

# ADULT BIBLICAL EDUCATION SERIES

Vol. II, Book 10

The Post-Exilic Period in Jerusalem

prepared by  
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## TEACHER'S GUIDE



Pictured on the cover is the Sower, pruning the tree so that it may bear good fruit. We note its increased growth over the year so that it may soon bear fruit.

John 15:1,2 comes to mind as we reflect on this picture: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit."

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# Teacher's Supplement to Volume II, Book 10

## THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD IN JERUSALEM (Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, I and II Chronicles, Zechariah, and Malachi)

Prepared By Jack B. Scott, Ph.D.

See the Teacher's Supplement for Vol. II, Book 2, pp. 1-3, for introductory material and guidelines in teaching Biblical lessons.

Below we will give some helps for the teacher in approaching each of the lessons of this quarter. Remember, the suggestions are based on the expectation that each student will have read the lesson material, so that the teacher can build on what the student has already done with the lesson.

### LESSON ONE

#### Introduction to the Lesson:

As we begin this new book of study, remind them that this is the final period of Biblical revelation in the Old Testament era although there are yet two quarterlies of study dealing with the books of Job through Song of Songs.

This period of study deals with the struggles of believers after they returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon.

The first lesson in the quarterly pertains to the proclamation of Cyrus, long before predicted by Isaiah in Isaiah 45. You might want to review that prediction.

In the first part of Ezra we learn about the return of the believers under the leadership of Zerubbabel, to build the temple again, what is known in history as the second temple.

Remind them that while a large group did return to Jerusalem, still more remained behind in Babylon where they were prospering. Only those who cared returned.

**Point One:** Rulers decree what is ultimately in accord with the purpose of God.

Start out by reviewing the way in which Cyrus rose at that particular time in history to set Israel free, even as Isaiah had said he would do some 200 years earlier.

Remind them that Cyrus may well have decreed the return of other people to their lands and may have

sought to honor their pagan gods as well, but this takes nothing from the fact that at God's specific time, he obeyed the Lord to set free those whom God would bring back.

Note how Noah had prophesied, long before, that the nations of the world will, in reality, be servants of God's people, doing what they do, ultimately, in accord with God's purpose for His own (Gen. 9:25-27). You may need to review our remarks at that time.

Pharaoh is another example of a pagan ruler who did what God wanted; even his resisting God was in order that he might be judged by God and overthrown at the sea to God's glory.

Egypt also gave refuge to Joseph and training to Moses to the end that good should come on God's people.

Likewise, you can note how both Assyria and Babylon served God's good purposes in being His instruments for the discipline of His people.

We can think of subsequent world rulers such as Alexander the Great, whose efforts in spreading the Greek language and culture prepared the way for the spread of the gospel three centuries later, and the decrees of Caesar Augustus which brought about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, as God had purposed (Mic. 5:2 and following verses).

Finally, remind them of Acts 2, where Peter, in the sermon at Pentecost, shows that what men purpose for evil, God works out for the good of His people, as in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Conclude this point by stressing that today, even in the darkest times, we need to see that men still are serving God's purposes even while they do their worst against God and His church.

**Point Two:** Unbelievers, by nature, seek to interfere with God's will.

You can begin this point by referring to the opposition of the Samaritans to the arrival and work of the Jews. They, at first, sought to lead the Jews into compromise by volunteering to help them with the work. When Israel would not compromise then they sought to block the Jews in any way they could, using all the resources of human power available to them.

Go back to the building of the tower of Babel and you see that from early times men have sought to rebel against the Lord by doing what they do without reference to God or without acknowledging their responsibility to Him.

The resistance of Pharaoh to the releasing of the Israelites held in captivity is another example. In spite of many warnings from God through Moses and through the plagues, he nevertheless stubbornly refused to submit to God.

We see the same thing in the actions of the Canaanites to resist God's people as they entered into Canaan; and, later, the Assyrians and the Babylonians both fought against God's people arrogantly seeking to bring them into submission to their own control and laws.

Point out Psalm 2, which shows that it is the nature of men and nations to resist God's will and to rebel against Him and whomever He chooses.

From the New Testament you can mention Herod the Great who, when he learned that Jesus had been born as the King of the Jews, did all he could to stop Jesus.

Peter, in Acts 2, shows the Jews that they have always resisted the Lord, but no time more than in their desire to kill His Son, Jesus.

Point out that today, also, we should not consider that the enmity between the rulers of this world and God is over. It goes on, and anything they offer the believers is out of a malicious heart, and therefore we must guard against such compromise.

**Point Three:** God works out His purposes on earth through His willing servants.

In this point, begin by showing how God used Zerubbabel and those with Him to build the temple to His glory, in spite of all the opposition of men. God always has place for His children to serve Him in a hostile world.

Note how Abraham was set aside from his generation and called to a unique work which seemed foolishness to the world. God did not choose him because of his strengths or attributes, but gave him faith and then worked through him so that all glory would go to the Lord.

Similarly, God called a man like Moses, old and with his life mostly behind him, and worked through him to establish Israel in the world among the pagan nations as a beacon of light in the darkness of the world.

David, too, was despised by his kin as insignificant, while they sought to serve Saul in the army. Nevertheless, the Lord did not choose any of them for the task of being king, but reached down to the apparently insignificant shepherd boy and used

those attributes in him, developed over his years of faithfulness to his God.

In the new -Testament we make mention of Mary and Joseph, a very insignificant family in their day, weak in the eyes of men but made strong by the Lord for the important task of rearing His Son.

Note that each of these people did what others, much stronger and more self-confident, would not have dreamed of doing in their generation. They did it because they had learned to trust in the Lord.

Show that today, too, the most important jobs in God's sight will be given not to those whom the world would choose but rather to those who please God by the trust in Him and faithfulness they display daily.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. Discuss the recent court decisions which have affected the church in some way, in the light of questions 1,3,5.
2. Help the class to discuss how the work of God is done in your particular church, in various aspects, noting what men consider the most important work and what God may consider important. Utilize questions 2,4,6.

## **LESSON TWO**

### **Introduction to the Lesson:**

This lesson has to do with the message of one of the Lord's prophets to post-exilic Jews, when they had ceased to build on the temple of the Lord and became interested in their own homes and gardens instead.

The neglect of the temple brought scorn from the enemies of the Lord and of the Jews. God therefore began to stir His prophet Haggai to call the people back to their primary task.

**Point One:** Neglect of God's work by His people brings scorn from the world.

Help the class to see the shameful effects of having the temple lie incomplete and neglected by the Jews while the Gentiles were daily passing by. It would be the butt of many jokes and ridiculed by those who wished to dishonor the Jew's God.

We see this when the Israelites at first refused to enter into Canaan and thus finish the task God had begun when He called them out of Egypt, this too brought ridicule from the enemies of God in Canaan.

Similarly, when the Israelites refused to finish the job of conquering the nations in Canaan and began to settle down to live in the midst of the heathen, this too

brought shame and defeat on Israel.

You can note that on the occasions when the worship which God instituted at Sinai was neglected and the altars unused, they fell into disrepair, as one did on Mt. Carmel, in Elijah's day, to the shame of the people of God.

Likewise, the failure to apply the Law of God, which occurred in the days of Amos and other prophets, brought great shame and disgrace on Samaria and led the people to live more like heathens than like the noble people they had been called to become.

The failures of the kings of Israel and Judah to honor God, which cut short their reigns, likewise dishonored the Lord before the eyes of the world, as though God had failed.

And the same thing can be said concerning the failures of all of the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel, who departed from the missions to which they were called and left God's work undone.

