

ADULT BIBLICAL EDUCATION SERIES

Vol. II, Book 11

The Believer's Testimony in the Midst of a Hostile World

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 11
THE BELIEVER'S TESTIMONY IN THE MIDST OF A HOSTILE WORLD
(Job and Psalms)
Prepared by Jack B. Scott, Ph.D.

You may wish to review the suggestions found in the Teacher's Supplement for Vol. II, Book 2, pages 1-3. There you will find some general suggestions for preparing and teaching a good Biblical lesson.

Below we will seek to give you help in preparing this specific quarterly of lessons. It is always important to remember that the lesson suggestions assume that the students have read the material at home and meditated upon it, using the questions at the end, and are prepared, as you teach, to build upon what they have already learned in their individual study.

There are various ways in which you, as the teacher, can approach the material given below, as you teach the class. You may wish to ask them for Scriptures that illustrate each point you are trying to make in the lesson. This works well if the students are well versed in Scripture or have been consistent in Scripture study. Or you may wish to ask them to look up certain Scriptures which illustrate the points drawn from this lesson, in which case you will have to aid them in thinking through those Scriptures and how they relate to the lesson you have studied for that week. Or, you may simply give to them the Scriptures and help them to see how they relate to the lesson before you.

In any of these procedures, you must not feel bound to use every Scripture suggestion we note in our aids to you. Be selective, depending on the particular needs or knowledge of your class. Be relaxed, not trying to rush to the end, but satisfied if you are able to cover only a part of what you had prepared. It is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared.

You must help them to see that the objective of your approach to the study of the lesson is to help them to a growing awareness of the unity of Scripture and of the agreement that is to be found throughout God's revelation, pertaining to the lessons of Scripture.

Specific suggestions for each lesson of this quarter follow.

LESSON ONE

Introduction to the Lesson:

In the introduction, help the class to see that the five remaining books to be studied are a unit. Stress their

overall purpose to teach the response of the righteous man to God's revelation, both in the created world and in the written Word. Show, therefore, how these books build on what we have already learned through our study of the history of Israel and writings of the prophets.

Also stress the importance of these books to God's child in any generation, as he must struggle with the world as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Point One: The Lord expects His children to endure tribulation for His glory.

You may begin by pointing out that Jesus taught His own to expect tribulation in the world as they served Him (John 16:33). Then, returning to Job, show how God was pleased with the faith and faithfulness of Job, so that Job became a particular target of Satan. This shows that the more faithful God's children are, the more opposition from Satan they can expect. This leads to the concept that the faith of God's children will be tested in this world. That is how faith glorifies the Lord.

Point to the testing of Abraham's faith, not just by the trials recorded in Genesis 22, but throughout his life, as a believer.

You can also contrast the trials of David and the trials of Saul and show how David's faith showed through in all that he did in the midst of his trials, while Saul's lack of faith also was apparent. Contrast Solomon and David to show the importance of having our faith tested, lest we grow complacent and weak spiritually.

Remind the class of the place of faith in the believer's life as this is brought out in Elijah's experience, when he wished at first to rely on signs to bring the people to God, and, later, through trials himself, learned that only faith in the Lord sustains. Such faith comes through the hearing of God's Word. You could also note the revelation of God to Habakkuk that prepared him to endure all kinds of trials to come, by living in faith (Hab. 2:4).

Note in the life of Jesus how quickly His faith in the Father and in His Word was tested by Satan, and continually tested throughout His life.

You could also cite the words of Jesus to Peter, telling him that he would be sifted and tested by Satan, but that his faith would endure (Luke 22:31).

You may also wish to read portions of I Peter 1, which teach the importance of the trials of our faith, and finally

Philippians 1:29, which shows that it is our privilege as believers not only to believe of Christ but also to share in His sufferings.

Relate what you say in connection with this point to the members of the class, helping them to see that our faith is challenged every day by the world in which we live, at our work and in our social life, as well as in our homes. We must expect it and learn how to endure it for God's glory.

Point Two: In times of tribulation, the child of God needs, above all, assurance of God's presence with him.

You may wish to begin this point by reminding them that the very fast words of Jesus, after teaching His church to go out into the world with the message of the Kingdom of God and to endure hardness for His sake, were that He would be with them (Matt. 28:18-20).

Returning to Job, you can remind them that ail through his debates with his friends, the chief concern of Job was assurance that the Lord was there, with him, to sustain him.

You can point to the example of Moses, who, when told to go into Egypt and face whatever Pharaoh had for him there — in order to deliver God's people out of his hands — the one great concern of Moses and the great promise of the Lord was that the Lord would be with him (Ex. 3).

You could also mention how Joshua and Jeremiah shared the same experience with Moses of having God's assurance that He would be with them — after the Lord had given to each of them great tasks to perform. In all such cases, the truth recognized by these men was that without God they could do nothing.

Show how David carried this same confidence into battle against Goliath and later, against the enemies of Israel.

You can also note how Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, stressed the evidence from the created world that God knew and cared for His own (Matt. 6). Note, too, how Jesus, in the boat with His disciples in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee, sought to give them great assurance through His presence with them.

We see from Paul's experience how even such a great man of faith needed reassurance, from time to time, that God was with him and would sustain him (Acts 18:9,10;27:24).

As you bring this point to a close, you can challenge the class to relate God's assurances to His saints in Biblical times that He was near them at all times to their own lives and trials today. Help them to see that the revelation of God's presence in His Word is far better than the need for miracles or signs to assure us mat God is with us. The Word will endure forever, and by faith we must learn

totally to depend upon its promises.

