



LEADER'S GUIDE

Old Testament Basics

Course Lecturer: Dr. Sid Buzzell

If you have not already done so, it is important that you first review our [Leader's Packet](#) for specifics on how to open, facilitate, and close your group sessions.

This Leader's Guide walks you step by step through this lesson. Use as much of the suggested material as you find helpful. Some sections have more than one discussion question or idea so you can choose an option that fits your group. Feel free to add other ideas as well. You may also choose to extend this particular lesson to two or more sessions.

The Leader's Guide contains information that isn't covered in the Listening Guide so the group session adds value to those who have completed the Listening Guide.

Step by Step Through the Study

As you prepare for the session, you will find information you need to lead the discussion questions in this Group Leader's Guide.

Teaching Note:

- There are "Application Questions" for each Old Testament book covered in the session. You can tailor this portion of your session to your group's interests and needs by selecting questions appropriate to your group.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 1. “In Lesson 1 we will explore the Old Testament’s structure and discover how it is organized. We can then place each Old Testament book into its proper historical and literary context when we read it.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Describe what the Old Testament teaches us about God’s character.
2. Explain why the Old Testament books are placed in the order they are.
3. Identify the categories of books contained in the Old Testament.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Since this is the first session, open with a discussion on how people relate to the Old Testament. You may want to discuss some reasons people give for not reading the Old Testament:

- Unfamiliar customs—camels, chariots, shepherding, warfare, politics, covenants, etc.
- Unfamiliar religious rites—animal sacrifice, grain offerings, tabernacle, temple, priests
- Unfamiliar geography—Kadesh-Barnea, Canaan, Babylon, Assyria
- Uncomfortable theology—God endorsing warfare, God’s vengeance, God changing His mind
- Irrelevant or outdated laws—dietary laws, Levirate marriage (a brother marrying his dead

- brother's widow), cities of refuge, celebration of feasts
- Boring genealogies and lists—Genesis, Numbers, Chronicles, Nehemiah
- Hard to put the books together chronologically—Nehemiah and Ezra lived after David and most of the prophets, but their books are located before the psalms and the prophets.

You can also discuss the Old Testament's contributions:

- Many Old Testament writers refer to the value of keeping God's Word—Deuteronomy 6, Joshua 1, Psalms 1, 19, and 119.
- Jesus frequently used the Old Testament—Luke 24:13–27 “Road to Emmaus.”
- All four gospel writers used the Old Testament.
- The gospel presentations in the New Testament are filled with Old Testament references (Peter in Acts 2, Stephen in Acts 7, Philip in Acts 8).
- James urged his readers to be hearers and doers of God's Word.
- The Old Testament reveals God's nature: righteous, loving, patient, eternal, etc.
- The Old Testament is the foundation for understanding the New Testament.

Discussion

Introduction

Discuss what the two Bible passages below claim about the Old Testament (you can discuss as a whole group, or divide the group into two smaller groups to study and report on each passage).
(*Listening Guide question 1*)

Ideas for Discussion

- *2 Timothy 3:16*
 - ◇ *Don't go into detail on the four things it is “profitable” for—you will do this in a later discussion.*
 - ◇ *Focus on the idea of inspiration—that God “spoke” through His writers (Hebrews 1:1).*
- *2 Peter 1:20–21*
 - ◇ *Emphasize the fact that we can be confident that, although wise and godly men were used by God to write these books, He was always controlling the process.*

Also recognize that in both passages the references are to the Old Testament.

Discuss how that claim should influence our reading of the Old Testament.
(*Listening Guide question 2*)

The Old Testament Is a Story About God

Ask if anyone can explain what the Old Testament story is about.

(Listening Guide question 3)

Ideas for Discussion

- *The Old Testament is a story about God’s plan to rebuild the relationship between Himself and His people who were alienated from Him by sin.*
 - ◊ *Ask group members to discuss their own relationship to God and to Jesus.*
 - ◊ *Read Romans 3:23 and ask group members how they respond to that claim.*
 - ◊ *How does the condition of our world relate to Romans 3:23’s claim?*
 - ◊ *Point out that in the Old Testament, Israel had an ornate system of sacrifices to atone for their failure to keep God’s laws and that Jesus became the supreme sacrifice and did away with the Old Testament’s system of sacrifices.*
 - ◊ *Read Romans 6:23 and ask if anyone is trying to pay their own way into God’s favor.*

Explain the two ways we use the word *book* in this course. (See Lesson 1, paragraph 2, under the heading, “The Old Testament Is a Story About God” for an explanation.)

(Listening Guide question 4)

Ask if anyone in the group can name the primary difference between Israel and her neighbors.

(Listening Guide question 5)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Deuteronomy 18:9–14 and then discuss the content of paragraph 3 in the lesson. All the Canaanites had gods and that wasn’t what made Israel unique.*
- *Read Deuteronomy 6:4 and discuss the fact that Israel was monotheistic and God related to them in love—a unique relationship in a culture where their gods were cruel and demanding.*

Ask what is significant about the fourth word in the Bible.

(Listening Guide question 6)

Ideas for Discussion

- *The word God forces a decision about how we read the rest of the Old Testament.*
 - ◊ *If someone denies God’s existence, the rest of the Old Testament becomes an interesting story.*
 - ◊ *If someone believes in God but tries to define Him in ways other than the Old Testament description, they will misunderstand the Old Testament’s purpose and content.*
 - ◊ *Discuss how willing the group members are to learn from the Old Testament rather than impose previously learned ideas on its content.*

Ask what the group thinks the Old Testament writers emphasize about God.

(Listening Guide question 7)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Isaiah 53:4–6 and discuss what it says about God. Stress the fact that the Old Testament’s major focus is on God’s grace, forgiveness, mercy, and restoration.*
- *Read John 3:16–17 and relate it to Isaiah’s description of God’s Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53.*

Most People Know *About* the Old Testament

Ask group members who their favorite character or what their favorite event is in the Old Testament and why.

(Listening Guide question 8)

Ask group members what their experience with the Old Testament is: Never read it, casual reader, took courses? Other?

(Listening Guide question 9)

Ask how they think their culture (age group, neighbors, etc.) relates to the Old Testament. How about their friends and/or close acquaintances?

Explain the recurring theme in the Old Testament from Lesson 1, paragraph 3, under the heading **Most People Know About the Old Testament**: *“The Old Testament is a story of God’s patient forgiveness. It presents God’s teachings, His people’s rebellion against that teaching, and God’s willingness to forgive them. That is the recurring theme from the beginning in Genesis to the ending in Malachi.”*

Ask how many in the group would have thought that was the main theme. What other themes would people think are the main ones for the Old Testament?

(Listening Guide question 10)

Ask the group members who they think the ultimate character in the Old Testament is.

(Listening Guide question 11)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask how Jesus can be the major character when He didn’t even come to earth until four hundred years after the last book of the Old Testament was written.*

Discuss how Jesus is characterized in the Old Testament.

(Listening Guide question 12)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Suffering Servant—Isaiah 53*
- *Shepherd-King—Jeremiah 23:5–6; Ezekiel 34:25–31; Isaiah 9:6–7*
 - ◊ *King—cf. Rev. 19:16.*
 - ◊ *Shepherd—John 10:14–15*
- *Sacrificial Lamb—Isaiah 53:7, Jeremiah 11:19*
 - ◊ *cf. Revelation 5:11–14; John 1:29*

Ask if group members have a favorite image of Jesus. If so, what is it?

(Listening Guide question 13)

Why the Old Testament Is a Closed Book

Ask group members about their impression of the Old Testament.

(Listening Guide question 15)

Ask if they read it: never, occasionally, regularly, etc. How about their friends and acquaintances? What parts do they read? How about their friends and acquaintances?

Fewer People *Know* the Old Testament

Ask how many books are in the Old Testament.

(Listening Guide question 17)

- *The Old Testament has thirty-nine books.*

How many of them are narrative books?

(Listening Guide question 18)

- *The first seventeen books, Genesis through Esther, are narrative books that tell the Old Testament's historical story.*

How is the Old Testament not arranged?

(Listening Guide question 20)

- *Chronologically. People who try to read it like a normal book are confused.*

How are the Old Testament books arranged?

(Listening Guide question 21)

By types of literature:

- *Seventeen narrative books (Genesis through Esther) tell the Old Testament's story.*
- *Five poetry and wisdom books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon – see Lesson 8)*
- *Seventeen prophetic books*

How many writing prophets did Israel have?

(Listening Guide question 23)

There were sixteen writing prophets.

Explain that the goal of the ten lessons in this course is to give us a working knowledge of how the Old Testament “works” or is arranged and what God is saying to us in its content.

(Listening Guide question 24)

Why the Old Testament Is Important

Remind the group of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20–21 and discuss who the Bible’s author is.
(*Listening Guide question 25*)

Remind the group that both these passages refer to the Old Testament. Look more carefully at 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and discuss the four ways the Old Testament is “profitable.”
(*Listening Guide question 26*)

Ideas for Discussion

Remind the group that both these passages refer to the Old Testament. Look more carefully at 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and discuss the four ways the Old Testament is “profitable.”

- *Teaching = a worldview—a way of understanding our world and how to live in it*
- *Reproving = points out areas of life that are not in sync with the “teaching”*
- *Correcting = instructions on how to “fix” what we are reproved for*
- *Training in righteousness = a path from correcting what’s wrong to living a wholesome, righteous life*
- *SO THAT we may be equipped for doing God’s work.*

Remind them that Paul was referring to the Old Testament. The New Testament didn’t exist at this point.

Talk about what a person must do to benefit from the Old Testament’s teaching.
(*Listening Guide question 28*)

Ideas for Discussion

Read James 1:22 and discuss its meaning. Remember, this passage, too, is talking about the Old Testament.

Application

Close with a discussion about how you, as a group, will respond to what you learn as you go through the lessons on the Old Testament.

- An academic study—learning facts about the Old Testament
- An applicational study—learning what God wants to teach us about how to live
- A combination of the two

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading the overview of Lesson 2. “In Lesson 2 we will discuss the story that runs through the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi and how three types of Old Testament literature combine to tell and enhance that story.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Describe how the “color” books differ from the “time” books.
2. Identify the eleven books that move the story of the Old Testament forward.
3. Name the four eras (or periods) into which the Old Testament is divided.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Discussion

Why the Old Testament Confuses Some People

Ask why many people find the Old Testament confusing.
(Listening Guide question 1)

Ideas for Discussion

Give a short, oral quiz:

- List the following names and ask if the group can put them in chronological order:
 - ◊ Moses, Nehemiah, David, Abraham, Samson, Noah
 - » (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samson, David, Nehemiah)
- List the following events and see if the group can put them in chronological order:
 - ◊ Solomon's temple, dividing the Red Sea, split of Israel's kingdom into Israel and Judah, Moses on Mt. Sinai, great flood, Babylonian captivity
 - » (Great flood, Red Sea, Mt. Sinai, Solomon's temple, kingdom split, Babylonian captivity)

Discuss how we organize our life by events (high school graduation, first job, marriage, etc.) and how knowing the sequence of events in the Old Testament similarly helps us keep the content organized in our minds.

The major focus of this session is to organize the big picture of the Old Testament's story in chronological order.

Explain how we should read the Old Testament. Review from Lesson 1 how the Old Testament (OT) books are organized—not like a novel or history book, but by types of literature or genres (genre means writing style).

(Listening Guide question 2)

- Seventeen narrative books tell the whole OT story (first seventeen books in the OT: Genesis to Esther).
- Five poetry and wisdom books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) express Israel's culture and poetry.
- Seventeen books of prophets record the prophets' sermons when they warned Israel about disobedience and promised restoration after judgment.

Preview what your group will be studying together in the ten Old Testament Basics lessons.

- In lessons 2 and 3 we will study the relationships between these thirty-nine books so we can better understand how the OT is organized.
- In lessons 4 through 10 we will explore the OT books in more detail.

Explain that this lesson presents the main theme and story line of the OT so we can fit each of the OT books logically into the flow of OT history and understand its contribution.

Explain that there are two categories of narrative books in the Old Testament.

(Listening Guide question 3)

- The narrative books are the first seventeen books in the OT, and they tell the OT story from the beginning in Genesis to the chronological end of the story in Nehemiah.
 - ◊ Eleven of those seventeen narrative books move the story forward in time.
 - ◊ Six of those narrative books contribute to the story, but instead of moving the story forward, they provide additional detail and insight into the period of time portrayed in one of the "time" books.

(See the section in the Lesson 2 transcript under “The Old Testament Story.”)

- *In our Old Testament Basics course, we will refer to the eleven books that move the story forward (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Ezra, and Nehemiah) as “time” books and the six books that provide additional insights (Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Ruth, 1 & 2 Chronicles, and Esther) as “color” books.*

Ask the group if anyone can explain why it would be helpful to examine these two types of narrative books in the Old Testament in separate categories.

(Listening Guide question 6)

- *The eleven “time” books are spliced together like a movie reel and keep the story moving.*
- *We need the more detailed information in the “color” books to complete the Old Testament story, but they can slow the story down and get us lost in detail.*
 - ◊ *For example, Exodus ends with Israel at Mt. Sinai and Numbers begins where Exodus ends—at Sinai—and continues the story begun in Exodus.*
 - ◊ *Leviticus (written during the historical period described in Exodus) is placed between Exodus and Numbers and adds the essential details about Israel’s 613 laws. But because Moses listed them in a separate book (Leviticus) we can keep Israel’s historical story moving by focusing first on the “time” books and coming back later to study all the detailed information found in Leviticus.*

Do a brief review of the session so far.

- *Ask what three kinds of genres the Old Testament books are organized under.*
 - ◊ *Narrative, Poetry & Wisdom, Prophets*
- *Ask what two types of narrative books we find in the Old Testament and how they differ.*
 - ◊ *“Time” books (move the story forward) and “color” books (add details).*
- *Review the “time” books and what each of them focuses on. “Walk” the group through the OT story by asking them if they can name the “time” books and their themes.*
 - ◊ *Beginning of all things in Genesis 1–11*
 - ◊ *Beginning of Jewish nation and introduction to Israel’s patriarchs in Genesis 12–50*
 - ◊ *Deliverance from Egypt and founding of Israel as a nation in Exodus*
 - ◊ *Journey from Sinai to Canaan in Numbers*
 - ◊ *Invasion and settling in Canaan in Joshua and Judges*
 - ◊ *Israel’s kingdom era and exile in Samuel and Kings*
 - ◊ *Release from captivity and reconstruction of Jerusalem’s temple and walls in Ezra and Nehemiah*

Ask the group to repeat that sequence with you to “fix” the OT’s story line in their minds.

The Old Testament’s Four Eras

Introduce the four Old Testament eras.