In the New Testament, we see how Jesus warned the Ephesians that He would remove their church from His presence if they continued to fail to finish the work He had given them to do, failing to show that love which He had called them to show (Rev. 2).

Remember, too, how Paul warned the Galatians that they were dishonoring the Lord before the nations when they turned from living in faith and began to try once more to live by their works (Gal. 1,2).

**Point Two:** The completion of God's work brings joy among those believers who have learned to serve the Lord together.

Challenge the class to see how important it is for them in the church to learn to work together to see through the projects that they begin for the Lord.

The conclusion of such works brings real joy to the whole Christian community and also glorifies the Lord before the unbelieving world, as it did when the Jews finished the temple in the post-exilic times.

You can show how greatly Israel celebrated when they entered into the land of Canaan, finishing the task begun in the wilderness. God was glorified and the nations feared the Lord.

So too, when David finished the conquests of the land which God had promised since the time of Abraham, the people greatly celebrated and God's glory reached to the ends of the civilized world of that day.

You can show too how, when Ezra and Nehemiah taught the Law and the people finished the application of that Law to themselves, they rejoiced in what had been accomplished.

Looking ahead, we see the joy brought on the Christian community in the days of the accomplishing

of the work of Christ, when the church received the Holy Spirit and rejoiced together in a close bond of fellowship unknown before.

So, we can anticipate that in the end, when Christ comes again and the task of evangelization of the earth is done, the people of God on earth will rejoice with those in heaven as they are joined for eternity with the Lord.

Help the class members to see how their present work together in the church is a part of that final accomplishment of Christ's work at the end of the ages and that even now we can be filled with joy in the sense of accomplishing things together for the Lord.

**Point Three:** Reflection on God's working among believers leads to maturing in the faith.

Recall for them how Haggai led the people to consider what had happened and how they had fallen on hard times when they did not honor the Lord at first; and how, when they did learn to honor Him above anything else, their lives began to prosper again.

Show how Jacob, so long as he sought a fortune for himself, never found any real happiness in the world; but when he surrendered all to God and began to seek His face, then his life prospered.

Note how God called Israel to be His holy people and set them on a goal of sanctification, promising that if they honored His Law, then they would prosper in the land. Note, too, that God gave the same formula to Joshua when he took over the reins of leadership in Israel.

In the New Testament you can point to the words of Jesus who taught us to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness, assured that all we needed would be added to us if we do.

Help the members to see the importance of our learning to reflect on any experiences we have together, as God's people, to learn through God's Word what has been happening and why, so that we may grow and mature as God's children, each helping the other in our maturing. This is what Paul indicates in Ephesians 4, where he describes the church as like a body that is supplied by all of the members.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. Get the class to consider together projects and programs of the church which have remained unfinished and its effect on the Christian community and unbelieving community. Utilize questions 1,2,3,5,7.
2. Share together in testimony of joint projects that have been a blessing to your church and tell how they have helped to mature the believers. Here you may use meditation questions 6,8,9.

## LESSON THREE

### Introduction:

Remind them that Zechariah was contemporaneous with Haggai and that his ministry covered a longer time than Haggai's.

Also remind them that the style of Zechariah is unusual among the prophets, in the first part, being apocalyptic in style, as are parts of Daniel and most of Revelation.

Help them to see that in spite of this more difficult style of writing, the prophet is after the same thing that Haggai is: the return of the people to the building of the temple.

**Point One:** The work of God's people on earth has eternal implications.

You can remind them how God showed through Zechariah that God had more in His plan than the rebuilding of that one building. It was symbolic of His whole effort to rebuild His people on earth and to sustain them until He came to be their Redeemer.

Go back to the time of the building of the ark and show how that project, too, had more implications than simply saving one family. It was to prove to be the means by which the whole human race was sustained on earth.

Likewise, the building of the one family of Abraham by Isaac was to have eternal implications in regard to the holy Seed that was to come.

The building of the nation of Israel in Egypt would ultimately lead to the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Without that one nation — insignificant as it appeared at times — there would have been no salvation to the Gentiles.

In dealing with Israel, the Lord gave many intricate directions for building the tabernacle. They may have seemed tedious to Israel, but they had eternal implications regarding the way in which they were ultimately to come to the Lord as His people.

David's capture of Jerusalem and making it the city of God, Zion, similarly had much greater significance than the building up of one small city in the world; it pointed to the New Jerusalem of God, which is above.

Finally, we are reminded of Jesus' words to His disciples, when He talked to them about His church and their work on its behalf (Matt. 16:39).

Help them to see that the small projects they may be engaged in, in the church, undoubtedly have more important implications for God's glory than may appear on the surface.

**Point Two:** What is accomplished on earth is by God's Power.

Remind the class that while it is important for them to see the significance and heavenly implications of what they do on earth, this should not lead to vain pride. All that is accomplished by us should be done to God's glory alone.

So in God's Words through Zechariah, we are taught that God's help was what ultimately made the second temple possible.

We go back again and see that the same thing was true in the building of the ark. Without God's grace, Noah and his sons would never have built it. So too, it was the Lord who gave Isaac to Abraham and began to build the family of His people. Without God's promised heir, there would have been no meaningful future for Abraham's seed.

In the building of the tabernacle and its furniture, we are shown that those who built were endowed by the Lord with special talents and the Holy Spirit to enable them to do what they did.

Help them to see that this is why, when the Lord was ready to send out His own to preach the gospel to every nation, He commanded them first to await the Holy Spirit whom He would send to empower them.

Charge the class members to be alert, always, to do what they do so that they and all with them may know that God has done all that has been accomplished.

**Point Three:** God's Word, His eternal witness to His people, continues to be the basic motivation for us to do God's Work.

Start with the revelation about the two witnesses seen in one of Zechariah's visions. We noted that the vision most likely pointed to the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. They were the two in that day who were given God's Word for the people; but it teaches the important place which God's Word always holds in molding and motivating God's people to do His work.

Show how, at Sinai, the people had to receive God's Word before they could be fit to enter Canaan. It was imperative that their motivation be obedience to that Word rather than their own personal reasons, before they could indeed enter the land.

Note the place God gave to His Word in dealing with Elijah and with all succeeding prophets. The power was in the Word which the prophets were to proclaim.

We see in the New Testament that at the start, Peter chose to base his whole message, interpreting those events at Pentecost, on God's written Word. Paul, later, taught Timothy that his basic duty was to see that he preached the Word and taught it to others so that they, in turn, could teach others (II Tim. 2:2).

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. Lead a discussion on matters your church has neglected which are of great concern to God. Utilize questions 1-4.
2. You can also lead a discussion on things which God has accomplished through your church. Questions 7-11 may aid in this.

## **LESSON FOUR**

### **Introduction:**

Remind the class that this lesson points out the two basic needs of God's people: to have a King to rule over them in righteousness and in justice and a Shepherd to protect them and to lay down His life for them. Focus on the Shepherd-King.

Show how failure to appreciate this message of Zechariah led to the Jews' rejection of Jesus when He came as their Shepherd-King.

**Point One:** We need a Redeemer to remind us of our failures.

Let the class see that the Redeemer does not come simply to faring good news of salvation but rather to show us, first, that we have failed God and need Him.

In the Old Testament remind them of the continuing testimony from Genesis 3 to the end that men have failed the Lord and that, left to themselves, they could never faithfully keep His Word or meet His standards.

Remind them that when Jesus came, He began His public ministry by declaring that men ought to repent first of their sins and then look to Him as their Savior.

You can show, too, that as soon as the Lord began to speak of men's need of forgiveness of sins, hostility grew toward Jesus, even among the Jews. In closing this point, remind them that the cross stands not simply as a reminder that God loved us, but also that we deserved full punishment for our sins.

