05

DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

ADULTS

LEADER GUIDE

FALL | 2025

theGOSPELPROJECT.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

WE NEED THE TRUE KING

The last verse in the book of Judges—a book that chronicles the downward spiral of disobedience of those who were called to be radically different as the people of God—is one of the most depressing verses in the Bible: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judges 21:25). Is this not a fitting definition of sin? In this one verse, we see the prideful root of self-lordship, self-exaltation, and self-determination at the core of all our rebellion. We are, in our own minds, the gods of our own universe; we choose whatever is right and wrong for ourselves, and anything that imposes some authority over us other than our own autonomous minds, hearts, and desires is a constraint that must be thrown off.

As sinners, we are like the Israelites of old, convinced of our own truth, our own ideas, and our own wisdom. Our sin has blinded us to what is truly good and right, and it's precisely because of this blindness that we need a true king.

We need a king who tells us the truth, guides us with justice, and leads us in righteousness—a king who can open our eyes to these things and more. Because we are enslaved by sin, the true king must not only be our ruler but also our rescuer.

In Jesus, we find this King—the One before whom every knee will bow and whose greatness every tongue will eventually confess. In Jesus, the true King has come. He is the King of love as well as the King of power. In Jesus, and in Him alone, will we finally find all our desires for peace, security, and wholeness met.

We must then acknowledge that every other king we seek to enthrone is only a substitute for Jesus. It is far better for us to trust in Jesus, not only as our rescuer but also as our ruler, and to acknowledge that all authority has been given to Him.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

CONTENTS

From Line Leader to Class Monitor 6
The Gospel Project Scope and Sequence 8
How to Use the Leader Guide 12
Division and Defiance 16
The Prophet Elijah 40
Jonah: His Life and Times 74
The Doctrine of God's Judgment 138
3 Reasons We Don't Share the Gospel 160
The Discipline of Evangelism 162

UNIT 13: DIVISIONS

SUGGESTED FOR THE WEEK OF			
	Memory Verse		19
Sept. 7	Session 1	**A Divided Kingdom** (1 Kings 12)	20
Sept. 14	Session 2	**Divided Kings** (1 Kings 12–14)	30
Sept. 21	Session 3	**A Divided People** (1 Kings 18)	42
Sept. 28	Session 4	**A Divided Response** (1 Kings 21)	52

UNIT 14: RENEWAL

	Memory Verse		63
Oct. 5	Session 1	**Resurrection** (2 Kings 4)	64
Oct. 12	Session 2	**Repentance** (Jonah)	76
Oct. 19	Session 3	**Reconciliation** (Hosea)	86
Oct. 26	Session 4	**Retribution** (2 Kings 17)	96

UNIT 15: DECLINE

	Memory Verses		107
Nov. 2	Session 1	**God's People Worshiped** (2 Kings 18–23)	108
Nov. 9	Session 2	**God's Prophets Warned** (Micah)	118
Nov. 16	Session 3	**God's Covenant Renewed** (Jeremiah 17; 31)	128
Nov. 23	Session 4	**God's Nation Fell** (2 Chronicles 36)	140
Nov. 30	Session 5	**God's Revival Promised** (Ezekiel 37)	150

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

THE EDITOR

Our lives are a series of decisions and choices we make that can result in positive or negative consequences. If we try to base these decisions on our own thoughts and morality, we will soon realize that it will lead to pitfalls in life. That's why we need God, His Word, His Spirit, and His people to help us and teach us the way toward life. But even with those things, we may choose not to listen and still choose our own prideful ways.

This is as true of us as it was of God's people of old, the Israelites. Though God sent prophets to point them toward the right path, the Israelites chose their own path many times, deciding to do evil in the Lord's sight. The few that were faithful, from kings to commoners, found joy in the Lord and His Word. But those who weren't found that they made their own destructive paths. And in the end, the split kingdom of Israel and Judah both failed to be faithful to the Lord and both became captive to their enemies.

Through it all though, God's mercy and compassion still overcame. God did not destroy them completely as they deserved, but He sent prophets to let them know a day of hope was coming, a day when a Savior would come and lead and guide them and take away their sins. God would restore and refresh His people, and they would follow Him toward life everlasting.

These prophets were pointing to Jesus, the Messiah. He is the hope that we all need. He took on our sin and made atonement, which restored our relationship with the Father. He put His Spirit in us and established a new covenant that we would have life with His presence forevermore. Praise be to God!

Y Bonesteele
Team Leader
The Gospel Project for Adults

Scan this QR code to PROVIDE FEEDBACK of your experience with The Gospel Project for Adults materials.

The Gospel Project®
Adult Leader Guide
Fall 2025
Volume 2, Number 1

Y Bonesteele
Team Leader

Daniel Davis
Content Editor

Rachel Myrick
Content and Production Editor

Darin Clark
Design Team Leader

Chad Hunter
Contributing Graphic Designer

T. J. Norris
Contributing Illustrator

Dwayne McCrary
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

John Paul Basham
Director, Adult Ministry

Send questions/comments by email to TGP.adults@lifeway.com or mail to Team Leader, *The Gospel Project: Adult Leader Guide*, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707.

Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project®: Adult Leader Guide (ISSN 2163-0917; Item 005438061) is published quarterly by Lifeway Christian Resources, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher.

For ordering or inquiries including Autoship, visit Lifeway.com, call 1.800.458.2772, write Lifeway Resources Customer Service, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707, or fax 615.251.5933. For address changes, email subscribe@lifeway.com. For bulk shipments mailed quarterly to one address, visit Lifeway.com/Autoship, email orderentry@Lifeway.com, or write to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

THE WRITERS

PERSONAL PREPARATION

Charron Brown
(Unit 13, Sessions 1-4)

Charron has a Master of Arts in Bible Teaching from Columbia International University. She has taught the Bible to nearly every age as a preschool teacher, as a youth group volunteer, Sunday School teacher, and small group leader.

Collin G. Whitney
(Unit 14, Sessions 1-4)

Collin serves as Discipleship Pastor at Faith Baptist in Youngsville, North Carolina. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Pastoral Theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He loves trying new restaurants with his wife, Anna, and watching movies with his daughters, Libby and Lottie.

Allyson Howell
(Unit 15, Sessions 1-5)

Allyson is the Communications Director for a non-profit organization. She holds an MDiv from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Allyson has served in churches through women's ministry, worship ministry, and is a writer and editor of many topics. She is married to Randy.

GROUP EXPERIENCE

Jim Gantenbein
(Unit 13, Sessions 1-4)

Jim is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He retired in November 2022 after more than thirty-one years of ministry, including over sixteen years as a Senior Pastor. Jim and Cathy have been married over fifty-one years and live in Port Orchard, Washington.

Lexie Hood
(Unit 14, Sessions 1-4)

Lexie received her MA in Christian Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. She resides in East Texas with her husband and son. Lexie is a former Preschool and Children's Minister. She now stays at home with her son while serving with the Children's Team of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

Leslie Hudson
(Unit 15, Sessions 1-5)

Leslie worships with her family at First Baptist in Dickson, Tennessee. She teaches high school youth Sunday School, plays in the praise band, and is active in women's ministry. She's studying the Minor Prophets in her quiet time this year, and she's loving the challenge.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

FROM LINE LEADER TO CLASS MONITOR

By Dwayne McCrary

Being the class line leader as a preschooler was a highlight for most of us. But as we got older, being line leader called for more tact especially when being line leader included monitoring the class and maintaining order. We wanted to do a good job for the teacher, but we also wanted people to play with us on the playground and still sit with us at lunch. Gaining the teacher's trust without appearing to be the class favorite was an even greater challenge. And we understood the ramifications of telling on a classmate if we rode on the same bus or walked the same path home. We had to be the eyes and ears of the teacher while also being trustworthy and learning to communicate with our classmates.

Those same characteristics are important for us in the role of a Bible study leader.

EYES AND EARS

Just like the teacher could not be in two places at once or see everything going on in the class, neither can the church staff and leaders be everywhere or see everything going on in the church. We can help them by being their eyes and ears. This begins with prayer requests.

Most prayer requests shared are an expression of a need and reveal the values of a person. Time does not permit for requests to be shared in a worship setting. Imagine what it would be like if your pastor took time this Sunday to go row by row and collect prayer requests from each person present. Whatever we had planned for lunch would now be for supper. However, individuals can share requests in a Bible study group, and we can take the time to pray for that need specifically.

We also become aware of needs that need to be addressed beyond saying a prayer. Our group may then be able to mobilize and address the need or formulate a plan for how a need may be met. We may need to bring the discovered need to the attention of a church leader, who can then connect us with other resources and people who can help as well.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

One of the roles we play as the group leader is maintaining a focus on reaching those far from God.

HONESTY AND TRUST

Certain students were relied on more than others when it came to being class monitor. Much of that depended upon whom the teacher could trust. Being class monitor required honesty with the teacher. If that honesty was broken, our turn to be class monitor again could be a distant hope. But that trust extended to the class as well. Some classmates were preferred over others not because they were lenient but because they were fair. Everyone was given the same treatment.

As Bible study leaders, our church leaders trust us, but so do our group members. Honesty and fairness are still valued just like they were for the class monitor. When we are asked by church leaders about how our group is going, we can be honest and avoid making things look better or worse than they are. If we are not fair, then decisions and plans made by the leaders may be doomed from the get-go.

Our group also trusts us to be fair to them. When they have a comment or question, they should expect us to hear them out and help them find an answer. They also expect us to value their thoughts as much as we value ours and the thoughts or others in the group. We want to place Scripture ahead of our opinions but that does not negate the reasons a person may have for believing what they believe. We can challenge beliefs in a way that fosters trust by asking questions and pointing them to Bible passages for them to consider in their formation and reformation of their personal beliefs.

CARE AND COMMUNICATION

Being the eyes and ears and maintaining trust require communication skills. The class monitor needs to be able to express what needs to be expressed to the teacher and to the class they are monitoring. As Bible study leaders, we need to develop those same kinds of skills.

When a need is expressed in the group, how we communicate to others outside the group takes some thought. For example, if a person expresses frustration with their job and some of his supervisors are also in the church but not in the group, how that request gets stated for people outside the group matters. "John is asking God to help him better represent Christ in his work" may be the best way to communicate the request without putting John in a compromised position with his supervisors if they happened to see the request.

When church leaders approach us about the potential of starting a new group so the church can more effectively reach the community, we can help the group understand the strategy and role they can play in reaching people who are not involved in a Bible study group. We become the voice for the church leader, helping them accomplish the tasks God has called them to carry.

When we had opportunities to be line leader and class monitor in our younger years, we probably did not realize how those experience and skills would help us be an effective Bible study leader. Being the eyes and ears, building trust, and finding ways to communicate were essential then and they are essential for us now.

Dwayne McCrary is the manager of the Adult Ongoing Bible Study team at Lifeway.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The Gospel Project for Adults aspires to point to the gospel of Jesus Christ through weekly group Bible studies and additional resources that show how God's plan of redemption unfolds throughout all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. This curriculum provides theological yet practical studies that immerse your group in the STORY of the gospel, helping to develop a gospel CULTURE that leads to gospel MISSION.

GOSPEL STORY

Our aim is to help people see the storyline of Scripture, the thread from the beginning to end, that weaves God's plan to rescue and redeem His creation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL CULTURE

Our hope is that the message of the gospel saturates our understanding of Christ, increasing our joy in Him, helping doubters become believers who become declarers of the gospel.

GOSPEL MISSION

Our desire is to empower believers to live on mission, declaring the good news of the gospel in word and deed for God's glory and the growth of His kingdom.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

YEAR 1

VOL 01:
CREATION AND COVENANT

(Genesis; Job)
Fall 2024
Unit 01: Foundations
Unit 02: God's Promises
Unit 03: Struggles of Faith

VOL 02:
LAW AND LIFE

(Exodus–Deuteronomy)
Winter 2024–25
Unit 04: God's Miraculous Work
Unit 05: God's Character
Unit 06: Humanity's Selfishness

VOL 03:
LAND AND LOSS

(Joshua–1 Samuel)
Spring 2025
Unit 07: God Is for His People
Unit 08: God Delivers His People
Unit 09: God Cares for His People

VOL 04:
FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM

(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)
Summer 2025
Unit 10: The Foolishness of God's People
Unit 11: Everything Belongs to the Lord
Unit 12: The Need for Wisdom

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

YEAR 2

VOL 05:
DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

(1 Kings–2 Chronicles; The Prophets)
Fall 2025
Unit 13: Divisions
Unit 14: Renewal
Unit 15: Decline

VOL 06:
PROPHETS AND PROVISION

(The Prophets; Ezra–Esther)
Winter 2025–26
Unit 16: God in the Exile
Unit 17: God in the Restoration
Unit 18: God in the Return

VOL 07:
THE SON HAS COME

(The Gospels)
Spring 2026
Unit 19: The Arrival
Unit 20: The Preparation
Unit 21: The Ministry

VOL 08:
THE SON HAS AUTHORITY

(The Gospels)
Summer 2026
Unit 22: Responses to Jesus
Unit 23: The Way of Jesus
Unit 24: The Teachings of Jesus

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

YEAR 3

VOL 09:
THE SON HAS TRUTH

(The Gospels)
Fall 2026
Unit 25: The Truth of His Power
Unit 26: The Truth of His Actions
Unit 27: The Truth of His Kingdom

VOL 10:
THE SON HAS RISEN

(The Gospels; Acts)
Winter 2026–27
Unit 28: The Final Days
Unit 29: Post-Resurrection
Unit 30: The Gospel Spreads

VOL 11:
THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION

(Acts; The Epistles)
Spring 2027
Unit 31: Sharing Truths of the Mission
Unit 32: Living Out the Mission
Unit 33: Christ Focuses Our Mission

VOL 12:
THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE

(The Epistles; Revelation)
Summer 2027
Unit 34: We Are in Christ
Unit 35: We Are Citizens of Heaven
Unit 36: Jesus

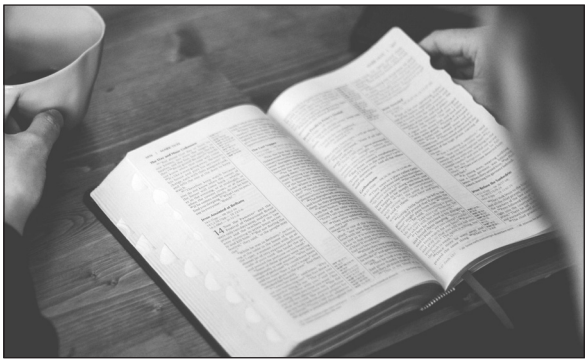
© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

HOW TO USE THE LEADER GUIDE

The Leader Guide is an important tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here's how to make the most of your time with it:

1) READ THE WORD DAILY

Begin each week by reading the Scriptures according to the Daily Readings. These Bible readings will help you mentally and spiritually prepare for the group experience each week while also building healthy Bible study habits for personal growth. The daily readings will help you understand the context of the Bible story for each week's session and fill in the gaps between sessions. The weekly psalm reading will help you think worshipfully and prayerfully about the story's place in the greater redemptive narrative of the Bible. And the timeline will give you a visual perspective so you can place the Bible story in the larger context of the Bible's storyline.



- ***Daily Readings***
- ***Chronological Timeline***

TIMELINE

Solomon Marries Foreign Women, Turns to Idolatry, and Is Disciplined by the Lord (1 Kings 11)

Rehoboam Accepts Foolish Advice: the Kingdom Is Divided (1 Kings 12)

SESSION STUDY: **Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam Lead Their Nations in Idolatry (1 Kings 12–14)**

Wicked Ahab Becomes King in Israel (1 Kings 16)

The Prophet Elijah Confronts Ahab (1 Kings 17–21)

Daily Readings

- **Day 1:** 1 Kings 12:25–14:20
- **Day 2:** 1 Kings 14:21–15:24
- **Day 3:** 1 Kings 15:25–16:34
- **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 11:5–14:1
- **Day 5:** 2 Chronicles 14:2–16:14
- **Day 6:** Psalm 135

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

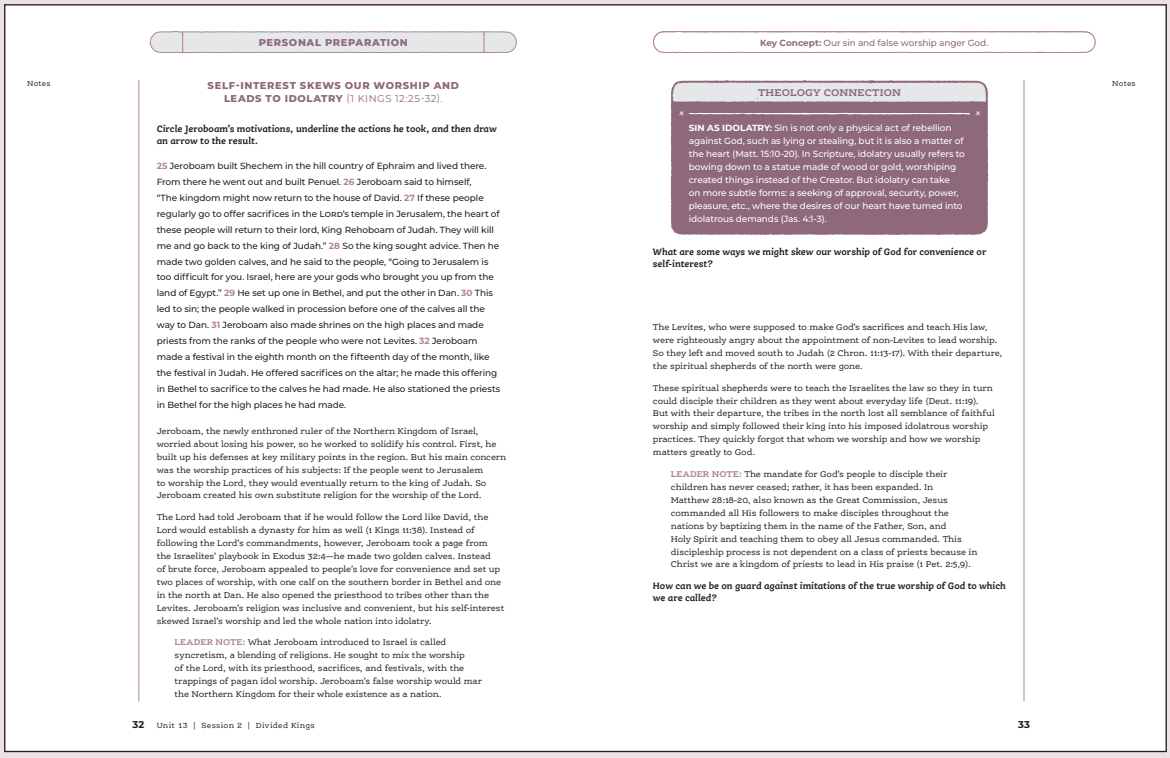
31

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

2) STUDY FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION

The Personal Preparation section contains the Scripture passages that will guide you and your group to prepare for Bible study during the week before group time begins. A Bible study prompt will help you engage with the Scripture passage, but encourage your group to do more than what's asked in the prompt. Space is provided for you and your group to add notes and questions and markings that will help you study the passage more deeply and see any nuances about the words and phrases of the Scripture provided. In addition to a brief commentary with thought-provoking questions to help you and your group dig deeper into the text, leader notes will provide you with additional nuggets for understanding the Scriptures. Use this Personal Preparation to experience what your group is experiencing as they study the week prior. Consider what questions, thoughts, or challenges they might have while engaging with the Scripture passages.

- **Scripture**
- **Commentary**
- **Questions**



PERSONAL PREPARATION

Notes

SELF-INTEREST SKEWS OUR WORSHIP AND LEADS TO IDOLATRY (1 KINGS 12:25-32).

Circle Jeroboam's motivations, underline the actions he took, and then draw an arrow to the result.

25 Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there.
From there he went out and built Penuel. 26 Jeroboam said to himself,
"The kingdom might now return to the house of David. 27 If these people
regularly go to offer sacrifices in the LORD's temple in Jerusalem, the heart of
these people will return to their lord, King Rehoboam of Judah. They will kill
me and go back to the king of Judah." 28 So the king sought advice. Then he
made two golden calves, and he said to the people, "Going to Jerusalem is
too difficult for you. Israel, here are your gods who brought you up from the
land of Egypt." 29 He set up one in Bethel, and put the other in Dan. 30 This
led to sin; the people walked in procession before one of the calves all the
way to Dan. 31 Jeroboam also made shrines on the high places and made
priests from the ranks of the people who were not Levites. 32 Jeroboam
made a festival in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like
the festival in Judah. He offered sacrifices on the altar; he made this offering
in Bethel to sacrifice to the calves he had made. He also stationed the priests
in Bethel for the high places he had made.

Jeroboam, the newly enthroned ruler of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, worried about losing his power, so he worked to solidify his control. First, he built up his defenses at key military points in the region. But his main concern was the worship practices of his subjects: If the people went to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, they would eventually return to the king of Judah. So Jeroboam created his own substitute religion for the worship of the Lord.

The Lord had told Jeroboam that if he would follow the Lord like David, the Lord would establish a dynasty for him as well (1 Kings 11:38). Instead of following the Lord's commandments, however, Jeroboam took a page from the Israelites' playbook in Exodus 32:4—he made two golden calves. Instead of brute force, Jeroboam appealed to people's love for convenience and set up two places of worship, with one calf on the southern border in Bethel and one in the north at Dan. He also opened the priesthood to tribes other than the Levites. Jeroboam's religion was inclusive and convenient, but his self-interest skewed Israel's worship and led the whole nation into idolatry.

LEADER NOTE: What Jeroboam introduced to Israel is called syncretism, a blending of religions. He sought to mix the worship of the Lord, with its priesthood, sacrifices, and festivals, with the trappings of pagan idol worship. Jeroboam's false worship would mar the Northern Kingdom for their whole existence as a nation.

32 Unit 13 | Session 2 | Divided Kings

Key Concept: Our sin and false worship anger God.

Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SIN AS IDOLATRY: Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc., where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (Jas. 4:1-3).

What are some ways we might skew our worship of God for convenience or self-interest?

The Levites, who were supposed to make God's sacrifices and teach His law, were righteously angry about the appointment of non-Levites to lead worship. So they left and moved south to Judah (2 Chron. 11:13-17). With their departure, the spiritual shepherds of the north were gone.

These spiritual shepherds were to teach the Israelites the law so they in turn could disciple their children as they went about everyday life (Deut. 11:19). But with their departure, the tribes in the north lost all semblance of faithful worship and simply followed their king into his imposed idolatrous worship practices. They quickly forgot that whom we worship and how we worship matters greatly to God.

LEADER NOTE: The mandate for God's people to disciple their children has never ceased; rather, it has been expanded. In Matthew 28:18-20, also known as the Great Commission, Jesus commanded all His followers to make disciples throughout the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded. This discipleship process is not dependent on a class of priests because in Christ we are a kingdom of priests to lead in His praise (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

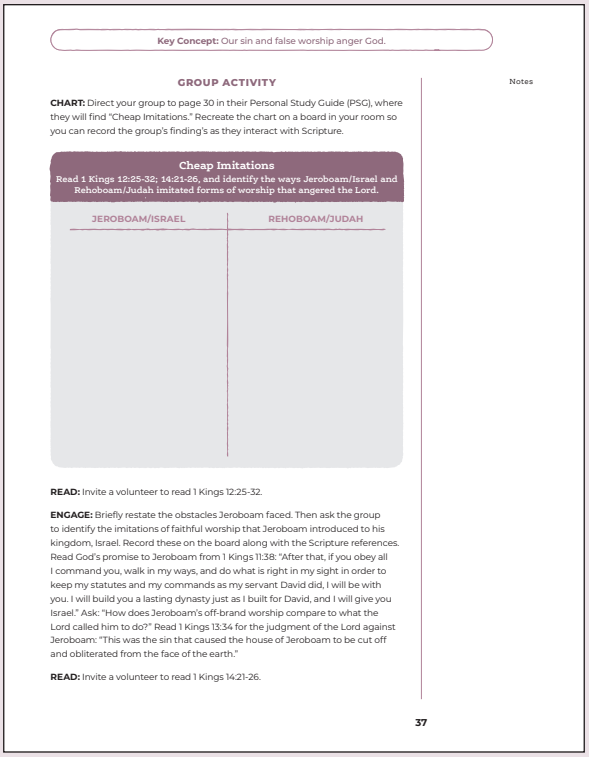
How can we be on guard against imitations of the true worship of God to which we are called?

33

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

3) DIRECT THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Group Experience for each session includes an activity and interactive questions designed to be used in the group context to engage your group in active learning. The personal prep you and your group put into the days leading up to your group time will provide a richer discussion and more thoughtful theological applications to mutually encourage each other during your group time. The first page of the Group Experience will help you engage your group members as they arrive. Dialogue suggestions describe the context, transitions, and a recap of Bible readings or previous sessions to remind your group of what has already been studied or give a framework for where the lesson is heading. The second page gives a visual representation of the activity from the Personal Study Guide. A teaching outline helps guide your members through the activity and the debrief discussion.



Key Concept: Our sin and false worship anger God.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 30 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find "Cheap Imitations." Recreate the chart on a board in your room so you can record the group's finding's as they interact with Scripture.

Cheap Imitations

Read 1 Kings 12:25-32; 14:21-26, and identify the ways Jeroboam/Israel and Rehoboam/Judah imitated forms of worship that angered the Lord.

JEROBOAM/ISRAEL	REHOBOAM/JUDAH

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 12:25-32.

ENGAGE: Briefly restate the obstacles Jeroboam faced. Then ask the group to identify the imitations of faithful worship that Jeroboam introduced to his kingdom, Israel. Record these on the board along with the Scripture references. Read God's promise to Jeroboam from 1 Kings 11:38: "After that, if you obey all I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight in order to keep my statutes and my commands as my servant David did, I will be with you. I will build you a lasting dynasty just as I built for David, and I will give you Israel." Ask: "How does Jeroboam's off-brand worship compare to what the Lord called him to do?" Read 1 Kings 13:34 for the judgment of the Lord against Jeroboam: "This was the sin that caused the house of Jeroboam to be cut off and obliterated from the face of the earth."

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 14:21-26.

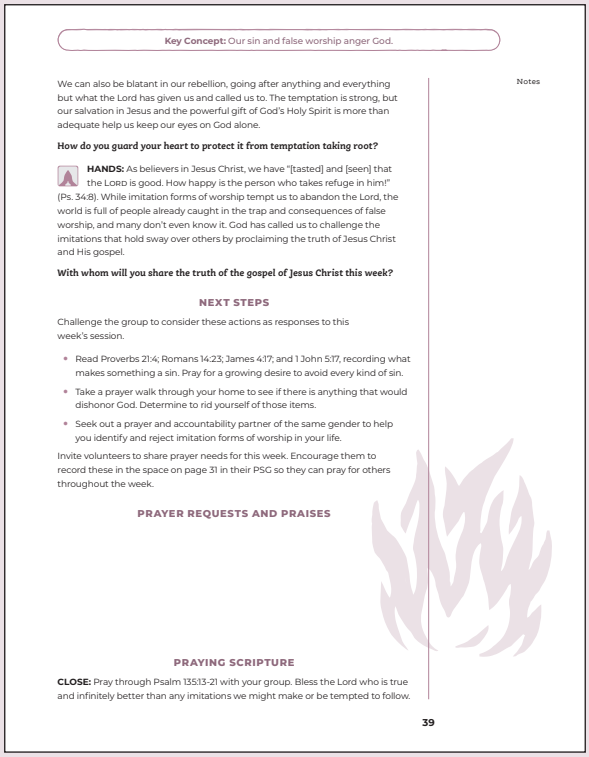
37

- **Group Activity**
- **Interactive Questions**
- **Theological Applications**

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

4) TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

After the recap of the activity, help your group take the next steps with the day's Scripture lesson by walking them through the Head, Heart, and Hands applications. Invite volunteers to share and discuss answers to the questions for their mutual benefit. Then take prayer requests and praises as you wrap up your group time. Space is provided to jot those down in your guide for prayer during the following week. And finally, guide your group to read and pray through the designated psalm, focusing your thoughts and words once more upon God's Word as you conclude the session.



Key Concept: Our sin and false worship anger God.

We can also be blatant in our rebellion, going after anything and everything but what the Lord has given us and called us to. The temptation is strong, but our salvation in Jesus and the powerful gift of God's Holy Spirit is more than adequate help us keep our eyes on God alone.

How do you guard your heart to protect it from temptation taking root?

HANDS: As believers in Jesus Christ, we have "[tasted] and [seen] that the LORD is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him!" (Ps. 34:8). While imitation forms of worship tempt us to abandon the Lord, the world is full of people already caught in the trap and consequences of false worship, and many don't even know it. God has called us to challenge the imitations that hold sway over others by proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

With whom will you share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read Proverbs 21:4; Romans 14:23; James 4:17; and 1 John 5:17, recording what makes something a sin. Pray for a growing desire to avoid every kind of sin.
- Take a prayer walk through your home to see if there is anything that would dishonor God. Determine to rid yourself of those items.
- Seek out a prayer and accountability partner of the same gender to help you identify and reject imitation forms of worship in your life.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 31 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 135:13-21 with your group. Bless the Lord who is true and infinitely better than any imitations we might make or be tempted to follow.

Notes

39

- **Application Questions**
- **Scripture-Based Prayer**
- **Prayer Requests**

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

By Allyson Howell

Growing up in the land of SEC football, I saw a common yard decoration. It wasn't a gnome or a flamingo but a flag that said "House Divided" with a split down the middle. On either side would be the color and logo of a preferred team and an opposing preferred team on the other. One of the most curious divisions was that of Alabama and Auburn. This is one of the most intense rivalries in all of college football. My family's allegiance was to Auburn, and my younger self couldn't fathom a family member supporting that other team! It seemed impossible to live in the same house with an Alabama fan.

Football rivalries only matter during one game when the teams play each other. A couple can wear different colors and cheer for different accomplishments, and three-and-a-half hours later, it's over. You can boast about your team's win or pout about your team's loss, but life moves on and nothing is different. This kind of division is trivial and temporary, for most families.

But imagine all but one state in America stripped from their identity as an American state and given to an enemy ruler. This kind of conflict would evoke fear and uncertainty and would affect daily life. But even this doesn't capture the true devastation that Israel faced when the nation was divided. The split of the kingdom didn't just mean the descendants of Jacob were no longer a unified nation but that they were distanced from God. The security that came from knowing they were God's nation became fragile, whether they knew it or not. In their sin, they were divided from one another and divided from God.

DIVISION

Sin was the reason a formerly unified kingdom of Israel endured a painful and tumultuous division. Because Solomon allowed idolatry to gain a foothold in his life and Rehoboam followed in his father's foolish footsteps, the kingdom was divided.

From there on out, division was the defining reality of Israel's story. The kings of Israel and Judah were divided, often causing friction between their two nations. These rulers also led the people into idolatry, creating a division in their worship from the true God to false gods. God's people allowed the wicked practices of other nations to influence their worship and divide their hearts from full focus on the Lord. Elijah emphasized this point in 1 Kings 18:21 when he said, "How long will you waver between two opinions?" The question showed that the hearts of the people were divided—they were not in full allegiance to God or to the other idols.

This was not simply a physical or political division, it was spiritual. Not only were the nations themselves divided, but the people were divided from God's favor as they continued to pursue idols instead of God. Division from God meant removal from the safety and security He brought. It meant exposure to attacks from other nations and exposure to God's wrath and judgment.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

The split of the kingdom didn't just mean the descendants of Jacob were no longer a unified nation but that they were distanced from God.

DEFIANCE

God's people allowed their own desires and idolatries to replace the relationship God offered to them in His covenant. Instead of recognizing God's faithfulness and great love for them, they chose to worship things made with human hands that were false gods and could not love them back.

As a response to this rebellion, God sent several prophets to call the people back to a right relationship with Him. Repeatedly the kings and people ignored these prophets. They were defiant in the face of God's chosen messengers, openly mocking their prophecies (2 Chron. 36:16).

Even one of God's own prophets, Jonah, acted in defiance against God and initially refused to share the message he was given (see Jonah 1–4). No one was blameless in the constant rebellion and dismissal of God's warnings. The people refused to listen, and yet, God demonstrated His continued love for the people in His patience and longsuffering.

Still, judgment was inevitable, and both Israel and Judah eventually were exiled from their homeland. Even in this, however, the story wasn't over.

While the prophets were warning of judgment and destruction to come, they were also pointing to a promise. In Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 37, we hear of God's promise to turn division and defiance into restoration and renewal. We also know that God's ultimate promise of salvation would come through a descendant from Judah in the line of David—One who sees all the ways we are defiant and divided and takes the punishment for those sins upon Himself. Jesus would bring about the new kingdom, and He would be the perfect ruler, never leading the people to idolatry but only ever leading them to the throne room of grace.

God remains faithful. He will call His people back to Himself, and He offers forgiveness and relationship through Jesus Christ.

Allyson Howell is the Communications Director for a nonprofit organization. She holds an MDiv from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Allyson has served in churches through women's ministry, worship ministry, and is a writer and editor of many topics. She is married to Randy.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

UNIT 13
DIVISIONS

1 KINGS

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Memory Verse

"Then Elijah approached all the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him.' But the people didn't answer him a word."

—1 Kings 18:21

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

A DIVIDED KINGDOM

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 12:1-8,10-17

CONTEXT

Solomon had been made the wisest man on earth by God, and his reign as king brought prosperity to Israel and glory to God as people came from all over to hear Solomon's godly wisdom. But Solomon married foreign wives who worshiped other gods that he eventually worshiped as well (1 Kings 11:4-8). Because of this evil, God told Solomon that He would tear the kingdom from him during his son Rehoboam's reign, leaving only one tribe for his son's rule. At his coronation, Rehoboam was presented with a choice of what kind of king he would be. His unwise decision fulfilled the Lord's judgment.