- Ask if anyone can name major blocks of time in OT history.
- Ask group members to list some of the major events they remember from the OT.
- Organize the events under these four major eras:

(Listening Guide question 7)

- *Beginnings (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers) tells about*
 - ◊ *The beginning of everything from creation to the Jews in Genesis 1–11.*
 - ◊ *Israel’s beginning with Abraham and the Jewish patriarchs in Genesis 12–50.*
 - ◊ *The founding of Israel as a nation and their journey to the homeland in Exodus and Numbers.*
- *Settlement (Joshua and Judges) explains how Israel invaded their land and divided it among the twelve tribes (in Joshua) and about why they transitioned from a theocracy with God as their king to a monarchy with human kings in Judges.*
- *Kingdom Era (1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings) describes the half-century period of time when Israel was ruled by kings—from King Saul to their final destruction and captivity by Babylon.*
- *Exile and Reconstruction (Ezra and Nehemiah) tells how Israel was released from their seventy years of captivity in Babylon and returned to Israel to rebuild the temple, Jerusalem’s walls, and their lives as Jews.*

Review the four eras by asking different group members to name and briefly describe each one.

Remind group members again that this session is devoted to surveying the OT’s framework and is very general in nature. In later sessions you will fill in some of the details.

- *Also remind them of Our Daily Bread Christian University’s Old Testament series, OT216–OT227 by Dr. Douglas Stuart, which provides a thorough interaction with the Old Testament if they want additional Old Testament study.*

Ask what three books are included in the “Beginnings” era.

- *Genesis, Exodus, Numbers*
- *The first word in the Hebrew text of Genesis is bereshith which means “In the beginning.”*

Briefly preview the two “beginnings” presented in Genesis.

(Listening Guide question 10)

- *Genesis 1–11 forms a background for the whole biblical story.*
 - ◊ *Genesis 1–2 describes God’s creation of everything and focuses on Adam and Eve whom He created in His own image. The focus is on the relationship between God and the humans He created.*
 - ◊ *Genesis 3 introduces Satan and the beginning of sin into the story and sets the tone for the Bible’s plot ... restoring the broken relationship between God and humanity.*
 - ◊ *Genesis 4–11 focuses on sin’s destructive power. Noah’s flood and the tower of Babel are included in these chapters.*
 - ◊ *Ask someone to read Genesis 6:5 and discuss how thoroughly sin had permeated humanity and why God flooded Noah’s earth.*
- *Genesis 12–50 introduces the beginning of Israel’s history contained in the rest of the Old Testament.*
 - ◊ *Abraham was the first “patriarch” or “father” of Israel.*
 - ◊ *Ask if anyone can name Israel’s three “patriarchs.” (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob)*
 - ◊ *Ask a group member to read Genesis 12:1–3 and name three parts of the promise God made to Abraham. (blessing, land, and a great nation—more detail on this in Lesson 3)*
 - ◊ *Stress the fact that God’s relationship to Israel, His chosen people, is the Old Testament’s major*

story line from Genesis 12 through Malachi and is continued in the New Testament. Ask someone to read Matthew 1:1.

Remind the group that Exodus continues the era of Beginnings.

- *Ask where Abraham’s descendants were at the end of Genesis (Genesis 50:22).*
- *Read Exodus 1:1–8 and introduce Exodus’s “story.”*

Ask group members to name any major events they know of that are recorded in Exodus. (*Listening Guide question 11*)

- *Plagues, parting the Red Sea, water from the rock, Law at Sinai, building the tabernacle, etc.*

Explain that Exodus is the second “time” book in the story of beginnings.

- *It describes the beginnings of Israel as a nation. They had been Abraham’s family, but at Sinai, God established Himself as their king and gave them the Mosaic law as their constitution and the tabernacle to remind them of His presence among them (Exodus 19–40).*
- *The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and their expansion in the Mosaic law formalized the relationship between God and Israel.*

Ask the group what the next “time” book is that moves the story forward (not Leviticus—that’s a “color” book that provides detailed description of the laws God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai).

Review the difference between “time” and “color” books by asking how many narrative books there are, what the two types of narrative books are, and what the difference is between the two types.

Read Numbers 1:1 and ask where Israel is at the beginning of Numbers. Point out that we splice Numbers to Exodus like we would a movie film to keep the narrative moving. (*Listening Guide question 12*)

Read Numbers 13:1–2.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Numbers 13–14 records a critical event in Israel’s history—their refusal to enter Canaan and the result of their disobedience: forty years of wandering in the Sinai desert.*
- *When Numbers ends, Israel is still not in their land.*

Ask which book introduces the next era in Israel’s history. After the Beginnings era in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, what’s the next book that moves the story forward?

- *Not Deuteronomy—it’s a crucial book but has no forward movement.*
- *Deuteronomy explains how God prepared Israel to enter their land and successfully live in it.*

Explain that Joshua and Judges are the books of the Settlement era. Read Joshua 1:1–3 and discuss Joshua’s task.

Ask if anyone can name the two major movements recorded in the book of Joshua.

- *Invasion of the land in Joshua 1–11*
 - ◊ *Walls of Jericho story included here*
- *Distribution of the land among Israel’s twelve tribes in Joshua 12–24*

Explain that the next “time” book that describes the Settlement era is Judges. Discuss the major “story” that recurs throughout the book of Judges.

- *Stories of disobedience, oppression, repentance, and God’s deliverance through a “judge”*
- *This cycle is repeated six times in the book, and it highlights six of the judges God used.*

Ask if anyone can name some of the judges. (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson)

Read Judges 21:25 and discuss the following.

- *The fact that Judges sets up the Kingdom era, which is the next era of Israel’s history*
- *Because Israel had rejected God’s rule, there was no king and chaos reigned.*
- *Israel needed a human king because they had rejected their Divine King.*

Introduce the fact that Israel’s kingdom existed in two forms: the united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon and the divided kingdom with Israel and Judah coexisting as two separate nations.

Read 1 Kings 11:9–13 and briefly summarize Solomon’s idolatry and God’s judgment.

- *God split Israel into two nations—Israel and Judah—and from 1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 25 we read about two nations with two kings.*
- *You will study more detail on the Kingdom era in Lesson 6, “The Kingdom Era.”*

Explain that both Israel and Judah were defeated by foreign powers and taken into captivity. Seventy years after Judah was taken to Babylon, they were released from exile by Cyrus the Persian king and returned to rebuild Jerusalem.

Ask what two Old Testament books tell Israel’s reconstruction story.

(Listening Guide question 16)

- *Ezra recorded the temple-building process.*
- *Nehemiah tells the story of rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall.*

Conclusion

Ask your group, “What is the best part of the Old Testament story?”

(Listening Guide question 17)

Ideas for Discussion

- *The Old Testament story is filled with accounts of Israel’s disobedience and rebellion against God and,*

in contrast, of God’s faithfulness to His covenants and promises.

If there is time, review with a series of questions:

- *What are the three types of literature the Old Testament books are grouped into? (Narrative, Poetry & Wisdom, and Prophets)*
- *How many books tell the OT “story” from beginning to end? (seventeen)*
- *Where are those books located in the Old Testament? (the first seventeen books)*
- *How did we divide the seventeen narrative books? (into two types: “time” and “color” books)*
- *What’s the difference between a “time” and a “color” book?*
- *Can anyone list the “time” books? (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah)*
- *Can anyone name the “color” books? (Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Ruth, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Esther)*
- *What are the four eras of Old Testament history? (Beginnings, Settlement, Kingdom, Exile and Reconstruction)*

Application

The following exercise can be done as a whole group, or if the group is large enough, in four smaller groups.

Give the group members eight minutes to focus on the four Old Testament eras (two minutes for each era).

- Summarize how each era began and ended.
- Identify one life lesson from each era. What did your group learn about living life from Israel’s successes and failures?

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something

one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 3. “In Lesson 3 we will survey the Old Testament books that supplement the Old Testament story presented in the eleven ‘time’ books.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Explain the purpose of the “color” books in the Old Testament.
2. Understand who wrote the books of poetry and wisdom found in the Old Testament.
3. Identify the prophetic books contained in the Old Testament.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Lesson 3 adds detail to the Old Testament story line you constructed in Lesson 2 from the “time” books. Review from Lesson 2:

- Ask what three writing styles help organize the Old Testament books.
 - ◊ Narrative, Poetry & Wisdom, and Prophets
- Ask how we divided the narrative books.
 - ◊ “Time” books (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah)
 - ◊ “Color” books (Job, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Lamentations, Esther, Chronicles)

Discussion

Introduction

The Old Testament “Color” Books

Ask where the book of Job fits into the Old Testament chronology.

(Listening Guide question 2)

- *We don’t know when Job was written, but the events best fit Abraham’s time, around 2000 BC—about as long before Jesus as we are after Him. So we place Job as a “color” book beside Genesis.*
- *Job is written mostly in poetry so we will discuss the content in Lesson 8.*

Discuss what Leviticus’s content deals with.

(Listening Guide question 3)

- *“Holiness” is Leviticus’s major theme. Ask someone to read 11:44–45 and 19:2 and discuss God’s demand for Israel to be holy.*

Ask the group what “holy” means to them. Explain how the word *holy* is used in the Bible.

Ideas for Discussion

- *“Holy” means separate, set apart, or unique. Israel belonged to God and, like Him, we are to be separated from sin, uncleanness, and defilement.*
- *The word holy is used eighty-five times in Leviticus—more than in any other book.*
- *God described what a holy life looked like by giving 613 laws that governed a holy life.*
- *Israel had three categories of law: moral and civil (emphasized in Exodus) and religious (emphasized in Leviticus).*
- *He also provided an elaborate system of sacrifices for Israel so they could atone for their sins (failure to keep God’s laws) and restore their holiness.*
- *Note the first four letters in Leviticus are “L-E-V-I.” This book primarily deals with how Levi and his descendants should function as Israel’s high priests to restore holiness through administering the people’s sacrifices when holiness was violated.*

Ask if someone can describe where Deuteronomy fits into the Old Testament story.

(Listening Guide question 4)

Ideas for Discussion

- *It is placed between Numbers and Joshua because it is a transition book between Israel’s forty years in the wilderness and their entrance into Canaan.*
- *Moses’s three speeches recorded in Deuteronomy were delivered to the children of those who left Egypt more than forty years previously. Deuteronomy’s content is a second presentation of the law Moses*

received at Sinai. The generation of Israel that received the law at Sinai had died in the wilderness, and Moses was restating the law to this generation who would enter the land and live there.

Ask someone to read Deuteronomy 30:15–18. This is a summary of the “Code of Deuteronomy” that shapes the rest of Israel’s history.

- *When Israel obeyed and served God, He blessed them.*
- *When they rebelled, He removed His protection and provision and Israel suffered the consequences of their sin.*

Explain that the book of Ruth tells a story of success in the midst of failure.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Ruth 1:1 and ask if someone can briefly review what life was like when Ruth’s events occurred.*
- *Read Ruth 4:18–22 and ask what the earliest date for writing could be (after David became king, 1000 BC).*

Explain Ruth’s four movements.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Naomi and her family moved to Moab to escape a famine in Bethlehem (1:1–2).*
- *Naomi’s two sons married Moabite women and then Naomi’s husband and sons died (1:3–5).*
- *Naomi returned to Bethlehem, and her daughter-in-law Ruth returned with her (1:6–22).*
 ◇ *(Read Ruth 1:16–18.)*
- *Ruth met and married a righteous citizen of Bethlehem named Boaz, and they had a baby boy (2:1–4:15).*
- *The story closes with Naomi holding Ruth’s baby on her lap. He is introduced as King David’s great-grandfather (4:16–22).*

Discuss the two themes in the book of Ruth.

- *During the time of Judges there were people in Israel who followed God’s laws faithfully. Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz illustrate this important fact.*
- *The great king David’s ancestors were faithful to God and include a Gentile, Moabite woman who accepted God as her Lord and faithfully followed His teaching.*

What event in Israel’s history do we link with the book of Lamentations?

(Listening Guide question 6)

- *Read 2 Kings 25:8–11 and then read Lamentations 1:1–3. The book of Lamentations is the writer’s “lament” over Jerusalem’s destruction by the Babylonians. Israel’s consistent violation of God’s law eventually resulted in God’s removal of His protection as stated in Deuteronomy 30:15–18.*
- *From 1400 BC when Moses gave his speeches in Deuteronomy to 586 BC (over 800 years), God had patiently waited for Israel to live holy lives as He had instructed in Leviticus and reminded in Deuteronomy. Now the prophet Jeremiah was lamenting the tragic results of Israel’s failure.*

Ask what the difference is between the story told in Ezra and the one told in Esther.
(Listening Guide question 7)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ezra's book describes life among the exiles who returned to Jerusalem.*
- *Esther's book describes life among the Jews who chose to stay in Susa, the Persians' capital city.*
- *Esther's story occurred shortly before the events of Ezra 7–10.*
 - ◊ *Ezra 1–6 (537 BC); Esther's events (479–460 BC); Ezra 7–10 (460 BC); Nehemiah (444 BC).*

God isn't mentioned in Esther, but the story indicates that He was at work to protect His people.

Esther contributes to the Old Testament by providing insight into life for Jews who stayed in Persia.

Ask if anyone can describe what life was like for God's people when Chronicles was written.
(Listening Guide question 8)

Ideas for Discussion

Ezra wrote Chronicles during the reconstruction period. The content describes the Davidic line of kings and closes with Cyrus the Persian's decree to release Judah from Babylonian captivity.

- *There are two histories we have to keep in mind when reading 1 & 2 Chronicles.*
- *The book records Israel's history from David's reign through Judah's destruction, captivity, and release from Babylon by Cyrus the Persian in 538 BC.*
- *Ezra wrote Chronicles after Judah returned to rebuild Jerusalem's temple and walls.*

Ask what Ezra's purpose was for writing Chronicles.
(Listening Guide question 9)

- *Ask someone to read 2 Chronicles 26:23 and emphasize the number of times it states that God is in charge.*
 - ◊ *To reassure the people that even though God had judged them for disobedience and rebellion, He had not abandoned His covenants with them.*

Ask what fact Ezra reminded Israel of in Chronicles.
(Listening Guide question 10)

- *Read 2 Chronicles 7:14 and discuss what Ezra was doing with this statement in light of its historical context.*
 - ◊ *Even though the returned exiles were discouraged in their efforts to obey God, He still offered to restore them. (Note the emphasis on the need for continued repentance and seeking God; but also God's promise to hear, forgive, and heal.)*

What role do the "color" books play in the Old Testament?
(Listening Guide question 11)

Ask someone how they would describe the “color” books’ role in the Old Testament. Ask the group if they can name the “color” books and their themes.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Leviticus – Be holy as God is holy.*
- *Deuteronomy – The code of blessing for obedience and discipline for disobedience.*
- *Ruth – There were righteous people in Israel during its darkest time.*
- *Lamentations – The consequences of sin bring deep grieving for God’s people.*
- *Chronicles – God is faithful even when His people aren’t.*
- *Esther – God is at work even when we aren’t conscious of it or acknowledging it.*

Poetry and Wisdom Books

Ask who wrote the psalms.

(Listening Guide question 12)

- *There are many writers, and we don’t know for certain who wrote some of the psalms.*

Ask what span of Israel’s history the psalms cover.

(Listening Guide question 13)

- *The earliest (Psalm 90) was written by Moses (1440s BC).*
- *The latest (Psalm 137) was written during the Babylonian exile (after 586 BC).*

Explain the purpose of discussing poetry and wisdom in this lesson.

(Listening Guide question 14)

Because we will study the poetry and wisdom books in Lessons 8 and 9, our discussion here focuses on how these books fit into the Old Testament’s chronology and story.