**Point Two:** We need a Redeemer to live an unending life on our behalf.

Point first to the long list of imperfect prophets, priests, and kings through our study of the Old Testament. Even the best of men were not good enough to be saved. None could perfectly obey God's Law.

Show how the Old Testament temple and sacrifices, in themselves, though teaching us truth about our needs, could not provide those needs. They failed to change the lives of the people.

Note Ezekiel's temples: the old one filled with corruption, and the new one, without flaw; and show them how this pointed to our need of Christ to come in the body to do perfectly what we could never do.

Show them Jesus' words regarding His body as the true temple (John 2:19). Help them to see that Christ obeyed the Lord perfectly in His body and that the resurrection of His body was the evidence that He had done successfully for us what we could never do ourselves.

Challenge the class to examine their hearts to be certain they have believed wholly in Jesus and His work as the substitute for their own righteousness.

**Point Three:** We need a Redeemer to pray for our sins and triumph over our enemies.

You can show that from Genesis 3:15 to the end of the Old Testament, God testifies of His Son Who will come and will pay the full price for our sins, as our Redeemer-Shepherd. Show that this is the heart of Zechariah's message too.

You can remind them that God taught this to Abraham in sending a substitute for his son, Isaac: the lamb provided by God (Gen. 22).

The whole sacrificial system and the work of the Old Testament priests also pointed to the work of Christ that was needed for our sins.

Remind them that God acknowledged the imperfect priesthood of Aaron (I Sam. 2) and pointed to a new priesthood to come in the Christ, as Hebrews also shows us.

Recall for them the words of Isaiah 53.

Show how the death of Jesus on the cross was, in effect, God's clear rejection of our "righteousness" and His showing to us that we need salvation as a gift from Him.

You can also note Paul's words in I Corinthians 1 that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who do not believe that they have a need, but it is good news to those who do.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. Have a discussion of the modern world's concepts of Jesus and His mission, utilizing questions 1,2,4,5,6.
2. Discuss how our bodies, as believers, function as the temple of God's Holy Spirit (Questions 7,8).

## **LESSON FIVE**

### **Introduction:**

In this lesson we wish to focus on the importance of Jerusalem in the plan of God, until the Christ

should come and accomplish His work there. God wanted the temple rebuilt to assure the people that Jerusalem would endure the next few centuries, though men would try to destroy it.

The Lord had a use for that city. It was the city of Israel's King; not just of David, but also of David's heir who would be greater than David—God in the flesh (Is. 7:14).

Lead them to see that this study of God's intentions for Jerusalem help us to see what all believers must expect in this world, in terms of hardship and suffering, until Christ's return.

**Point One:** Jerusalem: mourning in the day of Christ.

Jerusalem had often been, in the past, a city of mourning. It was a city of the Canaanites long after most of Palestine had fallen into the hands of the Israelites. It was captured and lost several times in the period of the judges.

Only when David took the city did it finally fall into the hands of the Israelites. Though David wished to make it a city of joy in the Lord, it was constantly the scene of suffering and sorrow, even in the days of David, as when he had to leave that city, chased out by his own son, Absalom, for a time.

Later, the city was often under siege by Israel's enemies until finally it fell into the hands of the Babylonians and most of its citizens were carried away.

We see how Jeremiah lamented over the city then (Lamentations).

But even before its fall, we see how Habakkuk lamented over the city because of its great sins.

When the people returned and rebuilt the city, they too mourned because it had none of its former glory, at least to the eyes of men.

Zechariah reminded them that its future would not be different. The days of mourning in Jerusalem were not ended.

Remind the class of how, in the period between the Testaments, Jerusalem was constantly caught in a tug of war between Egypt and Syria, until it was finally captured by the Romans who ruled the city with an iron hand in the days of Christ.

In the time of Jesus we see much mourning there. Jesus, Himself, taught the disciples how to mourn over that city as they contemplated its rebellions against the Lord. Jesus looked over the city and wept more than once. There, too, Peter, who denied Jesus, would also weep — for shame.

At the cross, Jesus' family and friends stood afar and wept over His death, and Mary Magdalene wept at His tomb when she was there alone (John 20:11). Even as Jesus went to the cross, He challenged those who were weeping for Him, rather, to weep for

themselves (Lk. 23:28). Jerusalem would literally flow with tears before her history was over.

Help the class to see that weeping is, for believers, part of this life, and that to mourn is blessed for those who put their faith in the Lord, even as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

In this world we will have tribulation and mourn for our own failures before the Lord, as well as for the resistance of the world to Jesus. Not to mourn is to be hard-hearted and without compassion.

**Point Two:** Jerusalem: the city of redemption.

Help them to see how Zechariah had prophesied of a city with a flowing fountain. As sorrowful as the death of Jesus was to His friends, God purposed that out of Jerusalem, where He died, there should flow a healing fountain for those who would believe in Him.

The flow of blood had been ceaseless since the time of God's establishing the sacrificial system through Moses. All of that blood of the sacrificial animals pointed to the one healing fountain of blood that would one day flow from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

We recall, too, Isaiah 53, which tells of the Savior laying down His life for the sheep.

At the Last Supper, Jesus sought to show to the disciples, His church, that He had come to fulfill all that the sacrifices of old had symbolized: the need for His shed blood for them all.

On the cross, the blood of Jesus did flow out of His side and from His hands and feet: the death of God's Son for the sins of men.

It was this point that Peter intended to make at Pentecost. He declared that though wicked men had done wickedly in killing Jesus, yet God meant it all for good to those who would believe in Him (Acts 2).

You can show how the sense of the flowing fountain from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth is also predicted by Isaiah in Isaiah 2:2-4.

Lead the class to see that though we must mourn for the sins of men and for men's rebellions against God (Ps. 2), we must also learn to rejoice that God has won over all His enemies and ours, in the death of His Son for our sins, to heal our broken and mourning hearts.

**Point Three:** Jerusalem: the city of trial for believers.

The trials of God's people in Jerusalem are also a topic dealt with by Zechariah. Remind them of how trials for the servants of the Lord have been numerous in Jerusalem throughout Old Testament history, for example, David, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, etc.

After the Old Testament revelation had ceased — during the interim years — Jerusalem was often a city of trial for true believers, right up to the time of Christ's coming.



Show how Peter and the other disciples learned increasingly about trials as they continued to stay with Jesus up until the time of His trial. Then, they all fled.

In the early church too, no sooner did the believers begin to proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem than they began to be persecuted.

Peter and John were imprisoned. Stephen and James were put to death, and finally, most were forced to flee from the city — a city under trial.

In later years of the first century, the poor saints in Jerusalem — made poor as a price for their staying there, where Christianity was not popular — were often in need of help from Christians in other parts of the Roman Empire.

Finally, the Jews were prohibited from living there, and the city was destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70.

Show to the class that this preview of the suffering of God's people in the world should help believers today to see that in the world we can expect the trials to continue.

If believers suffered so much, even in the city that had been established to serve the Lord, how much more out in the hostile world!

But remind the class that even though Christians are strangers in the world, having no Jerusalem as refuge in this world, we do have hope of the New Jerusalem that God has prepared for His own; and it is where our citizenship is today.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. You may discuss the practice among Christians today of mourning for the world and for its sins. Is such mourning occurring in your church? How is it expressed? Use questions 4,5.
2. Discuss the impact of the gospel on your church and its members? What sets off the members of your church from the world? Utilize questions 2,7,8,9.

## **LESSON SIX**

Help the class to be conscious of the time lapse between the first part of Ezra (1-6) and the latter part of the Book.