KEY CONCEPT

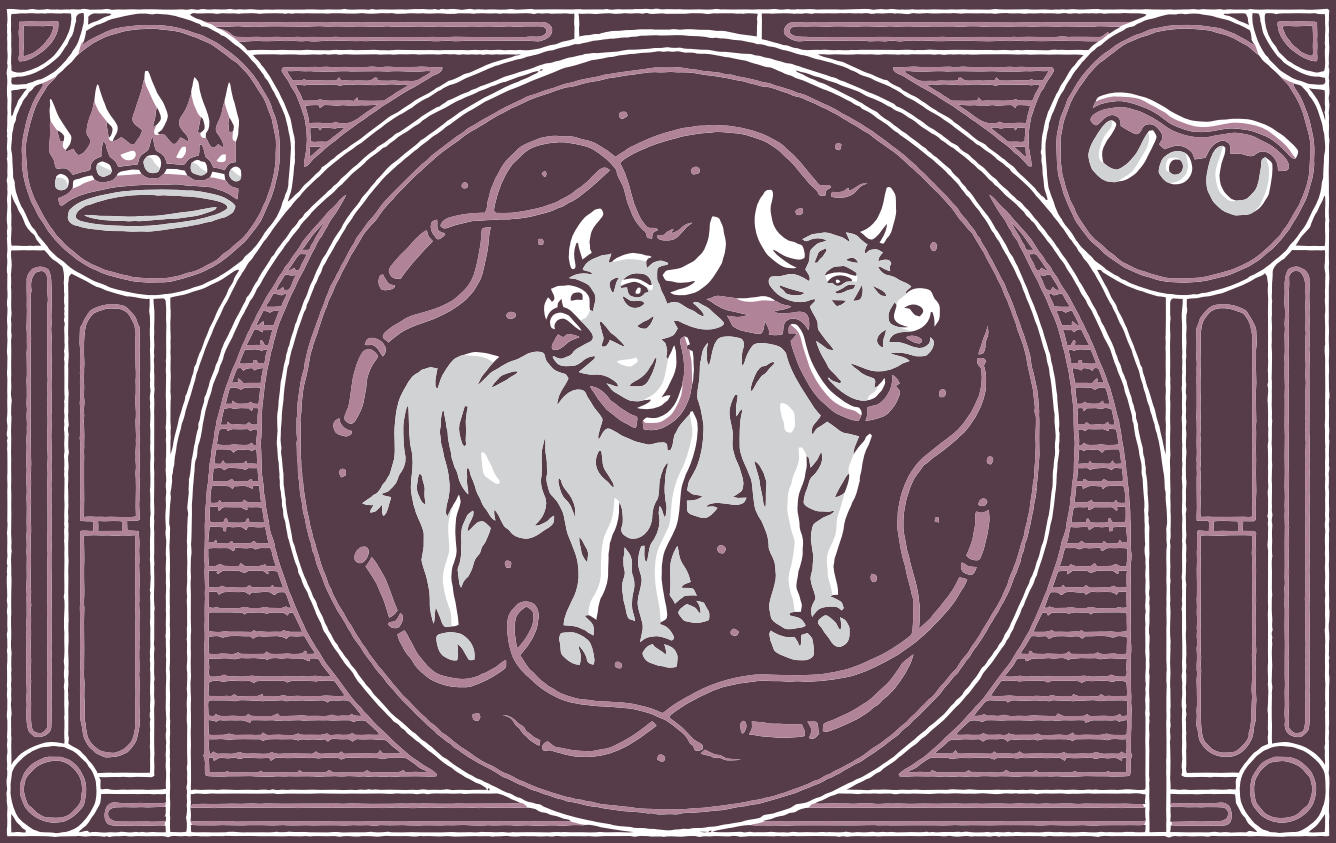
Division occurs when wisdom is ignored.

As you examine 1 Kings 12:1-8,10-17:

- Note the differences between Rehoboam's advisors and the advice they gave to their king.
- Recognize that God's sovereign will as prophesied to Solomon was being fulfilled through Rehoboam's actions.

Scan this QR code to **PROVIDE FEEDBACK** of your experience with The Gospel Project for Adults materials.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources



TIMELINE

- Solomon Becomes King and God Gives Him Wisdom (1 Kings 1–3)
- Solomon Builds the Temple and His Palace (1 Kings 5–9)
- Solomon Marries Foreign Women, Turns to Idolatry, and Is Disciplined by the Lord (1 Kings 11)
- **SESSION STUDY: Rehoboam Accepts Foolish Advice; the Kingdom Is Divided (1 Kings 12)**
- Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam Lead Their Nations in Idolatry (1 Kings 12–14)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 11:1-13
- ☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 11:14-43
- ☐ **Day 3:** 1 Kings 12:1-19
- ☐ **Day 4:** 1 Kings 12:20-24
- ☐ **Day 5:** 2 Chronicles 9:29–11:4
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 72

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

REJECTING THE ADVICE OF GODLY ELDERS LEADS TO RUIN
(1 KINGS 12:1-8).

Highlight the key words of the elders' advice given to Rehoboam. Underline the choice Rehoboam made.

1 Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to
make him king. 2 When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard about it, he stayed in
Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon's presence. Jeroboam stayed
in Egypt. 3 But they summoned him, and Jeroboam and the whole assembly
of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam: 4 "Your father made our yoke harsh.
You, therefore, lighten your father's harsh service and the heavy yoke he
put on us, and we will serve you." 5 Rehoboam replied, "Go away for three
days and then return to me." So the people left. 6 Then King Rehoboam
consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon when he was
alive, asking, "How do you advise me to respond to this people?" 7 They
replied, "Today if you will be a servant to this people and serve them, and
if you respond to them by speaking kind words to them, they will be your
servants forever." 8 But he rejected the advice of the elders who had advised
him and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and
attended him.

Solomon had been a mighty king and brought prosperity to Israel, but his many building projects took their toll on the people. Israelites were conscripted to work up to a month at a time, followed by two months off, over the course of seven years to build the temple and another thirteen years for Solomon's palace, plus other constructions, cities, and places for his resources (1 Kings 5:13-18; 9:15-19).

When the Israelites came to the new king Rehoboam's coronation, they brought with them Jeroboam, who had once served Solomon as chief over the forced labor from his tribe but who had also rebelled against Solomon (11:26-28). No doubt the people believed Jeroboam was someone who could champion their cause with the young king. But behind the scenes some years earlier, the prophet Ahijah had told Jeroboam that he was chosen by God to be the instrument of judgment against Solomon and his lineage for the once-wise king's idolatry (vv. 29-40).

> **LEADER NOTE:** Rehoboam's coronation at Shechem was an indication of his weakened position.[1] Shechem was where Abraham received God's covenant (Gen. 12:6-7) and where Joshua challenged the people to follow the Lord alone (Josh. 24). Yet Jerusalem was the city of David (2 Sam. 5:6-7) and God's chosen place for His temple (1 Kings 9:3). Choosing to meet the king in Shechem was like drawing a dividing line in the sand before negotiating.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

Jeroboam and the Israelites presented their case to the king: If Rehoboam would reduce the hard labor Solomon had placed on the people, then they would serve the new king (12:4). Service to the king was an expectation of the people (1 Sam. 8), but the level of requirement could be misused and abused. Israel's kings were supposed to shepherd and serve for the good of their people, but sin and foolishness have derailed many from such goals.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRISTIANS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.

How can believers faithfully fulfill their responsibilities to lead and to serve?

Rehoboam asked for three days to respond to the people's request. He sought advice from his father's advisors, who said he should be a kind servant leader. Following their wisdom would earn a good standing with his people, as kindness tends to do. But Rehoboam rejected their sage advice and instead would follow the unwise counsel of his peers.

> **LEADER NOTE:** King Solomon wrote, "The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm" (Prov. 13:20). In choosing to reject the wisdom of the elders who had served his father, Rehoboam chose to be a companion of fools. Like Rehoboam, the young men had grown up in privilege and wealth in the palace and most likely did not have the experience to give sound advice.

Why is listening to wisdom and experience so important?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

BEING A SELF-SERVING LEADER RATHER THAN A SERVANT LEADER BRINGS DIVISION (1 KINGS 12:10-17).

Highlight Rehoboam's response to the people. Underline the response of the people.

10 The young men who had grown up with him told him, "This is what you
should say to this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy,
but you, make it lighter on us!' This is what you should tell them: 'My little
finger is thicker than my father's waist! 11 Although my father burdened you
with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with
whips, but I will discipline you with barbed whips.'" 12 So Jeroboam and all
the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had ordered:
"Return to me on the third day." 13 Then the king answered the people
harshly. He rejected the advice the elders had given him 14 and spoke to
them according to the young men's advice: "My father made your yoke
heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but
I will discipline you with barbed whips." 15 The king did not listen to the
people, because this turn of events came from the LORD to carry out his
word, which the LORD had spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam
son of Nebat. 16 When all Israel saw that the king had not listened to them,
the people answered him: What portion do we have in David? We have no
inheritance in the son of Jesse. Israel, return to your tents; David, now look
after your own house! So Israel went to their tents, 17 but Rehoboam reigned
over the Israelites living in the cities of Judah.

Rehoboam had two options: gentleness or force. Out of pride, he followed the advice of his peers and spoke harshly to the people, not listening to their burdens, and this lack of consideration divided his kingdom. Being a self-serving leader rather than a servant leader brought division and rebellion against his crown.

> **LEADER NOTE:** In Ecclesiastes 2:18-19, Rehoboam's father, Solomon, lamented: "I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool?" Solomon's concern came to fruition in Rehoboam's response in his very first kingly decision.

The kind of leadership we exhibit will impact many situations in our lives. Our roles and responses in the family, workplace, neighborhood, community, and even our country can bring peace or cause division. Rehoboam should have listened to his elders and the proverbial advice of his father—"A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath" (Prov. 15:1). We would do well to heed this humbling advice as well.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

LEADER NOTE: The elder's wise advice resembled the leadership Jesus modeled for His disciples (Matt. 23:11). In His incarnation, Jesus, the Son of God, took on flesh and assumed the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5-7), even washing the dirty feet of His disciples (John 13:4-20). The book of Acts tells how the disciples responded to Jesus's servant leadership. The legacy of their service has spread the gospel for generations across the map to reach even us.

What words could Rehoboam have used to respond as a servant leader?

God's sovereign judgment as prophesied to Solomon (1 Kings 11:9-13) and Jeroboam (vv. 26-40) was fulfilled through Rehoboam's foolish actions (cf. Ex. 7:3-4; 8:15). Rehoboam didn't listen to the people but responded harshly, and this whole scenario—the people's request, the king's response, and the people's rebellion—fulfilled God's word.

The discipline against Solomon was experienced and simultaneously earned by his son. Yet there was also purpose and grace in this punishment. Through the division, idolatry and pride were shown to be counterproductive. Some wise kings learned this lesson, while many foolish kings did not. Beyond this, the Lord showed His faithfulness and grace in keeping Rehoboam as king over the tribe of Judah because the Lord would not fail to fulfill His promise to David and to send us our Messiah-King—Jesus Christ.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Because of Solomon's idolatry (1 Kings 11:11-13), God would tear the nation away from him as He had with Saul. Because of His promise to David, the Lord would allow one tribe of Israel to remain under the authority of Solomon's son, Rehoboam (vv. 34-37). This nation would continue with the line of David's descendants that would eventually lead to the promised King and Savior, Jesus, the King of kings.

What are some ways you need to humble yourself to bring peace instead of division?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

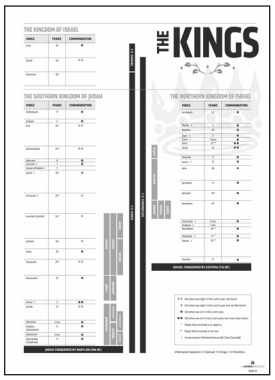
Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive, form two teams, giving each team pieces of paper with the instruction "Work together to create a map or directions from here to _____'s house" (a friend/relative living in another city). Provide only one team with the address. Allow each group to share their results. Ask: "Would it be wise to follow the directions of the group who did not have the address?"

CONTEXT

SAY: Solomon succeeded his father, David, as king of Israel. Solomon made peace with many surrounding nations, gained great wealth, and built the first temple. Yet he married many pagan women who turned his heart to pursue and worship their pagan gods. Therefore, God was angry with Solomon and told him that He would tear most of the kingdom away from his son (1 Kings 11:9-13). God also sent the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam, a high-ranking servant for Solomon, to tell him that God was going to give him ten of the tribes of Israel to rule as a punishment to Solomon (vv. 29-39). Upon Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam was set to become king over all Israel, but according to God's word, that would not last. *(Display* **Pack Item 2: The Kings** *as a tool for the whole volume to help your group grasp the context of each session.)*



RECAP

ASK: Using information from this week's preparation, did the nation gather to ask Rehoboam to divide them into two kingdoms? (1 Kings 12:1) What did the people want their new king to do? (v. 4)

SAY: Solomon's many building projects had worn out his people, and they hoped for a change under Rehoboam's rule. The elders advised Rehoboam to give the people time to take care of their own homes and families. But the new king had grown up as a prince and had friends who enjoyed the lifestyle. Rehoboam turned to his friends for advice, which was to establish himself as an even tougher taskmaster than his father. His "my way or the highway" attitude was not received well, and the people decided to reject him as their king, fulfilling what God had told Jeroboam.

TRANSITION: It would be unwise to treat the events in today's Scripture as having historical significance but little or no value for our lives today. Let's dig deeper as a group to see what we can glean for our decisions and actions.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Division occurs when wisdom is ignored.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 22 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find "Favoring Our Own Beliefs." Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with Scripture.

Favoring Our Own Beliefs Identify and record potential biases that existed for the people listed and how they influenced their decisions and actions.
REHOBOAM
REHOBOAM'S FRIENDS
THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Kings 12:1-17.

INFORM: Divide your group into three teams. Assign each team a person/group from the chart: Rehoboam, Rehoboam's friends, and the people of Israel. Say: "We all have a tendency to favor information that supports our own existing beliefs, so we often dismiss other beliefs that don't match with ours. As we look at the people from our passage today, let's assess their biases."

DISCUSS: Patiently ask the following questions as prompts for your groups to interact with the Scripture: "What biases may the person/group have had? Do you think they were aware of their biases? What factors may have led the person/group to develop the biases that came to guide the way they perceived things in their lives?" Encourage each group to share their responses.

IDENTIFY: Remind everyone of the other group—the elders who advised Solomon (vv. 6-7)—and add them to the table. Direct the group to identify potential factors that influenced the elders to give the new king the advice they did. *(They had lived a long time and had witnessed the consequences of Solomon's demands on the people; they also had seen the good outcome of Solomon's wisdom when acting on behalf of the people and for God.)*

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ASK: "In whose interest were the elders acting?" *(the king's and those who needed an opportunity to recover from all the work imposed by Solomon)* "In whose interest were the young men acting?" *(the king's and their own)* "In whose interest was Rehoboam acting?" *(his own and his friends')* "In whose interest were Jeroboam and the northern ten tribes acting? *(their own)*

CLARIFY: The elders reflected upon Solomon's decisions and the impact his reign had upon the people of Israel. When their advice was ignored, everyone experienced the negative consequences. (*Display* **Pack Item 3: The Divided Kingdom** *to show the division between Israel and Judah and Rehoboam's diminished kingdom.*) Point out that while his young friends are never mentioned again, Rehoboam had to live with the consequences of their advice. Sadly, Jeroboam also ruled foolishly. While the kings of Judah had their share of evil kings, virtually no king in the north followed the Lord faithfully.

DEBRIEF

How have you seen unity or division result from following someone's advice?

(PSG p. 22) As an adult, whose advice are you listening to, and how do you assess if it is wise or foolish advice?

SUMMARIZE

Pass out copies of **Pack Item 4: Seeing Jesus in the Divided Kingdom** to help your group look for Jesus throughout this volume. Say: "Rehoboam's foolish decision and the resulting division of the kingdom fulfilled God's word to punish Solomon for his idolatry. But Rehoboam was responsible for his choices, just as we are responsible for our own unwise decisions. Still, we can trust the Lord to discipline faithfully (Jer. 17:9-10) and to work all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28), as He has shown us through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 23). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: The apostle James explained that worldly wisdom is marked by "bitter envy and selfish ambition," but godly wisdom "is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense" (Jas. 3:14-17). God's Word and Spirit help us to discern what is godly wisdom that we should follow.

What are some ways we can increase our exposure to godly wisdom?

HEART: When Rehoboam heard the people's grievance, his heart was unmoved. Conversely in the Gospel accounts, we consistently find Jesus

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

is "moved with compassion" for the people following Him (Matt. 9:36; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13). Jesus's compassion moved Him to serve those in need.

How can you develop compassion for others to serve them like Jesus would?

HANDS: Rehoboam resisted wise advice that he did not like. Instead, he chose to go where he was comfortable, with his friends. Leaders inevitably have to make tough decisions as well as do uncomfortable, hard things—not the least of which is letting go of their own pride to follow good yet unpleasant advice.

How will you seek and follow wise counsel for a difficult decision in your life?

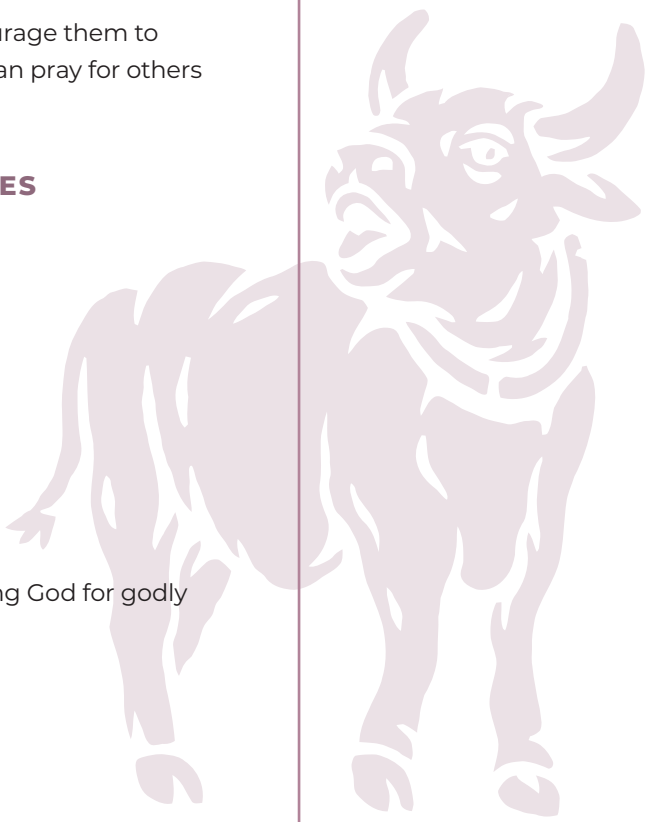
NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Proverbs 19:20; Isaiah 30:21; and Philippians 4:8. Pray that you will discern counsel that is wise from that which is self-serving.
- Recall any decision you have made recently that may not have been wise. If possible, take steps to correct that decision.
- Resolve to share wisdom with others rather than saying what they want to hear. Memorize Ephesians 4:15 to help you share that wisdom with love.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 23 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 72:1-4 with your group, thanking God for godly leaders He has placed in your life.

References

1. Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 2 Ch 10:1.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

UNIT 13 • SESSION 2

DIVIDED KINGS

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 12:25-32; 14:21-26

CONTEXT

After King Rehoboam's disastrous start, the northern tribes united under Jeroboam and made him their king. Rehoboam mustered 180,000 troops from his tribes of Judah and Benjamin to fight against the rebel Israelite tribes. The prophet Shemaiah brought Rehoboam a message from the Lord: "You are not to march up and fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Each of you return home, for this situation is from me" (1 Kings 12:24). Judah listened to the Lord and went home, but both kingdoms were at odds with each other for several decades.

KEY CONCEPT

Our sin and false worship anger God.

As you examine 1 Kings 12:25-32; 14:21-26:

- Reflect on how Jeroboam's worry caused him to lead Israel into idolatry.
- Consider how Rehoboam allowed Judah's idolatry to run rampant, and that God subsequently allowed enemies to seize treasure from the temple and palace.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

Solomon Marries Foreign Women, Turns to Idolatry, and Is Disciplined by the Lord (1 Kings 11)

Rehoboam Accepts Foolish Advice; the Kingdom Is Divided (1 Kings 12)

SESSION STUDY: Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam Lead Their Nations in Idolatry (1 Kings 12–14)

Wicked Ahab Becomes King in Israel (1 Kings 16)

The Prophet Elijah Confronts Ahab (1 Kings 17–21)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 12:25–14:20
- ☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 14:21–15:24
- ☐ **Day 3:** 1 Kings 15:25–16:34
- ☐ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 11:5–14:1
- ☐ **Day 5:** 2 Chronicles 14:2–16:14
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 135

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

SELF-INTEREST SKEWS OUR WORSHIP AND LEADS TO IDOLATRY (1 KINGS 12:25-32).

Circle Jeroboam's motivations, underline the actions he took, and then draw an arrow to the result.

25 Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there.
From there he went out and built Penuel. **26** Jeroboam said to himself,
"The kingdom might now return to the house of David. **27** If these people
regularly go to offer sacrifices in the LORD's temple in Jerusalem, the heart of
these people will return to their lord, King Rehoboam of Judah. They will kill
me and go back to the king of Judah." **28** So the king sought advice. Then he
made two golden calves, and he said to the people, "Going to Jerusalem is
too difficult for you. Israel, here are your gods who brought you up from the
land of Egypt." **29** He set up one in Bethel, and put the other in Dan. **30** This
led to sin; the people walked in procession before one of the calves all the
way to Dan. **31** Jeroboam also made shrines on the high places and made
priests from the ranks of the people who were not Levites. **32** Jeroboam
made a festival in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like
the festival in Judah. He offered sacrifices on the altar; he made this offering
in Bethel to sacrifice to the calves he had made. He also stationed the priests
in Bethel for the high places he had made.

Jeroboam, the newly enthroned ruler of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, worried about losing his power, so he worked to solidify his control. First, he built up his defenses at key military points in the region. But his main concern was the worship practices of his subjects: If the people went to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, they would eventually return to the king of Judah. So Jeroboam created his own substitute religion for the worship of the Lord.

The Lord had told Jeroboam that if he would follow the Lord like David, the Lord would establish a dynasty for him as well (1 Kings 11:38). Instead of following the Lord's commandments, however, Jeroboam took a page from the Israelites' playbook in Exodus 32:4—he made two golden calves. Instead of brute force, Jeroboam appealed to people's love for convenience and set up two places of worship, with one calf on the southern border in Bethel and one in the north at Dan. He also opened the priesthood to tribes other than the Levites. Jeroboam's religion was inclusive and convenient, but his self-interest skewed Israel's worship and led the whole nation into idolatry.

> **LEADER NOTE:** What Jeroboam introduced to Israel is called syncretism, a blending of religions. He sought to mix the worship of the Lord, with its priesthood, sacrifices, and festivals, with the trappings of pagan idol worship. Jeroboam's false worship would mar the Northern Kingdom for their whole existence as a nation.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SIN AS IDOLATRY: Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc., where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (Jas. 4:1-3).

What are some ways we might skew our worship of God for convenience or self-interest?

The Levites, who were supposed to make God's sacrifices and teach His law, were righteously angry about the appointment of non-Levites to lead worship. So they left and moved south to Judah (2 Chron. 11:13-17). With their departure, the spiritual shepherds of the north were gone.

These spiritual shepherds were to teach the Israelites the law so they in turn could disciple their children as they went about everyday life (Deut. 11:19). But with their departure, the tribes in the north lost all semblance of faithful worship and simply followed their king into his imposed idolatrous worship practices. They quickly forgot that whom we worship and how we worship matters greatly to God.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The mandate for God's people to disciple their children has never ceased; rather, it has been expanded. In Matthew 28:18-20, also known as the Great Commission, Jesus commanded all His followers to make disciples throughout the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded. This discipleship process is not dependent on a class of priests because in Christ we are a kingdom of priests to lead in His praise (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

How can we be on guard against imitations of the true worship of God to which we are called?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD WILL PUNISH ALL WHO FOLLOW THE DETESTABLE WAYS OF THE WORLD (1 KINGS 14:21-26).

Underline what Judah did to anger the Lord. Highlight what the Lord allowed to happen to His temple.

21 Now Rehoboam, Solomon's son, reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was
forty-one years old when he became king; he reigned seventeen years in
Jerusalem, the city where the LORD had chosen from all the tribes of Israel
to put his name. Rehoboam's mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite.
22 Judah did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They provoked him to
jealous anger more than all that their ancestors had done with the sins they
committed. **23** They also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars,
and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree; **24** there
were even male cult prostitutes in the land. They imitated all the detestable
practices of the nations the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.
25 In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt went to war
against Jerusalem. **26** He seized the treasuries of the LORD's temple and the
treasuries of the royal palace. He took everything. He took all the gold shields
that Solomon had made.

As forceful as Rehoboam presented himself when he rejected the request of the northern tribes and then rallied troops to put them under his subjection, he ultimately proved to be a weak and permissive king—"he abandoned the law of the LORD—he and all Israel with him" (2 Chron. 12:1). Rehoboam allowed Judah's idolatry to run rampant.

Rehoboam's father had been deeply attached to foreign wives who worshiped foreign gods. Solomon's marriages, numbering 700 wives with 300 concubines, represented political alliances with foreign nations. Solomon built a form of peace that was characterized by the absence of war, but the kingdom was divided in worship with each wife he married. Like his father, Rehoboam pursued peace in a similar manner by permitting whatever kind of worship the people wanted rather than promoting obedience to the Lord as his grandfather David had done.

> **LEADER NOTE:** In the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matt. 5:29). Removal of body parts to fight sin is extreme, but Jesus was using hyperbole to communicate how serious we need to be about getting idolatry out of our lives. Rehoboam had both authority and opportunity to root out the worship of other gods in Israel, but he did not, and it cost him dearly.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

What do you do when you know you need to root out sin?

Rehoboam allowed Judah's idolatry to reach the most intimate parts of the people's lives. They built high places and Asherah poles, and male cult prostitutes were in the land (1 Kings 14:23). These practices came from surrounding cultures, and God had taken the land away from Israel's predecessors for detestable activities such as these (v. 24).

Israel had lived among these cultures for centuries, but they did not keep God's covenant laws, which would have set them apart from the pagans around them. So God allowed Judah's enemies to seize the treasures of the temple and palace. In another sign of weakness, Rehoboam had to replace the gold shields his father had made with inferior bronze shields (v. 27).

> **LEADER NOTE:** The promise God made to David that He would be with David's offspring if his sons followed God's laws and walked in His ways was for Rehoboam too, but Rehoboam failed to trust in God's covenant, just as Jeroboam did. Judah's lack of wise, godly leadership caused them to spiral into idolatry. Judah did not even pretend to say they were worshiping God alone. They either abandoned the worship of the Lord or placed Him as equal to other gods in their hearts and spaces of worship, thereby breaking the first and second commandments (Ex. 20:3-6), just like the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

What role should our holiness as believers play in sharing the gospel with the world around us?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

So often the kings of Israel and Judah led their people astray into idolatry that imitated the world, but a true king leads his people to worship faithfully the one true God. Jesus came as this King, for He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As the group arrives, ask volunteers for their opinions on off-brand products. Encourage them to share the name brand, the off-brand, whether or not they have a preference, and what feeds into that opinion (cost, taste, etc.).

TRANSITION: Sometimes off-brand products are exactly the same as a name brand. But other times they are noticeably different. We may find ourselves content with an imitation product because of a cheaper cost, convenience, or a consistent experience, but not all imitations live up to the original.

CONTEXT

SAY: Prior to having kings rule over them, everyone in Israel did whatever seemed right to them (Judg. 17:6; 21:25), only turning to God for help when their self-serving ways got them into trouble. Once they had a king, generally speaking, as the king went, so went the nation. For the most part, David led the people in faithful worship. Solomon ended his reign in idolatry with a coming split for the kingdom. Now two nations, two kings could rule faithfully and be blessed by the Lord, or they could take another route. Unfortunately, both chose the latter.

RECAP

IDENTIFY: Using information from this week's preparation, call for volunteers to name obstacles that concerned Jeroboam as he began his reign over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. *(His subjects would recognize Rehoboam as their true king; the people would return to Jerusalem to sacrifice and worship at the temple; the people would kill him.)* Ask: "What obstacles might Rehoboam have been facing as king over the Southern Kingdom of Judah?"

TRANSITION: Obstacles in life can cause us to look for shortcuts or imitations to bypass what concerns us. These can be inconsequential, as it might be with an off-brand cereal purchase for a cheaper breakfast option. But as it was with the two kings in our Scriptures for today, and often can be with us, some imitations can have great spiritual consequences.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Our sin and false worship anger God.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 30 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find "Cheap Imitations." Recreate the chart on a board in your room so you can record the group's finding's as they interact with Scripture.

Cheap Imitations

Read 1 Kings 12:25-32; 14:21-26, and identify the ways Jeroboam/Israel and Rehoboam/Judah imitated forms of worship that angered the Lord.

JEROBOAM/ISRAEL	REHOBOAM/JUDAH

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 12:25-32.

ENGAGE: Briefly restate the obstacles Jeroboam faced. Then ask the group to identify the imitations of faithful worship that Jeroboam introduced to his kingdom, Israel. Record these on the board along with the Scripture references. Read God's promise to Jeroboam from 1 Kings 11:38: "After that, if you obey all I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight in order to keep my statutes and my commands as my servant David did, I will be with you. I will build you a lasting dynasty just as I built for David, and I will give you Israel." Ask: "How does Jeroboam's off-brand worship compare to what the Lord called him to do?" Read 1 Kings 13:34 for the judgment of the Lord against Jeroboam: "This was the sin that caused the house of Jeroboam to be cut off and obliterated from the face of the earth."

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 14:21-26.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

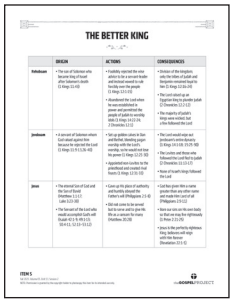
ENGAGE: Call for the group to identify and record the sins of Rehoboam and Judah in these verses. Ask: "How were the sins of Judah a form of imitation? If Jeroboam and Israel had an "off-brand" form of worship, how would you describe the imitation worship of Rehoboam and Judah? Is one form of imitation worship better than the other? Why or why not?"

DEBRIEF

Why is it right for the Lord to be angered by cheap imitations and false worship?

(PSG p. 30) What are some ways we might step into the trap and consequences of sinful imitation and false worship?

SUMMARIZE



THE BETTER KING

	ORIGIN	ACTIONS	CONSEQUENCES
Rehoboam	• The son of Solomon who became king of Israel after Solomon's death (1 Kings 11:43)	• Foolishly rejected the wise advice to be a servant-leader and instead vowed to rule harshly over the people (1 Kings 12:1-15) • Abandoned the Lord when he was established in power and permitted the people of Judah to worship idols instead (1 Kings 14:22; 2 Chronicles 12:1) • Set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel, diverting pagan worship with the Lord's worship in Jerusalem (near the power) (1 Kings 12:25-30) • Appointed non-Levites to the priesthood and created shrines (1 Kings 12:31-33) • Came up the place of authority in Israel (Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 2:21-38) • Did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28)	• Relinquished the ministry only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to him (1 Kings 12:20-24) • The Lord raised up an Egyptian king to punish Judah (1 Kings 14:25-28) • The majority of Judah's kings were wicked, but a few followed the Lord
Jeroboam	• A servant of Solomon whom God raised against him because he rejected the Lord (1 Kings 11:9-13, 26-40)		• The Lord revealed major sin (produced a nation divided by 1 Kings 14:1-18; 19:29-30) • The Levites and those who followed the Lord fled to Judah (2 Chronicles 11:13-17) • None of Israel's kings followed the Lord
Jesus	• The eternal Son of God and Savior of the world (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 2:21-38) • The Servant of the Lord who would accomplish God's will (Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12)		• God has given Him a name above all other names (Jesus) and made Him Lord of all (Philippians 2:9-11) • Alone can save sinners (only God) so that we may live righteously (1 Peter 2:21-24) • Jesus is the perfectly righteous King who will reign with Him (Revelation 22:1-5)

ITEM 5

SOURCE: NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

NOTE: Participants assembling the pack might choose to photocopy this chart for the handouts section.

the GOSPEL PROJECT

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 5: The Better King** and review it with your group. Say: "Our sin and false worship does not humor, surprise, or confuse God. He knows who we are—sinners—and what is in our hearts. But the sin and false worship of God's image-bearers does disappoint and anger Him. We were created to worship and obey Him alone, and this was for our good and His glory. But sin leads us to chase after imitations that can never live up to the one true God and can only lead to death and destruction. If we would be wise, we will learn from the consequences of Israel's and Judah's imitation forms of worship and choose instead to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1)."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 31). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Jeroboam made his decisions in favor of imitation worship out of worry for the longevity of his situation. He forgot what the Lord had promised—a dynasty if he obeyed God's commands. Rehoboam consolidated his power in Judah after the division of kingdoms, and once he was settled, he and his people abandoned the law of the Lord to worship the idols of foreign nations (2 Chron. 12:1). Whether we find ourselves in a place of worry or comfort, we must be on guard against the temptation of cheap imitations and false worship.

Why does God deserve our sole devotion and worship?

HEART: The temptation toward cheap imitations of worship is strong because it puts us in control over the direction of our heart. But true worship is a matter of loving and total submission to the One who created us and saves us in Jesus. Like children, we can be subtle in our rebellion, putting on a good show that satisfies an audience but falls short of pleasing the Lord.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

We can also be blatant in our rebellion, going after anything and everything but what the Lord has given us and called us to. The temptation is strong, but our salvation in Jesus and the powerful gift of God's Holy Spirit is more than adequate help us keep our eyes on God alone.