- *The psalms span Israel’s history from Exodus to the exile but most are from David’s time.*
- *The Proverbs, too, span Israel’s history, but most, like the book of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, are associated with Solomon.*
- *Job appears to have lived during Abraham’s time, but his account was probably written after Solomon’s time.*

Read Psalm 1:1–3 and discuss the two ways of life this “introduction to the Psalms” presents.

These poetry and wisdom books provide insight into Israel’s culture, worship, education, and wisdom.

Prophetic Books

Ask someone to read Amos 3:7–8 and discuss Amos’s view of his ministry.

Remind the group that you will study the prophets in more detail in Lesson 10.

Ask if anyone can describe what period of time Israel’s writing prophets belong to.
(From the kingdom’s division in 930 BC to the end of the Old Testament in 440 BC.)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask someone to read Deuteronomy 18:18. Prophets ministered from Moses’s time to the end of the Old Testament.*
- *“Prophet” simply means “messenger,” and God used many spokesmen and women.*

Ask if anyone can name well-known prophets other than the writing prophets in Israel’s history.
(Listening Guide question 16)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Elijah and Elisha—875–797 BC (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13)—are the most famous.*

Ask, “During what three times did the writing prophets minister?”
(Listening Guide question 17)

- *The divided kingdom: 930–586 BC (most of the writing prophets)*
- *Exile: 586–538 BC (Ezekiel and Daniel)*
- *Post-Exile: 538–444 BC (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)*

Read Isaiah 6:8–12 and discuss, generally, how successful the prophets were.

- *There were moments of great success, but mostly the prophets were ignored and often persecuted.*

Conclusion

Discuss the difference chronologically between the “color” books, the poetry and wisdom books, and the prophetic books.
(Listening Guide question 19)

- *The “color” books span Israel’s history from Abraham to Malachi and provide additional insights and explanation to various events described in the “time” books.*
- *Wisdom and poetry illustrate Israel’s culture, education, and worship and provide illustrations of their deepest feelings and longings.*
- *The prophets span Israel’s history from the divided kingdom to the end of the Old Testament and teach us about God’s instructions and warnings to Israel and His patience with their disobedience.*

Application

Discuss with the group what main lesson(s) we should learn as we study the Old Testament.

- Ask group members what they would name as some of the primary lessons.
- If no one names it, add that God created us in His own image so we can enjoy a relationship with Him. Sin has separated us from God, and the Old Testament reminds us of the initiative God expends to heal those broken relationships.

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 4. “In Lesson 4 we will explore the first of four main historical eras that occur during the Old Testament’s story. This ‘Beginnings’ era introduces us to major characters in the story and sets the stage for the unfolding drama of God’s relationship with Israel.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. List the first, second, and third beginnings found in the Old Testament story.
2. Describe what happened to the Israelites between the end of the book of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus.
3. Identify the miraculous events that occurred as the Israelites exited Egypt and began their wanderings in the desert.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Review the four Old Testament “eras” from Lesson 2 by asking if anyone can name the Old Testament’s four eras and the books that describe each era.

- Beginnings (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers)
- Settlement (Joshua, Judges)
- Kingdom (Samuel, Kings)

- Exile and Reconstruction (Ezra, Nehemiah)
 - ◊ Review the diagram

Think of these eras as drawers in a file cabinet. When we read a “time,” “color,” poetry/wisdom, or prophetic book, we can organize its characters and events into their proper chronological place by putting them into one of the file drawers. The four eras are just a way to keep all the Old Testament details organized in our minds.

Ask if anyone can describe what events open and close the “Beginnings” era.

- Begins with creation (Genesis 1:1–2) and
- Ends with Israel being prepared to enter Canaan (Numbers 26–36 and Deuteronomy)

Discussion

Teaching note. There is extra emphasis on Genesis in this lesson because it is so foundational to the rest of the Old Testament. Genesis 12–50 introduces Abraham as the father of Israel. The Old Testament, from Genesis 12 through Malachi, is about his descendants.

Introduction

Genesis

Ask if anyone can describe how Genesis is organized.

(Listening Guide question 4)

- *Genesis 1–11 describes the beginning of all things:*
 - ◊ *Creation of time, space, a habitable world and creatures, including humans (Genesis 1–2)*
 - ◊ *Introduction to Satan and the beginning of human corruption by sin (Genesis 3–11)*
- *Genesis 12–50 describes the beginning of Israel:*
 - ◊ *Abraham (11:27–25:11)*
 - ◊ *Isaac (21–28)*
 - ◊ *Jacob (27–37)*
 - ◊ *Joseph (36–50)*

Ask how each of Genesis’s “beginnings” (Genesis 1–11 and 12–50) mattered to Moses’s original hearers/readers.

(Listening Guide question 6)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Talk about Moses’s original audience. It’s important to place ourselves in his original audience’s situation as we read Genesis.*

Ask if anyone can explain why Genesis 12–50 was especially important to Moses’s original audience.

- *Genesis 12–50 is their own history, their roots.*
- *Genesis 12 and 17 explain that, as Abraham’s descendants, they are a special people chosen by God to represent Him to all the other nations. (You will read these passages later in this lesson.)*
- *Ask how the people of Israel may have felt about themselves as people born into slavery and treated as slaves all their lives.*
- *How confident would they have been about defying Pharaoh’s armies, crossing the Sinai desert with their families and animals, and invading Canaan?*

Ask someone to read Genesis 1:1–3 and discuss how the Bible deals with the fact that God created us.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Genesis doesn’t defend or explain God; it takes belief in God for granted.*
- *When Moses wrote Genesis, all cultures believed in gods of many kinds.*
- *The difference between Israel and other nations was not their belief in God, but what they believed about THEIR God:*
 - ◊ *Believed in one God (Deuteronomy 6:4)*
 - ◊ *Believed their God was good, loved the people He created, and was to be loved by them (Deuteronomy 6:5)*

Discuss how important one’s view of God is. Ask group members if their view of God has changed since beginning this Bible study. If so, how? Talk about their views of God.

Review these facts Moses established in Genesis 1–11:

- *God is the supreme ruler of the good universe He created.*
- *God created all humans and they all matter to Him.*
- *Sin was introduced in Genesis 3 and its devastating power to corrupt was described in Genesis 4–11*

Read Genesis 6:5 and discuss how complete humanity’s rebellion against God was in Noah’s time.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Discuss with the group what evidence we have that our world is or is not like Noah’s world.*

Read Genesis 6:6–7 and discuss God’s response to man’s sin and His decision to begin again.

Ideas for Discussion

- *God’s intention was not to merely destroy humanity, but to give humanity a new start.*
 - ◊ *Read God’s instructions to Adam in Genesis 1:28–30; then read His instructions to Noah in 9:1–4.*
 - ◊ *Discuss the comparisons between the two “covenants” and explain that Noah was, in some ways, a second beginning for humanity and the earth.*

Ask what happened with Noah's descendants after the flood.

- *Genesis 9:20–11:10 describe Ham's sin and the sin of Babel.*
 - ◊ *These chapters are painted with a very broad brush, and we know little about what Ham did, or about the details of Babel's sin.*
 - ◊ *What Moses communicated was that the world still continued to degenerate and needed another solution to their alienation from God.*

Ask where Abraham is introduced in the Bible.

(Listening Guide question 15)

Read Genesis 12:1–3 and discuss the fact that God introduced another “Beginning” by establishing this covenant with Abraham.

Ideas for Discussion

- *God's strategy to address sin's power and penalty was to establish a people who would model His way of life to the world.*
 - ◊ *This chapter introduces the rest of the Old Testament's story.*
 - ◊ *God is “beginning” again. Adam and Eve, Noah and his family, and now Abraham and Sarah are three beginnings of relationships with God.*
 - ◊ *Rather than start all over again by destroying humanity, God selected a righteous man and woman of faith and focused His attention on them and their descendants.*
- *Read Genesis 17:4–5 where Abraham's name was changed from Abram (“Exalted Father”) to Abraham (“Father of Many”), and God's covenant with him was expanded.*

Review how significant Abraham is to the Old Testament story.

(Listening Guide question 16)

- *He and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob are Israel's patriarchs (Exodus 3:15).*
- *God's covenant with him promised his descendants that they would be a blessing to the whole world, they would have their own land, and God would bless them (Genesis 13:1–3; 17:1–5).*
- *Abraham was called God's friend (Genesis 18:17).*
- *God introduced Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:5–6).*
- *In the New Testament Abraham is used as the model for our faith (Galatians 3:8–9).*
- *The Jews, even in Jesus's time, honored Abraham as their father (John 8:52–53).*
- *He is listed, along with David, as the father of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1).*

Discuss the role Genesis played for its original hearers/readers.

(Listening Guide question 17)

Review the paragraph in the lecture transcript for Lesson 4 that begins with, “To read Genesis well ...”

- *Genesis explained to an enslaved people that they were God's special, chosen nation and that He could and certainly would deliver them from slavery and fulfill the covenant promises He made to their fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

- *That's why God told Moses six times to emphasize to Israel's citizens that they were descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5; 6:3–4, 8).*

Explain and emphasize the two contexts that we have to put Abraham's story in.
(Listening Guide question 19)

- *The historical context—the story itself as history. We have to understand what actually happened between God and Abraham in 2100 BC. It is a historical record.*
- *The literary context—the setting in which the story was told. We have to understand the way Moses used Abraham's historical story for his original audience. He told Abraham's story to a specific people at a specific time to teach or emphasize the important point that they were God's chosen people.*
- *It's essential that we put ourselves in the context of an Israelite in Egypt during their difficult escape from Egypt and their journey to Canaan. It's important to "hear" these Genesis stories as Israel in Egypt and in the desert would have heard them.*

Ask how these two contexts are different.
(Listening Guide question 20)

- *We read the historical context to discover what actually happened in the time the events occurred.*
- *We place the story in its literary context to identify why the writer told this story to his particular audience.*
- *Stephen used Abraham's story in his sermon (Acts 7:1–8) for an entirely different reason than Moses used Abraham's story when he wrote it during the time of Israel's exodus.*
- *We have one historical context, but two very different literary contexts where the historical story was used to fulfill two different literary purposes.*

Exodus

Discuss Israel's condition when the book of Exodus opened.
(Listening Guide question 21)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Genesis 50:22–26 and explain that it is a bridge to Exodus. Compare Genesis 46:8 and Exodus 1:1 to see how Exodus is written as a continuation of the Genesis narrative.*
- *Read Exodus 1:6–7 and comment on how the Genesis story is continued in Exodus.*
- *Read Exodus 1:8 and discuss how it introduces a contrast from the end of Genesis where Joseph was favored to the beginning of Exodus where his and Abraham's descendants were enslaved.*
- *Read Exodus 1:15–16 and 22 and discuss Israel's condition in Egypt.*

Have someone read the following passages and discuss Israel's two responses to their condition.
(Listening Guide question 22)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Exodus 5:15–20 – Israel was afraid of the Egyptians' anger and submitted to Pharaoh.*

- *Exodus 2:23–25 (note the reference to the Abrahamic covenant in v. 24) and 3:7–9 - They cried out to God.*

Ask the group to list things they can think of that God did to convince Israel He could deliver them from Egypt.

Ask someone to read Exodus 3:9–15 and discuss Moses’s call and God’s reference to His covenant with Abraham.

- *God gave Moses His personal assurance that He would deliver His people.*
- *God prepared and empowered Moses to be their deliverer—read Exodus 11:3.*

God sent ten plagues on Egypt (7:14–12:32) to demonstrate His power and build Israel’s confidence in Him—read Exodus 10:1–2 and 11:9.

God parted the Red Sea so Israel could escape Pharaoh’s armies and so God could build their confidence in Him—read Exodus 14:31.

Read Genesis 15:13 and Exodus 12:41 and discuss what they say about God’s sovereignty.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask the group if they believe God is still that aware and that much in control of our world today.*
- *The second movement in Exodus describes Israel’s experience at Mount Sinai.*
 - ◇ *Exodus 1–18 describes Israel’s experience in Egypt.*
 - ◇ *Exodus 19–40 describes Israel’s experience at Sinai.*

Discuss what actually happened at Sinai.

(Listening Guide question 24)

- *Israel became a nation. They had been Abraham’s “family,” but now God formalized His relationship with them as a nation.*
 - ◇ *God called the Mosaic law a “covenant” (Exodus 24:7), establishing it as His official law for the nation. In a real sense, the Mosaic law functioned as Israel’s national constitution.*
 - ◇ *God became Israel’s king—His law was their constitution and the land God promised to Abraham was their home.*

Numbers

Read Exodus 40:34 where God entered the tabernacle He commanded Israel to build so He could “dwell among them” (Exodus 25–40).

Then read Numbers 1:1 to show how Exodus and Numbers are “spliced” together as a single story.

Review the three segments Numbers is divided into:

- *Israel at Sinai after receiving God’s Law (1:1–10:10)*
- *Israel wandering in the wilderness (10:11–22:1)*

- ◇ *From Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea (10:11–12:16)*
- ◇ *Rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea (13:1–20:13)*
- ◇ *Israel’s journey from Kadesh-Barnea to Moab (20:13–22:1)*
- *Israel instructed about how to live in their new land (22:2–36:13)*
 - ◇ *Moses’s sermons recorded in Deuteronomy were delivered at this time.*

Read Numbers 13:1–2, 24–28; 14:1–4, 26–33 as a summary of what happened at Kadesh-Barnea.

- *Israel rebelled against God at Kadesh-Barnea and God’s judgment on their disobedience was that He would answer their prayer request that He not make them enter the land. That resulted in forty years of wandering in the Sinai Desert.*

Discuss how the book of Numbers is about the tragic consequences of disobeying God’s instructions.

- *The older generation, who endured the plagues and the journey to their land, never entered it.*
- *They spent the next forty years of their lives wandering aimlessly in the desert instead of being settled in the land of milk and honey.*

Application

Discuss the question in the last paragraph of the lesson. What are some specific ways we can remind ourselves, and each other, to deal properly with our own personal “Kadesh-Barnea” incidents?

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 5. “In this session we will explore the ‘Settlement’ era of Old Testament history. The forty years of wandering was over and a new generation of Abraham’s descendants had entered the land of promise and settled into their new life as God’s chosen people.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Name the books that provide information on the Settlement era.
2. Describe the two subsections of the Settlement era.
3. Learn important traits about Joshua, who succeeded Moses as Israel’s leader.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

The Settlement era began with a huge transition for Israel. Most of the people who entered the land had been born during Israel’s forty years in the wilderness and had only experienced that nomadic existence. In Joshua, they entered their promised land and had to adjust to a whole new way of life.

Begin the session by asking people to share some of their transitions in life. Ask them to share their most exciting transition or their most difficult.

Ask what they think would have been the most exciting and the most difficult for them if they had been part of Israel in Joshua's time.

Discussion

Introduction

Ask where Israel was when the Beginning era ended.

