah to profit from his experience. In the second year of Amon's reign he was assassinated.

The Best of the Kings of Judah

The two best kings of Judah in this period of the divided kingdom were Hezekiah and Josiah. The Bible says of Hezekiah: "And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. In

the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them" (2 Chron. 29:2-3). God's law was observed and the passover celebrated once again. A few kings succeeded in taking a step in the right direction, but their successors often took two steps backward.

Hezekiah prayed for deliverance when he was told that he was soon going to die. God answered him saying:

I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake (2 Kings 20:5-6).

Isaiah told Hezekiah that Sennacherib and his Assyrian army would not so much as shoot an arrow into the city of Jerusalem. The enemy army, numbering 185,000 men, was wiped out by direct intervention of God (2 Kings 19:35). Babylon, not Assyria, was to carry Judah into captivity.

Josiah was another good king of Judah. He began ruling when he was eight years old. He broke down the altars of Baal, purged the land of all heathen practices, and repaired the temple. His predecessor, Amon, had ignored these things. During the clean-up campaign, a priest found a neglected book of the law of Moses. Josiah immediately gathered together all the people and "he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:30).

It was too little and too late. The days of the southern kingdom of Judah were numbered. The Babylonians were threatening the empires of both Assyria and Egypt. Pharoah Necho of Egypt tried to shift the balance of power by entering upon the scene. Josiah intercepted him at the hill of Megiddo, provoking the Egyptians into battle. Egypt had no quarrel with Judah at this time. They were concerned about Babylon. Pharoah Necho said: "What have we to do with each other, king of Judah? I am not coming against you this day, . . . Nevertheless Josiah would not turn away from him" (2 Chron. 35:21-22). Josiah was mortally wounded and later died in Jerusalem. The people of Judah mourned his death and with good reason, for a promising era had come to an end. In a few short years king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would crush the southern kingdom of Judah and carry them away into captivity.

Judah in Exile and Jerusalem Destroyed

Pharoah Necho journeyed to the Euphrates River where the battle of Carchemish was fought. Nebuchadnezzar defeated him. The year was 605 B.C. Egypt still tried to hang on to its crumbling empire of which Judah was a part. Egypt encouraged Judah to resist the Babylonians and they tried, but this loyalty to Egypt would be just as disastrous as their loyalty to Assyria. How completely they had forsaken their loyalty to God, His house, and His Word.

Jeremiah knew that the hand of God was behind Nebuchadnezzar's success, and he called upon Judah to surrender without resistance. He prophesied:

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste (Jer. 25:11-12).

This was not what the paid, professional prophets were saying. Some prophesied that Babylon's power would be broken in a few years and that Egypt would prevail. Others merely brought the kind of news people like to hear. At any rate, Jeremiah was branded a traitor and arrested. He nevertheless continued to speak God's message without fear or favor of men. In compassion, God had sent prophets like Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, and Amos to both Israel and Judah, but they were treated with contempt. "They kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16).

In 598 B.C. the Babylonians invaded the southern kingdom of Judah. They carried away the best people in the first of a series of deportations. Those who remained soon followed because they persisted in their foolish rebellion. It all came to an end in the year 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar sent "Nebuzaradan, the general of his army, to Jerusalem, to pillage the temple; who had it also in command to burn it

and the royal palace, and to lay the city even with the ground, and to transplant the people into Babylon."³⁰

The southern kingdom of Judah lasted approximately 135 years longer than the northern kingdom of Israel.

Judah's nineteen kings and one queen all belonged to the house of David, but most of them did not walk in the ways of David, nor of his God--the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A remnant would survive, but they were powerless to prevent Nebuchadnezzar from destroying Jerusalem and the temple.

And they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia (2 Chron. 36:19-20).

Through all these events God was still in control. He may bless or He may punish. It is the same today. God is still ruler of all nations--"King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16). He builds up and tears down, purifies and restores. He causes nations to fall and to rise, but always in the best interests of the people of God.

Review Questions and Comments

1. Did Judah learn anything from the experience of the northern kingdom?

³⁰Flavius Josephus, Complete Works of Flavius Josephus, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), p. 220.

2. What offensive heathen practice was imported by King Ahaz?
3. Why did not Judah follow the example of Manasseh and humble themselves before God? What does it mean to be humble?
4. The Bible tells us to "trust in the Lord and do good." Can you turn that around and say: "Do good first and then trust in the Lord?"
5. Pick out one of the prophets that God sent to Judah and give an example of his message.
6. Describe the reformation of king Josiah. How did it begin? In what way was the reformation begun by Martin Luther similar?
7. Why did God allow the temple to be destroyed and Judah carried away into captivity?
8. What does the word "remnant" mean? How does it apply to Judah?
9. Can you see the hand of God moving among the nations today? Upon what does a nation's true prosperity and peace depend?

Memory Work

1. 2 Kings 19:34
2. 2 Chron. 31:21
3. 2 Chron. 36:16
4. Catechism, p. 156, "The Third Petition"
5. Catechism, pp. 157-59; questions 224-27

XXII. EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER: THE REMNANT
OF GOD'S PEOPLE RETURN TO JERUSALEM

The Captivity Ends

The days of the Assyrians and Babylonians are past. Persia now rules the world. The Jews return to their homeland under Persia's first king, Cyrus. Jeremiah had prophesied Babylon's destruction and the seventy years of captivity (Jer. 25:11). The prophet Zechariah writes at the end of those years: "O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these seventy years" (Zech. 1:12)? He was promised: "The Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem" (Zech. 1:17). In these words we can see that God has not forgotten the exiles of Judah nor His promise of a Savior.

The people of Judah survived their ordeal of exile. The influence and example of prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel helped them preserve their spiritual health. In addition, some of the Jews held important positions of responsibility and trust in the governments of both Babylon and Persia. Consequently the Jews were given the opportunity to return to the land of their forefathers. Of course, God was behind all of these events.

We are told that "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" (Ezra 1:1), and the first group of exiles prepared to leave. The year is 538 B.C. They took with them the gold and silver vessels of the temple that the Babylonians had plundered. Most of the remaining Old Testament books deal with this period of the captivity and return of the Jews to Jerusalem. The prophetic message also points clearly to the New Testament age and the new covenant that God was preparing for His people.

The Temple Rebuilt

The first group of exiles to return home numbered approximately fifty thousand people. Many others preferred to remain in Persia. Born in captivity, they knew no other home. However the returning exiles could not forget Jerusalem, the temple, and the promises of God. Immediately they began rebuilding the foundation and altar of the temple. Some of the older men who remembered the glory of Solomon's temple "wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy" (Ezra 3:12). Nevertheless there was a big celebration when this first stage of the work was completed.

The Samaritans did not want the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The Samaritans had stayed behind while Judah suffered in captivity and, for the most part, had adapted themselves to the ways and wishes of their

conquerors. They succeeded in bringing the work to a halt by using deceit, force, and finally by obtaining a decree from the king (Ezra 4:23).

The Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel appealed to the next king of Persia. He revived the original decree of Cyrus and ordered the work to resume. He also reaffirmed that all expenses were to come out of the government's treasury (Ezra 6:1-4). The temple was finally completed "in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy" (Ezra 6:15-16). It had taken them twenty three years to complete this project, from 538 B.C. to 515 B.C.

Ezra the Priest

A new era begins with Ezra many years after the temple's completion. Ezra set out for Jerusalem with a carefully numbered group of 1,496 males with their families. Ezra also encouraged 258 priests from the tribe of Levi to join them in their pilgrimage. They were not the first nor the last group to arrive, but their presence brought new hope and direction for the settlers. Ezra's purpose was to restore the services of the temple and to strengthen the religious life of the people by teaching them the laws of God.

Ezra was displeased when he discovered that the people had intermarried with their idolatrous neighbors. He began to clean up this situation. His ruthlessness in this matter was prompted by the fact that Israel's downfall had been caused by this very thing. "Therefore give not your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever" (Ezra 9:12).

Nehemiah the Builder

Nehemiah followed Ezra. In Persia he served as cup-bearer to king Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1). One day the king noticed that something was bothering Nehemiah. He asked: "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sadness of the heart" (Neh. 2:2). Nehemiah then requested and received permission to leave for Jerusalem. He took with him a letter of introduction. Nehemiah's purpose was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:5). The walls were needed in order to protect the city and the temple.

The enemies of Judah once again interfered, but Nehemiah successfully organized the people and the work. They labored under ridicule and the constant threat of violence. On the walls, their weapons were always near at hand. They never took off their clothes except for washing.

As a result the task was completed in fifty-two days (Neh. 6:15). Jerusalem was once again a fortified city. The laws of Moses were observed and the Levites read "the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). The Feast of Booths was also re-introduced after being neglected since the days of Joshua (Neh. 8:17). The people rededicated themselves to the living God and promised to walk in His ways. The enabling power of God's Word and Spirit makes a reformation possible. It happened in the days of Joshua and Josiah, and it happened again in the days of Martin Luther. It can and should happen today, if only God's Word will become an open book--a book that is read, believed, and obeyed.

The captivity had served its purpose. Israel was cleansed. They were a nation once more, just as God had promised. The remnant of Judah would now stay together until the time when God would send the Messiah.

Esther the Jewish Queen

The book of Esther is much like the book of Ruth in that the history it describes becomes secondary to the people involved. In this case Esther serves as an instrument in the hand of God to preserve the life and future of His people. It all began when Queen Vashti would not obey the command of the king of Persia. Another woman is sought to take her place.

A Jewish man named Mordecai lived in Persia during the exile. He raised a young Jewish girl by the name of Esther (Hadassah) after the death of her parents. She was a beautiful girl both outwardly and inwardly. "The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti" (Esther 2:17).

Would Esther, now that she was queen, remember her own people? This question became important when a man by the name of Haman was promoted to prime minister. He did not like Mordecai because he would not bow down to him like the others. When Haman found out that Mordecai was a Jew, a foreigner, he planned the destruction of all Jews and their strange customs. He received permission from the king to do what he thought was best, particularly because Haman promised to put about twenty million dollars into the king's treasury. The money would come from seizing all Jewish properties and businesses. The day for the plan's execution was set and made into a royal decree for all the land to observe.

Mordecai went to Esther and said: "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14)? Esther decided to act. She received the king's permission to sponsor a banquet for Haman, and Haman was pleased to be the only guest invited. His pride and

position now prompted him to move against Mordecai, a trusted servant in the king's house. Haman thought that he could get away with it, and he was encouraged by his wife and doting friends to build a seventy-five foot high gallows on which to hang Mordecai.

The hand of God now begins to move. That night, strangely enough, the king found it difficult to sleep. He therefore began to read some records of his kingdom and discovered that Mordecai had once saved his life by uncovering an assassination plot. No reward had been given to Mordecai for this service. The king therefore summoned Haman to ask what should be given to a man whom the king wished to honor. Haman recommended that such a man should be made a prince, and he was shocked to find out that the man's name was Mordecai. He had wanted the honor for himself.

At the banquet Esther told the king that a man planned to destroy her people. The king wanted to know who dared to undertake such a heartless campaign. When he found out it was Haman, the king stormed out of the banquet hall to think things over. Esther also retired and left Haman alone with his fears and a growing sense of panic. Soon he decides to appeal to Esther and plead for his life. When the king returned and found Haman in the embarrassing position of being in Esther's bedroom, he made up his mind to punish Haman. The king was told that Haman had built

a gallows for Mordecai, and so he said: "Hang him on that" (Esther 7:9).

It was too late to stop the king's decree against the Jews but, with Mordecai as the new prime minister and Esther as the queen, it is not surprising that the Jews in Persia were allowed to defend themselves and their homes. However some took this opportunity to return to Jerusalem. They had the king's good will and blessing.

It has been observed that the name of God is not once mentioned in the book of Esther. Nevertheless the guiding hand of God can certainly be seen in the events of this period. God promised to preserve His people, and the exciting story of Esther proves that point in a striking manner. The Jews in memory of this particular deliverance began celebrating what today is known as the Feast of Purim.

Review Questions and Comments

1. What did God accomplish through Cyrus, king of Persia?
2. What did God accomplish through prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel?
3. What did the first group of exiles do when they returned to Jerusalem?
4. What purpose did Ezra have in returning to Jerusalem?
5. What important task was undertaken by Nehemiah?
6. Who opposed the rebuilding of the temple, the city, and the walls of Jerusalem?

7. What is necessary before a successful reformation of heart and life can take place?
8. How did Esther make it possible for God to preserve His people in captivity?
9. Give examples of the hand of God at work in the story of Esther? Give an example of God's guidance in your life?

Memory Work

1. Ezra 3:11
2. Neh. 1:8b-9
3. Esther 4:14
4. Catechism, p. 25, "To Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers"
5. Catechism, pp. 52-53, questions 30-33

XXIII. JOB AND PSALMS: THE PATIENCE OF JOB
AND THE BEAUTY OF THE PSALMS

Intermission

The five poetical books of the Old Testament will now occupy our attention before getting back to the activities of the prophets. The book of Job is the first one. It is not a poem in the normal sense of the word because it does not rhyme, but it does describe in great beauty and depth the problem people have with suffering. There is much in this book that is difficult to understand, but little that will not create a sense of wonder. Therefore it ought to be read many times over the years.

Job Loses Everything Except His Life

Job was a God-fearing man. He was also a very wealthy man. In his day he was known as "the greatest of all the people of the east" (Job 1:3). God holds Job up to Satan as an example of a good and upright man. The devil says that Job is not good for nothing! In other words: "Look at his wealth and great possessions! He can afford to be good, kind, and generous." Satan says that if God would take everything away from Job, he would "curse thee to thy face" (Job 1:11). God therefore permits the devil to have power over everything that belongs to Job.

Job's possessions and children are taken away, but his response is: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Job still trusts God. Satan then tells God that it would be a different story if the health and strength of his body were taken away. God says: "Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life" (Job 2:6). When Job finds himself painfully sick and covered with sores, his wife urges him to give up his faith and hope. Job calls her a foolish woman and confesses: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15, KJV).

Job's Friends Try to Comfort Him

News of Job's suffering travelled far and wide. Three friends of Job come to visit him. Their names are Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Job is in such a sad state that he wishes he had not been born. Then his three friends begin to explain to Job the possible reasons for his suffering. In a series of speeches, Eliphaz first says that he is suffering because he must have sinned terribly (Job 4: 6-8). Bildad tells him that all this has happened to correct Job, not to punish him (Job 5:17-18). Zophar suggests that God's punishment is less than Job deserves, and that he should repent of his secret sins, his pride, and anger (Job 11). He brutally infers that Job is not so innocent as he pretends. In a stinging rebuke he says:

"A stupid man will get understanding, when a wild ass's colt is born a man" (Job 11:12). However, understanding a problem does not make it disappear nor explain its origin.

Job's friends try to reason with Job. They plead with him. They condemn, insult, and console him. They criticize his replies and his deep despair, but Job does not know or understand why all this has happened to him and, incidentally, neither do his friends. Talking about it seems to help, but at other times Job asks his friends to leave him alone. He calls them all "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2). Job sometimes gets angry, resentful, and bitter. Yet even in the midst of his complaints, Job still cries out in confident faith: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (Job 19:25-27, KJV). Job realizes that in this life no final answer can be found to explain his situation, nor to explain the sufferings of mankind.

Job's Fortunes Restored

After dozens of speeches and Job's insistence that he is not a wicked man in the normal sense of the word, God finally has His say:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements--surely you know! . . . or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38:2-7)?

God reminds Job how small man is compared to the Almighty. Job and his friends are silent. In humility, awe, and wonder Job repents of his presumption and overconfidence, realizing that God works in ways that cannot be fully understood. In the redemptive suffering of Jesus, we see another man, unlike Job, who endures silently and without complaint.

In reading this book you will understand a little more about the wonderful will and works of God, and the hope that His presence in the world inspires. You will also understand what is meant by the well-known phrase: "The Patience of Job." You will begin to understand the mystery of why the righteous suffer and the wicked seem to prosper. In the end, of course, the righteous and God-fearing person will triumph, but if not in this life then certainly in the life to come. As for Job we are told that God restored to him twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10).

The Beauty of the Psalms

The book of Psalms is a kind of hymn book used by the Old Testament people of God. About half of the Psalms

were written by David who was a skilled musician. Many musical instruments were used to accompany the singing of these psalms. They were a part of worship in the temple and every special occasion or celebration.

One of the psalms was written by Moses (Psalm 90), showing us that these psalms had been collected over many years. Many psalms do not give us the name of the author. It really does not matter because they are still God's Word to us. The psalms praise God for His wonderful works. Many of them point in prophecy toward the coming Son of David and Savior, Jesus Christ. They also describe the troubles of the God-fearing. For example, Psalm 57 was written by David when he fled from king Saul and hid in a cave. Psalm 51 was written to celebrate God's mercy when Nathan the prophet came to David after he had committed the sins of adultery and murder. The psalms speak of sin and sorrow, repentance and forgiveness, joy and victory. We can recognize ourselves and our condition in many of them. They express our deepest thoughts, our longing, our fears, and our hopes.

The New Testament quotes the book of Psalms over one hundred times. Jesus often referred to them. Today people use them in their private devotions as well as in public worship. Martin Luther, inspired by Psalm 46, wrote the hymn: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Many of the psalms have been committed to memory not only because they

are so beautiful, but also because they are important statements of faith. They can also serve as an added spiritual resource in our arsenal of faith.

The apostle Paul in Ephesians urges us to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart" (Eph. 5:18-19). James counsels: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13, KJV). This echoes the many references in the psalms where we are encouraged to "Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob" (Ps. 81:1)! "Make a joyful noise to the Lord" (Ps. 100:1). "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Ps. 103:1)!

Review Questions and Comments

1. List Job's possessions before and after his trial of faith.
2. List Job's three friends.
3. What was Satan not permitted to do to Job? Can Satan harm you?
4. Give a few reasons why Job's friends thought he was suffering so much.
5. Describe Job's faith according to Job 13:15 and 19:25-27.
6. How do you bear up under any sorrow or suffering that comes your way? How can your attitude in trials and troubles be improved?
7. How many ways can the book of Psalms be used?

- 8. How many psalms are there? Which one is the longest, and which one is the shortest?
- 9. List the sufferings of Jesus as described in Psalm 22.

Memory Work

- 1. Job 1:21
- 2. Job 19:25-27
- 3. Select one of the following psalms and commit it to memory: Psalm 1; 8; 23; 32; 46; 90; 121.
- 4. Catechism, p. 95, question 111

CONVENTION SEMINARY JANUARY

XXIV. PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, AND SONG OF SOLOMON:

THE WISDOM, FEAR, AND LOVE OF GOD

Proverbs

A proverb is a truth that has been discovered by experience. It goes beyond knowledge and enters into the realm of wisdom. You might say that a proverb is a piece of crystallized wisdom. It is like a diamond that has been hardened under pressure. The book of Proverbs was written mainly by Solomon, and it certainly shows us that he was personally experienced with life and all of its pressures. He had prayed for understanding as a young king in order to rule over Israel. Behind his wisdom therefore was the wisdom of God.

Proverbs is a very practical book. You will recognize many truths that apply to your life in a striking way. In particular you will notice a repeated refrain, which is sounded first in Prov. 1:17: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." This phrase occurs with only slight variation also in Prov. 9:10; 16:6; and 28:14. The book speaks to parents, children, and society in general about such matters as personal honesty and fair dealings, sexual morality and purity, and keeping your mouth shut while your ears and heart remain open. In other words, Solomon impresses

upon us the need for sanctified common sense and above all, a sincere and heartfelt trust in God.

In order to sample the flavor of the book, listed here are two dozen practical proverbs:

1. "Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways" (Prov. 3:31).
2. "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing hidden" (Prov. 11:13).
3. "Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion" (Prov. 11:22).
4. "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24).
5. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).
6. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).
7. "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it" (Prov. 15:16).
8. "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention" (Prov. 15:18).
9. "A perverse man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends" (Prov. 16:28).
10. "Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife" (Prov. 17:1).
11. "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent" (Prov. 17:28).
12. "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion" (Prov. 18:2).
13. "Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel" (Prov. 20:17).
14. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

15. "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die" (Prov. 23:13).
16. "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles" (Prov. 24:17).
17. "Do not say, 'I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done'" (Prov. 24:29).
18. "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house with a contentious woman" (Prov. 25:24).
19. "Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked. It is not good to eat much honey, so be sparing of complimentary words. A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov. 25:26-28).
20. "Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool that repeats his folly" (Prov. 26:11).
21. "Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Prov. 26:12).
22. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Prov. 28:13).
23. "He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue" (Prov. 28:23).
24. "A man's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor" (Prov. 29:23).

Ecclesiastes

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher [Solomon], vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccles. 1:2). The word "vanity" occurs no less than thirty-seven times in the twelve chapters of this book. The word "vanity" means something that is vain, empty, useless, futile, or devoid of worth. Solomon found out by experience that there is

nothing in life that can offer permanent joy and satisfaction. He experimented with many forms of human endeavor from deep and serious study to hard labor. He tried good times, laughter, wine, women, and song. The more he learned the more questions he had to ask, and the more troubled he became. The more he looked for pleasure the emptier he became.

Several times in this book Solomon advises a person to keep busy and to work hard in the attempt to accomplish something good. If a person stops and broods about the meaning of it all, he might be led to despair. Perhaps this is why some people become paralyzed with doubts and fears, unable to make a decision or to act. Others find little reason for living and little purpose to life. They reach the sad conclusion that life itself is vain. Solomon observes: "This, however, you must know: I find that God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising."³¹ In other words, we cannot blame God for our own problems in life, run out on our responsibilities, or avoid facing up to our own sinfulness.

One of the reasons why we are never completely at home here in this world, and why we find no permanent happiness with the things of this life is because God "has put eternity into man's mind" (Eccles. 3:11). We know we

³¹Eccles. 7:29 (JB). [JB = Jerusalem Bible.]

have been created for something better. This life and all that it contains is not all there is. It is true that death comes to everyone as a result of sin, but that does not end life.³² In death our bodies return to the dust of the ground, but "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccles. 12:7). With God, at last, we shall understand the meaning of it all. Meanwhile, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. 12:13, KJV).

The phrase "fear God" can be found in this book many times, such as in Eccles. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12; and 8:13. Fearing God expresses our dependence upon God and our humility in the presence of God. It is as basic to life as oxygen is to breathing. Our relationship to God is to begin in our earliest years. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Eccles. 12:1, KJV).

Keep in mind that Solomon writes mainly about man's moral, intellectual, and physical existence. He is not describing the life of faith. He simply directs man to God, and we know that God's plan for rescuing mankind centers on the promise and coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in his own way, Solomon proves the importance of faith.

³²Rom. 5:12; 6:23

Indeed, apart from faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf, "all is vanity."

Song of Solomon

This last in a series of five poetical books is a love song. It speaks of the relationship between Solomon and his bride, and the joys of marriage. You will find the phrase "my beloved" used many times in this book, but over and above its beautiful, earthly meaning there is a divine meaning. In the New Testament, the Church is often called the bride of Jesus Christ and He is called the bridegroom.

Our relationship to the Lord is described in both the Old and New Testament in terms of the relationship between a man and his wife. Faithfulness to the marriage covenant makes fulfillment and happiness possible for a man and his wife. It also works that way in our relationship with the God of the covenant. We know He is faithful to us and that He loves us. He demonstrated this by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. He gave His life for our life in order to present us faultless before the throne of God. He therefore calls us to faith and invites us to His wedding banquet in the halls of heaven. The last book of the Bible informs us: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9).

Review Questions and Comments

1. What is more precious than gold or jewels?
2. What is the beginning of wisdom?
3. Compare some of today's proverbs with those in the Word of God, such as: "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em;" or, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."
4. Write an original proverb of your own based on your experience with life and with God.
5. Look through a few recent newspapers or magazines and cut out a section that describes or shows the vanity of life.
6. Why do we never feel completely at home in this world?
7. What do you consider to be the ingredients that go into making "the good life?"
8. What do you think Solomon would say to a person who is always worrying about the future? Is it a sin against hope to give up?
9. What are some of the things in a marriage relationship that are similar to our relationship with Jesus Christ?

Memory Work

1. Prov. 3:5-6
2. Prov. 9:10
3. Eccles. 7:20
4. Eccles. 12:1
5. Eccles. 12:7
6. Song of Sol. 8:6b
7. Catechism, p. 63, questions 52-54

XXV. ISAAH, JEREMIAH, AND LAMENTATIONS: WEEPING OVER
THINGS PRESENT, REJOICING OVER THINGS TO COME

The Prophets

We have studied the historical books of the Bible from Genesis to Esther. These books told us about man's creation, his fall into sin, and the history of God's people from the beginning of the covenant relationship to the organization, rise, and fall of the nation of Israel. We have also studied the poetical books of the Bible from Job to the Song of Solomon. We now begin a study of the books of the prophets.

We call Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel the major prophets, not because they are more important than the other prophets, but because their books are longer. The prophets like Hosea, Joel, and Amos wrote shorter books, and so we call them the minor prophets. All of them had major things to say for God. They spoke not only about Israel's religious life, but also about social conditions, economic, and political matters. They wanted Israel's relationship with God to be a seven-day-a-week affair, not just something for special occasions. They spoke not only of the situation in which they found themselves, but also of the future. Some of the things they wrote they did not

understand themselves. They knew they were writing also for future generations. They "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11, KJV).

The prophets reminded Israel of the covenant God had made with them. For review purposes, recall that God promised Abraham: (1) that he would have many descendents and great blessings; (2) that his descendents would own the land in which Abraham was a stranger; (3) that through Abraham and his descendents God would bless the world; and (4) that one of his descendents would be a special blessing for the whole world.

God keeps His promises in spite of His people's rebellion and captivity. The prophets therefore repeat God's promise of a Messiah to come. That is why, in their writings, there is the sound of rejoicing in the midst of weeping and hope in the midst of tragedy. They point forward to the establishment of God's new covenant in Christ.

The prophets were also voices in the wilderness. They were not popular because they spoke the kind of truth people did not want to hear, especially when in unbelief and pride they wanted to go their own way. The prophets were harassed, humiliated, and sometimes slain for their efforts, but they did not give up. Some may have felt like running away. Jonah tried it, but he returned to finish the task God had given him. Others tried to excuse

themselves from the great responsibility of being God's spokesman. Moses tried it and so did Jeremiah, but in the end God had His way with them. He had personally chosen them to perform a difficult assignment. He enabled them, and strengthened them in their task. Throughout their writings therefore you will notice an intense moral passion, and also a personal, unwavering dedication to God.

The prophets not only spoke of doom but also of the glorious future God had in store for Israel. They were seldom content or happy because what they had to say, and the salvation they offered, was ignored. With the breakdown of the old covenant came the first stirrings of the new covenant. Purification followed punishment and forgiveness followed failure. Through it all God was going to preserve a small part of Judah (the remnant) in order to fulfill the great promise He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The prophets were active during the years 800 to 400 B.C. All of them spoke either before, during, or after the fall of Israel and Judah. Some of them spoke to both Israel and Judah. They lived to see many of their warnings and promises come true, but after the year 400 B.C. there is silence. God would break that silence only with the final revelation of His plan of salvation, the birth of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah

Isaiah was called by God during the reign of king Uzziah around the year 740 B.C. In his lifetime the northern

kingdom of Israel came to an end, 722 B.C. Isaiah tried to prevent the same thing from happening to the southern kingdom of Judah. His book begins with these words:

"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Is. 1:1).

Isaiah's call to be God's messenger came to him in a glorious vision of the Lord of hosts. In the presence of God, Isaiah was very much aware of his unworthiness. He cried out: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). Cleansed and purified, Isaiah then "heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'" (Is. 6:8).

Isaiah was to proclaim the inevitable destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Reforms like those introduced by king Hezekiah did not last long. The normal response of the people was rebellion and ingratitude toward God.

Isaiah calls the nation and inhabitants of Jerusalem another Sodom and Gomorrah. Religiously they were like cattle, trampling in the courts of the Lord (Is. 1:12). God was weary of all their solemn assemblies and feasts, because there was no change in their life. God said: "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do

good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Is. 1:16-17). However they continued with their vain sacrifices and religious observances. God put His finger on the problem when He said: "This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote" (Is. 29:13).

The hearts of the people became hardened. Destruction was unavoidable. Jerusalem would fall, but she would rise again. A purified people would emerge out of the fires of captivity and affliction, for God can no more forget His people than a mother can forget her child (Is. 49:15). Isaiah's own children were a sign of God's intentions. One child was called "Shearjashub," meaning "the remnant shall return" (Is. 7:3). His other child was called "Mahershalalhashbaz," meaning "the spoil hastens" (Is. 8:3). Nations like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon would press in upon Judah and Jerusalem. They would spoil and plunder her, but she would rise again. The nations and tribes who rejoiced in their victories over God's people would not rise again. The kings of Judah did not believe Isaiah.

We turn now to an unforgettable picture God paints of His people. He compares them to a vineyard. God asks: "What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it" (Is. 5:4)? Instead of grapes (the fruits

of faith), the vineyard produced wild grapes (the fruits of disobedience). Therefore God would see to it that the vineyard was utterly laid waste. In a similar way, Jesus says: "I am the vine, you are the branches. . . . If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:5-6).

God's chosen people, like the vineyard Isaiah describes, would soon be in ruins, but out of one stump would grow a new and fresh branch. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him" (Is. 11:1-2). From the family of Jesse came David, and from king David's descendents would come the Messiah, the King of kings. He would restore the kingdom to Israel, but it would not be the same old Israel or a glorified revival of David's kingdom. It would be a totally new and different Israel. The new Israel would come to be known as the Church, and membership in this new kingdom would be open to people of every country and race. "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Is. 60:3). The people of the Church, Jew and Gentile alike, would be the spiritual descendents of Abraham. They would believe God's promises like Abraham of old.

Isaiah often blends the present with the future as when he speaks of his beloved Jerusalem. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Is. 40:1-2). He blends the present with the future when he predicts the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Persians. Cyrus of Persia becomes the liberator of God's people and foreshadows the deliverance of the Messiah. "Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him" (Is. 45:1). The Spirit of God also moved Isaiah to look into the future when he describes the birth of the Messiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14, KJV). He calls this Child: "The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6, KJV).

The majesty of Isaiah's vision reaches its highest point with the description of Jesus' suffering and death.

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he

opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. . . . he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. . . . Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin (Is. 53: 3-10).

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is often called "the weeping prophet" because he loved God's people and did not want to see them perish. He followed in the footsteps of Isaiah and, like Isaiah, he failed in his task because God's people did not repent. They turned to other nations instead of turning to God. Jeremiah was chosen by God before he was born. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Jeremiah tried to excuse himself saying: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Jer. 1:6). God told him: "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:9-10).

Jeremiah's task was a thankless one. It was also a dangerous task because the people were determined not to listen to him. They preferred to listen to the prophets God did not send. These false prophets filled the people with vain hopes, speaking "visions of their own minds, not

from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say 'no evil shall come upon you'" (Jer. 23: 16-17).

Jeremiah tried to save Judah from the Babylonians by urging them not to resist. He was branded a traitor and arrested. Jeremiah insisted that Babylon would conquer Judah and take them into captivity for seventy years whether they like it or not. Only after that period of time would Judah return to their homeland. Of course, the words of this lonely prophet were ignored. Yet Jeremiah would not and could not keep silent.

I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer. 20:7-9).

Judah apparently had learned little from the captivity of the northern kingdom. They also learned little from Jeremiah. His words were in vain. Jeremiah realized it, but he persisted in telling the truth simply and clearly.

Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are delivered!"--only to go on doing all these abominations (Jer. 7:9-10)?

He writes further: "When I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer" (Jer. 7:13). "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord" (Jer. 23:24). "Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the Lord'" (Jer. 17:5).

Jeremiah knows that the way to repentance and faith is not in man. He says: "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). The pride in people will not allow them to admit that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it" (Jer. 17:9)? God searches our hearts and knows them very well. God knew Judah's heart and their future. He corrected them, but not in malice: "For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). Not only would the day come when they would return to Jerusalem, but:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness" (Jer. 23:5-6).

The message is clear. God says: "I am with you to save you, says the Lord; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I have scattered you, but of you I will

not make a full end. I will chasten you in just measure" (Jer. 30:11). "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer. 31:3).

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

When God promises something, it is as good as done. In Christ, all of these words have been fulfilled.

Lamentations

The Lamentations of Jeremiah³³ were read in Jewish synagogues "on the 9th of Ab, the day on which Jerusalem was destroyed, and is therefore in the Jewish mind inseparably connected with the greatest national catastrophe that ever befell their race."³⁴ On that day in 586 B.C. Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed. Jeremiah lived through those

³³This book can also be considered a poetical book written in the form of an acrostic poem, and belonging to that category entitled "Writings" in the Hebrew Bible.

³⁴Charles Gore et al., A New Commentary on Holy Scripture Including the Apocrypha (London: SPCK, 1958), p. 515.

dark days. He had been a witness to all the political deals that were made with the nations surrounding Judah, and he warned against them. He lived to suffer for it, but not to regret it. Nevertheless, he laments and mourns for Jerusalem saying: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem; 'Is this the city which was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth'" (Lam. 2:15)?

The destruction and the famine resulting from the siege of Jerusalem was so terrible that Jeremiah says: "Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger" (Lam. 4:9). He explains the reason for this disaster: "The Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe" (Lam. 1:5). If God would do this to His chosen people whom He loved and cherished, do you suppose Babylon or any godless nation of the world shall escape His righteous anger?

In the midst of calamity Jeremiah can still clearly point to the mercy of God.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. . . . The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. . . . For the Lord will not cast off for ever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men (Lam. 3:22-33).

The book closes with the request and prayer: "Restore [turn] us to thyself, O Lord, that we may be restored" (Lam. 5:21)!

Review Questions and Comments

1. List the four basic promises God made to Abraham.
2. In what time period were the prophets active? In what year was Jerusalem destroyed?
3. What did the prophets weep over? What did the prophets rejoice over?
4. Compare the care given to a vineyard with the care God lavishes upon you? Does caring also include being able to say "no."
5. Look up Is. 28:16 and compare it with Matt. 21:42-46; Rom. 9:33; Eph. 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:6-10.
6. What assurance do you find in Is. 43:1-2?
7. Compare the glories of the old covenant with the greater glories of the new covenant as described in Jer. 33:31-34.
8. What is man's nature like according to Jer. 17:9?
9. Compare Jer. 23:5-6 with Jer. 33:15-16. What is Jeremiah talking about?
10. Handel's "The Messiah" puts Lam. 1:12 to music. What do you think he had in mind when he used this particular verse?

Memory Work

1. Is. 41:10
2. Is. 42:3a
3. Is. 55:8-11
4. Jer. 6:14
5. Jer. 29:13

6. Lam. 3:22-23

7. Catechism, pp. 138-39, questions 187-90

The word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, I have made you
 a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth,
 you shall give them warning from me." (Ezek. 3:17)
 I said, "Lord, I am a man of words, I am not a seer." (Ezek. 3:18)
 He said to me, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel;
 whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me."
 (Ezek. 3:17-18)
 If you do not give warning to the wicked, they will die in their iniquity,
 and I will be held responsible for their blood. (Ezek. 3:18)
 I said, "Lord, if I am a watchman, what shall I do when I hear a word from
 your mouth?" (Ezek. 3:19)
 He said to me, "When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall say to the
 wicked, 'Behold, I have heard the word of the Lord, saying that you shall die
 in your iniquity, unless you turn away from it.' And if they do not turn
 away, you shall say, 'Behold, I have heard the word of the Lord, saying
 that you shall die.' And if I have not spoken, I will not be held responsible
 for their blood." (Ezek. 3:19-21)
 I said, "Lord, if I am a watchman, what shall I do when I hear a word from
 your mouth?" (Ezek. 3:22)
 He said to me, "When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall say to the
 righteous, 'Behold, I have heard the word of the Lord, saying that you shall
 live.' And if they do not live, you shall say, 'Behold, I have heard the
 word of the Lord, saying that you shall die.' And if I have not spoken, I
 will not be held responsible for their blood." (Ezek. 3:22-23)

XXVI. EZEKIEL AND DANIEL: TWO PROPHETS IN EXILE

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was taken into captivity by the Babylonians ten years before Jerusalem was destroyed. In captivity God called him to be His witness. "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me" (Ezek. 3:17). God called Israel a rebellious people but, in sending Ezekiel to them, at least they would know "that there has been a prophet among them" (Ezek. 2:5). Terrible things had happened to Israel, but the worst was yet to come--Jerusalem would be destroyed.

Ezekiel pointed out that Israel's captivity was not meant to destroy them, but to correct them. God's name had been abused so undeservedly. As God's chosen people they had been blessed with God's law and covenant. Many faithful teachers and leaders had been sent to them, but what was the result? "She has wickedly rebelled against my ordinances more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries round about her" (Ezek. 5:6). Israel had no excuse. In a vision Ezekiel was shown how the Israelites had turned their backs upon God and the temple of Jerusalem. Instead of worshiping Him, they worshiped the sun and many other images in secret places.

They said: "The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land" (Ezek. 8:12).

Israel was like an unfaithful wife. Even her children were used as human sacrifices to false gods (Ezek. 16:20). The surrounding heathen nations blushed with shame when they heard of Israel's behavior (Ezek. 16:27). Claiming to be God's chosen people and heirs of the promises given to Abraham did not give them the right to be wicked. God said to them: "You eat flesh with the blood, and lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood; shall you then possess the land? You resort to the sword, you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife; shall you then possess the land (Ezek. 33:25-26)?"

Meanwhile the false prophets had been busy building up the false hopes of the people. They pretended that what they said was God's word and will. "Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing (Ezek. 13:3)! They white-washed the truth and made false promises. "'They have misled my people,' God said, 'saying, "Peace," when there is no peace'" (Ezek. 13:10). The people eagerly listened to the false prophets. They liked to hear good things. As for Ezekiel's message, God said:

And they come to you as people come; and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with their lips they show much love, but their heart is set on their gain. And, lo, you are to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful

voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it (Ezek. 33:31-32).

The prophecies God gave Ezekiel came true. Ezekiel knew they would. This did not make Ezekiel happy, nor did it make God happy. "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel" (Ezek. 33:11)? They did not turn back or repent. Therefore God's fury was poured out upon Israel. Perhaps then they would know that God is still God. Sometimes it is only in great trouble and calamity that people will cry out to God in humble dependence. Israel learned the hard way that God meant what He said: "I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries, and I will consume your filthiness out of you" (Ezek. 22:15).

Ezekiel saw many visions of what God had in mind for His people. God even used Ezekiel as an object lesson to illustrate events that were to come. On one occasion Ezekiel was told that his wife, the desire of his eyes, would die. He was not to mourn or weep for her (Ezek. 24:15-18). He was to be an example of what would happen to Jerusalem, the desire of Israel. Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Israelites in captivity would not weep or mourn for her because they would not hear about it until years later (Ezek. 24:26-27).

Several times Ezekiel cries out in deep distress:

"Ah Lord God! wilt thou destroy all that remains of Israel in the outpouring of thy wrath upon Jerusalem" (Ezek. 9:8)?

God promised Ezekiel that "a remnant" would be preserved.

He would gather the scattered exiles and again give them the land of Israel. More importantly He would put a new spirit within them. "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God"

(Ezek. 11:19-20). This would be accomplished in its fullest sense with the coming of the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken (Ezek. 34:23-24).

God also determined that the nations who laughed at Israel's great trouble and distress would be destroyed utterly in due time. God had special plans for His people: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak" (Ezek. 34:15-16).

Ezekiel moves back and forth from the present to the future. His record often weaves the two together into a single strand. He speaks particularly of Christ and His

eternal kingdom when he prophesies: "David my servant shall be their prince for ever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them" (Ezek. 37:25-26). New life would be given to "the dry bones" of God's people. In the days of the new covenant people would have the power to walk in God's ways.

The final chapters of Ezekiel speak of God's glory returning to Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple. Heaven's glory would indeed come down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He would be the glory of His people Israel and the Light of the Gentiles. Ultimately, God's glory is going to be fully revealed in the new Jerusalem above. God's people will appear there in glory everlasting. "And the name of the city henceforth shall be, The Lord is there" (Ezek. 48:35).

Daniel

Daniel was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 605 B.C. This was the first in a series of deportations. Ezekiel followed Daniel several years later. The exiles were scattered throughout the empire and given a degree of freedom in order to practice their religion. Some of them were trained for government service, like Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar took the most talented and intelligent young people he could find for this purpose: "Youths without blemish, handsome and skilful in all wisdom, endowed with

knowledge, understanding learning and competent to serve in the king's palace, and to teach them the letters and language of the Chaldeans" (Dan. 1:4).

Three other young men were chosen besides Daniel. Their names are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were given the Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel was given the name Belteshazzar. They lived in the city of Babylon.

Ancient historians said that its wall was 60 miles around, 15 miles on each side, 300 feet high, 80 feet thick, extending 35 feet below the ground so that enemies could not tunnel under; . . . the wall protected by wide and deep moats (canals) filled with water; 250 towers on the wall, guard rooms for soldiers; 100 gates of brass. The city was divided by the Euphrates into two almost equal parts.³⁵

King Nebuchadnezzar also built the famous "Hanging Gardens of Babylon," one of the seven wonders of the world.

It is interesting to note that the term "Jew" is used in the book of Daniel (Dan. 3:8). The first use of this term "Jew" or "Yehudi" in the Bible goes back to the reign of king Ahaz (2 Kings 16:6). A similarity can be seen and heard when you compare the word "Jew" with "Judah." The term also occurs in the book of Esther (Esther 2:5; 3:4).

We are told that God gave the four chosen men of Judah "learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"

³⁵Henry H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook, 24th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 336.

(Dan. 1:17). The king found them "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom" (Dan. 1:20). On one occasion the king demanded his wise men to tell him not only the contents of a dream he had forgotten, but also the interpretation of the dream. The wise men answered that no one on earth was able to do that (Dan. 2:10). Daniel however received power from God to discover and interpret the dream, like Joseph who once did the same thing for Pharaoh in Egypt. Daniel also refused to take any credit for such ability. Instead he gave all glory to God. Daniel said: "There is a god in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. . . . But as for me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living has this mystery been revealed to me" (Dan. 2:28-30).

Daniel was promoted ahead of the other men in the king's court. He was made "ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan. 2:48). Daniel's three friends were made administrators "over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (Dan. 2:49). Daniel's special position as advisor to the king inspired jealousy among his competitors, even into the reign of Darius the Mede. They tried to get Daniel into trouble, but their evil schemes only resulted in getting themselves into trouble. For example, they were thrown

into the lion's den that was intended to destroy Daniel. Daniel survived Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and the fall of Babylon. He served Darius the Median king, and continued his work well into the reign of Cyrus, the Persian king. He lived to see the end of Judah's captivity.

Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego also got into trouble in the early days of the Babylonian empire. They refused to worship and bow down before a ninety-foot high, golden image of the king. Threatened with a horrible death, they were asked: "And who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands" (Dan. 3:15)? The three men replied: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; . . . But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18).

God preserved them from the fire by the mysterious presence of a fourth man in the flames. Their hands had been tied and the men who had thrown them into the fiery furnace perished, but Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed in surprise: "But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods" (Dan. 3:25). It was discovered when they came out of the furnace that their clothes did not smell of smoke, nor was a hair on their heads singed. Nebuchadnezzar decreed: "Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (Dan. 3:29).

Daniel, like Ezekiel, moves from the present into the future by introducing apocalyptic visions. The word "apocalypse" means "to uncover" or "to disclose." Daniel's most important disclosure is that, in the future, an everlasting kingdom will be established under the Messiah. Daniel calls this Messiah "the Son of man," a royal title often used by Jesus to describe Himself.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all people, nations, languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

Jesus fits the description of this glorious and all-powerful figure proclaimed by Daniel. His coming was eagerly awaited, but the people of Jesus' day stumbled over the fact that He identified Himself so completely with man. He would bear our burdens and suffer our sorrows. He would die and rise again in order to remove our sins from us. It is not surprising therefore that John writes: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

The angels Gabriel³⁶ and Michael³⁷ are introduced by name in the book of Daniel. They appear as God's messengers, interpreters, and also as defenders of God's people. Later they reappear in the Gospels and in the book of Revelation. Daniel's vision of the future also reappears in the Gospels and in the book of Revelation, especially with regard to the eventual triumph of Christ and His Church over the kingdoms of this world, the flesh, and the devil. The apocalyptic visions of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation have often been abused by those who force them to fit and to apply to specific situations and persons in this world. It is therefore well to remember that Christ's kingdom is not a national or political reality, like old Israel, but a spiritual reality. It is the new Israel of God, the Church, and its true members are believers in Christ.

Review Questions and Comments

1. Pick any one of the object lessons recorded in Ezek. 4: 1-17; 5:1-17; 12:1-28, and summarize their contents and importance.
2. How was God's name and God's way abused by Israel? What did God do about it?
3. What blessing would the shepherd of Israel bestow upon Israel?
4. Who are the "dry bones" in Ezek. 37:1-14? Who is David in Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-28?

³⁶Dan. 8:16; 9:21

³⁷Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1

5. What hope did Ezekiel hold out to the exiles? What hope does it offer you in your situation in life?
6. How did the actions of Daniel and his three friends encourage the exiles in a strange land? What price often has to be paid for being faithful to God? Have you paid your dues? made a down-payment yet? declared your intentions to remain faithful to Christ and His Church?
7. Explain the different parts of the image in Dan. 2:31-45. How does Jesus fit the description of "a stone" that "was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image"? How does Jesus fit the description of "the Son of man" as proclaimed by Daniel in 7:13-14?
8. Summarize either Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great tree in Daniel 4, or Belshazzar's feast in Daniel 5.
9. How may a person take the apocalyptic visions of Ezekiel, Daniel, and the book of Revelation and abuse them?

Memory Work

1. Ezek. 33:11
2. Dan. 12:2-3
3. Catechism, p. 155, "The Second Petition"
4. Catechism, pp. 155-56, questions 222-23

XXVII. HOSEA, JOEL, AMOS, AND OBADIAH:

LOVE AND JUSTICE

The Minor Prophets

The twelve books of the Minor Prophets are not arranged in chronological order, but all of them center around a critical time-period in the history of Israel and Judah. The people of God were floundering like a ship without a rudder in storm-tossed seas. They needed direction because the priests of Israel and Judah were not faithful in teaching the people God's will and way. Therefore God personally sent them His messengers. These men followed in the footsteps of the great prophets like Moses, Samuel, and Elijah. They spoke to a particular people at a particular time, and yet their vision of the future includes all people, for they announced the coming dawn of a new and glorious age. They pointed clearly to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Hosea

Hosea spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel "in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel" (Hos. 1:1). Hosea's ministry lasted approximately sixty years. He was a contemporary of Isaiah who was at work among the people of the southern kingdom of Judah. In

Hosea's day the people of northern kingdom had forgotten their covenant relationship with God. They had become prosperous and, under the rule of Jeroboam, had reached the height of their national greatness. "During his [Jeroboam's] reign of forty-one years wealth increased, and the standard of living became so luxurious that it called forth the vehement and bitter reproaches of Amos and Hosea."³⁸ Israel was ripe for Assyrian conquest and captivity.

Matthew's Gospel makes use of the prophetic words of Hosea: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1). Jesus had been taken to Egypt as a child and later returned to live in Nazareth. In the same way, when Israel was like a child, Moses led them out of Egypt and forged them into a nation. God loved them very much. Time and again, God reminded His people: "I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior" (Hos. 13:4).

Israel, as God's bride, had become old, hard, and unfaithful. To illustrate this hardness and unfaithfulness, God told Hosea to marry a harlot. Her name was Gomer. Their children were given names that described what God was going to do in punishing Israel. God's people were acting

³⁸Arthur W. Klinck, Old Testament History (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938; reprint ed., 1950), p. 89.

just like Hosea's adulterous wife. She was faithful to Hosea for a short time, but soon left him and went to live with other men. In a similar way, this is what the people of Israel were doing. They were playing the harlot with other gods. As a result: "None of them calls upon me" (Hos. 7:7). Instead they were calling upon other nations and gods to help them. "They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria" (Hos. 7:11, KJV).

God wanted His people to return to Him. To illustrate this concern, God told Hosea to find his run-a-way wife and bring her back home again. God was going to do the same thing for Israel. "Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days" (Hos. 3:5).

Meanwhile, Hosea writes and speaks to the heart of the matter:

1. For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7).
2. Woe to them when I depart from them (Hos. 9:12)!
3. My God will cast them off, because they have not hearkened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations (Hos. 9:17).
4. You have plowed iniquity, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruits of lies. . . . you have trusted in your chariots and in the multitude of your warriors" (Hos. 10:13).
5. So I will be to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, . . . O Israel,

thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help (Hos. 13:1-9, KJV).

6. I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction (Hos. 13:14, KJV).

God will keep His promises even though we, like Israel, do not keep ours. The prophet spares no words in condemning sin, but when he proclaims God's love for the sinner, his words are like a wonderful oasis in a desert, a breath of clean, fresh air, and like a sudden burst of brilliant light in the gathering darkness.

Joel

Joel points forward to the coming day of Pentecost and the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit. In the wilderness Moses had prayed: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29)! That day would arrive, for Joel declares: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28). The Holy Spirit would not open the eyes and hearts of a chosen few, but young men and old, sons and daughters, servants and masters would all come under His gracious influence through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. They would be enabled to know God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and they would be empowered to do His will.

Joel announces the coming of the great "day of the Lord." He uses this apocalyptic phrase throughout his message as a way of preparing Israel and the world for God's judgment. This judgment is illustrated by an actual plague of locusts in the land. "Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run" (Joel 2:4). The locusts that ravaged the land were like a powerful army. There was no escape from them, nor is there any escape from God. "For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it" (Joel 2:11)?

Joel therefore calls the people to repentance. He sounds like Peter on the day of Pentecost when he says: "Rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13). Joel also pronounces judgment upon Israel's enemies, but promises peace to God's people: "Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations" (Joel 3:20).

Amos

Amos was not very popular with the rulers and the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. For one thing Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah. For another, they did not like to be reminded of their sins. They told Amos: "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at

Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom" (Amos 7:12-13). Amos replied that he had no desire to be a prophet. He was not even a prophet's son, but a herdsman and a fruit-picker. Nevertheless God had called him and told him: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (Amos 7:15).

Amos was not looking out for himself or seeking personal gain. He was not a professional priest or prophet. God seldom chose such people because they were too busy pleasing the king to think of pleasing God. Amos had to go to Bethel and say what had to be said. God wanted him to speak in the capital city and religious center of the northern kingdom, the same place where God once appeared to Jacob as he slept under the stars. Jacob had built an altar there and called the place Bethel, which means "the house of God." Bethel had now become the house of Satan. The people worshiped Baal and even borrowed other gods from their heathen neighbors. They had become just like the foreign nations surrounding them, only worse, because they had no excuse for their ignorance of the true God.

Amos therefore pronounces judgment against Israel: "On the day that I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel" (Amos 3:14). Israel had ignored all the warning signs. Now it was too late. The words of the prophet and the gentler judgments of God did not succeed in bringing Israel to repentance. Five examples

of God's judgment are given and five times God says: "Yet you did not return to me, says the Lord" (Amos 4:6,8,9,10, 11). Therefore the prophet says: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (Amos 4:12)!

Israel was very religious, but only on the outside. In their hearts and lives they loved dishonesty and injustice. "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes" (Amos 2:6). God says: "I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins-- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate" (Amos 5:12).

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

God gave Amos a number of object lessons in a vision to illustrate His intentions toward Israel, such as a plumb line³⁹ and a basket of summer fruit.⁴⁰ Amos also used comparisons that were not very complimentary. For example, he compared the women of Israel to prize cows (Amos 4:1). These women demanded and received their luxuries at the expense of the poor, but the day was coming when invading armies "shall take you away with hooks" (Amos 4:2).

Amos sounded the alarm of judgment in the midst of Israel's idleness and feasting: "Woe to those who are at

³⁹Amos 7:7-9

⁴⁰Amos 8:1-3

ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountains of Samaria" (Amos 6:1). Their worldliness and their false sense of security began when they turned away from God. Their society, like their religion, had become corrupt. "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground; except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord" (Amos 9:8). In judgment God still remembers mercy.

Obadiah

This is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It speaks of the destruction of the nation of Edom, descended from Esau. Esau had once hated his brother Jacob, and his descendents were now continuing that hatred by rejoicing over Judah's capture and captivity. They even helped the invading armies by cutting off all escape routes and by joining in the slaughter and plunder of Jerusalem.

On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. But you should not have gloated over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted in the day of distress. . . . you should not have looted his goods in the day of calamity. You should not have stood at the parting of the ways to cut off his fugitives; you should not have delivered up his survivors in the day of distress. . . . As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head (Obadiah 11-15).

The Edomites felt secure in their fortresses built high in the hills of the wilderness, but God said:

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is high, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord (Obadiah 3:4).

God promises that "the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; . . . there shall be no survivor to the house of Esau; for the Lord has spoken" (Obadiah 18).

Review Questions and Comments

1. Why did God send prophets when Israel had many priests?
2. The prophets spoke to the people of their day. How is it that we find ourselves included in their words?
3. What had prosperity done to Israel?
4. List the names of the children of the prophet Hosea (Hos. 1:3-9). What do the names mean?
5. What did God desire more than sacrifices and burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6)?
6. What problem did Israel have according to Hosea 4:16; 11:7; and 14:4?
7. What does Joel tell us about God's Holy Spirit?
8. What special privilege did Israel enjoy according to Amos 3:2?
9. Amos denounces many social and economic sins of Israel. What were they doing according to Amos 8:5? What would happen to them according to Amos 8:11?
10. What did God want instead of the sound of music and solemn assembly (Amos 5:21-24)?

- 11. What does Obadiah have to say about the security of fortresses, armies, or weapons?

Memory Work

- 1. Hos. 6:6
- 2. Hos. 13:9
- 3. Joel 2:13
- 4. Amos 5:24
- 5. Amos 8:11
- 6. Obadiah 15
- 7. Catechism, p. 73, "The Seventh Commandment"
- 8. Catechism, pp. 73-74, questions 66-67

XXVIII. JONAH, MICAH, NAHUM, HABAKKUK, AND ZEPHANIAH:

JUDGMENT AND MERCY

Jonah

Jonah was the son of Amittai and lived during the reign of Jeroboam (2 Kings 14:25). He was an effective but unwilling prophet. He was commanded: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). Immediately Jonah proceeded to flee from the presence of the Lord. He did not want the responsibility of preaching repentance to the people of Nineveh. He therefore boarded a ship heading for Spain, the end of the known world of that day. God followed him and caused it to happen that Jonah was thrown overboard into the Mediterranean Sea. God then "prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah" (Jonah 1:17, KJV). He came home a humbler, wiser, and more obedient servant.

The burden of Jonah's message to Nineveh was: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4)! His message must have been persuasive and powerful because the people of Nineveh believed God's spokesman. "They proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). Jonah was surprised and at the same time disappointed. He wanted to see Israel's ancient enemy and the city of Nineveh destroyed.

Jonah was angry when he found out that God was going to spare Nineveh. He wanted to see some fireworks, but now all he could do was sulk in a booth under the shade of a plant that God had caused to grow. Then God caused the plant to die so that Jonah faced the hot sun again. He was angry because the plant had died, and "asked that he might die" (Jonah 4:8). He was more upset over the death of that precious little shade plant than he would have been if all Nineveh had perished. God told Jonah:

You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle (Jonah 4:10-11)?

There are many who prefer to reduce the book of Jonah to a parable, a poem, or an allegory. However, it is rooted in history according to 2 Kings 14:25, and particularly because Jesus compared Himself to Jonah. Jesus said: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39-40).

The main message of the book of Jonah is that God cares about the salvation of other people and nations. God's people were to be a blessing to the whole world even

before the Messiah came. Israel often withdrew behind their special privileges and ended up losing them. Meanwhile, the cruel nation of Assyria repented when they heard Jonah preach God's Word, but God's own people did not repent even though many prophets preached to them the Word of God.

Jesus said: "For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation" (Luke 11:30). He then added: "The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Luke 11:32-33). The people of Jesus' day did not repent and believe even though God's own Son was in their midst. His life, death, and glorious resurrection was God's final solution of the sin problem and the fulfillment of every prophetic word and deed. What more did Israel want or need? As for us: "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation" (Heb. 2:3)?

Micah

The prophet Micah lived during the days of king Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. He defended the poor and fatherless, rebuking the rulers and priests of the people who seemed first in line to do evil. Micah describes the problem in this way:

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us" (Micah 3:9-11).

Micah pronounces the verdict: "Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height" (Micah 3:12).

The word "Zion" is another name for Jerusalem, the national and spiritual center of Israel. Originally, Zion was a stronghold on a hill around which Jerusalem was built. David's royal palace was situated on Mount Zion, the citadel. The Messiah was to come to Zion. In fact, Micah says that He would be born in Bethlehem, just a short distance from Jerusalem and clearly visible from the heights of Zion. Micah prophesies: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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" (Micah 5:2). The great Son of David would be born in the same town where David was born. Micah also describes Jesus as being alive and active even before He was born in Bethlehem.

Micah also speaks of the return of Israel to their spiritual homeland. God's plan also includes the Gentiles.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Micah 4:1-2).

Finally, Micah proclaims the certainty of God's mercy:

"He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot. Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old (Micah 7:19-20).

Nahum

Jonah had been instrumental in saving Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, but now Nahum announces its ruin. Nineveh's repentance was short-lived, but God's judgment would be permanent. The city would be utterly destroyed, and no one would feel bad about it. Almost every nation had experienced the cruelty of Assyria at one time or another. Now it was their turn. "All who hear the news . . . clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil" (Nah. 3:19)? God did not want Israel to trust in armies, weapons, or terror-tactics, nor to rejoice in taking vengeance. God would see to it that justice was done in the earth. Meanwhile, Nahum tells

Israel as he reminds us: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (Nah. 1:7).

Habakkuk

The prophet sees the conquering army of Babylon (Chaldea) ready to swallow up Judah and Jerusalem. "They sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god" (Hab. 1:11)! They acted as God's instrument: "For lo, I am rousing the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize habitations not their own" (Hab. 1:6). Habakkuk mourned over the violence done to Judah and Jerusalem. It seemed excessive to him. He did not want to see the innocent suffer with the guilty, an age-old lament. Yet, in the sight of God, no one is innocent. No one can be acceptable or righteous before Him except by faith: "Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4).

The message of Habakkuk is clear: do not trust in your own strength or righteousness. Trust in the God who is able to declare you righteous by faith.⁴¹ We dare not boast of our powers and accomplishments, for: "the Lord

⁴¹Rom. 1:17

is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20). Let every person hold his hand to his mouth when God speaks and judges. The only boast we can make is that the Lord's mercy toward us lasts forever. Habakkuk wants Israel to remember that God has not forgotten them, nor the sins of those who rise up against them. Though He uses the Babylonians to punish and purify His people, in due time He will visit Babylon with judgment. Habakkuk therefore concludes with this ringing affirmation in the midst of impending calamity: "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:18).

Zephaniah

Zephaniah lived during the reign of king Josiah and prepares the people of Judah for "the day of the Lord" (Zeph. 1:7). He announces God's intention to "bring distress on men, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord" (Zeph. 1:17-18). With certain judgment on the horizon for both Israel and her enemies, God's people continued to think in their hearts: "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (Zeph. 1:12).

Israel had come to the conclusion that God had retired or that He was not interested in the world or its

people. They did not believe there was a moral law governing their lives. Nevertheless it is true: "Whatever a man sows that he will also reap,"⁴² except when it comes to what we could never imagine or deserve--salvation! We have sown sin, which results in death, but the harvest and gift of God is eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23).

The searching light of God's Word, which exposes our sin and pronounces judgment upon us, is the law of God. However there is another kind of light. It is the light of the Gospel, which heals our wounds and forgives our sins. Zephaniah anticipates this good news when he writes:

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more (Zeph. 3:14-15).

Review Questions and Comments

1. Why did Jonah run away? Compare the mission of Jonah with the mission of the church today and our part in it.
2. Abraham was promised that his descendents would be a blessing to the world. How did Israel measure up to that task? Do you think there is a temptation for Christians today to retreat behind the walls of the church with their faith? How do you overcome this tendency?
3. What was Jonah's response to God's mercy upon the Gentiles? Give some reasons for stating that the book of Jonah is historical.

⁴²Gal. 6:7

4. If a tree dies from the top down, how does Micah describe this happening to the people of Judah (Micah 3:9-12; 6:6-8)?
5. What information does Micah give us about Jesus (Micah 5:2)?
6. What does Nahum tell us about Nineveh? Does this apply to the nations of our day?
7. Why does God permit violence and wickedness to continue, and the innocent to suffer with the guilty? How does God handle the problem (Hab. 1:1-6)?
8. Explain the phrase: "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4).
9. What does Zephaniah mean by "the great day of the Lord" (Zeph. 1:7, 12-16; 2:2-3)?

Memory Work

1. Jonah 2:9
2. Micah 6:8
3. Nah. 1:7
4. Hab. 2:4
5. Zeph. 2:3
6. Catechism, pp. 146-51, questions 201-12

XXIX. HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, AND MALACHI:

RETURN AND RESTORATION

Haggai

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi speak to God's people after their return from captivity. The exile had lasted seventy years, and immediately upon their return they begin to rebuild the temple. It was not long before they became discouraged and turned to other interests. Survival was uppermost in their minds. Haggai blisters their ears, saying: "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins" (Hag. 1:4)? They neglected to take an interest in God's house, and so God saw to it that their labors were not blessed. "You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6).

You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while you busy yourselves each with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought upon the land and the hills (Hag. 1:9-11).

The Lord stirred the people to action after eighteen years of delay through the prophets words. They began to work again on the house of God. "The elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo" (Ezra 6:14). The second temple was nothing like the first temple, neither in size nor cost. God's glory, however, does not depend upon size or cost. His glory will be present with those of a humble and contrite spirit. His blessing will be upon those who trust in Him, both Jew and Gentile alike. God promised: "The desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts" (Hag. 2:7, KJV). The glory of Israel and the light of all nations would be Jesus Christ. He would stand in the temple and then real glory would be seen in God's house. Silver and gold, armies and empires, cannot produce this kind of glory, but wherever Jesus Christ and His Gospel can be found, there you have real glory.

Zechariah

Zechariah was given a number of visions regarding the future of God's people after returning from exile. No longer were the people of Judah to trust in themselves, in their allies, or armies. They had tried that once, and the result had been disaster and captivity. The operating principle was now to be: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

Zechariah also spoke of the coming **Messiah** and the dawning of the New Testament age. **He** refers to Jesus as "the Branch" (Zech. 3:8; 6:12). He describes the events of Palm Sunday: "Rejoice greatly, **O** daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is **he**, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an **ass**" (Zech. 9:9). He points to the betrayal of Jesus by **Judas**: "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter" (Zech. 11:12-13). Matthew's Gospel tells us that after **Judas** had cast down the thirty pieces of silver in the temple, the chief priests "took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in" (Matt. 27:6).

In anticipating the blessings that would come to all people through the one, special **Child** of Abraham, Zechariah prophesies that the Messiah "will remove the iniquity of that land in one day" (Zech. 3:9, KJV). The crucifixion of Jesus certainly fits this prophetic utterance of Zechariah: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication: and they shall look upon me who they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. 12:10, KJV). Jesus uses the words of Zechariah when He tells His disciples that they would all

leave Him before His arrest and crucifixion: "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Zech. 13:7, KJV).

The last chapters of the book of Zechariah describe the mysterious future of Judah and Jerusalem in the New Testament age. However, there is a temptation to take these symbolic oracles of Zechariah and use them to describe definite historical events. The task becomes all the more difficult and confusing, especially if the events described have not yet occurred.

We must remember that when the prophets speak of the return of Israel to their former greatness and glory, they are mainly pointing forward to the New Testament age and the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Many make the mistake of taking these visions and using them to describe political and national events rather than spiritual events. The immediate context of course deals with the return of God's people from exile and slavery, but in the larger context of the whole Bible we see Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of prophecy and our Savior from the bondage and slavery of sin.

We can take fresh courage from these apocalyptic visions, realizing that our future is secure in God's hands. In Christ we triumph over sin, death, and hell. The Church of Jesus Christ shall prevail and overcome in this faith, and her people shall never perish. Zechariah wanted the returning exiles to have this conviction, expectation, and faith.

Malachi

Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophets. Haggai and Zechariah encouraged and revived the exiles in Judah, but in the days of Malachi they were beginning to lose their zeal. They were becoming worldly, unspiritual, and indifferent to God again. For example, the people were offering God only the blind, sick, and lame animals for sacrifice. They would not give such a gift to anyone else. They would be ashamed to do so, but that is what they give to God. Their heart was not in their worship. God therefore sets the record straight:

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Mal. 3:8-10, KJV).

Those who do not know God, do not honor Him, even if they would sacrifice their best to Him. God wants the giver before the gift. Those who know and love God, fear and serve Him. They do not have to be told. It is a result of true repentance and faith in God's son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will empower and enable God's people to do what is pleasing in God's sight.

Malachi announces the coming of a new age when he writes: "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way

before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3:1). With these words Malachi identifies the task of John the Baptist. He will come in the spirit and power of Elijah. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet" (Mal. 4:5). Jesus describes John as Elijah (Matt. 11:14). He is called the second Elijah just as Jesus is called the second Adam. One announces and the other ushers in a new humanity. "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The curtain now descends upon the Old Testament and there is silence for the next four hundred years. The New Testament age will dawn with the birth of Christ and the voice of John in the wilderness. "He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (Mal. 4:6).

Review Questions and Comments

1. Why was the temple not completed in the early years following the exile? What did the people experience as a result of this delay according to Haggai? Apply this to our day and describe the conditions under which God's glory and blessing will rest upon His Church?
2. List the prophecies that point to Jesus in the book of Zechariah?

3. In what different ways can you handle Zechariah's vision of the future?
4. How had the worship of God deteriorated in Malachi's day (Mal. 1:6-14)?
5. What did God expect of both the priests and the people (Mal. 2:1-10)?
6. What blessing does God promise those who honor Him (Mal. 3:8-10)? What does the word "tithe" mean?
7. What would happen before the dawning of the New Testament age (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6)?

Memory Work

1. Hag. 2:7
2. Zech. 4:6b
3. Zech. 7:9-10
4. Mal. 3:10
5. Catechism, p. 168, "The Conclusion"
6. Catechism, p. 168, question 241

XXX. THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Historic and Prophetic Summary

God promised Abraham that his descendents would become a great nation. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your descendents be named.' He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead" (Heb. 11:17-19). Isaac's son, Jacob, went to live in Egypt where Joseph had been sent to preserve the life of God's chosen people. At that time the children of Israel (Jacob) numbered seventy souls (Gen. 46:26). They numbered in the millions when Israel left Egypt around the year 1500 B.C. They were forged into a nation under the leadership of Moses.

Israel became a strong and united nation under king David, 1000 B.C. The power of Egypt faded and Syrian domination was broken. The Assyrian empire also crumbled into dust, but not before they had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. The Babylonians then destroyed Assyria and conquered the southern kingdom of Judah. World power then passed to the Medes and Persians. Under their rule a remnant of Judah returned after seventy years of captivity to fulfill

the promises of God.⁴³ Persia dominated the world for the next two hundred years.

The next world power was Greece. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. at the age of thirty-three the Greek empire was divided into four parts. One of those parts was Egypt. The nation of Israel was included in this section of the Greek empire for the next one hundred years. The breakdown of the Greek coalition began when the Syrian part of the empire decided to enlarge its territory to include Israel. They succeeded, but their rule under Antiochus Epiphanes became an intolerable burden for Israel. He claimed that he was God, but he should never have demanded the Jews to worship him; he should never have marched his troops into Jerusalem; and he should never have offered swine's flesh upon the altar in the temple. The day is remembered in the Jewish calendar as December 25, 168 B.C.

⁴³Synagogues became popular during the exile as worship and educational centers. It later became common practice to establish a synagogue wherever twelve families settled, and the families of Israel had been scattered all over the civilized world. This becomes significant during the days of the apostle Paul. He entered synagogues in almost every part of the Mediterranean world to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Paul used the famous Roman roads and was protected by the iron peace of Rome. The universality of the Greek language and culture also made it possible for him to communicate the Christian faith to the Gentiles in their own language. Thus, God's purposes can clearly be seen in the events of history as He works things out for the welfare of His people.

Israel rebelled when the temple was defiled and their Sabbath Day outlawed.

King Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, And every one should leave his laws: . . . And forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the sabbaths and festival days: And pollute the sanctuary and holy people: Set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine's flesh, and unclean beasts: That they should also leave their children uncircumcized, . . . they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar, and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Juda on every side; . . . And when they had rent in pieces the books of the law which they found, they burnt them with fire. . . . Now the five and twentieth day of the month they did sacrifice upon the idol altar, which was upon the altar of God. At which time according to the commandment they put to death certain women, that had caused their children to be circumcized. And they hanged the infants about their necks, and rifled their houses, and slew them that had circumcized them.⁴⁴

The sacrilege of the Syrians aroused the national anger of Israel. The Jews could not survive without their religion, Jerusalem, and the temple. At least they remembered something of the prophet's message. They did not appreciate what they had until it was taken away from them. As a result: "Mattathias cried throughout the city with a loud voice, saying, Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me. So he and his sons fled into the mountains."⁴⁵ The heroic Maccabees led the guerrillas into warfare, and they finally won their

⁴⁴1 Macc. 1:41-61, The Apocrypha

⁴⁵1 Macc. 2:27-28

fight for freedom. The temple was rededicated on December 25, 165 B.C. The Jews celebrate this day as the Feast of Hannukah in memory of the struggle of the Maccabees. Once more Israel is an independent nation.⁴⁶

The most famous Maccabee was Judas Maccabeus, "the hammer." It did not take long, however, before a peace treaty was signed with Rome, the new world power. "Now Judas had heard of the fame of the Romans, that they were mighty and valiant men, and such as would lovingly accept all that joined themselves unto them" (1 Macc. 8:1). Rome was only too willing to come and help rule over Judea. Gradually, of course, they took it over completely. Rome ruled the world.

The stage is now set for the coming of Christ. It happened when Caesar Augustus decided to levy a new tax upon all his provinces.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed

⁴⁶A new and enlarged temple was built during the reign of King Herod, prior to the birth of Jesus. With its destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70, and the fall of Jerusalem, the Star of David would not be raised over Jerusalem until A.D. 1948, or as it is known on Jewish calendars, the year 5709. That means the year A.D. 1977 is considered the year 5738. It also means that the birth of Jesus as Messiah and Lord has been tragically dismissed. The new, spiritual kingdom of Christ has been overlooked in favor of a creaking, tottering, age-old legalism and nationalism. The new Israel, the Church, has replaced old Israe.

with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child (Luke 2:4-5, KJV).

We can clearly see the hand of God as it moved through history to the day when the Messiah was born. God had made a promise to Adam and Eve and He kept it. The "seed of the woman" was born of the Virgin Mary. God kept the promises He made to Abraham: (1) that Abraham would have many descendents and great blessings; (2) that these descendents would own the land in which Abraham lived as a stranger; (3) that through Abraham and his descendents God would bless the world; and (4) that one of Abraham's descendents would be a special blessing for the whole world. These prophecies are emphasized, particularly the one dealing with the Messiah, because only in Him can eternal life be found and paradise regained.

In the beginning of this course of study it was pointed out that eternal life is not found in words on a page in a book. It is not found in laws and traditions either. It is found only in Christ! We do not, on this account, minimize the words found in the Bible. They are important because this is the way God has chosen to communicate with us. He used human language that we can understand. He tells us particularly about His plan of salvation and how it has been accomplished in Jesus Christ.

The only salvation we know about is the salvation God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. Further, the

only Christ we know about is the Christ revealed to us in the Scriptures and abiding in us through the Holy Spirit of God. We can see therefore how important it is that the words of the Bible are not merely considered the words of men. They are the inspired Word of God. Men can and do make mistakes, but God does not. At the same time we are not to allow the words on a page in a book to become our god. They are to lead us to Christ. That is their God-intended purpose. To overlook this and become so caught up in the smallest details of the words and laws of Scripture is to become like the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees of Jesus' day.

The Scribes

The Scribes were something like lawyers whose business it was to pour over the laws of Moses and find out the correct course of action to follow in a given case. They were very important people with a great deal of power, something like an Attorney General today. People depended on them because the laws of Moses were interpreted, copied, and preserved by them.

The Scribes took advantage of their privileged position. That is why Jesus said: "Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses

and for a pretense make long prayers" (Mark 12:38-40). They loved being important and lining their pockets at the expense of other people. They twisted the law to suit their own purposes. They were capable of confusing an issue and muddying the waters so thoroughly that no one knew exactly what they meant. The people were quick to understand. They also noticed that Jesus "taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:29).

The Pharisees

The Pharisees were an organized group dedicated to Judaism. They wanted to protect the Jewish religion from foreign influence. When Greek culture dominated the world, many Jews accepted not only the Greek way of life but also their heathen gods and customs. The Pharisees had learned only too well the lessons of the prophets. They did not want their nation to be guilty of idolatry. The Law of Moses was not to be broken and the covenant was to be kept. Therefore they acted as policemen in supervising the religious life of the people. They saw to it that the Sabbath Day was strictly kept, dishes washed correctly, and all tithes paid.

It is too easy and too cheap simply to make of scribe and Pharisee homiletical whipping boys, as the pulpit so often does. It must never be forgotten that the law housed and expressed a great ideal and attempted to make it actual. The law sought to create the true people of God over whom God could establish his rule. The end

of the law was never rule keeping for the rule's own sake; it was God, and total obedience to God.⁴⁷

Nevertheless the Pharisees developed into a group that was more concerned about the letter of the law than its spirit. They paid lip-service to truth and faith, justice and mercy, just so long as the rules were strictly kept and appearances maintained. They were so scrupulous and exact, in fact, that they became self-righteous. Jesus had to pronounce:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves (Matt. 23:13-15).

The Pharisees made an issue out of the smallest detail but overlooked the whole point and purpose of the law: to make us aware of our sins and our desperate need of a Savior, and secondly; to show us that which is right and good in the eyes of God. The Pharisees were called "blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel" (Matt. 23:24)! They troubled the Christian Church from within during the days of the apostles.

Some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcize them [the Gentiles], and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." . . . Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and

⁴⁷Bright, p. 176.

believe. . . . and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (Acts 15:5-11).

Work-righteousness and self-righteousness were so deadly that Jesus reserved His strongest words for the Pharisees: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt. 23:27-28). They pretended to be what they were not, and that is the definition of a hypocrite. Jesus also said to them: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell" (Matt. 23:33)? Let us not pretend to be what we are not--good enough without Christ. Without Christ and His righteousness we shall not escape the sentence of hell.

The Sadducees

The Sadducees were the exact opposite of the Pharisees. They went along with Greek customs, Roman customs, any customs just so long as they maintained their power, wealth, and control. They did not believe in such things as angels, the resurrection of the dead, or a life after death. They controlled the Sanhedrin,

which was like a parliament or council, made up of seventy members with the High Priest as its president. The Pharisees, Scribes, and elders of the people were also part of the Sanhedrin. This group governed the civic and religious life of the people under Roman rule.

. . . Several parties competed for attention in Jewish religious circles, and each of them becomes a foil to the claims of Jesus. They were, first, the Sadducees, a party of aristocrats who did not chafe under the Romans. It is no surprise to find this patrician group representing religious as well as economic complacency and conservatism. The Sadducees rejected the newer religious ideas associated with an apocalyptic piety; in the New Testament (Mark 12:18 and Acts 23:8) they appear in opposition to the doctrine of the resurrection. Two of this lineage, Caiaphas and Annas, are prominent in the trial of Jesus.

If the Sadducees are the right wing, then various Pharisaic parties represent the left. At the extreme were the activists, called Zealots, who were ready to take up arms for God and nation. Less impetuous were the more popular parties made up of men who rigorously observed the ritual demands of legal religion. In the times of the Maccabees the pious and concerned Jews who revolted were called the Hasidim, and out of them had come the Pharisees. Within this group were the 'scribes' or professionals who often allied themselves with the Pharisees in opposition to Jesus.⁴⁸

The Old Testament and the Apocrypha

Josephus who was a noted Jewish historian states that "we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another as the Greeks have, but only twenty-two books, which contain the

⁴⁸Martin E. Marty, A Short History of Christianity (New York: World Publishing Co., 1956; Meridian Books, 1964), pp. 20-21.

records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine."⁴⁹ Moses had been commanded to put God's Word into writing, and to place the Book of the Law into the Ark of the Covenant. After the Jews returned from captivity the number of books had grown to twenty-two. The thirty-nine books we now have in the Old Testament were gathered together and accepted as genuine in the first century A.D. We call this group of thirty-nine books a part of the Canonical Scriptures. The word "canon" means "a rule" or "a measuring rod." The books of the Old Testament were measured according to certain rules so that only the most genuine books would be accepted as the Word of God.

The books that did not receive recognition were called "the Apocrypha," a word which means "hidden" or "fictitious." Many apocryphal books were written in the period between the Old and New Testaments. Some of them have more authority than others, such as 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, the History of Susanna, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees. Martin Luther considered these books worthwhile reading and excellent for instruction but not for teaching doctrine.

The Septuagint

The Septuagint is a name given to the Old Testament Bible written in the Greek language. The word

⁴⁹Josephus, Complete Works of Flavius Josephus, p. 609.

"septuagint" means "seventy." Seventy scholars are said to have translated the original Hebrew language of the Old Testament Scriptures into the Greek language around the second century B.C. They did this because most people at that time understood Greek. For this reason the New Testament was also originally written mainly in the Greek language. The original manuscripts have been lost, but we can see the influence of the Septuagint upon the New Testament in that many Old Testament quotations are of Greek and not Hebrew origin. That is why you will sometimes find the New Testament reference to an Old Testament passage a little different from the Hebrew original.

The Evidence of Faith

The Old and New Testaments have been found to be historically reliable in spite of those who have tried to discredit the Bible. The recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and modern archeology bear witness to the Bible's truthfulness and accuracy. However we do not depend on archeology or history for our faith, because faith means believing without evidence or proof. While it is good to have evidence and proof, it is not absolutely essential to faith. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate proof. He is also the Bible's guarantee of truthfulness.

The words of the prophets and apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit. He kept the words they wrote free from

error. He protected the Bible, His Book, from being changed and from those who have tried to destroy it. He has preserved God's Word for us through many centuries and through many translations. Therefore read and study your Bible regularly and faithfully, and the power of the Holy Spirit working through the words you read will overwhelm you. Many have experienced their hearts "burning within them" like the Emmaus disciples of old, when the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are heard, read, and explained.

In general, the guiding principle to remember in your study of the Scriptures is that Scripture interprets Scripture. Poetry remains poetry and symbolism remains symbolism, but the clear Word of God is taken in its literal, intended sense according to the analogy of faith. In other words, you are on the right path whenever salvation through faith in Christ, by God's grace alone, is uppermost in your mind and heart. When this central truth is by-passed or ignored in interpreting the Scriptures you are on the wrong path.

Use this manual as an aid but never as a substitute for the study of the Word of God.

1. "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me"

(John 5:39, KJV).

2. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV).
3. "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:14-17, KJV).

Review Questions and Comments

1. Briefly outline the rise and fall of those empires which affected the nation of Israel until the birth of Christ.
2. How did God fulfill the four promises He made to Abraham?
3. Characterize the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.
4. What different purposes can the Bible be made to serve? What purpose did God have in mind?
5. Be prepared to identify one of the following: (a) the Apocrypha; (b) the Sanhedrin; (c) the Septuagint; (d) the Canonical Scriptures.
6. Give a report on some reading in one of the books of the Apocrypha.
7. History says that Jesus died, but faith says that Jesus died "for me!" What is the evidence of faith? Where does it come from?

Memory Work

- 1. John 5:39
- 2. 2 Tim. 2:15
- 3. 2 Tim. 3:14-17

APPENDIX A

PROCEDURAL SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis has been to demonstrate the workability of using the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible as the basic outline for a planned course of instruction in the Word for catechumens of a Lutheran Church. The advantage of such an approach is that the twelve to fourteen year old is immersed directly in the Word of God as source material. He reads the Bible in a systematic manner rather than being exposed to it in bits and pieces. He is alerted to the main themes of the Bible in their context and captures some of the awesome sweep of its history. Above all he studies the plan of God for mankind's salvation in Christ as revealed by the prophets of the Old Testament.

Each lesson in this manual attempts to make the Old Testament come alive. The simple, narrative form of the lessons is designed to help the pupil understand what he is reading in the Bible and to stimulate further reading and study. Generous quotations from the Bible are found within the framework of each lesson. They are carefully chosen, not only to help the student sample some of the rich flavor and style of expression, but also to maintain

continuity in the rapidly moving narrative of the Old Testament. The main themes and concepts of the Old Testament are often repeated in the lessons in order to help the students retain what they have learned.

It was pointed out in the introduction that key chapters in the Bible are to be read in preparation for each lesson.⁵⁰ The number of chapters selected ought to take into consideration the capacity of the learner. Obviously there is a limit to the amount of reading required. One of the benefits of such reading, in addition to proper preparation for class, is the habit of regularly using the Bible. The pupils become familiar with the Bible's arrangement and discover that it is not a closed book for young minds. In fact, reading it in a systematic, connected fashion can be a thrilling experience. Also, the instructor has an opportunity each week to clear up any misunderstandings that may occur, and to answer any questions that may have arisen from their reading.

The material contained in this planned course of instruction can be covered in thirty lessons. However, starting early in September and continuing until the month of May, or until Pentecost, will provide an extra lesson or two. The extra time can be spent profitably in a number

⁵⁰See Appendix C for a selection of suggested chapters of the Bible from which a choice may be made, pp. 201-2.

of ways, such as having a special lesson on the Church Year or on the Reformation era. A field trip to a synagogue, perhaps during Passover or a Bar Mitzvah, would be helpful while the Old Testament is being studied. At the close of the year the different officers and boards of the congregation can meet with the class to explain the constitution, organization, and purpose of their church, and encourage them to take an active part in both worship and service in the church.

It is assumed that the pupil has gained at least a familiarity with the important events and doctrines of the Bible from their parents and from their training in Sunday School before they arrive for confirmation instruction. There should be no need, for example, to spend half a year on the Ten Commandments. Instead, the application and meaning of the Ten Commandments are tied in with the events of the Old Testament. The same method is employed for the entire six chief parts of the catechism along with their questions and answers. In this way the problem of getting bogged down in one area or another is avoided.

Basically the catechism is used in this manual as an aid in clarifying the doctrines and concepts of the Bible as they arise. Of course, the emphasis will vary from one instructor to another, but there is more than ample opportunity in the review questions following each lesson for repeating the main themes of Law and Gospel,

sin and grace, over and over again. The review questions also serve to bring out contemporary concerns for discussion in the light of God's Word. Periodic tests would also be helpful for purposes of review and retention of what has been studied. Four units are discernible in this manual: (1) chapter I through IX; (2) chapter X through XV; (3) chapter XVI through XXIV; and (4) chapter XXV through XXX.

It has been suggested that each class session last for two hours. It is also feasible to meet twice a week for one hour. It is proposed that each lesson contain these elements:

1. An opening prayer or devotion led by a different pupil each week in order to develop the habit of prayer and the practice of praying in public;
2. a review of the previous lesson and theme;
3. covering the review questions and comments in the lesson under study;
4. memory work and catechism;
5. a short recess;
6. an open discussion on materials not understood or questions arising;
7. application;
8. an introduction to the main points of the next lesson;
9. Sunday service highlights and closing prayer.

It is also suggested that if the congregation uses an acolyte, some time ought to be devoted to training the members of the class to take over this responsibility. An atmosphere conducive to worship can be instilled by their attitude of reverence and proper decorum. Helping the ushers and Altar Guild is another way of developing their sense of responsibility and partnership in the Christian congregation.

Attendance at worship ought to be another part of their learning experience as well as an indication of their commitment to Christ. The liturgy should be explained. Also, the hymns and lessons for the day ought to be discussed. Perhaps the class can be invited to take notes during the service in order to sharpen their ability to pick out the theme of the service and the main points of the sermon.

Contact with the home on the progress of the pupil is also to be encouraged. This contact, aside from the years spent in Sunday School, begins on the day of registration. In this initial orientation, the parents and catechumens together discuss how best to fulfill the purposes of confirmation instruction. Procedures, methods, and expectations can be outlined and agreed upon. In this way, problems can be avoided before they arise, and the desired cooperation between church and home obtained.

Occasional contact with the home during the two years of training culminates in the public examination of

the catechumen. This experience can be less frightening if, during the course of their instruction, the catechumens have had parents and church officers visit the class from time to time. Some congregations conduct the public examination of the catechumens in church on a Sunday morning. Others prefer the less formal arrangement of having parents, sponsors, interested members of the congregation, and elders gather on a week night to hear the catechumens give witness to their faith and hope. In any event it ought to be a joyful experience, and one which does not give the impression of a graduation exercise.

Ultimately, the desired goal of catechetical instruction is to prepare the children of the Church for the Sacrament. This goal began, and is implied, in their baptism. The life of faith, begun in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is continued and strengthened in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. To that end, the Church owes its children the best in the way of instruction in the Word so that they might rightly examine their life and faith, be empowered to increase their stature and maturity in Christ, and grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX B

OBJECTIVES OF CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTION

- I. To Understand:
 - A. the language, arrangement and content of the sixty-six books of the Bible with particular emphasis upon Law and Gospel, sin and grace;
 - B. the basic theme and interpretation of each book of the Bible as it applies to God's plan of salvation in Christ;
 - C. the basic teachings of the Christian faith as presented by the Lutheran Church;
 - D. the importance of Word and Sacraments as the means of grace and the power to accomplish the purposes of confirmation instruction.
- II. To Acquire Skills:
 - A. in reading and studying the Word of God instead of merely learning something about the Word of God;
 - B. in using the Small Catechism as a systematic understanding of what has been studied in the Word of God;
 - C. in memorizing specific verses of the Bible within the context of the Word of God;
 - D. in the Christian life of prayer and worship.
- III. To Develop Attitudes:
 - A. of seeing and appreciating Jesus Christ as the promise and fulfillment of the Word of God and thus to grow in both grace and knowledge;
 - B. of respect for the uniqueness of the revealed Word of God as the rule and norm for faith and

- XXI. life, and loyalty to the Lutheran understanding of that faith;
 - C. of willingness to apply the Word of God to all of life and a readiness both to practice their faith and witness to their Lord;
 - D. of responsibly examining their stewardship of time, talents, and treasures in order to support and extend the kingdom of God.
- XXII. ...
- XXIII. ...
- XXIV. ...
- XXV. ...
- XXVI. ...
- XXVII. ...
- XXVIII. ...
- XXIX. ...
- XXX. ...
- XXXI. ...
- XXXII. ...
- XXXIII. ...
- XXXIV. ...
- XXXV. ...
- XXXVI. ...
- XXXVII. ...
- XXXVIII. ...
- XXXIX. ...
- XL. ...
- XLI. ...
- XLII. ...
- XLIII. ...
- XLIV. ...
- XLV. ...
- XLVI. ...
- XLVII. ...
- XLVIII. ...
- XLIX. ...
- L. ...

APPENDIX C

SUGGESTED CHAPTERS OF THE BIBLE

- I. Introductory lesson; no assignment
- II. Introductory lesson; no assignment
- III. Introductory lesson; no assignment
- IV. Introductory lesson; no assignment
- V. Genesis 1-3
- VI. Genesis 4-11
- VII. Genesis 12-23
- VIII. Genesis 24-36
- IX. Genesis 37-50
- X. Exodus 1-14
- XI. Exodus 15-20
- XII. Exodus 32-35; Leviticus 9-12; 18-19; 26
- XIII. Numbers 1:1-5; 11-14; 16-17; 20-21:1-9
- XIV. Deuteronomy 1; 3:23-29; 4:1-40; 5-9; 31; 34
- XV. Joshua 1:1-9; 2:1-16; 3; 6-7; 10:1-14; 23-24
- XVI. Judges 2-4; 6:1-16; 7; 13-16; 19
- XVII. Ruth 1-3:11; 1 Samuel 1-6
- XVIII. 1 Samuel 8-10; 15-18; 24; 26; 28; 31
- XIX. 2 Samuel 1; 6-7; 9; 11-13; 18; 22
- XX. 1 Kings 2:1-4; 3; 8; 9:1-9; 10; 11:1-13; 17-19;
21; 2 Kings 2; 4-6:1-18; 9; 1 Chronicles 28

- XXI. 2 Kings 18-20; 22-23; 2 Chronicles 10-11:1-4;
33; 36:9-21
- XXII. Ezra 1:1-4; 3; 6:19-22; 7:1-10; 9; Nehemiah 1-2:
1-8; 4; 6:15-16; 8:1-8; 13:23-31; Esther 1:10-18;
2:1-20; 3:1-6; 4-8; 10
- XXIII. Job 1-5; 15-17; 21; 29-30; 32-33; 38-42; Psalms
1-2; 5-6; 8; 14-15; 19; 22-24; 27; 32; 37; 42-43;
46; 51; 53; 57; 62; 70; 73; 84; 90-92; 95-96;
98; 100; 102-103; 111; 116; 121-122; 125; 127;
130; 133; 136-139; 145; 148-150
- XXIV. Proverbs 1-3; 6; 10; 14-16; 22-23; 26; 31;
Ecclesiastes 1; 3; 5; 7; 9; 11-12; Song of
Solomon 2-3; 7-8
- XXV. Isaiah 1-2; 5-9; 11-12; 25; 35; 40; 43; 52-53;
55; 59-61; 63; 65-66; Jeremiah 1-2; 4-6; 8; 10;
13; 17-18; 20; 23; 26; 29; 31; 33; 51-52;
Lamentations 1-5
- XXVI. Ezekiel 2; 4-5; 8-9; 12-14; 18; 22; 28; 33-34;
36-37; Daniel 1-7; 12
- XXVII. Hosea 1-3; 6; 10; 12-14; Joel 2-3; Amos 3; 5-9;
Obadiah 1
- XXVIII. Jonah 1-4; Micah 3-7; Nahum 1; Habakkuk 2;
Zephaniah 3
- XXIX. Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1-3; 6-8; 14; Malachi 1-4
- XXX. One of the books of the Apocrypha

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943.

Achtemeier, Elizabeth R. The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973.

Allan, Tom. The Face of My Parish. London: SCM Press, 1954.

Apocrypha, The. Introduction by Robert H. Pfeiffer. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, n.d.

Arbaugh, George B. Growth of a Christian. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953.

Backus, William; Malte, Paul; and Saffen, Wayne. Adventuring in the Church: A Confirmation Guidebook. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1957.

Barclay, William; Paterson, John; Jones, Edgar; Anderson, Hugh; and Robinson, Gordon. The Bible and History. New York: Abingdon Press, 1968.

Black, Matthew, gen. ed. Peake's Commentary on the Bible. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962.

Bright, John. The Kingdom of God. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953.

Callinicos, Constantine N. The Greek Orthodox Catechism. New York: n.p., 1953.

Coffin, Harold G. "Evolution or Creation." Liberty, September-October 1975, pp. 10-17.

Connell, Francis J. The New Confraternity Edition of the Revised Baltimore Catechism No. 3. New York: Benziger Bros., 1949.

Cully, Iris V. The Dynamics of Christian Education. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958.

- Danker, Frederick W. Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study, 3d ed., sl. rev. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970.
- Dix, Dom Gregory. The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism. London: Dacre Press, 1946.
- Douglas, J. D., ed. The New Bible Dictionary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962.
- Driver, S. R. An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament. New York: Meridian Books, 1956.
- Driver, S. R.; Plummer, A.; and Briggs, C. A., eds. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. 42 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910.
- Edge, Findley B. Teaching for Results. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1956.
- Eissfeldt, Otto. The Old Testament: An Introduction. Translated by Peter R. Ackroyd. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Finegan, Jack. Handbook of Biblical Chronology. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964.
- Flanders, Henry Jackson; Crapps, Robert Wilson; and Smith, David Anthony. People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Old Testament. 2d ed. New York: Ronald Press Co., 1973.
- Gore, Charles; Goudge, Henry Leighton; and Guillaume, Alfred, eds. A New Commentary on Holy Scripture Including the Apocrypha. London: SPCK, 1958.
- Growing in Christ: An Exposition of Luther's Small Catechism. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953.
- Halley, Henry H. Halley's Bible Handbook. 24th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965.
- Harmon, Nolan B., ed. The Interpreter's Bible. 12 vols. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1939.
- Harrison, R. K. Introduction to the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969.
- Old Testament Times. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970.

- Hegland, Martin. Getting Acquainted with the Bible. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1936.
- Heinecken, Martin J. Basic Christian Teachings. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949.
- Heinisch, Paul. Theology of the Old Testament. St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1955.
- Henry, Matthew. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible. 6 vols. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.
- Highet, Gilbert. The Art of Teaching. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951.
- Holy Bible, The. Authorized (King James) Version. Philadelphia: National Bible Press, 1944.
- Holy Bible, The. Revised Standard Version. New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953.
- Jerusalem Bible, The. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966.
- Josephus, Flavius. Complete Works of Flavius Josephus. Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960.
- Keil, C. F., and Delitzsch, F. Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament. Translated by James Martin. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.
- Keller, Paul F. Studies in Lutheran Doctrine. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960.
- Killgallon, James, and Weber, Gerard. Life in Christ: Instructions in the Catholic Faith. Chicago: n.p., 1958.
- Klinck, Arthur W. Old Testament History. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938; reprint ed., 1950.
- Klos, Frank W. Confirmation and First Communion. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968.
- Kuhlen, Raymond G. The Psychology of Adolescent Development. New York: Harper & Bros., 1952.
- Leslie, Elmer A. Jeremiah. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954.
- Lumb, Reginald. The Education of Souls. London: The Faith Press, 1952.

- Lutheran Hymnal, The. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941.
- Luther, Martin. Works of Martin Luther. 6 vols. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1932.
- _____. Large Catechism. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1935.
- Maertens, Thierry. Bible Themes: A Source Book. 2 vols. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964.
- Marty, Martin E. A Short History of Christianity. New York: World Publishing Co., 1956; Meridian Books, 1964.
- Miller, Randolph Crump. Education for Christian Living. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1956.
- New English Bible, The. Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- New Testament in Modern English, The. Translated by J. B. Phillips. New York: Macmillan Co., 1957.
- Noth, Martin. The Old Testament World. Translated by Victor I. Gruhn. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.
- Payne, J. Barton. Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973.
- Pfeiffer, Charles F., ed. The Biblical World: A Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966.
- Plass, Ewald M., ed. What Luther Says: An Anthology. 3 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.
- Rehwinkel, Alfred Martin. "New Testament World." 3d rev. ed. 3 vols. St. Louis: n.p., 1950. (Mimeographed)
- Repp, Arthur C. Confirmation in the Lutheran Church. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964.
- Richardson, Alan, ed. A Theological Word Book of the Bible. New York: Macmillan Co., 1951.
- Riess, Oswald. "Instructor's Manual: What Does the Bible Say?" Part I. Detroit, 1945. (Mimeographed)

- Robinson, George L. The Twelve Minor Prophets. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953.
- Sanders, James A. Torah and Canon. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.
- Sherrill, Lewis Joseph. The Rise of Christian Education. New York: Macmillan Co., 1953.
- Smart, James D. The Teaching Ministry of the Church. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954.
- Studtmann, H. "Outlines on the Catechism." St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeograph Co., n.d. (Mimeographed)
- Westermann, Claus. Handbook to the Old Testament. Translated and Edited by Robert H. Boyd. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967.
- Wittenberg, Rudolph M. Discipline in the Teens. New York: Association Press, 1963.
- Wright, G. Ernest. God Who Acts. Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 8. London: SCM Press, 1952.
- . The Old Testament and Theology. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

LC
6483