How do you guard your heart to protect it from temptation taking root?

HANDS: As believers in Jesus Christ, we have "[tasted] and [seen] that the LORD is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him!" (Ps. 34:8). While imitation forms of worship tempt us to abandon the Lord, the world is full of people already caught in the trap and consequences of false worship, and many don't even know it. God has called us to challenge the imitations that hold sway over others by proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

With whom will you share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read Proverbs 21:4; Romans 14:23; James 4:17; and 1 John 5:17, recording what makes something a sin. Pray for a growing desire to avoid every kind of sin.
- Take a prayer walk through your home to see if there is anything that would dishonor God. Determine to rid yourself of those items.
- Seek out a prayer and accountability partner of the same gender to help you identify and reject imitation forms of worship in your life.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 31 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 135:13-21 with your group. Bless the Lord who is true and infinitely better than any imitations we might make or be tempted to follow.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Figure Article

THE PROPHET ELIJAH

By Jim Gantenbein

The prophet Elijah was a pivotal figure for the Old Testament people of Israel, and his significance reached far beyond his own life on earth. Yet he did not author a book of the Bible, as did later prophets, nor have a book named for him. His ministry is primarily narrated from 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2.

ELIJAH'S MINISTRY

As a prophet, Elijah was personal, empowered by the Holy Spirit, prayerful, and peculiar. His clothes were crafted from animal skins (2 Kings 1:8), and for a time, he dined on food brought to him by ravens (1 Kings 17:5). He prophesied a drought in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (17:1). He raised a boy to life (17:22). He challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a sacrifice duel and executed them when they lost (18:38-40). Yet when threatened by Jezebel, he ran away and hid in a cave (19:1-9). Later he anointed two future kings as well as his own successor (19:15-18), and he prophesied the deaths of Ahab, Jezebel, and all of their dynasty (21:20-24).

This was Elijah's life, but perhaps he is most remembered for his departure from this life with transportation more spectacular than any hearse could provide. God carried him into heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11-12), but his work was not yet finished.

Elijah relied completely on the Lord to prove Himself in front of the people. Both on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-37) and earlier at the onset of the drought in the land (1 Kings 17:1; Jas. 5:17), Elijah prayed. He prayed and proved his faith in the Lord by acting on God's word even before it came to fruition.

ELIJAH'S IMPACT

Elijah's impact continued well beyond his lifetime. He was mentioned by name 29 times in the New Testament, 7 times by Jesus Himself. Alongside some of the most significant Old Testament figures, Elijah often was connected with the life and ministry of Jesus.

In the close of the Old Testament, God foretold the coming of His promised Messiah with a connection to the past: "Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes" (Mal. 4:5). God promised the arrival of a familiar and powerful prophet who would boldly declare God's truth and confront the godless, regardless of what it might cost him personally. More bold confrontation was coming!

The Jewish scribes in Jesus's day knew of this promise and believed that Elijah would return before the Messiah appeared (Matt. 17:10), and that prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist (17:11-13). The single-mindedness of Elijah's work had such an impact that when Jesus's ministry was causing a stir and shaking up the religious establishment, some people thought He was Elijah (16:13-14). The Jews understood there was a direct link between Elijah and the coming of the promised Messiah.

Elijah continues to be a significant figure in modern-day Judaism. Drawing from Aharon Weiner's essay, "The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism," commentator Ralph L. Smith writes:

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Elijah had faithfully served the Lord as a prophet in his days on earth, and even in the New Testament, he faithfully pointed people to Jesus Christ.

> Elijah still plays a significant role in Jewish liturgy and ritual. He is mentioned when grace is said after meals . . . in the benedictions after the weekly Sabbath reading of a chapter from the books of the prophets . . . in the circumcision ceremony and in the Passover seder. At the beginning of the celebration of the Passover a special cup of wine, called "Elijah's cup" is placed on the table. When grace is said after the meal, a child opens the door in expectation of Elijah's appearance and biblical passages are recited which express the hope of Jewish people for deliverance from oppression.[1]

ELIJAH'S MISSION

Jesus—the promised Messiah and God in the flesh—was not being deceptive by saying the long-dead prophet was coming. He was using a figure of speech the Hebrews of the day understood quite well. As recorded in Luke 1, the meaning was stated plainly when God sent an angel to the aged priest Zechariah announcing that his wife, also advanced in years, would bear him a son and he was to name him John. Part of that announcement was a callback to the prophecy we find in Malachi:

> He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people. (Luke 1:17)

The Jews knew about Elijah, his life and ministry, and they were anticipating his return, whether literal or symbolic. During His crucifixion, some thought Jesus was calling for Elijah (Matt. 27:46-49; Mark 15:34-35). Yet not everything was symbolic or representative. At the transfiguration, Jesus was with Elijah and Moses as they "were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). In this one-of-a-kind moment, all the words and works of Moses and Elijah served as an endorsement of God's Son, Jesus. Elijah had faithfully served the Lord as a prophet in his days on earth, and even in the New Testament, he faithfully pointed people to Jesus Christ.

1. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 342 [Logos].

Jim Gantenbein is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He retired in November 2022 after more than thirty-one years of ministry, including over sixteen years as a Senior Pastor. Jim and Cathy have been married over fifty-one years and live in Port Orchard, Washington.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

UNIT 13 • SESSION 3

A DIVIDED PEOPLE

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 18:20-26,30-39

CONTEXT

Following the pattern of Jeroboam, virtually every king in the Northern Kingdom of Israel did what was evil in the Lord's eyes. The worst was Ahab, who set up a temple for the false god Baal in the capital city of Samaria and made an Asherah pole, leading Israel further into idolatry. The Lord sent Elijah to Ahab to prophesy about a three-year drought throughout Israel as a punishment against the wicked rule of Ahab and his father, Omri (1 Kings 17:1; 18:18). With no rain in the land and the famine affecting their food, the time had come for Elijah to present the question to the people of Israel: Who is the true God, Baal or the Lord?

KEY CONCEPT

The Lord alone is the true God and worthy of worship.

As you examine 1 Kings 18:20-26,30-39:

- Recognize that Elijah demanded that the people stop trying to worship both God and Baal.
- Dwell on the fact that a true, living God will act and respond to His people.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

The Kingdom Is Divided (1 Kings 12)

Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam Lead Their Nations in Idolatry (1 Kings 12–14)

Wicked Ahab Becomes King in Israel (1 Kings 16)

The Prophet Elijah Confronts Ahab (1 Kings 17–21):

1: Elijah Prophesies a Famine

SESSION STUDY:
2: Elijah Challenges the Prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel

3: Elijah Declares God's Judgment for Naboth's Vineyard

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 17:1-18
- ☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 18:1-19
- ☐ **Day 3:** 1 Kings 18:20-46
- ☐ **Day 4:** 1 Kings 19:1-21
- ☐ **Day 5:** 1 Kings 20:1-43
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 97

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to discover more about Ahab, Jezebel, and the idolatry of their reign.

PEOPLE WILL FOLLOW THE LORD OR THEY WILL FOLLOW COUNTERFEIT GODS (1 KINGS 18:20-26).

Circle each use of the word "answer." Underline any number or reference to quantities.

20 So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at
Mount Carmel. 21 Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long
will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if
Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word. 22 Then Elijah
said to the people, "I am the only remaining prophet of the LORD, but Baal's
prophets are 450 men. 23 Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose
one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not
light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not
light the fire. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the
name of the LORD. The God who answers with fire, he is God." All the people
answered, "That's fine." 25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Since
you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first.
Then call on the name of your god but don't light the fire." 26 So they took
the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from
morning until noon, saying, "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound; no
one answered. Then they danced around the altar they had made.

King Ahab had established Baal and Asherah worship in Israel, though that had come at the cost of no rain in the land for three years (1 Kings 16:30-33; 18:1). Ahab's wife, Jezebel, had executed the Lord's prophets (18:4). So it may have seemed to the Israelites as if Baal were more powerful than the Lord, and were it to rain, they might have attributed that to Baal. Therefore, Elijah issued a challenge to the Israelites that they should only follow the one true God. They could not serve both God and Baal; one would always have their devotion.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

THE KINGDOM: The kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly, the kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

The terms of Elijah's challenge allowed each deity to show their strength with an element both were believed to command: fire. Baal was the Canaanite god of lightning and fertility; so if Baal indeed were a god, then he would have no trouble setting a sacrifice ablaze with a bolt from the sky. The terms were acceptable to the people and the false prophets, and to sweeten the set up, Elijah let Baal's prophets pick their bull and go first.

> **LEADER NOTE:** As a lightning deity, Baal often was depicted with lightning bolts, and according to lore, Baal built his house with fire.[1] The Lord appeared by fire in multiple places throughout Scripture (Ex. 3:1-4; 24:17; Ezek. 1:4; Acts 2:1-4). If followers of both deities had been praying for the drought to end, the resulting rain could be attributed to either group. But the challenge of calling down fire would have decided without a doubt whose God was most powerful and who ultimately was responsible for the rain.

How might you challenge the false gods of your culture in a way that people will listen?

The prophets of Baal called on their god until evening using prayer, dancing, and their most vigorous, bloody practices (1 Kings 18:26-29). But no fire descended, no lightning bolts flashed. No sound from the sky, only the voices of their prophets. No answer from their god, only the silence of nothingness.

The prophets looked foolish for their efforts, and Elijah mocked them as such (18:27), because those who follow false gods are foolish, just as it is foolish to think an idol crafted by a human being could control the weather or anything for that matter (Isa. 44:9-20). The modern idols we bow to in place of God are just as foolish. These may even be good gifts and important responsibilities from the Lord, but none of our idols can compare with the one true God—none of them can save.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Being found to look foolish is embarrassing and puts up a person's defenses. Bringing someone to the truth of the gospel after helping them see the foolishness of their sin requires compassion, understanding, and patience. In Romans 2:4, Paul said, "God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance." God showcased His kindness to the Israelites by displaying Baal's lack of power in order to draw them to Himself. Yet we should be aware that Elijah dealt immediate death to the prophets of Baal for their part in leading God's people astray (1 Kings 18:40).

What are some modern-day idols that draw people away from the Lord?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

THE TRUE GOD WILL ANSWER, ACT, AND REVEAL HIMSELF AS LORD (1 KINGS 18:30-39).

Highlight Elijah's simple prayer to the Lord.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near me." So all the people
approached him. Then he repaired the LORD's altar that had been torn down:
31 Elijah took twelve stones—according to the number of the tribes of the
sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel will
be your name"— 32 and he built an altar with the stones in the name of the
LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about
four gallons. 33 Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on
the wood. He said, "Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering
to be burned and on the wood." 34 Then he said, "A second time!" and they
did it a second time. And then he said, "A third time!" and they did it a third
time. 35 So the water ran all around the altar; he even filled the trench with
water. 36 At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah
approached the altar and said, "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,
today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and
that at your word I have done all these things. 37 Answer me, LORD! Answer
me so that this people will know that you, the LORD, are God and that you
have turned their hearts back." 38 Then the LORD's fire fell and consumed
the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up
the water that was in the trench. 39 When all the people saw it, they fell
facedown and said, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!"

Even though God's people were divided into two nations, Elijah rebuilt an altar with twelve stones so all twelve tribes were represented in this sacrificial showdown. It may have been decades since the people in the north had seen an altar to the Lord with an appropriate sacrifice on it. This would have reminded the Israelites of God's faithfulness in the past as well as His covenant.

Elijah's next step was to douse the altar and sacrifice with water, possibly drawn from the nearby Mediterranean Sea on account of the famine in the land. By drenching the sacrifice, Elijah seemed to make this challenge more difficult for his God, yet he acted in faith according to God's word (v. 36). This set up God's glory to be displayed all the more in the presence of the people as the Lord would answer, act, and reveal Himself as the only true God.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Elijah's past experiences with God built his trust in the Lord. After Elijah prophesied that there would be a drought in Israel, God sent him to camp by a wadi, a creek bed that is dry except during rainy seasons. He drank water from the wadi and was supplied with bread and meat by means of ravens until the wadi

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

dried up (1 Kings 17:1-7). Then Elijah was sent to a widow and son in Zarephath, outside the promised land, where he and the family were provided for miraculously by a flour jar and an oil jug that never ran out. Elijah also raised the widow's son from the dead (17:8-24).

Should we try to make our circumstances more difficult to help point people's attention to the Lord? Why or why not?

Baal's prophets spent all day begging their god to answer them with fire, but all their efforts amounted to nothing. By contrast, Elijah's prayer to the Lord was an economy of words. And within seconds of Elijah's petition, God didn't just burn up the sacrificial animal, He incinerated the drenched altar and dried up the overflowing trench. God did the impossible at Elijah's prayer.

The true, living God will act and respond to His people. God proved Himself to be the one true God to the Israelites, and their response showed their recognition. The Lord turned their hearts back to fear Him and to know that He alone is God. Unfortunately, witnessing this event did not stir up a national revival as the rest of Israel's history shows.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus's disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. This question led to Jesus teaching the Twelve what often is called the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4). Jesus also taught them to pray without giving up (Luke 11:5-10), to pray with faith in the Lord (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24), and to resist praying with many babbling words (Matt. 6:7-8), similar to what Baal's prophets did.

How has God answered your prayers, and how did you show your gratitude?

CHRIST CONNECTION

The Lord is the one true God, and "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Before the group arrives, label two opposite walls in the room with the following: "Agree" and "Disagree." When enough of the group arrives, start asking the following questions and direct the participants to move to the wall that corresponds with their answer: "I like tomatoes"; "I like books more than movies"; "I like to drive"; I like the mountains more than the beach"; "I like to travel"; "I like going to the dentist."

TRANSITION: Questions like these are rather low-stakes, and our opinions, while personal, most likely aren't controversial. But some opinions can disturb others, and even more serious, some opinions can have life or death consequences.

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: Wise Solomon came to the foolish opinion that worshiping the Lord alone wasn't necessary, so he followed the hearts of his many wives and began to worship idols, which led to God's disciplinary split of the kingdom. Things didn't improve with the next kings of Judah and Israel, as Rehoboam and Jeroboam, and others after them, did what was evil in the Lord's sight and continued to prop up idol worship in their kingdoms. A couple of good kings in Judah reversed this course for a time, but in Israel, things only got worse as Omri and then his son, Ahab, did more evil than all those who had come before them, instituting Baal worship in the land. In their opinion, the Lord wasn't worth their time. But the Lord revealed the truth to Ahab by the word and actions of the prophet Elijah, who foretold a famine in the land that even Baal, the god of storms and lightning, could do nothing about.

RECAP

ASK: "After three years of famine, what decision did Elijah lay before the people of Israel?" *(whom to follow, Baal or the Lord; 1 Kings 18:21)* "Why might the famine have caused the people to consider their options? What role did water play in the showdown that Elijah proposed?" *(Elijah doused his sacrifice with water to make it clear who was God; vv. 33-35)*

TRANSITION: Elijah, the prophet of the Lord, faced off with 450 prophets of Baal in a battle for the soul of their kingdom. For decades the people had been straddling the fence on who was the true God, but Elijah forced their hand. No more wavering opinions allowed; they now had to decide for one or the other.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: The Lord alone is the true God and worthy of worship.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 40 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find "Pros and Cons." Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group's responses as they interact with Scripture.

Pros and Cons

Using 1 Kings 18:20-26,30-39, consider how the Israelites might have evaluated the pros and cons of worshiping the Lord or Baal.

WORSHIP OF BAAL	
PROS	CONS

WORSHIP OF THE LORD	
PROS	CONS

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Kings 18:20-26.

ANALYZE: Encouraging the group to put themselves in the position of the Israelites on Mount Carmel, invite them to identify potential pros and cons from this passage for worshiping Baal or the Lord. Record these on the board and in the PSG. To prompt some answers, ask the following questions: "What might we make of the size of the two teams in this face off?" *(450 prophets of Baal vs. 1 prophet of the Lord might give a pro of cultural acceptance and even political acceptance by Ahab and Jezebel to the worship of Baal, while loneliness or rejection might seem to be cons of worshiping the Lord. Life with Baal and death with the Lord might be potential outcomes, given Jezebel's persecution of the Lord's prophets [vv. 4,13].)* "How might Baal's responsibilities as a god have fit in the pro column?" *(Baal was responsible for storms and fertility, so he seemed to have a direct line to some vital aspects of life for the Israelites.)* "How might the people have evaluated Baal and the Lord in light of the ongoing famine?" *(Baal's power seemed limited, whereas the Lord's power seemed superior.)* "What might the people conclude from Baal's lack of response to his prophets?" *(Baal was not always available or possibly powerless.)*

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Kings 18:30-39.

ANALYZE: Instruct the group to identify potential pros and cons out of this passage. Ask the following if prompts are needed: "What might Elijah's attention to Israel's tribes and heritage communicate about the worship of the Lord?" *(The people had a history of covenants, promises, fulfillments, and deliverance with the Lord that they would not have had with Baal.)* "How might the people have viewed worship according to God's law, given Elijah's prayer for their hearts to be turned back?" *(The law might have seemed restrictive to the people, whereas the worship of Baal allowed them to fulfill their heart's sinful desires.)* "What are the pros from the Lord's fire from the sky?" *(The Lord is God. The Lord is powerful. The Lord answers His people. The Lord vindicates His servants.)*

SAY: In their rebellion, the Israelites had wavered in their opinions regarding the Lord and Baal. At times it seemed the worship of the Lord was not worth their effort and that the worship of Baal would get them what they wanted. But sin always distorts our perception of who God is and of what He knows is best.

DEBRIEF

What are some idols that draw us away from God? How can we keep God's good gifts in perspective so that the Lord alone is the God we worship?

SUMMARIZE

As sinful human beings, we have a tendency to idolize things on earth rather than worship our Creator. This means we can even prioritize God's good gifts, such as family, over Him. Perhaps we could come up with some pros and cons for all of our idols, but the most significant con is that none of our idols can save. Only the Lord, who is Jesus, saves from sin, so only He is worthy of our worship.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 41). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: The Israelites' opinions about the Lord and Baal led them to a false understanding of their world and their worship. What we think about God matters greatly for how we see the world He created and how we live in it.

How are you forming your understanding of who God is and who is God?

HEART: Because of sin, our hearts are deceitful (Jer. 17:9), always turning us away from God. So we ought to pray as Elijah did, both for ourselves and for others, that the Lord would constantly turn our hearts back to Him.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

How are you wavering in your opinions regarding the Lord and potential idols?

HANDS: Elijah obeyed the Lord despite some significant difficulties. Alone, he confronted the king who slaughtered true prophets. Alone, he challenged 450 false prophets who had the king's support. But in truth, Elijah was not alone—the Lord was with him—so he obeyed the Lord, and his faith was rewarded.

What opportunities might you have this week to obey the Lord, whether alone or with fellow believers?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read John 10:30; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:9-11 to see how the ultimate bowing before God as the people did on Mount Carmel involves bowing before Jesus, God in flesh.
- Pray for God to show you how you can encourage members of your family to recognize Jesus's lordship in everything and above every other thing in their lives.
- Determine that you, like Elijah, will remain faithful to God's message even when others oppose you.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 41 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 97:7-12 that idols will be cast down in the lives of your group and the people they encounter in the coming week and that the Lord Jesus Christ would be exalted through their actions and words.

References

1. Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1 Ki 18:23–24.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

A DIVIDED RESPONSE

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 21:17-29

CONTEXT

After Elijah's victorious showdown on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal, whom Elijah executed, the Lord sent torrential rain on Israel for the first time in three years. The drought was over. Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done, and she swore an oath that she would kill Elijah. Some time later, Jezebel found Ahab pouting because his neighbor Naboth would not let Ahab buy his family's vineyard. So she hatched a plot to bring false accusations against Naboth that led to his execution. Then she told Ahab to take what he had wanted. All this incurred the wrath of the Lord against Ahab and Jezebel.

KEY CONCEPT

God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

As you examine 1 Kings 21:17-29:

- Recognize that Ahab and Jezebel thought they could get away with false witness, murder, and theft.
- Marvel at the mercy God showed to Ahab because of his humble response to Elijah's proclamation of judgment.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

- Wicked Ahab Becomes King in Israel and Marries Jezebel (1 Kings 16)
- Elijah Prophesies a Famine (1 Kings 17)
- Elijah Challenges the Prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18)
- Elijah Flees from the Threat of Jezebel (1 Kings 19)
- **SESSION STUDY: Elijah Declares God's Judgment for Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)**
- Ahab Dies in Battle, Fulfilling Prophecy (1 Kings 22)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 21
- ☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 22
- ☐ **Day 3:** 2 Chronicles 17–18
- ☐ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 19–20
- ☐ **Day 5:** 2 Kings 1
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 58

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN INJUSTICE WILL BE JUDGED
(1 KINGS 21:17-26).

Underline the reasons the Lord gave for bringing destruction to both Ahab's and Jezebel's legacy and lineage.

17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 18 "Get up and go
to meet King Ahab of Israel, who is in Samaria. He's in Naboth's vineyard,
where he has gone to take possession of it. 19 Tell him, 'This is what the
LORD says: Have you murdered and also taken possession?' Then tell him,
'This is what the LORD says: In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's
blood, the dogs will also lick up your blood!'" 20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So, my
enemy, you've found me, have you?" He replied, "I have found you because
you devoted yourself to do what is evil in the LORD's sight. 21 This is what
the LORD says: 'I am about to bring disaster on you and will eradicate your
descendants: I will wipe out all of Ahab's males, both slave and free, in Israel;
22 I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and
like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have angered me and
caused Israel to sin.' 23 The LORD also speaks of Jezebel: 'The dogs will eat
Jezebel in the plot of land at Jezreel: 24 Anyone who belongs to Ahab and
dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and anyone who dies in the field, the birds
will eat.'" 25 Still, there was no one like Ahab, who devoted himself to do
what was evil in the LORD's sight, because his wife Jezebel incited him. 26 He
committed the most detestable acts by following idols as the Amorites had,
whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.

King Ahab wanted a vineyard that belonged to his neighbor Naboth, offering a better vineyard in its place or its value in silver. But Naboth, obeying the law of the Lord (Lev. 25:23), was unwilling to give his ancestral inheritance to the king for any price. Ahab pouted at his rejection, but Jezebel orchestrated events to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy so they could claim the vineyard after his execution (1 Kings 21:1-16).

Ahab and Jezebel thought they could get away with stealing, false witness, murder, and exerting unjust power over others, but Elijah found them out by the word of the Lord. Elijah pronounced a stark message of judgment against the power couple—death, disgrace, and destruction to their house and descendants—making it clear that those who participate in injustice will be judged by the Lord.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The pronouncement that Ahab's blood would be licked up by dogs (1 Kings 21:19) and that Jezebel's body would be eaten by dogs (v. 23) signified that there would be no honor in death for anyone connected to Ahab. Jezebel had unjustly set up Naboth

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

to be stoned to death, and dogs licked up his blood outside the city (v. 19). God's punishment for Ahab and Jezebel would be poetic justice for what they had done to Naboth.

How are you challenged and comforted by the truth that God sees and will judge all injustice?

God's announcement of judgment on Ahab recalled His judgment on the houses of Jeroboam and Baasha, two early kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:9-11; 16:1-4). But as bad as those kings were, they had nothing on Ahab, who was notable for all the wrong reasons. The Lord had sent His people into the promised land to conquer it, in part, to judge the current inhabitants because of their extreme wickedness. Ahab led Israel in that same type of wickedness.

Proverbs 13:20 says, "The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm." Ahab allowed Jezebel to influence him and the people of Israel to do evil. Ahab followed his wicked wife rather than the Lord, and both Ahab and Jezebel were judged by God for their evil.

LEADER NOTE: The Bible has plenty to say about our relationships and the company we keep. Some friends need to be closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). We need some other friendly relationships for the purpose of making new disciples (Matt. 9:10). But not even Jesus entrusted Himself to everyone (John 2:23-24), and neither should we.

What qualities should we look for when deciding who influences us?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"Do not be an Ahab and covet a neighbor's possession. Let not Jezebel dwell with you, that deadly avarice that persuades you to bloody deeds; that restrains not your desires but urges you on; that makes you sadder even when you gain possession of what you desire and that makes you destitute when you are rich."[1]

–Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397)

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD SHOWS MERCY WHEN SINNERS HUMBLE THEMSELVES
(1 KINGS 21:27-29).

Highlight how God responded to Ahab's humility.

27 When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth over
his body, and fasted. He lay down in sackcloth and walked around subdued.
28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 29 "Have you seen
how Ahab has humbled himself before me? I will not bring the disaster
during his lifetime, because he has humbled himself before me. I will bring
the disaster on his house during his son's lifetime."

Ahab humbled himself before the Lord, putting on sackcloth and fasting, basic outward displays of repentance and mourning in ancient Israel (see 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 3:31; 12:16,22). Receiving word of a punishing famine upon the land didn't faze him. Seeing the Lord light up a sacrifice from the sky, followed by the execution of his favored prophets, didn't sway him. But to Elijah's message of judgment for his injustice against Naboth, Ahab reacted with humility and the marks of repentance.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Sackcloth was made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable, a stark contrast to the clothing of a king. Fasting was going without food for a time to show God that the petition or repentance was more important than daily nourishment. Ahab would have had unlimited food and drink at his beck and call, but he refused those to help communicate the state of his heart.

Not only did Ahab put on sackcloth and fast, he also took on a "subdued" attitude, reflecting an inward change in his demeanor (1 Kings 21:27). Ahab's self-humiliation was prolonged and heartfelt, not just a pretend act of manipulation.

What are some ways we might display repentance for our sin before God?

God had told Ahab that he and his whole family and dynasty would be wiped out (vv. 21-24). But in response to Ahab's humility, God showed him mercy! God would delay the disaster for a few years to fall upon his sons (2 Kings 1; 9–10). God's patience and mercy make no sense from a human mind-set. Ahab was the worst and most wicked king of Israel, and yet, because he responded to the Lord with humility, God had mercy on him.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Ahab, a thief, a murderer, and one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history, had earned God's judgment, yet he humbled himself before the Lord, and God mercifully delayed that judgment. Like Ahab, we all have earned death as the wages for our sin, but those who humble themselves before the Lord, who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus, will never be condemned and will receive God's gift of eternal life with Him.

Such mercy doesn't make sense until we recognize that all of us are "the worst" (1 Tim. 1:15-16). God is perfect in His justice—sin will be judged—yet He loves to shows mercy when sinners humble themselves and believe in Him. We see a picture of this in God's response to Ahab's humility, but we see the fullness of God's mercy in His gospel to save sinners who repent and believe in Jesus for eternal life.

LEADER NOTE: Though Ahab humbled himself and received God's mercy, judgment still came. In 1 Kings 22, Ahab's death was foretold by a lone prophet of the Lord whom Ahab despised. God brought his death to pass with a stray arrow, after which his blood was licked up by dogs. For those saved by grace through the gospel, Jesus takes upon Himself the judgment due our sin. We will still experience discipline and death, but we are saved for eternal life with God.

How does God's mercy extended to Ahab help you to grasp the gospel of Jesus?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS MERCIFUL: Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God's withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive, give each person two sticky notes and a pen. Direct them to label one sticky note "100% Me" and the other "100% Not Me." Encourage them to hold up the appropriate sticky note as you read the following statements: "I think people who do not signal before changing lanes should lose their license"; "I keep some money with me to give to homeless people I may encounter"; "I judge parents with misbehaving kids in the store or restaurant"; and so forth.

TRANSITION: Today's Scripture might be challenging to your sense of right and wrong. You may come to a point of having to choose between holding on to your sense of justice or learning to see events and people through the lens of God's mercy, even when it does not match your long-held value system.

CONTEXT

SAY: After the confrontation on Mount Carmel, Elijah slaughtered the prophets of Baal. Jezebel responded to the loss of her prophets by threatening to have Elijah killed within twenty-four hours. Elijah ran for his life and was ready to give up and die. But God sustained him and spoke to him as he stood at the entrance of a cave in the wilderness. The Lord assured Elijah that He was not done with him and that he was not alone in serving Him. The Lord declared that seven thousand people in Israel had remained faithful to Him, and in addition to those faithful, the Lord commanded Elijah to anoint Elisha to take his place once he was gone (1 Kings 19).

RECAP

SUMMARIZE: Some time later, King Ahab desired a vineyard that belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab wanted to buy it from him, but Naboth would not sell it. It was his God-given right to retain the land that had belonged to his family through generations. Because of that, Ahab sulked. Jezebel, Ahab's wicked wife, came up with a scheme to have Naboth falsely accused and stoned to death. After Naboth was killed, Ahab went down to possess the vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16).

ASK: Think about the events of the Bible passage you read this week. If you were in charge of everything and knew what had happened, what would you do to Ahab? What do you think Elijah felt Ahab deserved?

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 48 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find "What We Deserve." Recreate this table on a board to record the group's responses as they interact with Scripture. Divide your group into two halves. One half will contribute to the arguments for judgment on the table, and the other half will contribute to the reasons for mercy.

What We Deserve

Read 1 Kings 21:17-29. Write down what was deserved and what was received in each square.

AHAB DESERVED JUDGMENT BECAUSE . . .	AHAB RECEIVED MERCY BECAUSE . . .
I DESERVED JUDGMENT BECAUSE . . .	I RECEIVED MERCY BECAUSE . . .

READ: Call on a volunteer to read 1 Kings 21:17-26.

RECALL: Invite the judgment team to list reasons Ahab deserved judgment for his actions. Permission is granted to recall from the previous session and the daily readings of Scripture. Record responses on the table. Then discuss why we deserve judgment for our actions as well. Write answers on the board.

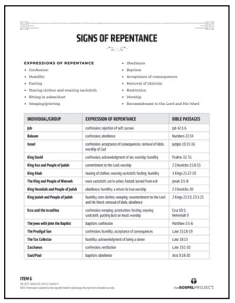
READ: Call on a volunteer to read 1 Kings 21:27-29.

ANALYZE: Invite the mercy team to list the reasons God extended mercy to Ahab. Permission is granted to draw from other places in Scripture that speak to the attributes and character of God on this point. Then discuss why God extends mercy to us as well. Write the answers on the board. Allow a moment of quiet reflection for individuals to answer more personally in their PSGs.

REVIEW: Invite your group to be transparent if anyone has a hard time accepting God's mercy toward Ahab, but be sure to uphold God's perfect justice and His perfect mercy. Say: "Ahab deserved God's judgment. His offenses

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes



against God were egregious: 'There was no one like Ahab, who devoted himself to do what was evil in the LORD's sight, because his wife Jezebel incited him. He committed the most detestable acts by following idols' (1 Kings 21:25-26). But we aren't any more holy than Ahab on our own, so we are just as deserving of God's judgment. Yet God is also merciful, and that is an undeserved grace of God. As we see in part from God's response to Ahab, the Lord 'will not despise a broken and humbled heart' (Ps. 51:17)." Pass out copies of **Pack Item 6: Signs of Repentance** and review it with your group to discuss what true repentance might look like today.

DEBRIEF

What does this passage teach us about God's concern for justice? About God's delight in showing mercy?

SUMMARIZE

God will not ignore injustice among His people, nor will He ignore injustice from any of His image-bearers, and we are all guilty of sin and injustice against Him and others. Ahab was complicit in lies, murder, and theft amongst other sins; our may differ by degree but are no less offensive to God. And yet, the Lord is merciful. He responds to the humble and broken hearts of sinners. Ahab received a reprieve, a postponement of his judgment. Under no circumstances could we say he deserved this from God. But even greater, through the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, taking upon Himself the judgment we deserve, those who believe in Him and repent of their sins are graced with forgiveness and eternal life. In Christ, the justice and mercy of God meet and are satisfied.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 49). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: In Exodus 20:13-17, the Lord says, "Do not murder. . . . Do not steal. Do not give false testimony against your neighbor. Do not covet your neighbor's house . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Ahab and Jezebel broke God's law and earned God's just judgment, but for his humility, Ahab also received a measure of mercy.

How do you reconcile God's perfect justice and His perfect mercy?

HEART: Ahab was the worst king of Israel, having done more evil to anger the Lord than any before him. Yet a change of thinking led to a change of heart, and thus, he humbled himself before the Lord, for which he received mercy.

How does it feel to know that mercy is found just by repenting and turning to the Lord?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

Notes

HANDS: It is easy to look at others who may live in open sin as being "the worst" or unworthy of God's mercy. But as a common phrase says, "You bring nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary." All of us are the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16); we all need to trust Jesus for salvation.

How will you reach out to unbelievers, knowing that the Lord delights in showing mercy to all who repent?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read James 2:13 and prayerfully plead with God to make mercy a greater trait in your life than judgment.
- Be aware of opportunities to help people change through loving them, pointing out the sin that kills and holding out the mercy of Christ (Eph. 4:15).
- Call one acquaintance of whom you have been judgmental, ask them to forgive you, and offer to help when they feel trapped by their circumstances.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 49 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 58:10-11 with your group, acknowledging and rejoicing in God's certain justice, and also acknowledge and rejoice that no one is righteous and rewarded but by the mercy of God through the perfect obedience and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

References

1. Ambrose, On Naboth, 11.48-49, in Marco Conti and Gianluca Pilara, eds., *1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 130 [Logos].

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

UNIT 14
RENEWAL

2 KINGS; HOSEA; JONAH

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Memory Verse

"Take words of repentance with you and return to the LORD. Say to him, 'Forgive all our iniquity and accept what is good, so that we may repay you with praise from our lips.'"

—Hosea 14:2

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

RESURRECTION

CORE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 4:18-22,24-25,28-37

CONTEXT

The prophet Elijah's ministry ended when he was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha, his successor, went to Shunem, where he met "a prominent woman" who fed him and provided him a place to stay whenever he came that way. In response, Elisha desired to help her in some way. He learned she had no offspring and her husband was aging. Aside from the general desire to bear children, if she were to become a widow with no offspring, the Shunammite woman would be vulnerable and likely oppressed. Therefore, Elisha prophesied that in one year she would have a son, and it came to pass, just as Elisha had promised.