Suggestions for discussion:

1. Lead the class in a discussion of individuals whom they have known in the church who have held up under adverse circumstances and have endured to God's glory. Utilize questions 1-7.
2. Help the class to think through the matter of how their church has sought to minister to those undergoing trials of their faith. Utilize questions 8,9.

LESSON TWO

Introduction to the Lesson:

Remind the class that in this lesson we are dealing with the entire scope of Job's debate with his three friends. Help them to see that this section of Scripture may seem repetitious at times, but that this is just the point. The friends, though very wordy, said very little that was new. Remind them that while much of what the friends said is true, per se, nevertheless, in the context in which they uttered it — hi judgment against Job — they were wrong.

Prepare the class to understand that the three friends were actually behaving as agents of Satan, not for but against their friend Job, and help them to apply this lesson to themselves; for we all, at times, become Satan's advocates when we behave more like Satan's children than children of the Lord.

Point One: The problem of guilt in times of adversity.

You need to remind the class that all through the debates the friends of Job were trying to make him feel guilty before God, thinking that what he needed was to get right with God. Remind them that this was then, and still is, the popular view which men hold, so that whenever some terrible thing happens to another, they are tempted to conclude that that person did something to displease God. Show how it was still very much in the thinking of the disciples of Christ, in His days on earth (John 9:1-3).

You can also show, by Psalm 22, that many times the psalmist was plagued by those who felt that his trials were due to his own sins and that, therefore, God would not aid him.

Show how Daniel's friends were tried, and how Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to feel deserted by their God so that they would yield (bow) to the king's bad theology.

On the cross, as Jesus died for our sins, He had to endure the mocking words of men who sought to prove by the fact that Jesus was dying there that He was not really the Christ (Matt. 27:42,43).

You can note, too, that the Corinthian Christians had difficulty in following or respecting Paul because he had to endure so many trials and hardships. To them, he seemed forsaken by the Lord.

Help the class to understand that by this point we must learn that the world will often interpret our hardships suffered for Christ's sake as indications that we are godforsaken. We must not begin to wonder if they are right but remember the lesson taught in God's Word that the Lord never forsakes His own.

Point Two: The necessity of faith in times of adversity.

You may begin by drawing from Job's experience of bitterness the warning of the dangers of bitterness developing in the heart of God's child. It did in Job's heart, for a time; and later, it was even to be seen in Jeremiah (20:14-18). Even the psalmist reflects such bitterness at times, as in parts of Psalm 73, and elsewhere. Even Peter showed evidence of bitterness in his own heart when he thought that the Lord was teaching that he must endure great suffering while John would not (John 21).

Lead the class to see that the real issue with Job was the issue of justification by faith. He knew that he was justified (righteous) in God's sight and that, therefore, he was not being punished as a sinner by all that he suffered. To him, that great doctrine was too precious to surrender; but his friends sought to ridicule him for holding to it — insisting that he was righteous in God's eyes, in spite of all his friends saw or thought.

Challenge the class to see that, daily, our faith in the Lord is challenged by the world, which rejects the necessity for such faith and throws doubts on our belief and even on our own credibility.

You can strengthen the point by showing that David, in Psalm 51, held tenaciously to the doctrine that he was justified by faith, and that he had not lost his salvation by his sin against the Lord and Uriah the Hittite, but that he had lost the joy of that salvation.

The same is seen in Paul's life when, in Galatians, he fights so strongly for the doctrine of justification by faith against false teachers who had sought, by persecuting Paul, to show that Paul's hardships proved that his doctrine was not true.

The class should understand that every day we either show our confidence in that doctrine or we show our lack of confidence in it by our behavior before the unbelieving world.

Our own complaints in the midst of adversity, like Job's complaints to his friends, can contribute to the world's doubting the genuineness of our faith.

It is important that we refrain from complaining and give all glory to the Lord, no matter what tribulation we are tailed to endure.

Suggestions for discussion:

1. You can discuss how members of the class can be better prepared to be comforters in church visitation, utilizing questions 1-5.
2. Another discussion point might be on how we can learn better to uphold the great doctrines we profess by our daily conduct, and not merely by our words. Utilize, here, questions 6-9.

LESSON THREE

Introduction to the Lesson:

In this lesson, show that even the younger generation in Job's day did not really hold a view any different, in substance, from the view of its elders, though Elihu ridiculed them. It is quite the same today. The world's ideas and concepts are never substantially different in any generation, though they may be expressed differently. At bottom, they glorify man and humanism, not God, whatever form they take, and however they are expressed.

The primary thrust of this lesson will be God's answer to Job and its consequences in the life of Job and in the lives of his friends.

Point One: God's children, when failing to utilize the revelation which God has given to them, will be humbled by the Lord.

Job was brought low before the Lord when God spoke to him because he had failed to relate the revelation of God's care all around him (in the created world) to his own needs. Like the disciples of Jesus, he needed to see that as the Lord cared for all the lesser creatures, much more, He would care for His own children.

We see Jacob later humbled by the Lord when he refused to behave in accord with the revelation of God given to him, but went on trying to provide for his own future by his own cleverness. When he finally saw that only God enabled him to win out over his enemies, then he grew in his faith.

David, likewise, was humbled when he behaved in a manner as though the Word of God did not apply to him, in the case of Uriah's wife. He knew God and God's Law, as his psalms testify, nevertheless, for a time he laid aside that Law to do his own pleasure.

We see the same lesson on a larger scale when the Israelites, entering into Canaan with God's Law, promptly ignored that Law and sought to live as they pleased. God, through the period of the judges, greatly humbled Israel.

Jonah, too, knowing the truth about God's love, refused to show that love in his own life, in dealing with the

Ninevites. Therefore, the Lord had to punish him by humbling him, so that he would learn to honor the Word of God which he knew.

Finally, Peter, who knew who Jesus was and had confessed to Christ his faith, nevertheless, later denied Jesus three times and was humbled before God for his refusal to act in accord with his faith.

By this point you can show that believers today also must be careful to behave in accord with the Word of God which they have. If we do not, then we may be humbled before Him and our fellowmen.

Point Two: The afflictors of God's people will be rebuked by the Lord.

You may begin by showing that the friends of Job did not please the Lord by their judgments against Job and their vain words, which were not the truth. Therefore, they were subjected to great rebuke by the Lord and needed Job's intercession for them.

Similarly, Abimelech needed to be humbled in his dealings with Abraham and was afflicted until Abraham interceded for him (Gen. 20). We also see how God rebuked Pharaoh for all of his arrogance against God and His people, as well as for his opposition to Moses.

Later, we see that even though Israel sinned, nevertheless, God ultimately rebuked the Philistines, in the days of the judges — particularly in the time of Eli and his sons — so that they were forced to return the ark of God which they had stolen.

One by one, the nations which God used to punish Israel for her disobedience were overthrown: Assyria, Babylon, Persia.

In the New Testament as well, we see this principle at work, as those who opposed Christ were themselves rebuked by the Lord through Peter, at the sermon at Pentecost, so that many repented and came to God with broken hearts.

Indeed, the whole Book of Revelation shows that the ones who oppose Christ and His church in its work on earth will feel the wrath of God, ultimately.

By this point, you can drive home to the students the very high place and calling to which every believer is called, so that the very hairs on his head are numbered; and whoever seeks his harm will be dealt with by the Lord. That makes both our place and our responsibility very awesome.

Point Three: The Lord will always lift up those who put their trust in Him.

You must remind the class that in the lesson discussion we made the point of saying that it was not necessary, from Job's point of view, that he be vindicated and exalted before men. He was satisfied just to be assured that the

Lord had never deserted him.

So, too, we who serve Him should not expect that we will always appear to win or be exalted by the Lord in this world, in the eyes of men. We may appear to be defeated in their eyes, but we can know and be certain that in the end every one of God's children will be exalted with Christ, in triumph; and, in the end, every eye will see that.

This was also the hope of the psalmist, as he was reconciled to having many enemies and enduring much ridicule in this world, but hoped for God's final exaltation of him in his endurance of hardships for God's sake.

We see this theme in Hannah's prayer as we have pointed out many times.

We see in the contrast between Hezekiah and his father, that the father sought to exalt himself and in the end was brought low, but Hezekiah sought to exalt the Lord in his life and God also exalted him before his enemies, who were not allowed to fulfill their boastings against him.

Similarly, Daniel and his friends were consistently exalted before men, but not because they needed to be, for their own sake, but for the sake of the Lord, that He might be glorified through their triumphs.

Jesus, in the Beatitudes and thereafter, consistently taught that the humble will be exalted and the exalted will be humbled before God's children. Both James and Peter testify to this later: James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6.

With this point, help the class to see that though, in the world and in the eyes of the world, God's children may seem to fail, nevertheless, in the end all are assured of triumph. So Stephen may well have seemed to be defeated by his enemies who killed him, but the life and testimony of Paul show that in the end Stephen triumphed in Christ. But sometimes, even in this world, as in the case of Job, Daniel and many others, their triumphs before man testified to the whole world that God was with them.

Suggestions for discussion:

1. In the discussion period, help the class to think about passages of Scripture which teach us lessons from the created world, as Jesus taught about God's love through the example of the birds and the flowers of the field. You can use a concordance to find many lessons which God teaches from the created world. This is utilizing the verbal revelation to enable us to understand better the natural revelation of God.

LESSON FOUR

Introduction to the Lesson:

Be aware that you and the class are moving into a different type of study than you have been in before. Here,

we will be studying individual psalms which do not have a specific context, as do the studies in the history of Israel and the prophets. Remind the class that while we will have opportunity to study all of the psalms individually — at home — in the class we will have to concentrate on only a few.

Stress the importance of the first two psalms to aid us in understanding the entire Psalter. For this reason, it is important to study just these two psalms today, so that we may have a door to enter into the study of the rest of the psalms.

First, outline for the class the three major topics dealt with in the first two psalms: 1) the life of the righteous and the unrighteous; 2) the enmity of the unrighteous toward God and His people; 3) the work of the King of God's Kingdom in the unrighteous world. They should understand that these three major topics are the topics to be found chiefly throughout the Psalter, as expressed in the 18 separate themes which we have studied in this lesson.

Our approach in the lesson guide for you, the teacher, will be to suggest that you concentrate on the major three topics, rather than the 18 themes separately, so that the class can get a grasp of the sweeping significance of the Psalter for our study in the future. We will give below some examples from the New Testament of how these topics are worked out in the later Word of God.

Point One: The life of the righteous and the unrighteous (Ps. 1).

It would be well for you to put on a board, for all to see, under each heading of your lesson outline, several examples from the New Testament which illustrate each topic.

The temptations of Jesus from Matthew 4, show both the subtlety of Satan in the world — in trying to get Jesus to conform to the world's (Satan's) way of thinking — and also Jesus' dependence on God's Word, on which He has meditated. Romans 12:1,2, also show both the dangers of the world's conformity and the solution: be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Verses dealing with the fruit of the believer's life include Jesus' words on fruit bearing by those who abide in Him (John 15) and Paul's words in Galatians 5:22,23, dealing with the fruit of the Spirit.

The contrast between the righteous and the unrighteous is shown from the New Testament by such verses as Matthew 7:24-32, which speak of the differences between the house built on the rock (Christ's words) and on the sand (the world's counsel and ways).

Judas, is a good example of those within the visible church who, because unrighteous, are therefore unacceptable to God, though often acceptable to men. Jude teaches the reality of those in the visible church, who,

nevertheless, do not belong there, in God's view.

John 3:16, shows clearly the great contrast between the destinies of the righteous and the unrighteous, as does the closing verse of Psalm 1.

Suggestions for discussion:

Utilize the first 6 questions to lead into a discussion of the relevance of the first great topic of the Psalter to our present day and life.

Point Two: The enmity of the unrighteous kingdoms of this world toward God and His people (Ps. 2:1-6).

As New Testament examples we suggest Herod's attempts on the life of the babe, Jesus (Matt. 2), and Peter's sermon, illustrating the hostility of the world against Jesus and believers (Acts 2). In both of these examples you can note that men's plans to oppose God always fail. Judas is an example of how men rebel against God, often from within the visible church; and Ephesians 6 teaches us that we, as the righteous in Christ, are indeed engaged in a great warfare with Satan and his children in this world.

Matthew 28:18-20 shows how Jesus has invaded this world and established His Kingdom to go to the ends of the earth — open warfare against Satan's kingdoms of this world. You can compare John 19:10,11, which shows that though threatened, the Kingdom of Christ is secure because all power is in God's hands.

You may wish to note that Jesus, by the words, "My Kingdom," is showing God's counter-purpose to the plans of men and that Jesus gives the keys of the Kingdom to His true church, to make war with Satan and to set free from his clutch those whom Christ will save by the preaching of the gospel (Matt. 16:17-19).

Suggestions for discussion:

Be guided by questions 7-12.

Point Three: The work of the King of God's people, in the world (Ps. 2:7-12).

Here, the message of the entire gospel comes to focus, as we read in the Gospels about Jesus' redemptive work, and its proclamation through the Book of Acts, and its doctrines through the Epistles. There are too many verses that could be chosen for us to suggest any specific ones. You may wish to begin with the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1ff.), where Jesus outlines the ministry of the saints on earth and you can refer again to Matthew 28:18-20, which tells Christ's plan in brief words.

In your discussion, utilize the last six questions (13-18).

LESSON FIVE

Introduction to the Lesson:

For this lesson and the remainder of the lessons of this quarter of studies, it would be advisable to put on the board, in view of all the students, a list of the 18 themes which were noted in the last lesson and which will appear in the Book of Psalms, throughout the Psalter. This will help them to get better in their memory what the themes are and will make them more conscious of them as they read the Psalms. Also, it will save you having to repeat what each theme is; you may simply refer to it by number, for instance, "Theme 4," or "The 12th theme," etc.

Since each psalm may deal with many themes and the interweaving of the themes in one psalm is often important to see, we will not try to deal with all of the psalms covered in any one lesson. Rather, we are suggesting that you concentrate on a few psalms for each of the remaining 8 lessons, and that you be selective, so that the psalms you choose illustrate specific themes. That way you can cover all of the themes by the end of the quarter of lessons, and you will not be trying to cover each theme in each lesson or all of the psalms studied in any one lesson.

Below, we will suggest the themes to focus upon in this lesson. The themes chosen are themes which occur in several of the psalms covered in the discussion of the content, in the student's book.

We suggest that you feature two themes in this lesson: #7 and #18.

We suggest that you concentrate on Psalms 4,10, and 14, for your study of Theme 7 and on Psalms 16,20, and 21 for your study of Theme 18.

Part One: Theme 7 (Pss. 4,10,14).

Remind them that Theme 7 deals with the vanity of the plans of the unrighteous (Ps. 2:1). In the three psalms at which we are looking, we note this theme in 4:2; 10:2,15,16; and 14:1-3.

You can point out that it is the characteristic of men to love vanity (4:2) and to seek after what is not true. The wicked may plot against God and His people, but their plans will be their own undoing (10:2). God will not let them go until He has punished every one of them (10:15). Man's vanity against God leads him even to deny that there is a God (14:1). But all the time, the God they deny is watching them, to deal with them according to their corrupt vanity (14:2).

Note that the psalmist feels the ridicule of these vain persons (4:6) but acknowledges the evidence of God's mercy in his life, since, in the face of their ridicule, he can still rejoice (4:7-8). He is thus like Habakkuk. In accord with God's promise to overthrow the wicked, the psalmist

can pray for their overthrow (10:15) and earnestly long for the refuge from them in his Lord (14:7). He wants his own experience of joy in the midst of tribulation to be the common experience of all of God's people (compare 14:7 and 4:7,8).

Lead the class in a discussion of how knowledge of this theme helps us to understand and react to a hostile world in which we live, maintaining both joy and peace.

Part Two: Theme 18 (Pss. 16,20,21).

Theme 18 deals with the blessings of those who take refuge in the Lord. Show how this relates closely to Theme 7, studied above.

In Psalm 16, the psalmist declares that he has taken refuge in the Lord (16:1). He looks to no alternative other than the Lord as his Savior (v. 2). He expresses the conviction that this is so of all the saints (v. 3). We can see his faith in his certainty that when God is with him, he will not be moved (16:8). Remind them that this psalm is applied to the resurrection of Christ (16:10; Acts 2:31).

In Psalms 20 and 21, he shows that taking refuge in the Lord means assurance that the Lord will always be there, for the saint, in times of trouble (20:1-3).

Psalm 21 expands on the meaning of blessedness for those who take refuge in God (21:6-8).

In the two themes dealt with here, we see the tension between the attackers and mockers of God's children and those children of God who must endure such hostility. Help the class to reflect on what this means for them in today's world. Be prepared with some examples of how believers today may be harassed by unbelievers in business and social contexts and how the believer should behave under fire.

LESSON SIX

Introduction to the Lesson:

This lesson will focus upon the 3rd and 4th themes, in the manner done above.

Part One: Theme 3 (Pss. 24,25,26).

Theme 3 is concerned with the believer's life, perseverance, and prosperity, all of which are dealt with in the above noted Psalms. Since these three psalms are in succession, it will be easy to concentrate on them in the first part of the lesson.

Psalm 24 clearly describes the righteous in terms of his life and nature. He is clean and pure, not false or proud (24:3,4). This illustrates what is meant by a changed heart, for no natural man can be described in this way. Thus

cleanness and purity of heart, honesty and truth in word and deed are the fruits generated in the life of God's child. This stresses Jeremiah's point that the heart is where the issues really are.

Psalms 25 shows the child of God hungering and thirsting for God's truth (25:4,5) and relying on God's mercy in his dealings with the righteous. Verse 12 leaves no doubt that God's man is one instructed by the Lord so that he has learned to fear (respect, revere) the Lord in all of his life (25:12-15).

Psalms 26 develops the concept of the fruit of the righteous life. He is one who trusts without wavering, whose life can be examined by God and please Him (26:1-3). It is a life that is busy about the Lord's work, loving God's house and His people (26:6-8).

Remind them of the New Testament teachings about the fruits of the Spirit, as found in Galatians 5:22-23, and have them compare those fruits with what we find in these psalms.

Lead the class into a discussion of the fruits as described by the psalmist and how we ought to cultivate them in our own lives or test our own lives by them.

Part Two: Theme 4 (Pss. 35,37).

This theme is concerned with the opposite character and nature of the unrighteous, as he is contrasted with the righteous. By contrast, he is lifeless and therefore fruitless, in God's sight (though they need to remember that he may be praised by men, who do not look for the fruits which God desires to see in a man).

The psalmist describes the unrighteous as in Psalm 1, chaff (35:5). Their life is called "dark" and "slippery", words that further connote the instability of their lives (35:6).

The writer had experiences like Job (35:11 and following). The words of the unrighteous reflect their instability for they are words of hostility and deceit.

In Psalm 37, we find the writer comforting and assuring himself by remembering that though the unrighteous may afflict the righteous, they are unstable in all their ways and their persecutions will not last (37:1,2). The righteous can take comfort, legitimately, in the knowledge that the sin and misery of this world will one day pass away and all unrighteous ones will be removed (37:2,9,10,20,35-38).

Stress the truth that to ignore this fact can cause the righteous to do wrong, by leading him to compromise with evil persons to alleviate his present sorrow (37:8).

The two themes taken together show the great contrast between the righteous and the unrighteous and the importance of the believer in the Lord remembering that difference, lest he lose sight of who he is and who his enemy is.

Help the class to reflect on this clear idea in God's Word: there really are just two kinds of people, worlds apart spiritually. Let them think of some ways in which the world's view of mankind is just the opposite: 'there is some good in all men,' "we are all alike at heart," etc.

LESSON SEVEN

Introduction to the Lesson:

This lesson will look at the three themes: 8,11, and 15. Point out that Theme 11 is implied throughout the Psalter, but is less developed in the Psalter than any of the others, perhaps because it is so clearly and fully developed in the prophets.

Part One: Theme 8 (Pss. 41,54,55,59).

Theme 8 pertains to the hostility of the unrighteous toward God and His children. We are made aware in these psalms of the oppression of God's children in the world. They feel the brunt of man's hatred of God. In Psalm 41, the psalmist speaks of those who oppose him as "my enemies" (v. 5). They want him dead and associate everything that is wrong in the world with him (vs. 6-8). He even recognizes some among them who claimed to be his friends (v. 9).

In Psalm 54, again, this righteous one speaks of those who seek after his soul because they do not honor God (54:3). It is important for us to understand that the psalmist, far from being paranoid, is speaking of real enemies. They are his enemies because they are God's enemies. It is in this context, therefore, that he can pray for their overthrow. They are rejected by God; therefore, he cannot accept them as his friends.

In Psalm 55, we see the heart of God's child, as he shows sensitivity to the hostilities of men against his God (55:8-11). Again, he has come to be aware that even from among those whom he counted as trustworthy some have risen to oppose God and thus become his enemies (vs. 12-14). Again, we note that they are first God's enemies, then his (v. 19).

By the use of Psalm 59, you can show once more that the psalmist prays for their overthrow because of their enmity against God and His children. To pray otherwise would be to betray his Lord (59:5 and following).

In connection with this section, it is well to hold a discussion of our sensitivity to the presence of our enemies today. Christians often fail to relate to the psalmist and his battle with enemies of God and therefore fail to recognize their enemies (all who reject the gospel). This failure can be harmful to us and to the church in which we serve.

Part Two: Theme 11 (Pss. 46:6-9; 52:1).

This theme deals with the ultimate judgment of God against the nations of the world. As we noted above, this theme is not the major theme of any particular psalm, though it is implied throughout the Psalter. This particular theme is more fully developed in the messages of the prophets, as we have seen.

In Psalm 46, the psalmist is awed by the power and sovereignty of God, as He overthrows the nations that oppose Him. The desolations on earth and the cities fallen and faded in glory testify to God's sure judgment, even as the Book of Revelation also testifies.

Psalm 52:1,5 are a stinging rebuke to any man who glories in his own might and exalts himself above God. He will surely be destroyed, even as the nations that plot against God will fall.

Part Three: Theme 15 (Pss. 44,58).

This theme pertains to the triumph of God's King (the Christ, His Son) over the nations. Therefore, we can see the relationship among the three themes studied here. We can see how it is that the righteous are right in praying for the overthrow of their enemies before God.

The psalmist recognizes the favor that the Lord has shown to his people in dealing with the nations (44:2). He, therefore, prays to the Lord to deliver His people and to defeat the enemy. He recognizes that the victory is God's and not by the strength of men (44:4-8). And even when temporarily put to flight and afflicted, the psalmist continues to look to the Lord to put down the nations, which He has promised to do (44:9-26).

Therefore, the writer of Psalms 58 is able to rejoice in the victory of God over each nation, for by that victory, praised by the believers, God is glorified and His presence and activity on earth are known to the whole world (58:11).

From this, you can lead the group into a discussion of our responsibility today to interpret for the world what is happening, so that men — even unbelievers — will know that there is a God at work; and though they will not believe in Him, at least they will learn to tremble before Him. Ask how many in the class have ever had a discussion with another, outside the church, concerning the evidence of the activity and sovereignty of God in the world today.

LESSON EIGHT

Introduction to the Lesson:

In this lesson, our focus will be on themes 14 and 16. Both pertain to the activity of the King of God's Kingdom, the Christ.

Part One: Theme 14 (Pss. 65,68).

Theme 14 dwells on the inheritance of the Great King: the nations of the world. This theme is closely related to the words of Jesus at the end of His earthly ministry, as He stood to command His soldiers (believers) to go out into all the nations to claim His people, for whom He had died (Matt. 28:18-20).

The psalmist praises God for this fact: that He chooses and causes a people to come to Him from all the earth. They are the inheritance of the Christ, and He will claim His full inheritance from among the nations. The wonder of God's goodness particularly attracts the writer's attention — the wonder that the Infinite and All-powerful God would choose a people from among the sinners of the world to be redeemed and made ready to come into His presence, to spend eternity with Him (65:1-4)!

Like Habakkuk, the psalmist is able to see the Lord as One Who marches through the nations, for His people (68:7). He goes to claim His inheritance (v. 9).

Here, as the teacher, you could lead a discussion of our awareness that we have been called God's inheritance. So often our attention is on what we will inherit in heaven, but we forget or lose sight of the fact that God eagerly anticipates us as His inheritance. How unworthy we are of such an honor!

Part Two: Theme 16 (Pss. 71,75).

The psalmist, unlike Jonah who could not relate his own personal salvation at the hands of the Lord to the needs of others, is able to relate God's rescue of him from his enemies to the needs of others around him for the Lord's saving power (Ps. 71:1-7). Therefore, in accord with Theme 16 (the call to hear the King), he determines to praise the Lord before others (v. 8,14-18). Indeed, he determines that he shall talk of nothing else than the glory and righteousness of his God (vs. 22-24).

In Psalm 75, he shows that he is prepared to go boldly before his enemies and proclaim to them God as Judge and Lord (vs. 4 and following).

From these two themes, you can lead the class into a discussion of the relationship between God's goodness, shown to us in choosing us to be His forever, and our obligation now, in the world, boldly to represent Him among men — speaking on His behalf before even the enemies of God, not fearing our enemies, but desiring to praise Him before the nations of the world. Discuss ways in which believers can support one another better in this endeavor.

LESSON NINE

Introduction to the Lesson:

Point out to the class that Theme 2, one of the themes to be studied today, is the most fully developed of the themes, dealing with the delight of the believer in studying and meditating on God's Word. This is so because the entire Psalter is, in reality, a meditation on God's revealed truth and its effect in the life of the believer.

The other theme to be studied, 9, is concerned with the rebellion of the unrighteous against God.

Part One: Theme 2 (Pss. 77,78,80,81, 85,86,88).

There are many psalms dealing with Theme 2, not only in this particular lesson, but throughout the Psalter. It would not be inaccurate to say that every psalm deals with this theme either directly or indirectly.

Remind the class that those psalms which deal with the discipline and chastisement of the believer belong in this category, for they illustrate how God deals with His children through their meditation on His Word. If they did not study the Word, they would not be brought under conviction by it and thus not be disciplined, and as the writer of Hebrews says, they would be not sons of God but bastards (Heb. 12:4-11).

In Psalm 77, we see the believer under discipline. It is clearly agonizing to him as he feels the heavy hand of the Lord, even as it was for David (vs. 1-9). Yet, the believer, though his knowledge of the Lord is His Word, is able to wait for God's mercy and meditate on all that he has learned (vs. 10-12).

Psalm 78, illustrates the fruits of meditation, as the psalmist reviews God's dealings with His people in the past and learns lessons from how they behaved and how God dealt with Israel, to know both the severity and the mercy of his God. All of this shows how God's children grow in understanding and learn to become not just hearers of the Word but doers also (responding positively to what they have learned). Compare Psalm 81 which also reviews lessons of history.

Likewise, in Psalm 80, we detect the psalmist's concern for God's discipline, as he sees that discipline not just against him but also against the whole people, and pleads for the mercy of God.

Psalm 84 is a meditation of a different order. He is here simply exulting in the goodness and mercy of the Lord in his own life. He dwells on the blessings of those who have taken refuge in the Lord. It is meditation that leads to a thankful heart.

In Psalm 85, once again, the writer is recognizing,

through God's Word, how the Lord has turned His people back to Him. He sees that God's mercy, peace, and truth prevail in His dealings with Israel, and he rejoices in it.

Psalm 86 shows how meditation on the Word leads to prayers that are lifted in accord with what God has taught in His Word (86:6-11). He understands that through God's Word his own life is changed for the good.

Finally, in Psalm 88, once more we see the psalmist under discipline; much of what he says is similar to Jonah's prayer in the belly of the great fish which God had prepared (compare Jon. 2).

It would be well to lead the class to think of the benefits of study and meditation on God's Word and to ask them to testify of blessed times they have had and also of chastening from God which they have felt as they studied His Word. Point to II Timothy 3:16,17, which notes both the chastening and the building up that comes from a study of God's Word.

Part Two: Theme 9 (Ps. 83).

This theme pertains to the rebellion of the unrighteous against God. One psalm will suffice to illustrate that the rebellions of the enemies of God are motivated by a hate in their hearts (v. 2). Such rebellion is expressed in their attempts to deceive and take advantage of His children (vs. 3 and following).

Believers must never forget, as the psalmist shows us, that the intent of the unrighteous is to destroy from among men the very name of the people of God (v. 4). Their intent is to gather all nations against God's people (83: vs. 5 and following).

Stress to the class the importance of our grasping this as we note, today, efforts in the world to unite men on every level — socially, economically, politically, etc. But men united with men will inevitably be turned against God's people on earth who cannot take part in the counsels of the ungodly. Like the psalmist, we must pray for the Lord to frustrate their plans against His Kingdom on earth (vs. 12-17), remembering that the reason we wish them to be frustrated is that they may learn that only God is sovereign over the earth and that the answers to men's problems can be answered and met only by God (v. 18).

Have the class to consider various peace efforts among men today and to analyze them to note whether they seek God's will or His glory in what they do.

LESSON TEN

Introduction to the Lesson:

This lesson will cover Themes 10 and 17.

Part One: Theme 10 (Pss. 94,102).

Theme 10 is concerned with God's view of the vain purposes of men. It stresses the fact that God is not worried about what men do against Him. God's view is expressed in Psalm 2 by the words, "God will laugh." But this does not mean that God finds it funny. Laughter can also express the response of utter rejection, as it does in this case. God utterly rejects all the plots of men. He can handle rebellious men, and He wants them to know this.

In Psalm 94, the psalmist recognizes the Lord as the One to whom vengeance belongs. We need to keep in mind that the righteous child of God never plots vengeance against his enemies. He always leaves that in the hands of the Lord. He simply looks to God to handle the situation that is too great for him (94:1 and following).

In this psalm, we see the writer developing God's outlook on his enemies, so that he is not intimidated by them at all. In fact, he warns them that they will have to deal with his God (94:8-11). He understands that only the Lord stands between him and his enemies. But this knowledge is enough to give him boldness against them (vs. 16 and following).

Psalm 102 well illustrates what the knowledge of God's attitude toward His enemies can do to strengthen the believer. At first, the writer is dismayed by his enemies (102:1-11), but then he remembers who his Lord is and takes great comfort that He is the true champion; therefore, the righteous need not fear the threats and intimidations of others (vs. 12 and following).

Under this theme, be sure that the class considers and discusses the importance of our gaining God's perspective of what is going on in the world today, through His Word, lest we be overcome by what men see and behave as those who have no hope or Savior.

Part Two: Theme 17 (Pss. 95,96,98,100).

Theme 17 is the call to others to make their peace (vs. 6-11).

In Psalm 96, he calls the hearers to learn to praise God and enlists others with him to declare God's glory among the nations (a clear call to proclaim the gospel, v. 3). He wants the world to hear that the Lord is King and that ultimately all will have to give an accounting to Him (vs. 9,10).

In Psalm 98, as in Psalm 19, he affirms that, indeed, all the nations of the earth have already seen the glory and salvation of the Lord; therefore, he calls on them to praise Him and acknowledge Him before He comes in judgment (v. 9).

Psalm 100, which is more familiar to us, likewise calls on others to serve the Lord and to know Him, so that they long to come into His presence.

In the study of these two themes, help the class to see that closely related with our knowledge of God's view of the vain efforts of men is the responsibility to proclaim the truth about Him among the nations (a strong missionary call). Relate this to Jesus' call to us all to be His witnesses in the world (Acts 1:8).

LESSON ELEVEN

Introduction to the Lesson:

In this lesson our focus will be on themes 5 and 13.

Part One: Theme 5 (Ps. 109).

Theme 5 tells of the unacceptability of the unrighteous in God's eyes. In Psalm 109, this is the basic thrust of the psalmist. The prayer of the psalmist reflects his knowledge that the unrighteous are not acceptable to God, and he prays accordingly that no righteous man may ever enter into God's presence. He is well acquainted with the nature of the wicked (vs. 17 and following).

Yet, by contrast, he is assured of the acceptability of those who have taken refuge in the Lord (the righteous; vs. 21 and following). Therefore, he is bold to look to God for help while he knows that God will not help the wicked.

Theme 5, as we have shown, clearly recognizes the unacceptability of the unrighteous before God and should lead the righteous to see that neither can he accept them as his friends, so long as they remain in the state of unrighteousness. To accept those whom the Lord has rejected would be to rebel against the Lord. This does not mean that he cannot labor for their conversion and testify to them of God's truth, but he must not become their partner in any sense.

This should lead to a discussion in class of how we do deal with our enemies — how we oppose them and yet seek to lead them to the Lord.

Part Two: Theme 13 (Pss. 110,113,114, 118).

This theme focuses on the King and His Kingdom. It contrasts the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

Psalm 110 is a well-known celebration of the Kingship of Jesus Christ, as it is applied in the New Testament (v. 1). The King is likened to Melchizedek and declared to be the judge of all the peoples of the earth (v. 6). The class should be aware of the significance of Christ's invasion of the kingdoms of men (Satan's domain) to declare war on Satan on earth, until Satan is finally defeated on earth as he has been already, in heaven (see Rev. 12).

Psalm 113 celebrates the exaltation of the Lord as King and gives to us an additional significance for believers: that they are raised up with the King to rule with Him (113:4-8). Help the class to an increasing awareness that we do reign with Christ on earth. He has given to His people the keys of the Kingdom, by which they do rule on earth, as they proclaim the message of the Kingdom and the gospel of salvation. As they do, those who are born again are loosed from the clutch of Satan, who is helpless to hold them any longer in his control.

Psalm 114 rightly charges the whole earth to tremble, now that the Lord has established His kingdom among men. All will ultimately have to face the Lord (vs. 7-8).

In the 118th Psalm, the writer celebrates the glory and triumph of the Christ. He rejoices that God has brought about the day of Christ's triumph, a day in which believers will be glad (vs. 22 and following).

The class could profitably discuss how our knowledge that we are sons of the King of heaven and earth should affect us on earth, not making us vainly proud but bold and unwavering in our proclamation of the gospel.

LESSON TWELVE

Introduction to the Lesson:

In this final study in the content of Psalms, we will be taking the remaining themes: 1,6, and 12.

Part One: Theme 1 (Pss. 123,141).

Theme 1 is concerned with the believers' stand in a sinful world. In Psalm 123, the writer expresses the difficulty of the child of God in standing in the world for His Lord. Nevertheless, he shows that he has the heart of a saint, for his soul is grieved with all the sin, scoffing, and contempt that he sees among the sons of men on earth. He, as Jesus taught all Christians to do, truly mourns over the sin of the world; and for that he is blessed (vs. 3,4).

Psalm 341 expresses again the distress of the saint as he has to live in a sinful world, and yet is sensitive to the will of God. He knows the difficulty of the stand and therefore asks the Lord to keep his heart from going after what is evil and after the wicked practices of the world (vs. 3,4). Verse 4 reminds us of Daniel and his companions, set off in a hostile environment and seeking to glorify their Lord there. Again, in verse 9, he prays for the Lord to keep him from those hidden snares that men lay to entrap the righteous in their sins.

From this, lead into a discussion of our sensitivity today toward the evil that we see all around us. Does it truly grieve us or have we been ensnared by it? Get them to illustrate some tempting evils that Christians might become involved in.

Part Two: Theme 6 (Pss. 125,140).

This theme stresses the ultimate destinies of the two kinds of people on earth: the righteous and the unrighteous, in reflection of what was said in Psalm 1:6.

Psalm 125, begins by describing the destiny of the righteous: they will abide forever, secure from wickedness (vs. 1-3). In contrast, the wicked will be led away from the righteous. Here, the words "lead forth" obviously mean into punishment (v.5).

In Psalm 140, the knowledge of the destinies of the two kinds of people on earth leads the psalmist to pray for God's protection, as he lives for the Lord in the world, and to pray for the ultimate overthrow of those who are wicked in God's sight.

Help the class to see that the psalmist never confuses the righteous and the wicked and that we, also, must never be confused in our minds about the reality either of heaven, the destiny of God's people, or the reality of hell, the sure destiny of those who do not believe.

Part Three: Theme 12 (Pss. 122,132).

This final theme of our study pertains to God's counter-purpose to the unrighteous world. It gives us knowledge to deal with a world that is constantly in rebellion against God's good purpose for His people.

Psalm 122, for example, calls on all believers to pray and keep on praying for what God has promised: the blessings on His people and their city (ultimately the New Jerusalem), as it is manifest in the world by the church. The psalmist is glad to have, as refuge in the world, a house where God's people gather. Stress the importance of this for believers today. Have them discuss the value of worshipping with God's people on the Lord's Day rather than staying home and reading the Bible or watching a worship service on TV.

Again, in Psalm 132, the writer rejoices that God has chosen Zion, the people of God on earth, and will work through them, in spite of what the world may plot or design. The world is enamored with its own cities; but God's people must know and never forget that there is but one lasting city, the city of God, which will endure when all the cities of this earth have been destroyed. Therefore, our hope is in the heavenly city, that place God has prepared for His own, of which we are already the citizens, through faith in Jesus Christ.

LESSON THIRTEEN

For our review lesson, we would suggest that the teacher place all 18 themes on the board once again, or

have them copied on paper which can be given to each member of the class.

Then, after reminding them that many of the psalms we have studied are prayers of God's Old Testament saints, suggest that the class give the entire class time to prayer, being guided by the themes, as to what they should pray for. Encourage various members to pray, one at a time, according to the order of the themes, and one theme per prayer. They should pray in the light of the themes studied, which surely concern God, and in the light of what we have learned about each theme.

This will show the class one more practical significance of the study in the Psalter: to learn to be better prayers.