It was a period of 57 years, so that the generation of Ezra was totally different from the generation of Zerubbabel.

**Point One:** Every saint must be ready to serve the Lord.

Begin the lesson by pointing out how Ezra was a ready scribe. This indicates that he was well-studied in

God's Word and ready to teach it to the people. His days of preparation were a necessary precedent to his being an effective teacher when he was needed.

Show them that, from the beginning, the Lord had long prepared His servants, before they were actually used to serve His Kingdom.

You can mention Abraham, who learned over 75 years of his life about shepherding and about maintaining a family, while he was in Ur of the Chaldees. Then, when he was ready in God's sight, he was taken to live alone, separated from his ancestors. All that he learned about people and management of a large household served him and his family well.

Note, too, Moses, who was prepared by 40 years of education in Egypt and then by 40 years of leading sheep in the wilderness, until he was ready to lead Israel out of Egypt and to the promised land.

You can mention David, who was prepared to fight Goliath in God's name by years as a shepherd boy, while he developed his various skills that were to serve him well when he confronted Goliath; but, above all, he learned to trust in the Lord.

So too, Jeremiah, when called, was taught that God had been working on him, preparing him long before he was called.

We see how Jesus called the disciples from various occupations of life, by which they later learned to serve the Lord — to be fishers of men.

Point to II Timothy 2:15 and 3:16-17, to help them see that God expects all of us to be prepared to serve Him, specially by our study of His written Word.

**Point Two:** All saints must be ready to be taught God's Word.

Let this point lead from the last one. Remind them that, primarily, Ezra was made ready to teach while the people were made ready by their experiences to be taught God's Word.

You can remind them of the days of Israel in the wilderness. At first, when Moses received the Law, they were not really ready for that Word, so that they rebelled, committed idolatry, and refused to follow Moses. That generation had to die; and another, born in the wilderness, arose to be ready to learn from Moses.

Show how in the days of the judges, few were ready to be taught God's truth and so most died in unbelief; but point out the exceptions, such as Ruth, Naomi, and Hannah and their people who were ready to obey God.

Show how Samuel arose when Israel had been beaten down for many centuries. Then, the people were once again ready to be taught; so Samuel, ready to teach them, led them out of the dark ages of unbelief.

Show how the Lord taught Elijah to rely on God's Word rather than on miracles and to await the day when the people would once again be ready to be led and taught God's truth.

Remind them that in Malachi's day the prophet proclaimed that before the Lord came to earth, He would send His servant to prepare their hearts to receive him, lest they be destroyed.

In Jesus' day, we are able to contrast those who were ill-prepared for Jesus with those who were prepared. The Pharisees, because of proud hearts, were not prepared to receive Him; but the disciples, for the most part, were ready in their hearts to be taught.

Finally, you can note II Timothy 2:2, which teaches us the principle that each generation must see its responsibility both to be taught and to teach others.

**Point Three:** The whole people of God must move to deeds of faith in the world.

Reminding them first of the faith of Abraham, then show that the Lord led him on to deeds of faith and righteousness, through the teaching of Melchizedek and through his learning to offer his son to the Lord (Gen. 22).

Remind them of the wilderness experience in which those who refused to show any faith by deeds done to God's glory were destroyed, while the next generation, Joshua's, stepped out in faith to God's glory.

Point to Rehab the harlot, who, in faith, showed deeds of righteousness in saving the spies.

Note how the prophets called continually for works of righteousness and justice as proof of the people's faith.

Note, too, how John the Baptist called for the Pharisees, soldiers, and others who came out to him to show by their deeds their repentance and faith.

Remind them that Jesus, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, called for the people to do what He taught, and not merely to hear what He said.

Likewise, Paul taught that all true righteousness produced fruits of righteousness (good works), as did James in his epistle.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. You may wish to lead the class on the topic: "How are believers in our church made ready to serve?" Utilize questions 1,2,4,5,7.
2. Also, ask the class to comment on what deeds done in their church are clearly deeds of faith. Questions 3,6,8,9,11 could be used.

## **LESSON SEVEN**

Remember that Nehemiah had a very good position in secular government, as influential as Daniel's was. Yet, when he saw the needs of his people, he did not hesitate to identify with them, much as Moses did when he was in a high place in Egypt.

Let this lesson, in particular, be a lesson exemplifying the faith of God's child in the world. We note several things about the faith of all believers by the study of Nehemiah's faith expressed in this study.

**Point One:** Faith is shown by stepping out to serve the Lord.

Begin with Nehemiah's example. When he heard that there was a need in Jerusalem, he was willing to leave his comfortable job to do what he could for his people.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, he saw what had to be done: the walls must be rebuilt. He did not hesitate to challenge the people to exercise their faith by working with him in this project.

You can point to Abraham, who, when called by God, left his homeland and family and set off for a place he had never been before, not knowing what to expect.

Moses, too, when he saw the needs of his people, was willing to aid them, though it would surely cost him his high place in Egypt and possibly his life.

Joshua, when told that he was to lead the people into Canaan, stepped out into the waters of the Jordan in faith that God would see them through to success in their expeditions, leading the whole people with him.

Gideon, though with a small force, stood against the camp of the Midianites, stepping out in faith, prepared to fight them, knowing that they could only succeed if God was for them.

David, after becoming king, saw the city of Jerusalem as a sore thumb, still held by the enemies of Israel and knew that he must take it for the glory of his God.

Elisha, when surrounded by enemies, was assured that God was with him to protect him. By faith he saw the protection of God which the servant with him could not see, except God showed him.

Amos, when called from his occupation to go to the north and preach against Bethel and Samaria, did not hesitate to go, seeing that God had spoken through him.

You can mention Jeremiah and Ezekiel who, when called, were told that they would be opposed by those they came to aid. But they went anyway; and though they suffered, they did not draw back from preaching what God taught them.

In the New Testament, we can mention Peter, who once stepped out onto water to walk to Jesus. Later, in

a much greater act of faith, he stood at Pentecost and preached to the very ones who had crucified his Lord. It took great faith to do what needed to be done.

Paul, when called by God, was ready to go into the unknown Gentile world to preach, though a Jew, because he could see by faith the fields white unto harvest.

All of these, like Nehemiah, show us that we exercise our faith when we recognize what God would have us to do, and then do it.

**Point Two:** Faith must be shown by withstanding all opposition to our obedience to the Lord.

Remind the class that many have undertaken difficult tasks but have drawn back when the going got tough.

Show how Nehemiah did not withdraw, in spite of much opposition, both from without and from within Israel.

You can further show that this is characteristic of all great people of faith in Israel's history.

Note how Noah kept building the ark over a period of 100 years, in spite of the ridicule that must have come on him from his neighbors, and that he preached to his generation, being an example of righteousness.

You can note, too, how righteous Lot had his soul vexed by the Sodomites, among whom he lived; yet he did not turn, himself, from faith in the Lord.

Moses, when threatened by Pharaoh, did not draw back from completing the task God had given to him.

Similarly Rehab, though at great risk to herself and her family, protected the spies Joshua had sent to Jericho, not betraying them, even when she had ample opportunity to do so.

Ruth too, left her home to go and live an uncertain life with Naomi, certain only that she desired to learn about Naomi's God and worship Him.

Hannah, when vexed by her rival, did not draw back from praying to God for a son; and when the son came, she did not fail to keep her promise to the Lord concerning Samuel.

We see Jonathan by faith relinquish the throne of his father, preferring David to himself, though it cost him his fame and in the end his life.

Nathan, when he knew that he had to go to David, who had just had one man killed, nevertheless, boldly went and told David to his face that he was a sinner in God's sight.