KEY CONCEPT

God has the power to overcome death.

As you examine 2 Kings 4:18-22,24-25,28-37:

- Recognize that when her son died, the Shunammite woman knew to seek God through His prophet.
- Consider that both the woman and Elisha needed to persist in their hope in the resurrection.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

Elijah Anoints Elisha as His Successor (1 Kings 19)

Ahab Dies in Battle, Fulfilling Prophecy (1 Kings 22)

Elijah Goes into Heaven in a Whirlwind (2 Kings 2)

A Shunammite Woman Shows Hospitality to Elisha (2 Kings 4)

SESSION STUDY:
Elisha Raises the Shunammite Woman's Son to Life (2 Kings 4)

Elisha Heals Naaman the Syrian of Leprosy (2 Kings 5)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 2 Chronicles 21
- ☐ **Day 2:** 2 Kings 2–8
- ☐ **Day 3:** 2 Kings 9–12
- ☐ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 22–25
- ☐ **Day 5:** 2 Kings 13–14
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 30

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD'S PEOPLE PUT THEIR HOPE IN HIM
(2 KINGS 4:18-22,24-25).

Underline all the action verbs to reveal the fast-paced action of this narrative.

18 The child grew and one day went out to his father and the harvesters.
19 Suddenly he complained to his father, "My head! My head!" His father told
his servant, "Carry him to his mother." **20** So he picked him up and took him
to his mother. The child sat on her lap until noon and then died. **21** She went
up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut him in, and left. **22** She
summoned her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and
one of the donkeys, so I can hurry to the man of God and come back again."
. . . **24** Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Go fast; don't
slow the pace for me unless I tell you." **25** So she came to the man of God at
Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her at a distance, he said to his
attendant Gehazi, "Look, there's the Shunammite woman."

The Shunammite woman had placed her hope in God, supported His prophet, and experienced His blessing—she was given a son! But one day her son, whom she had not asked for, died of a sudden illness. One moment he was fine, the next, he had a headache, and within a few hours, he died in his mother's arms. Can you imagine? She held the son God had miraculously given her and watched the child slip away.

But then the Shunammite woman did something unexpected. Instead of weeping over her son's body, changing into mourner's clothing, or preparing his body for burial, she laid him on Elisha's bed and hurried to find the prophet. She hoped that the Lord through His prophet would intervene in her desperate situation. What faith! She pursued "the man of God" as quickly as possible and found him at Mount Carmel, the place where the Lord demonstrated His superiority to all Israel (v. 25; cf. 1 Kings 18:19-20).

How would you react if you lost what was most precious to you?

Elisha had great affection and concern for the woman and her family, recognizing her from a distance. Seeing the woman approach, he sent his attendant, Gehazi, out to meet her and make sure everything was okay. The woman told Gehazi, "It's all right" (2 Kings 4:26). When she reached Elisha, however, she clung to his feet in anguish. Gehazi tried to push her away, but Elisha realized something was wrong that the Lord had not revealed to him (v. 27).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

LEADER NOTE: The Shunammite woman twice described her situation and state of mind with the words "It's all right" (vv. 23,26; Heb. *shalom*). But when she finally reached Elisha, she let her anguish be known. Elisha was "the man of God" who spoke and acted for the Lord in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. There were others known as "the sons of the prophets" (2:3,5,7,15), but Elisha had a special role in Israel passed down to him from Elijah by the word of the Lord (1 Kings 19:16). The woman's seeking Elisha was her seeking the Lord.

The woman had told no one what happened to the child, refusing to accept her child's death without first seeking the prophet's help.[1] She had learned to place her hope in the Lord through her contact with Elisha. So when the unimaginable, unexpected tragedy happened, she wasted no time in exercising hope that the all-powerful God of Elisha could intervene. She exemplified Hebrews 11:6: "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." In seeking after God, the woman pleased the Lord with her faith and compelled Elisha to act. God's people place their hope in Him.

LEADER NOTE: The Bible often describes hope and faith as being placed in something unseen or yet to be revealed. For example, the writer of Hebrews defined faith as "the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen" (Heb. 11:1). In Romans 8:23-25, Paul described our hope in our unseen but coming salvation. While we have yet to see Jesus face to face, those who are in Christ have an abiding hope that "he who started a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6).

What does it mean to put your hope in the Lord?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

RESURRECTION: Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

OUR HOPE RESTS IN THE RESURRECTION POWER OF GOD
(2 KINGS 4:28-37).

Circle each time someone changes their physical posture, considering the significance of each action.

28 Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn't I say, 'Do not lie to me?'"
29 So Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your mantle under your belt, take my staff
with you, and go. If you meet anyone, don't stop to greet him, and if a man
greets you, don't answer him. Then place my staff on the boy's face." 30 The
boy's mother said to Elisha, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will
not leave you." So he got up and followed her. 31 Gehazi went ahead of them
and placed the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or sign of
life, so he went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy didn't wake up."
32 When Elisha got to the house, he discovered the boy lying dead on his
bed. 33 So he went in, closed the door behind the two of them, and prayed
to the LORD. 34 Then he went up and lay on the boy: he put mouth to mouth,
eye to eye, hand to hand. While he bent down over him, the boy's flesh
became warm. 35 Elisha got up, went into the house, and paced back and
forth. Then he went up and bent down over him again. The boy sneezed
seven times and opened his eyes. 36 Elisha called Gehazi and said, "Call the
Shunammite woman." He called her and she came. Then Elisha said, "Pick up
your son." 37 She came, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; she picked
up her son and left.

Clinging to Elisha's feet, the woman reminded the prophet that he had promised she would have a son, and Elisha immediately understood this to mean the boy was either ill or dead (v. 28). So Elisha instructed his assistant to go quickly in his place; nothing was to interrupt his mission. Yet when Gehazi put Elisha's staff on the boy, nothing happened. But the story wasn't over.

Elisha and the Shunammite woman needed to persist in their faith and hope. Upon finding the boy, Elisha closed the door on the two of them and prayed. Then he lay on the boy, and the dead body grew warm, but Elisha needed to continue. He did not give up hope. He paced back and forth, undoubtedly crying out for God to intervene. Elisha bent over the boy once more, and this time, the once-dead child began to sneeze and opened his eyes, fully alive. Then the mother who fell at Elisha's feet in anguish and faith fell at his feet once again, this time in reverence to the Lord and His prophet.

What role does persistence play in our prayers and hope?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

LEADER NOTE: Throughout the Bible, resurrections are a rarity. Only Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, Peter, and Paul raised the dead. So we should temper our expectations of the dead being raised today apart from Jesus's second coming, though God can if He wills. But in the things we pray for, Jesus encouraged us to be persistent, like a widow pestering an unjust judge for justice (Luke 18:1-8). In large categories, we should pray for God's will to be done, for His justice to be done, for our needs to be met, for the salvation of unbelievers, and for our own faithfulness to the Lord, trusting that God is the loving and just judge of all the earth, of both the living and the dead.

The Shunammite woman had no hope other than the resurrecting power of God. The resurrection of her son reminds us of the resurrection of another son: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is only in the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we have hope for our salvation from sin and to eternal life.

Without the resurrection, we are dead in our trespasses and sins (1 Cor. 15:17; Eph. 2:1). Because of Christ and His resurrection, our hope rests in the resurrection power of God who "loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

LEADER NOTE: The whole Christian faith rests upon the bodily resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15). Skeptics claim Jesus's body was stolen (Matt. 28:13-15). False teachers say Jesus's teachings reappeared or that Jesus appeared only in spirit. However, the Bible teaches that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead, meaning he was physically resurrected (Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6; Rom. 6:4). Furthermore, after His death, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred witnesses (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Jesus is alive, seated at the right hand of God the Father, and will one day return (Rom. 8:34; Rev. 19:11-16).

How does faith in Jesus's resurrection and hope for the future resurrection impact your life?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Because God has the power to bring the dead to life, He was able to give His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice, knowing He would be resurrected to defeat sin and death for the salvation of all who believe in Him.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive, begin by asking this ice-breaker question: "When have you received a gift that you didn't ask for but it turned out to be an unexpected blessing?"

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: The books of 1 and 2 Kings give many accounts of the works and ministry performed by Elijah and his successor, Elisha. Yet more profound than the faith of these two prophets, these books testify to the sovereignty, righteousness, and merciful nature of God. In 2 Kings 4:8-10, we read of a Shunammite woman and her hospitality to Elisha, building a room for him to stay in when he passed through town. Because of that, Elisha wanted to give her something as a blessing. Despite what seemed to be an impossible situation, the God of miracles gave this woman a child, a son. But Scripture goes on to tell us that after battling a brief illness, the boy died suddenly. Yet that was not his end. What seemed like a final period on a heartbreaking story was just a comma in God's plan for the Shunammite woman's family.

RECAP

ASK: What stood out to you this week about each person's response to the events of the passage (the Shunammite woman, Gehazi, and Elisha)?

SAY: In the previous study of 1 Kings 21, we saw the Lord's mercy on full display in His response to injustice and Ahab's surprising humility. Today we will see His mercy and authority through something as horrific as death. In God's goodness and mercy, we will always see His authority. As we prepare to dive into today's passage of Scripture, it is necessary for us to remember that what God allows and ordains is always for our good and His glory.

TRANSITION: Throughout Scripture there are instances of people being raised from the dead. One remarkably similar account to today's Scripture is the story of Jesus and Jairus's daughter in Mark 5. Let's compare these two stories.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: God has the power to overcome death.

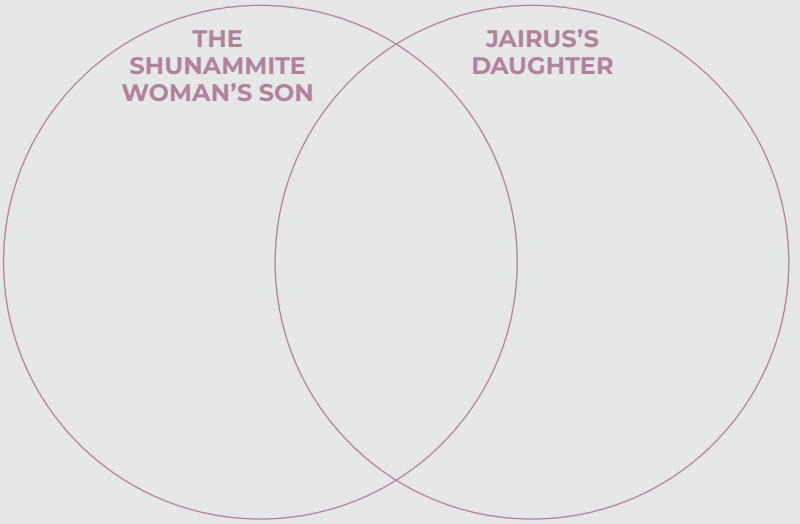
Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

DIAGRAM: Direct your group to page 58 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a Venn diagram comparing Elisha's miracle and Jesus's raising of Jairus's daughter. Recreate this diagram on a board in your room so you can record the group's responses as they interact with Scripture.

Power over Life and Death

Read 2 Kings 4:18-22,24-25,28-37 and Mark 5:21-24,35-43. Compare the similarities and differences between these two resurrections.



READ: Invite one volunteer to read aloud 2 Kings 4:18-22,24-25,28-37. Invite another volunteer to read aloud Mark 5:21-24,35-43.

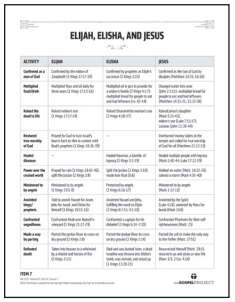
INSTRUCT: Divide the large group into three smaller groups. Instruct Group 1 to identify things unique to the story of the Shunammite woman's son. Instruct Group 2 to identify details unique to the story of Jairus's daughter. Instruct Group 3 to find characteristics that both stories share. After a few minutes, record the groups' conclusions along with the appropriate Scripture references in the diagram on the board. Encourage participants to record these in their PSG as well.

DISCUSS: What were the main differences in these stories? What were the similarities? What can we learn about the authority of the Lord in both accounts?

SAY: One of the major differences between the resurrection of the Shunammite boy and Jairus's daughter is that Elisha prayed to the Lord, asking for the boy's healing, whereas Jesus simply commanded the girl to rise. Though Elisha was a

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes



ELIJAH, ELISHA, AND JESUS

ACTIVITY	ELIJAH	ELISHA	JESUS
Confirmed as a man of God	Confirmed by the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24)	Confirmed by prophets as Elijah's successor (2 Kings 2:15)	Confirmed as the Son of God by disciples (Matthew 14:33; 16:16)
Multiplied food/drink	Multiplied flour and oil daily for three years (1 Kings 17:13-16)	Multiplied oil in jars to provide for a widow's family (2 Kings 4:1-7); multiplied barley loaves to feed 100 and had leftovers (v. 42-44)	Changed water into wine (John 2:1-11); multiplied bread for 5,000 men and had leftovers (Matthew 14:15-21; 15:32-38)
Raised the dead to life	Raised widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24)	Raised Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4:18-37)	Raised Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21-43); widow's son (Luke 7:11-17); Lazarus (John 11:38-44)
Restored true worship of God	Prayed for God to turn Israel's hearts back to Him in contest with Baal's prophets (1 Kings 18:36-39)	–	Overturned money tables in the temple and called His Father in a unique way of God for all (Matthew 21:12-13)
Healed illnesses	–	Healed Naaman, a Gentile of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-19)	Healed multiple people with leprosy (Mark 1:40-44; Luke 17:12-19)
Power over the created world	Prayed for rain (1 Kings 18:42-45); split the Jordan (2 Kings 2:8)	Split the Jordan (2 Kings 2:14); made iron float (6:6)	Walked on water (Mark 14:51-52); calmed a storm (Mark 4:35-40)
Ministered to by angels	Ministered to by angels (1 Kings 19:5-8)	Protected by angels (2 Kings 6:16-17)	Ministered to by angels (Mark 1:12-13)
Anointed kings/ prophets	Told to anoint Hazael for Aram, Jehu for Israel, and Elisha for himself (1 Kings 19:15-16)	Anointed Hazael and Jehu, fulfilling the word to Elijah (2 Kings 9:1-3; 9:1-10)	Anointed by the Spirit (Luke 4:18); anointed by Mary for burial (Mark 14:8)
Confronted unjust/evil	Confronted Ahab over Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:2-19)	Confronted a captain for his disdain (2 Kings 1:9-12)	Confronted Pharisees for their self-righteousness (Mark 2:5)
Made a way by parting	Parted the Jordan River to cross on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8)	Parted the Jordan River to cross on dry ground (2 Kings 2:14)	Parted the veil to make the only way to the Father (Mark 15:38)
Defeated death	Taken into heaven in a whirlwind by a chariot and horses of fire (2 Kings 2:11)	Died and was buried; later, a dead Israelite was thrown into Elisha's tomb, was revived, and stood up (2 Kings 13:20-21)	Resurrected Himself (Mark 28:6); resurrects us and gives us new life (Mark 3:5, 21ce, 4:16)

ITEM 7

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources
This resource is provided for the sole use of the purchaser for ministry or personal use. Any other use is prohibited without written permission.

the GOSPEL PROJECT

prophet of God and mightily used by Him to resurrect a child, Elisha begged for the Lord's power. Jesus, as God the Son, spoke with authority. Just as with every other hero of the faith, Jesus is the true and better Elisha. The power to defeat death is held by Jesus alone.

EXAMINE: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 7: Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus** and review it with your group, summarizing the similarities and differences between the three. Say: "Jesus is the true and better Elisha, not just because He has authority over death but because through His death, burial, and resurrection, He defeated death forever. We may never see someone raised from the dead in our lifetime, but because Jesus lives and reigns, we can rest in the hope of knowing that physical death is not the end for those who trust in the risen King."

DEBRIEF

(PSG p. 58) Knowing that God has the authority to defeat death, how should we approach death?

Knowing that God has the power to bring new life, what should be our response?

SUMMARIZE

Lead the group to review the key concept, inviting them to share ways today's group experience helped them better understand the hope of the resurrection. Close by inviting a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 15:54-58.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 59). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: As Christians, our hope rests upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. Romans 15 teaches that the Scriptures were given to us for instruction "so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures" (v. 4). Reading God's Word daily is an opportunity for God to strengthen our hope of salvation.

What role does the hope of resurrection have in your understanding of salvation?

HEART: Romans 15:13 describes another way God strengthens our hope: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." When we are born-again through faith in Jesus Christ, God transforms us to be hope-filled people through the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

In what areas of your life do you need to repent of resisting the joy, peace, and hope God provides?

HANDS: Paul prayed, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another" (Rom. 15:5). Our hope that corresponds with the hope found in the Scriptures helps us to live in harmony and stay on mission as the church, sharing the hope of Christ with those who do not know Him. The hope of the resurrection empowers us to action—ministering to one another and sharing the gospel with the lost.

How will the hope of the resurrection motivate you to action this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read and pray through Isaiah 25:8-9, noticing the ramifications of the curse of sin that will be undone and the certainty of our hope that leads to praise.
- Reflect on your life. The hope of the resurrection calls human beings to a life of victory, not of defeat. How are you living in victory today?
- Share with a friend how the gospel brings us from death to life. The hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ is meant to be shared.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 59 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 30:1-4 with your group, praising the Lord for His merciful salvation that raises us from the dead both now and for eternity.

References

1. Paul R. House, 1, 2 Kings, vol. 8, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 267–68.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

ARTICLE

JONAH: HIS LIFE AND TIMES

Adapted from an article by Phillip J. Swanson

Jonah was God's prophet. He had proven his status as a true prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II when he predicted Jeroboam would reestablish the God-given boundaries of the land when he "restored Israel's border from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah" (2 Kings 14:25). Then God had a new mission for His faithful prophet, as shown in the book of Jonah (Jonah 1:2; 3:2).

This time around, however,something went terribly wrong. The prophet fled from his country, his mission, and his God. What could, and would, make a true prophet respond to his Master in such a disobedient and disgraceful way? The message Jonah was given to proclaim was not the issue. Jonah's problem appears to have been with the destination God had chosen—Nineveh, Assyria's capital. While no excuse would be adequate for his behavior, a partial, possible answer for his inconceivable response to God's mission may be found in the situation that confronted Jonah in the early decades of the 8th century BC.

A KNOWN ENEMY

A Bible student might manufacture an imaginary day in the life of the prophet Jonah. I will do so in order to illustrate the situation and personal problem Jonah confronted. He probably arose early in the morning to begin his day with his God. After prayer and meditation on God's law, he might have looked out the upper story window of his prophet's room. There, in the distance to the east, he could have seen a small, almost indistinguishable cloud of dust rise from the desert sand. No matter how hard he peered into the distance, he could not make out who or what it was. And each day the cloud of dust would appear closer and closer and closer to his home in Gath-hepher. But still, no matter how hard he strained his prophetic eyes, he could not see clearly the origin of the cloud. But he knew! He knew without looking; he knew without seeing; it was the Assyrian army!

Like the cloud of dust, the Assyrian army's reputation was preceding them. The Assyrian army was noted for its cruelty, although they were probably no more cruel than their contemporaries. Historians remember the Assyrians for their practice of exiling those whom they conquered. Especially notable was their practice of leading captives away on foot, tethered together with fishhooks and line. Amos 4:2 reports this practice: "Look, the days are coming when you will be taken away with hooks, every last one of you with fishhooks." Considering the Assyrians' might and reputation for fearsome behavior, Israel (and her prophet) might rightly be afraid of them. This was Jonah's world.

The prophet Jonah prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (about 782–745 BC). The historical books of the Bible record little about Jeroboam II or Jonah, but in reality, the importance of this king and this prophet to Israel appears to have been larger than the space allotted to them in Scripture.

AN OBSCURE KING

Jeroboam II came to rule at an opportune time in Israel's history. From the time of the split between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, both Israel and her southern counterpart were pestered, if not terrorized, by the military incursions of their neighbors. Jeroboam II, however, entered the palace with the possibility of expanding Israel's territory. The major powers—Egypt, Syria, and Assyria—had enormous internal problems, which

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

The prophet fled from his country, his mission, and his God. What could, and would, make a true prophet respond to his Master in such a disobedient and disgraceful way? . . . Jonah's problem appears to have been with the destination God had chosen—Nineveh.

allowed Jeroboam II to reassert independence in Israel. At the same time, wars between the Assyrians, Syrians, and the northern Urartu left Israel and Judah to their own devices.

Given his military abilities, Jeroboam II expanded Israel's borders to their former greatness. Israel's borders, combined with Judah's in the south, rivaled the territorial limits held during the time of Solomon. Yet for all the political genius of Jeroboam II, the prosperity was external. Corruption ran rampant, and within a few short years of his death, the political state had developed into anarchy. Corruption was the problem, and it was total, including king, priest, prophet, and people. A dual-class citizenship, with a great gulf fixed between them, reached epidemic proportions. The prophet Amos, a contemporary of Jonah, described the situation: "I know your crimes are many and your sins innumerable. They oppress the righteous, take a bribe, and deprive the poor of justice at the city gates" (Amos 5:12). The poor in Israel found themselves at the mercy of the king, the judges, and their neighbors.

Concerned primarily with his own treasure, Jeroboam II turned his attention to his own economic well-being. The buildings excavated in Samaria from Jeroboam II's reign indicate the wealth of the nation. The excavations at the northern city of Tirzah, however, illustrate the disparity between the wealthy and the poor classes.

AN APOSTATE PEOPLE

In religious terms, the people of Israel fared no better. Kingship, economy, and social welfare in general had been governed by Israel's religion, especially her covenant concept. From the inception of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam I usurped the privilege reserved for the priest, offering sacrifices for himself on the altar at Bethel (1 Kings 12:33). Amos involved himself in the controversy with his proclamations against Jeroboam II at Bethel (Amos 7:11), a dangerous enterprise at the very least. The prophets understood the significance of the kingly abuse of the priestly function, but it seemed to matter little to Israel's kings. Even though the warnings of Amos (and others) were clear and to the point, they were not heeded, and Amos's prophecies came to pass.

The prophet Hosea, another of Jonah's contemporaries, denounced Israelite society and religion for their apostasy with idols and dependence on worldly measures for protection. Israel's religion had disintegrated into lip service, dead ritual, and ineffective worship. While king, priest, and people "obeyed" the Lord with their ritual and allegiance to the national sanctuaries, their religion focused on these cultic matters rather than on the God who gave them. By Jonah's time, Israel's religious practices were a short step from becoming as pagan as the religions that surrounded them.

The situation Jonah confronted might have given him great hope for the future if the economic situation of the rich had been his only concern. However, Israel was bankrupt. Jonah knew the past difficulties with Assyria because he lived through them. He also would know the difficulties Israel would face from Assyria in the future because God told him. Jonah wanted Assyria destroyed. The Israelite army couldn't do it, but Israel's God could. Jonah wanted Him to take that opportunity.

Phillip J. Swanson served as pastor of Coltsneck Baptist Church in Coltsneck, New Jersey, for several years.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

REPENTANCE

CORE PASSAGE: JONAH 3:4-10; 4:1-2,6-11

CONTEXT

Jonah, a contemporary of Amos and Hosea, was a prophet of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who did evil in the Lord's eyes. Yet the Lord spoke graciously to Israel through Jonah in order to help them (2 Kings 14:25-27). God also commanded Jonah to go and proclaim judgment against Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. But Jonah fled in the opposite direction. Through a series of circumstances orchestrated by God, Jonah found himself in the belly of a large fish and then back on dry land. God gave Jonah a second chance, and this time Jonah obeyed, going to Nineveh to preach the message the Lord gave to him.

KEY CONCEPT

God is merciful to forgive when people repent, and He desires His people to be merciful as well.

As you examine Jonah 3:4-10; 4:1-2,6-11:

- Recognize that because the Ninevites fasted and repented, God relented in His judgment and spared the city.
- Contemplate Jonah's reason for fleeing from the Lord's mission—he knew the Lord is gracious and compassionate.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

Elijah Performs Miracles and Prophesies to Israel (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2)

Elisha Performs Miracles and Prophesies to Israel (2 Kings 2–13)

SESSION STUDY:
Jonah Prophesies to Israel and Nineveh (2 Kings 14; Jonah 1–4)

Israel's Kings Persist in Doing Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 14–17)

Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Jonah 1–2
- ☐ **Day 2:** Jonah 3–4
- ☐ **Day 3:** Amos 1–2
- ☐ **Day 4:** Amos 3–6
- ☐ **Day 5:** Amos 7–9
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 85

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to see the timeline of the Assyrian Empire and its biblical connections.

GOD RELENTS FROM ADMINISTERING JUDGMENT WHEN HE SEES REPENTANCE (JONAH 3:4-10).

Circle every action (verb) the Ninevites and the king of Nineveh took in response to God's message.

4 Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, "In
forty days Nineveh will be demolished!" 5 Then the people of Nineveh
believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the
greatest of them to the least. 6 When word reached the king of Nineveh,
he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with
sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he issued a decree in Nineveh: By order
of the king and his nobles: No person or animal, herd or flock, is to taste
anything at all. They must not eat or drink water. 8 Furthermore, both
people and animals must be covered with sackcloth, and everyone must
call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from his
wrongdoing. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his
burning anger so that we will not perish. 10 God saw their actions—that they
had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had
threatened them with. And he did not do it.

The city of Nineveh was an evil place. As the capital and most prominent city of Assyria, Nineveh was the center of anti-Israel fervor. The Assyrians were sworn enemies of God's people, and they historically dominated the entire Near East. After conquering a people, they often would stack their enemies' corpses and skulls in celebration. The Assyrians and Israelites hated one another.

Nineveh deserved God's judgment for their wicked ways. Having been given a second chance to obey God's call, Jonah walked around and throughout the densely populated city, taking three days to saturate the people with God's message. He declared, "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!" (v. 4). God had planned a disaster in judgment of the wicked people.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Jonah's message to Nineveh, which he received from the Lord, spoke simply of judgment: "Nineveh will be demolished" (v. 4). It would seem the Lord left no recourse for the Ninevites, except for two facts: (1) the Lord sent Jonah to communicate this message of judgment, and (2) the Lord included a countdown—"forty days." Given these two facts, the Ninevites took some measure of hope that their prospects might be changed by their response.

What role might the announcement of judgment for sin play in the sharing of the gospel?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

The Assyrians were a polytheistic people, believing in many gods, but when they heard Jonah's preaching on the first day of his walk in the city, they believed Jonah's God. They understood that they deserved God's judgment for their sins, so they took steps of repentance. Even the king declared a city-wide fast from food and water and that all the people and animals should be covered in sackcloth. These outward signs were to accompany the people's inward repentance from evil. And finally, they were to call out earnestly to God in hopes that He would relent from His anger and judgment.

The Ninevites heard God's message and responded with repentance. God saw their repentance and relented from administering His judgment. God's merciful forgiveness is not constrained to one particular nation or ethnicity. He is compassionate to all who respond to Him in repentance.

> **LEADER NOTE:** We could compare the Ninevites' repentant response to Jonah to King Ahab's response to Elijah (1 Kings 21:27-29) and find many similarities. The outward signs such as fasting and sackcloth revealed a genuine change in the disposition of these people's hearts. Similarly, our repentance in response to the preaching and sharing of God's Word will involve a change of heart, though perhaps not fasting or wearing sackcloth. The outward signs can vary based on culture, but the inward reality of a heart convicted regarding sin reveals the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a sinner (John 16:7-11).

How might you evaluate your own response of repentance to conviction from God's Word?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

REPENTANCE: Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD DESIRES THAT HIS PEOPLE SHOW MERCY AND FORGIVENESS TO OTHERS (JONAH 4:1-2,6-11).

Underline Jonah's description of God and reflect on the characteristics he lists.

1 Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious. 2 He prayed to the LORD,
"Please, LORD, isn't this what I said while I was still in my own country? That's
why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you are a gracious
and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one
who relents from sending disaster." . . . 6 Then the LORD God appointed a
plant, and it grew over Jonah to provide shade for his head to rescue him
from his trouble. Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant. 7 When dawn
came the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, and it
withered. 8 As the sun was rising, God appointed a scorching east wind.
The sun beat down on Jonah's head so much that he almost fainted, and
he wanted to die. He said, "It's better for me to die than to live." 9 Then
God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "Yes, it's
right!" he replied. "I'm angry enough to die!" 10 And the LORD said, "You
cared about the plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow. It
appeared in a night and perished in a night. 11 So may I not care about the
great city of Nineveh, which has more than a hundred twenty thousand
people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as
many animals?"

God mercifully relented from sending disaster upon the city of Nineveh in response to the people's repentance. But in response to the Lord's mercy, Jonah threw a tantrum. He complained to God about the turn of events and sought to justify his previous disobedience of running away from Nineveh based on God's character. The Lord is "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster" (v. 2). Jonah didn't want Nineveh rescued from God's wrath—he wanted them destroyed—so he initially opted to keep the Lord's message from them to help ensure they never repented. In his anger, Jonah demonstrated the misalignment between his own heart and God's.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Jonah knew of God's character as gracious, compassionate, patient, loving, and merciful because that's how the Lord revealed His glory to Moses way back in Exodus 34:6-7. But this self-description by God wasn't just a jumble of platitudes, it had a specific context—God's response to the debacle of Israel's golden calf, in which they broke the first two of God's Ten Commandments. The Lord proclaimed His judgment and destruction for the people but "relented concerning the disaster" for the sake of His glory and covenant, as Moses interceded for the people (Ex. 32:11-14).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

What are some ways you find yourself at odds with God's character?

Whatever Jonah's reason to be angry at God's mercy, the Lord wanted His prophet to grasp the bigger picture of His heart to save sinners. So every step God took over the next couple of days—addressing Jonah's anger directly, growing the plant, sending the worm to eat the plant, sending the scorching wind—was meant to prompt Jonah to repentance of his sinful anger toward the Ninevites and his resentment toward the Lord.

Jonah had such a wild range of emotions concerning the plant that lived for a day. God used this to patiently point out the hypocrisy of Jonah's love for the plant and his unwillingness to forgive the more than 120,000 people of Nineveh. God compassionately explained His heart of mercy to forgive the Ninevites and challenged Jonah to turn his care for a plant into care for people.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The story of Jonah is a cliffhanger; we don't know how Jonah responded. Did he continue his tantrum or repent of his unforgiveness? Instead of resolution, the cliffhanger prompts the reader to reflect inward. God desires that we show mercy and forgiveness to others just as He does. Jesus taught that forgiving others is a mark of a true believer (Matt. 6:14-15) and that there should be no limit to our forgiveness of others (18:21-35).

How are you showing others God's heart of care, mercy, and forgiveness?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God is compassionate and will forgive when people repent. All who believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sin will be saved.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive for the group experience, ask this ice-breaker question: "When have you experienced a situation that seemed unfair at the time?" Invite the group to share their responses.

CONTEXT

REVIEW: Jonah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel some decades after Ahab's reign. He prophesied around the same time that Elisha's ministry ended. He was one of the prophets God sent Israel to convict them of their sin so they could repent. He also received the task of prophesying to Nineveh, a very wicked, violent city of the Assyrians. God commanded Jonah to go Nineveh, but the prophet was reluctant. Instead, he tried to sail away, which resulted in God sending a storm, Jonah getting tossed overboard, and a big fish swallowing him. Given a second chance, Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh to preach. But when he did, he was surprised at the result. The book of Jonah tells a story of the wickedness of man, the stubbornness of a prophet, and the relentless, merciful pursuit of a holy and loving God.

RECAP

ASK: From your personal preparation this week, what are your thoughts about Jonah and his character? Any other thoughts or questions that came up from your study of the Scripture?

SAY: In last week's study of 2 Kings 4, we saw the Lord's authority over death and His ability to bring new life. Today we will see God's mercy and desire for all people to come to know Him as their Savior and King. As we dive into today's passage of Scripture, it is necessary for us to remember that we are never too far from God to receive His grace, and we are also never too far into our salvation that we don't need His mercy.

TRANSITION: Scripture includes many examples of the Lord calling individuals and groups into a loving relationship with Him while rebuking and teaching the religious elite that His mercy is for all. As we prepare to further examine Jonah's story, let's examine some of these accounts found in Scripture.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 66 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart labeled "Too Far Gone?" Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group's responses as they interact with Scripture.

Too Far Gone?
Read the passages and write down how God showed mercy and how the people responded.

THE NINEVITES' REPENTANCE (JONAH 3:4-10)	DAVID'S REPENTANCE (2 SAMUEL 12:7-20)
THE SAMARITAN WOMAN'S MESSAGE (JOHN 4:7-30,39-42)	**SAUL'S REPENTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION (ACTS 9:1-20)**

INSTRUCT: Divide the large group into three smaller groups. Assign each group one of the three non-Jonah accounts listed above. Instruct the small groups to read the passage as a group and record notes about the stories. Encourage them to answer questions such as: "Who did the Lord call to repentance in the story? What were the people's responses?" After a few moments, call for the groups' conclusions and record these along with the verse number in the table on the board. Encourage participants to record these in their PSG as well.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Jonah 3:4-10.

DISCUSS: Lead the group in answering the previous questions for this account. Then discuss: "What are similarities between these accounts? What opposition, if any, arose against the mercy extended to these people?"

SAY: When we examine each of these passages, we can see that mercy is being spared from what we deserve, the way God relented of His judgment against

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

Nineveh because the people repented. We should rejoice to be on the receiving end of God's mercy, but we may not be so quick to rejoice in God's mercy shown to others.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Jonah 4:1-11.

DISCUSS: What are some ways Jonah revealed his hard heart toward God and the Ninevites? *(anger; rebellion against the character of God; a desire to die rather than live as a witness of God's mercy to Nineveh; misplaced priorities)* How might we struggle to align our hearts with God's mercy?

DEBRIEF

Knowing that we do not deserve God's grace and mercy yet He still calls us to Himself, how might this change the way we view our own salvation?