(Listening Guide question 1)

- *Numbers 22:1—Israel moved to Moab and camped there across from Canaan. Chapter 22 to the end of the book (36:13) is a mixture of events and instructions that occurred there while Israel waited to enter their land.*
- *Numbers 27:15–20—God instructed Moses to commission Joshua as the next leader.*
- *Deuteronomy 34:5–6 records Moses's death.*
- *Joshua 1:1–3 gives God's initial instructions to Joshua.*

Briefly discuss with your group how these passages transition us from Numbers to Joshua and tie these two books and the book of Deuteronomy into a literary unit.

Ask if members of the group can name and summarize the four books of the Settlement era.

(Listening Guide question 2)

- *Deuteronomy presents the Code of Deuteronomy, which promised God's blessing for obedience to His law and curses for disobedience. This crucial book introduces the theological formula for the rest of the Old Testament and places God as the primary influence in Israel's history.*
- *Joshua describes how Israel invaded Canaan, divided it among the tribes, and settled in it.*
- *Judges describes the next 325-year period in Israel when they abandoned their relationship with God and suffered the consequences. It provides a transition to Israel's Kingdom era.*
- *Ruth tells the story of a family who faithfully followed God during the time of Judges.*

Ask the group what events open and close the Settlement era.

(Listening Guide question 3)

- *The Settlement era began with Moses's instructions to prepare Israel to live well in their land.*
- *It ended with Israel's miserable failure to follow Moses's instructions and the devastation that resulted.*

Joshua

Discuss the book of Joshua's purposes.

(Listening Guide question 5)

Ideas for Discussion

- *To present a historical record of how God kept His promise to bring Israel into the land He promised to Abraham and his descendants*
- *To illustrate the first part of the Code of Deuteronomy's truth that God would bless Israel's obedience*
 - ◊ *Read Deuteronomy 28:1–2 and Joshua 11:23.*
 - ◊ *(Note: The second part of Deuteronomy's code that God would curse Israel for disobedience is illustrated in Judges.)*

Discuss Joshua's big idea.

(Listening Guide question 6)

Ideas for Discussion

Ask if anyone can name it. "God rewards obedience."

- *Ask someone to read Psalm 1:1–2 and discuss the "Blessing-follows-obedience" idea.*
 - ◊ *Psalm 1:1 teaches what the "blessed" (literally, "happy," "fulfilled," "content") person avoids, and Psalm 1:2 teaches what the "blessed" person delights in. Psalm 1 is a "wisdom" psalm that reflects the Old Testament belief in the Code of Deuteronomy. But often that "blessing" is not so much God's supernatural intervention but the result of a life lived by following His advice and counsel.*
 - ◊ *God's laws were not given to prohibit behavior as much as to protect from disaster by giving us wise direction.*
 - ◊ *Life—naturally, through consequences and "supernaturally" through God's intervention—works best when we follow God's Word.*

Ask if anyone can name the three major movements in Joshua.

(Listening Guide question 7)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Israel conquered their land under Joshua's leadership (1–12).*
- *Israel divided the land among its tribes (13–21).*
- *Joshua addressed Israel and challenged them to follow God (22–24).*
 - ◊ *Read and discuss Joshua 23:6–8—God wanted Israel to protect themselves from the Canaanite religious practices.*
 - ◊ *Read John 17:13–18 and Matthew 5:13–16 and talk about how Christians relate to our "Canaan."*
 - ◊ *God wants us to be lights to the world but to still protect ourselves from the "Canaanite" practices of our culture.*

Briefly describe Joshua the man.

(Listening Guide question 8)

Ideas for Discussion

Ask your group what they think Joshua was like. Can they name a current public person who they think might be like Joshua was?

- *Israel's military leader (Exodus 17:8–13)*
- *Went up Mt. Sinai with Moses as his "servant" (Exodus 24:12–14)*
- *Was, along with Caleb, one of the faithful spies (Numbers 14:1–10)*

Read Joshua's commission by God in Joshua 1:1–9 and ask what its two parts are.

- *Verses 2–5: God's role and responsibility in the commission (note six uses of "I").*
- *Verses 6–9: Joshua's role and responsibility in the commission (note references to God's Word).*

Ask what major events are recorded in Joshua 1–12.

(Listening Guide question 9)

- *Joshua's commission*
- *Joshua's success and two affirming miracles:*
 - ◊ *Crossed the Jordan (chapters 3–5)*
 - ◊ *Defeated Jericho (chapter 6)*

Ask what the central portion of Joshua's book deals with.

(Listening Guide question 10)

- *Israel divided Canaan among the tribes.*

Read Joshua 24:14–15 and talk about how the book of Joshua ended.

(Listening Guide question 11)

- *We face a similar challenge today. Ask what "idols" we live with today, and how we can identify and destroy our idols.*

Judges

Discuss how Judges continues the story of settlement begun in Joshua. There are two "bridges" that tie Joshua and Judges together:

Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Joshua 24:29–31 and Judges 2:6–9 together and discuss Joshua as a link.*
- *Read Joshua 24:18–20 and Judges 2:10–13 together and discuss Israel's behavior as a link.*

Ask if anyone can state and explain the big idea of Judges.

(Listening Guide question 14)

- *Israel failed to keep the promises they made to God and suffered the consequences of their disobedience.*

Discuss the purpose of Judges.

(Listening Guide question 15)

- *To reveal what happened in Israel between their success under Joshua's leadership and their success under David's reign as king.*
 - ◊ *Judges explains why Israel moved from a theocracy (a nation with God as their king) to a monarchy (a nation with a human king).*

Ask how many judges are listed in the book.

(Listening Guide question 16)

There are twelve judges named in the book, but only six of their stories are developed.

Ask if anyone can name one of the major judges and if anyone has a favorite judge; if so, who and why?

(Listening Guide question 17)

- *The six major judges are Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson.*
- *If you want to summarize the book and the judges further, use the table below.*

Judges: The Fatality of Failure and Israel's Major Judges				
I. The Reason for Failure (Chapters 1–2)	Failure to Drive out Canaan's Inhabitants (Chapter 1)		Failure to Separate Themselves from the Canaanites (Chapter 2)	
II. The Stories of Failure (Chapters 3–16)	Apostasy	Oppressed By	Years	Deliverer (Judges)
	3:5–8	The King of Mesopotamia	8	Othniel (3:9–11)
	3:12–14	The King of Moab	18	Ehud (3:15–20)
	4:1–3	The King of Canaan	20	Deborah & Barak (4:4–5:31)
	6:1–10	The Midianites	7	Gideon (6:2–8:35)
	10:6–18	The Philistines	18	Jephthah (10:1–12:7)
	13:1	The Philistines	40	Samson (13:2–16:31)
III. The Extent of Failure (Chapters 17–21)	Sins of a Family (Chapter 17)	Sins of Two Tribes (Chapters 18–19)	Sins of a Nation (Chapters 20–21)	

Explain the 4-step cycle that characterizes the central portion of Judges (chapters 3–16).
(Listening Guide question 19)

- *Sin: “The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord.”*
- *War as judgment: “The Lord sold them into the hands of () for () years.”*
- *Repentance: “The Israelites cried out to the Lord.”*
- *Deliverance under a judge: “He raised up ... a deliverer (judge) who saved them...”*

Discuss what Judges’ final section tells us about Israel.
(Listening Guide question 20)

Ideas for Discussion

- *When there is no king (authority to govern us) and everyone does what is right in his own eyes, life becomes chaotic and dangerous. Even Israel, God’s chosen nation, became a dangerous, barbaric nation.*
- *God gave us laws and commandments and wisdom to guide us, and He accompanied those teachings with promises of blessing and threats of cursing because He knows how powerful and dangerous sin is.*
- *Discuss sin’s power to pull people away from God’s instructions for an effective life.*
 - ◊ *As illustrated in Judges.*
 - ◊ *As illustrated in life as a whole. Read and discuss God’s warning to Cain in Genesis 4:7 and Cain’s response in 4:16 as the prototype of the human relationship to sin and to God. Discuss how we can guard ourselves against Cain’s and Israel’s failure.*

The next two books, Deuteronomy and Ruth, are “color” books that add essential insight to the Settlement era but do not move the story forward.

Deuteronomy

Remind the group that Moses’s speeches recorded in the book of Deuteronomy were delivered to Israel just before they entered Canaan. They were reminders to Israel about how they should live as God’s nation in their new land.

Read Deuteronomy 30:15–20 and discuss why Deuteronomy is one of the Old Testament’s most important documents. This “Code of Deuteronomy” is the theology that governs the rest of the Old Testament story and is Deuteronomy’s big idea.

Discuss how the books of Joshua and Judges relate to the book of Deuteronomy.
(Listening Guide question 25)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Joshua illustrates the “life and prosperity” and the “you will live and increase and the Lord will bless you in the land” portion of Deuteronomy 30:15–20.*
- *Judges illustrates the “certainly you will be destroyed” and the “you will not live long in the land” portion of Deuteronomy 30:15–20.*

Briefly summarize each of Moses's speeches.

(Listening Guide question 27)

- *Moses rehearsed God's faithfulness to Israel in the past to give a sense of perspective (1:1–4:43).*
- *Moses reissued and expanded on the Ten Commandments God gave Israel to give Israel clear direction about how to live in their new land (4:44–28:68).*
- *Moses promised God's blessing for obedience and His curses for disobedience to give incentive to follow God's law (29–33).*
 - ◊ *Moses's third speech includes the Code of Deuteronomy.*
 - ◊ *This ending of Deuteronomy tells us that God was concerned enough about His people to stay involved in their lives—even to use life's difficulties to warn them against sin's disastrous consequences.*

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9, which is Israel's "Shema" and is one of the Bible's most famous statements. (The word *shema* means "hear" or "listen" in Hebrew and is the opening word of this statement.)

Ideas for Discussion

The Shema deals with Israel's two most foundational realities:

- *Verses 4–5 tell them what their God is like and how they should relate to Him.*
- *Verses 6–9 tell them how important God's law is and how they should relate to it.*

Discuss with the group how they stand in relation to each part of Israel's (and consequently our) Shema.

Ruth

Because you have already summarized Ruth's content in Lesson 3, we may only survey it here for review. If you want to go into more detail on Ruth, look at the Leader's Guide for Lesson 3.

- *Ruth occurred during the time of the Judges (Ruth 1:1).*
- *That's important because it shows that even in Israel's darkest time there were people who followed God and were blessed by Him.*
- *The major characters are Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. David is introduced at the end of the book and, though not present in the story, is crucial to the book's purpose.*

The major portion of Ruth tells how Naomi carefully followed God's law as she orchestrated the relationship and eventual marriage between Ruth and Boaz.

The book ends with Naomi holding Ruth and Boaz's son in her lap while the faithful women in Bethlehem blessed her and praised God for His faithfulness.

Ruth was written to show that God recognized individual faithfulness even in a nation that was rebelling against Him. It also explained how God used faithful Naomi to introduce Ruth, a Gentile Moabite woman, into the lineage of the great king David, and ultimately the lineage of the Son of

David, Israel's Messiah and the world's Savior.

Summarize the truth of the Settlement era in your own words.

(Listening Guide question 39)

- *God blesses obedience and curses disobedience.*

Application

Ask the group to discuss the following question.

- If ever there was a period in Israel's history that teaches us the value of obedience and the dangers of disobedience to God's laws, it's this Settlement era. Of all that you processed in this lesson, what would you name as the most important "takeaway" for you?

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 6. “In Lesson 6 we will survey the period in Israel’s history where, under the rule of her kings, she split into two separate nations and was taken back into exile as slaves of Gentile nations.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Explain why the people of Israel wanted a king to lead them.
2. Describe the four periods of the Kingdom era.
3. Name the three kings who reigned over Israel before it was divided.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Open the session with a question to introduce the idea of Israel’s new leadership under the kings.

- Ask group members to name their best leadership experience or favorite leader and explain why they made the choice they did.
- OR ask what they think are a few of the most important differences between good and bad leadership.
- OR ask what made life so difficult for Israel’s people during the time of the judges.
 - ◊ External: oppression from surrounding nations because of their sin
 - ◊ Internal: a tragic lack of effective leadership and rejection of God as their leader

Discussion

Introduction

Ask what was the major reason Israel wanted a king.

(Listening Guide question 1)

- *There was no king in Israel because Israel had rejected God as their King.*

Ask if someone can name the “time” books that tell the Kingdom era story.

(Listening Guide question 2)

- *First Samuel presents the founding of Israel’s kingdom.*

Explain that Second Samuel tells the story of David, Israel’s greatest king.

- *First Kings 1–11 tells of Solomon’s success and failure and why Israel split into two nations.*
- *First Kings 12–2 Kings 25 presents the divided kingdom’s destruction and fall.*

Explain that there are no books that were written to add “color” to the Kingdom era, but there are books that provide information about it and which should be read with this era in mind.

- *Many psalms and proverbs were written by David, Solomon, and others who lived during the Kingdom era.*
- *Thirteen of the sixteen writing prophets ministered during the divided kingdom and shed great light on that time.*
- *First and Second Chronicles, though written during the Reconstruction, present a detailed account of the Davidic kings—especially David (1 Chronicles 11–29) and Solomon (2 Chronicles 1–9).*

Summary of the Kingdom Era

Ask the group if they can name some of the major people and events of this era in Israel’s history.

(Listening Guide question 5)

- *Best known: David (and Goliath, and Bathsheba), Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Elisha.*
- *Samuel and King Saul are lesser known but are huge players in the Kingdom era’s early years.*

Ask if anyone can tell what the Kingdom era’s big idea is.

(Listening Guide question 6)

- *During Israel’s monarchy, God still ruled Israel and the Code of Deuteronomy was active.*

Discuss the author's purpose in writing the books of Samuel and Kings (the authors are unknown to us).

(Listening Guide question 7)

Ideas for Discussion

- *To record the history of the Kingdom era*
- *To explain that the kingdom's division and destruction was a result of Israel and her kings' rebellion*
 - ◊ *Read 2 Kings 17:5–8 and discuss why Israel, the northern nation, was destroyed (in 722 BC by the Assyrians).*
 - ◊ *Read 2 Chronicles 36:15–17 and discuss why Judah, the southern nation, was destroyed (in 586 BC by the Babylonians—the term “Chaldeans” is another name for Babylonians).*

Note: We must read 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles in both their literary contexts (a historical account of Israel's kings) and their historical contexts:

- *Kings was written during Israel's exile to explain that she was destroyed because of her rebellion against God under a series of unfaithful and godless kings.*
- *Chronicles was written during the reconstruction era to remind Israel that even after their years of rebellion and exile, God was still faithful to His covenant and the promises He had made to them were still valid.*

Explain that the Kingdom era has four distinct periods.

(Listening Guide question 8)

- *The transition time from Judges to the Kingdom (1 Samuel 1–7)*
- *The united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon (1 Kings 8–1 Kings 11)*
- *The divided kingdom (with Israel and Judah) (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 17)*
- *Judah only (after Israel's destruction by the Assyrians) (2 Kings 17–25)*

1 Samuel

Open a conversation about what Samuel may have been like as a man.

(Listening Guide question 9)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Genesis 17:6 and Deuteronomy 17:14–15 where God promised Israel she would have a king.*
- *Then read 1 Samuel 8:6 where Samuel was displeased because Israel demanded a king.*

Ask why Israel wanted a king.
(Listening Guide question 11)

Ideas for Discussion

What was Samuel's problem?

- *Read 1 Samuel 8:7. Israel had rejected God as their king. The problem wasn't with having a new king, but with their rejection of their real King.*

Read 1 Samuel 8:20. Israel wanted a king like the nations around them.

- *Read Deuteronomy 17:18–20 where God described how the king would relate to Him and His law. A human king would be God's representative.*

Read 1 Samuel 10:17–19, which is the introduction to God's announcement that Saul was to be Israel's first king, and discuss the disconnect between God's promise to give Israel a king and their disobedient demand for one.

Like He did at Kadesh-Barnea, God gave the people what they demanded in defiance of His wishes for them.

Ask how God comforted Samuel when Israel rejected his leadership.
(Listening Guide question 12)

Read God's encouragement to Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:9 when Israel rejected Samuel's leadership. The verse reconfirms Israel's issue over a king. It was not so much that they wanted a new king but that they had rejected the rule of their real King. God planned to rule them through His godly kings, but they wanted kings like the nations around them.

2 Samuel

Read 2 Samuel 5:4–5 as a summary of 2 Samuel's theme. The book is about David, Israel's greatest king, and both his success and his failures.

- *David's success was God's blessing in response to his obedience (1 Samuel 1–10).*
- *He inherited a troubled kingdom (chapters 2–4).*
- *He united the tribes under his leadership (5:1–5; cf. 5:4–5).*
- *He captured Jerusalem and made it his capital (5:6–16; cf. 1 Chronicles 11).*
- *He defeated the Philistines (5:17–25).*
- *He moved the ark of the covenant (the symbol of God's presence in Israel) to Jerusalem (chapter 6).*
- *Significance = uniting the political and religious life of Israel in one place*
- *God promised to build David a "house"—meaning a dynasty (chapter 7).*

Explain how 2 Samuel 7 records the covenant God made with David that introduced him as the “father” of God’s Messiah. The covenant made six promises that became the Jewish hope since David’s time:

- *God would make David’s name great (verse 9).*
- *God would provide a secure land for Israel to live in forever (verses 10–11).*
- *God would raise up David’s son to build the temple for God (verses 12–13).*
- *God would establish David’s “house” (dynastic line) forever (verse 13).*
- *God would establish a Father/son relationship with David’s descendants (verse 14).*
- *God’s loving-kindness would not depart from David’s dynasty as it had from Saul’s (verses 14–15).*

Ask who fulfilled that great promise.

(Listening Guide question 19)

This covenant with David is so significant because of who fulfills that great Davidic covenant.

- *See Matthew 1:1 and 20:31 and Acts 2:29–36.*

Ask if anyone can state how 2 Samuel divides David’s story.

(Listening Guide question 20)

- *David’s great success (chapters 1–10)*
- *David’s great failure and its consequences (chapters 11–24)*

Ask what 2 Samuel’s big idea is.

(Listening Guide question 21)

Second Samuel’s big idea is that no one is immune from God’s loving discipline (Proverbs 3:11–12) or from sin’s natural consequences. From 2 Samuel 12 (David’s sin with Bathsheba) through 1 Kings 2:10–11, David lived a troubled life.

But at four different times, even after David’s death, his legacy from God was that “David followed God with his whole heart” (1 Kings 3:14; 9:4; 11:6; 11:38).

Ask what one of 2 Samuel’s purposes is.

(Listening Guide question 22)

To teach us that God forgives and restores the sinner but does not always remove the consequences of the sin.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if anyone knows someone who, though forgiven, lives with the results of their sin.*
 - ◊ *Prison sentences, broken marriages, physical scars from sinful activities, STDs, AIDS, etc.*

1 Kings 1–11

Ask the group to name positive things about Solomon and discuss his early years as Israel's king.
(*Listening Guide question 23*)

- *His prayer for wisdom (1 Kings 3:6–9) and God's response (1 Kings 3:10–14)*
- *He built the magnificent Jerusalem temple for God (4:1–8:11)—the major event of his reign.*
- *Wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32)*
- *Had astounding wisdom*

Read 1 Kings 11:4 and 11:9–13 and describe Solomon's later years as Israel's king.
(*Listening Guide question 24*)

- *God's judgment on Solomon's disobedience changed Israel's history forever.*

1 Kings 12–25

Ask why God allowed Israel to split into two nations.
(*Listening Guide question 25*)

- *God split Israel into two nations as a way to judge Solomon's disobedience while remaining faithful to His covenant with David (2 Samuel 7).*

Ask what the two nations were called after Israel's division.
(*Listening Guide question 26*)

- *This long period of Israel's history (from 1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 17 there were two nations, Israel and Judah) continued from the division in 930 BC to the end of the Old Testament in 444 BC.*

This is a complex time in Israel's history and its details are far beyond the scope of an Old Testament Basics course. For more information on this fascinating time, take Dr. Douglas Stuart's course OT219: 2 Samuel–2 Kings. We provide a brief summary below to aid in leading a discussion on this mostly tragic period of Israel's history.

God "removed" the major part of Israel's kingdom from Solomon's descendants.

- *God preserved a smaller kingdom for Solomon's descendants because He promised David that one of his heirs would always rule over God's people (2 Samuel 7:16).*
- *So Israel was divided into two nations with separate kings, priests, armies, and governments.*
- *From 1 Kings 11 to 2 Kings 17 two nations existed: Israel, consisting of ten tribes, and Judah, consisting of two tribes.*
- *Israel, the northern nation consisting of ten tribes, was defeated by Assyria in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:6).*
- *Judah, the southern nation consisting of two tribes, was defeated by Babylon in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8–9).*
- *In 538 BC, Cyrus, king of Persia, released the Jews and many returned to Jerusalem to rebuild it.*
- *Read and discuss Ezra 1:1–2. You will study the exile and reconstruction in Lesson 7.*

Israel	Judah
Northern portion of Israel's nation	Southern portion of Israel's nation
Consisted of ten tribes	Consisted of two tribes (Judah and Benjamin)
Lasted from 931–722 BC: 210 years	Lasted from 931–586 BC: 345 years
Twenty kings: none godly	Twenty kings; eight godly
Destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC	Captured by the Babylonians in 586 BC
Capital: Samaria	Capital: Jerusalem
Four dynasties (as kings murdered their predecessors)	One dynasty: Davidic
Nation never restored	Restored under Cyrus in 538 BC (Ezra 1)

Remind the group that the writing prophets became prominent during the divided kingdom era. Lesson 10 will focus on their ministry.

Ask what is the big idea of 1 and 2 Kings.

(Listening Guide question 33)

- *First and Second Kings' big idea is that until the end of Israel's history God never wavered from His covenant established in Deuteronomy. Israel's two nations met their doom after centuries of oppression and frustration because they never followed God's law.*

Ask what the essence of the prophets' messages to Israel and Judah was.

(Listening Guide question 34)

- *The prophets' message to Israel and Judah was that God was still the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. They continually called Israel back to the code of holiness presented in Leviticus 7 and reminded her that the Code of Deuteronomy was still in effect.*

Application

Two of the Old Testament's greatest characters—David and Solomon—started well and ended poorly. What safeguards are you taking to protect yourself against a disastrous downturn in your life?

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 7. “Lesson 7 explores Israel’s exile in Babylon, their release from exile by the Persians, and their efforts to rebuild their temple, their walls, and their lives in Jerusalem after their return to their homeland.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Describe how the exile period occurred in three stages and identify the prophets that represent each stage.
2. Name the three major “rebuilders” of the reconstruction era.
3. Name the prophets who represent the reconstruction period.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

This session is about Israel starting over again in their new land.

Ask if anyone can relate to a new beginning:

- Moved as a kid
- New job or neighborhood
- Marriage or first child, etc.

What are some issues with new beginnings? Fear, discouragement, sense of failure that required a new start?

Judah was a devastated nation. They were pawns under the Babylonians and now the Persians. They were released from captivity but had to take their families, herds, and meager belongings on a four-month journey to a strange land most of them had never seen.

Remind the group that the era of exile and reconstruction lasted 200 years.

- Ask if anyone can remember how many years were covered in
 - ◇ Beginning era: from Abraham to Joshua (2100 to 1400 BC – 700 years)
 - ◇ Settlement era: from Joshua to King Saul (1400 to 1050 BC – 350 years)
 - ◇ Kingdom era: from Saul to Babylonian captivity (1050 to 586 BC – 465 years)

There are two stages of Israel's history addressed in this era.

- Babylonian exile: 586 to 536 BC (50 years)
- Reconstruction: 536 to 444 BC (92 years)

Discussion

Introduction

The Exile

Ask if someone can name the books we use to describe the exile. (There is no single “time” book as such).

(Listening Guide question 3)

- *We use portions of books to piece together information about the exile: 2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36:10–21; Daniel. Lamentations is a poem about Jeremiah's response to Jerusalem's destruction.*
- *Daniel gives us a picture of what life was like for him during the exile, but it is so far removed from the experience of the rest of Judah's citizens that it distorts what life was like for them. They were exiles and mostly assigned to laborious tasks.*

Read Ezra 1:1–2 and discuss the historical event that ended the exile.

Ideas for Discussion

- *The Persians defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and ruled the ancient Near East.*
- *Note in Ezra 1:1–2 who the real power behind Cyrus was. Who “actually” ruled?*
- *Why did that fact matter to the people Ezra's book was addressed to?*
 - ◇ *Another historical/literary context point: Ezra's readers were struggling with their identity in Judah because they were still under Persian rule, about 100 years after Cyrus's decree. (Historical context: Cyrus's decree in 539 BC. Literary context: Ezra wrote the account of Cyrus's decree in*

440 BC.)

Explain that Daniel’s book provides bits of “color” about the Babylonian rule in chapters 1–5 and Persian rule in chapter 6 but nothing about life for the Jewish exiles.

The Reconstruction

Introduce Ezra and Nehemiah’s big idea that God was leading Judah in the reconstruction process. Ask if someone can name the two construction projects (emphasize that there were two projects). (*Listening Guide question 7*)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Ezra 1:2; 3:2–3; and Nehemiah 1:1–3 and discuss their focuses on reconstruction.*
- *Read Ezra 9:1–4, 10; 10:1–2; and Nehemiah 8:1–3; 9:1–3 and discuss their other “building” project.*
 - ◊ *Ask if either of these two projects mattered more to God.*
 - ◊ *Discuss how both “physical” building projects prepared the people for the “spiritual” building projects.*

Explain that Ezra and Nehemiah are “time” books and both describe two reconstruction projects: (*Listening Guide question 8*)

- *Ezra 1–6 describes rebuilding the temple (completed in 516 BC) (Ezra 6:15).*
- *Ezra 7–10 describes rebuilding Israel’s disobedient citizens (457 BC) (Ezra 10:11–12).*
- *Nehemiah 1–6 describes rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall (completed in 445 BC) (Neh. 6:15–16).*
- *Nehemiah 7–13 describes rebuilding Israel’s disobedient citizens (445 BC) (Neh. 8:8–9).*

Talk about how most people only discuss the temple in Ezra and the walls in Nehemiah—and not the spiritual reconstruction that took place.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Discuss the danger of churches focusing too much on physical plants, programs, and numbers of people and neglecting the spiritual condition and ministry of the people. Which are means and which are ends?*
- *How can we guard against the danger of overfocus on the physical and neglect of the spiritual?*

It’s important to understand that many in Israel expected a Messianic deliverance from Gentile rule when they returned and were confused about what God was doing.

Read Jeremiah 29:10–14 and Isaiah 44:28. These prophecies were proclaimed before the exile and were familiar to the Jews. (Isaiah prophesied from 740–681 BC and Jeremiah from 626–584 BC.)

Ideas for Discussion

- *What did Jeremiah 29:10 predict? (He stated that the exile would last 70 years.)*
 - ◊ *The first deportation was in 605 BC (Daniel 1); and Cyrus released the Jews in 537 BC = sixty-eight years.*

- ◇ *The temple was destroyed in 586 BC (Jeremiah 25); and reconstructed in 516 BC = seventy years.*
- *What did Isaiah 44:28 predict?*
- *Given the literal fulfillment of these prophetic statements, what would Jeremiah 20:11–14 sound like to these Jews? Read Isaiah 40:9–10.*
- *Add to these prophetic statements the fact that Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2), who was the Jewish governor when the Jews rebuilt the temple, was a descendant of David.*

Fulfilling the prophetic statements about seventy years and about Cyrus led to high expectation that God was going to initiate the Messianic promises He made to David (2 Samuel 7). Many believed Israel would soon be restored to her place as God's ruling nation. They would be free of foreign domination.

The Book of Ezra

Ask what chapters in Ezra record each of the events.
(*Listening Guide question 12*)

Review Ezra's record of reconstruction:

- *Rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1–6); Dates: 538–516 BC*
- *Rebuilding the people (Ezra 7–10)*

Ask who led the first wave of Jews back to Judah and started rebuilding the temple.
(*Listening Guide question 13*)

(Note: Ezra 1:11 says that Sheshbazzar led them and 2:2 says Zerubbabel led them. Some believe it was the same man who used his Jewish and his Persian names. Others say that Sheshbazzar was the first governor, but he died soon after they returned and the next governor was Zerubbabel. It is still a mystery.)

Explain through the details of Ezra 3–6 that we see how God intervened to preserve the temple construction process in spite of Judah's enemies' attempts to stop the work.

- *The work began in 537 BC (Ezra 3:1–13).*
- *Opposition to the work by local enemies of the Jews continued from 536–530 BC (Ezra 4:1–5).*
- *The work was stopped by decree of the Persian ruler from 530–520 BC (Ezra 4:24).*
- *Darius the Persian ruler decreed that the work could continue in 520 BC (Ezra 4:24; 5:2).*
- *The Jews neglected the work so God introduced the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to resume the temple reconstruction (Haggai 1:1–4, 14).*
- *The temple was completed in 516 BC (Ezra 6:15).*

Read Haggai 1:4–6 and open a discussion about believing we will benefit by neglecting God's work and channeling all our resources into our own initiatives. This is a danger both in personal and in church life.

Read Ezra 7:1, 6, 8 and ask the group what each verse tells us about Ezra's return.

- 7:1—Ezra returned during Artaxerxes’s reign.
- 7:6—Ezra was from the city of Babylon, was a skilled scribe, received all that he requested from Artaxerxes, and the Lord his God was with him.
- 7:8—tells us the specific time of Ezra’s return (458 BC), sixty years after the temple was rebuilt.

Read Ezra 7:10 and 25 and discuss Ezra’s mission.

Ideas for Discussion

When Ezra’s record ends, the Jews had repented of their disobedience and the temple was completed. But Jerusalem’s wall still had not been rebuilt. This left the Jews without protection from their enemies and was a source of shame and humiliation because they had not been able to complete it.

The Book of Nehemiah

Read Nehemiah 1:1–3 and ask the group what facts we discover from the verses.
(Listening Guide question 20)

- The events occurred November–December 445 BC, twelve years after Ezra had returned (Ezra 7:8).
- Attempts to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls had not succeeded.
- The people living in Judah (the “province”) were in great distress and reproach.

Read Nehemiah 1:4–7 and discuss Nehemiah’s response to the facts he heard. Note that Nehemiah included himself in Israel’s failures even though he was living in Persia and not in Jerusalem.

Ideas for Discussion

Read Nehemiah 1:11–2:5.

- Cupbearer to the king—see 1:11—was a role assigned only to a king’s most trusted servants and suggested high position in the court.
- Read the passages below and ask what each passage tells us about Nehemiah the man.
 - ◊ 1:4–7—Nehemiah was responsive; he genuinely cared about his people. He had a cushy position in the Persian Empire with direct access to the emperor, but his people’s misery mattered to him.
 - ◊ 1:11–2:5—Nehemiah was responsible; he used his position to address the situation.

Because of God’s favor, Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah’s request and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and mobilized her citizens to rebuild the walls (Nehemiah 2:11–6:19).

- 2:11–20 describes how Nehemiah prepared Jerusalem’s people to build the wall.
 - ◊ Jews had lived in Jerusalem for ninety years and no one was able to complete the wall.
- 3:1–32 describes how Nehemiah mobilized the people to actually build the wall; he got everyone involved.
- 4:1–6:14 describes the opposition that was going on during the wall’s building effort.
 - ◊ 4:1–23 describes opposition by foreign enemies surrounding Jerusalem.
 - ◊ 5:1–19 describes opposition by citizens inside Jerusalem whose greed hindered the work.

- ◇ 6:1–14 describes opposition by enemies and citizens who attacked Nehemiah’s person.
- ◇ 6:15–19 describes the overwhelming recognition that only God could have completed this work. (While the events described in chapter 3 were going on, so were the events of chapters 4–6.)

Ask what the difference is between the two possible big ideas for Nehemiah’s story.

- Under God’s direction, Nehemiah built Jerusalem’s wall.

OR

- Under God’s direction, Nehemiah built Jerusalem’s wall ... anyway!
 - ◇ Discuss how a sense of God’s commission and support helped Nehemiah (and can help us) address discouragement and temptations to abandon His work when it gets tough.
 - ◇ How do our attitudes and plans of action resemble and differ from Nehemiah’s?
 - ◇ What can we learn from Nehemiah about life and service to God?

Review the primary focus of Ezra and Nehemiah’s rebuilding stories.

Read Nehemiah 9:6–8 (Israel’s statement of celebration after rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls) and walk through it with your group by asking the following questions:

- What did verse 6 give recognition to? (Their recognition of their monotheism)
- How did verse 6 acknowledge God? (As the creator)
- What did verse 7 remind them of? (God’s choice of their father Abraham)
- What about verse 8? (God’s promise to give Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan)
- What did verse 8 assure them of? (God’s faithfulness to His promise)
- And how did verse 8 relate to the whole statement? (It acknowledges God’s righteousness.)

This brief statement expresses Israel’s acknowledgement of their relationship to God, their place as Abraham’s descendants, and God’s faithfulness to them in spite of all their rebellion. It is a fitting summary of the seventeen hundred years of Israel’s history from Abraham to Nehemiah.

Discuss how reflecting on God’s faithfulness in the past can renew our confidence in His care for our future.

The Reconstruction and Its Color Books

Ask if anyone can name the two “color” books of the Exile and Reconstruction era. (Listening Guide question 25)

- Esther and Chronicles

Ask if someone can explain what Esther’s story is about. (Listening Guide question 26)

Esther records the account of a family (Esther and her cousin Mordecai) who stayed in Persia when the

Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem (more Jews remained in Persia than returned to Judah). Esther's story occurred around 460 BC just before Ezra returned to Jerusalem. The book's purpose is to record the institution of the annual Jewish festival of Purim and to remind future generations of Jews that God had preserved the Jewish people from extermination during the Persian era.

Walk through Esther's plot and outline:

Ideas for Discussion

- *Vashti, King Xerxes's queen, disobeyed him and was banished from the kingdom (1:1–19).*
- *Esther, a Jewess, was chosen to replace Vashti (2:1–20).*
- *Haman, a corrupt member of Xerxes's court, hatched a plan to exterminate the Jews (2:1–4:17).*
- *Esther, the queen, foiled Haman's plan and saved the Jews from extermination (5:1–10:3).*

Esther makes no explicit reference to God, worship, prayer, or Jewish religious activity. The events of the book appear to be coincidental, but the reader who believes in God's sovereign control over even seemingly insignificant events of life reads the book with that conviction in view. The seemingly happenstance sequence of events that move the story's plot from beginning to end demonstrate God's presence with and concern for His children.

Esther's big idea is that God protects His people even when they are unaware of His presence.

Discuss 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Ideas for Discussion

The author of 1 & 2 Kings organized his material so his account of Israel's kingdom era would inform and encourage Israel during her days in exile.

The author of 1 & 2 Chronicles organized his material so his account of Israel's kingdom era would inform and encourage Israel during her days as a restored community, commissioned by God to rebuild life as God's chosen people after their exile.

Remind the group of Israel's belief that God would restore Israel to their prominent place as an independent nation under the rule of their Davidic king (see the notes above under "The Reconstruction").

But their belief was sometimes weak, and they wondered if it was true. Read Ezra 9:5–10 to see even Ezra's struggle with Israel's place with God during the Reconstruction era.

The purpose of 1 & 2 Chronicles was to show how Israel's life after their exile related to God's promises to their ancestors before the exile. Was God still interested in their fate? Did they matter to God more than other nations? Had God withdrawn His covenant promises from them when He dethroned the last of David's descendants before their exile?

Among other emphases, the chronicler highlighted two facts to reassure restored Israel that God had not abandoned them.

- *Chronicles' author emphasized David's and Solomon's interest and investment in the pre exile temple as essential to Israel's identity as God's chosen people. Then he closed 2 Chronicles with the reminder that Cyrus's decree was issued "in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah" and*

that Cyrus's proclamation focused specifically on the fact that, "The Lord, the God of heaven ... has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 36:22–23). The temple built by the returned exiles was important to God Himself and tied the life of people after Israel's exile to God's promises to Israel before the exile.

- Chronicles' author emphasized the importance of the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7 (1 Chronicles 17) and demonstrated how subsequent Davidic kings were reminded of its claims, even though they disobeyed God (2 Chronicles 13:5; 21:7; 23:3). The author assured his readers that God had not forgotten His promises to David. These returned heirs of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—and David—still mattered to God.

First and Second Chronicles add color to the Reconstruction era by showing how important it was to the restored Israelites that God had not abandoned them.

Discuss Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Ideas for Discussion

Because we will see these postexile prophets in Lesson 10 we will only mention them here because they reveal so much about what was happening in Jerusalem and Judah during this era.

- You read Haggai 1:4–6 earlier in the lesson, where Haggai urged Israel to invest themselves in rebuilding God's temple.
- Zechariah's prophecies promised that if Judah returned to God, He would return to them (1:3; 5–6). The final chapters of the book (9–14) promised the future fulfillment of the Messianic promises.
- Malachi, though difficult to date, is associated with Nehemiah's book because they both addressed similar sins of Judah (compare Nehemiah 13:7–31 with Malachi 1:6–14; 2:14–16; 3:8–11).

Conclusion

Explain that this closing period of Old Testament history shows ample evidence that all God's covenants with Israel were still in view.

- They were still children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- They lived under the Mosaic covenant and were responsible to keep the whole law of Moses.
- These returned exiles were accountable to the Code of Deuteronomy and were promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.
- Their great hope for restoration as a nation lay in God's faithfulness to His covenant with David.

Review ...

Ideas for Discussion

- What three things were rebuilt during the Reconstruction era?
- Who are the three "builders" in the Reconstruction era?

Application

The Reconstruction era shows us that God specializes in “reconstructing” people. How would you help a person who needs reconstructing go about that process? How do you work with God in your own reconstruction when you need it? What role does 1 John 1:9 play in the process?

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 8. “In this lesson on Old Testament poetry we will discuss how to read Hebrew poetry and briefly introduce three of the five Old Testament books that are written in poetic form.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Know the characteristics of Hebrew poetry.
2. Explain why truth discovered is more powerful than truth told.
3. Understand why the books Song of Solomon and Lamentations were included in the Old Testament.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Discussion

Introduction

Open with a discussion about poetry (not biblical poetry, but poetry in your own world). Why do some people like it so much—and some people don't? Has anyone memorized any poetry? Remind them that song lyrics are mostly written in poetry. Ask group members to talk about their own attitudes about poetry.

Ask if anyone can name the Old Testament books that are written mostly or entirely in poetry.
(Listening Guide question 1)

- *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations*
- *Although written in the poetic genre, Job and Proverbs are referred to as “wisdom” books.*
- *Lamentations is most often placed with the prophets because Jeremiah wrote it.*

Ask where else we find poetry in the Old Testament.
(Listening Guide question 2)

- *About one-third of the Old Testament is written as poetry. Most of the narrative books and the prophets contain poetry.*

Characteristics of Old Testament Poetry

Explain that it is so important that we know how to read Hebrew poetry that you are taking some time to focus on that skill. Some of God’s most important revelations to us are written in poetic form, and if we don’t know how to read this genre we will misunderstand these messages God wants us to live by.

Ask if someone can describe the difference between prose and poetry.
(Listening Guide question 3)

- *Prose is explicit, and most poetry is written so that its message has to be “discovered” or “figured out” by the reader.*
- *Prose writers choose words primarily for their meaning; poets add to that the task of selecting words that fit the line’s meter and sound and still communicate the line’s meaning.*
- *Both prose and poetry can be profound or silly. The difference is not in the meaning but in the form of expressing the meaning.*

Discuss why poets often veil their messages rather than making them explicit.
(Listening Guide question 4)

Ideas for Discussion

- *To make the reader linger over the poem. The message does not give itself up in a quick reading but is embedded in the poem. The reader has to work out the meaning the poet labored to work into the poem.*
- *With Hebrew poetry, the listener (and now the reader) has to grapple with the literature and discover the meaning by becoming more involved with what the author wrote.*
- *The principle is that “truth discovered is often more powerful than truth told.” The truth discovered belongs to the one who discovers it.*

Discuss with the group how we recognize Occidental (Western culture) poetry.
(*Listening Guide question 5*)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if anyone can quote a few lines of poetry that they've memorized.*
- *If no one volunteers, here's one:*
 - ◊ *Now I lay me down to sleep*
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
- *We normally recognize a poem by its rhyme and rhythm.*

Discuss how Hebrew poetry is different from Western poetry.

Ideas for Discussion

- *There is no rhyme or rhythm (meter) in Hebrew poetry.*
- *Hebrew poetry's principle feature is parallelism—the idea that the lines of a verse strengthen, reinforce, and develop each other's thought or idea.*
- *The thoughts of the lines are the poet's focus more than their sound.*

Introduce and illustrate the three major types of parallelism. Ask if anyone can describe what characterizes synonymous parallelism.

(*Listening Guide question 9*)

- *The writer repeats the same thought in both lines.*
- *Psalm 24:1*
 - ◊ *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it*
The world, and all who live in it (NIV)
- *Psalm 19:2*
 - ◊ *Day to day pours forth speech*
And night to night reveals knowledge (NASB)

Ask if anyone can describe what characterizes antithetic parallelism.

(*Listening Guide question 10*)

- *The thought in the second line is in contrast with the thought in the first line.*
- *Psalm 1:6*
 - ◊ *The Lord knows the way of the righteous*
But the way of the wicked will perish (NASB)
- *Proverbs 18:2*
 - ◊ *A fool does not delight in understanding*
But only in revealing his own mind (NASB)

Ask if anyone can describe what characterizes synthetic parallelism.

(*Listening Guide question 11*)

- *The thought in the first line is completed in the second line.*

- *Psalm 2:6*
 - ◊ *I have installed my King*
On Zion, my holy mountain (NIV)
- *Proverbs 23:15*
 - ◊ *My son, if your heart is wise*
Then my heart will be glad indeed (NIV)

Emphasize that not all Old Testament poetry is as easily categorized or understood as these illustrations. Some verses have three or four lines and are not as neatly arranged. Moses's song in Exodus 15:2 and 7, for instance, takes a bit more work to read.

But when reading poetry:

- *The lines relate to each other differently than they do when reading prose.*
- *The verse's meaning is most often discovered by comparing the lines with each other.*
 - ◊ *The meaning is between the lines.*

The Poetic Books

Discuss the difference between Old Testament poetic and wisdom books.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Poetry is a genre, or style, of writing and can be used to express various thoughts. Psalms, for instance, contain praise, lament, wisdom, thanksgiving, supplication (prayers of request), rage, and retribution. These sentiments are also expressed in prose genre in the Bible.*
- *Wisdom deals with the statement's meaning and perspective; poetry is a style of expression.*
- *Two of the books that are written in poetic form (Job and Proverbs) are categorized as wisdom books because their purpose is to teach wisdom. But the writing style (genre) in both books is poetry. Ecclesiastes, the other wisdom book, is written in prose.*
- *Not all wisdom literature is written as poetry, and not all poetry is written to teach wisdom.*

Ask if anyone has a favorite psalm. Give the group a few minutes to reflect on favorite psalms.

Ask who wrote the psalms.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Many people wrote biblical psalms. The earliest (Psalm 90) was written by Moses and probably relates to Israel's wandering recorded in Numbers. The latest (Psalm 137) was written during Israel's Babylonian captivity.*
- *David was by far the most prolific psalmist, but he certainly didn't write all of them.*

Ask how the psalms are different from most other Scripture passages.
(*Listening Guide question 14*)

The Hebrew title (“Tehillim”) means praises, or prayers. Because “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:26) we believe the psalms, though written by humans, are “authored” by God.

- *Scripture by its nature is God’s way of speaking His will to humans.*
- *The psalms of prayer and praise are designed to help us speak to God. In the prophets and apostles, the reader is the primary listener or audience. In the psalms, God is the primary listener or audience.*
- *When God inspired the psalmists to write these prayers, He was teaching us how to talk to Him. We can read these psalms most profitably when we read them as God-inspired prayers.*

Ask the group to name some of the ways the psalmists talked with God in their psalms. What were some of the types of expression?

(*Listening Guide question 15*)

- *Praise, cries for help, thanksgiving, etc.*
- *You could have the group members look through some psalms and identify the different types of “conversations” they find:*
 - ◊ *You can assign each group member a section of five to ten psalms so everyone doesn’t look at the same ones.*
 - ◊ *After a few minutes let them talk about the psalms they surveyed.*

Ask if anyone can explain the psalms that express bitter feelings toward God or other people. Why would these kinds of statements be included in such a beautiful collection of praise and worship?

(*Listening Guide question 16*)

Ask if anyone has read the Song of Solomon and can briefly summarize what it’s about.

(*Listening Guide question 17*)

- *The book is a story, written totally in poetry, about the love between a man and woman who meet and enjoy a courtship where they express their wonder and appreciation to each other for their physical beauty. They marry and enjoy each other’s love.*
- *The content of the book is mostly the poetic expressions of the two lovers, and it moves through six phases:*
 - ◊ *The courtship (1:2–3:5)*
 - ◊ *The wedding (3:6–5:1)*
 - ◊ *The marriage’s maturation (5:2–8:4)*
 - ◊ *Love’s nature and power (8:5–7)*
 - ◊ *Love’s beginning (8:8–14)*

Open a discussion on why the Song of Solomon is in the Bible.
(*Listening Guide question 18*)

Ideas for Discussion

- *It's a book about one of God's greatest gifts to us—the gift of love.*
 - ◊ *God's love for us, our love for Him, and our love for our neighbor is Scripture's basic theme.*
 - ◊ *Jesus named it as the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36–37).*
- *God created man and woman with the capacity to express their mutual love in a sexual relationship.*
 - ◊ *In Genesis 1, sex is essential to fulfilling God's first commandment to Adam and Eve.*
 - ◊ *In 1 Corinthians 7, sex is encouraged inside of marriage as a safeguard to sex outside of marriage.*
 - ◊ *The Song of Solomon teaches us that God creates sex as something a man and woman should enjoy as part of their marriage relationship.*
- *The Bible never stutters or stammers when it discusses sex. God intended that sex, so grossly distorted and abused by His people in ancient and in modern times, be a normal part of marital love.*

Ask if anyone can name where Lamentations fits into the Old Testament. Then open a discussion about the fact that it fits into a number of places:
(*Listening Guide question 19*)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Because it makes such an important statement about the destruction of Jerusalem and God's temple at the end of 2 Kings, it provides "color" to the Kingdom era.*
- *Because Jeremiah wrote it, it fits the prophetic writings—which is where it is located in the Old Testament canon.*
- *Because it is written in poetry, it fits with the poetic books.*

Ask someone to read Lamentations 1:1 and discuss what Lamentations is about. Read it slowly. It is a six-line poem and provides an excellent illustration of how much more a poem reveals when read carefully, as a poem. You may want to read it quickly first, and then have the group read it line by line to see the contrast. Note how each two-line couplet fits together.

Ideas for Discussion

*How deserted lies the city,
Once so full of people!
How like a widow is she,
Who once was great among the nations!
She who was queen among the provinces
Has now become a slave. (NIV)*

Note that the last four lines are arranged so that Jerusalem's exalted position is repeated in lines 4 and 5 and her fallen condition is stated in lines 3 and 6 to emphasize her current devastation.

Each chapter of Lamentations is a separate lament over the tragic consequences of Israel's consistent disobedience and God's judgment.

But even with the stark reminder of sin's destructive consequences, Jeremiah—God's prophet—couldn't ignore the hope that never dies for those who trust God's love.

Read Lamentations 3:21–24 in light of Jeremiah's situation and discuss the source of the prophet's hope.

Ask if anyone has experienced this conviction of God's forgiveness and restoration after they have sinned. First John 1:9 is a New Testament echo of Jeremiah's confidence that God forgives and restores.

Conclusion

Discuss with the group the value of investing the time to read God's poetic messages slowly and carefully. Many people do not gain maximum benefit from the Psalms and other Old Testament poetry because they are too impatient to read it as poetry.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Psalm 1:1–2 offers a key point to appreciating the Old Testament's poetic writings:*
 - ◇ *“Blessed is the one ... whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on His law day and night” (NIV).*
 - ◇ *Old Testament poetry is carefully crafted literature that can only be most beneficially appreciated by those who invest the time to prayerfully meditate on its rich meaning.*

Review...

Ideas for Discussion

- *How is Hebrew poetry different from Western poetry?*
- *Explain in your own words the meaning of the phrase, “truth discovered is more powerful than truth told.”*

Application

Open your Bible to one of the shorter psalms, or to one of your personal favorites, and read it as Hebrew poetry. Examine how the lines work together and meditate on what the writer is saying to you. Imagine how the writer worked to find the right words to put into each line as he created the parallelism and invest the same kind of effort into working the meaning out of the psalm. Reading poetry prayerfully and meditatively is the only way to benefit from it.

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 9. “In Lesson 9, we will explore the characteristics of wisdom literature found in the Old Testament and discuss the rich wisdom from God found in these books.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Explain how proverbs differ from promises.
2. Understand how Proverbs and Ecclesiastes represent two ends of the spectrum on how to view life.
3. Describe how the book of Job deals with the age-old questions of why good people suffer.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Discussion

Introduction

Begin the session with a discussion on the topic of wisdom.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if anyone would like to define it or describe it.*

- *Ask if anyone knows a person who demonstrates it—either a public person or someone they know.*
- *What is it about that person that makes them embody what wisdom is?*

Discuss where wisdom is actually found in the Bible.

Ideas for Discussion

- *The Bible is filled with wisdom teaching from Genesis to Revelation.*
 - ◊ *Read Deuteronomy 4:5–6.*
 - ◊ *Read 1 Corinthians 2:6–10.*
- *We can offend no prophet and break no law of Moses or command of Jesus and still live a defeated life if we ignore God’s wisdom in the Bible.*
- *Wisdom is an important addition to the Law and the Prophets.*
 - ◊ *The Law spells out God’s specific commands and demands.*
 - ◊ *The Prophets remind people of how essential it is to follow those commands and demands.*
 - ◊ *Biblical wisdom deals more with the common-sense results of living by God’s commands and demands—the practical outcomes of living foolishly or living well.*
 - ◊ *For example, we break no law when we don’t save money, protect our reputation, or live a productive life. But the consequences of such foolish behavior are, nonetheless, destructive, and their opposites produce a happier, more productive life.*

Talk about what sets the wisdom books apart from the rest of the Bible.

- *Although every Bible book contains wisdom, three books are devoted to teaching wisdom.*

Ask if anyone can name which books are known as the wisdom books.

- *Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*

The Hebrew Idea of Wisdom

Explain what the Hebrew word in the Bible that we translate “wisdom” means.
(*Listening Guide question 4*)

- *The Hebrew word is chokma and is pronounced like “khoak–ma.” The “ch” begins in the back part of your throat.*
- *The word means “skill” and was used of those who applied extraordinary ability in*
 - ◊ *Embroidery—those who worked on Aaron’s garments in Exodus 28:3*
 - ◊ *Arts and crafts—to make artistic designs in the tabernacle implements in Exodus 31:3*
 - ◊ *Craftsmen—those who made the tabernacle furniture and implements in Exodus 31:6; also Isaiah 3:3*
 - ◊ *Seamanship—see Ezekiel 27:8*
 - ◊ *It is also used of skilled leaders, administrators, parents, etc.*

- *By far, the most common use of chokma referred to the application of spiritual/mental skill to live a wise life.*
- *When proverbs refer to a person as wise, they say that person lives life with great skill.*

Read Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Psalm 11:10; Job 28:28 and discuss what the Old Testament says is the foundation of a wise life.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13 and discuss what the fear of the Lord involves.

- *The fear of the Lord is a loving reverence for God that includes willing and intentional submission to His commandments.*

Discuss the relationship between the fear of the Lord and living life with skill.

- *Only when we are convinced that God is smarter than we are and willingly follow His commands, demands, advice, and teachings—even when we don't fully understand them or agree with them—will we live a genuinely wise life.*
- *The extent to which we follow God's teaching is the extent to which we will be wise and, conversely, the extent to which we deviate from God's teaching is the extent to which we will be fools.*

Proverbs

Discuss the source and authority of the proverbs.

- *Read 1 Kings 4:32 and 10:23 and discuss Solomon's wisdom.*
 - ◊ *1:1; 10:1; and 25:1 mention Solomon specifically.*
- *22:17; 24:23; 30:1; and 31:9 name other sages who wrote proverbs.*

Read 2 Peter 1:20–21 and discuss what gives these proverbs their ultimate authority as genuine wisdom.

Read Proverbs 1:1–7 and discuss its role as an introduction to the whole book.
(Listening Guide question 11)

Discuss the proverbs' purposes that are listed in 1:1–7. The following verses are from the NASB and are very literal translations. There are five infinitives ("to" verbs that describe the proverbs' purposes).

Ideas for Discussion

- *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*
- *To know wisdom and instruction,*
- *To discern the sayings of understanding (discern means to distinguish, to identify),*
- *To receive instruction in*
 - ◊ *wise behavior,*
 - ◊ *righteousness,*
 - ◊ *justice and*

- ◊ *equity (fairness),*
- *To give prudence to the naïve (prudence means cleverness, cunning and naïve means untaught), (to give) to the youth knowledge and discretion,*
- *A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,*
- *To understand*
 - ◊ *a proverb (a short statement that cleverly communicates a truth)*
 - ◊ *and a figure (a saying that is difficult and requires wisdom to understand),*
 - ◊ *the words of the wise and*
 - ◊ *their riddles.*
- *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Ask group members if they think people read the proverbs with these goals in mind.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if they read them this way.*
- *What difference would it make if people read the proverbs with these intentions?*

Ask if anyone can summarize these five purposes into two purposes.

- *To live wise lives.*
- *To develop mental skill. The mind is a muscle and needs to be exercised to fully develop.*

Talk about the two skills that are required to write a proverb.

(Listening Guide question 15)

- *The skill of carefully and astutely and wisely observing how life works.*
- *The skill of crafting those wise observations into a statement that requires some challenge and wisdom for the reader to get the message.*

Ask what skills readers must develop to read a proverb well.

(Listening Guide question 16)

- *The ability to think deeply and sharply.*
- *The ability to read Hebrew poetry well.*

If time allows, read Proverbs 2:1–11 and discuss:

Ideas for Discussion

- *Our part in developing wisdom (verses 1–5)*
- *God’s part in us becoming wise (verses 6–8)*
- *The outcome of this God/human team working together (verses 9–11—notice the word then in v. 9).*

Discuss the difference between a proverb and a promise.

(Listening Guide question 17)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Why is that difference important?*
 - ◊ *Because people blame God when their life isn't what a proverb claimed it would be.*
- *A proverb is a truism—a general observation about life—but it is not a promise.*
 - ◊ *22:1; 10:4; 10:27 are not always true. They are not promises, they are proverbs. If we do what the proverb says, we increase the probability that the desired outcome will happen.*

Ask how you would explain to a child what a proverb is.
(*Listening Guide question 18*)

- *A proverb is a saying that teaches us about how life usually works. We use them all the time:*
 - ◊ *Eat your veggies, and you will be healthy.*
 - ◊ *Do your homework, and you will get good grades.*
 - ◊ *Brush your teeth, and you won't have cavities.*

Explain that the book of Proverbs is divided into two major sections.
(*Listening Guide question 19*)

- *Chapters 1–9 introduce the proverbial statements.*
- *Chapters 10–31 contain the actual proverbial statements.*

Explain that both are written in poetic form, but 1–9 contain more long sections where the verses are connected and in 10–31 most verses are stand-alone proverbs.

Ecclesiastes

Ask if anyone has read the book of Ecclesiastes and, if so, what they think of the book.

Ask why Ecclesiastes is so troubling for many readers.
(*Listening Guide question 21*)

- *Read Ecclesiastes 1:2 and talk about it as the introduction to the book. Does it draw you in?*
- *Some find Ecclesiastes troubling because it sounds so contrary to the rest of the Bible. It makes life sound hopeless and confusing and futile.*

Read Ecclesiastes 1:3. This question is the book's theme.

- *The question in the NIV asks, "What does a man gain?" The NASB asks, "What advantage does a man have?" The writer is literally asking, "How can a man gain an advantage in this life where he is safe from the world's disasters and problems?"*
- *The phrase "under the sun" means "this side of the sun." He repeats the phrase "under the sun" numerous times in the book and is referring to a life that excludes God.*
- *We could restate the question, "How can a person protect herself from life's troubles using only her own wisdom and hard work ("toil," v. 3)?"*

Talk together about how the two sections of Ecclesiastes' outline help answer the question of 1:3.

- *1:1–11:6 says we must learn to live happily in a world we will never understand.*
- *11:7–12:8 says we must learn to live happily in a world we cannot control.*
- *Ask how true these two observations are in real life. How much do we understand and how much do we control?*

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 together and note that this is the conclusion of the matter.

Discuss how the outline and the conclusion fit together.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Life will never make sense and we will never find ultimate peace or a sense of control if we limit our perspective to “under the sun” (1:3).*
- *To live wisely in this life we must, “Fear God and keep His commandments, because this is the whole duty of man” (12:13 NIV).*

Ask the group how we should coordinate the messages of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. What is the riddle that exists between them?

(Listening Guide question 24)

- *Proverbs presents an “If/Then” approach to life. It teaches that we have some control over our circumstances if we understand how life works.*
- *Ecclesiastes presents an “If/Who knows?” approach to life and claims that we cannot understand or control our world. All effort is futile.*

The answer to the riddle is that real life is lived between the teachings of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. We can exert some influence on our life, but, ultimately, if we don’t trust in God’s sovereignty we will always find ourselves living in the frustration of Ecclesiastes 1:1–12:8. Read Ecclesiastes 12:8 as the alternative to Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 and discuss the two alternatives and their contrasts.

Ask if anyone completed the Listening Guide questions and would like to share how they explained the integration of the two books.

Job

Ask if anyone has read Job and what question they think the book wrestles with.

(Listening Guide question 27)

- *Why do “good” people suffer?*

Read Job 1:1 and ask if anyone knows a person like that.

(Listening Guide question 28)

Ideas for Discussion

- *So what kind of man was Job?*
- *Read Job 1:8, which is God’s commentary on Job.*

Read Job 1:9–12 and discuss the book’s plot.

Read Job 4:1–7 and 9 to get a sense of how Job’s friends were dealing with him. Eliphaz’s statements are typical of Job’s friends’ accusations.

Ask what Job and his friends were debating about.

(Listening Guide question 29)

- *Was Job suffering because God was punishing him for something, or was he innocent?*
- *Remind the group about what we know that Job and his friends didn’t know.*
 - ◊ *Job suffered, not because he was evil, but because he was so righteous!*
- *Job’s outline helps us make sense of this book.*
- *Chapters 1–2 introduce the plot (and are written in prose).*
- *Chapters 3–37 record the dialogues between Job and his friends (and are written as poetry).*
- *38–42:7 is a conversation between Job and God (poetry).*
- *42:7–17 concludes the story with Job’s vindication (prose).*

Remind the group that when the book of Job ends, Job is a better man because of his wrestling with God. He was totally vindicated, and God restored all that Satan had been allowed to take away.

Ask the group what lesson they believe we can take from Job. Some suggestions:

(Listening Guide question 32)

Ideas for Discussion

- *As Ecclesiastes teaches, we will not always be able to understand or control what happens in our lives.*
- *As Job did, we must never stop seeking God’s answers to our lives’ situations.*
- *We can never assume that our pain is a result of sin or our pleasure a result of our righteousness.*
- *We MUST never assume that others’ pain is a result of their sin or their pleasure a result of their righteousness. Avoid being a “Job’s friend.”*

Conclusion

Discuss with the group what the wisdom literature teaches about developing a wise life.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Be constantly seeking God’s will.*
 - ◊ *Read Paul’s prayer in Colossians 1:9–10.*
- *Be vigilant about living God’s will.*
- *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

Review...

- *Explain how proverbs differ from promises.*

- *How do Proverbs and Ecclesiastes represent two ends of the spectrum on how to view life?*
- *How does the book of Job deal with the age-old question of why good people suffer?*

Application

We often hear people quote the phrase, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” That means that when we fear God we recognize how much greater and wiser He is than we are. Many of our problems are created because, in reality, there are times when we believe we are greater and wiser than He is and we ignore His teaching. Take some time to examine your own attitude toward God and monitor how often you follow His teaching and how often you don’t. How much do you actually fear God?

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 10. “In Lesson 10 we will discuss the characteristics of Old Testament prophetic literature. These books record the stories and sermons of God’s messengers during Israel’s kingdom and reconstruction eras and contain some of the Bible’s most profound teaching.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Understand that God ordained the prophetic office during Moses’s time.
2. Explain why a proper understanding of the time period of a prophetic book is essential.
3. Summarize the collective eternal message of the prophets.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Open with a conversation about the prophets. Ask if anyone

- Can name any of the Old Testament prophets.
- Can describe some stereotypes we see of the “Old Testament prophet.”
- Will describe what they think the prophets were like.
- Has read any of the Old Testament prophetic books. Which ones?
- Has read any prophetic passages. Which ones?

Discuss the fact that there were two categories of prophets.

- This session will focus on the writing prophets, but there were many other prophets whose sermons weren't recorded in a book named for them.
- Ask if anyone can name any nonwriting prophets.
 - ◊ Elijah (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2) and Elisha (1 Kings 19:19–2 Kings 13:20) represent an unknown number of faithful men and women who functioned as God's representatives, proclaiming His message to Israel.
 - ◊ Huldah, a non-writing prophetess, played a significant role in Josiah's reform (2 Kings 22:14–16).

Discussion

The Beginning of the Prophetic Office

Explain that Moses was the first prophet because his major role was to proclaim God's message to God's people.

Read Deuteronomy 18:18–19 and ask the group to study the passage for a few minutes and see how many things they can identify that God said about the prophets.

Verse 18

- *I will raise up for them a prophet – God instituted the prophetic office.*
- *like you – The prophets would represent God and speak His words, like Moses.*
- *from among their fellow Israelites – They would be Israelites.*
- *I will put my words in his mouth – Their messages would come directly from God.*
- *He will tell them everything I command him.*
 - ◊ *The prophets were responsible to deliver the bad news along with the good news.*
 - ◊ *The prophets were commanded to speak what God delivered to them.*

Verse 19

- *I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words.*
- *The one who hears the prophets' message was accountable to God "Himself."*
- *God will hold listeners accountable because what the prophet spoke were "[His] words."*
- *that the prophet speaks in my name – The prophet didn't address people with his own authority; he spoke in "[His] name."*
- *Other observations or insights from the group?*

Discuss with the group how this passage should influence how we read God’s Word.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Remind the group that because Moses was the prototype prophet, all of God’s messengers and messages have prophetic authority.*
- *2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 2:20–21 give God’s authority to all His prophets.*

The Prophets’ Time and Place

Ask the group why, even though there are sixteen writing prophets, there are seventeen prophetic books.

- *Jeremiah also wrote Lamentations*

Discuss what we must know about a prophet if we want to make sense of his writing.

Ideas for Discussion

- *The prophet’s time. They ministered over three centuries (eighth to fifth centuries BC) and Israel’s political and spiritual situation shifted dramatically over those three centuries.*
- *The prophet’s place. Some ministered in Israel, some in Judah, and one (Jonah) to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.*

Ask if anyone knows where the themes of the prophets’ messages came from.

(Listening Guide question 7)

- *The content of their message was always from God—see the consistent notation, “The word of the Lord came to ...” in just about every prophetic book.*
- *But the ideas or themes of their messages were determined by the spiritual/political situation of the time and place the message was delivered.*
 - ◊ *Amos’s scolding message to Israel about social injustice in the eighth century BC was vastly different from Jeremiah’s pleading message to Judah before the Babylonian invasion, and both were different from Haggai’s encouragements to the restored exiles to rebuild God’s temple.*

Six Groups of Prophets

To help us organize the writing prophets by geography we list them in six groups:

- *To Gentiles—Jonah (to Nineveh)*
- *To Israel, but about Gentile nations—Obadiah (about Edom) and Nahum (about Nineveh)*
- *To Israel (northern nation) about Israel—Joel, Amos, Hosea*
- *To Judah about Judah—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Zephaniah, Micah, Habakkuk*
- *To Judah during the exile—Ezekiel and Daniel*
- *To Judah after the exile—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*

Review: Ask what two things must we know about each prophet to read his book well.
(Listening Guide question 9)

- *When he ministered*
- *To whom he ministered*

Ask how we can find out those two facts.

- *Verse 1 of most prophets' books name the kings who reigned during their time.*
- *Find those kings in 1 Kings 12– 2 Kings 25 and read the description of each king's reign.*
- *Those prophets who don't give that information at the beginning of the book usually have information in the book that helps date them.*

The Prophets' Dual Ministry

Ask what the two foci are of the prophets' ministry.
(Listening Guide question 10)

- *The prophets spoke to their own people about the current issues facing them in their time.*
- *Because they often spoke of God's judgment, they projected into the future—to warn of the coming judgment—and then beyond the judgment, to God's promise of restoration.*
 - ◊ *The prophets' ministry always involved proclaiming God's message about their audience's immediate situation ("forthtelling").*
 - ◊ *The prophets also often announced God's plans for future judgment and restoration ("foretelling").*
- *The essential ministry of the prophets was to speak for God. Although that sometimes included messages about future events, the prophet's primary ministry was to warn his own listeners about judgment and plead for repentance and faithful obedience to God's law.*

For example, Jeremiah urged Judah's citizens to follow God's law (forthtelling); told them of God's soon-coming judgment from the Babylonians (foretelling); and promised that after seventy years of exile, God would bring Judah back to their land (foretelling).

Briefly explain the time orientation of most Old Testament prophetic visions of the future.
(Listening Guide question 12)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Use Jeremiah's timeline to point out the fact that although his "foretelling" prophecies were future to his listeners, they are history to us. The vast majority of the Old Testament prophets' "foretelling" utterances are in that category—future to them, past history to us.*

A Closer Look at the Prophets

The following table will help place the prophets geographically and chronologically. You may want to copy it and make it available to the group so when they read an Old Testament prophetic book they can place it.

Ideas for Discussion

- You also could encourage group members to get a copy of the NASB or NIV Study Bible (or another study Bible of their choice) that has introductory material for each Bible book.
- They could also take Dr. Douglas Stuart's courses on the prophets for more detailed study of each prophetic book: OT223–227.

The Prophets in Chronological Order			
Assyrian 800–698 BC	Babylonian 650–585 BC	Exile 650–535 BC	Postexile 536–400 BC
Amos	Jeremiah	Ezekiel	Haggai
Hosea	Zephaniah	Daniel	Zechariah
Jonah	Nahum		Malachi
Joel	Habakkuk		
Micah	Obadiah		
Isaiah			

The Prophets in Geographical Order		
To Judah	To Israel	To (or about) Gentiles
Micah	Amos	Jonah
Isaiah	Hosea	Nahum
Joel	Joel	Obadiah
Zephaniah		
Jeremiah (Lamentations)		
Habakkuk		
Ezekiel		
Daniel		
Haggai		
Zechariah		
Malachi		

Ask if anyone can explain the difference between a major and a minor prophet.
(Listening Guide question 14)

- The major prophets are longer.
- The designations have nothing to do with how important the prophet is.

Ask if anyone can name the four major prophets.
(Listening Guide question 15)

- Isaiah, Jeremiah (Lamentations), Ezekiel, Daniel

The minor prophets are grouped together in the Hebrew Bible and called “The Twelve.”

The Prophets' Messages

Each of the following eight prophets was selected for a brief overview because they illustrate different facts about the prophetic ministry and not because they are more important than the

others.

Ask someone to read Amos 1:1 and discuss the following question:

Ideas for Discussion

Where did Amos live, and where did he minister?

- *Amos lived in Tekoa, about eleven miles from Jerusalem, in Judah, the southern nation.*
- *But God called him to travel north to Israel (Amos 7:10–13) to deliver His message.*
- *He was not a “professional” prophet (most of the prophets name no other occupation) but was a farmer who shepherded flocks and grew figs.*
- *We include Amos in our survey because he was a layman.*

Read Amos 5:24 and discuss the issue Amos addressed there.

- *Amos primarily addressed social injustice in Israel.*

Ask if anyone knows what God asked Hosea to do to demonstrate how He viewed Israel’s idolatry. (*Listening Guide question 18*)

- *Read Hosea’s call in Hosea 1:1–3 and discuss the unusual command God gave to Hosea.*
- *Hosea married Gomer, who soon left him and went back to prostitution. God commanded Hosea to find her, forgive her rebellion and prostitution, and restore her as his wife.*
- *God then used Hosea’s extreme grace and forgiveness to teach Israel that even though they had “prostituted” themselves by worshipping idols, God would forgive and restore them if they repented.*

We include Hosea in our survey because of his highly unusual call from God.

Ask someone to read Isaiah 40:27–31 as one of many illustrations of Isaiah’s magnificent literary gift. He is called the prince of writing prophets.

Read Isaiah 38:1–2. This is an illustration of Isaiah’s ministry to Judah’s kings. He instructed them, encouraged them, prayed for them, and even rebuked them. But, sadly, a king also killed Isaiah. The wicked king Manasseh executed him.

Explain that we include Isaiah in our survey because, while most prophets ministered to Israel’s and Judah’s citizens, he most often ministered in Judah’s royal court.

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4 and discuss Habakkuk’s first problem.

Ideas for Discussion

- *He complained to God because sin was rampant in Judah and God was doing nothing about it.*
- *God told Habakkuk to be patient because He was going to use the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem.*
- *Habakkuk was amazed that God would let the evil Babylonians destroy His people, and he challenged God (“We’re bad, but they’re worse than we are!”).*
- *God explained His reasons and His plans to Habakkuk, and the prophet replied that even though he*

was terrified and distraught (3:16), he would rejoice in God and trust Him (3:17–19).

Ask the group what we can learn about the prophets from Habakkuk's experience.
(*Listening Guide question 23*)

Ideas for Discussion

- *We include Habakkuk in our survey because he illustrates the fact that, at times, God's prophets were confused or they understood God but didn't like what He was going to do.*
- *What we learn about our own lives with God is that even though we don't always understand what He is doing, we can always trust His sovereign love and wisdom.*
- *Ask your group how ready they are to quote Habakkuk 3:17–19.*

Explain that Jeremiah, like Isaiah, had access to Judah's kings. He lived through Judah's final years and her last three kings. They all persecuted him because he told them the truth about God's judgment.

- *Jeremiah was beaten and imprisoned (37:15), he was thrown into a cistern and left to die (38:6), and his own family turned on him. He suffered because he faithfully fulfilled his prophetic office.*
- *Jeremiah lived through the Babylonians' destruction of Jerusalem and wrote the tragic book of Lamentations to express his sorrow over what happened to his beloved nation.*

We include Jeremiah in our survey because he illustrates how much opposition some of the prophets suffered—even from Israel's and Judah's kings—because they were committed to their prophetic ministry.

Read Ezekiel 1:1–3 (NIV) together and summarize what it says about Ezekiel.

- *In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, (Ezekiel was thirty years old.)*
- *while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, (He was among the Jews who had been taken to Babylon as exiles.)*
- *the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. (Ezekiel saw a vision of God.)*
- *On the fifth of the month—(a month later)*
- *it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—(The Babylonians took Jehoiachin and ten thousand other Jews, including Ezekiel, to Babylon in 597 BC—2 Kings 24:14. So the event Ezekiel is about to describe occurred in 593 BC.)*
- *the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel (Ezekiel heard a word from God.)*
- *the priest, the son of Buzi, (Ezekiel was a priest and his father's name was Buzi.)*
- *by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. (Ezekiel heard from God in the same place he saw his initial vision of God—the river Kebar in Babylon.)*
- *There the hand of the Lord was on him. (God had commissioned Ezekiel.)*

Explain how Ezekiel's ministry overlapped with Jeremiah's ministry.

- *Their message was the same: that Judah's citizens would be taken into exile by the Babylonians as God's judgment for their sins. The judgment was going to happen. It was too late to repent.*
- *Though their message was the same, their audiences were different. Jeremiah preached to the Jews in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel preached to the Jews exiled in Babylon.*

- *In 586 BC, seven years after Ezekiel was commissioned as a prophet, the Babylonians finally destroyed Jerusalem—the city and the temple—and the rest of her citizens were deported to Babylonian exile.*

We include Ezekiel in our survey of prophets because he ministered to the exiles in the final years before all of Judah’s citizens were taken captive and deported to Babylon. He then ministered to them in exile.

Read Daniel 1:1–2 (NIV) and summarize what it says about Daniel.

- *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, (605 BC—Jehoiakim was king Jehoiachin’s father, so Daniel’s story occurred before Ezekiel’s story.)*
- *Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. (The exile to Babylon included three deportations: Daniel’s in 605 BC, Ezekiel’s in 597 BC, and the final destruction and the rest of the citizens in 586 BC.)*
- *And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, (Jehoiakim was exiled to Babylon along with Daniel and a number of other Jews in 605 BC—2 Kings 24:1–5.)*
- *along with some of the articles from the temple of God. (Nebuchadnezzar raided the temple at Jerusalem in this first deportation but didn’t destroy it until the third deportation in 586.)*
- *These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia*
- *and put in the treasure house of his god. (The ancients considered that battles between nations were actually battles between the nations’ gods.)*

Ask how Daniel was different from the other prophets.

(Listening Guide question 29)

- *Daniel was different from the other prophets because he had no “forthtelling” ministry. He was a Jewish exile who served as a statesman both to the Babylonian and the Persian emperors.*

Ask why we list Daniel with the prophets.

(Listening Guide question 30)

- *Daniel is listed with the prophets because of his “foretelling” ministry in chapters 7–12.*
- *We include Daniel in our survey of prophets because he was not a traditional prophet and he illustrates another way God used to proclaim His Word.*

Talk about the focus of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi’s ministry.

(Listening Guide question 31)

- *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi ministered after the Jews returned from exile. Their ministry was focused on helping the returned Jews re-establish their identity as God’s chosen nation, even after their devastating experience of God’s judgment.*

Conclusion

Review the prophets you covered in the study and discuss how they were different from each other.

(Listening Guide question 32)

Ideas for Discussion

The point of the exercise is to establish the fact that these were real men and women. The term prophet refers to what God called them to do, but each man and woman was unique and each had a unique ministry.

Review the discussion on Deuteronomy 18:18–19 and discuss some of the ways all prophets were alike.

Close with a discussion about how the Holy Spirit enhances our individual gifts but in no way makes us all alike. However, there are some things that should characterize all of Christ’s followers. Discuss what some of those things are:

Ideas for Discussion

- *Love God and neighbor*
- *Study God’s Word (2 Timothy 2:15)*
- *Make disciples (Matthew 28:18)*
- *Be Jesus’s witnesses (Acts 1:8)*

Review ...

- *When did God institute the prophetic office?*
- *Why is a proper understanding of a prophetic book’s time period essential?*
- *How would you summarize the collective eternal message of the prophets?*

Application

Jesus’s final commission to His followers was, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Do you sense your calling as God’s prophet for your time and your situation? What are some ways you could minister God’s Word to the people around you? In your answer, consider how God asked Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezekiel to “live” His message so people could see it.

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the

beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.