In the New Testament, we note how Stephen went right on preaching God's truth, even when he could see the faces on the people turning to rage against him.

And Barnabas, when none other would take Paul under his wings, embraced the new convert and welcomed him into the circle of Christian friends.

By these examples you can illustrate how important it is to follow through for the Lord whenever we step out in faith, lest our hesitancy bring dishonor to the Lord we seek to serve.

**Point Three:** Faith ultimately looks to God, not men, for the triumph (prosperity).

Remind them that Nehemiah — no matter how hard he tried to withstand the onslaught of the enemies — at all times, ultimately, prayed to God, asking for His blessings on all he sought to do.

He knew that in the final analysis, only God could bring success to what he sought to do.

You can show that Abraham learned from Melchizedek the same thing.

Similarly, Jacob, after he had become humbled, realized that not his cleverness against his enemies, but God's grace would help him to victory in the end.

David too, in facing Goliath, knew that it was not his skill with the sling, but God's presence that would cause him to triumph.

In fact this is the message of the prophets of God throughout the Old Testament period. They called for the people to cease to trust in themselves and to learn to wait upon the Lord.

Daniel's friends understood this and saw their duty to be to take their stand for the Lord, knowing that their destiny was in His hands and not in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

In Philippians 3, Paul shows that he had to learn to discount every thing that men usually trust in and learn to trust only in the Lord for his triumphs in life.

This is also the message of Revelation, as it teaches the saints that in the world they will surely have tribulation and will appear to be losing to Satan. But, in the end, Christ will return and will execute righteousness and judgment in the world, causing them to triumph in such a way that all the glory will belong to the Lord alone.

That is why, when we do our best, we must be certain to give all glory to God for whatever results occur, knowing that He and not we has caused the success.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. You may wish to lead the class in a discussion of the problems and advantages of Christians serving in secular governments today. Use Questions 1,2.
2. Another good topic of discussion would be: ways in which Christians can show their concern today for other Christians in need. Here, utilize questions 3,4,6,10,11,12,14.

## **LESSON EIGHT**

This lesson is built around the spiritual revival that developed under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

So long as Jerusalem lay unprotected, though Ezra was ready to teach the people, they were not really attentive to God's Word as they ought to be. They were constantly worried and harassed by their enemies who freely invaded their city at their pleasure. Help the students see this.

Once the walls had been built, then the people were ready to be taught and led into a true revival. This lesson is about that revival among them.

**Point One:** The people were ready to hear God's Word.

Start out by reminding them of how Ezra had been a ready teacher of God's Word and that it required only an attentive people for revival — the work of God's grace — to begin in them.

You can refer to the second generation of Israel in the wilderness, which was ready to learn, so that after the first generation of Israelites had died in the wilderness, being unready to listen and believe, then God began to teach the next generation by Moses.

Note, too, that the people, for several hundred years, had not been ready to be taught — during the time of the judges — so that there were no great teachers in that time. But when God was readying the people to learn, He also had prepared His servant, Samuel, to teach them.

You can point out that, likewise, in David's day, in contrast to Saul's day, the people were again readied to learn from the sweet psalmist, David.

In Elijah's day the prophet was frustrated because the people were not ready to be taught; but, through him and Elisha, the Lord did prepare later generations to be teachable, so that when men like Isaiah and Micah came along the kings listened.

In the days between the Testaments (400 years), the people had no great teacher of the Word, being not ready to be taught; but when the time was come for the Christ, God sent John the Baptist who prepared the hearts of many to receive the teachings of Jesus.

Finally, remind them that Paul, seeing that the Jews were no longer teachable in his day (for the most part), turned to the Gentiles whom God had evidently prepared to receive God's Word.

Stress that any good teaching situation for Christians today demands not only a well-prepared teacher but also a well-prepared people, who are ready to learn.

**Point Two:** The people were ready to meditate on God's Word.

Show how the people demonstrated their sincerity not only to hear the Word taught but also to meditate upon it. They patiently and attentively remained for hours, listening to every word from the lips of Ezra and of those who explained what he had been reading.

They desired to understand.

You can show that when Moses had died, God charged Joshua to give heed to Moses' words and to meditate upon them, if he expected to have good success. God has thus given His Word to be taught and to be meditated upon. Real revival demands both.

We note that this truth is stressed in Psalm 1:2, where the righteous one is described as one who meditates on God's Word day and night.

We see how Jeremiah applied that Word to his own life and endured great persecutions for the sake of the Word, not only believing it to be true but applying its demands to himself.

We find in the Proverbs (1 -9 in particular) how the father counsels his son to give heed always to God's Word and to meditate upon it continually.

In the New Testament, we find Christ reflecting on God's Word so that whenever He is confronted by His enemies or by those enquiring concerning the truth, He is always prepared.

Paul, when called of God, before he began his missionary journeys to the Gentiles, went away into the desert for three years to become schooled in God's Word and in how to apply it to himself (Gal. 1).

Thus we see that respect for God's Word means more than saying that we believe it to be God's infallible Word. We must demonstrate with our lives that we believe its truth enough to live by it, in faith.

**Point Three:** The people were ready to do God's will.

When the people began to apply the truths of God's Word to themselves, understandably, they were overcome by their own sins. They needed help in how to apply the Word.

One fault of many sermons preached today is that the preacher fails to apply what he has taught, so that even when people desire to do the will of God, they do not know how.

Ezra did not fail in this. He taught and then showed them what they must do.

We have seen already how the second generation in the wilderness was ready to do God's will, so that when Joshua began to lead them, they readily followed. The same was true of David's generation, so that the people immediately began to prepare for the building of the temple, when shown by David its importance.

Likewise, we note how Hezekiah began to do something about the temple in disrepair in his day, in contrast to his father, Ahaz, who did not even bother to

pay attention to God's Word as taught by Isaiah.

Daniel's generation in Babylon also was not only ready to hear but eager to do what God desired, as is exemplified in the lives of Daniel and his friends.

In the New Testament, we see the importance that Jesus put on doing God's Word, in His first major sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. As a result the Pharisees, who liked to talk of sound theology but who did not follow the teachings themselves, turned from Jesus, while the disciples continued to follow Him and learned from Him and ultimately committed their lives to being doers of the Word and not hearers only.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. You may wish to lead the class in a discussion of your church and its respect for God's Word. How is that respect evidenced? Use questions 1,2,3.
2. You could also discuss the evidences in your church that its members are not just hearers of the Word but doers also: get them to give some concrete examples from the lives of others, not themselves. Utilize questions 4,5,6,8,9.

## **LESSON NINE**

This lesson should emphasize the place of total commitment in the community of believers in the Lord. Therefore it is a lesson in holiness or committing ourselves exclusively to be the Lord's people and to honor Him in all we do.

Remind them of how that community in Nehemiah's and Ezra's day prepared for this commitment. First, they taught the people God's Word; then they built the walls to protect them from distractions from the world; and finally they led them to these commitments.

Point out that the same kind of commitments need to be made today, by the people of God, if they are to be truly holy as they have been called to be.

**Point One:** True commitment to God (holiness) requires an end to commitments to unbelievers.

By this we mean that we cannot serve God and mammon, we can have but one Lord of our lives. If we become entangled in human alliances which divide our allegiances or distract us from commitments to the Lord, then we are not holy as we ought to be.

Remind them of the entanglements into which the people in Jerusalem had fallen in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, most particularly their marriages with unbelievers. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were distressed by such alliances and sought to lead the people away from them.

You can go back to the pre-flood era when the sons of God married the daughters of men (daughters of unbelievers). The result was a strong human race, but one that turned from God. It brought on the judgment of God against that whole generation (Gen. 6).

Note also the warnings to Israel which God gave as He brought them into Canaan. He warned that they must not intermarry with the people or begin to worship the gods of the Canaanites. Rather they must destroy those people, removing all temptations.

This was because God was greatly concerned for the integrity of Israel as the people of God. They must have a holy seed (a seed that would be committed, too; Deut. 6; compare Gen. 18:19).

Remember, also, Solomon, and how he misled a whole generation of Israelites by his bad example in marrying many pagan wives and bringing them right into Jerusalem. It started a trend of intermarriages that plagued both Israel and Judah in the future.

You can mention Ahab, who married Jezebel, who brought Baal worship not only to Israel but also to Judah, through her daughter, Athaliah, who married Judah's king.

In the New Testament, remind them of the stern warnings of Paul against mixed marriages with unbelievers (II Cor. 6:14, etc.)- Show them that the New Testament reasons for this warning are the same as the Old Testament ones, namely, that the family of God's people be holy and totally committed to the Lord, not divided by unbelief.

You should remind them of the problems of mixed marriages today and the threats of divorce rates which continue to increase and of a style of living together without marriage or commitment to one another, which is on the increase, and how all of this is threatening the well-being of present and future generations.

**Point Two:** True commitment to God (holiness) requires honoring God on His day as a major priority in our lives.

Help them to recall how the Sabbath was violated in Nehemiah's day, so that merchants in Jerusalem desired eagerly to get the Sabbath over with so that they could make their profit, while pagan merchants outside the city used the occasion to make a profit for themselves on the Sabbath, from Jews who went outside to do business.

Show how the Lord, from creation on, has made clear that He expects of all mankind an observance of one day in seven as a day of rest and for honoring and recognizing the great Creator.

Remind them that in the wilderness, even before the Israelites arrived at Sinai and received the Law, they were already living in the awareness that they

were to keep the Sabbath day and not gather manna on that day.

Show how, at Sinai, one of the Ten Commandments was to keep the Sabbath — a key commandment pertaining to their relationship with God.

Remind them, too, of how Isaiah, after presenting the plan of salvation through the Christ, then showed the people that God expected them to maintain their honor of Him by keeping the Sabbath day holy (exclusively for the Lord and His will).

You can point out to them how Christ observed the Sabbath day, Himself, and regularly went to the synagogue to worship on the Sabbath with His disciples. Later, we see the disciples follow His example after His ascension.

Remind them that though the Day of the Lord began to be celebrated on the first day of the week rather than the fast day, to observe the resurrection of Christ on that day, nevertheless, the reasons for observing that day are still the same: to set priorities for the whole week, so that Christ is preeminent in everything in our lives.

**Point Three:** True commitment to God (holiness) requires our giving of possessions and ourselves to God.

Start by reminding them of how the failure of the people in Nehemiah's day to give the tithe — and thereby free the priests of having to work, otherwise, for their livelihood — cost the whole community, since the priests could not give the time to the things of the Lord and to the community's spiritual needs. They were distracted by having to go to the fields and earn their own bread by manual labor.

Show that the concept of the tithe was established first by Abraham's giving a tenth of all he possessed to Melchizedek, thereby acknowledging that all he possessed, and he himself, belonged to God and that he had what he had by the grace of God.

Later God took the tithe as a portion, representing the necessity for all of the people to give themselves totally to serve the Lord.

You can point out that Malachi, in particular, reminds the people that their failure to give God the tithe is tantamount to their robbing God of what is rightfully His.

Show that in the New Testament, also, giving of their resources for the work of God was expressive of the people's acknowledgment that all they possessed was from God and was to be used for His glory (II Cor. 8:1-5; Rom. 12:1,2).

Challenge the class to think about these three calls to commitment by examining themselves in the light of what God expects to see in every one of His

children.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. You may wish to lead the class in a discussion of the current practices of Sabbath (Lord's Day) observance in the Christian community. You may use questions 1,8,9,10 to help in this discussion.
2. You could also discuss the church's attitude today toward mixed marriages of believer and unbeliever and divorce and remarriage. How has your own church responded to the challenges of today that threaten the integrity of the family? Utilize questions 2,5,6,7.

## **LESSON TEN**

Remind the class that Chronicles is not just another history, but a record of God's use of the sacerdotal system in Israel for His own good purposes, to revive the interest of the people in that system and in the leaders, once again, after they had lost their interest through bad experiences over their past history.

Remind them, too, of the different format for the lesson in Chronicles and encourage them to learn from the Books the important lesson that we must not just set aside things that God has taught us because some say they are "outmoded" today or "not practical" or "won't work."

**Point One:** We must not set aside, as old-fashioned, what God has ordained in His Word for His people.

You can begin by reminding them of the background against which Nehemiah and Ezra had to work in their day. The people had learned many new things in Babylon, including a new language.

It was natural that they might think that the old ways, which had not brought them glory but defeat before the enemy, were outmoded and old-fashioned.

Thus the whole worship of the people was in jeopardy and the authority of God's Word was in danger of being set aside by the new generations, as is evidenced by the rapid spiritual decline between the time of the building of the temple under Zerubbabel and the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Call to their attention that the attitude of many in those days was not unlike the attitude of Esau, who thought that the whole idea of the blessings of the firstborn and the promises of God to Abraham were old-fashioned in his day, so that he did not hesitate to sell his birthright for something practical, like a bowl of soup. He despised his birthright, the Scriptures tell us.

Point, too, to the sad outcome of the generations after Joshua and his generation, which did not respect what their parents had practiced and turned away to experiment with new ways of worship learned from the pagans of Canaan who seemed to prosper so well. That brought on the dark ages of history in Israel.

We have noted Samuel's generation, which thought judges to be outmoded and wanted a king "like the other nations," much to their own sorrow later.

In Jesus' day, we note how the Sadducees had rejected almost the entire Scripture as no longer valid and adopted the Roman customs and laws as more apropos. But Jesus rejected them as "in error, not knowing the Scriptures."

Finally, you could mention Paul, in his words to Timothy, warning that in later times people would seek new ideas and things that pleased them, setting aside the truth, but that Timothy must continue to preach the Word and uphold that Word as pastor of the flock.

Help the class to see that today, too, we are tempted to set aside many teachings of Scripture as no longer applicable and to adapt to modern thinking about such things as divorce, marriage, homosexuality, etc. If we do, we too will enter into spiritual dark ages.

**Point Two:** We must not set aside as impractical (won't work) what God has ordained in His Word for His people.

Start with the example of Ezra's generation, when the people found themselves living in a situation in which they were no longer independent but now subjects of the Persian Empire. How easy it was, then, to suppose that now they owed their allegiance to the earthly sovereign, the King of Persia, rather than to the heavenly Sovereign, God. After all, had not the earthly sovereign brought them into captivity? Was their God able to deliver them from his hands?

Remind them of Lot and his relationships to Abraham. Lot foolishly chose to live in the city of Sodom, where he thought he would receive greater protection and thereby prosper more than Abraham, who lived out in the hillside, away from the wails of the city and more susceptible to the raids of thieves and roving bands that were so numerous in Canaan in those days.

Yet, who was invaded and who suffered the loss of all of his possessions? Not Abraham, but Lot! Allegiance to men is always uncertain. Allegiance to God is always right, no matter what the seeming demands of the day may suggest.

So Israel, in the wilderness, wanted to return to Egypt and its security, forgetting the years of bitter

slavery they had undergone there. In the end, because of their unbelief, God did take away the lives of most of the murmurers, but those who trusted Him did come through, because they had obeyed him when it seemed popular not to do so.

We have noted already how the people wanted the security of a king in Samuel's day, feeling that judges could not protect them and that having God as their King was not good enough.

In the end their kings did not protect them but deserted them, as we have seen in our study of the fall of Samaria and of Jerusalem.

We say, too, in the New Testament, that many among the followers of Jesus deserted Him, feeling that He was not practical and did not reckon with the facts as they existed in His day. They wanted a different kind of leader, who would lead a rebellion against the Romans; but Jesus knew that was not in accord with the will of the Father.

They deserted Jesus and in later years joined in a rebellion to overthrow the Roman control; but, in the end, they lost Jerusalem and it was destroyed, and they were expelled from the city for hundreds of years, while Christianity moved out from the city and to the ends of the earth.

Paul was able to see that he was a sweet-savor to God (well-pleasing to God), when he obeyed God's Word and taught it as God gave it, rather than twisting it to say what it did not say, to please men (II Cor. 2:14-17).

Challenge the class not to be intimidated by those today who insist that the gospel is not practical and that we must change the appeal and message of the church- When all other messages of men are forgotten, the gospel will still be valid.

**Point Three:** We must not set aside, as unfit because of abuses in the past, what God has ordained in His Word for His people.

You can point, in the first place, to the times of the post-exilic era, when there was a strong tendency to throw out the entire sacerdotal system and not to listen to any prophet because in the past the priests and prophets, for the most part, had failed the people and had only sought their own gain.

But the fault was not in the offices which God ordained, but in those who failed to fulfill those offices as God intended.

Remind them briefly of the past history of the priests and prophets, showing them that though many failed in these offices, still, the offices pointed to the ultimate fulfillment of each office in the person and work of Jesus Christ; and, therefore, the offices deserved the respect of the people until their function was fulfilled perfectly in Jesus Christ.

Help them to see that in the New Testament times, Jesus did fulfill these offices perfectly and thereby they no longer had a need.

Lead them to relate this to the government of the church today where God has ordained the offices of elder and deacon, according to His Word. While there have been many elders and deacons in the history of the church who have failed the Lord, nevertheless the offices remain today just as vital to the church, because they reflect the ministry which Christ has given to His church and which He expects to be seen in His church, wherever and whenever it occurs.

Therefore, we ought not to dissolve the office of deacon or elder, as some churches have, or set them aside as inconsequential, as many more churches have done, but retain them and all other forms of worship and service in the church, ordained by Christ, until He comes again, knowing that, in the end, God will bless and work through these offices.

### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. Lead the group to discuss some of the old practices in your church or denomination which have been discarded or neglected in recent years. Seek to get them to discover why they were dropped. Utilize questions 1,2,3,7,11.
2. Discuss the roll of your church: Is it accurate? current? are copies available? how important is that roll to you? Utilize questions 3,4,5.

## **LESSON ELEVEN**

This prophet (Malachi) is the last of the writing prophets of the Old Testament, and lived around the end of the 5th century, about 400 B.C.

Several decades had passed since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and that was enough time for a general decline in the spiritual life of the people and their leaders to occur.

This lesson will be concerned with drawing some principles about spiritual decline in the church from the events of those days.

**Point One:** The beginning of spiritual decline in the leadership of God's people is indicated by a careless attitude toward the things of God.

Begin with the time of Malachi. You can point out that in his message, the prophet indicates that the people had begun to despise the name of God by the way they lived and behaved, and this had resulted in their profaning His name before the nations of the world. At the bottom of all of this behavior was their boredom with the whole office to which God had

called them.

Point out, therefore, that leadership in the church is always in danger of being guilty of despising the name of the Lord when, in its efforts, it gives only second best to the Lord. God demands the best in all of us; above all, He demands that all leaders put first His Kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

You can show that this was a major problem in the life of Saul who obviously did not put God's Kingdom first; but rather the establishing of his own kingdom and sovereignty over Israel. He developed a very careless attitude concerning the things of God and neglected the very Words of God, thus despising God's name and honor before his people.

Similarly, David, though to a much lesser degree, became careless. He had, at first, pleased the Lord. But he began to think of himself as above God's Law and took matters into his own hands for a time.

God later accused David of despising Him and His Word (II Sam. 12:9-14) and the resulting consequences for David were very sorrowful through the rest of his life.

However, unlike Saul, David did repent and grew spiritually once more, which was all to the good of his people.

Later, Solomon, seemingly, became bored with what God had given him to do (see Eccles. 1,2); and not being satisfied to glorify the Lord through the great wisdom and wealth which God gave to him, he began to behave in such a way that he brought great dishonor on God's name and much sorrow to God's people for many generations to follow.

Even Hezekiah, who had once pleased the Lord by listening to Isaiah, His prophet, and by trusting in God rather than in man, nevertheless, later, through vain pride, brought despite to God's name by showing all the things of God to pagan Babylonians who visited him (II Kings 20).

In the early church history, as seen in Acts and the epistles of the various apostles, we learn that many church men brought despite on the name of God and His gospel by their wrong motivations in their places of leadership, which caused many to stumble and to turn away from the gospel.

Finally, you can remind them of the messages of Christ to the churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 2,3), by which God makes clear that He will not bless or tolerate churches which become neglectful and indifferent concerning the things which God has entrusted to the leadership of the churches. They will be held accountable.

Help the class to see that today, also, there is constant danger that leaders in the church may begin to despise God's name by careless handling of their duties as leaders and by their own lack of preparation. It is incumbent on the people in the churches to watch



out for such signs of neglect in their leaders and to pray for them constantly.

**Point Two:** Spiritual decline in the leadership of the church leads to spiritual decline among the people.

Call to the attention of the class that if spiritual decline through neglect and careless attitude is not soon checked in the leadership, the result will be that the entire congregation will be in danger of spiritual decline as well.

Point to the time of Malachi, when there was much evidence that just as the priests and other leaders declined spiritually, so did the spiritual concern of the people in general. This is seen in their attitude toward their own marriages and toward God's tithes.

We see that earlier, not only Saul but most of Israel declined rapidly, becoming indifferent to God's will.

We see, too, that David's careless attitude greatly affected Israel for bad and particularly the members of his own family who imitated him in sin.

We have studied at length the dire consequences of Solomon's failures which brought division to Israel and ultimately the fall both of Israel and Judah, as leader after leader and generation of the people after generation followed in the foot-steps of Solomon.

Later, one prophet captured the concept in the very brief summary: "Like people, like priest" (Hos. 4:9).

We see, too, that just as Isaiah predicted to Hezekiah, after his false step in regard to the Babylonians, soon the nation would decline to the point that God would deliver the nation of Judah into the hands of the Babylonians.

As we study the history of the New Testament church, we see that the early signs of decline already noted in the New Testament worked themselves out in the many heresies and divisions that occurred in the following centuries, and which still plague the church in the world today.

Emphasize that under this point we all need to see the great dangers that can occur in the church, if we or our leaders are allowed to become careless or neglectful concerning the things of God. We are indeed our brothers' keepers!

**Point Three:** Spiritual decline leads to strained relationships between God and His people.

Note how, in Malachi's day, a twisted view of righteousness developed, as a result of their carelessness, so that the people set aside God's standards of judgment and rejected His Word. God also warned of coming judgment and of His wrath against that generation and of His determination to set

aside such leaders and people who rejected His standards.

You can go all the way back to Eden and remind them of how the disobedience of Adam and Eve immediately brought a broken relationship between God and man.

In the pre-flood era, when men refused to go the way God had set for them but became wise in their own sight, then they did many mighty things in men's eyes; but it was all viewed as sin by God. This resulted, ultimately, in the destruction of all mankind, except for Noah and his family by God's grace.

We see that when Jacob became careless in dealing with his children, it led to alienation between him and his sons, between brother and brother, and between the whole family and God.

We see, in the whole history of Israel and Judah later, how such sin can lead to rebellion and to destruction by the hand of God.

In the New Testament we need only to note how the leaders of Jesus' day at first simply refused to follow Jesus, but then eventually sought to destroy Him, saying that it was good to kill Him, thinking that in so doing they served God. This is how far man's rejection of God's standards can lead away from God and from peace with God.

#### **Suggestions for discussion:**

1. You may wish to discuss the signs of decline today in the leadership of the Christian church in the world. Utilize questions 1,2,3,4,9.
2. Another helpful subject to discuss is ways in which we may be despising the Lord today, though unknowingly (use questions 5-8 in this discussion).

## **LESSON TWELVE**

This lesson is the final one in the study of the Old Testament Prophets and comes at the end of the Old Testament period. This fact should be emphasized so that the students will be thinking of this message and what happened in the next 400 years, until the Christ did come to His people.

In particular, through the lesson, help the class to think in terms of the Second Coming of our Lord, and what we can learn from Malachi to prepare us better for that Day of the Lord.

**Point One:** But for the grace of God, the coming of the Lord would be a terrible day.

Show them that Malachi makes the point very clearly that were it not for the grace of God, all would be consumed when the Lord appeared before men in

the world. This was true of the first coming of the Christ, and it will also be true at the second coming.

While Jesus' return will be a joyous occasion for those who, by His grace, are ready (believers in Jesus), for the rest of the world — inside and those outside the visible church — it will be a terrible day of God's wrath and judgment. This needs to be said today more than ever.

Remind them of the flood and its meaning for the world of that day — but for God's grace shown to Noah. Frequently, in the New Testament, the flood is used as an example of the coming judgment of God at the end of the world (Matt. 24:38,39; II Pet. 2:5 and following verses).

You can note, also, the use of the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and the destruction of all the people there, except for God's grace shown to Lot and his family. This too has application in reference to the coming judgment of God at the return of Christ (II Pet. 2:6; Jude 7).

Likewise, in Canaan, God's judgment destroyed most there. We see the wrath of God poured out on Jericho and its citizens — but for the grace of God on Rehab and her family.

In Israel, though most were judged, yet a remnant was spared whom God recognized as His people, out of the whole house of Israel according to the flesh. The rest were warned by the prophets that the Day of the Lord — which they desired — would be a terrible day for them when it came.

In the New Testament, it was so with the Jews in Jesus' day. Most did not receive Him and were condemned, but the elect were saved, by the grace of God, as Paul shows us in Romans 9-11.

Paul shows to the Gentiles that they, too, must learn from this. Believers among the Gentiles will be saved; but those who do not believe, though in the visible church, will be destroyed, together with the pagans of history, when Jesus returns.

Help the class to see, therefore, that it is important that all men understand that the day of Christ's return will not be a day of victory and triumph for all men. Except by the grace of God on the elect — that makes them able to believe in Jesus as their Savior and gives to them promise of triumph and joy forever — for the rest, Jesus' return will be terrifying.

**Point Two:** The day of the Lord will mark a great victory for God's people.

Point them to the Malachi words (Mal. 4:2,3) which assure us that for those who do believe in the Lord, the day of His coming will be joyous indeed. So, even now, in this sinful world they can live freely for the Lord, assured that their victory is already won in Christ and that they can labor hard in the world for

Him against seemingly great odds and opposition.

There have been promises of that day of victory ever since man first sinned. God then made the first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. Remind the class of how we have traced the promises of God concerning His Son to come and the triumph over Satan and death in many of our lessons of study in the Old Testament.

Remind them of how the Old Testament prophets, which we have studied, have taught the believers (the elect, the remnant) that though, in the world, they suffer greatly for Christ's sake and endure hardship, nevertheless, in the end, their triumph is assured. The issue is never in doubt.

Remind them of how Habakkuk's viewpoint changed, once he saw this truth through God's revelation.

Help them to consider the difference between Jesus' first and His second coming. In the first, He came to accomplish what was necessary for us to be saved, and then called us to go and preach that message to a sinful world, enduring the same suffering which He endured while accomplishing the work of redemption.

But when He comes again, He will come in glory and triumph, and all eyes shall see Him and tremble. But we who look for His coming will receive Him with great and everlasting joy. It spells the end of all our suffering and the beginning of eternal blessings with Christ.

**Point Three:** In the meantime, God's people are called to obedience and to await His promises, no matter what occurs in the interim.

Begin by reminding the class of what Malachi called his generation of believers to do. They were to endure the hardness that would come and to await patiently God's working out of His schedule, busily keeping God's Word even though the world and many of the Jews would refuse to honor God and His Word.

Show that, in reality, this is the same call given to Christians today. We must be steadfast in our service in His Kingdom, even though the majority in the world — and even in the church — will not recognize God's Kingdom or honor those who do serve the Lord.

Remind them that Jesus, when He had finished His work at His first coming into the world, called His disciples to obey Him. They were to keep His Words and teach others to do so also. At the same time they were to be waiting and looking for His coming again, with eager expectation.

Show that in Revelation, the last Book of the New Testament — and thus in some ways comparable to Malachi's message — the call is to the "patience of the saints." This means that we are to be patient, enduring whatever we must, for the sake of the Kingdom

now. We are not to use the weapons and ways of the world, but to be willing to be wronged by men, so that in the end, when Christ does come, we can join in His triumph and joy.

## LESSON THIRTEEN

### Review Lesson:

#### Suggestions for discussion:

1. You may wish to discuss ways in which we show our readiness for Christ's return as a church (denomination). Utilize questions 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8.
2. You can also consider together the question of how your church emphasizes obedience to God's Word and the Great Commission of Christ in the interim, until Christ returns. Here, use questions 9,10,12,14.

**PART I: The test** may be done at home or in the class, individually or together. If the class is not disposed to do it at all, this entire part may be omitted; however, it is an excellent opportunity for the class to review what has been covered and to see whether they have grasped some of the significant truths in this quarter of study. You, as the teacher, ought to encourage all to test their progress. Working together in the classroom may be a good way to handle this, to encourage the others. If tests are taken individually, it is best not to make the results known publicly.

The questions have been arranged so that the pupils may check the answers in the lesson. Questions are by the lesson, for easier reference.

Below, you will find the answers to the questions.

1. F	21. T	41. T	61. F	81. T
2. F	22. T	42. F	62. T	82. T
3. T	23. T	43. F	63. F	83. F
4. T	24. F	44. T	64. F	84. T
5. F	25. T	45. F	65. T	85. F
6. F	26. F	46. T	66. F	86. T
7. F	27. T	47. F	67. T	87. F
8. T	28. T	48. T	68. F	88. F
9. F	29. T	49. T	69. T	89. T
10. T	30. T	50. F	70. F	90. T
11. T	31. T	51. T	71. T	91. T
12. F	32. F	52. F	72. F	92. T
13. F	33. T	53. F	73. T	93. F
14. T	34. T	54. F	74. T	94. T
15. T	35. F	55. F	75. T	95. T
16. T	36. T	56. T	76. T	96. T
17. F	37. T	57. F	77. F	97. T
18. T	38. T	58. F	78. F	98. F
19. T	39. F	59. T	79. F	99. T
20. T	40. F	60. T	80. T	100. F

**PART TWO: The review** of the quarter on the basis of Ephesians 1:4, ought not to be omitted; and if there is not time in class to go over this content, because of the test, then urge the class to read and reflect on what is summarized in this section at home. It may be useful simply to read these paragraphs in class and have discussion of them afterwards.