(PSG p. 66) Knowing that God desires for no one to perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9), how should this influence the way we interact with those around us?

SUMMARIZE

Lead the group to review the key concept, inviting them to share ways today's group experience helped them better understand the mercy of the Lord. Pass out copies of **Pack Item 8: The Better Jonah** and review it with your group. Say: "May we never forget what the Lord has saved us from and called us to. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, deserving of God's judgment, yet because of God's great love, believers have been made alive in Jesus Christ. This should spur us on to be quick to show mercy to others and to share this good news."

THE BETTER JONAH

JONAH	JESUS
Jonah was a prophet in Israel (2 Kings 14:25; Jonah 1:1)	**Jesus** is the Prophet (Matthew 2:15; Acts 3:17-26)
Jonah slept in a boat as a storm raged, and he was hoisted into the sea to calm the waves (Jonah 1:4-12)	**Jesus** slept in a boat as a storm raged, and He spoke to calm the winds and the waves (Matthew 8:23-27)
Jonah was in the belly of a fish for "three days and three nights" and was vomited onto dry ground (Jonah 1:17; 2:10)	**Jesus** was in the heart of the earth for "three days and three nights" and then raised from the dead (Matthew 12:38-40; 28:1-10)
Jonah repented and prayed, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Jonah 2:9)	Salvation in Christ **Jesus** alone and obtained through repentance and faith in Him (Acts 4:11-12; 2 Timothy 3:15)
Jonah's preaching resulted in Nineveh's repentance (Jonah 3:4-10)	The preaching of **Jesus** results in repentance throughout the world (Revelation 5:9-10; 19:1-7)
Jonah resented God's compassion for the people of Nineveh, who did not know their right hand from their left (Jonah 4:1-11)	**Jesus** reflected God's compassion for people, who are like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34)

ITEM 8
Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior.
NOTE: This resource is provided by the Holy Spirit Guide to accompany Four Gospels for Kindered Journey.
the GOSPEL PROJECT

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 67). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: In Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Through God's merciful gift of salvation, we are transformed to show others mercy. Jesus taught in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." Mercy is an essential quality of God, so He desires for His people to be merciful.

What are some potential results of showing mercy to those who don't seem to deserve it?

HEART: There is no end to God's mercy (Lam. 3:22). But like Jonah, we often place limits on our forgiveness and mercy. Shockingly, Jesus said: "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). An unforgiving heart marks someone unchanged by the gospel of Jesus, whereas one who has been forgiven by God will forgive others (Matt. 18:21-35).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

What are some ways you struggle to reflect God's merciful heart, for which you need to repent?

HANDS: Mercy and forgiveness are commanded of Jesus's followers, both toward those in the church and outside of it (Mark 11:25; Eph. 4:32). God transforms our hearts with His mercy and forgiveness, and He gives us practical ways to demonstrate His mercy to others.

What are three ways you can show mercy or forgiveness to those around you in the coming week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Reflect on Ephesians 2:11-14, noticing how the Lord's mercy has the power to save and unite all people.
- In your prayer time, confess to God areas of your life where pride is hindering you from a deeper relationship with the Lord and a deeper love of others. Ask God to help you have a merciful and forgiving heart like His.
- Share with a friend the mercy that God has shown you and how your life is different now because you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 67 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 85:1-7. Thank the Lord for His mercy and forgiveness of sins in Christ, and pray for a revival in your hearts to show God's mercy to others so the Lord will be glorified.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

RECONCILIATION

CORE PASSAGE: HOSEA 1:2-3; 2:19-20,23; 3:1-5; 14:1-4

CONTEXT

Though he is often listed as a minor prophet in the Bible based on the length of his book, Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah for many decades. Through Hosea's life and message, God presented His case against Israel, stating, "There is no truth, no faithful love, and no knowledge of God in the land! Cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery are rampant; one act of bloodshed follows another" (Hos. 4:1-2). God used Hosea's family as a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to Himself, comparing their relationship with that of a husband and an unfaithful wife.

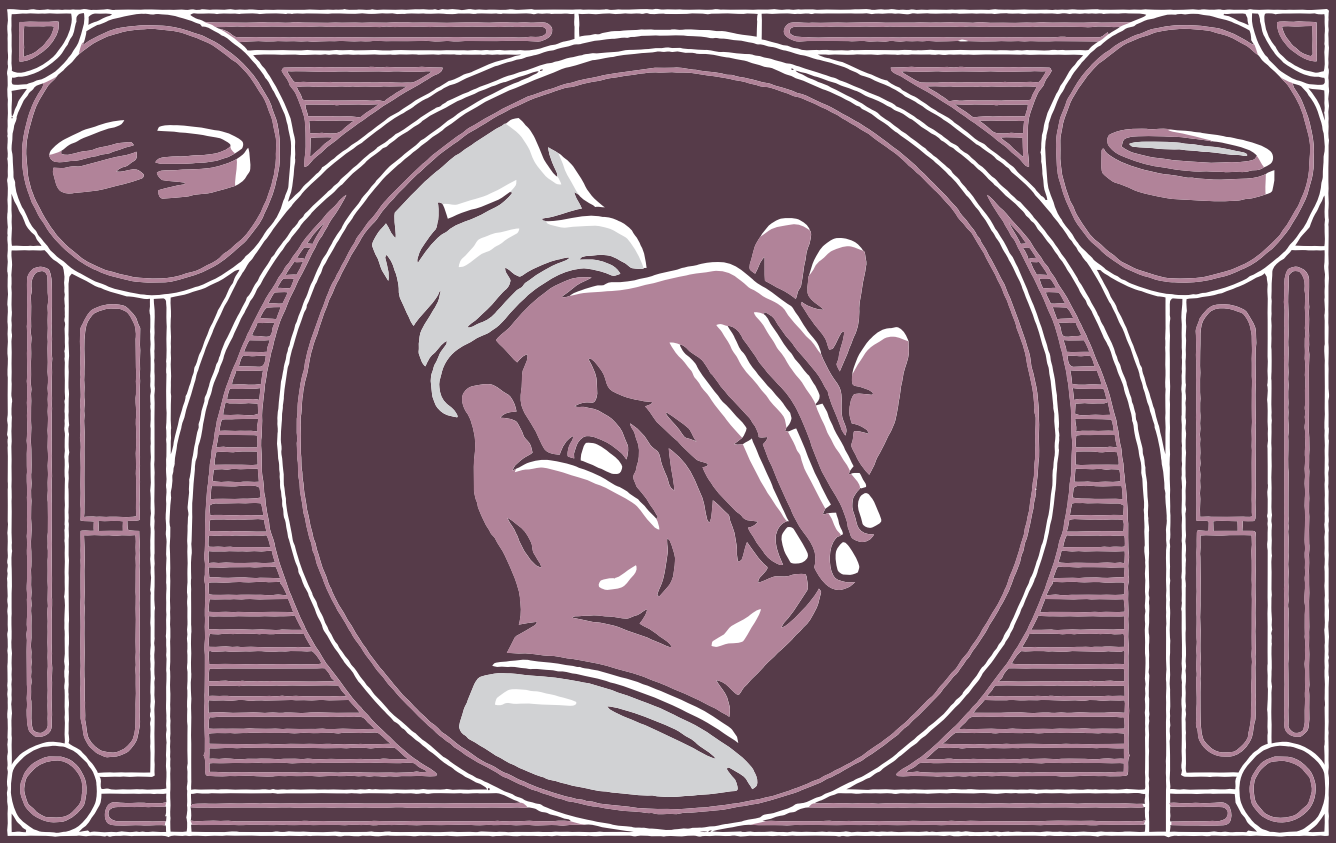
KEY CONCEPT

God in His grace reconciles with His sinful people.

As you examine Hosea 1:2-3; 2:19-20,23; 3:1-5; 14:1-4:

- Contemplate the difficult call of God upon Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman and his willingness to obey.
- Rejoice in the example of Hosea and the greater reality of the faithful love and reconciliation found in Christ.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources



TIMELINE

Elijah Performs Miracles and Prophesies to Israel (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2)

Elisha Performs Miracles and Prophesies to Israel (2 Kings 2–13)

Jonah Prophesies to Israel and Nineveh (2 Kings 14; Jonah 1–4)

SESSION STUDY: Hosea Prophesies to Israel and Judah (Hosea 1–14)

Israel's Kings Persist in Doing Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 14–17)

Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Hosea 1–3
- ☐ **Day 2:** Hosea 4–5
- ☐ **Day 3:** Hosea 6–7
- ☐ **Day 4:** Hosea 8–10
- ☐ **Day 5:** Hosea 11–14
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 89

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD'S LOVE IS BASED PURELY ON HIS COMPASSION AND CHARACTER (HOSEA 1:2-3; 2:19-20,23).

Underline each word used to describe Israel's unfaithfulness, and circle each word used to describe God's character.

2 When the LORD first spoke to Hosea, he said this to him: Go and marry a woman of promiscuity and have children of promiscuity, for the land is committing blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the LORD. **3** So he went and married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

.....

19 I will take you to be my wife forever. I will take you to be my wife in righteousness, justice, love, and compassion. **20** I will take you to be my wife in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD. . . . **23** I will sow her in the land for myself, and I will have compassion on Lo-ruhamah; I will say to Lo-ammi: You are my people, and he will say, "You are my God."

> **LEADER NOTE:** The prophets of the Old Testament ordinarily spoke messages given by God about the state of Israel and warned people against coming judgment incurred by their unfaithfulness to the Lord. Often the prophets fulfilled their calling through public oration or mighty acts. God commanded Hosea to do something different—acting out his assigned message.

Hosea's prophetic ministry was unique, to say the least. God instructed him to marry an adulterous woman and raise a family with her, symbolizing God's faithful love for His unfaithful people: the Israelites. In this way, Hosea's life showed the people a picture of their own "blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the LORD" (1:2).

Hosea obeyed God's command and married a woman named Gomer, who fit God's description of "a woman of promiscuity." She most likely was a prostitute, although her life may simply have been characterized by sexual activity within the community. Gomer bore Hosea three children of questionable parentage, and God gave each of their children names that symbolized Israel's unfaithfulness (vv. 3-9).

> **LEADER NOTE:** God gave each of Hosea's children unique names. Their firstborn son's name was Jezreel, a reference to God's fulfilled judgment on Ahab's house by Jehu now coming upon Jehu's house for their continued idolatry (2 Kings 9:24–10:11; Hos. 1:3-5). Gomer's daughter's name, Lo-ruhamah, meant "No Compassion," symbolizing Israel's coming exile at God's hand for their sin (1:6). Gomer's second son's name, Lo-ammi, meant "Not My People," symbolizing the result of Israel's broken covenant promises with God—divorce (1:8-9).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

What has been the hardest thing the Lord has called you to do?

Hosea's broken family on account of his wife's unfaithfulness may have been cause for a declaration of divorce, but the Lord was still working through this situation. Hosea's family was a call to repentance in his generation and an opportunity for God to teach the Israelites about His compassion and mercy (1:10). The Lord promised Israel, despite their unfaithfulness, "I will take you to be my wife forever" (2:19). To the nation He had declared "No Compassion"—"Lo-ruhamah"—He promised compassion. To the people He called "Not My People"—"Lo-ammi"—He will call them "My People" (2:23). God's love for Israel was not dependent on Israel's faithfulness; rather, His love was rooted in His compassion and character. Even though His bride—Israel—was unfaithful, God's mercy led Him to love His wife.

God has not changed (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Jas. 1:17). Even though we were dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), God had mercy. In fact, Hosea was not the only one to marry an unfaithful wife. Ephesians 5:25-26 pictures Jesus Christ as married to the church: "Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her." One day the Bridegroom will come for His bride (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2), and the church will be with Jesus forever. God loves His unfaithful people because of His unchanging compassion and character.

Why is it important that God's love for Israel was rooted in His character and not Israel's faithfulness?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION: Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. Sin resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in enmity between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's death, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD IS READY TO HEAL AND SAVE HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARE READY TO TURN TOWARD HIM (HOSEA 3:1-5; 14:1-4).

Circle each instance of the words "turn" and "return."

1 Then the LORD said to me, "Go again; show love to a woman who is loved
by another man and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the Israelites
though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." 2 So I bought her for
fifteen shekels of silver and nine bushels of barley. 3 I said to her, "You are to
live with me many days. You must not be promiscuous or belong to any man,
and I will act the same way toward you." 4 For the Israelites must live many
days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without
ephod or household idols. 5 Afterward, the people of Israel will return and
seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come with awe to the
LORD and to his goodness in the last days.

.....

1 Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity.
2 Take words of repentance with you and return to the LORD. Say to him,
"Forgive all our iniquity and accept what is good, so that we may repay you
with praise from our lips. 3 Assyria will not save us, we will not ride on horses,
and we will no longer proclaim, 'Our gods!' to the work of our hands. For the
fatherless receives compassion in you." 4 I will heal their apostasy; I will freely
love them, for my anger will have turned from him.

Even when we are far from God, He desires for His people to turn toward Him so they may receive healing and salvation. Israel had forsaken their covenant with God in egregious ways. They worshiped the Canaanite god Baal (2:8,13,16-17) and attributed their prosperity to false gods (2:12). Because of this, Hosea prophesied the consequences of Israel's unfaithfulness: the Lord would expose their shame (2:3,10) and take away their provision (2:9,12). Still, God desired Israel's repentance and remained faithful to her. He patiently waited for Israel to return to Him so that He may heal and free them.

> **LEADER NOTE:** It is easy to condemn Israel for their egregious sins, thinking we are somehow better. But God's Word says, "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). Everything written of Israel is a warning for us (1 Cor. 10:11-14).

In what ways have you, like Israel, been unfaithful to the Lord?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

God instructed Hosea to go again and love Gomer "just as the LORD loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods" (3:1). Hosea had to buy Gomer back. It is not clear why Gomer needed to be redeemed, but she did, and Hosea paid that price. Hosea's pursuit of Gomer and his desire to remain faithful to her illustrates God's covenant relationship with His people. Though God would exile His people in punishment, He would still pursue them in compassion.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Hosea 3:4-5 prophesies Israel's exile and restoration: "The Israelites must live many days without king or prince . . . Afterward, the people of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king." Contained in this prophesy about Israel's immediate future is a promise about Israel in the last days, when she will be led by the Son of David, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

God's readiness to accept Israel's "repentance" (14:2) points to His character. When Israel returned to Him, He was ready to forgive their sin, save them from their enemies, and let them experience His love and compassion once more. God is ready to heal and save His people when they are ready to turn toward Him (2 Chron. 7:14). God's readiness to accept His people's repentance is ultimately exhibited in the gospel of Jesus Christ. God is always ready to heal His people when they repent and turn to Him—this is the heart of gospel reconciliation (Rom. 5:6-11).

How have you experienced healing from your sin when you turn to God in repentance?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Though Gomer was unfaithful, God commanded Hosea to take her back in love and compassion, symbolizing God's own love and forgiveness for His people, Israel. One day, Israel will return and seek after the messianic King, Jesus (Rom. 11). Through faith in Jesus, all who believe are forgiven and reconciled with God because of God's grace and mercy.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive ask: "When have you done something wrong and someone showed you grace and forgiveness, either as a child or an adult?"

CONTEXT

SAY: When people show us grace and forgiveness, most of the time we feel humbled and grateful. And we should feel that toward God especially because He is a forgiving and gracious God. To fully understand today's text, it must be read in light of the full story of Scripture. The story of Hosea, who prophesied to both Israel and Judah, reminds us that God is faithful even when His people are unfaithful, which is constant. He is good even when His people are sinful; He is merciful even when His people deserve wrath.

RECAP

ASK: What was one key idea that stood out to you in your personal preparation this week?

SUMMARIZE: Display **Pack Item 9: You Will Know the Lord** where the group can see it as you help recap the Bible passage. Say: "Today's account in Hosea begins with the Lord commanding Hosea to take a promiscuous woman, Gomer, as his wife. Scripture tells us that Hosea and Gomer had children, perhaps while she was committing adultery, and then she left. But even then, the Lord instructed Hosea to reconcile his relationship with Gomer. Throughout this story of redemption and reconciliation, the Lord compared the relationship of Hosea and Gomer with the covenant relationship of the Lord and His people."

TRANSITION: Scripture reveals an overarching pattern in human history in which the Lord gives a command, His people break that command, and repeatedly the Lord, in His loving-kindness, draws them back to Himself. This faithful and unfaithful relationship comes to a head at the cross, where Jesus paid the ultimate price so a guilty people might be seen as blameless before Him. Let's take a closer look at a couple of instances in Scripture where the Lord reconciled what man had broken.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 74 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Radical Reconciliation." Recreate this table on a board so you can record the group's responses as they interact with Scripture.

Radical Reconciliation

Examine the following biblical accounts of separation and reconciliation to better understand what God has done for us in Jesus.

	ACTIONS	RESPONSE	RECONCILIATION
Joseph and His Brothers (Genesis 45:1-15; 50:15-21)			
The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)			
Paul and Peter (Galatians 2:6-16; 2 Peter 3:15-16)			
Hosea and Gomer (Hosea 3:1-5)			

INSTRUCT: Divide the group into three smaller groups. Assign each group one of the three non-Hosea accounts listed above. Instruct the groups to read the passage(s) and record notes about the stories that answer questions such as: "What initially caused the damage in the relationship?" "What responses facilitated the reconciliation?" and "How was the reconciliation affirmed?" Instruct one person from each group to transcribe their findings on the board while participants record these in their PSG as well.

DISCUSS: What are some common themes in these stories? How are these themes found in the larger story of Scripture?

SAY: It is not a stretch to see ourselves as the offenders in these stories, whether toward God or others. So often we are unfaithful, yet the Lord is always faithful, pursuing us, drawing us to repent, and reconciling with us when we do.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Hosea 3:1-5.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

DISCUSS: Lead the whole group through the Actions–Response–Reconciliation activity for the relationship between Hosea and Gomer, recording conclusions on the board.

CONNECT: Help your group see how the situation between Hosea and Gomer illustrated the situation between the Lord and spiritually adulterous Israel, as well as our own sinful state. God's people would soon experience destruction and exile by the Assyrians for their broken vows to the Lord. But the Lord also promised to buy them back, to bring them back, and to be their God forever. The same pattern is on display in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sinners, enemies of God, are pursued by the love of the Lord to draw them to Himself, and those who repent, trusting in Jesus, who paid the ultimate price for our freedom, are reconciled to God for all eternity. Jesus is the better Hosea.

DEBRIEF

God did not instruct Hosea just to marry Gomer but to love her. How are we as believers called to love others, even those who wound us?

(PSG p. 74) What does Hosea's pursuit of Gomer teach you about God's pursuit of you?

SUMMARIZE

Lead the group to review the key concept, inviting them to share ways today's group experience helped them better understand the concept of reconciliation. May we never forget that God's loving-kindness calls us to repentance. In Christ, we are no longer bound by our sin nor defined as enemies of His holiness. Rather, we have been set free and are now known as co-heirs of the kingdom of God. When we fail, may we be quick to return to our good and faithful God.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 75). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all have broken God's law, and our sin has earned us eternal separation from Him (Rom. 6:23). But with Christ, we are saved by faith, not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Understanding our inability to reconcile ourselves to God is paramount to understanding the gospel.

What are some specific ways you have broken God's law and need reconciliation?

HEART: Those who have been born again experience life in a new way (John 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17). Yet we also anticipate a day when our reconciliation to God is finally complete. On that day, the Scriptures say: "He will wipe away

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). The anticipation of full and final reconciliation with God comforts us during this life of pain and brokenness.

How does the anticipation of full reconciliation with God for eternity strengthen or comfort you today?

HANDS: The forgiveness and reconciliation we receive from God leads us to reconcile with others (Eph. 4:32). In fact, as followers of Jesus, we have received the ministry of reconciliation, in which we are ambassadors of God and share His mission, pleading with people to be reconciled to God through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We are compelled to reconcile with others and to help others be reconciled to God as we reflect the character of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who do you need to forgive and reconcile with, and what steps will you take to do so?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- For further study, read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, noting how the Lord's extension of reconciliation toward us is also a call to extend reconciliation to those who have wronged us.
- In what areas of your life does sin have a stronghold? Know that you can go to God for mercy and forgiveness and help.
- Who do you know that needs to hear of God's mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, the better Hosea? Reach out to them this week.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 75 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 89:13-18 with your group, thanking God that He pursues us to reconcile us through the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

RETRIBUTION

CORE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 17:6-15,18-20

CONTEXT

The books of 1 and 2 Kings record the history of the kings of Israel over approximately four hundred years. Beginning with the death of King David and the start of Solomon's reign, through the split of the kingdom into Israel and Judah, and ending with the destruction of Jerusalem, the author documented each king in both the north and the south in light of their faithfulness to the Lord. While Judah enjoyed a few faithful kings, Israel's kings consistently followed a path away from the Lord, in spite of the warnings from the Lord's prophets. This led to their destruction and exile at the hands of the Assyrians.

KEY CONCEPT

Though God is merciful, sin has dreadful consequences.

As you examine 2 Kings 17:6-15,18-20:

- Recognize that Israel sinned against God, and God allowed them to be conquered by Assyria.
- Recall how God used prophets to warn the people, but they still disobeyed.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

- Elijah and Elisha Perform Miracles and Prophesy to Israel (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13)
- Jonah Prophesies to Israel and Nineveh (2 Kings 14; Jonah 1–4)
- Hosea Prophesies to Israel and Judah (Hosea 1–14)
- Israel's Kings Persist in Doing Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 14–17)
- **SESSION STUDY: Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)**
- Assyria Threatens Judah, but Hezekiah Relies on the Lord (2 Kings 18–20)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 2 Kings 15–17
- ☐ **Day 2:** 2 Chronicles 26–28
- ☐ **Day 3:** Isaiah 1–12
- ☐ **Day 4:** Isaiah 13–24
- ☐ **Day 5:** Isaiah 25–35
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 12

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

WHEN WE WORSHIP OTHER GODS, DISASTER HAPPENS
(2 KINGS 17:6-12).

Underline what the Israelites did to deserve judgment.

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria. He
deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in Halah, along the Habor
(Gozan's river), and in the cities of the Medes. **7** This disaster happened
because the people of Israel sinned against the LORD their God who had
brought them out of the land of Egypt from the power of Pharaoh king of
Egypt and because they worshiped other gods. **8** They lived according to the
customs of the nations that the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites
and according to what the kings of Israel did. **9** The Israelites secretly did
things against the LORD their God that were not right. They built high
places in all their towns from watchtower to fortified city. **10** They set up for
themselves sacred pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under
every green tree. **11** They burned incense there on all the high places just like
the nations that the LORD had driven out before them had done. They did
evil things, angering the LORD. **12** They served idols, although the LORD had
told them, "You must not do this."

Hoshea was the last king over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Though not as bad as the kings before him, Hoshea still did what was evil in God's sight (v. 2). God disciplined the Northern Kingdom by allowing Assyria to attack and force them to pay tribute. But after Hoshea rebelled against that arrangement, God's judgment finally came due as Assyria invaded, besieged, conquered, and deported the Israelites, spreading them anywhere from 400 to 1,000 miles from home.

Reading only verses 3-6 would make it seem Hoshea's poor political maneuverings cost Israel their freedom and land. But the Lord made it clear the reason the Israelites suffered—they sinned against God (v. 7). The Israelites were exiled because they were rebellious and disobedient. Though God had brought their ancestors out of the land of Egypt, they were unfaithful to Him. Though God had conquered and given them the promised land, they worshiped other gods. Though God sees and knows all, His people thought their secret wickedness and idolatry went unnoticed. But they were wrong.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Sin always ends in destruction. Since the garden of Eden, sin has wrought painful and deadly consequences upon humankind. Sin brought pain, strife, toil, separation from God, and death into the world (Gen. 3:16-23). Sin not only results in pain, but it requires God's discipline. Sin is the core problem of all humanity, residing in our very hearts, and apart from the intervention of the Lord, we can do nothing about it on our own.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Though God is merciful, sin has dreadful consequences.

Notes

Why do we sometimes think and act as though the Lord cannot see us?

The Lord had promised to provide for every need of His people, but Israel habitually sinned against Him. They were continually wicked, rebellious, and disobedient despite God's gifts and His warnings (2 Kings 17:12). Because of this, God allowed them to be captured and exiled by Assyria. The Lord had repeatedly shown that He is merciful, but sin has consequences. Israel's unfaithfulness to God resulted in the disaster they now experienced.

Similarly, people today are responsible for their actions, and sin is rebellion against God. In Galatians 6:7-8, Paul warned Christians to walk in obedience to God: "Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh." When we worship other gods, even ourselves, disaster happens.

> **LEADER NOTE:** When discussing sin in the believer, it is important to remember that those who are in Christ are a new creation; the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17). Through Jesus, our sins are washed as white as snow (Isa. 1:18) and have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Because we are in Christ by faith and have been given the Holy Spirit, sin no longer rules over those who have been born again. Yet because we are still in the flesh, we will still struggle and succumb to sin, leading to consequences and discipline. But the Lord promises that His grace is greater than all our sins (Rom. 5:20-21).

How would you explain sin to someone who has no Bible background?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SIN AS REBELLION: Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD WARNS OF THE DANGER OF DISOBEDIENCE, ALLOWING US TO CHOOSE (2 KINGS 17:13-15,18-20).

Underline the phrases that express how God responded to His people's sin.

13 Still, the LORD warned Israel and Judah through every prophet and
every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commands and
statutes according to the whole law I commanded your ancestors and sent
to you through my servants the prophets." 14 But they would not listen.
Instead they became obstinate like their ancestors who did not believe
the LORD their God. 15 They rejected his statutes and his covenant he had
made with their ancestors and the warnings he had given them. They
followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves, following the
surrounding nations the LORD had commanded them not to imitate. . . .
18 Therefore, the LORD was very angry with Israel, and he removed them
from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained. 19 Even Judah did
not keep the commands of the LORD their God but lived according to the
customs Israel had practiced. 20 So the LORD rejected all the descendants
of Israel, punished them, and handed them over to plunderers until he had
banished them from his presence.

God had chosen the Israelites as His people, had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, had given them His law, and had given them the promised land. But from Exodus to Judges to 1–2 Kings, a pattern developed that described hundreds of years of the history of God's people: The people sinned and rebelled, turning from God to wickedness. Next, God warned them through His prophets. Then the people were faced with a decision: turn from their wickedness and back to God or continue in their sin and rebellion.

Though the Lord had sent them Elijah, Elisha, and Hosea, among other prophets, unfortunately the Israelites had a problem with stubbornness and pride like their ancestors (v. 14). Their false worship of false gods had so marked them that they became worthless like the idols they worshiped. God's intended purpose for Israel had been rejected, and now they were good for nothing more than to be cast out and trampled (Matt. 5:13). So this time, the discipline for their rebellion would be the most severe.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The discipline and retribution of God are closely related. God disciplines and rebukes those He loves (Prov. 3:12; Rev. 3:19). He is patient, but He will not allow sin to go unpunished (Ex. 34:6-7). Hebrews 12:3-11 teaches that God, as a loving father, disciplines us, His children, through the suffering of this life, yielding righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Discipline, while painful in the moment, is a tool God uses to produce righteousness in us and turn our wayward hearts back to Him.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

What are some ways the Lord warns His children today to turn from evil and to keep His commands?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"The sinner mocks and scorns, When offered the love of God. This will be his undoing, For God will not be deceived."[1]

–George Blaurock (c. 1492–1529)

As the Lord had foretold in His law, He would keep His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and lead the Israelites into the promised land, but if they rebelled, He would send them away from it and from His presence (Deut. 28:58-68). Israel did rebel, they did reject God's covenant, they did resist God's prophets, so "the LORD was very angry with Israel" (2 Kings 17:18), and He "banished them from his presence" (v. 20). Israel had already cut themselves off from the temple of God through their counterfeit idolatry, but now they were cut off from their land and from the patient grace of the Lord. They chose their idols, so they also chose disaster, exile, and death.

LEADER NOTE: Israel and Judah were largely guilty of the same sins for most of their existence as independent nations. Here, Israel paid the price for their rebellion—exile at the hands of the Assyrians. Yet Judah was just as guilty as Israel. Why weren't they swept away by the Assyrians? Because when the Assyrians invaded and threatened Judah, good King Hezekiah listened to the prophet Isaiah and relied on the Lord for Judah's rescue (2 Kings 18–19).

What idols might you be choosing today instead of listening to the Lord?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Sin leads to disaster and death. Trusting and following God is necessary for life. Trusting and following Him leads to a fulfilled life here and in eternity.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As people arrive for the group experience, begin by inviting them to share memories of the first time they experienced consequences for their actions, but don't pressure anyone. Ask: "What led to the consequence? What was the consequence? What did you learn from the consequence?"

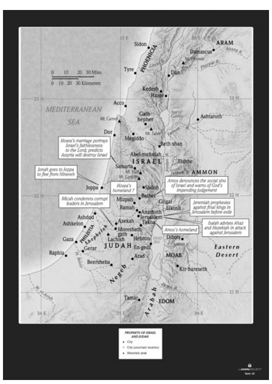
TRANSITION: Life is full of consequences. If we eat too much, we will get a stomachache. If we leave home without an umbrella during a storm, we will get soaked. The cause and effect of our actions applies to everyone universally. We also see consistent patterns of cause and effect in Scripture.

CONTEXT

REVIEW: God is merciful, as we have seen repeatedly throughout the history of the Israelites, from the first golden calf to the cycle of the judges to King David's sin to practically all of the events in 1–2 Kings. The Lord's response to Ahab's humble repentance is among the more shocking displays of God's mercy. Yet God is also holy and just. Ahab was shown mercy, but he and his family also experienced God's judgment. To understand and fully worship the Lord as we were created to do, we must understand that God's mercy does not negate His holiness and justice, and vice versa. Rather, they complement each other, helping us to see the fullness of God's glory in both His holiness and mercy.

RECAP

SAY: In last week's study of Hosea, we discussed the pattern in Scripture of the Lord giving a command, the people breaking said command, suffering the consequences of that broken command, and the Lord restoring the Israelites. Here we see God's holiness and mercy at work, and so often that was centered on the ministry of the Lord's prophets.



ASK: Display **Pack Item 10: Prophets of Israel and Judah Map** to show their birthplace or ministry. Pass out copies of **Pack Item 11: God's Prophets** and discuss what the prophets tried to teach the people. Then ask: "From your study this week, how did the prophets exemplify God's holiness and mercy?"

TRANSITION: For God to stand in opposition to the strongholds of sin in our lives is not hatred but rather an act of great love and mercy. Let's take a closer look at how the Lord's holiness and mercy are on full display in His warnings to the Northern Kingdom and their fall.

GOD'S PROPHETS

NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL			SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH		
PROPHET	BIBLE PASSAGE	CENTRAL TEACHING	PROPHET	BIBLE PASSAGE	CENTRAL TEACHING
Ahijah (c. 931–910 BC)	1 Kings 11–15	The Lord would split the kingdom	**Shemaiah** (c. 931–910)	1 Kings 12:22-24	The division was by the Lord's hand and not to be resisted
Elijah (c. 875–850)	1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2	The Lord, not Baal, is God	**Azariah and Hanani** (c. 848–841)	2 Chronicles 15–16	Seek the Lord and depend on Him alone
Micaiah (c. 856)	1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 18	Judgment on Ahab; proof of a true prophecy	**Isaiah*** (c. 740–698)	2 Kings 19–20; Isaiah	Hope through repentance and suffering
Elisha (c. 855–800)	1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2–9; 13	The Lord's miraculous power	**Micah*** (c. 735–710)	Jeremiah 26:18; Micah	Call for humility, mercy, and justice
Jonah (c. 786–746)	2 Kings 14:25; Jonah	God's universal concern and mercy	**Nahum** (c. 686–612)	Nahum	God's jealousy protects His people
Hosea* (c. 786–746)	Hosea	The Lord's unquenchable love	**Zephaniah** (c. 640–621)	Zephaniah	Hope for the humble and righteous
Amos* (c. 760–750)	Amos	God's call for justice and righteousness	**Jeremiah** (c. 626–584)	2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah; Lamentations	God will establish a new, eternal covenant
			Habakkuk (c. 608–598)	Habakkuk	God calls for faithfulness despite circumstances
			Ezekiel (c. 593–571)	Ezekiel	Future hope for God's people

* These prophets had ministries and/or messages that spanned both kingdoms.

ITEM 11

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject • gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Though God is merciful, sin has dreadful consequences.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 82 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Mercy and Holiness." Recreate this table on a board so you can record the group's responses as they interact with Scripture.

Mercy and Holiness

Read the following passages from 2 Kings 17. Summarize the problem the Israelites faced, the warning, and the consequence of their actions.

THE PROBLEM (17:7-12)	THE WARNING (17:13-15)	THE RESULT (17:18-20)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 2 Kings 17:6-12.

ANALYZE: Lead the group to identify the problem(s) the Israelites faced. Record the group's conclusions with appropriate verse numbers, and then help the group to summarize the problem in one statement.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 2 Kings 17:13-15.

ANALYZE: Lead the group to describe the Lord's warning(s) to His people and to summarize the warning in one statement.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 2 Kings 17:18-20.

ANALYZE: Lead the group to identify the consequences of the Israelites' sins and to craft a summary statement for this section.

DISCUSS: Why do you think God appoints consequences for sin? How can we see both God's holiness and His mercy in the consequences He brings?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

SAY: We are designed to listen to and obey our Creator. His commands are boundaries not only to protect His creation and image-bearers from harm but also to reveal His character for us to reflect Him in the world. When the Israelites broke His commands, He mercifully sent prophets to call them back to Him. But when they rejected His mercy, He justly gave them the consequences of their actions. God's mercy cannot be taken as a license to ignore God's holiness.

DEBRIEF

What does this passage have to say to those who do not believe in Jesus Christ? To those who do believe in Jesus?

