

LESSON 7

April 18, 2021

Unit II: Prophets of Restoration

Initiating Renewal

DEVOTIONAL READING: Daniel 9:4-6, 15-19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Nehemiah 2:11-20; 13:1-22

PRINT PASSAGE: Nehemiah 2:11-20

Key Verse—Said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. (Nehemiah 2:17, KJV)

.....

I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” (Nehemiah 2:17, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Examine why Nehemiah decided to restore the walls of Jerusalem and reform/revive the Sabbath law.
- Appreciate Nehemiah’s feelings and behavior in restoring the wall and reforming Jewish worship.
- Identify ways to restore worn parts of the faith community and revive traditions that honor God.

KEY TERMS

Gates (verse 13)—Hebrew: *shaar* (shah’-ar): gate; gateways.

Rebuild (verse 17)—Hebrew: *banah* (baw-naw’): to build again; “build up” (KJV).

PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher’s Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week’s student assignments (“Your Life” and Your World!”).
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- Please note that you have the option of using your subscription bundle supplements, i.e., Lesson Scenario, Student Activity Sheet, SSL-AAG

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Wise people are usually contemplative before they make major decisions. How should one react after carefully considering a major decision? Nehemiah set out to rebuild the wall after praying and surveying the ruins.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

Those who are committed to God and His people have a deep, abiding concern for His reputation and the well-being of His people. Nehemiah is a noteworthy example of this. While serving as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, he received disturbing news about the conditions in Jerusalem, his ancestral homeland. God's promise of orchestrating the return of those exiled in Babylon had been fulfilled, but political autonomy had not been realized. The devastating destruction of the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar left the city without a protective wall and vulnerable to assault from surrounding enemies. Focused opposition had successfully prevented the reestablishment of Jerusalem as a city capable of defending itself and protecting the rebuilt Temple. This condition posed both a physical and spiritual dilemma. Nehemiah initially responded to news concerning Jerusalem with a four-day fast and intercessory prayer, weeping and grieving for his people and their plight. In his prayer, Nehemiah identified with the sins of his people and asked God to remember His promise to Moses to return His exiled people to their homeland. He asked God to remember him as he went to seek permission to go to Jerusalem and assist with the physical and spiritual restoration of the city.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

The book of Nehemiah is a chronological memoir of Nehemiah's time as governor of Jerusalem. Authorship of this book is accredited to Ezra, the scribe-priest who was Nehemiah's contemporary in ministry to the remnant that had returned to Jerusalem from Persia, according to God's promise. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally written as a single book. Bible scholars have suggested Ezra's authorship because of the detailed references to administrative documents from Persian archives mentioned in both books. Nehemiah's divinely orchestrated task as the civil leader of Jerusalem was to oversee the public works and to secure national defense by leading the project of rebuilding the wall around the city (chapters 1–7). As a co-laborer with Ezra, he played an instrumental role in restoring spiritual renewal among the people (chapters 8–13). Thematically, the book is unique in its focus on Nehemiah's obedience to God and his prayerful dependence on God for the successful completion of the rebuilding mission. Nehemiah is also recognized as a model of effective spiritual leadership.

OPENING INQUIRY

(Choose from the items below.)

1. What was Nehemiah's initial focus when he arrived at Jerusalem?
2. Why did he choose to be secretive about his purpose for coming to Jerusalem?

3. How might his mission have turned out differently had he revealed his plans upon his arrival? Describe Nehemiah's strategy for winning the support of the people to rebuild the wall.
4. Why is it wise to refuse to engage in negative debate with those who oppose or ridicule you and/or your ministry?

INSIGHTS

God has a plan and purpose for every season. He looks for those who are committed and submitted to His leadership, with a servant's heart toward His people. Nehemiah was this kind of servant and God used him to direct the reconstruction of the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah humbly and wisely acknowledged God's guidance in the reconstruction project, repeatedly crediting his success to "the good hand of the Lord." In today's spiritual climate, the church desperately needs leaders with the exemplary leadership qualities and attitude of Nehemiah.

EXPLORATION

There are several valuable leadership lessons in Nehemiah's story for those who have been called or assigned to manage a spiritual task, including the following: (1) begin any task with prayer for divine guidance; (2) seek God's power and His will; (3) establish functional and achievable goals before the mission begins; (4) identify with the work team, encouraging their participation as co-laborers; (5) acknowledge God as the source of success; (6) face opposition and ridicule with self-confidence; and (7) refuse to engage in negative arguments with opponents. As you unpack the lesson's content and Print Passage, help your students identify these principles and discuss their potential for accomplishing effective ministry. Challenge any ministry leaders in your class to compare and contrast their current style of leadership with these principles and commit to use any that are relevant to them.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on Nehemiah 2:11-15

KJV

11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the *gates* thereof were consumed with fire.

14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. 15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

NIV

11 I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days

12 I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

13 By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its *gates*, which had been destroyed by fire.

14 Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through;

15 so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.

Sometimes, people rush headlong into a task without stopping to consider the potential and the problems to be encountered. Successful leaders often know the importance of prayerful planning, for “if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” This principle can be applied to any task, spiritual or otherwise. Before Nehemiah announced his purpose for being in Jerusalem, he spent three days in prayerful planning. Specifically, he considered his course of action (verses 11-12). He secretly reviewed the terrain and surveyed the walls to determine the extent of the problem he faced. His exact route can only be estimated, but the names of the various reference points suggest an inspection route beginning on the west side of the city, continuing toward the southern section and ending on the east side (verses 13-15). Being aware of internal enemies in the city, Nehemiah kept his counsel to himself until he had completed his research and devised his strategy (verse 16). The conditions Nehemiah saw firsthand allowed him to see both potential and problems to be addressed. Nehemiah was convinced that God was with him, but he took the initiative to gather facts and use them as the basis for a plan of action. This is an effective leadership principle often missed or overlooked in developing action plans for ministry. God gives discernment to leaders who seek and follow His will so that they might choose the best means for achieving the best results. As with Nehemiah, God-centered leaders can also discern the “alligators in the swamp” and how to avoid them.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

Why is planning such a key component of success?

- **Young Adult Question:**

Have there been times when you have misread the level of a relationship or friendship and shared too much with the wrong people? Describe the consequences.

Commentary on Nehemiah 2:16-18

KJV

16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us *build up* the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

18 Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

NIV

16 The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us *rebuild* the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”

18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.

Nehemiah had successfully done his homework. Knowing his reliance on prayer, we can believe that he took his plan to God in prayer for direction. After he had completed his secret survey of the project and was confident that his plan was workable, Nehemiah revealed it to the people. First, he challenged them to consider their deplorable condition (verse 17a). The condition of the city walls was more than deplorable—they were disgraceful because every aspect of the city represented the King of Glory. The city itself was a symbol of God's presence among His people. Nehemiah's desire was that the people would see themselves and acknowledge their responsibility for the city's current condition and be moved to improve it. Nehemiah then challenged the community to join him in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem by offering his own personal testimony that God was with him and had given him favor before King Artaxerxes (verse 17b). Nehemiah's willingness to work alongside the people and his assurance that God was in charge of the project helped to secure the people's willing support (verse 18). Effective leaders help those they lead to see themselves as capable of improving or changing their condition. Sensitive spiritual leaders engage the people as co-laborers together, and direct their focus off themselves and toward God.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

• Adult Question:

Which of Nehemiah's leadership strategies have you seen other leaders implement with success?

• Young Adult Question:

How important is it to have God's gracious hand upon us as we undertake significant projects, ministries, or missions for God?

Commentary on Nehemiah 2:19-20

KJV

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

20 Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

NIV

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"

20 I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."

In most important tasks, whether secular or in Christian ministry, those engaged must expect opposition and some form of ridicule. Many have rightly said that every great victory will be followed by a challenge. With God's help, Nehemiah successfully challenged the people to respond to the call to rebuild the wall, but almost immediately, enemies arose to oppose the project (verse 19). Sanballat and Tobiah, district magistrates and leaders of Samaritan factions that opposed the rebuilding of Judah, were joined by Geshem, a ruler from an area south of Jerusalem. The men asserted that the project was not approved by King Artaxerxes and amounted to an act of rebellion. Prevented from openly attacking Jerusalem, the three resorted to ridicule and false accusations in an effort to stop the work before it began. The accusation of rebellion against the king proved to be especially damaging to the project's momentum. Nehemiah addressed the opposition by bringing the task into focus (verse 20). First, he affirmed that the God of heaven would enable them to succeed and that the Jews were God's servants. Every ministry task must be seen as God's work enabled by His power at work through His servants. Spiritual leaders must see themselves as servants focused on God and not their own talent, administrative skill, ability, human resources, or personal intelligence. Second, Nehemiah informed the opposition leaders that they had no present claim or past right of ownership to Jerusalem. He left no room for any form of negotiation. Nehemiah also refused to openly debate or respond with unkind threats. There are times when leaders must negotiate, but when the will of God is explicitly clear there is no room for compromise. Nehemiah and those who joined him in the task faced opposition from others who aligned with the opposition, but the task was already successful because God's hand was in it. God used Nehemiah for the task of initiating renewal in Judah because of his faith, his dedicated heart, his willingness to sacrifice personal time and energy, his dependence on prayer, his patient strategic planning, and his ability to motivate and focus people's attention on what God was doing.

All believers are called to engage in God's mission in the world today, primarily that of making disciples. Whether leaders or followers, the characteristics demonstrated by Nehemiah represent God's expectations for those who co-labor with other believers to accomplish His will.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**
Why is it sometimes difficult to resist the temptation to respond negatively to ridicule and opposition?
- **Young Adult Question:**
Nehemiah had courage. Why is courage an important quality for spiritual leaders? Explain briefly.

LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book**
(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
—What ministry task has God assigned to you? If God has revealed a task to you, follow the example of Nehemiah by seeking His will and His direction first. Seek His guidance in establishing your goals through prayerful planning and reliance on God's "gracious hand" as the source of success.
(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
—The work of the Lord on earth has operated in the midst of worldly opposition since ancient times. Today's leaders should emphasize the importance of relying on God's wisdom and strength, and on knowing God's will and doing it. Nehemiah focused his mind and the people's attention on the gracious hand of God throughout the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall.
- **Refer to Young Adult Book**
(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
—What are you passionate about? Let that passion drive you to do what God has called you to do. There are many areas in our churches and our communities that are worn and need reviving. Identify those areas and pray for God's direction in responding to the need.
(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
—Nehemiah faced enemies who violently opposed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Do not be surprised or discouraged when you confront criticism, opposition, and detractors in life. They want to kill the passion and vision God has given you. Do not let that happen. Stay focused and live a life of purpose.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, April 25, 2021, is "Overcoming Losses and Brokenness." The Devotional Reading is Lamentations 3:22-33, the Background Scripture is Lamentations 5, and the Printed Text is Lamentations 5:1-22.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, You have called us to rebuild the walls of spiritual renewal by making disciples to carry out Your mission in the world. Guide the work of our hands so that we will be successful in every task we pursue for Your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 19-25, 2021)

Jeremiah Pleads for Restoration

MONDAY, April 19: "Praise for God's Wonderful Works" (Psalm 111)

TUESDAY, April 20: "God's Blessings Intended for All" (Zechariah 8:18-23)

WEDNESDAY, April 21: "The Lord, Our Sovereign" (Psalm 102:12-22)

THURSDAY, April 22: "Plea for Mercy for Jerusalem" (Psalm 79)

FRIDAY, April 23: "Mourn the Destruction of Zion" (Jeremiah 9:17-22)

SATURDAY, April 24: "God's Mercy and Love Never Ends" (Lamentations 3:22-33)

SUNDAY, April 25: "Remember and Restore Us" (Lamentations 5:1-22)

LESSON 8

April 25, 2021

Unit II: Prophets of Restoration

Overcoming Losses and Brokenness

DEVOTIONAL READING: Lamentations 3:22-33

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Lamentations 5

PRINT PASSAGE: Lamentations 5:1-22

Key Verse—Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. (Lamentations 5:21, KJV)

.....

Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old. (Lamentations 5:21, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Understand why the writer of Lamentations pleaded with God for the restoration of Israel.
- Sense the writer's feelings over the oppression of his nation.
- Pray for and engage in the restoration of broken relationships with God.

KEY TERMS

Forsake (verse 20)—Hebrew: *azab* (aw-zab'): to leave, abandon.

Remember (verse 1)—Hebrew: *zakar* (zaw-kar'): take thought; recall.

Restore (verse 21)—Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): to turn back; return; "turn" (KJV).

PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher's Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week's student assignments ("Your Life" and Your World!).
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- Please note that you have the option of using your subscription bundle supplements, i.e., Lesson Scenario, Student Activity Sheet, SSL-AAG.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

People seek restoration when their possessions are lost and relationships are broken. How does one cope with significant losses in life? In a season of overwhelming loss and despair, the writer of Lamentations trusted that God would reestablish His relationship with Israel.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

It is difficult to endure the separation and loss of intimate relationships and fellowship with others. Such losses can trigger a roller coaster of emotions: brokenness, despair, abandonment, depression, and anger. There are recorded instances of married couples' following each other in death when one of them has predeceased the other. Even for the children of God, deep emotional reactions to loss and brokenness are natural and to be expected. Our Savior does not condemn us when we respond in one or more of these ways because He understands human pain, for He himself experienced the ups and downs of the human experience during His time on earth. How can we be victorious in overcoming a deep sense of loss and brokenness without "falling apart"? Realistically, the key is found in our relationship with God. The more intimate our relationship with Him, the more easily we will tap into the resources God has provided to strengthen, bring inner peace, and sustain us. The closer our fellowship with Him, the more eagerly we will be able to recall His tender mercies and His faithfulness to us. As Jeremiah lamented over the devastation of Jerusalem and the deaths and exile of its residents, he received renewed hope for the future by recalling God's covenant loving-kindness and His enduring faithfulness to Judah despite her sin.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

The book of Lamentations is a sorrowful sequel to the book of Jeremiah. Its literary form is a series of five funeral laments that express Jeremiah's grief over the conquest and capture of Jerusalem which resulted from Judah's sin. Jeremiah's overwhelming sense of loss and brokenness drained all joy from the realization that his prophecies concerning Judah had come to fruition. The book's title is derived from its first word *ekah* (translated "alas" or "how"), a characteristic cry of exclamation or lament. Jewish tradition attributes authorship to Jeremiah, who would have written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 BC. Jeremiah witnessed the devastation and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which left the city in jumbled heaps of smoldering rubble. Structurally, the book of Lamentations is composed of five chapters with each being in the form of a funeral poem or song. Funeral songs were usually written and recited for the dead, celebrating their good qualities and acknowledging the loss felt by those who mourned them. Jeremiah followed this pattern to lament the death in Jerusalem and the tragic aftermath of the conquest. Four of the five chapters of Lamentations are written in an acrostic style, a poetic composition in which the first word of each sentence forms a word or follows the regular sequence of the Hebrew alphabet. Scholars have suggested that Jeremiah's purpose for using this form was to aid the memorization of the words of the songs. Chapter 5 does not employ this technique and is more of a prayer than a funeral poem. The climax of Lamentations's message is found in chapter 3, where Jeremiah appears to overcome the feelings of loss and brokenness by remembering the great faithfulness of God to His covenant promises to Israel.

OPENING INQUIRY

(Choose from the items below.)

1. What was the focus of Jeremiah's prayer in verse 1?
2. How does Jeremiah describe their relationship as God's people in verses 2-3?
3. What were the consequences of sin experienced by all levels of society in Judah?

4. What was Jeremiah and the people's ultimate desire in verse 21, and why was this significant?

INSIGHTS

No one can avoid the inevitable experience of loss and brokenness in life. Such experiences are not always the result of personal sin but are woven into the fabric of our human existence in a fallen world. "Good" people, those who walk faithfully with Lord, are not exempt, but they do have a powerful advantage—the opportunity to develop and maintain an intimate relationship with God. As the relationship with God grows deeper and the believer becomes more spiritually mature, the focus in life becomes more spiritual than temporal. When this occurs, it becomes easier to accept losses and brokenness in view of the greater benefits associated with being God's child. How can one overcome loss and brokenness? It is through a lifelong, obedient relationship with the God of all comfort whose faithfulness to His promises endures forever.

EXPLORATION

This lesson provides a teaching platform to encourage your students to focus on their relationship with God. There are no seminars or self-help techniques more effective in helping to overcome loss and brokenness than a deep and abiding relationship with God. Discuss the change in the tone of Jeremiah's prayer in verse 19 when he consoled himself with the fact that God will always reign on His throne. Because God reigns, those in a relationship with Him have a never-ending source of comfort and inner peace. Be mindful of any student(s) who may be experiencing troubles or grief and encourage them to follow Jeremiah's example of recalling the power, presence, and provision of our faithful God.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on Lamentations 5:1-10

KJV

REMEMBER, O Lord, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.

2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.

3 We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.

4 We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us.

5 Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest.

6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. 7 Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

8 Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.

9 We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness. 10 Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.

NIV

REMEMBER, LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.

2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.

- 3 We have become fatherless, our mothers are widows.
- 4 We must buy the water we drink; our wood can be had only at a price.
- 5 Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest.
- 6 We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.
- 7 Our ancestors sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.
- 8 Slaves rule over us, and there is no one to free us from their hands.
- 9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the desert.
- 10 Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger.

Lamentations 5 is a prayerful response to the suffering caused by the devastation of Jerusalem. It begins by drawing attention to the tragedy as the basis for seeking God's compassion. In the aftermath of disaster, the prophet calls God to regard the desperate state of His people and their disgrace (verse 1). Jeremiah petitioned God to move with compassion on the people's great sorrow. The once proud land of Judah was now the possession of foreigners and had also fallen victim to annexation by the nations around them (verse 2). Descriptively, Jeremiah lists the deplorable conditions of the suffering caused by Babylon. Those remaining had lost both property and their rights (verse 3). Their new taskmasters had no compassion on them and treated them like orphans and widows, the most defenseless people in their culture. The bare necessities came with a monetary cost and they were constantly reminded of their complete subjugation (verses 4-5). Conviction of sin causes introspective reflection. The survivors recalled the sin of trusting men rather than God that was committed by their fathers (verse 6). They had intentionally pledged allegiance to Egypt and Assyria for the sake of national security. This sin attributed to the nation's downfall and their survivors reaped the punishment for it (verse 7). The bitter fruit of cruel taskmasters was their reward (verse 8). Desperate situations produce desperate measures. To survive these harsh conditions, the people had to risk their lives just to buy bread. Prowling bands of desert nomads who preyed upon them or whose territory they had to go through to get food added to their suffering (verse 9). So desperate were these circumstances that the people had become physically ill because of the lack of food (verse 10). Jeremiah's message is clear: the wages of sin are high. Israel, the entire nation, repeatedly chose to rebel against God. They chose to worship the created rather than the Creator. God's will never share His glory with anything or anyone else. Judah realized too late the necessity of honoring God and was forced to suffer the consequences of her own rejection of God. This is a somber message for humanity, both the saved and the unsaved. The only way to escape divine judgment is to totally obey God. Judah ignored God's commandments and His prophets. God has given us the complete revelation of His Word; our task is to trust and obey.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

• **Adult Question:**

How do you feel about the possibility of suffering because of the sins of others?

• **Young Adult Question:**

Jeremiah went to God in intercessory prayer on behalf of suffering people whom he could not help. What situations have prompted you to intercede for other people?

Commentary on Lamentations 5:11-18

KJV

- 11 They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.
- 12 Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.
- 13 They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.
- 14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.
- 15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.
- 16 The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!
- 17 For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.
- 18 Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.

NIV

- 11 Women have been violated in Zion, and virgins in the towns of Judah.
- 12 Princes have been hung up by their hands; elders are shown no respect.
- 13 Young men toil at the millstones; boys stagger under loads of wood.
- 14 The elders are gone from the city gate; the young men have stopped their music.
- 15 Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.
- 16 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!
- 17 Because of this our hearts are faint, because of these things our eyes grow dim
- 18 for Mount Zion, which lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it.

Sin and its consequences have a cancerous effect. They spread and contaminate beyond their point of origin. Jeremiah describes the devastating consequences of Judah's sin. The women who survived were the first group mentioned who suffered the horrors of the Babylonian occupation. They were brutally raped and abused by the Babylonian soldiers. Totally defenseless, they were the unfortunate victims of their immoral and hateful conquerors (verse 11). God had often rebuked Judah's leadership for leading the people astray and supporting rebellion against Babylon. Now, they too suffered the consequences of their sin. The elders were cruelly tortured to death (verse 12). Most likely this was death by crucifixion, impaling men on stakes. The young men of Judah were enslaved and forced to do the work usually performed by animals (verse 13). The physical suffering among the people was accompanied by the loss of intangible blessings and privileges—wisdom, justice, and joy were gone. God's deserved judgment at the hands of the Babylonians left God's people with little to rejoice about (verses 14-15). Gloom like a black shroud hung over the city (verses 16-18). Sadness replaced joy, desolation replaced prosperity, dishonor replaced glory, hunger replaced fullness, and tears replaced joyous laughter—all because of their sin. All of this gloom and doom was avoidable. All God had required was for His people to honor and obey His commandments. Instead, they had refused, choosing harsh judgment rather than promised blessings. After years of halfhearted devotion, the nation was teetering on the balance between obedience and disobedience. Even though the people are only inclined to hear words of blessings, today's church must be firm in proclaiming the whole truth of the Gospel: the wages of sin is indeed death, but the gift of God's grace is eternal life for all who will accept it (see Romans 6:23).

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

Many believers find themselves drifting into sin and becoming complacent and nonchalant. Explain why consistent obedience to God is so necessary.

- **Young Adult Question:**

In the wake of devastating circumstances, it is often hard to speak words of hope. How has looking to God strengthened you to have hope for the future?

Commentary on Lamentations 5:19-22

KJV

19 Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.

20 Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?

21 Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.

22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.

NIV

19 You, Lord, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.

20 Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

21 Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old

22 unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

God is patient and longsuffering. His Word tells us that if we genuinely confess our sins, then He is faithful and just to forgive them and will cleanse us from unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:9). So great is His loving-kindness toward those who fear Him that when He forgives, He removes transgression as far as east is from west (see Psalm 103:11a-12). Jeremiah closed his prayer with a focus on God's divine character. First, he acknowledged God's eternal and sovereign rule (verse 19). This was the source of consolation for him and for believers in every generation. God will reign forever and what He allows to happen will always be under His control. Just as God orchestrated Judah's calamity, He was equally capable of bringing about her restoration in His own timing. Jeremiah's knowledge and recognition of God's ability to bring about restoration prompted the prophet to ask whether God had abandoned His people (verse 20). The question was actually a request for God to remember His covenant promise. When we pray, we can call to remembrance God's promises—for God always honors His Word. Jeremiah specifically asked God for the blessings of spiritual restoration and physical restoration to their homeland (verse 21). With confidence in God's faithfulness, the prophet asked God to remember His covenant promises and to fulfill them (verse 22). When we pray, our requests for the spiritual should always exceed requests for temporal or material blessings. The power to overcome loss and brokenness is achieved spiritually. Joy and inner peace are available to those who seek spiritual union with God (see Isaiah 26:3).

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

When have you known adversity to lead you (or someone else) to a deeper relationship with God?

- **Young Adult Question:**

The people's relationship with God was broken. Discuss how sin affects our spiritual life and how to restore a broken relationship with God.

LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book (**
See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
—Judah suffered loss and brokenness because of deliberate disobedience. Realistically, every living soul will experience some degree of trouble and adversity—sometimes through no fault of our own, and at other times because of our own sin. Our eternal hope rests in God's unfailing love and faithfulness to us. This week, give God intentional praise for His grace, mercy, and faithfulness to His promises.
(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
—The world is full of people who suffer the bitter consequences of sin and misfortune. This lesson provides a pathway of understanding that believers can find hope and comfort despite the anguish of their current condition. A strong relationship with God equips believers for facing the challenges of life. The world needs to hear the message of God's hope and see it manifested in the lives of all who claim Jesus as Lord.
- **Refer to Young Adult Book**
(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)
—Having joy in your life brings optimism and a sense of hope. At times when you feel you are losing your joy, remember how God reveals Himself as the Lord who sits on His sovereign throne, reigning forever.
(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)
—So many situations in life can bring us to the point of despair. In those times, remember to take God at His Word, for He has promised to never leave or forsake you. This promise of God's constant presence extends to His people in every generation.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, May 2, 2021, is "Speak Truth Boldly." The Devotional Reading is 1 John 3:23–4:3a; Deuteronomy 18:19–22, the Background Scripture is 1 Kings 22:1–40, and the Printed Text is 1 Kings 22:15–23, 26–28.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, we acknowledge Your unlimited power and thank You for remaining faithful to Your promises concerning us. We trust You to help us overcome any loss and brokenness we may face. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 26–May 2, 2021)

Micaiah: Speaking Truth to Power

MONDAY, April 26: "Elisha Prophesies Truth to King Jehoshaphat" (2 Kings 3:9–17)

TUESDAY, April 27: "Kings Propose Battle Against Aram" (1 Kings 22:1–6)

WEDNESDAY, April 28: “Micaiah Resists Pressure to Prophesy Falsely” (1 Kings 22:7-14)

THURSDAY, April 29: “A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster” (2 Chronicles 18:18-22)

FRIDAY, April 30: “King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury” (1 Kings 22:29-40)

SATURDAY, May 1: “Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel” (1 Kings 22:41-46)

SUNDAY, May 2: “Prophet Micaiah Speaks the Truth” (1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28)