SUMMARIZE

Lead the group to review the key concept, inviting them to share ways today's group experience helped them better understand God's holiness and mercy. Read aloud Romans 3:23-26. Say: "The consequences of our sin results in spiritual death. We deserve God's wrath. But by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, we are forgiven and freed from those eternal consequences. Instead of death, we receive life. Instead of wrath, we receive mercy and relationship. Sin still has consequences for the believer, but even these are merciful and disciplinary in nature to call us to the better life of holiness and obedience."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 83). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Generation after generation, the Israelites were unfaithful to God's covenant, perpetuating a cycle of sin that invited God's retribution. They became obstinate, or stiff-necked (2 Kings 17:14), refusing to turn from their sin and back to God. Recognizing sin patterns in our own lives provides us an opportunity to refuse stubbornness and to ask the Lord for strength to do His will.

What "sin cycles" have you seen emerge in your own life?

HEART: In Scripture, God's ascribed different durations to His mercy and retribution. God's mercy is described as new every morning and having no end (Lam. 3:22-23), and that from one who was suffering during the exile. God's discipline or retribution lasts for a specific time and purpose: "only a moment (Ps. 30:5). Consequences for His people's sin may be severe and lasting from our perspective, but they are temporary and outshined by the glorious purpose of His grace, mercy, and faithful love (Ex. 20:5-6).

How do you need to reevaluate your perspective and feelings toward God's holiness and discipline?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Though God is merciful, sin has dreadful consequences.

Notes

HANDS: Understanding God's just retribution for sin leads us to fear Him, but this should not prompt us to enact retribution or vengeance in our own lives. The Bible is clear that vengeance belongs to God (Deut. 32:35). His perfect holiness and mercy means He can and will make all things right in His perfect timing. We, on the other hand, are to focus on mercy and to pray for and seek God's justice (Rom. 12:17-21).

How will you reflect God's holiness and mercy in your interactions with others this week?

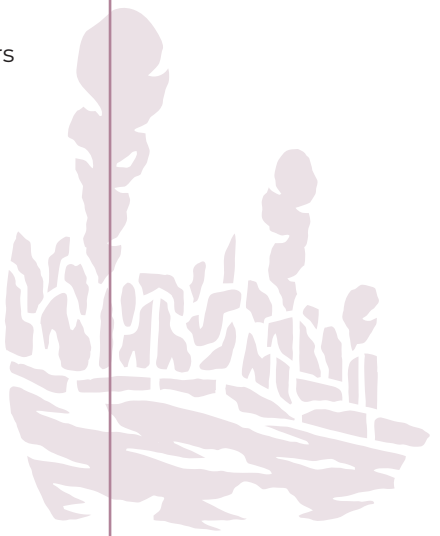
NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Colossians 3:1-15, noticing how the Lord's mercy is a call to holiness.
- Ask yourself what qualities in Colossians 3:12-15 are on display in your life? Pray about the qualities you need the Lord to develop in you.
- Sin damages our relationships with God and others. Confess your own offenses to God, and ask God for wisdom to take the next steps toward forgiveness and reconciliation with others.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 83 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 12:1-5 with your group. Acknowledge the need for God's justice and vengeance on account of the evils in this world, and pray for sinners, whether believers or unbelievers, to long for and find the safety of God's mercy available through faith in Jesus Christ.

References

1. George Blaurock, "Anabaptist hymn," in *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel Liechty (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 47.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

UNIT 15
DECLINE

2 KINGS; 2 CHRONICLES; PROPHETS

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Memory Verses

"Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity
and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his
inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger
forever because he delights in faithful love.
He will again have compassion on us;
he will vanquish our iniquities.
You will cast all our sins into
the depths of the sea."

—Micah 7:18-19

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

GOD'S PEOPLE WORSHIPED

CORE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 18:1-6; 22:1-2; 23:1-3

CONTEXT

Throughout most of the history of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God's people did not follow His ways. Often they chose to worship the idols of the nations around them. In His mercy, the Lord sent prophets to call His people to repentance, but God's message often fell on deaf ears. As a result, God sent the Assyrians to attack, conquer, and exile the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrians also threatened the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but the Lord rescued them through a much-needed, God-fearing leader. In the declining years of Judah, the Lord gave them two faithful kings who worshiped the Lord alone.

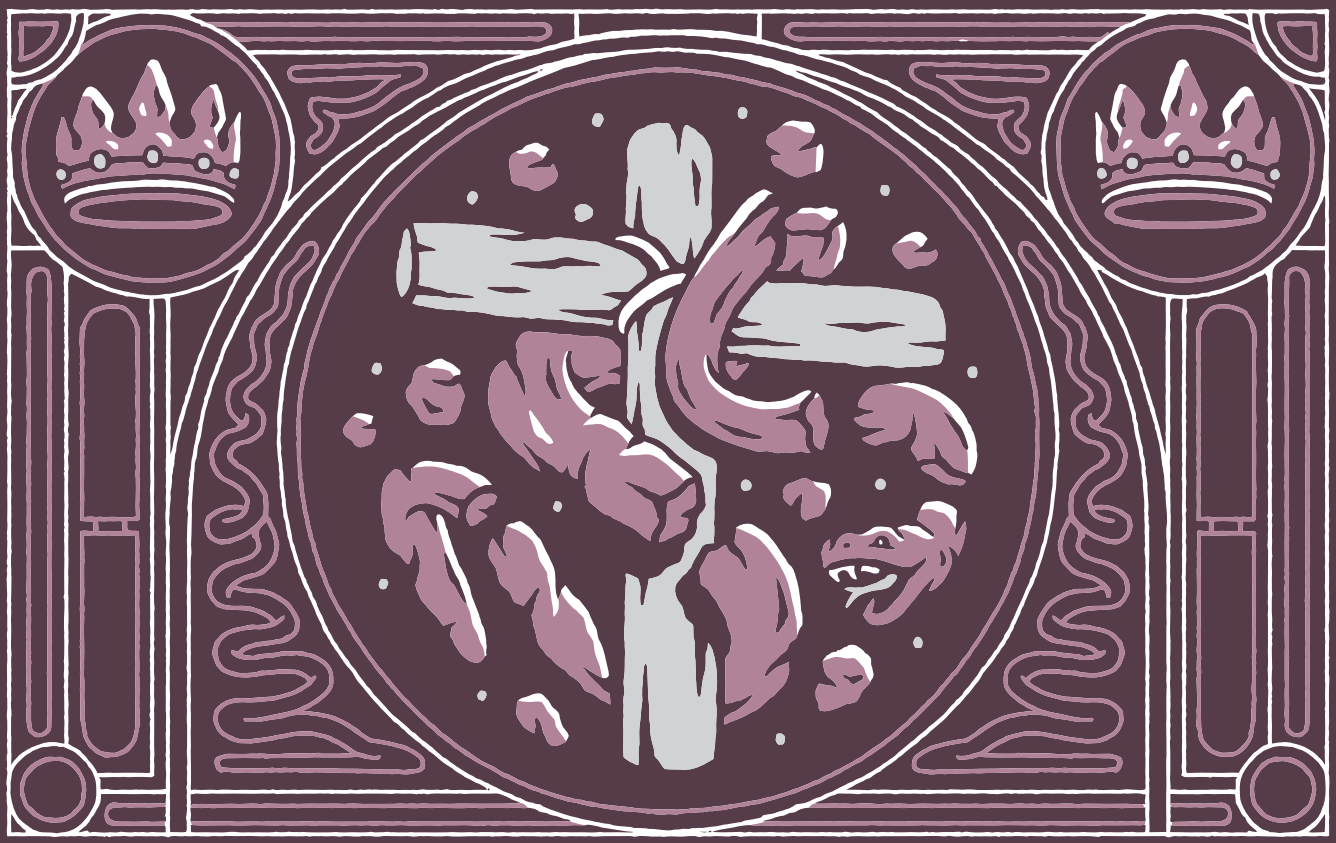
KEY CONCEPT

Worship of God includes following Him and His Word.

As you examine 2 Kings 18:1-6; 22:1-2; 23:1-3:

- Recognize that both Hezekiah and Josiah relied on God's Word to lead the people of Judah.
- Consider how the Word of God convicts us of our sin and leads us to humble ourselves before the Lord.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources



TIMELINE

Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)

Manasseh and Amon, Two Evil Kings of Judah, Turn Back to Idols with Excessive Wickedness (2 Kings 21)

SESSION STUDY: Assyria Threatens Judah, but Hezekiah Relies on the Lord (2 Kings 18–20)

SESSION STUDY: Josiah Repairs the Temple, Finds the Law, and Restores the Worship of the Lord (2 Kings 22–23)

Judah's Remaining Kings Return to What Is Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 23–24)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 2 Kings 18:1–20:21
- ☐ **Day 2:** Isaiah 36:1–39:8
- ☐ **Day 3:** 2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33
- ☐ **Day 4:** 2 Kings 21:1–23:30
- ☐ **Day 5:** 2 Chronicles 33:1–35:27
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 19

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

WORSHIPING GOD INCLUDES REMOVING OTHER THINGS WE ARE TEMPTED TO WORSHIP (2 KINGS 18:1-6).

Highlight the descriptions of Hezekiah as a king of Judah, and underline the specific actions of Hezekiah recorded in the passage.

1 In the third year of Israel's King Hoshea son of Elah, Hezekiah son of Ahaz
became king of Judah. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became
king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was
Abi daughter of Zechariah. 3 He did what was right in the LORD's sight just
as his ancestor David had done. 4 He removed the high places, shattered
the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the
bronze snake that Moses made, for until then the Israelites were burning
incense to it. It was called Nehushtan. 5 Hezekiah relied on the LORD God of
Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after
him. 6 He remained faithful to the LORD and did not turn from following him
but kept the commands the LORD had commanded Moses.

So often Israel and Judah found themselves in a spiral of sin, disobedience, and idolatry, a spiral we ourselves likely are familiar with. We may be believers in Christ, but we are not yet perfect beings, so we still struggle with sin. Yet all throughout the Bible books detailing Israel's and Judah's kings, we see that God is the One upholding His promises. God is the One who keeps the covenant to bring the people back to Himself.

King Hezekiah was a gracious gift from God in the midst of some turbulent years. Many of the kings before him did well but tolerated a form of unsanctioned worship, but his father worshiped idols and led the people of Judah to do the same. Hezekiah, however, walked in remarkable obedience to the Lord, just as David had done. This involved destroying idols (v. 4). He did not simply provide lip-service and tell the people to stay away from idols. Rather, he removed them entirely, even destroying the bronze snake that Moses raised in the wilderness because the people worshiped it (Num. 21:9).

> **LEADER NOTE:** At this point, God's people had preserved the bronze serpent from the wilderness for almost seven hundred years. No doubt it had served as a reminder of God's mercy to heal those who had been bitten by poisonous snakes because of their sin. But it had also become an object of false worship. Hezekiah rightly understood that even the good gifts given to us by God can lead us astray when we allow them to usurp the Lord's rightful place in our lives.

What idols do you need to remove from your own life so that you may walk with the Lord more faithfully?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

Hezekiah eliminated idols in Judah because he trusted God alone (2 Kings 18:5). His reliance on the Lord was so remarkable that no other king of Judah could compare to Hezekiah. Relying on the Lord was a key factor missing from the evil kings—they relied on alliances with pagan nations and their worship of false gods. Hezekiah's trust in God led God to bless Judah during Hezekiah's reign, particularly through Hezekiah's faith-filled obedience.

Because of his faith in the Lord, Hezekiah faithfully kept the Lord's commands (v. 6). He knew the law of the Lord, and he was blessed to receive the prophet Isaiah's counsel when the Assyrians—who had just exiled the Northern Kingdom of Israel—threatened the people of Judah (18:13–19:37). He understood that the people of Israel were exiled because they turned away from the Lord. Hezekiah's faithfulness as king blessed the people of Judah and delayed their own exile to Babylon by several decades.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Christians today can sometimes view the historical books in the Old Testament as boring, confusing, or even discouraging with the judgment God brought upon His people. Yet it is important to remember that all of God's Word is powerful, inspired, and instructive for the Christian life. We can receive encouragement to stand firm in a secular world by reading about God's faithfulness to Hezekiah, who received the commendation of being a king unlike any who had gone before or followed him.

Who has been a faithful, godly leader in your life, and how has their leadership blessed you and others?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God's Word teaches us all we need to know and obey the Lord. Scripture compels us to stay faithful to God because God has always been faithful to us through His covenant, especially the new covenant through Jesus Christ. Jesus's death and resurrection is our salvation.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

WORSHIPING GOD INCLUDES KNOWING HIS WORD THAT WE MAY FOLLOW IT (2 KINGS 22:1-2; 23:1-3).

Circle each time the word "all" is used in the passage.

1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-
one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of
Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. 2 He did what was right in the LORD's sight
and walked in all the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn to the right
or the left.

.....

1 So the king sent messengers, and they gathered all the elders of Judah
and Jerusalem to him. 2 Then the king went to the LORD's temple with
all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as the
priests and the prophets—all the people from the youngest to the oldest.
He read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had
been found in the LORD's temple. 3 Next, the king stood by the pillar and
made a covenant in the LORD's presence to follow the LORD and to keep his
commands, his decrees, and his statutes with all his heart and with all his
soul in order to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this
book; all the people agreed to the covenant.

Hezekiah, a righteous king, was followed by his son, Manasseh, whose sins were abundant. Manasseh undid all the good of Hezekiah and even sacrificed his own son (21:1-16). The evil perpetrated during his rule was the tipping point that guaranteed God's judgment against Judah (23:26-27). Manasseh did exhibit repentance under God's punishment and made some significant reforms (2 Chron. 33:10-16), but when his son, Amon, became king, all of those reforms were undone once again in favor of idol worship. Amon's assassination led to his son, Josiah, taking the throne at age 8 (2 Kings 21:19-24).

Josiah, like Hezekiah, was a faithful king of Judah. He repaired God's temple, and while doing so, the priest Hilkiah found "the book of the law." At the hearing of God's Word, Josiah tore his clothes in repentance (22:3-11). He could have walked in the wicked ways of his father and grandfather, disobeying God's Word or ignoring it altogether, but he took God's Word seriously.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Manasseh's father was a godly king, but Manasseh did most everything he could in rebellion against the Lord. Josiah's father was an evil king, yet he responded in humility and repentance to the law of God. Some believers come from generations of faithful Christ-followers; some are the first or only member of their family to trust Christ. We should cherish godly homes and embrace our responsibility to teach the faith to the next generation, but each person must repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ to be saved.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

What is the relationship between the Word of God and our obedience to and worship of the Lord?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: Since the Bible is the inspired Word from God, God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

When Josiah heard the words of the law, he understood immediately the judgment that rightly would come upon Judah because they had broken covenant with God (vv. 12-13). Moses had warned the Israelites of the curses that would befall the people of Israel when they turned away from the Lord (see Deut. 27–29).

Even though Josiah was walking righteously and not directly responsible for the sins of his ancestors, he still accepted the wrath of God as an appropriate punishment for the sins of his people. But once more, God showed His grace in response to a king's humility (2 Kings 22:14-20). So Josiah took the Word of God and shared it with all the people of Judah, resulting in a renewed covenant by the whole nation to turn from their sin and follow the Lord alone—a pattern we see perfected in the rule of the Messiah-King, Jesus, with His church.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Typically, a covenant is an agreement between two parties to uphold certain terms. The Lord had already established the Mosaic covenant with Israel, which they had broken irrevocably. Here, Josiah led the people to renew their commitment to wholehearted obedience to the Lord and His Word. This would forestall God's judgment for a time, but the people and subsequent kings would reject the Lord and earn the wages of their sin—death.

What areas of your life require a renewed commitment to the covenant God has created with us in Jesus?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: Before your group arrives, write the word "Worship" on a board. Challenge the group to call out some other words or phrases that carry the same meaning as "worship" in our culture today, and record these on the board. (Answers may include honor, adore, etc.) Ask: "As a society, what do people worship? How can we see outwardly what they worship inwardly?"

TRANSITION: In the Old Testament, the root meaning of the word translated "worship" means "to bow down." In those days, often there was a literal bowing down to a person or thing deserving of honor. We don't literally bow before sports figures, money, or self-aggrandizement, but we can watch a life bend itself toward those things.

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: After Solomon died, Israel became two nations: the Northern Kingdom (Israel, or Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). These two nations rarely got along, often fighting against one another. The Northern Kingdom had a succession of kings, but none of them followed the Lord. Unsurprisingly, without a godly leader, the nation moved further and further away from God. God's gracious call for them to return to Him had been rejected enough that He sent the Assyrians to destroy and capture Samaria. Their root problem? They did not see God as Lord. The external proof? They worshiped idols. God's first two commandments had been ignored, and the Israelites paid for their sin. Judah witnessed this judgment, but how would they respond to their own sin?

RECAP

SAY: As you studied this week's passages, you saw the heart of worship from two kings of Judah: King Hezekiah and King Josiah.

ASK: What stood out to you from these kings as you studied this week? How you were encouraged, instructed, or convicted by the examples of Hezekiah and Josiah?

TRANSITION: This week's passages didn't include the word *worship*, but they illustrated it. Let's dig into that.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 92 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Worship: Inside and Out." Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Worship: Inside and Out
Reflect on the worship displayed by Hezekiah and Josiah in the passages below.

	INTERNAL WORSHIP	EXTERNAL WORSHIP
HEZEKIAH (2 KINGS 18:1-6)		
JOSIAH (2 KINGS 22:1-2; 23:1-3)		

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Kings 18:1-6 aloud.

ANALYZE: As a group, slowly walk through verses 3-6, discussing the different ways Hezekiah lived a life of worship to the Lord. (You may want to re-read the verses one at a time in order to focus on them individually.) As volunteers offer answers, decide as a group whether these were external or internal forms of worship, and then add them to the chart on the board and in the PSG.

CONNECT: Hezekiah demonstrated the kind of leadership we all want in our churches, our groups, our families, and even ourselves: righteous living, a godly example in actions, and bold steps to eradicate sin. But we also see humility and faithfulness, which overflow from a heart for the Lord. Ask: "What is the relationship between external acts of worship and the internal heart of worship?"

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Kings 22:1-2; 23:1-3 aloud.

ANALYZE: As a group, identify and record the internal and external evidences of Josiah's worship of the Lord. Note the impact that Josiah's life and leadership had on his people and their faith.

DEBRIEF

(PSG p. 92) Based on the examples of Hezekiah and Josiah, what should our internal and external worship of the Lord look like?

Who are some Hezekiahs and Josiahs in your own life? How has their faith impacted yours?

SUMMARIZE

Godly leadership isn't being a great speaker, having a charismatic personality, or holding a seminary degree. Rather, it is the overflow of a heart and mind yielded to the Lord and committed to worshiping Him in spirit and truth. The internal heart of worship from Hezekiah and Josiah overflowed in the worshipful actions of their lives and affected their nation. That should be how we all live. We should expect to see and encourage outward worship from ourselves and others, but we must acknowledge that God desires hearts and minds fixed on Him and lives shaped by that commitment. With true worship of the Lord that is external and flowing from what is internal, we can impact everyone around us with a true picture of our great God.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 93). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Obeying God's Word is a form of worship, and Josiah led Judah by sharing God's Word with them. When Josiah heard the law and learned God's wrath was impending, he responded appropriately with humility. His response may not look like worship to us, but any time we humble ourselves and mourn sin, we are acknowledging God's holiness.

How can the knowledge and study of God's Word inform your worship?

HEART: While we commonly think of idols as statues, real idolatry was in the hearts of the people of Judah. They often placed their own desires for sin above God's desire for our holiness. The correct response to conviction regarding idolatry is repentance and obedience to God. Both Hezekiah and Josiah led the people of Judah toward a humble response to God's holiness.

Of what sins do you need to repent, and how will you combat the idolatry present in your life and seek the Lord first?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

HANDS: One amazing result of Hezekiah's and Josiah's acting according to God's will was the response of the people of Judah. Their leadership and willingness to follow the commands of God encouraged Judah to do the same. Glorifying God is the most important thing anyone can do, and many will be blessed when the people of God walk in obedience.

How can you model the beautiful gift of repentance and obedience to people in your life?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read the account of Hezekiah's life in 2 Kings 18–20. Note Hezekiah's highs and lows, considering how your own faith may have done the same.
- Assess your level of commitment to praying, reading, and studying God's Word. How is your knowledge of God directly connected to your worship?
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal idols in your life, including people or things that inhabit the position God alone deserves in your life, and repent.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 93 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 19:7-11 with your group, asking the Lord to help you to consider the Lord's righteous rules are more desirable than gold and sweeter than honeycomb. Ask God to help you to delight in walking in the Lord's ways.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

GOD'S PROPHETS WARNED

CORE PASSAGE: MICAH 5:1-5; 6:6-8; 7:8-9,18-20

CONTEXT

During the reigns of Judah's kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, God sent the prophet Micah with a message for both Israel and Judah. Micah spoke the word of the Lord and foretold the judgment, destruction, and exile that was coming for both Israel and Judah. Both kingdoms had failed to keep the Lord's covenant and would continue to do so, with a few exceptions from Judah's kings, such as Hezekiah and Josiah. But Micah also had a message for the future, a message of hope and restoration. Micah prophesied that the Messiah-King would come to shepherd God's people in righteousness forever.

KEY CONCEPT

Though there is a future judgment, there is also a future hope.

As you examine Micah 5:1-5; 6:6-8; 7:8-9,18-20:

- Emphasize God's desire for His people to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with Him.
- Recognize that disobedience results in judgment, but God's grace and mercy abound as well.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

SESSION STUDY: **Micah Prophesies to Israel and Judah (Micah 1–7)**

Assyria Threatens Judah, but Hezekiah Relies on the Lord (2 Kings 18–20)

Josiah Repairs the Temple, Finds the Law, and Restores the Worship of the Lord (2 Kings 22–23)

Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)

Manasseh and Amon, Two Evil Kings of Judah, Turn Back to Idols with Excessive Wickedness (2 Kings 21)

Judah's Remaining Kings Return to What Is Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 23–24)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Micah 1–7
- ☐ **Day 2:** Isaiah 40–54
- ☐ **Day 3:** Isaiah 55–66
- ☐ **Day 4:** Nahum 1–3
- ☐ **Day 5:** Zephaniah 1–3
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 73

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

AMID JUDGMENT, THERE IS A FUTURE HOPE OF THE ONE WHO WILL BRING PEACE (MICAH 5:1-6; 6:6-8).

Underline the prophecies that point to the exile that would be coming. Circle the prophecies that point to Jesus.

1 Now, daughter who is under attack, you slash yourself in grief; a siege is
set against us! They are striking the judge of Israel on the cheek with a rod.
2 Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will
come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity,
from ancient times. 3 Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of the ruler's brothers
will return to the people of Israel. 4 He will stand and shepherd them in the
strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD his God. They will
live securely, for then his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. 5 He
will be their peace. When Assyria invades our land, when it marches against
our fortresses, we will raise against it seven shepherds, even eight leaders
of men. 6 They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, the land
of Nimrod with a drawn blade. So he will rescue us from Assyria when it
invades our land, when it marches against our territory.

.....

6 What should I bring before the LORD when I come to bow before God on
high? Should I come before him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves?
7 Would the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousand
streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the offspring
of my body for my own sin? 8 Mankind, he has told each of you what is good
and what it is the LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and
to walk humbly with your God.

The book of Micah is listed in our Bibles in the division of the Minor Prophets, but the term "minor" only refers to the length of their message, not the significance of it. The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah, and his message from God was directed to the cities of Samaria (Israel) and Jerusalem (Judah).

Micah's prophecy in chapter 5 opens with Jerusalem being attacked by her enemies. At one point, Assyria was on Jerusalem's doorstep, but the future threat of Babylon may also have been in mind.[1] ("Nimrod" in v. 6 was associated with both Assyria and Babylon; see Gen. 10:8-12.) More important than the attacker, however, was the Lord's promised help—the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This Shepherd-King would be born in Bethlehem from the line of David, and He would be a ruler for Israel over the whole earth. This Messiah is the hope and peace of all God's people to rescue them from their enemies.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Though there is a future judgment, there is also a future hope.

Notes

LEADER NOTE: Micah 5 illustrates the "now-and-not-yet" property of some biblical prophecy. The Assyrians had already taken Israel captive and set their sights on Jerusalem. While Micah referred to the future coming of the Messiah, he prophesied in the context of immediate danger. Israel and Judah faced the consequences of sinful rebellion, and they were desperate for salvation and rescue. King Hezekiah's faith in the Lord prevented the Assyrians from bringing judgment on Judah (2 Kings 19), but ultimately judgment would fall on Judah through the Babylonians (20:12-19).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Micah tells of the One who would come from Bethlehem to shepherd the people and be their peace. This is one of the prophecies about Jesus, who came to be the Good Shepherd and the Prince of Peace.

How has Jesus, the Messiah, brought peace into your life?

In Micah 6:6-8, we see the people of Judah question what God required of them. Verses 6-7 list various offerings someone could make because of their sin. The people even wondered if they should sacrifice a firstborn son for their sins, a pagan, idolatrous practice that God forbade (Jer. 19:5). The only firstborn son the Lord ever accepted as a sacrifice was His own—the sinless, only begotten Son of God, who died on the cross and rose again to cover our sins.

In verse 8, Micah listed what God actually required of His people. God did not want perpetual blood offerings or sacrifices, nor did He require magnificent feats for His name. The Lord wanted His people to act in a way that was good, right, and fair, to love faithfulness to God and one another, and to live in humble submission to God and with God.

LEADER NOTE: Micah's audience wanted to evade the coming judgment, but they did not love God, as was evidenced by their disobedience and idolatry. In the New Testament, John said, "This is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden" (1 John 5:3). Worship and obedience go hand in hand.

What might it look like for you to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with God?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

EVIL WOULD BE JUDGED, BUT GOD WOULD ALSO PROVIDE A WAY OF SALVATION (MICAH 7:8-9,18-20).

Circle the contrasting phrases in the passage. Then highlight the actions God takes to champion for His people.

8 Do not rejoice over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will stand up;
though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. 9 Because I have sinned
against him, I must endure the LORD's fury until he champions my cause
and establishes justice for me. He will bring me into the light; I will see his
salvation. . . . 18 Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity and passing over
rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger
forever because he delights in faithful love. 19 He will again have compassion
on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths
of the sea. 20 You will show loyalty to Jacob and faithful love to Abraham, as
you swore to our ancestors from days long ago.

At this point in the book of Micah, Jerusalem was experiencing moral destitution. Evil was prevalent, and Micah felt like the only righteous person left (vv. 1-2). The Lord's impending judgment on the nation was certain because of their sin and disobedience (v. 9). And yet, Micah declared that those who repented would see the Lord's salvation.

While punishment for sin is inevitable, Micah encouraged the people, saying that God had not completely turned away from them. He would allow their enemies to take them into exile, but in His mercy, God would bring them back to the land. He would provide the way for them to be restored to Him again.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

THE GOSPEL: The gospel is both an event and a story. First, it is an event that took place in history, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:21). Second, it is also the story of redemption that God planned "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), which runs through Scripture and culminates in a restored and redeemed creation—a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering will never again plague humanity, and God's people will live with Him forever (Isa. 25:8; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21). The event and story do not exist apart from or in conflict with one another but together inspire us to a life of devotion and mission.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

LEADER NOTE: Believers in Jesus today don't experience God's wrath the same way that Israel did in the Old Testament, but this doesn't mean we should take sin lightly. God still disciplines His children for their sin, but the difference is we know that Jesus Himself experienced God's judgment and wrath on our behalf. Our response to this truth should be one of humility and gratitude. It is the height of grace and mercy that Jesus, fully God and fully man, would step between us and God's wrath and take it on Himself.

How have you experienced God's promise of restoration for His people?

Micah 7:18-20 uses many action verbs, and most of them are God's actions in response to the sins of the people. God does not hang their sins over their head forever, but when they repent, He forgives, passes over, does not hold on to, vanquishes, and casts their sins into the sea. To use this many descriptions of how God would forget their sin shows how much Micah wanted to emphasize God's eternal covenant-keeping that endures.

Despite the sins of the people, God would not abandon the promise He made to Israel. God's faithfulness to forgive sin and have compassion on His people is an essential attribute—it is tied to His name (Ex. 34:5-7). Micah praised the Lord for His uniqueness in love, grace, and forgiveness to remind the people of who God is so they could have hope in their coming exile.

LEADER NOTE: When we dwell in our sin, we are not acting as those who have been purchased by Jesus's blood. Those who have received freedom from sin should not use that as an opportunity to continue in sin but to walk forward in godliness and love (Gal. 5:13-14). When we are tempted to dwell in our past sins and not walk in freedom, our response should be to love our brothers and sisters, and this will help us out of our sorrows into the blessing of serving one another.

How should you address your struggles with sin in light of God's faithfulness and forgiveness?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"There is no greater state than to get up from your knees knowing that in God's sight you are clean, that He has forgiven every sin you've ever committed."[2]

–R. C. Sproul (1939–2017)

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Before the session, think of a book or movie you've read or watched multiple times. Bring that book, movie, or a photo of its cover with you. To begin, share a brief overview of the plot, and say, "Even though I know what's going to happen in this story, I still read/watch it over and over." Engage participants in considering a book or movie that they too love to relive.

TRANSITION: Every great story has its hero or heroine as well as its villain. Every great story has times of peril and times of victory. We love these stories because they reveal the truth of the history of our world: there is good and bad, and yet, there is always hope.

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: Last week we looked at the godly leadership of Hezekiah and Josiah: they lived according to God's Word, destroyed idols, and led others to worship God alone. But as you probably know or guessed, eventually the people of Judah followed in the footsteps of their northern counterparts, turning away from God. Just as God sent prophets of warning and truth to the Northern Kingdom, He also sent prophets to Judah. Sadly, most of those prophets encountered deaf ears and hard hearts. But God's covenant was not dependent upon the faithfulness of Israel; He would bring every promise to fruition because He is faithful. But Judah certainly would go through the valley in the waiting.

RECAP

ASK: What key words would you use to summarize Micah's messages to Israel and Judah? How did these passages challenge you? How were you reminded of hope and mercy? Which verse(s) stood out specifically to you?

TRANSITION: Micah came on the scene with a message of judgment at a pivotal point in the histories of Israel and Judah. Yet in the midst of the promise of God's judgment, Micah also promised hope. As he pointed out his people's sin, he also pointed ahead to peace from God.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Though there is a future judgment, there is also a future hope.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 100 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Judgment and Mercy." Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Judgment and Mercy

Read the passages below and compare God's holy judgment to His loving compassion.

GOD'S HOLY JUDGMENT	GOD'S LOVING COMPASSION
MICAH 5:1-6	
MICAH 6:6-8	
MICAH 7:8-9	
MICAH 7:18-20	

SETTING: Explain that we don't know much about the prophet Micah, but his stern words observed the imminent fall of Samaria (Israel) as he also warned the people of Jerusalem (Judah).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Micah 5:1-6 and 6:6-8 aloud.

CONNECT: Point out that verse 1 revealed the dire situation for Judah, but verse 2 immediately pointed to a redeemer. Ask: "What do we observe about this redeemer in Micah 5:2?" As a group, make notes on the chart of God's acts of holiness and judgment in these passages in response to the disobedience of His people. Then read back through the passages to search for and record words of God's mercy and compassion. Reread Micah 6:8 aloud, and ask: "Who were these words directed to? How do these requirements from God relate to God's judgment and God's compassion?" Record conclusions on the chart.

READ: Invite another volunteer to read Micah 7:8-9,18-20 aloud.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ENGAGE: Point out the repetition of the word "I" in Micah 7:8-9 and help your group think about the future hope these words would have been for Judah. Say: "From the first sin in the Bible in Genesis 3, we can see that disobedience results in judgment. But we've also seen an overflow of God's grace and mercy." As a group, consider again the judgment and the compassion of God in these passages. Focus on Micah 7:18 and consider how this verse reflects Exodus 34:6-7. Record your findings on the chart.

DEBRIEF

If these were the only Scriptures you had about God, what could you observe about Him?

(PSG p. 100) Why is it important for our sharing of the gospel to speak the truth about God, that He is both the righteous judge and the giver of mercy?

SUMMARIZE

Display **Pack Item 12: Who Is Like You?** where your group can see it. Say: "God is almighty, holy, and sovereign; He alone sets the standard for His world and His people. And because He is righteous, He punishes sin. But amid this judgment, He is also gracious and compassionate, full of love and mercy. So the Lord has made a way back to Himself, regardless of the transgressions we have committed. These words were true for the Israelites and they are true for us: God is both holy judge and compassionate rescuer. In Jesus, we see all His purpose for eternity—justice and mercy—perfected."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 101). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Sometimes we get stuck in our own heads about our sin. We can swing the pendulum from wallowing in our sin to shrugging off our sin as not a big deal. Either way, we are not treating sin the way God demonstrates it should be treated. Yes, God offers His forgiveness to all those who repent and believe in Jesus. But we must never forget that our punishment for sin wasn't swept under a rug—it was paid by the death of Christ in our place.

What are some reasons we fail to deal with our sin as we should?

HEART: Our weaknesses are opportunities for God to reveal His strength. As we saw in Micah 7:8-9, though we experience turmoil, discipline for our sin, and darkness, God mercifully steps in and is the very thing that we need the most. God lifts us up when we fall. God is the light in our darkness. God is justice and salvation even when we sin.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: Though there is a future judgment, there is also a future hope.

Notes

How do you need the Lord to be your light, your champion, your justice, and your salvation today?

HANDS: God's forgiveness for sin is the most marvelous and miraculous thing to ever occur. What is even more amazing is the fact that God is all-knowing and He chooses to forget our sins and not hold them against us. When we are sinned against, it may be easy to say the words "I forgive you," but it is far more difficult not to allow the wrong done to negatively shape how we view the offender. The Lord, however, has no problem being just and forgiving because He has punished our sins and forgiven us our sins in His Son, Jesus Christ.

How can you use opportunities to forgive to share the gospel and point others to Jesus Christ?

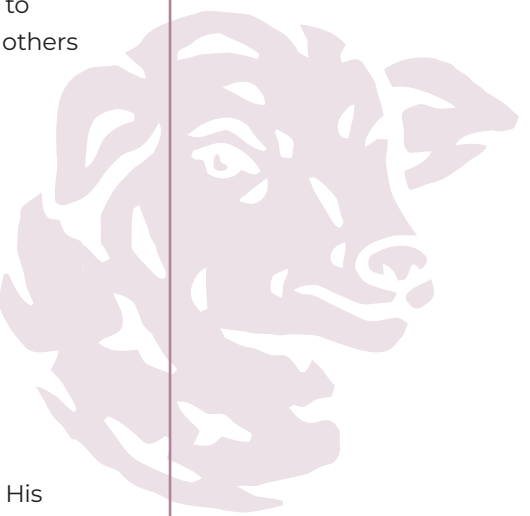
NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Choose one significant passage from this week's study and begin committing it to memory. Ask God to make that passage a blessing in your life and in the lives of others as you share it.
- Meditate on Micah 6:8 this week. As you do, analyze your own walk and consider how carefully you are obeying these requirements from God.
- Review the list of all the ways you saw God's compassion in the core passages. Use that as a starting point for your personal worship this week.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 101 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 73:21-28 with your group, praising God for His justice and compassion toward His people.

References

1. Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 95.
2. R. C. Sproul, *The Prayer of the Lord* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 85.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

GOD'S COVENANT RENEWED

CORE PASSAGE: JEREMIAH 17:5-8; 31:31-37

CONTEXT

Jeremiah was called to speak for the Lord in the waning days of the kingdom of Judah. Most of his messages warned of the coming judgment, which he witnessed with his own eyes, but a few promised hope for a ruined people. For a time, Judah was looking to put their trust in Egypt to fight the Babylonians, but Jeremiah's warning was to put their trust in God alone. In Jeremiah 17:5-8, which sounds like a psalm or proverb, the prophet addressed Judah's misplaced trust. And in Jeremiah 31:31-37, the prophet foretold the new covenant that God would make with His people to deal with their sin and ours once and for all.

KEY CONCEPT

A new covenant will establish followers of Jesus.

As you examine Jeremiah 17:5-8; 31:31-37:

- Understand that trusting in humankind leads to desert places without life.
- Dwell upon the promise that God will write His law on His people's hearts, call us His people, and forgive our sins.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

- Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)
- Hezekiah and Josiah Restore the Worship of the Lord (2 Kings 18–20; 22–23)
- Jeremiah Is Called as a Prophet (Jeremiah 1)
- Judah's Remaining Kings Return to What Is Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 23–24)
- **SESSION STUDY: Jeremiah Prophesies Judgment on Judah and a New Covenant (Jeremiah 1–38)**
- Babylon Besieges and Conquers Judah, Deporting the People (2 Kings 25)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Jeremiah 1–10
- ☐ **Day 2:** Jeremiah 11–20
- ☐ **Day 3:** Jeremiah 21–29
- ☐ **Day 4:** Jeremiah 30–38
- ☐ **Day 5:** Habakkuk 1–3
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 92

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

THOSE WHO TRUST IN HUMANKIND ARE CURSED; THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD ARE BLESSED (JEREMIAH 17:5-8).

Underline all the truths about those who trust in humanity. Circle all the truths about those who trust in God.

5 This is what the LORD says: Cursed is the person who trusts in mankind. He
makes human flesh his strength, and his heart turns from the LORD. 6 He will
be like a juniper in the Arabah; he cannot see when good comes but dwells
in the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land where no one lives.
7 The person who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence indeed is the LORD,
is blessed. 8 He will be like a tree planted by water: it sends its roots out
toward a stream, it doesn't fear when heat comes, and its foliage remains
green. It will not worry in a year of drought or cease producing fruit.

These verses are structured more like a psalm or proverb than a typical prophecy we might read in the Bible, but they still hold prophetic truth. The curse that Jeremiah pronounced calls to mind the blessings and curses Moses put before the people before his death, his final warnings before the people entered the promised land (see Deut. 27–30). In Jeremiah's day, the people of Judah were experiencing the punishment associated with those curses, and Jeremiah called them to repent and to trust in the Lord.

Jeremiah compared two types of trees to emphasize the differences between trusting humanity and trusting God. First was the "juniper in the Arabah" to describe those who put their trust in humankind (Jer. 17:6). The juniper is a prickly, bushy shrub that grows in the desert, often found in rocky fissures.[1] It barely scrapes by in the arid landscape. Similarly, the people of Judah, leaning on their own power and foreign alliances, were parched and barely surviving.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The reference to trees in this passage communicates truth about life and death. It is not simply that those who hope in humankind will wither but that they are actively pursuing death because they are pursuing something other than the Lord of life. This is the reality of God's punishment for sin that applies to every human being: those who follow their own sinful desires are destined for death. Alternatively, those who hope in the Lord are guaranteed eternal life, which is the promise of the gospel. Those who seek the Lord will receive everlasting life that is flourishing and beautiful.

What does godly trust in others look like compared to a cursed trust in others?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

For the second tree, the image used to describe those who put their hope in the Lord is that of a lush, thriving tree planted near a water source. Verses 7-8 are very similar to Psalm 1. According to David, the psalmist, those who trust in the Lord are like a tree that prospers and flourishes by streams of water, but those who do not are like chaff and blown away (Ps. 1:3-4).

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

UNION WITH CHRIST: At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.

Jeremiah 17:8 states that even when the heat comes, the tree planted by water does not fear but still flourishes. This does not mean that those who trust in the Lord won't experience suffering, but when they do, they can be unafraid and unmoved despite their circumstances. No matter what, they can be constant and faithful because their trust is in the One who is always faithful (Heb. 10:23).

LEADER NOTE: A false belief system that sometimes creeps into the church says that when you trust in God, you will not be harmed, nothing bad will happen to you, and you will receive material blessings. This "prosperity gospel" is a dangerous lie. This passage teaches us that those who trust in the Lord will receive blessing, but it is no promise of an easy life. Take Jeremiah, for example: Jeremiah struggled with his calling as a prophet but was faithful to the Lord, yet he is known as "the weeping prophet." He was not allowed to marry (Jer. 16:1-2), was beaten and put in stocks (20:2), was falsely imprisoned (37:15-16), dropped into a cistern (38:6), and forced to travel to Egypt with disobedient people after the destruction of Jerusalem (42–43). Like Jeremiah, we will face trials in this life, but the one who is rooted in the Lord will be able to persevere when circumstances are difficult.

How can you pursue the Lord now so that when trouble comes, you will be unwavering and strong amid trials?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

THE NEW COVENANT BRINGS HOPE AND FORGIVENESS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE (JEREMIAH 31:31-37).

Highlight every instance of "the LORD's declaration" in the passage below. Circle the promises God makes to Israel.

31 "Look, the days are coming"—this is the LORD's declaration—"when I will
make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
32 This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on
the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt—
my covenant that they broke even though I am their master"—the LORD's
declaration. 33 "Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house
of Israel after those days"—the LORD's declaration. "I will put my teaching
within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be
my people. 34 No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying,
'Know the LORD,' for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of
them"—this is the LORD's declaration. "For I will forgive their iniquity and
never again remember their sin. 35 This is what the LORD says: The one
who gives the sun for light by day, the fixed order of moon and stars for
light by night, who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar—the LORD of
Armies is his name: 36 If this fixed order departs from before me—this is the
LORD's declaration—only then will Israel's descendants cease to be a nation
before me forever. 37 This is what the LORD says: Only if the heavens above
can be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, will
I reject all of Israel's descendants because of all they have done—this is the
LORD's declaration."

Jeremiah prophesied the glorious promise of a new covenant, which would be established not because God broke His end of the deal but because God's people could not keep up their end of the agreement. From the moment He brought them out of Egypt, God's people consistently broke faith and pursued idols instead of God. They had failed to obey, earned God's curses, and would soon be exiled from the land, but now God in His mercy was laying out new terms for their relationship.

Previously, God's laws were written on stone tablets and on stone markers in the land, but in this new covenant, God's law would be written on the hearts of those who belong to Him. This demonstrates a shift from the law being an external commitment that the people broke regularly to an internal commitment that showed a transformation of the heart.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

LEADER NOTE: Jeremiah declared that one day all God's people will "know the LORD." Jesus said, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). This kind of knowing refers to intimacy and closeness. This does not mean we no longer need to read and study the Word but that each believer will experience forgiveness and salvation.[2]

How does the state of our heart impact our obedience to the Lord?

This new covenant will also be for all the people, "from the least to the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:34), including anyone despite their age, social class, or ethnicity. The New Testament confirms the new covenant is for all who repent of their sin and trust in the Lord (Heb. 8–10).

The new covenant ultimately displays God's forgiveness through Jesus. The old covenant offered forgiveness through sacrifices, but the new covenant provides forgiveness through one ultimate sacrifice—Jesus's blood (Luke 22:20). Jesus's sinless life and sacrificial death for sinners is the perfect display of God's willing forgiveness for our sins. And finally, God declares that this new covenant will be permanent. It will never cease to exist, nor will God's people.

LEADER NOTE: God declared that if the "fixed order" of the sun, moon, stars, and sea could be removed from His control, only then would His people cease to exist before Him (Jer. 31:35-36). Essentially, this is God swearing by His own goodness and power. The only way that God's people can be removed from His new covenant is if God is no longer God, and that is impossible.

How has God proven to you that He will uphold His covenant with you?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

The new covenant was established through Jesus, the Son of God, who was a substitute for the penalty of our sin. He fulfilled the law completely and writes the law on our hearts, and we are adopted as children of God. Through the new covenant, all who believe and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior are saved as a free gift because of God's grace and mercy.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Before the group arrives, write "I promise . . . " on a board. To begin the session, ask: "Has anyone said the words 'I promise' this week? If you are comfortable sharing, what did you promise?" Be prepared to share your own example, if applicable.

TRANSITION: Even if we don't say the words "I promise," we commit to things easily. Sometimes we make commitments but can't follow through with what we've promised. That's not the case with God. Even in Israel's darkest time, His promise to them was of hope and faithfulness, and His promises are always backed up by His power over all creation. His promises are forever.

CONTEXT

JEREMIAH'S LIFE

THE WEEPING PROPHET: Jeremiah, author of Jeremiah and Lamentations, prophesied a difficult message to God's people in the years leading up to the judgment and exile of the Southern Kingdom. He experienced anguish for his people and was persecuted by them (Jeremiah 4:19; 9:1; 14:17; Lamentations 3:48). His ministry began in 627 B.C., yet he was faithful to the Lord.

An approximate of Jeremiah's life constructed from the book of Jeremiah.

REIGN OF JOSIAH

- Beginning his ministry as a prophet soon the reformation of Josiah's reforms (1:1-3)
- Denounced the people of Judah for their faithlessness toward the Lord (2:1-8)

REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM

- Prophesied Judah's severely poor exile at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (25:1-14)
- Threatened with death for preaching judgment against Judah's disobedience (26:1-24)
- Jeremiah devoted to Baruch, his scribe, a scroll of his prophecies. Jehoiakim burned the temple; the scroll was read before the king, who cut it up and threw it into the fire. Jeremiah was ordered to rewrite the scroll (36:1-32)

REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH

- Carried a yoke, calling for Judah to submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon or be destroyed (27:1-22). Hananiah, a part of his false prophecy of a quick restoration for Judah and died two months later (27:1-28:17)
- Wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon, instructing them to settle there for the seventy years of exile (29:1-32)
- Prophesied Jerusalem's fall and grievous judgment against Judah (32:1-5)
- Twice asked by the king to inquire of the Lord about Babylon; Jeremiah responded with a message of judgment (21:1-14; 37:1-10)
- Imprisoned in the house of Jonathan, beaten and imprisoned in a dungeon (37:11-38)
- Asked by the king to inquire of the Lord about the coming destruction; Jeremiah gave a word of judgment; imprisoned again, this time in the guard's courtyard (37:17-21)
- Bought a field in Anathoth as a future restoration of Judah and Israel (32:1-28,44)
- Accused of enticing remnant in the city and dropped in a cistern of mud to die, but rescued by Ebed-melech; returned to the guard's courtyard (38:1-13)
- Asked by the king to inquire of the Lord about Babylon; Jeremiah responded with a message of judgment; returned to the guard's courtyard (38:14-28)

JERUSALEM FALLS TO BABYLON

- Freed by Nebuchadnezzar; settled at his home in Judah (39:11-14)
- Asked by the remnant to inquire of the Lord; Jeremiah told them to stay in Judah and not flee to Egypt; Jeremiah was forced to go and he was forcibly taken to Egypt (40:1-43:13)
- Prophesied judgment on the remnant in Egypt for their disobedience and idolatry (44:1-30)

ITEM 13

SOURCE: THOMAS NELSON'S NIV STUDY BIBLE

NOTE: Particular care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information, but due to its extensive use, the GOSPEL PROJECT cannot be the original author or endorsing the text for its intended use.

the GOSPEL PROJECT

REVIEW: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13: Jeremiah's Life** and review it with the group. Say: "If ever there were a preacher who lived out his message, it was Jeremiah. A man who was both priest and prophet, Jeremiah lived before and during the time of the Babylonian invasion of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Many of his prophecies to God's people were demonstrated through his life: he was threatened with death, jailed and bound, thrown into a pit, and forced to flee the king. His writings clearly show the sinfulness of the people of Judah, their promised destruction, and God's unwavering commitment to them."

RECAP

SAY: As you read our passages in Jeremiah this week, you probably noticed the definitive "declaration" of the Lord. He is God Almighty; He sets the standard for righteousness, and He chooses whom to bless and whom to curse. Because of His sovereignty, the Lord has the ability to make promises to Israel in the form of a covenant, whether for blessing or for cursing.

ASK: Speaking of blessed and cursed, how did God contrast two types of trees in Jeremiah 17:5-8? What was His promise for Israel in 31:31-34? Upon what did God guarantee His promises in 31:35-37?

TRANSITION: For our activity this week, we'll look closer at the promise God made to His people—the new covenant even better than His old covenant with them.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: A new covenant will establish followers of Jesus.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 108 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a table with the title "God's New Covenant." Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

God's New Covenant

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. In the spaces provided, identify the ways the old covenant is superseded by the better new covenant.

OLD COVENANT	NEW COVENANT
(Jeremiah 31:32)	**Jesus inaugurated and fulfilled this covenant for those who believe** (Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 9:11-28)
Laws written on tablets and monuments of stone (Exodus 31:18; Joshua 8:32)	(Jeremiah 31:33)
The Lord's presence was experienced by a few and secluded in the tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1-10)	(Jeremiah 31:34)
Impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4)	(Jeremiah 31:34)
Mediated by Moses (Exodus 24:3-8)	(Luke 22:20)

INTRODUCE: Point out that we will be hearing the phrases "This is what the LORD says" (Jer. 17:5) and "This is the LORD's declaration" (Jer. 31:31) in our passages today. Emphasize that while the prophet Jeremiah communicated the messages, the words are the Lord's, and they carry His divine power.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 17:5-8.

ENGAGE: Call for the group to identify several contrasts in this passage: for example, a cursed person (v. 5) versus a blessed one (v. 7); a person who trusts in humanity (v. 5) versus one who trusts in the Lord (v. 7); a tree in the desert (v. 6) versus a tree planted by water (v. 8). As a group, focus on the person who trusts in the Lord (vv. 7-8), noting the characteristics of that person. Record these observations on the board in a space separate from the activity.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Jeremiah 31:31-37 aloud.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ANALYZE: Focus on verses 31-34 and invite your group to work together to fill in the chart in their PSG with the ways the old covenant is superseded by the new covenant. Then task smaller groups of 3-4 to summarize each section of the chart with one or two words (ex. breakable vs. fulfilled; external vs. internal). After a few minutes, call for groups to share their conclusions. Point out God's unbreakable guarantee in verses 35-37, which is based on His eternal faithfulness to His people and His covenant.

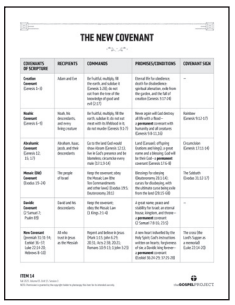
DISCUSS: How do the characteristics of a person who trusts in the Lord (Jer. 17:5-8) relate to the new covenant that God has promised to His people?

DEBRIEF

How should we view these Old Testament passages as we live in New Testament times?

How can we as believers in Jesus find strength and hope in these verses?

SUMMARIZE



THE NEW COVENANT

COVENANT'S OF SCRIPTURE	RECIPIENTS	COMMANDS	PROMISES/CONDITIONS	COVENANT SIGN
Creation Covenant Genesis 1–2	Adam and Eve	Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it Genesis 1:28; do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil 2:17	Eternal life for obedience; death for disobedience; spiritual alienation, exile from the garden, and the fall of mankind Genesis 3:17-24	–
Noahic Covenant Genesis 6–9	Noah, his descendants, and every living creature	Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth; do not eat meat with its lifeblood in it; do not murder Genesis 9:3-7	Never again will God destroy the earth with a flood; a **perpetual** covenant with humanity and all creatures Genesis 9:8-11,16	Rainbow Genesis 9:12-17
Abrahamic Covenant Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his descendants	Go to the land God would show them; walk before God and be blameless; circumcise every male 17:1-14	Land (Canaan), offspring, and blessing; God would be their name and inheritance; Gentiles will be blessed; God—a **permanent** covenant Genesis 17:6-18	Circumcision Genesis 17:11-14
Mosaic (Old) Covenant Exodus 20–24	The people of Israel	Keep the covenant; obey the Mosaic Law (the Ten Commandments, Levitical Law, Deuteronomic 20:1; Deuteronomy, 20:2	Blessings for obeying (Deuteronomy 28:1-14); curses for disobeying, with exile and dispersion from the land 28:15-68	The Sabbath Exodus 31:12-17;
Davidic Covenant 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89	David and his descendants	Keep the covenant; obey the Mosaic Law 1 Kings 2:1-4	A great name, peace and stability for Israel, an eternal house, kingdom, and throne—God would be his father 2 Samuel 7:8-16; 2:12	–
New Covenant Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36–37; Luke 22:14-20; Hebrews 8–10	All who trust in Jesus as the Messiah	Repent and believe in Jesus (Mark 1:15; John 6:29; 20:31; Acts 2:38; 20:21; Romans 10:9-13; 1 John 3:23)	A new heart indwelled by the Holy Spirit; God's instructions written on hearts; forgiveness of sin; a Gentile-inclusive kingdom; God—a **perpetual** covenant Ezekiel 36:24-29; 37:21-28	The cross (the Lord's Supper as a memorial) Luke 22:14-20

ITEM 1-4
NET ©2015 Lifeway Christian Resources
NOTE: Illustration is based on the map and table in Lifeway's The Gospel Project. Text cannot be reproduced verbatim.

The GOSPEL PROJECT

Pass out copies of **Pack Item 14: The New Covenant** and point to the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants as you say: "God's chosen people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—had abandoned Him and would be punished justly. But though they would be conquered and exiled, the Lord would always be faithful to His promise to be their God. Not only that, His new covenant would be even better. Through Jesus, God's Son, all who believe Him as Savior receive God's grace and mercy."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 109). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Knowing what the law of God says is different than understanding and implementing the truth He provides. Often we can recite verses and tell Bible stories like we are telling what we had for lunch that day. Recitation and memorization are not bad practices, by any means, but faith, obedience, and relationship with God are more than merely head matters.

Why is it important not just to memorize Scripture but meditate on the words?

HEART: God declared that the only way the new covenant will ever be broken is if He breaks it Himself. We know that God keeps His promises and will never break His covenant because of His perfect goodness, holiness, and trustworthiness. He never breaks a promise.

How should we respond to our sin in light of God's unbreakable new covenant?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

HANDS: All religions besides Christianity have a list of things that you must do to earn favor with a god or deity. The beauty of the gospel is that we believe Jesus accomplished everything needed for us, and so we are called to repent of sin and trust in Him. We do good works because we love Him, not because He requires us to earn His favor.

How will you approach your good works and obedience in light of the new covenant Jesus fulfilled for you?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Put Jeremiah 17:7 on an index card and set it in a prominent place or make it your phone background. As you see the verse this week, reflect on your level of trust in the Lord.
- Meditate on the new covenant found in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Use that passage to lead you to worship God privately this week.
- Pray for the people in your life who do not "know the LORD" (Jer. 31:34), and look for ways to testify to Christ and His salvation.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 109 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 92:1-5 with your group, thanking God for the works of His hands that have secured our salvation as part of His new covenant.

References

1. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Plants," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1714.
2. Fred Wood and Ross McLaren, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 16, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006), 263.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Doctrine Article

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

By Matt Rogers

The theme of God's judgment is threaded throughout the Old Testament, but the notion of God's judgment makes many uneasy. Some neglect the Old Testament or falsely believe that the God it reveals is fundamentally different than the God of the New Testament. A consistent reading of the Bible reveals just the opposite—the themes of God's holiness and the just judgment for sin are established in the Old Testament to make clear the unique hope offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Case in point is the exile.

THE WARNING AND JUDGMENT OF THE EXILE

God warned Israel of the consequences of their idolatry all the way back when Moses positioned the people on the brink of the promised land in the first place. God warned that they would be judged should they rebel from the Lord once they inhabited the land: "You will become an object of horror, scorn, and ridicule among all the peoples where the LORD will drive you" (Deut. 28:37). Though the exile would not take place for generations, the warning was loud and clear and repeated. When God's judgment came, no one would be able to say that God was capricious in His actions.

The looming threat of the exile was a constant reality during Israel's time in the land. Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah spent years echoing these warnings to no avail. The people persisted in their waywardness, and God did just what He said He would do. He allowed pagan nations to crush Israel, destroy their land, and carry their people off into captivity. Perhaps the high-water mark of this judgment occurred when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and ransacked the Lord's temple (2 Kings 25). As an act of just judgment, God removed His blessings of the land and the temple because He would not allow His people to mock Him with rampant idolatry (Ezek. 36:16-20).

THE GRACIOUS GOD OF THE EXILE

A number of themes emerge from the exile.

- First, God is just to judge humans for their sin. He is holy, and He has provided clear standards that must be obeyed. When people fail to honor Him as God, they are rightly judged.
- Second, God gives time to repent. While the final exile was swift, the time of warning was extensive. The people had ample time to repent from their idolatry and turn to the Lord.
- Third, God does what He says. We tend to apply this truth positively and reflect on how God keeps His promises to care, protect, love, and preserve His people—and we should. But we should also consider that God is faithful to keep His promises of judgment. He is not like the parent who threatens a punishment they never intend to enact. God does what He says.
- Finally, God gives grace. The Bible doesn't end with the exile. It's not the final word. The story continues with God bringing the people back to the land and ultimately undoing the exile through the salvation offered in Jesus.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

The themes of God's holiness and the just judgment for sin are established in the Old Testament to make clear the unique hope offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE GRACIOUS GOD OF THE GOSPEL

The exile also has implications for unbelievers today. In the same way as with Old Testament Israel, God has given clear warnings about the just judgment due for human sin (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). This judgment is more than a physical exile from the land. It is death—physical, spiritual, and eternal death. God also provides time for unbelievers to repent. Sadly, as Paul wrote, many presume upon this time and believe that God has turned a blind eye to their sin and that He will not hold them accountable. Instead, they should see this time as an opportunity to repent (2:1-11).

> A person who fails to repent of their sin will experience the reality of God's faithfulness in judgment.

Unbelievers should feel the burden to flee from the coming judgment because God will keep His word. As Paul warned the church in Galatia: "Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh" (Gal. 6:7-8). A person who fails to repent of their sin will experience the reality of God's faithfulness in judgment.

Finally, God does give grace. However, this grace will not come from another offer of salvation on the other side of death like the grace seen after the exile. Instead, this grace is available now. God has provided a means of escape from the wrath to come through the work of Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:7). Through faith in Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, sinners can be forgiven of their sins, made right with God, and promised an eternal inheritance with all of the saints that can never be taken away (Rom. 8).

Matt Rogers is the pastor of Christ Fellowship Cherrydale in Greenville, South Carolina. He and his wife, Sarah, have five children: Corrie, Avery, Hudson, Willa, and Fuller. Matt is also an assistant professor of church planting at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, the church development coordinator with the Pillar Network, and a freelance author.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

GOD'S NATION FELL

CORE PASSAGE: 2 CHRONICLES 36:11-21

CONTEXT

Josiah was a good king over Judah who followed in the ways of his ancestor David, and he obeyed the Lord in almost all that he did. Josiah's faithfulness brought restoration to God's people. But after Josiah's death, his successors—three sons and a grandson—did not follow in his faithful footsteps. Each one did what was evil in the Lord's eyes. They did not obey God but pursued wickedness and rebelled against His ways and His punishments. Their continual disobedience brought about God's judgment that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and exile from the promised land for God's people.

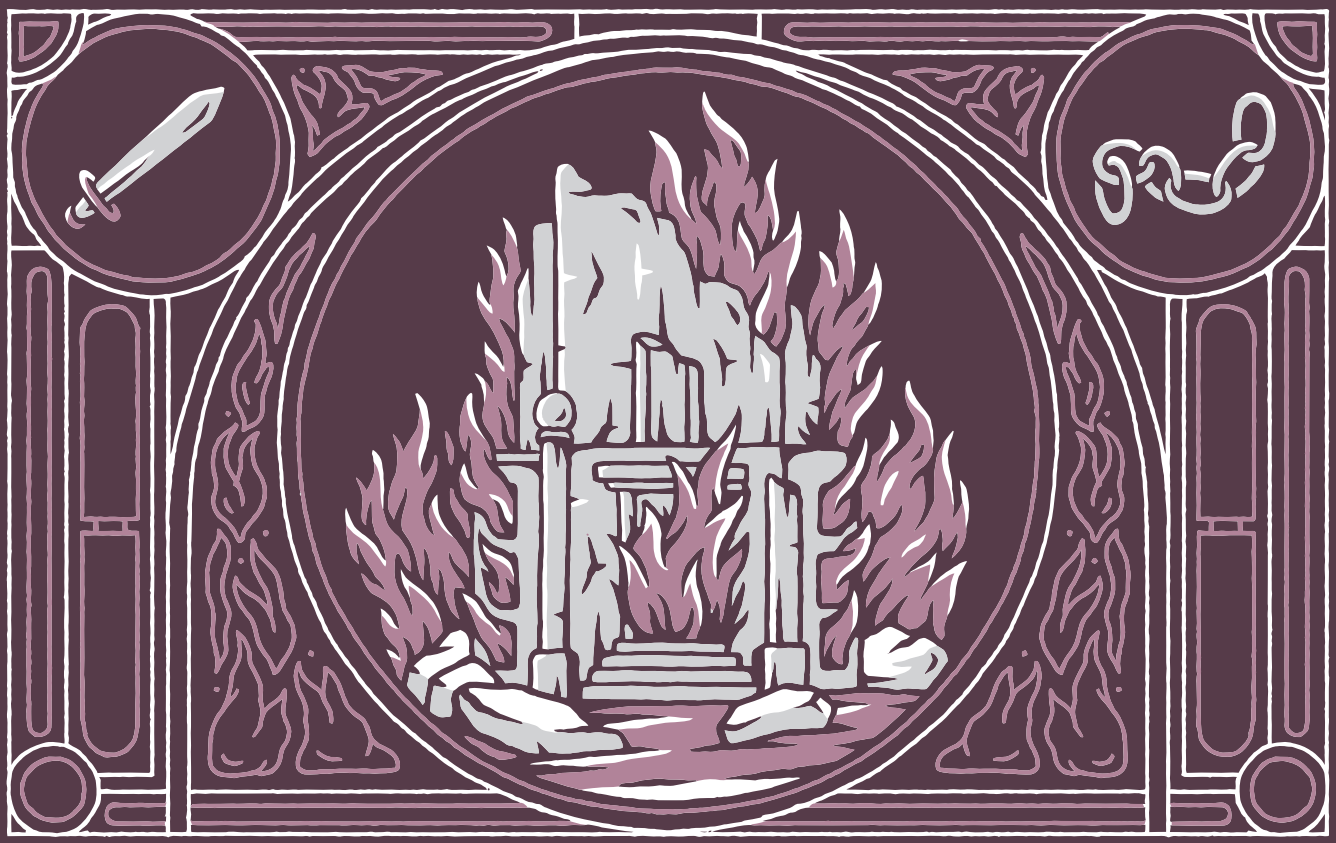
KEY CONCEPT

God warns people with compassion but will also judge evil.

As you examine 2 Chronicles 36:11-21:

- Recognize the compassion of God in sending messengers to warn and call His people to repentance.
- Understand that apart from Christ, everyone will reach a point of no remedy from the just wrath of God against sin.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources



TIMELINE

Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)

Hezekiah and Josiah Restore the Worship of the Lord (2 Kings 18–20; 22–23)

Judah's Remaining Kings Return to What Is Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 23–24)

Jeremiah Prophesies Judgment on Judah and a New Covenant (Jeremiah 1–38)

SESSION STUDY: Babylon Besieges and Conquers Judah, Deporting the People (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36)

Ezekiel Prophesies to the Exiles (Ezekiel 1–48)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** 2 Kings 23:31–25:26
- ☐ **Day 2:** 2 Chronicles 36:1-21
- ☐ **Day 3:** Jeremiah 39:1–44:30
- ☐ **Day 4:** Jeremiah 45:1–52:30
- ☐ **Day 5:** Lamentations 1:1–5:22
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 79

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to review God's message through the prophets concerning the Babylonian exile.

THOUGH GOD WAITS PATIENTLY FOR REPENTANCE, HE WILL JUDGE EVIL (2 CHRONICLES 36:11-16).

Underline all the words that indicate Zedekiah's rebellion. Circle the result.

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned
eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD
his God and did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah at the
LORD's command. 13 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who
had made him swear allegiance by God. He became obstinate and hardened
his heart against returning to the LORD, the God of Israel. 14 All the leaders of
the priests and the people multiplied their unfaithful deeds, imitating all the
detestable practices of the nations, and they defiled the LORD's temple that
he had consecrated in Jerusalem. 15 But the LORD, the God of their ancestors
sent word against them by the hand of his messengers, sending them time
and time again, for he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling
place. 16 But they kept ridiculing God's messengers, despising his words,
and scoffing at his prophets, until the LORD's wrath was so stirred up against
his people that there was no remedy.

Zedekiah was the last of Josiah's three sons to reign and the last king of Judah. He did not learn from his father's obedience and faithfulness but instead did what was evil in God's eyes. Even though the prophet Jeremiah shared God's warnings and declarations, Zedekiah pridefully ignored Jeremiah and relied on the feel-good messages of false prophets who promised God would never allow His people to be driven from the land (Jer. 28:1-4).

In the aftermath of a previous, smaller-scale exile (29:1-2), Zedekiah had been appointed as king by Nebuchadnezzar, the powerful king of Babylon whom God had appointed to bring punishment on Judah for their disobedience. But Zedekiah disobeyed God and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, also leading the people and even the priests toward evil behavior. A reckoning was coming as the Lord had foretold (Deut. 29:16-29).

> **LEADER NOTE:** Being prideful and unwilling to receive correction is a dangerous and deadly path. If our actions are in direct contradiction to God's Word and the Lord has confronted us in our sin through His Spirit and possibly through a brother or sister in Christ, then we ought to respond with a humble heart in repentance and faith in the God of patient grace who forgives.

What are some ways we can grow in humility to listen to and accept godly rebuke and correction?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

Despite the people's rebellion, the Lord was patient. He repeatedly sent messengers and prophets, such as Jeremiah, to call them to repentance. He even sent a message to the people who had been carried away to Babylon to encourage them that God would bring them back to the land of Judah after seventy years (Jer. 29:1-28). The Lord did this because He wanted His people to repent of their wicked ways and follow Him.

But God's patience and compassion were not met with gratefulness or humility. Instead, God's messengers weren't just ignored but ridiculed and abused, and by extension, so too was God Himself. Having reached a tipping point, the Lord would no longer allow their evil to persist, and His wrath, His appropriate and just response to their rebellion, became unstoppable.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Lord is perfect in all His attributes and all His ways. Therefore, the Lord's patience is infinite, just as He is. The Lord is also perfectly just, so His wrath against sin and sinners is always the appropriate and necessary consequence of evil. Being that God's patience is infinite, it can never run out, as we might speak of a parent's patience toward a child. Yet God can set a point at which He operates in patience toward sinners and then transitions to just judgment against them with "no remedy," which typically corresponds to death. The Lord is patient and desires all to repent and be saved, but we must not overlook God's warnings that the day of His judgment is certain (2 Pet. 3:8-13).

How have you been treated as you have shared the gospel with others?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS JUST: God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be judged according to those standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be unjust if God did not uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

NO ONE CAN ESCAPE GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT APART FROM REPENTANCE (2 CHRONICLES 36:17-21).

Circle each "he" that refers to the Lord, and underline each "he" that refers to Nebuchadnezzar.

17 So he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their
fit young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. He had no pity
on young men or young women, elderly or aged; he handed them all over
to him. 18 He took everything to Babylon—all the articles of God's temple,
large and small, the treasures of the LORD's temple, and the treasures of the
king and his officials. 19 Then the Chaldeans burned God's temple. They tore
down Jerusalem's wall, burned all its palaces, and destroyed all its valuable
articles. 20 He deported those who escaped from the sword to Babylon,
and they became servants to him and his sons until the rise of the Persian
kingdom. 21 This fulfilled the word of the LORD through Jeremiah, and the
land enjoyed its Sabbath rest all the days of the desolation until seventy
years were fulfilled.

Here we see the final result of Judah's rebellion against God. After multiple attempts to extend compassion to His people, God determined to judge their evil. Like many before him, Zedekiah had failed as a leader, but the people failed in their willingness to follow the Lord, ignoring the warnings of the prophets. Now the Lord would use King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, or Chaldeans, to tear it all down and take His people away. The description of God's judgment for Judah is stark and shocking, a reminder of the seriousness of sin and the just punishment for disobedience from which no one is exempt.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Babylonians' actions against Judah were their own, yet at the same time, God sent them to fulfill His judgment against His rebellious people. In Habakkuk 1:5-11, the Lord foretold His use of the Chaldeans to punish Judah and also condemned them as guilty in their attack because they did not act for God's glory but for their own. In this we see that God is sovereign, holy, and just.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil."[1]

–J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

For those who reject the gospel, both out of willful rebellion and sin-veiled ignorance, there will come a day when there is no remedy. God must punish sin, but in His mercy He has provided the means of salvation through His Son, Jesus. We have been given this gospel message to share with the world.

How might you communicate with others the remedy for God's wrath that God has provided in Jesus Christ?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Because of God's compassion, Jesus came to make a way of salvation for those who will believe in Him and repent of their sins. But there will come a time when all who harden their hearts against the Lord will be judged.

The exile, though a form of judgment, was not the final word for Israel. Verses 20-21 allude to the fulfillment of God's words spoken by Jeremiah, who foretold the length of their exile as seventy years (Jer. 29:10). Jeremiah also had a message of hope for those who would be taken to Babylon: "This city will bear on my behalf a name of joy, praise, and glory before all the nations of the earth, who will hear of all the prosperity I will give them. They will tremble with awe because of all the good and all the peace I will bring about for them" (33:9). God promised to restore His people and bring them back to the land. While there must be judgment for sin, there is also hope for salvation and restoration. And just as God kept his word regarding His wrath against Judah, He also keeps His word for the ultimate blessing of His people.

LEADER NOTE: Leviticus 25 provides God's laws regarding a Sabbath rest for the land every seven years and a Year of Jubilee every fifty years. On these special years, the land was not to be worked but left to produce on its own, and similar to how the Lord provided for the people's needs on the weekly Sabbaths, so too would the Lord provide for them on these Sabbath years. It would seem the people of Israel and Judah largely failed to obey the Lord in this matter, a symptom of their rebellion against God, and this determined the length of their exile.

How does this passage challenge your perspective on the seriousness of sin in your own life?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: Before the group arrives, write the following on the board: "I want to get healthier, but . . . " ; "I need to save more money, but . . . " ; and "The check engine light in my car is on, but . . . " Feel free to add any other such statements. Upon arrival, ask your group if they currently are going through a situation that requires action and yet they find themselves using similar "but" statements.

TRANSITION: The word "but" is small and seemingly insignificant, but it can change the course of a narrative. In the midst of idolatry and oppression, we know that a statement like "But the Lord" can turn the outcome immediately. The problem comes, though, when God's people continue to harden their hearts and minds against Him. That's what happened in this week's passage.

CONTEXT

OVERVIEW: We've been walking through the Bible from God's creation of Adam to the creation of His chosen nation and now to its fall. We've seen the Israelites wander in the desert, build a temple, and we've seen them completely disregard God's lordship. Though the prophets had been speaking God's word to them, the people chose rebellion. Today's passage contains a conclusion within the story: the last king over the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the sad, destructive exile of God's chosen people.

RECAP

ASK: In your personal preparation study this week, how do you recall King Zedekiah being described? What about the prophet Jeremiah? The people of Judah? King Nebuchadnezzar? The Lord?

TRANSITION: As you studied 2 Chronicles 36:11-21 this week, you watched the last bit of God's nation fall to their enemy. Over and over, God had called for His people to return to Him in repentance and faith, but they refused. Therefore, they reached a point of no return and "no remedy," and God fulfilled His promises to curse, punish, kill, and exile His people from His promised land. In our activity, we will consider what leads to a point of "no remedy" with God and how to avoid reaching that place.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: God warns people with compassion but will also judge evil.

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 118 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find an activity titled "No Remedy." Recreate this on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

No Remedy

Read the Scripture passages and briefly summarize the actions of the key figure(s) in the space provided.

2 CHRONICLES 36:11-14: "ZEDEKIAH . . . "

2 CHRONICLES 36:15: "BUT THE LORD . . . "

2 CHRONICLES 36:16: "BUT THEY . . . "

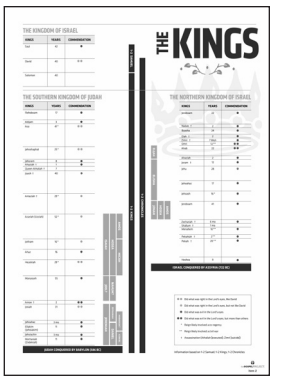
2 CHRONICLES 36:17-21: "SO HE . . . "

ENGAGE: Display and call attention to **Pack Item 2: The Kings**, and slowly read through the list of the kings of Judah. Invite the group to interrupt and summarize a narrative or lesson learned from a king previously studied. Reemphasize our focus today on Zedekiah as the last king on the list.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Chronicles 36:11-16 aloud.

SUMMARIZE: As a group, consider how the text from verses 11-14 could be summarized succinctly. Write that summary on the chart. Point out that Zedekiah had hardened his heart to the prophet Jeremiah, to King Nebuchadnezzar of the Chaldeans, and even to God. Direct your group to carefully consider verse 15, summarizing it as a group and recording that summary as well. Ask: "How many times have we seen God's people rebel against Him? How many times have we seen Him call them back through His love and faithfulness?" Continue the activity by summarizing verse 16 and writing it on the chart.

Notes



© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Chronicles 36:17-21 aloud.

DISCUSS: Conclude the activity by considering as a group how to summarize verses 17-21 and writing that on the board. Note that verse 17 begins with the words "So he," meaning "So God." Ask: "Do you think God's people were shocked that He brought about their defeat at the hands of the Chaldeans? How was this act a reflection of God's good and faithful character?"

DEBRIEF

(PSG p. 118) How can we avoid reaching a point of "no remedy" with the Lord? How can we help others trust in God's remedy in Jesus Christ?

Why should we praise God for being just? What does God's justice reveal about His character and our responsibility?

SUMMARIZE

When a parent doesn't parent, we might call that negligence. When a leader doesn't lead, we might call that incompetence. If Almighty God were to give His standards for right and wrong but never punish disobedience, we might question His status as God. But the Lord is judge and jury because He is holy, yet He is merciful too. For the totality of who God is—just and merciful, holy and gracious—we can praise Him even in the judgments He pronounces. The final story of Zedekiah (and Judah) point to the future judgment in which all who harden their hearts against Jesus will be judged, but all who humble themselves and turn to Him in repentance and faith will be saved.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 119). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Zedekiah heard the words of the prophets over and over again, yet he never heeded what they said. The prophets' warnings were ignored, and their prophecies fulfilled. When we hear God's Word, we must not ignore it.

What would God have us believe and do in response to Judah's destruction?

HEART: God is unbelievably patient with His people. He provided many opportunities for them to return to Him. And even when He poured out His wrath, He still promised to restore the people. This is undeserved grace, the same kind of grace God shows to anyone who repents and turns to Him.

How has God shown love and mercy toward you? How have you extended that love and mercy to others?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: God warns people with compassion but will also judge evil.

Notes

HANDS: The people of Judah failed to encourage one another toward obedience and the love of God. Zedekiah led wickedly and directed them toward other gods, but the people also led one another poorly by following this evil king and not challenging his poor example. We, on the other hand, should "consider one another in order to provoke love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

How will you encourage others to stay accountable and obedient to God's Word even when it's difficult?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- In your prayer journal this week, confess areas in which you've allowed your own heart to become hardened. Invite the Spirit to renew your heart as you yield to Him.
- Reflect on 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 each day this week, and use that as the starting point for your private worship time.
- Pray for the people you know who have hardened their hearts against the Lord. If the opportunity arises, share the truth of His grace and mercy with them.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 119 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray with your group through Psalm 79:9-13, thanking God that He has atoned for the sins of His people in Jesus Christ for the glory of His name.

References

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 136.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

GOD'S REVIVAL PROMISED

CORE PASSAGE: EZEKIEL 37:1-14

CONTEXT

Ezekiel was brought up to be a priest in Jerusalem, but he was carried away to Babylon during the first wave of the Babylonian exile. Yet even there, the Lord's hand was on him, and he was called by the Lord as a prophet. Ezekiel prophesied to the people who remained in Judah that their hardheartedness and sin would result in the Lord's abandonment of the temple and the total destruction of Jerusalem. When God's judgment came to pass, the people understandably lost all hope. They had earned their punishment. But God still had a plan for His people, and Ezekiel prophesied their revival and spiritual new birth.

KEY CONCEPT

God revives His people when hope seems lost.

As you examine Ezekiel 37:1-14:

- Visualize Ezekiel's experience of God commanding him to tell dry bones to come to life and them obeying.
- Reflect upon the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming us and drawing us out of hopelessness.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

TIMELINE

Jeremiah Prophesies Judgment on Judah and a New Covenant (Jeremiah 1–38)

Ezekiel Is Deported in a First Wave of Exiles and Prophesies Against Judah (2 Kings 24; Ezekiel 1–33)

Babylon Besieges and Conquers Judah, Deporting the People (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36)

SESSION STUDY: Ezekiel Prophesies Hope and Restoration for the Exiles (Ezekiel 34–48)

Daniel Prophesies in Babylon (Daniel 1–12)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Ezekiel 1–11
- ☐ **Day 2:** Ezekiel 12–17
- ☐ **Day 3:** Ezekiel 18–24
- ☐ **Day 4:** Ezekiel 25–32
- ☐ **Day 5:** Ezekiel 33–39
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 80

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

WHEN HOPE SEEMS LOST, WE RELY ON GOD'S POWER TO REVIVE US (EZEKIEL 37:1-10).

Circle every use of "live" and "breath" in the passage.

1 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by his Spirit and
set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me
all around them. There were a great many of them on the surface of the
valley, and they were very dry. 3 Then he said to me, "Son of man, can these
bones live?" I replied, "Lord GOD, only you know." 4 He said to me, "Prophesy
concerning these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the
LORD! 5 This is what the Lord GOD says to these bones: I will cause breath
to enter you, and you will live. 6 I will put tendons on you, make flesh grow
on you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you so that you come
to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD." 7 So I prophesied as I had
been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling
sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 As I looked, tendons
appeared on them, flesh grew, and skin covered them, but there was no
breath in them. 9 He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of
man. Say to it: This is what the Lord GOD says: Breath, come from the four
winds and breathe into these slain so that they may live!" 10 So I prophesied
as he commanded me; the breath entered them, and they came to life and
stood on their feet, a vast army.

Several years into their seventy years in exile, God's people were discouraged. But the vision God gave His prophet in Ezekiel 37 signified a restoration of hope. The vision began with the Holy Spirit taking Ezekiel to see a valley of dry bones scattered all about. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been forbidden to touch dead bones and become unclean (Lev. 21:1-2). Ezekiel likely recognized this shocking scene as an image of judgment against his people.

> **LEADER NOTE:** For a dead person to remain unburied indicates that something unnatural has happened. Typically loved ones will bury a relative, or brothers-in-arms might take up that responsibility in battle conditions. But a valley of bones would imply no one was left to bury the dead, at least no one who cared. Furthermore, the Lord had warned Israel in Deuteronomy 28:26 that rebellion would result in curses and death, signified by corpses left out to be food for birds and wild animals (see also Jer. 34:19-20).

Ezekiel was led all around the valley to see that the bones had been dry for a very long time. God then asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezek. 37:3). Ezekiel responded with reverence, acknowledging that only God would "know," and only in God's power could it be possible.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

God instructed Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, commanding them to hear the word of the Lord. As Ezekiel spoke, an unbelievable transformation unfolded. Bones came together; muscle, fat, and skin covered them; and bodies became whole—whole but lifeless. Then God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. As the prophet obeyed, the breath entered the bodies, bringing them to life. The bones once completely dry rose up as a vast, living army.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The re-formed bodies in the valley were lacking something integral; therefore, they were still dead and lifeless. They needed "breath in them." This recalls the account of God's creation of the first man. In Genesis 2:7, the Lord formed the man from the dust of the ground, but it wasn't until He "breathed the breath of life" into the man's nostrils that the man became a living being. Through this vision, God is reasserting that He is the One who raises up the dead and the downtrodden, and He is the One who gives life and vitality.

What areas in your life feel spiritually "dry" or lifeless? How can the Lord bring renewal and restoration?

The vision of the once-dead bones, now-living bodies told the story of Israel. The dead and dry bones represented the Israelites' despair and sense of hopelessness as they lived in exile, feeling abandoned and forgotten by God. Perhaps many of them believed the story of God's mercy and covenant with Israel was over. The living and vast army, however, pointed to the impending revival and God's promise to restore His people from the inside out, cleansing them from their sin and giving them a new heart and spirit (36:24-30).

God is the One who brings judgment and life, and He is the One who restores what is broken. Ezekiel's vision reassured the exiles that their restoration was certain. Likewise, we believers in Christ can be reassured of this unwavering truth: God's covenant faithfulness endures forever.

How does this passage challenge your faith in God's power to work in hopeless situations?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Though sin, guilt, and shame may have a hold on us, God's resurrection power brings renewed life to those who trust in His Son, Jesus, who conquered sin and death through His resurrection.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

GOD WILL REVIVE US WITH HIS SPIRIT SO THAT WE WILL KNOW HIM (EZEKIEL 37:11-14).

Circle all the times God says the words "I" and "my." Then underline all the times God says the words "you" and "your."

11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house
of Israel. Look how they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has
perished; we are cut off.' **12** Therefore, prophesy and say to them, 'This is
what the Lord God says: I am going to open your graves and bring you up
from them, my people, and lead you into the land of Israel. **13** You will know
that I am the Lord, my people, when I open your graves and bring you up
from them. **14** I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you
in your own land. Then you will know that I am the Lord. I have spoken, and
I will do it. This is the declaration of the Lord.'"

When Jesus taught His disciples and audiences in parables, they were not readily understood, being somewhat vague stories that invited interpretation. Therefore, Jesus explained His intended meaning of the parables to His disciples. If Jesus told the story of Ezekiel's vision, we might assume it referred to our physical resurrection or life after death, which may not be too far afield. But so it would be clear to Ezekiel and his audience among the exiles, God explained in detail the meaning of Ezekiel's vision.

God stated that the bones represented Israel and their struggle with hopelessness during the Babylonian exile. They had been so confident that Jerusalem could not fall because God had chosen it as the place where His name would dwell (1 Kings 9:3). Now that Jerusalem was destroyed, did that mean the covenant God had made with His people could not be restored? The people of God scattered across the Babylonian Empire were to see themselves in the scattered and disconnected valley of bones.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The image of a valley of dry bones corresponds well to the status of all people as sinners in rebellion against God. The house of Israel was destitute and cut off, having been exiled from the promised land and suffering under the just judgment of their God. Sinners, in general, are "dead in [their] trespasses and sins," and because we have all lived this way, "we [are] by nature children under wrath," cut off from a covenant relationship with the Lord (Eph. 2:1-3). As such, our only hope for restoration and life comes from God alone, which He has given to us in Jesus and the Spirit.

What is God's role in our understanding of His Word, and how should we submit to that?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

In the midst of His people's sorrow, which they had rightly earned by their rebellion, God promised to do what felt impossible. He promised to take scattered Israel and re-form them together in their land. This would not be just a physical restoration to the land but also a spiritual restoration in which the people would return to covenant relationship with God. The restoration would not be just individual but communal. Israel would one day be restored back to God as a unified nation in beautiful fellowship with Him.

God will be faithful to His people and keep His promises. For the nation of Israel, the Lord would return the people to the land and His Spirit would be with them and in them, helping them to live in obedience. God would write His new covenant on their heart, and He would breathe new life into them. In this way He would restore, uphold, sustain, and show His sovereignty over His people, proving to them without a shadow of a doubt that He is the Lord.

> **LEADER NOTE:** In Ezekiel 37:14, God promised that He would put His Spirit within the Israelites, enabling them to live. This, again, is a promise of the new covenant, in which the Spirit of God will live with and in His people and help them to know the Lord. The Spirit will help them live according to God's will and obey Him. This also shows that the Holy Spirit is necessary to help people walk with God and fulfill His will for them.

How can we rely on the Holy Spirit to live out God's purposes for our lives?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

REGENERATION: Regeneration takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is unable to produce.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Bring one or more of the following with you: a pencil, a wooden spoon, or a cardboard box. Set the item at the front of the room as the group arrives. Talk about how the item, at one time in the past, was alive: it was part of a tree. Consider (theoretically) the journey taken by that tree to yield the item: logging, hauling, processing, etc. Ask: "Would you call this alive today? Is there anything we could do to make this alive again?"

TRANSITION: When we get to the book of Ezekiel, and particularly the latter chapters, the nation of Israel had been utterly decimated. The Northern Kingdom was long gone, but now the Southern Kingdom had been captured, destroyed, and demolished. Its people were hopeless. They felt dead, no more alive than the item I brought today, but God promised to make them alive again.

CONTEXT

REVIEW: Some of God's prophets spoke words of warning, instruction, and hope to God's people before the falls of Israel (722 BC) and Judah (586 BC). But Ezekiel was a prophet who spoke God's words to His people during their exile. The levels of hope and endurance for God's people were at an all-time low. Some of Ezekiel's messages likely contributed to that mood as he, a fellow exile, foretold the final destruction of Jerusalem. But God also gave them words of hope through Ezekiel: The Lord was still with them, He was still working, and His plan was still in motion.

RECAP

SAY: In Ezekiel 37, the prophet was brought out by the Holy Spirit to a valley where he could see the remnants of a devastating battle: mounds of dry bones. God then commanded Ezekiel to command the bones to live, and they did.

DISCUSS: Why do you think God led Ezekiel "all around" the bones before asking if the bones could live? What else stood out to you from the passage as you read it this week?

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Key Concept: God revives His people when hope seems lost.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

DIAGRAM: Direct your group to page 126 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a diagram titled "Dry Bones Come Alive." Recreate this diagram on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Dry Bones Come Alive

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14. Write or illustrate the process that brought the dry bones to life.

DRY BONES		LIVING BONES

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Ezekiel 37:1-14 aloud, slowly. As he or she reads, invite all participants to listen with eyes closed, picturing the scene.

ASK: What did the bones represent in light of Ezekiel's ministry?

EXPLAIN: Help your group understand that the bones represented the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. They had been utterly conquered and left in ruins, exiled and scattered abroad without any hope for their future.

ENGAGE: As a group, identify how Ezekiel described the bones in verses 1-4, and write the answers in the left column on the board. Then direct the group to carefully consider verses 5-10, asking: "What took place to bring the bones from dry to living?" Record those actions in the center column of the diagram on the board *(Ezekiel prophesying; noise; rattling sound; bones attaching; tendons; flesh growing; breath entering from the four winds).* And finally, fill in the right column with the descriptions of the now-living bones in verse 10.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

ENGAGE: Now turning to verses 11-14, guide your group to draw a line on the diagram in their PSG to separate the entries from Ezekiel's vision from the notes your group will make from the Lord's interpretation of the vision. Invite volunteers to highlight descriptions and comments from verses 11-14 and to suggest where to place them on the diagram.

DEBRIEF

What is the significance of the breath in these verses? What does "breath" represent throughout Scripture?

(PSG p. 126) After all that the nation of Israel had done to reject God, why would He choose this course of action? What was His purpose in revealing this scene to Ezekiel?

SUMMARIZE

God is faithful to His promises. And though the descendants of Abraham had soundly rejected Him and found themselves living out the punishment for their sinful idolatry and unbelief, God's plan for eternity still included His chosen people. So, since they wouldn't live for Him, He would bring them back to life through His Spirit. We will see this in part when the Lord calls His people to return home after their exile. But ultimately we see this come to pass in the New Testament, when the first believers in Jesus Christ found themselves filled with the Holy Spirit. The hope of this passage remains true for us today: No matter how dry you feel inside, God's Spirit is there to bring you back to life.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 127). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: When God first revealed this vision to Ezekiel, He asked His prophet a question that seemed impossible to answer: "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezek. 37:3). Ezekiel deferred to God as the One who knows all things and has the power to do the impossible. When God told him to prophesy to dead, lifeless bones, Ezekiel obeyed, and the bones lived.

How does our understanding and faith in God impact our obedience to Him and our proclamation of His gospel?

HEART: God renewed and revived the dry bones in the valley, and He promises this same effect for all His people. This renewal came to ultimate fruition in Jesus as He brings new life to all who follow Him through the new covenant sealed with His blood.

In what areas of your life are you lacking hope and feeling cut off from God? How does this passage encourage you?

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Notes

HANDS: The purpose of the restoration of Israel was not only for individual benefit but for the whole nation. The restoration of Israel would also be how God would extend His blessing to the whole world, as He promised Abraham (Ezek. 36:36; cf. Gen. 12:3). The great thing about the community of faith being restored to God is that believers can usher others into the family of God.

How will you pray and prepare for sharing the gospel of Jesus with those who are spiritually dead in their sins?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Take one verse, sentence, or phrase that stood out to you this week and use it as a journal prompt each morning.
- Allow this text to remind you to pray for nations, churches, and individuals who feel their situation seems hopeless. Look for opportunities to point others to the Lord's faithfulness.
- Study the biblical concepts of revival and regeneration this week. Be ready to explain them to someone who doesn't understand what they mean.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 127 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 80:14-19 with your group, asking God to rebuke and remove any sin in your hearts and to supply you once again with hope for salvation through revival and restoration in Him.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Group Article

3 REASONS WE DON'T SHARE THE GOSPEL (AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT)

By Ken Braddy

When people find a great new restaurant, golf course, retail store, or ice cream shop, they will go to great lengths on social media to let others know about their discovery. Word-of-mouth advertising takes over, and things can go viral. You've seen it happen, I know.

One of the primary purposes we have as Christians is to share the good news of Jesus with others. The Great Commission is clear—we are to make disciples, and that process takes place when we introduce people to Jesus's redemptive work on their behalf.

Many believers don't step out in faith and share what they've discovered about Jesus for several reasons. Here are three reasons why people don't share their faith and how you as a leader can help them tell others the most important message in the world.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

The Great Commission is clear—we are to make disciples, and that process takes place when we introduce people to Jesus's redemptive work on their behalf.

1) PEOPLE DON'T KNOW A SIMPLE GOSPEL PRESENTATION

I remember when people used to attend 12-week seminars to learn a 1-hour gospel presentation. I doubt many people today will sit still that long! Knowing a simple gospel presentation is important. Find a method that can be written down and easily shared quickly using one verse, such as Romans 6:23 or John 3:16.

As a Bible study leader, I've taught groups a one-verse method using Romans 6:23, and it is easy to learn and share with others. The one-verse method feels more like a conversation than a presentation, and you can find visual guides online that you can easily sketch on a napkin too.

One of the primary purposes we have as Christians is to share the good news of Jesus with others.

2) PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO ARTICULATE THEIR TESTIMONY

Some believers don't know how to give an "elevator speech" about their come-to-Jesus moment. If they haven't thought it out, they just don't know where to start.

Teach your group to write out their story (testimony) in three parts: (1) their life before coming to Christ; (2) the situation surrounding their salvation experience; and (3) their life after receiving Jesus as their Savior.

Give your group time to write this out during Bible study, and then give them more time to practice sharing their testimony with another person in the group. This gives people a safe place to practice and hone their story. As their confidence grows, they will be more likely to speak up with a non-believing person.

3) PEOPLE DON'T FEEL THE URGENCY TO SHARE

Just like Peter's critics (see 2 Pet. 3), believers can be lulled into thinking that Jesus's return isn't imminent. Peter reminded his opponents that the Lord counts time differently, that He "delays" His return so that people can hear the gospel, and that unbelievers at Christ's return will face a terrible day of judgment. Second Peter 3 is a passage that group leaders can teach to help their group members see the seriousness and the urgency of helping others hear about Jesus.

Ken Braddy is Lifeway's director of Sunday School and is a 30-year veteran of Sunday School ministry and author of *Breathing Life into Sunday School*. He serves as a Sunday School leader at his church in Tennessee.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

ARTICLE

THE DISCIPLINE OF EVANGELISM

By Y Bonesteele

We sometimes see evangelism as needed only when opportunities arise. But as a discipline, it needs to be cultivated in our lives as an everyday practice. When we look at God's people throughout Scripture, we see them sharing God's words with others. Thus, as people of God, we are still to proclaim this message of hope and life for those left in darkness and hopelessness. But what does this look like? Studying the prophets reveals a holistic discipline of evangelism that we can learn from.

WE LEAD PEOPLE TO THE ONE TRUE GOD

Part of evangelism is leading people to the one and only Way. The prophets of old, like Elijah, knew the people were prone to worshiping multiple gods, and false gods at that. But they called people to remove those false gods and worship the one true God. Evangelism today is helping people see the false gods of our culture and pointing them to our true Lord, Jesus Christ. It is also helping those who want to worship Jesus *plus* other gods realize that Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life. A syncretistic worship will not satisfy our holy God. Only the Lord God deserves our worship.

WE FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

Evangelism also involves calling out injustices in this world for God's glory. We battle injustices in this world to be a light, calling for holiness and righteousness as God would have it. Like Elijah calling out Ahab and Jezebel for their wickedness and injustice against Naboth, we stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. Micah 6:8 states what is required, "to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God."

WE CARE FOR PEOPLE'S BODY AND SOUL

Some think we just need to live a good life helping others, and that is evangelism enough for us. Others think we need to pass out tracts showing people Scriptures that point to Christ, and that is evangelism. If we can move from both extremes to a balanced approach that cares for and loves all people by both helping with physical needs and sharing the gospel message seen in Scripture, we will get to a better understanding of what evangelism is about. Looking specifically at Jesus's life, He shared messages of hope with acts of love. He cared for body and soul. He helped meet the needs of others while sharing about their need for salvation. The prophet Elisha was an example of one like Christ who met the physical needs of people while also giving them messages of hope.

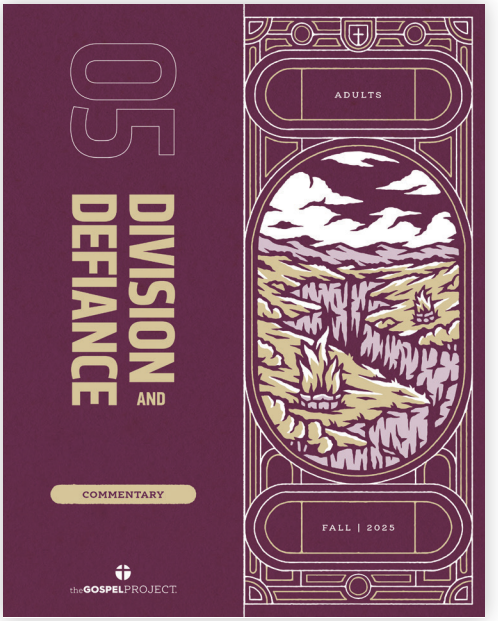
WE WARN PEOPLE OF JUDGMENT AND BLESS THEM WITH HOPE

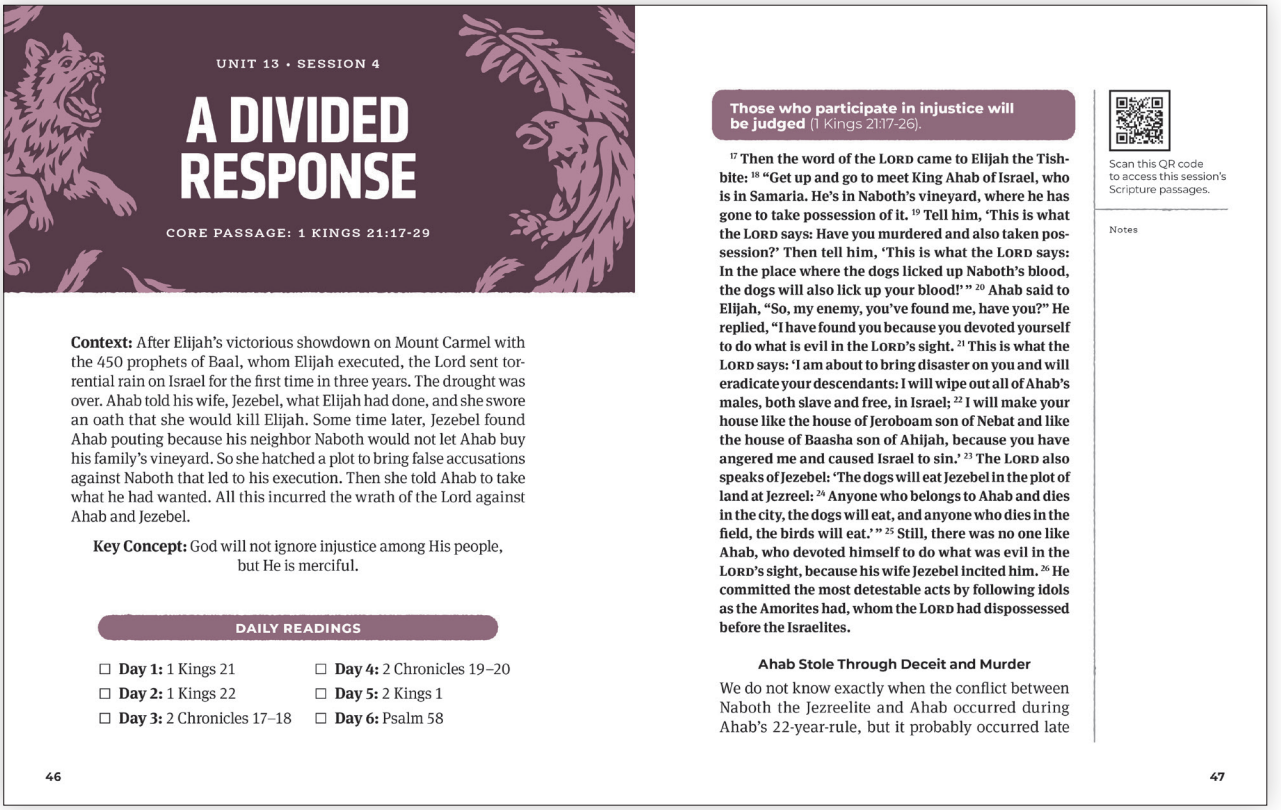
Evangelism always includes a message of hope, but it also includes a warning of judgment. We cannot skip over the sin and death factor, even though our culture may think it's politically incorrect. At the same time, if we only talk about sin, death, and hell and do not provide people with the message and source of hope, then we have lost the true meaning of the gospel. The prophets in the Old Testament warned God's people and even their enemies that continuing in their sin would bring God's judgment. But they also spoke of a day when a Messiah—a Savior—would come. Today we know that Savior as Jesus Christ. He is our Lord and salvation. In Him, we now have new life and know we are to share that same hope with others so that they may come to follow Him as well.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Get a new perspective on The Gospel Project.

Want to get more out of your Bible study each week? The new *Commentary* expands on the content of the core passage with an analysis of the text, going deeper to bring added insights to your group. It includes the questions and Scripture breakdown available in the *Personal Study Guide* and is easier to read since it's in larger print.





UNIT 13 • SESSION 4

A DIVIDED RESPONSE

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 21:17-29

Context: After Elijah's victorious showdown on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal, whom Elijah executed, the Lord sent torrential rain on Israel for the first time in three years. The drought was over. Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done, and she swore an oath that she would kill Elijah. Some time later, Jezebel found Ahab pouting because his neighbor Naboth would not let Ahab buy his family's vineyard. So she hatched a plot to bring false accusations against Naboth that led to his execution. Then she told Ahab to take what he had wanted. All this incurred the wrath of the Lord against Ahab and Jezebel.

Key Concept: God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 21
- ☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 22
- ☐ **Day 3:** 2 Chronicles 17–18
- ☐ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 19–20
- ☐ **Day 5:** 2 Kings 1
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 58

46

Those who participate in injustice will be judged (1 Kings 21:17-26).

17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 18 "Get up and go to meet King Ahab of Israel, who is in Samaria. He's in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. 19 Tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you murdered and also taken possession?' Then tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, the dogs will also lick up your blood!'" 20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So, my enemy, you've found me, have you?" He replied, "I have found you because you devoted yourself to do what is evil in the LORD's sight. 21 This is what the LORD says: 'I am about to bring disaster on you and will eradicate your descendants: I will wipe out all of Ahab's males, both slave and free, in Israel; 22 I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have angered me and caused Israel to sin.' 23 The LORD also speaks of Jezebel: 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the plot of land at Jezreel: 24 Anyone who belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and anyone who dies in the field, the birds will eat.'" 25 Still, there was no one like Ahab, who devoted himself to do what was evil in the LORD's sight, because his wife Jezebel incited him. 26 He committed the most detestable acts by following idols as the Amorites had, whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.

Ahab Stole Through Deceit and Murder

We do not know exactly when the conflict between Naboth the Jezreelite and Ahab occurred during Ahab's 22-year-rule, but it probably occurred late

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

47

theGOSPELPROJECT.

Shop now at lifeway.com/gospelproject or call 800.458.2772.

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

After Solomon's reign over a united people, because of his sin of idolatry, the kingdom split. To varying degrees, the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah often followed that same idolatrous path, with a few exceptions. Thus, God sent prophets to call them to repentance and to warn the people of His judgment. Because they did not humble themselves and listen, their enemies overtook them and they were sent into captivity. But even as the prophets warned of judgment, they also prophesied a future day of hope—a day when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come to establish His kingdom and a new covenant to forgive sin and provide eternal hope for God's people.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

WEEKLY HELPS:
gospelproject.com/resources

WEEKLY PODCAST:
Look for The Gospel Project for Adults on your favorite podcast app.

Lifeway adults

gospelproject.com

RELIGION / Biblical Studies / Bible Study Guides

0 81407 51371 3

© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources