Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah
Calling for Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness

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How to Make the Best Use of This Teaching Guide

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This Teaching Guide has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called “Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities,” and the second is called “Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions.” Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.
As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying with your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their Study Guides and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org on the Resources for Adults page.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.

2. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers don’t have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.

3. Overview the study in the Study Guide. Look at the table of contents, and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.

4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.
5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the Teaching Guide and the Study Guide has chosen a favorite translation. You’re free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)

6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the Study Guide. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—“sidebars”—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They’re intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this Teaching Guide.

7. Review the “Teaching Plans” in this Teaching Guide. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.

8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class, and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.

9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this Teaching Guide, with alterations as needed for your class.

10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Note: The time of the first release of this study includes Easter. To meet the needs of churches and classes who wish to have a Bible study lesson specifically on the Easter Scripture passages during this time, an Easter lesson is included.

Adult Online Bible Commentary. Plan to get the additional adult Bible study comments—Adult Online Bible Commentary—by Dr. Jim Denison
(president, Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, and theologian-in-residence, Baptist General Convention of Texas). Call 1–866–249–1799 or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order Adult Online Bible Commentary. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. The price of these comments is $6 for individuals and $25 for a group of five. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive Adult Online Bible Commentary free. Call 1–866–249–1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

Adult Online Teaching Plans. An additional teaching plan is also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1–866–249–1799. The price of these plans is $5 for an individual and $20 for a group of five. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive Adult Online Teaching Plans free. Call 1–866–249–1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.baptistwaypress.org! Watch for them in “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.baptistwaypress.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” for this study. These items are selected from “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for hand-outs and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

Writers of This Teaching Guide

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# Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah:
Calling for Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness

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FOCAL TEXT
Amos 1:1–3, 6, 9, 13; 2:1, 4–16

BACKGROUND
Amos 1—2

MAIN IDEA
God makes no exceptions in holding people accountable for their actions.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
Are we really so exceptional that God’s expectations do not apply to us?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to acknowledge that God’s expectations apply to themselves and not merely to everyone else.
Understanding the Context

The opening message in the Book of Amos, presented in Amos 1—2, might have been placed first in the book because it was Amos’s main message. When his oracles were collected and placed together in the scroll that preserved his ministry and bore his name, this particular sermon, among all possible choices, was given prominence.

Almost every preacher has favorite themes, perhaps even a favorite sermon on a biblical passage or doctrine that has become personally significant as God’s truth for life. For example, my favorite sermon is based on Psalm 139, a wonderful assurance that God is always with us in whatever we are facing. It’s my own big sermon, and I love to share it with others.

The Israelite audiences of Amos certainly came to know his most frequent theme: God would judge sinful wrongdoing anywhere it might be found. This theme unites the various parts of the Book of Amos, which consists mostly of oracles of judgment.

The opening passage makes the key point with remarkable clarity and unusual effectiveness. Amos had polished and perfected this sermon so that he could drive home the message in such a way that no one could miss it. What a preacher he was!

Interpreting the Scriptures

Introducing the Prophet and His Times (1:1)

In each book that comes to us from one of the Old Testament prophets, the opening few verses typically identify the prophet himself. Who was Amos, the prophetic spokesman for God whose words would follow in this book? When and where did he live and preach? Scholars call this brief preface the superscription to the book because it represents general statements about the prophet that are placed in front of the words from the prophet.
Efficiently, the final editor of the scroll told us that Amos was a shepherd from rural Tekoa in Judah. His messages grew from visions he saw. His occupation reveals that he was a layman, not a priest. We learn later (Amos 7:14) that he was a diversified agri-businessman who marketed both animal products and the fruit of a certain fig tree.

During the forty-year reigns of King Jeroboam in the Northern kingdom and King Uzziah in the Southern kingdom, Amos was called to be a prophet “two years before the earthquake.” Although we are not told exactly which tremor this was from among the many that occurred in the Ancient Near East, biblical scholars and archaeologists have estimated the date for Amos to be around 760 B.C.

The Theme of His Preaching (1:2)

Divine judgment on human sin was the simple but powerful theme that pervaded the preaching ministry of Amos. From a temple throne in Jerusalem, God thundered with a scorching judgment that melted the snows of Mount Carmel and withered the grass of the valleys. This single verse represents a kind of overture for the whole book.

The Big Sermon About God’s All-Inclusive Judgment (1:3, 6, 9, 13, 2:1, 4–16)

Amos was a master at speech communication. Although he was a native of a very rural area, he was not an unpolished country bumpkin but a man of the earth who was a careful student of images and phrases that reached the human mind and heart. We may safely assume that he held his audience spellbound—shrewdly holding the punch line until the end. In fact, he lured his Israelite listeners into his preacher’s trap so they could not deflect his message that was intended for them.

1:3, 6, 9, 13; 2:1. Like a drum beat, the refrain of indictment, “for three transgressions . . . and for four” rings repeatedly throughout this sermon. One people after another, in a carefully planned geographical sequence, fell under the judgment of God for their war crimes, atrocities against humanity, or other national sins. Amos gradually tightened the noose as he singled out Damascus to the far north and east (1:3), Gaza to the southwest (1:6), Tyre to the northwest (1:9), Edom to the far south and
east (1:11), Ammon to the east (1:13), Moab to the southeast (2:1), Judah to the due south (2:4), and then his target audience, Israel, who was right in front of him (2:6).

These are called oracles against the nations (or foreign prophecies) because all but the last two deal with judgments from God directed against foreign nations who were outside the Sinai Covenant. The peoples among “the nations,” the Gentiles, didn’t even accept Yahweh as God, but the judgment of God is universal. God’s worldwide created order means that all peoples everywhere must respect other human life, showing the basic decency that any reasonable person might expect. So Amos cataloged their failures to be inhumane and clearly pronounced God’s judgment against their crimes.

2:4–5. Judah was also fair game for God’s judgment, even though they were among the twelve tribes chosen to enter into the Sinai Covenant. In fact, because they were citizens of the covenant relationship with God, they should have acted at a moral level that was far higher than the nations. But they, too, acted like pagans, so they would receive the same punishment of destructive defeat. And in 587 B.C., the Babylonians arrived in Judah and meted out God’s punishment.

Rather than follow the Torah (the Hebrew word literally means teaching, instruction, guidelines for living), Judah repudiated and broadly ignored even God’s universal, all-encompassing standards for relationships. Failing to maintain proper relationship with God or other members of God’s chosen people, they were strikingly similar to their idolatrous forefathers who were led astray by lies and false gods (see Exodus 32 for a classic early example).

2:6–7. Israel, too, was as guilty as anyone else. Actually, they always were the prime target in the crosshairs of Amos’ prophetic big sermon. As they heard the earlier stanzas, the Israelite listeners likely had been saying amen to all of his lists of charges against other guilty peoples because, of course, they deserved it. But then Amos applied the very same basic standards of right and wrong to their behavior, and it was too late for them to change the rules to make things more lenient for themselves. The standards of God already had been set for others, and so they must be applied to all. God’s concern for justice is universal, and God’s judgments apply to all.
Lesson 1: No Exceptions

Amos specified many particular shortcomings of Judah’s broad faithlessness. As a keen observer, the prophet saw insensitivity and gross immorality all around. To “sell” someone meant to press a person into slavery because he could not pay his debts, even if only a small amount was owed. The poor became hopeless and crushed. The “way” of justice was perverted in courts where the process was corrupted and unfair. And promiscuous sexual activity meant that God’s standards for sexual purity were violated and a confident genealogical lineage was contaminated (see Deuteronomy 27:20; Leviticus 18:6–18).

2:8. In clear violation of specific instructions about receiving and returning a person’s cloak as the security one held for his debt (Exod. 22:26–27), some rich Israelites apparently were taking advantage of the poor, even at the worship shrines. These sinners loved neither God nor neighbor. Their religious practice was self-centered and thereby emptied of genuine covenant love.

2:9–12. In their earlier days and under God’s leadership and initiative, Israel received a Promised Land (even despite the giants, as in Numbers 13:25–33). The conquest and possession of the land occurred only after God led their escape from the horrors of Egyptian slave camps and through the stresses of the wilderness journey. God even called prophets like Amos to guide them consistently in truth, and God gave them Nazirites as examples of religious zeal and spiritual commitment (Numbers 6:1–21; Judges 16:17; 1 Samuel 1:11).

When Israel made her own free choices, the results too often were feeble, disappointing failures. The people at large fell far short of God’s will when they corrupted the vows of the Nazirites (Judg. 13:14; Num. 6:3), not to mention repudiating and persecuting the prophets who were God’s designated voices for truth.

2:13–16. So God’s judgment “on that day” of reckoning would come upon Israel. Using the language reserved for a hostile and terrible conqueror, Amos described God’s own action in punishment against the people of Israel.

The God of the Exodus, wilderness, and conquest was portrayed by Amos as the God who pressed a judgment battle against Israel. Earlier in their history together, God first introduced Israel to God’s will through
acts of blessed provision. But now God would remind them of God’s purposes by means of strong disciplinary action. Always, in every circumstance, Israel might decide to respond and to return to God.

**Focusing on the Meaning**

Jesus told the story of two men who went into the temple in Jerusalem to pray (take time to read Luke 18:9–14 and think about Amos as you do). In spiritual pride and arrogant superiority, one man prayed, *I am so glad that I am not like that sinful man over there. You and I both know how righteous I really am, God.* But the other man, in humble recognition of his own shortcomings before Holy God, begged, *Lord, show mercy to me, a sinner.*

Smug self-righteousness and spiritual superiority is a dangerous attitude in the life of the Christian disciple. *Pointing the finger and the blame game* have been around a long time, since the first couple arrived on the scene in Eden. And human pride and lack of repentance have frustrated God’s plans ever since.

Amos pointed us to a better way as God’s people. Sincere humility in the presence of God and other people, genuine openness to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, ready willingness to face shortcomings, renewed commitment to be more faithful as a Jesus follower tomorrow than we were today—those are the attitudes God uses to lead us to deeper maturity in Christ.

We might do well to revisit the old lyrics of the spiritual: “Not my mother, not my father, but it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” Amos preached the far-reaching, all-encompassing judgment of God upon sin—no exceptions. There is none righteous; no, not one.
TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Before class, prepare a markerboard with two columns, one saying “Occupations” and the other “Messages God Wants People to Know Today.” As people arrive, greet everyone. Have them write their primary occupation on the markerboard under “Occupations.”

2. Ask: What are some messages you are reasonably certain God wants people in our world to know? List answers on the markerboard. (Such as these: God loves us; God gave his Son Jesus to die on a cross to pay for our sin; God doesn’t like sin but loves the sinner; God offers forgiveness.)

3. Summarize (or have someone summarize) “Introducing Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah: Calling for Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness” from the Study Guide. Refer also to the two charts in the Study Guide to enable students to position this study of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah in the sweep of biblical history and events. Continue introducing the study by pointing out that this lesson is the first of three from the Book of Amos. State that Amos 1:1 and 7:14–15 reveal what we know about this prophet. (Have a volunteer read these verses.) Ask: What do these verses tell us about Amos? (a shepherd; not a “professional” prophet; cared for fig trees) Say: In today’s terms, Amos was more a layperson than clergy. (Add “shepherd” to the list of “Occupations”). Say: God uses all kinds of people to deliver His message. As we look at God’s word today, be thinking of ways God may want to use you.

Guide Bible Study

4. Ask: What do we do when we try to get someone else’s attention? Let’s list several. (For example, give hand signal, yell, tap shoulder, call name.) Ask, If God were trying to get our attention, how might he do
it? Encourage responses. Read Amos 1:2. Ask: How do we know God was trying to get Israel’s attention? (He roared; used nature.)

5. State: Amos was delivering the message that God told him to share. Enlist people to read aloud Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 13; 2:1. Say: Amos called out the surrounding nations for their outrageous behavior against vulnerable members of society. (Show locations on Bible map, if possible. Point out that these nations surrounded Judah and Israel.) Suggest that the Israelites probably enjoyed hearing God’s judgment toward these other nations, because they believed, as Israelites, that they were God’s chosen people and were exempt. The Israelites may have shouted Amen and Preach on to this series of Amos’s messages. It would be similar today to a preacher from America pointing out the wrongs in Mexico or Canada.

6. Say: Amos 2:4–5 reveals God’s judgment against Judah. The Northern Israelites would not have had a problem about this word from God either. It was against their southern neighbor. (Read verses.) Ask: What were the southern tribes of Israel doing that God despised? (Allow for response.) Say: While Amos’s hearers may have been comfortable up to then, the situation was about to change.

7. Have the class read silently 2:6–16, looking for the charges against Israel. Ask: What did you find? What was God’s decision towards them? (Allow for responses.) Explain the verses as seems helpful using information in the Study Guide and in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide.

Encourage Application

8. Ask: In what ways are the actions of the Israelites long ago similar to actions we see today? In other words, do you see any similar injustices in our society, and if so, how? (Allow for answers.) Point out that we tend to consider ourselves exceptions from God’s judgment.

9. Say: Amos was an ordinary follower of God who listened, acted, and shared God’s message when instructed to do so. Ask, Have you known someone who was called by God to do something similar? What did they do? (Encourage responses. Be prepared to share an example of your own.)
10. Say: *Just as God held people accountable in Amos’s day, God holds us accountable too.* Point back to the messages that God wants people to know today. Ask: *How do they apply to us? What are ways God can use us to deliver his message?* (Discuss.)

**Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions**

**Connect with Life**

1. Lead the class to briefly give suggestions how the following Christians could be used by God to share his love and message. Choose from the following or add your own:
   - A successful businessperson
   - Someone of low income
   - An adult with a high school diploma
   - A preacher with advanced theological degrees
   - A professional motivational speaker
   - A person who points to God, not self
   - A person who acts, in spite of fears

   Ask: *Of these we’ve mentioned, who would you vote as “the most likely to be used by God” and why?* (Allow for response. There is no single correct answer.)

2. Say: *In today’s study, we will look at a person God used to deliver a message of accountability. We will also look for God’s expectations of accountability for us.*

**Guide Bible Study**

3. Refer to and summarize “Introducing Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah: Calling for Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness” from the *Study Guide*. Refer also to the two charts in the *Study Guide* to enable students to position this study in the sweep of biblical history and events. Continue introducing the study by pointing out that this lesson is the first of three from the Book of Amos.
4. Have a volunteer read Amos 1:1; 7:14–15. Say: God sent a messenger to the people of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. How does the Bible describe this messenger? What do we know about him? (His name is Amos. He was from Tekoa, a small town ten miles south of Jerusalem and six miles south of Bethlehem. He was not a professional prophet. By occupation, he was a shepherd and also tended sycamore-fig trees.) Say: In some ways, you could say Amos was as an ordinary person; he could be like any one of us. Ask: What did God expect from Amos? (to deliver God’s message

5. Ask: What sounds give you cause for alarm? (siren, scream, cry, alarm clock, horn, thunder) In Amos 1:2, what two sounds are causes for alarm to the people of Israel? (a lion’s roar; a storm was coming) What was God trying to do? (gain the attention of the straying Israelites)

6. Assign the following verses to be read: 1:3, 6, 9, 13; 2:1. Say: In Amos 1:3—2:5 God pronounced judgment on Israel’s enemies, one nation at a time. There is a pattern to the messages. Listen for this pattern and the accusations. (Have volunteers read verses). Say:

Each judgment begins with “For three transgressions . . . and for four.” God was saying that three sins were more than enough for God’s judgment, but four sins were completely over the top. Basically God said, “I’m not putting up with this nation’s behavior anymore.” God then described the sins of the nation and pronounced judgment on them. What were some of the accusations? (Allow for responses.) Continue, Since these nations were Israel’s enemies, how do you think the Israelites received Amos’s message? (Amen, preach on; it’s about time.) Say: Next Amos turned the focus away from Israel’s enemies. The message to Israel would be the longest of God’s judgment messages.

7. Have a volunteer read Amos 2:6–8. Ask: How could you describe these sins in modern terms? (Possible answers: seeing other people as worthless, 2:6; no respect or regard for vulnerable, needy people, 2:6; arrogance, 2:6; abuse of power, 2:6; not caring about those in need, 2:7; sexual abuse, 2:7; playing church, 2:8; turning our back on God, 2:12.)
8. Have a volunteer read Amos 2:13–16. Say: *Those are pretty harsh words from the One we consider a loving God.*

**Encourage Application**

9. Read or summarize the small article, “To Discipline or Not to Discipline,” in the *Study Guide*. Ask, *As a loving parent, how would you have responded to the boys?* (Encourage response). Say: *As God’s children, God has expectations for us and holds us accountable for our actions.*

10. Have the following verses read aloud: Matthew 7:3; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27. Ask, *What do these verses say to us about God’s expectations for today?* (Encourage discussion.)

**NOTES**

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–3, 7–13, and the Easter lesson are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible.

FOCAL TEXT
Amos 4:1–5; 5:1–24

BACKGROUND
Amos 3—6

MAIN IDEA
God abhors attempts to substitute empty religious activities for justice in human relationships.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
What’s more important—worship services or justice in human relationships?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to evaluate the extent to which they are letting religious activities substitute for practicing justice in human relationships
Worship was—and is—a critical part of the relationship God’s people must maintain with God. Worship allows us to come into God’s presence with thanksgiving, praise, lament, confession, intercession, offering, proclamation, and commitment. Worship is a means by which God’s people renew, refresh, and re-align their personal relationship with God.

If a weekly worship service is to be truly authentic, its impact must be seen in the daily lives of the worshipers for the rest of the week. A seven-days-a-week lifestyle is what God expects—not just a one-hour-a-week, going-through-the-motions ritual. The well-planned worship ritual is not bad in itself, unless it fails to inspire us to love God and doesn’t lead us to love others as ourselves. The ritual is useless if our lives are not changed in relationship to others because we have been in the presence of God.

All four eighth-century prophets delivered at least one blistering sermon against empty religious rituals that failed to change the lives of God’s people. In addition to this lesson from Amos, read the oracles in Hosea 6:6, Isaiah 1:10–20 (see lesson seven), and Micah 6:6–8 (see lesson thirteen). When God’s people began to take God for granted, their worship became a stale, empty, and powerless routine. And the prophets told them so!

When we begin to take God lightly, we will start treating others with disregard, too. If we don’t love God, how can we love others? And if we cut corners in our relationship with God in weekly worship, we will lose spiritual stamina and begin to abuse others in our daily life. Amos became incensed when he saw God’s people claiming to honor and follow God in worship, but selfishly taking advantage of the most vulnerable people in society.
Interpreting the Scriptures

The Spiritual Threat of Prosperity (4:1–3)

4:1. Amos put his prophetic spotlight on the affluent life of the wealthiest citizens of Israel. The lifestyle of the rich was marked by plenty of good food and expensive wines. Amos recognized that the whole economic system was tilted in favor of the rich and to the terrible disadvantage of the poor. Yes, the rich were getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer—and Amos said it was wrong. It was seriously wrong for a few to feed sumptuously while many were scrimping so desperately to survive.

   Bashan was a well-watered district of forests and fields located to the east of the Northern kingdom. Luxuriant meadows produced sufficient grain to support cattle farming operations. Bashan was Israel’s bread basket region that supplied the feed lots. The rich were thanking God for their wealth, interpreting their prosperity as obvious evidence that God was pleased with them and blessing them fully.

4:2–3. But God would intervene to bring a stark reversal on those who acted so selfishly and callously. For many years, and despite their responsibility to care for their fellow Israelites within the covenant family, the rich ignored the needs of the poor and destitute.

   “The time is surely coming” was a common prophetic phrase that indicated a future moment of God’s reckoning judgment when God’s agenda would prevail to reward the righteous and to punish the wicked. Amos decreed that the filthy rich would be judged to be morally wicked and condemned because they had not bothered to care for the poor. The excessive wealth of the rich had stolen their soul (see the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13–21).

   When the Assyrian invaders arrived in 722 B.C., they slaughtered many inhabitants of Samaria, the capital city, using body hooks to drag away the corpses. Survivors were marched off in a chain gang, strung together with fish hooks in their ears, driven out like cattle through the breaks in the city walls to their ultimate destination of oblivion in the far north. Partying in affluence eventually gave way to pain in deprivation.
A Sarcastic Call to Worship (4:4–5)

In a bold, rhetorical flourish, Amos quoted a common Israelite call to worship—but he changed the key word. With biting sarcasm, he called them into God’s presence to “transgress” rather than to worship. From the time of Jacob (Genesis 28:10–22), the spot known as Bethel became a special place for Israelites to meet God. Gilgal was made a key religious site when the twelve tribes entered the Promised Land under Joshua and set up an altar there (Joshua 4:19–20).

In other words, Amos told them that their religious activity at their most significant worship centers was hurting their relationship to God, not contributing to it. So, come on down and sin big, since you obviously like it so much. But don’t fool yourselves into thinking God is moved to forgive you, because God is not being fooled.

Multiple Failures to Learn from Experience (4:6–13)

4:6–11. Amos reminded the people of Israel of their many past episodes of disobedience and broken covenant relationships. The judgment of God—in the forms of famine (4:6), drought (4:7–8), crop failure (4:9), warfare (4:10), and utter calamity (4:11)—had come on the nation and bore witness to their repeated failures.

However, despite these historical signals from God that the people were alienated from God, they did not return to God. The phrase, “yet you did not return to me,” repeated several times for emphasis, reveals God’s keen disappointment that the people had failed to find their way back to God.

4:12. Amos drew from the past to draw a lesson for Israel. Although the people repeatedly had failed to return, God had not given up. “Therefore” (in the light of this long history), God would come yet again in the near future to engage the people and to seek their responsive relationship once more. “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”

4:13. The God of all creation would come again to take a new initiative. Like a powerful, windy, mysterious, and life-giving rainstorm, the Lord would appear for a fresh new start. But would God receive a better reception from God’s people on this visitation?
Lament over the Failure and Fall of Israel (5:1–3, 16–17)

5:1–3. This oracle begins with the language of lament, grief, anguish, and woe. The breakdown in relationship with God would cause the nation to pay a heavy price. Fallen, decimated, and defeated, Israel’s chances for resurgence seemed bleak. So the only appropriate reaction was the grief of a funeral. The best response was one of honest admission of the prevailing state of pain, loss, and suffering.

5:16–17. Mourning was a public event because the losses were widely shared. The nation’s citizens, urban and rural, needed to join voices and give expression to the lament. Even professional mourners, “those skilled in lamentation,” were recruited to give Israel’s grief of loss the fullest voice possible.

Seeking God and Good (5:4–7)

God maintained that there was the ever-present opportunity to “seek me and live.” Do not seek the dead ends of Bethel or Gilgal. Seek a dynamic relationship with the true God, not merely the empty rituals of a sacred place.

Why did Amos repeat so often the refrain of return to God? Because Israel’s track record of failure continuously put the prophet in the position of needing to call them back to God. But what changes would a return to God require of the people?

God Expects Justice (5:10–15)

God yearned for the covenant people to reflect God’s own justice. But injustice had become the order of the day in too many encounters in Israel.

5:10, 12. The main gate opening in the walls around the city was the central access for ancient city life. The chambers or small rooms associated with “the gate” were where much of the social, economic, and legal activity was centered. The gate was the public place where court cases were heard and decisions rendered by adult males. This practice was an ancient parallel to our system of jury trials. But, in any age, justice is
perverted when false witnesses (5:10), dishonest or insensitive dismissal of the needy, and bribery by the rich (5:12) are tolerated.

5:14–15. Perhaps God would give Israel a second chance if God saw the practice of genuine justice “in the gate.” Amos held on to the hope that God’s requirement of legal justice and social righteousness could be realized.

Why Do You Look Forward to the End? (5:18–20)

Many ancient Israelites believed that God owed them, the children of Abraham, a covenant relationship with God. They remembered—and reminded God—that they were the chosen ones, the elect of God. Of course, they conveniently forgot that the Sinai covenant called on them to be faithful to God’s ways and obedient in their lifestyle to God’s instructions (*Torah*). So Amos challenged them to rethink their exuberant expectation of the end of the age when they fully anticipated they would receive God’s great reward as God’s own “righteous” people.

Amos was asking them whether they were sure they wanted the end of the world to come. What made them so confident that God would reward them? Since their lifestyle was hypocritical and far from what God expected, then they might receive a very unhappy surprise.

It would not be a day that was all sweetness and light—given their current situation with God—but a day of darkness and pain. They would experience woe, not joy. Amos warned them that it would be better to take advantage of the time left to work on their faithfulness to God and compassion for the needy. Then they would be in a better position for judgment.

With appropriate humility, the Apostle Paul wrote that he disciplined himself and his human tendencies toward sin and failure, “so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Amos and Paul both knew well that standing before God for judgment on failure and sin is serious business. But too many Israelites in Amos’s day took sin too lightly and took for granted their ongoing relationship with God. The people too often expected a *free ride*, but God expected a lifestyle of faithfulness, ethics, and love.
What God Despises—and Demands (5:21–24)

The title for this week’s lesson is based on this famous and powerful oracle of judgment. Amos bluntly spelled out the severe shortcomings that God found in the worship life of Israel. Certainly there was no shortage of religious activities in the Northern kingdom, but true faith and genuine covenant-keeping were in short supply.

5:21–23. The prophet took an inventory of the various practices Israel performed to try to reach God, but God was unimpressed. In fact, God hated and despised every aspect of their religious operations. God repudiated it all as empty and hypocritical.

Their religious festivals and holy days in the traditional sacred calendar (5:21), their system of sacrifices and offerings dedicated to God (5:22), and their raising of praises to God with trained voices and skillfully played instruments (5:23) were all spiritually bankrupt and useless, as far as God was concerned. None of it captured God’s attention.

5:24. How then do we connect with God if our worship activity won’t do it? What pleases God in the lives we live before God? The answer given by the prophets is very simple: God wants to see in us—and God demands from us—a lifestyle of justice and righteousness toward others that reflects God’s own character.

The life-giving water metaphor is crucial here. Our lives should flow always into our relationships with a life-giving integrity and kindness, just as surely as a stream flows twelve months a year with its life-giving sustenance and coolness (and not only in the rainy season, or else it becomes a dried up, undependable, stream when the heat is on and it is needed most).

Focusing on the Meaning

Jesus was as concerned about empty religious acts as Amos had been. “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:1; consider reading all of Matt. 6).

Jesus condemned hypocrisy especially among the most religious people. You hypocritical religious types keep picky rules but miss the real
key to relationships. While you are so careful to tithe the smallest leaves from your herb garden, you are at the same time neglecting big things like justice—what’s so difficult about doing both? And you carefully clean the outside of your cup at the same time you are full of filth—can’t both be clean? Your sham religiosity sparkles and gleams just like a bronze casket; you are a death box. You study Amos and claim you would not have ignored him like Israel did back then. O, church, church, let me gather you to myself and teach you how to mature, like a mother hen provides for her chicks (see Matt. 23:23–39).

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Before class, make three columns on a markerboard, labeling the first “Charges,” the second “Judgment coming,” and the third “God’s desires for his people.”

2. Ask: What are some television shows that focus on the lifestyles of famous people? (“Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,” “Keeping Up with the Kardashians,” “Real Housewives of Orange County,” etc.) When you think of shows like these, what comes to your mind? What words or phrases describe their lives? (excess, self-centered, luxury, riches, etc.) Follow up: What do you think might be the biggest challenges the rich and famous face? (Encourage discussion.)

3. Say: In many ways, all of us who live in America would be considered rich, especially when compared with those living in third world countries. Ask, What are some challenges Americans face in dealing with the riches and privileges we have? (Expect varied responses. Some have difficulty managing the riches they possess; some have difficulty sharing.)
Amos: The End Has Come

Guide Bible Study

4. Say: As God’s chosen people, the Israelites saw themselves as a privileged nation. Unfortunately, instead of realizing that God chose them to be a blessing to the other nations, they often saw themselves as superior because of who they were. They sometimes thought they could do no wrong, or that God would bless them regardless of their actions. Because of their wrongful attitudes and actions, God called Amos to deliver his message to his chosen people. It was a message of judgment and a call for change.

5. Point to the markerboard and say: In Amos 4—5, Amos delivered charges against the Israelites, warned that judgment was coming, and gave descriptions of what God desires from his people. In today’s study, we will focus on these three aspects. Form three equal listening teams. Team one will listen for charges against the Israelites; team two will listen for coming judgments; and team three will listen for “God’s desires for his people.” (Note: Not all three aspects are found in each passage to be read.)

6. Say: Let’s look at the first passage together. Read Amos 4:1–5. Using the Study Guide and “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide, explain “cows of Bashan” and the significance of Bethel and Gilgal. Then allow members of each team to identify what they heard in their assignments in step 5. Write answers in appropriate columns. (Supplement answers as necessary.)

7. Instruct groups to work independently as they read Amos 5, looking for their assigned topic. Allow groups five to seven minutes to read and discover their assignments. Instruct the teams to be prepared to share answers and read specific verses to demonstrate answers. Call for group reports after about six minutes. Supplement their answers using information in the Study Guide and “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide. Be sure to point out that God hates it when his people practice religious activity towards him while taking advantage of people around them.
Encourage Application

8. Refer to the column labeled “Charges against the Israelites,” and ask:
   - What similar actions or attitudes do we find in our society today?
   - In what ways might we be substituting religious ritual for practicing justice in human relationships?
   - Why do you suppose God doesn’t bring judgment on our society today? Or in what ways do you think God is bringing judgment?

9. Ask from question 4 in the Study Guide: What groups in our community are either ignored, discriminated against, or taken advantage of? (Encourage responses.) What are things our Bible study group could do to make an impact for God in their lives? (Encourage discussion.)

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Prepare a markerboard with three columns, “Church religious activities,” “Church helping ministries.” (Leave the third column untitled.) Say: Let’s make a list of the activities of our church, categorizing them according to these two headings. (Use the church bulletin if necessary.) Note: You will refer to these lists at the end of class.

2. Say: Churches generally attempt to provide opportunities for worship, ministry, discipleship, mission, and fellowship. Opportunities are designed for growth of the church (outreach—reaching non-believers), as well as for the growth of believers. Ministering to both groups is not an either/or choice, but a both/and assignment from Christ. Sometimes, churches do things because “that’s the way we’ve always done them.” Amos calls us to evaluate our activity and ministry to be sure what we say and do has meaning and is pleasing to God.
Guide Bible Study

3. State: *Amos delivered God’s message to the Israelites, pointing out the bad attitudes, actions, and assumptions of the Israelites. He also gave God’s remedy for the problem and warned that judgment would come if changes weren’t made.* As we read, let’s identify the bad attitudes, actions, and assumptions seen in Amos’s day. Have a volunteer read Amos 4:1–5 while the class listens for God’s charges against Israel. Receive responses, and record answers on the markerboard in the third column. Include ideas such as these:

- **Attitudes:** We’re wealthy, and we can do what we want.
- **Actions:** They oppressed the poor and needy.
- **Assumptions:** We can do whatever we want as long as we worship God.

Use information in the *Study Guide* and “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide* to explain what Amos was preaching against—primarily that the Israelites were pretending to love and worship God and yet they were taking advantage of the poor and marginalized in their society.

4. Have a volunteer read Amos 5:1–6. Explain why God was lamenting, and what he was about to do to the Israelites as judgment.

5. Lead the group to look for the main message in each of these sections of Scripture—Amos 5:7–13; 5:14–20; 5:21–27. Use information in the *Study Guide* and “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide* as seems helpful.

- Possible answers from 5:7–13—disregard justice; reject those acting righteously or telling the truth; mistreat and take advantage of the poor; accept bribes.
- Possible answers from 5:14–20—seek good, and hate evil, or a variety of judgments would come.
- Possible answers from 5:21–27—God hates religious acts of worship that do not result in justice and righteousness in daily life.
Encourage Application

6. Ask: What do people mean when they talk about a “24/7 Christian” or a “Sunday only Christian”? (Allow for responses.) Ask: In what ways do you see Amos’s message relevant for God’s people today—both “24/7” and “Sunday only” Christians? (Encourage discussion.)

7. Ask the class to look back at the list of ministries and activities on the markerboard (see step 1). Ask, Which list do you think God is most pleased with? (Allow members to share which list and why).

8. Ask: Do you think we allow our religious “activities” to substitute for practicing Christian ministry? What are some needs in our community where you’ve seen our church take action in the past? Lead the class to ask themselves what their responsibility is regarding future actions.

9. Ask from question 4 in the Study Guide: What groups in our community are either ignored, discriminated against, or taken advantage of? (Encourage responses.) What are things our Bible study group could do to make an impact for God in their lives? (Plan a follow-up time for your class to take action.)
FOCAL TEXT
Amos 7:7—8:3

BACKGROUND
Amos 7:1—8:6

MAIN IDEA
God condemns people’s attempts to maintain their privileges rather than to hear words that challenge their unjust actions toward their fellow human beings.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
Can we handle the truth?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to identify ways in which they may be refusing to hear God’s message that challenges their unjust actions toward their fellow human beings.

LESSON THREE
Don’t Preach to Us About That

AMOS
The End Has Come
Understanding the Context

The eighth-century prophets were called to challenge some broadly accepted practices. The religious practice among the Israelites had become compromised and corrupted. Both paganism and power were responsible for God’s standards being diluted and violated.

Since the days when Joshua had led the twelve tribes into the land of Canaan, the children of Israel had been tempted to mix elements of pagan religion into their worship of the Lord God. This unholy mixture is called *syncretism*. Israel contaminated the worship of Yahweh with aspects of the pagan religion of the Canaanites who worshiped Baal.

Canaanite Baalism was a nature religion, for it followed the cycle of the seasons of life in the natural world. It was a fertility cult, for it believed that Baal was the god of life and productivity. Worship of Baal often was located in hills and high places where trees or pillars were set up as idols to represent Baal and his female consort, Ashtarte. In some cases, worship practices involved Baal priestesses serving as cultic prostitutes to mimic the union of the god and goddess and thereby to bring fertility to flocks, farms, and families across the land.

When Israelites engaged in such syncretistic religious practices, they strayed further and further away from faithfulness to God under the Sinai covenant. Note how many of the Ten Commandments they were violating—more than one God, making graven images, committing adultery, and probably covetousness. As they strayed far from God, their relationships to others soon declined, too. Amos warned that God was judging their unfaithfulness in their covenant relationships to God and to others. The end was near.

Near the end of the Book of Amos, five visions of the prophet are recounted. In each one of these visions, God revealed a truth to the prophet to be preached to the people. As he preached these *vision reports*, Amos challenged the people of Israel with God’s highest expectations for them.
Interpreting the Scriptures

All five visions Amos experienced (Amos 7:1—9:4) were reported as oracles of judgment against the sins of Israel. In his vision of the locusts (7:1–3), the prophet saw calamity descend on the agricultural economy and consume the sustenance of the nation. He interpreted those hard times as God’s direct punishment. In his vision of the fire (7:4–6), the whole countryside was the target of parched destruction.

The Test of the Plumb Line (7:7–9)

7:7. In his third vision, Amos turned from agriculture to architecture. When carpenters and masons build a wall, they must establish a vertical line to ensure that the wall rises straight up from the ground. Since ancient times, and even today, a small but heavy weight attached to one end of a string or light rope serves the purpose—gravity makes the string straight as a test of the wall’s vertical dimension. Crooked walls cannot conform to the standard of the straight string of the plumb line when it is placed alongside the structure.

7:8. Amos looked on as the Lord judged the crookedness of Israel to be beyond repair. Some walls are so badly misaligned that they are too weak or undependable to bear any weight. The builder must tear down such a wall and start again.

God allowed the Northern kingdom to be torn down by hostile invaders in 722 B.C. The ten tribes were absorbed into the Assyrian Empire and never surface again in history as separate entities. The nation disappeared so completely that God would “never again pass them by.”

7:9. The failed king of the Northern kingdom was Jeroboam II, who ruled 786–746 B.C. On the surface, his long reign appeared successful as the nation prospered financially and expanded politically. But the spiritual life of the people was increasingly corrupt and rotten. Therefore, the king, the one most responsible for leading the nation of God to keep its covenant with God, was the focus of particular judgment. Within a generation, the hereditary monarchy of “the house of Jeroboam” came to an abrupt end on the sword of Assyria.
Lesson 3: Don’t Preach to Us About That

Confrontation with Authorities at Bethel (7:10–17)

Bethel was a spiritual center for worshipers in the Northern kingdom. Israel considered Bethel a special place to come before God, for they recalled the dream experience of their patriarch, Jacob (Genesis 28:10–22). The first king of the Northern kingdom, Jeroboam I (who ruled 922–901 B.C.) sought to replace the temple worship at Jerusalem in Judah with the sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel in Israel (1 Kings 12:25–33). Bethel was a powerful symbol and an active center of religious life. When Amos traveled north to the sanctuary at Bethel to deliver God’s message of judgment and rejection of Israel’s religious practices as a nation, he was not well received.

7:10–11. Amos apparently arrived in town and began to deliver his public oracles, perhaps including his big sermon we now find in Amos 1—2 (see lesson one). Word traveled quickly that a stick-in-the-mud, party pooper, killjoy prophet was condemning the life of a nation that obviously was being blessed by God. The priest in charge at Bethel, Amaziah, alerted King Jeroboam about the prophet’s disturbing words.

Amaziah worried that Amos would undercut the ruling authority and destabilize the entire social order. His memo even quoted an especially pointed and disturbing line about the king being killed by invaders and his people taken into foreign captivity.

7:12–13. Having notified the king of the bad news, the priest directly challenged the prophet. But Amaziah made some false assumptions. He believed that Amos came north on a profit-making preaching mission. He was in it for the money—by upsetting the people with guilt, he could extract big offerings from them.

So, giving Amos some shrewd political and psychological advice, Amaziah told him to take his anti-Israel sermons back to the Southern kingdom because those audiences would respond well to harsh messages against their cousins to the north. The people down in Judah would fill his crusade offering plates because they disliked the north and would like to hear messages about God’s rejection of Israel.

Amaziah told Amos to leave Bethel because “it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.” That was another false assumption. The true worship of the Lord God was supposed to recognize God as king, and so Bethel actually was God’s sanctuary. However, the political
and religious power grab under Jeroboam’s reign had convinced everyone that Jeroboam was the center of authority, not God.

Amaziah made a chilling statement about the marriage of what we would call church and state. And with the wisdom of hindsight across centuries of history, we know how corrupt and manipulative such a union typically becomes. History also reports that a precious gift Baptists have made to society is the crucial importance of religious liberty as expressed in the separation of church and state.¹

7:14–17. Amos responded directly and bluntly to the false assumptions and misplaced advice from Amaziah. The prophet roundly condemned both the priest and his king.

7:14. Amos used technical language of his day to deny that he was a professional prophet who was preaching to make money, although hereditary preaching guilds were doing so at that time. He made clear that he generated his income as a layman, not as a preacher, because he was a diversified agri-businessman. He was “a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees.”

7:15. God’s call on his life was the only reason Amos came north to preach change through repentance. And God was the only power Amos would obey—no king, and certainly no priest, would ever replace God’s own directives for his ministry.

7:16–17. Amos responded to Amaziah’s cynical confrontation by delivering God’s judgment on the power-hungry priest as representative of his entire sinful nation. The Assyrian invaders, when they arrived, would treat the entire population, including the family and lands of Amaziah himself, with a harshness that was typical of ancient conquest—rape and murder, occupation and plunder. Any survivors would be carried far from home and kept in exile until they died.

Although it sounds personal, this judgment/condemnation oracle applied broadly to the entire nation of Israel. And that bitter, unhappy end could be avoided if they would listen to the truth and change their ways.
A Vision of the End (8:1–3)

The fourth vision from Amos focused on a basket of summer fruit. Seeing the fruit, a clear indicator that the growing season and harvest were soon ending, the prophet constructed a brief sermon based on a play on words. Once again, we can appreciate the communicative creativity and rhetorical abilities of this prophet.

The Hebrew word for “summer fruit” is *qayits*, and the word for “end” is *qets*. God asked, “What do you see”? The answer was *qayits*—harvest fruit. That fruit signals the *qets*, the end, for Israel. Today, we might approximate the pun with something like, *Yes, the nation is far past its prime, dead ripe, and quickly on its way to complete rottenness and ruin.*

Empty Religion Means Moral Corruption (8:4–6)

In a direct challenge to the attitudes in Israel about God and others, Amos impugned the motives of many Israelite worshipers he had observed. He accused them of conducting a life of premeditated cheating and dishonesty, with tragic results for the poorest and most vulnerable members of the family of Israel.

8:5–6. Even while they were attending worship services on the various Hebrew holy days, the rich actually were concocting more ways to get richer. Impatient during the monthly festivals (“new moon”) and during the weekly worship (“sabbath”), they stopped thinking of God and started considering how to increase their wealth. What was worse, the plans they made were blatantly dishonest—deceptively smaller amounts for higher prices, inflated prices for inferior products, and deliberately false weights and measures to cheat the customer.

Greed had become more important than grace, and the rich were willing to ignore the preciousness and deep needs of human beings in order to enrich themselves, even just a little bit more. But larger transactions could have been involved, too. The language Amos used includes terms that can denote such acts as taking away someone’s land because of his debt or even turning a person into a debt-slave because the person has run out of money.2
Focusing on the Meaning

We don’t like it one little bit when the Old Testament prophets, or Jesus, or Paul start talking to us about money and its relationship to our faith walk with God. Many Christians in America get very uncomfortable, at best, and downright angry, at worst, when the Bible starts laying claim to our net worth. Like ancient Israel, we would like to think that all of this wealth we enjoy is proof of God’s blessing on us as the apple of God’s eye.

Amos told his resistant audiences that it was wrong for God’s people to stand by in smooth and comfortable circumstances while the rich got richer and the poor got poorer.

How would Amos react to the widely reported statistics about the seriously deepening economic disparity in America? Was Amos a socialist who favored redistribution of wealth—or a kingdom of God citizen who lived consistently within God’s agenda in the world? Would Amos become a vegetarian today and give up his steaks so the grain could go to people instead of beef cows? How much wealth is enough for me to keep while others don’t have enough to eat?

Amos concerned himself with the issues of marketplace ethics as a spiritual matter. Cheating, injustice, unfairness, and dishonesty in the marketplace are concerns of any Bible-grounded person. So a bumper sticker that reads there ought to be a law meets one that says less government intrusion. Think about what Amos would say about the ethics of buyer beware and whatever the market will bear. Is it okay to sell a car or a house and just quietly pass along its problems to the next owner without full and honest disclosure?
Lesson 3: *Don’t Preach to Us About That*

**TEACHING PLANS**

**Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities**

**Connect with Life**

1. Ask: *How many of you have been to a movie recently where, in your opinion, the movie did not live up to your expectations?* (Show of hands. Optionally, allow volunteers to name the movie they saw.) Ask: *How did you feel?* (Encourage responses.)

2. Say: *Multiply that feeling by many times and perhaps we would catch a small glimpse of how Amos felt when he realized that the Israelites were not living up to God’s expectations. The Israelites were taking advantage of the poor and mistreating their fellow Israelites. They clearly weren’t living up to God’s expectations. Today we’re going to use a movie theme to describe Amos’s biblical message back then, as well as today. Feel free to add other movies/movie lines that fit with our study!* (Note: Many of the suggestions in this teaching plan will be best used by those teachers and classes whose members like to watch movies.)

**Guide Bible Study**

3. Say: *It was obviously before movie times when Amos prophesied, but God did give him something visual—a series of visions, in fact. Let’s see Amos’s “movie clip” in Amos 7:7–9.* (Have a volunteer read these verses.) Ask: *What was the plot or theme of this vision?* (The Israelites were not measuring up to God’s standard; God was judging them and would ultimately allow them to be destroyed.)

4. Say: *One of the people who heard Amos’s words was a priest named Amaziah. The movie line the next few verses may remind some of you of a song from “The Wiz” (a take-off on The Wizard of Oz). The song is titled, “Don’t Nobody Bring Me No Bad News.” Read Amos 7:10–13, emphasizing Amaziah’s passionate words in verses 12–13.*
5. State, In the movie, “A Few Good Men,” actor Jack Nicholson spoke the most famous line from the movie when Tom Cruise said to him, “I want the truth!” Ask: Does anyone remember the character’s response? (“You can’t handle the truth!”) Point out that that is similar to Amos’s response to Amaziah. Have a volunteer read Amos 7:14–17. Ask: Do any movie scenes come to mind that picture this kind of destruction? (Possible movie themes: The destruction scene following the Civil War in Gone with the Wind; the destruction of the land in The Lion King under Scar’s rule.)

Encourage Application

6. Say: Amaziah and the Israelites did not want to hear God’s truth. Sometimes that’s how we are. We like to think all of our thoughts and actions are “correct,” even when they go against what God’s word says. So we say, “Don’t nobody bring me no bad news” because we “can’t handle the truth”!

7. Ask: Does anybody remember how the movie, “The Blind Side” got its name? Encourage response. (Quarterbacks need big offensive lineman to protect “their blind side” while throwing the football.)

Instructions: Make a copy for every participant. Have members cover their right eye and look at the X. Hold the paper at arm’s length and move the paper closer. At some point, the dot will no longer be visible. It’s in “the blind spot.” A copy of this activity is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.
8. State: We all have “blind sides,” or blind spots, in our Christian lives. We need a friend, a Sunday School teacher, a pastor, or a Christian mentor to be an “Amos” for us. We also need God to point out our “blind spots” as we read his word. We then need to be willing to repent and change. Amaziah had Amos, but he refused to accept God’s truth. Refer the class to the Study Aim in the Study Guide. Ask the class to consider silently ways in which they may be refusing to hear God’s message that challenges their unjust actions toward their fellow human beings.

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Before class, gather these items: a construction level, hidden from the class initially; a four-foot piece of string with a heavy device tied to one end to demonstrate a plumb line.

2. Say: Let’s see who can freehand draw the straightest horizontal line. Have volunteers draw a horizontal line four feet long on the markerboard. Have participants write their initials beside their line. Allow the class to vote for which line is the truest horizontal line. Ask: How can we know which line is the closest to horizontal? (Answer: We need a measure.) Reveal and use the level to determine which line is closest to horizontal. Say: The construction level is a “standard” for measuring.

3. Point out that today’s Bible study is about measuring truth. Ask: What are ways that our world measures truth? Encourage responses. (Possible answers: What’s on the internet; whatever the favorite television news channel says; what most people say; past experience.) Ask: What would Christians say measures truth? (God’s word)

4. Say: We all like to think that what we ourselves say, think, and do is right even though sometimes it isn’t. We need a trusted standard—the Bible—to measure our thoughts and actions against in order to know whether we are pleasing God. Even then, it’s sometimes difficult to accept God’s truth when God points out that our actions or
beliefs are wrong. Today’s Bible study helps us look at our attitudes and actions in light of God’s measuring standards.

Guide Bible Study

5. Say: God often used “visions” to communicate with the prophets of the Old Testament. Amos had a series of visions, described in Amos 7. Let’s look specifically at one vision in Amos 7:7–8. Have a volunteer read these verses aloud. Using materials you brought, demonstrate how a plumb line works. Read verse 9. Ask: What do you think God was trying to say in this vision of the plumb line? (God evaluated the behavior of the Israelites and found they were crooked.) What did God say he would do? (Spare them no longer).

6. Refer to the third paragraph in the lesson in the Study Guide, which reads: “Amos encountered a priest named Amaziah. Amaziah had the notion that since Jeroboam II was the king of Israel, he could do anything he wanted to do, exercising his political power or religious authority. It was Amaziah’s task to defend his king against the harsh criticism of Amos.” Have a volunteer read Amos 7:10–13. Say: Clearly Amaziah did not want to hear these words. Amaziah revealed that his first loyalty was to the king, rather than to God. This is an example of the unhealthy connection between religious and political authorities. (Consider referring to the small article in the Study Guide, “Are Baptists Like Amos?”) Read Matthew 6:24. Point out that Amaziah is an Old Testament example of what Jesus was teaching. Ask: In what ways is it difficult to be an obedient follower of Christ at work, where you earn your paycheck? (Encourage responses.)

Encourage Application

7. Say: Amos responded by saying he was going to obey God. (Read Amos 7:14–15.) Ask: How have you learned to handle the “Amaziahs” in your life, people who want to keep you from doing what God wants you to? (Encourage responses.) State, Let’s see what Amos did. Have class members read silently Amos 7:16—8:3. Ask: What did Amos do?
• He held true to the instructions from God
• He shared the message God wanted him to share
• He let Amaziah know that God would ultimately judge Israel’s actions

8. Refer to and enlist someone to read aloud the Study Aim and Question to Explore from the Study Guide. Ask, How does God point out areas in our lives that need to be changed for his purpose, or for our growth as Christians? In other words, how does God reveal his truth to us? (Possible answers: The Holy Spirit speaks through God’s word, godly people, prayer, and sometimes in circumstances.) Close in silent prayer asking: Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to point out growth areas in your life? Are God’s measuring tools in place in your life?

Notes


FOCAL TEXT
Hosea 1:1–11; 2:16—3:5

BACKGROUND
Hosea 1—3

MAIN IDEA
God’s relationship with his people includes both judgment on sin and restoration after judgment.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
To what part of God’s relationship with people do we most need to give heed—judgment or restoration?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to state what Hosea’s family relationships teach about both God’s judgment and restoration

LESSON FOUR
Real Judgment, Amazing Restoration

HOSEA
Restoration Beyond Judgment

46
Understanding the Context

In the Old Testament, sometimes God commanded his prophets to act out a message to symbolize the truth the Lord wanted the people to see and hear. We might characterize some of those actions as unusual (see Isaiah 20:1–6; Jeremiah 13:1–11). Few of those commands and actions rock our sensibilities as do God’s instruction to Hosea (Hosea 1:2) and the prophet’s subsequent marriage.

Hosea is set in the latter half of the eighth century B.C. Naming the kings in verse 1 gives an historical perspective: kings of Judah (the Southern kingdom) were Uzziah (783–742 B.C.); Jotham (742–735 B.C.); Ahaz (735–715 B.C.) and Hezekiah (715–687 B.C.).

Jeroboam was king of Israel (786–746 B.C.). Economic and political conditions during his reign were generally stable and prosperous, but the inequity between rich and poor was growing. The people’s worship was empty and did little to correct the nation’s sinful, downward spiral.

Following Jeroboam, stability and prosperity deteriorated. From 753 to 722 B.C., a series of kings occupied the throne of Israel. In addition, the threat from the powerful Assyrians drained the treasury and ultimately brought an end to the Northern kingdom (Israel).

Hosea prophesied to the Northern kingdom. His message was harsh because the sins of the people were blatant and entrenched. Their desperate spiritual condition required a symbol and a message that would expose the depths of their sin and the urgency of change required. The Northern kingdom was running out of time.

Still, through Hosea’s pain from Gomer’s unfaithfulness, God showed the people hope. As Christians, and as Bible teachers, we find it easy enough to identify sins and problems in our culture. However, can we, even in the most difficult situations, offer people hope in Christ?
Interpreting the Scriptures

The Word of the Lord (1:1)

The command of God to Hosea and Hosea’s subsequent marriage provokes considerable speculation, discussion, and interest. But, Hosea established the center and the context of his message with the phrase, “The word of the LORD.” Discussion of Hosea’s actions, their meaning, and our attitude about them based on our own moral leanings must be set in the context that the words and the actions are indeed “the word of the LORD.”

Other kings of Israel followed Jeroboam. That Hosea does not mention them might indicate that he considered Jeroboam to be the last legitimate king.

A Broken Covenant (1:2–11)

1:2–3. Verse 2 notes again that the Lord spoke his word through Hosea. What God said to Hosea must have rocked him and his contemporaries. It surely startles us as well. However, no human act could better illustrate the people’s depravity or the sorrow they caused the Lord.

The traditional interpretation follows the text. God commanded Hosea to take a wife who was a prostitute. Hosea married Gomer, and they had children. Verse 2 says, “for the land commits flagrant harlotry by forsaking the LORD.” Harlotry and adultery were common Old Testament depictions of the spiritual infidelity of the people towards God.

1:4–5. The names of Hosea’s children all carried a symbolic message. At the Lord’s command, Hosea named the first son “Jezreel.” “Jezreel” (God sows) was a fertile agricultural area. It was the site of Jehu’s purge in which he killed Jehoram of Israel, Ahaziah of Judah, Jezebel, and others of the house of Ahab. (2 Kings 9:14—10:33 tells the bloody story.)

Jehu’s purge was according to the will of God (2 Kings 9:1–10), but it gives us pause. In the end, “Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam” (2 Kings 10:31). We further wonder whether Jehu was excessive in his purge. To hear the name of Hosea’s son, or to see Jezreel,
would have recalled this bloody era that came on the people because of
their sin.

1:6–7. The second child born to Hosea and Gomer was a daughter he
named “Lo-ruhamah” (not pitied). If the first half of the century had
been relatively prosperous and stable, the political rumblings, war, and
economic instability that followed should have made the people sensi-
tive to the prophet’s unusual actions and to the ominous names of his
children.

Was it possible that God would neither pity nor forgive the people
of Israel because of their sins? God had promised deliverance to Judah,
but not by military power or by the political alliances in which they had
mistakenly placed their trust (Hosea 1:7). Then and now, sin has conse-
quences that people cannot escape.

1:8–9. The name of the third child summarized the end for Israel. Their
sins, as demonstrated by Jezreel, God would not forgive because the
people would be “Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not
your God” (1:9).

1:10–11. God promised judgment, but he still offered redemption. In a
dramatic shift, these verses give hope and set the stage for the redemp-
tive message God delivered through Hosea.

The Lord’s Compassion (2:16–23)

Hosea 2:1–15 continues the theme of judgment, using the illustration of
family life in which an unfaithful spouse would suffer further humili-
ation. The judgment clearly applied to Israel. The Lord would withhold
the commodities necessary for life (2:8–12). What would it take for the
nation to see that life and sustenance came from God, not from the idols
they worshiped?

2:16–17. Under the threat of God’s wrath, Hosea spoke God’s love to the
people. “You will call Me Ishi [“my husband,” NIV] and will no longer
call me Baali [“my master,” NIV]” (2:16b). “In that day” points to a time
of restoration and hope (2:16a).
However, restoration and hope required a change in the people’s relationship with God. Although the Lord initiated the change, they must repent and return to faith in God.

2:18–20. God’s promise to a repentant people was a new covenant. The people would no longer serve (“mention”) the Baals, but the Lord alone would be their God (2:17). It is as if the curse originally instituted in Genesis 3 would now be lifted. God would remove the dangers from the land and from their neighbors and would replace them with his loving-kindness and compassion.

2:21–23. These verses offer a startling change from the judgment promised in Hosea 1. With love, God would welcome back a people who had loved other gods. This grace further demonstrated the nature of the God we serve. “In that day” appears a third time. Hosea used the phrase to emphasize the hope and the help God gives when people trust him.

The closing verses of chapter 2, along with chapter 3, remind us of God’s great desire for his people to return to him. He loved them and wanted them to experience this love. To do so required turning from their sins and trusting him.

Overcoming Love (3:1–5)

3:1. The traditional interpretation is that the woman is Gomer. In the context of the story, this is likely. To command Hosea to take Gomer back further demonstrated the pain of the unfaithfulness. There would have been some measure of humiliation in trying to reclaim the one who had been unfaithful. God required from Hosea a love that would abandon self in order to restore a marriage. Hosea actively illustrated the Lord’s love dealing with sinful people—then and now.

Notice the choice of words. Hosea was not to grudgingly or out of pity take back an unfaithful spouse. He was to love the one who was unfaithful just as the Lord loved a rebellious people. The New Testament echoes this sentiment. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:8, 10).
3:2–3. The text does not tell us from whom Hosea had to buy his wife. Perhaps out of economic necessity she sold herself into slavery. The purchase price represented a considerable sum, and the nature of the payment suggests that it was not easy for Hosea to gather the needed amount.

Forgiveness is not cheap, and it should not be blind. Hosea named the conditions for their reconciliation. Gomer would not be allowed to have sexual relations with any other man. For a time, she and Hosea would not resume physical intimacy. She would demonstrate the reality of her repentance.

3:4. Israel suffered the privations Hosea predicted. The nation did not repent and return to the Lord. In 722 BC, at the hands of the Assyrian invaders, the Northern kingdom came to a bitter end.

3:5. “Afterward” is an important word here. Even in the tragedy of the nation’s fall, God held open the door for their return. The confident assertion was that they would return. However, it would be “in the last days.” As people of the New Testament, we see eschatological overtones. Hosea was saying, There is still hope.

Focusing on the Meaning

Judgment and love are two sides of God’s righteousness. Hosea shows us both. The people had wandered far from God, but God would take them back. It was late, and their opportunity was passing, but there was still hope.

As a pastor, I have seen few actions that cause more hurt to more people or are more difficult to overcome than unfaithfulness in marriage. In those situations repentance and forgiveness require extraordinary effort, love, and work. Perhaps no other illustration could better tell the story of the hurt that people’s rejection causes to the Lord or the lengths to which God will go to bring his people back.

Although he had suffered, Hosea still took the initiative in restoring the marriage. Just so, God has taken the initiative in providing and offering salvation today. This is good news we can receive and share.
The judgment of God is something to fear. Surely, however, the Bible shows us that God’s desire is that we walk with him. So important is this to the Lord, and so great is his desire for us to be restored to that walk with him, that he paid the price of our redemption. “Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18–19). Herein is our hope!

**TEACHING PLANS**

**Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities**

**Connect with Life**

1. Before the session, prepare handouts printed with the following list:
   a. Gossiping about me behind my back
   b. Failing to keep a promise to me
   c. Stealing from me
   d. Telling lies about me
   e. Losing something important they borrowed from me
   f. Publicly insulting me
   g. Developing erratic or unstable behavior toward me
   h. Deserting me for someone else
   i. Volunteering me to help with something before consulting me about it
   j. Depending on me for help but refusing to help when I need it

(A copy is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypresss.org.)
As you begin the session, distribute the handouts and ask class members to evaluate the statements as though someone close has committed each offense against them. If the statement is a behavior that would disrupt the relationship with no possibility of reconciliation, they should write a number 1 next to it. If it would damage the relationship but retain a possibility of reconciliation, have them write 2 next to it. If the behavior would not harm the relationship, they are to write 3 next to it. When all have finished, read the statements aloud and ask class members to indicate their answers by holding up one, two, or three fingers. As time allows, let people explain their answers. When finished, ask participants whether their answers would change if they were the ones committing the offenses against the other person. As a transition into Bible study, comment that Israel committed more and greater offenses than these against God, and yet God continued to offer terms for restoration. There was no sin God was not willing to forgive.

Guide Bible Study

2. Refer to and summarize briefly (or enlist someone to do so) “Hosea: Restoration Beyond Judgment” in the Study Guide in order to introduce the study of Hosea. Refer to the “Enactment Oracles” article in the Study Guide and then have class members read Hosea 1:1–4. Lead the class in a discussion of the first two questions in the Study Guide.

3. Have members read 1:5–8. Enlist three volunteers each to select a name of one of Hosea’s children and explain its significance to the class (refer to the Study Guide for additional information). Discuss reasons the enactment oracle included the children as well as Hosea’s marriage.

4. Invite someone to read aloud 1:10–11. Use information in the Study Guide to clarify the message God was trying to convey by reversing the children’s names (see also step 5 in “Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions”).

5. As someone reads 2:16–23 aloud, ask one half of the class to listen for actions that would result from Israel’s restoration (such as
calling God *husband*) and the other half to listen for actions that God himself would perform (such as betrothing them to himself). Discuss how right relationship with God might have impacted Israel’s society and history by summarizing paragraph two under “A Sudden Reversal” in the *Study Guide*.

6. Have the class compare 3:1–3 with 1:2–3. Ask, *What differences appear in the two passages?* Read 3:4–5. Ask, *How does the analogy of Hosea’s reconciliation with his wife illustrate the restoration God would like to see in Israel?* Have the class suggest adjectives that describe God’s love for his people.

**Encourage Application**

7. Read *Study Guide* question 3, and lead class members to suggest possible responses. Read *Study Guide* question 4, and allow people a few minutes to discuss their ideas with one or two neighbors before reporting to the whole class. Ask the class to suggest ways Christians can guard against corruptive influences within their homes and churches. Refer to the Question to Explore in the *Study Guide*, and lead the group to suggest responses. Close the session by inviting people to pray together in small groups.

**Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions**

**Connect with Life**

1. As you read the following list, ask class members to identify things children do that might anger their parents:
   - Breaking a valuable vase
   - Feeding a dog the steaks intended for that evening’s guests
   - Practicing scissor skills on Daddy’s favorite shirt
   - Scribbling on legal documents with permanent markers

   Have class members suggest similar actions. Note that parents are willing to forgive many disobedient behaviors. Lead class members to suggest offenses that might cause serious disruptions in
relationships between parents and children. Transition into Bible study by commenting on God’s ability to restore relationship with his children even after it has been damaged by unfaithfulness.

Guide Bible Study

2. Before the session, write “What Does It Mean?” at the top of a poster or whiteboard, with the following numbered phrases underneath:
   (1) The land is guilty of adultery
   (2) Jezreel
   (3) Lo-Ruhamah
   (4) Lo-Ammi
   (5) You will call me husband
   (6) I will betroth you to me forever
   (7) Show love to your wife
   (8) I bought her

Display the poster as you begin Bible study.

3. Have class members read Hosea 1:1–2. Explain how Hosea’s family was a living picture representing God’s relationship with Israel. Point to the first phrase on the poster, and ask what God meant by saying that Israel had committed adultery.

4. Ask whether any class members know the meanings of their names and let them share those. Comment that Bible names also have meanings. Read 1:3–5. Indicate Jezreel on the poster, and explain the name’s significance. Do the same with the other children’s names as the class reads 1:6–7 and 1:8–9.

5. Read 1:10–11, and point out how God reversed the interpretations of the children’s names as his way of saying, These are the names as they stand now, but this is what they could be if you repent and return to me.

6. Indicating phrase # 5 on the poster (step 2), have the class read 2:16–20. Invite class members to suggest ways God might relate to Israel as a husband. Ask how sharing a close relationship with
God could affect the quality of the Israelites’ lives. Continue to # 6. Explain the need for God to create a new betrothal contract because Israel’s covenant violation voided the original marriage.

7. Have someone read Hosea 2:21–23. Have the class compare these verses to 1:10–11. Explain that God’s promise of restoration was conditional on Israel’s repentance and renunciation of all unfaithfulness. It happened that the Israelites did not repent or return to God, and so they forfeited God’s promised blessings. But that in no way implies that God did not intend to keep his promises.

8. Enlist someone to read Hosea 3:1. Note that God’s first command to Hosea was to marry a wife who would prove unfaithful to him (1:2). The command in this verse was to show love to her after her unfaithfulness. Pointing to the poster, ask what kind of love Hosea was to show Gomer, and ask how he would show it. Inquire, *In what ways does God show love to people who have sinned against him?*

9. Invite someone to read Hosea 3:2. Explain that the statement “I bought her” does not mean Gomer became Hosea’s slave, but indicates that he paid all her debts. Point out how paying a sinner’s debt and redeeming the broken relationship hints forward to the purpose of Christ’s atoning death.

10. Read 3:3–5. Discuss how the Israelites’ sin would change the quality of their relationship with God even after restoration. Although God is willing to forgive sin, people must still live with its consequences.

**Encourage Application**

11. Ask: *Which is harder for you to believe or understand—God’s judgment on sin or God’s forgiveness of sin? Is God showing greater love when he disciplines us for our sins, or when he forgives our sins?* Follow by asking how we show our greatest love for God. Discuss ways people mistake religious activity for true devotion to God. Ask how Christians can keep their hearts right before God and avoid making a show of their religion. Allow a few moments for silent reflection, and then close the session with prayer.
NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 4–6 are taken from the 1995 update of the New American Standard Bible.
FOCAL TEXT
Hosea 4:1–13b

BACKGROUND
Hosea 4

MAIN IDEA
God condemns religious instruction and views that do not call for both right treatment of fellow human beings and faithful worship of God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
If God were suing us, what would the lawsuit be about—and who would win?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to describe God’s charges against Israel and to identify what religious instruction should include today

LESSON FIVE
God’s Lawsuit Against His People

HOSEA
Restoration Beyond Judgment

58
Understanding the Context

Israel’s sin was leading to its destruction. A number of factors contributed to its decline. Political and religious leaders were not faithful to the Lord. Their leaders were self-serving. They said what people wanted to hear. The destination of this direction was destruction. Evidently the people were only too willing to follow them in the wrong direction.

In this passage, the Lord held court. In the form of a legal proceeding, he brought his case against the people. Hosea stated the charges and laid out the evidence.

As Bible teachers, we see the sins that grieved the Lord and separated his people from him. Then, as now, those sins were subject to the judgment of God. As leaders, we also note the failure of leadership from those who should have known better. Jesus would later call such leaders “blind guides” (Matthew 15:14; 23:16). Their teachers were not simply wrong in their doctrine; their behavior betrayed their unfaithfulness.

The people were religious on their own terms, but their religion was inadequate. Through the prophet Hosea, God made it clear they had violated the covenant and were guilty. He also announced the consequences.

Hosea 4 offered little hope for sinful people. To continue to reject God results in rejection by God. Do people understand this message today? Do they hear it?

It is difficult for the message of a Christian witness to get through the noise. If people are to hear our words about Christ, they will need to see our actions for Christ and for others (see James 2:18).
Interpreting the Scriptures

The Lord’s Case Against the People (4:1–3)

4:1. This is the “word of the Lord.” Already Hosea had used a variation of this phrase (1:1, 2; 3:1). The source of Hosea’s message was God. The message was in stark contrast to the words of the unfaithful priests. The power and the effectiveness of Hosea’s message (and of ours) depends on its faithfulness to “the word of the Lord.”

Hosea then leveled the charges. First there was no “faithfulness.” The word can mean truth, integrity, or honesty.

Too, there was no “kindness.” This word describes the absence of love or compassion. Reading the Old Testament prophets one realizes the premium the Lord placed on compassion for others. God’s charge now linked the lack of truth and of love. People took care of themselves to the neglect of others.

The third charge was no “knowledge of God in the land.” Perhaps this caused the absence of truth and love (“faithfulness” and “kindness”). It certainly highlighted the failure of their teachers.

4:2. Hosea listed five of the Ten Commandments the people were breaking. All the sins related to the breakdown of human relationships. That was in keeping with the teaching of the prophets that godliness should have been evident in the people’s behavior toward others. That the prophet also cited bloodshed indicates a high level of violence in their society. One wonders about this in the twenty-first century when we see the violence against people in every part of the world—including our own.

4:3. Through his prophet, God pronounced Israel guilty so judgment would come. As our own history reveals, the sins of human beings affect all of creation. Greed, waste, and war all had their effect on God’s world then, and they do now.

The Failure of Leadership (4:4–10)

4:4–5. Effective leadership is always important: Israel’s kings failed to live and to lead in the ways of God. Her religious leaders served the king and served themselves. They failed to serve the people or the Lord.
Let no one find fault” means to attempt to counter-sue. They simply had no defense. The New Revised Standard Version offers an alternative translation that shows that the complaint was with the priests. “Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest.” This translation shows that the Lord’s conflict was first with the religious leaders.

If the priests spoke what people, especially the king, wanted to hear (2 Kings 22), one can be sure it was not the Lord’s word. “Stumble” probably means they were rendered ineffective. “Day” and “night” likely meant all the time. “Mother” is the nation. The people who should have led them to safety were leading them further away from God.

In a harsh and terrifying statement, the prophet showed the outcome of their faithlessness: “My people are destroyed.” This happened because the prophets and priests rejected knowledge (God’s word, Hosea 4:1).

Heartless worship, self-interest, and spiritual neglect all moved the spiritual leaders further from God. Their words may have reflected the tenets of their religion, but their lives made their words empty. They led the people to their demise.

So God rejected them as priests. Rejection is the end of those who reject God and who lead others to do the same.

The reign of Jeroboam II had been a time of economic prosperity. If religion was measured by the number of worshipers and meeting places, then religion had prospered as well. As the number and the places of the shrines multiplied, so did the priests. But, more sinful priests only meant more sin.

The law provided for parts of the sacrifice to be shared with the priests. But the system was subject to abuse (1 Samuel 2:12–17). The people were only too happy to accommodate the priests. The sacrificial system no longer was for confession and forgiveness. Instead, in return for material gain, the priests were giving permission to sin! The shrines were full, the priests were numerous, the sins were grievous, and judgment was upon them.

We expect more from religious leaders. Those who teach the Bible, who preach the word, or who are leaders in their churches must
pay close attention to these verses. God’s requirements and expectations are high. When immorality, greed, or lies characterize one who teaches God’s word, it does not go unnoticed in heaven. And, the harm unfaithful leaders can cause to churches, to individuals, and to the kingdom of God is devastating.

The last part of verse 10 shows the source of the sin. Rebellious spiritual leaders had stopped listening to the Lord. What grave danger this spells for the preacher and for the people!

**Spiritual Adultery (4:11–13b)**

4:11. The idea behind the words “adultery” and “harlotry” and the phrase “no faithfulness” (or a variation of these terms) is used many times in chapter 4. This follows the theme of the first chapters as Gomer’s marital infidelity illustrated Israel’s unfaithfulness to God.

In the New International Version, verses 10b through 12a read, “they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the LORD to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding of my people” (4:10b–12a). Our own observations of life demonstrate the truth of verse 11. How often do alcohol and sexual immorality dull the senses and open the door for disastrous choices?

4:12–13. So foolish had Israel’s spiritual leaders become that they sought guidance from idols (see the psalmist’s satire on idolatry in Psalm 115:1–8). Verse 13 pictures the location of their idol worship.

The people were still religious, but their religion was self-serving. They sought a god whom they could conform to their image, who would approve of their behavior, and who would overlook their sin. The result seemed to be that they no longer realized they were sinning. Because it profited the priests not to offer a true message, the people strayed even further from God.

The spiritual situation in Israel was desperate. Unfortunately, neither priests nor people seemed to recognize it.
Focusing on the Meaning

There is no shortage of false religious teaching today. It is not difficult to find examples of those who seem to teach and preach for profit. Paul offered a warning about this (2 Timothy 4:1–5). We who are preachers and Bible teachers must hear these words. We must teach truth. Sometimes the message is hard, but the people must hear it.

We must also live that truth. An important consideration to Hosea was not simply what people believed, but what they did. We generally have little trouble believing the Bible. We do have some difficulty doing what it says. In what ways can we give evidence of our faith? What do people see in us that makes our witness real? How do we show the love of God, particularly to those in need?

Hosea’s message was not simply truth about God. It was a message that required action. Those actions were most obvious in how the people treated others. Verse 2 shows that what they were doing was wrong and verse 1 shows what they lacked.

The Scripture teaches judgment, hope, repentance, and forgiveness. All of these actions and beliefs are important. All are sinners, but Christ died to pay for our sins. He forgives repentant sinners. But, repentant sinners must also change their ways.

Beliefs are important, and so are actions. In the end, actions may tell the true story of what we actually believe.

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Borrow or rent a video or download a video clip of a courtroom trial full of drama and pathos. Show a brief portion depicting a courtroom scene. If showing a video clip is not possible, divide the
class into small groups and see which group can be the first to write a list of ten lawyer or courtroom TV shows, old or new.

2. Discuss reasons courtroom dramas are often popular among viewing audiences. Note that people generally enjoy seeing guilty people convicted and punished for their misdeeds. Observe that in real life legal trials do not always progress as neatly as those designed to fill television time slots. Point out that Hosea 4 is in the form of a covenant lawsuit, with God stating the charges against the people of Israel. Note that Israel was clearly guilty of the charges God brought against them, and his impending punishments reflected the severity of their sin. Unlike human verdicts, which may be flawed, God’s judgments are always accurate and just.

Guide Bible Study

3. On a poster or whiteboard, make two columns headed “Crimes Against God” and “Crimes Against Humanity.” Have class members read through Hosea 4:1–3 and identify the charges against Israel. Record their crimes under the appropriate headings on the board. Ask everyone to turn to Exodus 20:1–17. Lead the group to find the specific commandments Israel broke and write the verse references for those laws next to the corresponding crimes listed on the board. Discuss whether God had sufficient cause for legal indictments against Israel.

4. Enlist someone to read Hosea 4:4–9. Call for volunteers to assume roles as a judge, a prosecutor, a defender, witnesses, and one or two defendants in a brief dramatization of a trial against Israel’s sinful priests. Referring to Study Guide explanations, have the prosecutor list charges against the priests of the Northern kingdom. Allow their lawyer to present a defense before the judge hands down a verdict. Either lawyer may call witnesses to testify as desired. The trial should emphasize the priests’ guilt in failing to teach the people God’s law, to call for covenant obedience in the nation, and to follow the law themselves.

5. Have class members look at 4:10–13 and identify evidences pointing to Israel’s involvement in pagan worship practices. List these
as a subsection along with the charges under the “Crimes Against God” heading on the board. Discuss reasons the Israelites might have been drawn into these practices, and how they might have prevented that fall into sin.

Encourage Application

6. Have class members join with two or three people sitting beside them to discuss the Question to Explore and questions 3 and 4 from the Study Guide.

7. Allow a few moments for individuals to reflect on question 5 from the Study Guide. Close the session with prayer.

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Tell this joke: As a man strolled down a city sidewalk one evening, he came upon a person searching for something under a streetlamp. He asked what the person was looking for. The person answered, “When I opened my billfold, a $50 bill fell out, and I’m trying to find it.”

   The man joined the search but found no sign of the missing money. “Are you sure it dropped here?” he asked after several minutes. “Oh, no,” the person replied, “I lost it across the street.” “Then why are you looking for it here?” the man exclaimed in surprise. The person who had lost the money responded, “Because I can see better in this light.”

2. Ask whether any class members have ever spent time and energy doing work that they later found was unnecessary. Invite any who are willing to share their experiences. Make the transition to Bible study by commenting on the Israelites’ futile worship practices. On the surface the people appeared very busy with religious activity, but they were performing religious rituals for the wrong reasons and with wrong motives.
Guide Bible Study

3. Ask class members how many of the Ten Commandments they can recite from memory (see Exodus 20:1–17 or Deuteronomy 5:1–21). Write the laws on a poster or whiteboard as they are named. Have class members read Hosea 4:1–3 and identify the commandments written on the board that are referred to in the passage. Discuss why God cannot excuse crimes against himself as Sovereign Creator or against humans, whom he has created in his own image for special relationship with himself.

4. Ask class members to think of examples of modern religious leaders who violated their own teachings or rules (for example, by embezzling money or having adulterous affairs). Ask how a leader’s wrongdoing affects his or her followers. Have someone read Hosea 4:4–9. Referring to information in the Study Guide, identify factors that corrupted Israel’s religious leaders and discuss how their sins affected the people’s lives.

5. Invite someone to read Hosea 4:10–13. Point out the futility of Israel’s religious practices. Ask, What was wrong with the motives that prompted their religious activity? What was wrong with their beliefs about God and pagan deities? Why do you think the Israelites did not believe what God’s prophets said about sinful religious practices or pay attention to their warnings?

Encourage Application

6. Comment that the Israelites seemed happy with their religious practices and were not willing to change. Lead class members to suggest some changes God might like to see in today’s churches. Ask, What current attitudes or practices might send a wrong message about Christian truths and values?

7. Refer to the small article, “An Illustration for Application,” in the Study Guide. Discuss how sinful actions and attitudes among some Christians can negatively impact the influence of the whole church. Ask class members how they would answer the questions in the article.
8. Point out questions 3, 4, and 5 in the Study Guide. Encourage further thought to the questions during the coming week, and challenge the group to watch for the kinds of syncretistic ideas or worldly influences that are mentioned in the questions. Close the session with prayer.

NOTES

FOCAL TEXT
Hosea 11:1–11; 14:1–2

BACKGROUND
Hosea 11—14

MAIN IDEA
Like a parent yearning for an estranged child to return, God yearns to restore the relationship in spite of people’s sins against him.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
How can we understand God as One who both punishes sins and yearns compassionately to show mercy and restore broken relationships?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to decide to respond to the wideness of God’s mercy in spite of their sins against him.

Lesson Six
The Wideness of God’s Mercy

Hosea
Restoration Beyond Judgment
When God tries to get through to a nation (or to an individual) but that nation (or individual) will not listen and will not change, then what? In Hosea 1—3, the relationship between God and his people was set in the context of marital unfaithfulness and Hosea’s determination to love and to buy back his unfaithful spouse (Hosea 3:1–2).

In Hosea 11, the imagery changed to the picture of the nurturing and long-suffering love of a parent for a wayward and ungrateful child. Both images come from family. The love or the hurt from family relationships is a concept that humans will always understand.

In Bible study, context is important. Conditions, political structures, religion, and even families were different then than today. The sins were not different, though. We still see it all: immorality; greed; turning from God to follow false gods, whatever the names of those gods. Hosea’s description still fits, “So My people are bent on turning from Me” (11:7a).

God will judge those who sin. He will also forgive the one who turns away from sin to follow the Lord. The wrath of God is evident in the Book of Hosea. So is the love of God! Because of their rejection of God, the people would go back into bondage. They would not go to Egypt but to Assyria. Even in judgment however, we still see the compassion and love of God. God sorrowed at their ways and promised to restore the people when they repented. The door to salvation was still open if the people would come in.

Remember God’s Grace (11:1–4)

11:1. The pivotal historical and spiritual event for Israel was God’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Old Testament prophets and New Testament disciples (Acts 6; Hebrews 11) repeated the story of God’s
power in defeating the Egyptians, in parting the Sea, and in his provision of food and water. He demonstrated mercy by not destroying the people when they rebelled, and they rebelled frequently.

That miraculous story was the great illustration of God’s love for his people. Matthew would later recall Hosea 11:1 to tell the story of Jesus, who came into the world to deliver his people from the bondage of sin and the death it brings (Matthew 2:15).

11:2. Short memories! How quickly Israel seemed to forget. The New American Standard Bible translates this verse, “The more they called them” (italics added for emphasis). Both the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version translate this verse, “The more I called them” (italics added for emphasis). Early in the wilderness experience the people complained. They worshiped the golden calf. As if Aaron’s ridiculous explanation of the golden calf (Exodus 32:21–24) was not enough, their memory of what God had done faded fast. They even remembered how good they had it in Egypt (Numbers 11:4–6). Reading it from afar, we are astonished. Can people so easily forget the mercy, the grace, and the mighty acts of God? Still, we do well to recall God’s goodness in our lives. A consistent, personal devotional life, faithfulness in our worship, and a thankful attitude all help us remember.

11:3–4. These verses describe the tender love of a parent for a child. Six times in these two verses God says “I.” We sense the Lord’s sadness at what seemed to be the loss of a child. He had loved Israel as his children. By their ingratitude and idolatry, they shattered the bonds of love between parent and child. In spite of God’s care, protection, and provision, spiritually they ran away.

Descent into Disaster (11:5–7)

11:5–6. We know that when adolescents choose to run away from home, disastrous consequences often follow. Israel thought it freed itself from the restraints it believed the Lord had placed on it. However, their presumed freedom would result in bondage again—not in Egypt, but this time in Assyria. In a strange way, they would be back where they were before the Exodus—slaves in a foreign land. That does not sound like freedom!
In 722 B.C., the Assyrians conquered the Northern kingdom, deporting its people and importing others to live in Israel. Even in the New Testament era, the consequences of this exile continued to reverberate in the animosity between Judah and Samaria. Hosea 9—10 gives some insight into the depth and the horror of the disaster facing Israel.

11:7. Apparently the people wanted to be free from the Lord. He allowed them to go. However, as any parent knows, sometimes the worst thing one can do for a child is allow the child to do what he or she wants. “God gave them over,” is the haunting refrain Paul repeated (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). God would let them do what they wanted to do. The result was not freedom but ultimately was death.

God of Mercy (11:8–12)

11:8. One can feel the Lord’s agony. As a Father who had taught his child to walk and had held the child in his arms (Hosea 11:3), God agonized, How can I let them go? After all the heartache his children had caused him, one incredible fact remained: God loved his people.

Admah and Zeboiim were two lesser known towns that were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deuteronomy 29:23). A responsible parent will discipline a child at the appropriate time and for the right reason. God does as well (Hebrews 12:4–11), but it is certainly not his desire to destroy them. To see the Lord recoil from the horror of the demise of his people is another demonstration of the depths of his love, his patience, and his anguish at their sin.

11:9. “For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst.” This declaration is crucial to biblical faith. God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, and God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8–9). He does not react to situations as we would. Thoughtful reflection wonders why God did not act against the people sooner or why, by this time, God would care. The simple explanation—He is God!

God is holy although the people did not honor his holiness or walk in it. God’s holiness demanded that the offenders be punished. But, because God is a God of compassion and mercy, his is a love that would not let go!
11:10–11. “The LORD roars” (see also Amos 1:2). When this happened, one would expect the people and animals to flee. Instead, like wayward sons who had come to their senses, they would return to God.

11:12. Unfortunately, in spite of God’s love and patience, Israel would not repent. Idolatry, misplaced trust in foreign nations, and lies characterized God’s people. They forgot God’s mercy and loving acts, and they trusted in idols. Therefore, they would go to Assyria. When people do not hope in God, they have no hope!

Return to God (14:1–2)

14:1. Our faith is characterized by hope. Surely nothing demonstrates the reality and the depth of sin like the cross of Jesus Christ. It is because of this cross that all people can receive the forgiveness of sins.

God has punished sin and will punish sin. The New Testament makes it clear that we cannot defeat sin on our own. God alone can provide the way of salvation from sin, and the inevitable death sin brings.

God offers hope. That hope requires that people repent (“return”). Isaiah expressed this hope, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). After all their rebellion, incredibly, God invited them back, “Return O Israel, to the LORD your God” (Hosea 14:1).

14:2. In verse 3, the people understood that their wrong choices could not save. Their bad choices all resulted in their demise. But, God did not stop loving and continued to offer the opportunity to repent. Even in God’s own heartache, symbolized in the adulterous marriage and in ungrateful, rebellious children, the invitation to grace remained open.

“Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously . . .” (14:2). Were it not possible, God would not have instructed the people to ask. We should not be surprised. From beginning to end, it is the Father’s desire that people be saved.
Focusing on the Meaning

An adulterous spouse; ungrateful, rebellious children—it would be easy enough to get angry and to stay angry. After all, love has its limits—or so it seems!

But, what we learn from our Lord Jesus is not how to be angry and how we might exact revenge. We already know how to do that. We learn from Jesus how to forgive and what love truly means.

Hosea began the book by describing heartache that knows no bounds. Unfaithfulness in marriage is hurt of the worst kind. He concluded the book by describing rebellious children who had chafed at a parent’s love.

Hosea did not sugarcoat either situation. The people would pay an awful price for their sins. Still, the message through the Scriptures that somehow rises above the sins and the rebellion of the people is that God loves us. God loves us and will forgive the sinner who repents. We see this in Hosea loving and reuniting with Gomer (Hosea 3). We see it in the invitation for Israel to return (14:1–2).

Hosea 14:4–9 further illustrates the healing, love, and forgiveness of our God. As Christians however, we see his love most clearly in the Lord Jesus. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Whatever one’s sins, to turn from that sin and to follow Christ is forgiveness and salvation. This is our message. This is our hope!

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Divide the class into small groups of six or fewer people each. Give each group a blank sheet of paper and pencils. Instruct groups to
write “A Parent’s Love” within a circle in the center of each sheet and to work from that phrase to build a word web. (Around the paper write words or phrases linked to the idea of a parent’s love, and draw lines to connect them to the center circle or to other related ideas surrounding it. Examples of web words might include “patience”, “disciplines”, “quality time”, “works hard”, etc.) After several minutes, have groups exchange papers and compare another group’s ideas with their own. Invite groups to identify traits that should be universally true of all parents, and then discuss which word web ideas also reflect the way God relates to us as Father. Make the transition into Bible study by commenting that God initiated a parent-child relationship with Israel, but the Israelites failed to appreciate the blessing of that gift. (A copy of the instructions for this group activity are available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Guide Bible Study

2. Have someone read Hosea 11:1–4. Lead the class to identify all the actions this passage associates with a loving father. Draw two columns on a whiteboard and record responses in the left column. Discuss possible meanings of some of the references, such as God’s calling Israel, teaching Ephraim (Israel) to walk, taking them by the arms, healing them, etc.

3. Read Hosea 11:5–7. Recalling specific sins noted in previous lessons, discuss Israel’s negative response to God’s love. Write those responses in the right-hand column on the board. Compare the two columns. Have the class create one-line summaries that describe God’s love toward Israel and the consequences that resulted from Israel’s covenant disobedience.

4. Have someone read 11:8–9. Ask how the two verses portray God as a loving father. Explain that verse 8 does not imply an impulsive change of heart but indicates a deliberate decision to temper the severity of Israel’s punishment as an expression of God’s inherent compassion and mercy.
5. Recall the story in chapter 3 of Hosea’s reconciliation with his wife (lesson four). Read 11:10–11 and discuss possible parallels between Gomer’s homecoming experience and the restoration God desires for Israel.

6. Read 14:1–2. Discuss God’s reasons for requiring verbal confession from people who have sinned against him. Ask class members to think of New Testament verses that link confession with repentance (suggestions may include 1 John 1:9; Romans 10:10; James 5:16).

**Encourage Application**

7. Have the class again form small groups to discuss the questions in the *Study Guide*. (Consider assigning one to three questions to each group to be sure all of the questions are dealt with.) As time allows, have groups share some of their thoughts with the whole class. Discuss this question: *How much is God willing to forgive in our lives?* Enlist a volunteer to read 1 John 1:9 aloud. Allow a few moments for silent introspection, and then close the session in prayer.

**Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions**

**Connect with Life**

1. Read the following statements aloud, having class members raise their hands for any statement they consider true in their experience:
   a. When I was a child, my parents provided all my basic needs such as food and clothing.
   b. My parents gave me gifts.
   c. My parents took care of me when I was sick.
   d. My parents encouraged and comforted me when I was disappointed or fearful.
   e. My parents established rules for behavior in our home.
   f. My parents punished me if I broke their rules.
2. Ask class members which statements reflected their parent’s love. (Be prepared for the possibility that some participants may have experienced great difficulty growing up.) Discuss how a parent’s disciplinary actions can be just as loving as giving gifts or providing necessities. Make the transition to Bible study by commenting that sometimes God’s love expresses itself in stern discipline as well as in mercy.

Guide Bible Study

3. Read Hosea 11:1–4. Read again the opening statements in step 1, asking class members to identify any that were true of God’s relationship with Israel.Briefly identify examples in Israel’s history for each statement in step 1 (see the following references):
   a. Exodus 16; 17:6; Deuteronomy 8:4; 2 Kings 4:42–44
   b. Genesis 12:2; 13:14–17
   c. 2 Kings 5:14; 20:5–6
   d. Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 61:1–2
   e. Exodus 20:1–17; Deuteronomy 6:1–2
   f. Exodus 32:34–35; Numbers 16:30–35

4. Invite a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 8:5. Have class members explain the purpose of discipline. Read Hosea 11:5–7. Discuss reasons Israel needed to be disciplined, and the form its discipline would take. (Explain that the image in verse 5 of a return to Egypt recalled Israel’s former enslavement, but the coming literal bondage would be within the Assyrian Empire.)

5. Lead class members to recall how dispensing discipline seemed to affect their parents. Were they happy, sad, or indifferent? If any class members are parents themselves, ask how it makes them feel to punish a child. Read 11:8–9. Observe how these verses describe God’s anguish of heart when considering the severe punishment made necessary by Israel’s sin. Read Deuteronomy 30:19 and Ezekiel 18:31–32. Discuss what those verses reveal about God’s desire for Israel and his reluctance to see his people suffer.
6. Ask whether anyone has ever seen a child tearfully return to mommy or daddy for a hug after receiving punishment. Discuss reasons children respond to a parent’s love even after suffering discipline. Read 11:10–11 and comment on God’s hopes for Israel’s return. Explain that God’s roar of wrath and judgment in Amos 1:2 is different from that in Hosea. Verse 11:10 refers to the kind of roar a mother lioness or alpha male would use to summon cubs or call a pride to assembly. God’s intention was that Israel would return to him in reverent submission after being disciplined and to be rewarded by a life of stability and peace.

7. Invite someone to read 14:1–2. Discuss the importance God places on verbal confession. Read Psalm 51:1–4. Note that David did not try to make excuses or pass the blame when he was caught in sin. He acknowledged his guilt and God’s sovereign right to judge him for it. Discuss the role that confession plays in repentance.

**Encourage Application**

8. Refer to “The Rest of the Story” in the Study Guide. Note that Israel experienced the full extent of God’s punishment because they did not listen to prophetic warnings and did not repent or return to God. Ask class members to consider this question: *If God sent prophets to us today, what warning message would they bring?* Discuss behaviors among contemporary Christians that reflect attitudes existent in Israel. Ask why God does not seem to punish sin in today’s church in the same way he punished Israel.

9. Refer to the questions in the Study Guide. Read through the questions, and encourage class members to share thoughts in response to them.

10. Encourage class members to consider the impact God’s mercy has on their lives. Ask them to imagine the greatest wrong they could commit, and how that would affect the way God relates to them. Ask whether there is anything they could do to cause God to withdraw his love from them. Have them consider God’s willingness to forgive anything if a person truly repents, and ask how that knowledge influences their view of and response to God. Close the session in prayer.
FOCAL TEXT
Isaiah 1:1–20

BACKGROUND
Isaiah 1:1–20

MAIN IDEA
No amount of religious activities can replace living in faithfulness to God, including acting with justice and care for the most vulnerable people.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
When will we learn that no amount of religious activities can replace living in faithfulness to God?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to decide how they will respond to God’s call to live in faithfulness to him, including acting with justice and care for the most vulnerable people.

LESSON SEVEN
When God Has Had Enough

ISAIAH
Trust in a Holy God

78
Understanding the Context

The prophet’s specific confrontation with King Ahaz (see Isaiah 7) and the frequent references to Assyria in the early chapters of the Book of Isaiah place the setting for Isaiah’s messages in the latter half of the eighth century B.C. The events described in these early chapters of the Book of Isaiah accurately reflect the historical issues Israel and Judah faced.

The king of Judah and his advisors did not share Isaiah’s trust in Yahweh and succumbed to the influence of the Assyrian culture. The prophet interpreted Judah’s submission to Assyrian power as a rejection of Yahweh. This rejection of the Lord led to Yahweh’s wrath being poured out on Jerusalem and Judah.

As Judah’s leaders turned from Yahweh, they also left behind their moral backbone and ethical ideals. The weak within Judah suffered as a result of this moral lapse. The most vulnerable within the land suffered at the hands of their fellow citizens.

Isaiah’s contemporary, Micah, sounded the same alarm. Without a right relationship with one’s fellow human being, it is impossible to have a right relationship with God. In the decades leading up to Isaiah’s ministry, the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah had experienced years of prosperity. However, prosperity changed to impoverishment following the accession of Tiglath-pileser III to the throne of Assyria. The Northern kingdom of Israel eventually fell to the Assyrians, and Judah became a poor vassal to the Assyrians. Isaiah interpreted the rise of the Assyrian threat in Judah as God’s means of judgment on the inhabitants of the land.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Isaiah’s Vision (1:1)

Scholars debate whether verse 1 applies to Isaiah 1, to Isaiah 1—39, or to the entire Book of Isaiah. Since the introduction points the prophecy
toward Judah and Jerusalem, some argue that it does not apply to the sections in the Book of Isaiah that address the other nations (for example, Babylon in Isaiah 13—14, and Moab in Isaiah 15). It is possible that redactors after the Exile added verse 1 as a clarification. Calvin argued that the priests in Jerusalem who kept a written copy of Isaiah’s message added the introduction to the prophecy.\(^2\)

Isaiah directed his primary message to Judah. At the same time he fulfilled his responsibilities to address Judah’s surrounding neighbors, including distant Babylon.

The reference to the four kings of Judah in verse 1 parallels Hosea 1:1. Micah 1:1 mentions three of the kings: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.\(^3\)

The word “vision” in this context conveys the idea of both specific visions\(^4\) and revelation in general.\(^5\) The word in this context does not refer to the individual’s personal inward perception, mental perception, insight, or intuition. The prophet claimed that God had revealed the message to him. The message was not Isaiah’s personal opinion or the result of his personal reflection.

The vision of Isaiah addresses Judah in general and Jerusalem in particular. Jerusalem was the capital of the Southern kingdom of Judah. The city is referred to as “Ariel” in Isaiah 29:1 and the “city of righteousness” in Isaiah 1:26.

The expression “of Isaiah” indicates that the vision belonged to the prophet. Isaiah was a person in whom God’s message could dwell. The father of Isaiah was Amoz, not to be confused with the prophet Amos. The identification of Amoz is unknown. Rabbinic tradition claimed that Amoz was the brother of Amaziah, the father of Uzziah.\(^6\) If, correct, Isaiah was the cousin of King Uzziah.

The expression “he saw” often refers to physical sight. It also can express inner sight. Here it means that Isaiah saw the vision by inner sight. The revelation did not come all at once but over a long period of time. Isaiah’s prophecy spanned the reigns of four kings of Judah.

The combined reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah cover a span of approximately ninety-six years.\(^7\) Isaiah began his ministry in the year King Uzziah died, about 742 B.C. Second Chronicles 26:22 claims that Isaiah wrote the history of Uzziah. Second Chronicles 32:32 implies that Isaiah also wrote the history of Hezekiah’s reign.
Judah’s Sinful Condition (1:2–3)

Verses 2–3 form a prologue to this section and indeed to Isaiah 1—39. The tone presents an initial negative judgment.

The prophet began with a majestic appeal for the heavens and earth to listen. This was an appeal to all of creation. The heavens and the earth, as personified in the passage, would outlive the present generation and therefore could bear witness against that generation. Creation provided an objective witness to Judah’s sins.

The expression “for the Lord has spoken” emphasizes the divine origin of the message in contrast to any human origin. The personal name of God is used—Yahweh. The Creator has spoken; therefore, the creation must listen. The word order in Hebrew places the emphasis on Yahweh rather than on the word “spoken.” In this context, to listen to the words of the prophet was to listen to the words of God.

Verses 2b–3 summarize the chapter. Yahweh is Creator of the universe and Creator of the people of Israel. They are called “children.” Yahweh is the divine parent of the people. This expression highlights Israel’s sin of ingratitude. God brought the people to a place of distinction among the nations. God bestowed special gifts on Judah. However, the people “rebelled” against their parent.

The word for “rebelled” implies the violation of a legal relationship in which the father might take a rebellious son to civil court. Judah constantly despised Yahweh’s gracious acts as a parent. Their internal attitude manifested itself in a variety of external acts, such as rebellion, apostasy, and idolatry. They were “children” who cast aside the loving acts of a father.

Their rebellion was specifically against Yahweh. All sin is ultimately against God (see Psalm 51:4). While God’s love shined toward his rebellious children, they turned their backs against that love. God did everything to make life meaningful for Israel; yet, Israel did everything to ignore God.

Isaiah compared the people of Judah to simple-minded animals. The prophet pointed out that the animals acted more intelligently than humans. God had provided enlightenment to Israel; yet, the ox and the donkey acted more wisely than Israel. Animals that belonged to a master were more obedient than the children of the tender and loving parent who had done everything for the children. The guilt of Judah therefore was inexcusable.
The crib is the place where the master placed the food for the beasts of burden. These simple-minded animals knew to return to the place in which the master fed them. In contrast, the children of Israel neither knew nor understood. The prophet proclaimed that the people of Judah did not possess the basic knowledge comparable to that of an ox or donkey.

Although the children did not recognize God, God still acknowledged the children. Although the people of Judah ignored Yahweh, God still called them “my people.” God remained faithful even though the people chose unfaithfulness.

The expression “understand” implies that the people did not have a conscious reflection of their immense obligations to Yahweh. In contrast, the animals at least knew from where their sustenance came. Clearly Israel did not utilize the divine gifts their Creator bestowed on them.

Guilt, Punishment, and Rejection: Like Sodom (1:4–9)

1:4. Isaiah proclaimed the words that he himself received from the Lord. These were not just Isaiah’s opinions. The verse begins with an exclamatory word from the prophet—“ah.” The term may express a threat or a lamentation. The prophet agonized over the sad moral condition of Judah.

The expression “sinful nation” indicates habitual sinning. The people were characterized by the terms “sinful,” “iniquity,” doing “evil,” dealing “corruptly.” The expression “laden with iniquity” indicates that sin is a burden. The nation suffered under the crushing weight of their iniquities. The term signifies the perverse wickedness of sin. The nation had become slaves to their iniquity.

The expression “the Holy One of Israel” is characteristic of the prophet Isaiah. The term “holy” refers to God’s complete separateness from creation.

1:5. The nation of Judah was so completely wounded that there was no remaining area in which it could be smitten. Even so, Jacob’s punishment had not brought about true submission. The nation’s sickness was present in the most significant parts of the body—the head and the heart.
1:6. “The sole of the foot” is the lowest part of the body. The entire body of the nation was inflicted with this illness. The reference to “bleeding wounds” indicates fresh punishment from the Lord. The wounds remained open and neglected. Only the Lord can heal such wounds.

1:7. The prophet Isaiah now turned his attention to the condition of the land. The reference to “your country” makes God’s punishment personal. It was not another people’s land that suffered, but Judah’s. The prophet described the land as “desolate,” like a desert. That which had been a land flowing with milk and honey had now become a desert. The reference to cities burned with fire indicates punishment by warfare. Judah’s humiliation is seen in the expression “in your very presence.” Their chastisement was also their embarrassment. The expression “aliens devour your land” demonstrates that Yahweh used foreign nations as instruments of punishment. These foreigners who invaded the land devoured its produce, leaving the people of Judah to suffer hunger and deprivation.

1:8. The prophet focused specifically on the city of Jerusalem. The prophet described the inhabitants of Jerusalem as survivors after a war. The expression “daughter Zion” refers to the entire city. It is a synonym for the city of Jerusalem. Zion generally refers to Jerusalem as God’s city.

The phrase “like a booth in a vineyard” refers to Jerusalem standing alone. The booth was a temporary shelter made of branches and leaves. Landowners erected booths as shelters for those who guarded their vineyards.

The expression “like a shelter in a cucumber field” describes the devastation on Jerusalem. Instead of a land flowing with milk and honey, it was a cucumber field with an unprotected hut. Therefore, Jerusalem was “like a besieged city” that stands alone with no one to help her.

1:9. The prophet described the role of Yahweh in Jerusalem’s present condition. God left a remnant in the city. Clearly this remnant had not earned its continued existence. Therefore, the prophet introduced a doctrine of salvation by grace.

The prophet described the deity as “the Lord of hosts.” Yahweh is the covenant name for Israel’s God. Yahweh alone is the source of grace.
and goodness. The use of the word “hosts” describes God as the head of the armies of Israel. Yahweh is a warrior God. God’s will limited Israel’s punishment and destruction.

The prophet included himself among the survivors. The remnant represents a blessing. Had the Lord not limited Jerusalem’s punishment, the Assyrians, as instruments of Yahweh, would have annihilated Jerusalem as the Lord had destroyed Sodom. The reference to Sodom and Gomorrah is not so much to the character of the cities as to the fate of the two cities.

True and False Worship (1:10–17)

1:10. Verse 10 introduces a new section. The references to Sodom and Gomorrah connect the verse to the preceding section in which Jerusalem had become a spiritual Sodom.

The verse begins with the imperatives “hear” and “listen.” The people must heed the prophet’s words. The expression “the word of the Lord” speaks to the authoritative message of the prophet. The message belongs to God. Hearing the message implies obedience to the message. One has not heard God’s word unless the individual obeyed that word. Everyone, “rulers” and “people,” must listen to him. The prophet referred to the present inhabitants of Jerusalem as though they were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

1:11. The people of Jerusalem depended on their religious activities to appease the deity. Isaiah condemned mere formalism and religion. The theme of this verse is found in the other eighth-century prophets (see Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; Micah 6:6–8; see also 1 Samuel 15:22). Yahweh always prefers obedience to religious behavior.

The people were offering proper sacrifices; however, they failed to obey the Lord. Worship that focuses on the act of worship and not the one worshiped always fails. Worship offered without the accompanying ethical behavior is a hollow mockery.

1:12. The temple was a safe sanctuary in the presence of the Lord in the eyes of worshipers. Many who came to the temple were sincere. However, sincerity was not sufficient. Sincerity was never a substitute for obedience to Yahweh’s commands. Entering the court of God with
a disobedient life profanes the temple and the worshiper is rejected by God. The trampling of the court may refer to the animals brought for sacrifice. Without a life that demonstrates obedience, religious behavior is useless.

1:13. The verse is an utter repudiation of the worship offered by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are commanded not to bring more offerings. The reference in the verse is to any offering; they had all become “futile,” vain, empty. Generally, “incense” was considered a smell of sweet savor to the Lord. However, it had become “an abomination” or loathsome odor to God.

The references to the “new moon,” “sabbath,” “convocation,” and “solemn assemblies” indicate important times for worship in ancient Israel. Yet, the Lord rejected each of them. Judah had mixed worship of Yahweh with iniquity. They divorced doctrine from practice.

1:14. Although verse 14 gives an impressive repetition of verse 13, it carries the discussion a step farther. The lunar calendar marked many of Israel’s religious feasts and fasts designed for the worship of Yahweh. God intended that these acts of worship bring together the worshiper and God. However, the Lord proclaimed “my soul hates” them. The reference to “my soul” speaks to the center of God’s being.

The acts of worship by the inhabitants of Jerusalem had become a burden to God. God was weary of their worship. The sinful worship of an unbelieving people had become a burden on the back of the Lord, who was “weary of bearing” their worship.

1:15. Verse 15 becomes more personal. Religious assemblies are communal. Sacrifices involve a group. However, prayer is personal. Prayer involved the opening of the palms toward the deity. Prayer offered with a life in disobedience to Yahweh is idolatry.

God closed his eyes and ears to their prayers. The people of Jerusalem had chosen to draw near to God in prayer, but they had also chosen to disobey the Lord. Therefore, they were guilty of idolatry. They approached Yahweh as though the deity was an idol that was helpless to address their stubbornness. Idols cannot see or hear. Therefore, the Lord, if treated like an idol, would refuse to see and hear.
In an odd twist, Isaiah claimed that the same hands lifted in prayer to Yahweh “are full of blood.” This expression indicates the violent nature of their sins. In the context of Isaiah 1, all disobedience, including the mistreatment of the most vulnerable members of society, is a violent act of sin against God. When we disobey God’s command, we become guilty of a violent sin against God.

1:16–17. Nine admonitions, presented in the plural, characterize verses 16–17, as follows:
- “wash yourselves”
- “make yourselves clean”
- “remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes”
- “cease to do evil”
- “learn to do good”
- “seek justice”
- “rescue the oppressed”
- “defend the orphan”
- “plead for the widow”

The prophet mentioned the widow and orphan because of their helplessness in society. They had no one to plead their cause. The weakest members of society deserved just treatment. The leaders of the nation must provide the example of righteousness for the people to follow.

The Good Things or the Sword (1:18–20)

1:18. Verses 18–20 offer an ominous bid for renewal. The prophet used the imperative “come now” as God spoke. The challenge was one that benefited those addressed. It was also a command that the people could not evade. They must obey the challenge. The invitation was not between a meeting of equals, but between the Lord and a sinful nation.

The expression, “let us argue it out,” conveys a reciprocity. The Lord issued a challenge to discuss the accusation against the nation, a command that the nation could not ignore. The terminology is legal in nature. The expression “says the LORD” emphasizes that the message originated from God.

Isaiah compared sin with the color of scarlet and crimson. The color of red is sometimes used to represent unjustly-shed blood or violence.
Even though the nation’s sins were deep red, God’s justification could turn them to white, the very opposite of the red. Only God’s mercy shown through forgiveness could produce this radical reversal.

1:19. The offer was not a straightforward offer of a pardon. The nation must choose between blessing and curse. Willingness was insufficient. Obedience was also required. Only obedience would lead to God’s blessings. Isaiah painted a picture of tranquillity and peace.

1:20. The opposite of the hope presented in 1:19 is “you shall be devoured by the sword.” Refusal to “argue” their situation with God was seen as an act of rebellion against God.

**Focusing on the Meaning**

The people of Judah truly believed that their religious activities pleased Yahweh. They thought that if they worshiped the Lord, then the Lord would bless them. Worship meant such things as sacrifice, songs, and keeping special observances. If they carried out these functions, then God would bless them. They never thought of themselves as in the same category as Sodom or Gomorrah. Yet, their neglect of the most vulnerable in society placed them in that classification.

Many who call themselves by the name of the Lord or Christians truly believe that they do the will of Jesus fully as they attend church services or serve on a variety of committees. However, where do they stand during the week at work, at home, or in their neighborhoods?

The challenge for the modern believer is to find ways in which to implement Isaiah’s mandates. Is it possible that believers, like the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Isaiah’s day, do not believe that God will send a form of punishment on them? Does God still use foreign powers to nudge along the believers? If nudging fails, will God resort to the use of “force” to create ethical behavior? Who or what are the “Assyrians” whom the Lord might use to elicit proper ethical behavior in a modern world?
TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Before class, write on the board or a poster the two questions mentioned in “For Life Today” in the Study Guide—“Are we merely going through the motions of religious activity without allowing God to transform our lives?” and “Are we using religious activity as a substitute for obedience to God?” To begin the class session, refer to these questions and refer to and summarize the comments under “For Life Today.” Point out that Judah may have been going through the right motions doing its sacrifices and other religious activities; however, Judah was not faithful to God, for they were not acting with justice and care for the most vulnerable people. They were using religious activity as a substitute for obedience to God.

Guide Bible Study

2. To introduce the study of Isaiah’s ministry, enlist someone in advance to summarize the article “Isaiah: Trust in a Holy God” in the Study Guide.

   Invite someone to read Isaiah 1:1. State that Isaiah identified his ministry with the kings of the Southern kingdom (Judah). Note the importance of this first chapter:
   - This book begins with a vision, but the book is more of a collection of revelations that the Lord gave to Isaiah.
   - Isaiah probably ministered between 742 and 701 B.C.
   - Many themes found in Isaiah 1—39 are introduced in chapter 1

3. Ask, Have you used any of the following statements with your children?
   - If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times.
   - If you do that one more time I will. . . .
   - I brought you up better than that!
Lesson 7: When God Has Had Enough

State: Our children we love and care for sometimes rebel against us—just as we likely did with our parents when we were children. That was certainly the case with Judah. Judah had to face judgment because it had violated its covenant with the Lord. The Lord who loved and cared for them must now punish his “children” (Isa. 1:2).

Have someone read Isaiah 1:2 while half the class listens for what God had done (“reared,” “brought them up”) and the other half listens for what Israel had done (“rebelled”).

Enlist someone to read Isaiah 1:3. Explain the verse using information in the Study Guide and in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide.

4. Invite someone to read Isaiah 1:4–9 while the class listens for the situation with Israel because of its wrongdoing. Ask, What do you think the word “Ah” means in verse 4? State that God was expressing his grief and frustration like a parent would do with his or her children. The three charges against Judah were:

- “They have forsaken the LORD” (NIV).
- “They have spurned the Holy One of Israel” (NIV).
- “They have turned their backs on him” (NIV).

Explain these verses briefly using information in the Study Guide and in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide.

Ask, Had God completely given up on them? (Refer to 1:9.)

5. Have someone read Isaiah 1:10–17 while the class listens for what the people were doing rather than being faithful to God. Receive reports. Emphasize that the people engaged in religious acts but were not being obedient to God. Ask, What did God want the people to do instead of focusing on having elaborate worship services? Refer to verses 16–17. Comment that their religion had nothing to do with how they lived their life. God wanted them to seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, and plead the case of the widow.

6. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 1:18–20. Have someone else read the first part of verse 18 in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, as follows: “Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord. . . .” Note that the expression “let us argue it out” in the context of 1:18–20 is a strong challenge from God, not an invitation to a polite
discussion among equals. The challenge was to choose between eating (“eat the good of the land”) if they “are willing and obedient” (1:19) or being eaten (“devoured by the sword”) if they “refuse and rebel” (1:20). Note that God does not want us to negotiate with him. He wants us to see things his way, repent, accept his forgiveness, and turn to him completely.

Encourage Application

7. Ask, Are we guilty of doing the same things Judah did? Do we attend church regularly, even tithe, but live a different lifestyle during the week? Do we neglect to see that we are to “seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow”? Point out that orphans and widows were the most vulnerable people in that society. Ask, Who are the vulnerable people in our society? How does God want us to relate to them? Does God condemn us for doing the same things as Judah?

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. State: A church located in a large downtown city provided many programs and ministries for all ages of the congregation. Over the years they involved their members in many mission activities around their state, nation, and world. A few years ago, a couple in the church made an appointment with the pastor. This couple realized that their church was providing little ministry to homeless adults, children with special needs, and financially challenged families. Out of this came a comprehensive ministry to meet the needs of the people in the area where the church was located. It took the church many years to respond to the hurting people around them, but now with a homeless ministry, community garden, food and clothing ministry, and medical and dental services, many physical and spiritual needs are being met. This church seemed to be doing all it needed to do to be the church, but it took this concerned couple to call the church to
do what it was really called to do in a comprehensive way. Ask the class to consider in studying this passage of Scripture what it has to say to us about things God wants us to do that we may not now be doing.

Guide Bible Study

2. To introduce the study of Isaiah’s ministry, summarize the article, “Isaiah: Trust in a Holy God,” in the Study Guide. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 1:1. Ask the class to find on the chart titled “Eighth Century Kings and Prophets” in the Study Guide the kings that are named. Point out that verse 1 introduces major themes and visions that we find in the next thirty-nine chapters. The time period seems to span about 742–701 B.C. Ask, What does the word “vision” mean to you? Who gave this vision? Why do you think God used a vision to communicate his message? Explain “vision” using information in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide.

3. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 1:2–3. Explain these verses using information in the Study Guide and in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide.

4. Have someone read 1:4–9. Point out that the word “Ah” is an expression of grief and frustration. The people carried a load of guilt. They were evildoers and corrupt. Even with all of this, God had not given up on Judah. Explain the verses using information in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide. Refer especially to verse 7, which pictures destruction from war. Refer also to verse 9. Explain the image of Sodom and Gomorrah. Point out that the implication is that Judah was so wicked it deserved to be punished like Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. God, though, had graciously “left . . . a few survivors” (Isa. 1:9).

5. Invite someone to read verses 10–17 while the class listens for why God would punish the people when they put such emphasis on worshiping him, even bringing offerings to him. Receive reports. Ask, Do you think doing things for the wrong reasons offend God? What were the people failing to do? Point out that temple worship and
keeping the law were being performed as they should be. However, their sacrifices, celebrations of new moons, Sabbaths, appointed feasts, and even their prayers were called “evil deeds” (1:16). Ask, Why? Because the less fortunate did not receive justice, and the fatherless and the widows were not being taken care of. Review the nine admonitions in verses 16–17 as listed in “Bible Comments” on these verses in this Teaching Guide.

6. Have someone read verses 18–20. After the reading, compare translations of verse 18a, especially of the New Revised Standard Version, which translates it, “Come now, let us argue it out.” Note that God was not calling his people to be reasonable or even to have an argument with him. God wanted to confront Judah to give an account of themselves to him. God offered forgiveness if only they would turn to him and change their ways.

Encourage Application

7. Refer to the questions in the Study Guide. Lead the class to respond to questions 1, 2, 4, and 5. On question 5, point out that God’s message through Isaiah especially emphasized care for the most vulnerable people in society. Ask, How do you think God evaluates what we are doing to “seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow”? Do we think our duty is done when we come to worship services? Refer to question 3, and encourage participants to meditate on it. After a few minutes lead the class in prayer to be more faithful in ministering to people in need of help.

NOTES


5. See 1 Samuel 3:1; Ezekiel 7:26; 12:22, 23; Proverbs 29:18.


8. See Deuteronomy 32:1 for a similar expression.


FOCAL TEXT
Isaiah 5:1–13, 18–23

BACKGROUND
Isaiah 5

MAIN IDEA
In spite of the fullness of God’s gracious provision, people have rejected God’s way for their own, and there will be consequences.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
What more could we expect God to do to get us to live in faithfulness to him?

TEACHING AIM
To lead the class to contrast how God has graciously provided for our good and how people have responded and should have responded

Lesson Eight
God’s Dilemma

Isaiah
Trust in a Holy God
Understanding the Context

Prophets often used parables to present their messages. In many cases the parables were allegories. The parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 establishes a mood of failure, rejection, and punishment. Its exquisite beauty makes this poem unique.

A long relationship between Yahweh and Yahweh’s beloved (Israel and Judah) are the basis of the poem. As such, the parable takes the form of an allegory in modern literary terms.

Prophets would often deliver a blessing for a landowner at the time of harvest or planting. Isaiah might have gone to a friend’s vineyard for such an occasion. The message began in a traditional fashion but soon turned into a scathing allegory of Judah’s relationship with Yahweh. A poem became a courtroom drama. A love relationship turned to judgment.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Song of the Vineyard (5:1–7)

5:1. Verses 1–4 serve as an indictment. The vineyard is Israel, specifically the Southern kingdom, and the “beloved” is God (Isaiah 5:1, 7). The vineyard is described as being on a very fruitful hill. The owner of the vineyard had selected the perfect site to plant his vines and produce the very best grapes. The exact location of the vineyard is uncertain; however, the land of Israel is what the prophet had in mind.

5:2. The owner of the vineyard demonstrated a loving and tender care for his vineyard. The land of Israel is unusually stony. The Arabs have an ancient proverb that states when God created the world “an angel flew over it carrying a bag of stones under each arm. As the angel flew over Palestine, one bag broke, so that half of all the stones of the world fell in Palestine.” The owner went to great lengths to clear the stones from his
vineyard. The ground is often hard, and yet he dug it to break up the soil so the vines could take root. He carefully harrowed the soil.

Jeremiah 2:21 refers to Israel as “a choice vine.” The idea is that God planted the most elite of vines in his vineyard. These vines could be expected to produce remarkably large grapes with wonderful quality. God plants only the best.

The owner of the vineyard used the stones cleared from the land to build a stone tower. The overseers of the vineyard had a solid place of protection from which they could oversee the well-being of the vineyard.

The owner placed a wine vat within the vineyard with which to prepare the harvested grapes. The term for “wine vat” refers to a carved stone that served as the receptacle of the juice from the trampled grapes. Emphasis appears to be placed on the term “wine vat” because wine vats were difficult to make and cutting a wide vat from stone was an unusually arduous task.

Notice how the owner of the vineyard did everything possible to plant a successful vineyard. This vineyard should have produced the very best grapes. The owner of the vineyard was calm, hopeful, and patient. However, the vineyard produced “wild,” rotten grapes. The grapes were not usable.

The irony of the allegory is that the Lord bestowed on Israel every possible blessing. God expected Israel to produce the very best fruit. Instead, Israel became like wild grapes. In the end, Israel was fit only to be cast out. Ultimately, the Assyrians and the Babylonians removed Israel from the land.

5:3. Isaiah’s role as a singer ends at the end of the verse 2. Isaiah now took on the role of the owner of the vineyard. He proceeded to bring a case against the vineyard owner before the audience.

Those addressed were the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. The entire country was at fault.

The audience was commanded to “judge.” They could not escape this duty. They were to make a decision on the rightness of the vineyard owner’s case. Ironically, when they pronounced their verdict, they passed judgment on themselves. The announcement of judgment also includes an acknowledgment that the Lord treated them with grace and mercy.
5:4. The prophet paused for a moment as though to give the hearers a chance to respond to the verdict. Their silence was an admission of guilt. No one could point out what the vineyard owner could have done for his vineyard that was not done. The question of “why” went unanswered. Not the Lord but the vineyard was at fault.

5:5–6. These verses provide the verdict. The verdict reflects the idea of a curse from a broken treaty. Briers and thorns represent infertility of the land. The prophet announced a threat of judgment. God was the judge and the executioner of this judgment. The vineyard belonged to God, and God would do with vineyard as he desired. The vineyard must be destroyed!

The “hedge” provided protection around the vineyard. This prevented the cattle from entering the vineyard and trampling the vines. Removal of the hedge would allow wild animals to enter the vineyard and destroy the grapes.

The wall made from the stones gathered out of the field would fall. The owner had constructed the wall, and the owner would break down the wall. The vineyard would lie open and vulnerable to all the wild animals. Israel, too, would lie open and accessible to the pagan nations that surrounded her. As the vineyard became a place of trampling, so too would Israel become a place of trampling for the nations.

Verse 6 echoes the curse in Genesis 3:18. The vineyard would abruptly come to an end. No additional pruning would occur. No soil would be turned. Briers and thorns would grow freely. Briers and thorns denoted the infertility of the land. God would hasten the growth of the weeds by withholding the rain. Only God can command the clouds.

5:7. This verse provides the interpretation of the parable. The phrase “pleasant planting” refers to God’s election of Judah. Yet, “the LORD of hosts” (armies) would act against the vineyard.

God chose Judah not because she was greater or more righteous than other nations. The Lord, within divine sovereignty, chose Judah. Outwardly, Judah was the elect. Inwardly, however, Judah had become a deceiving nation.

The prophet used two special plays on Hebrew words. Mishpat means “justice,” and mishpah means “bloodshed.” Tsedaqah means “righteousness,” and tse’aqah means “a cry.” God waited with eager expectation for
the chosen people to practice “justice” and “righteousness,” but instead he found “bloodshed” and “a cry.” The cries came from those who had been wrongfully oppressed. Notice that “justice” and “righteousness” are things one does, not mere concepts or ideals.

**A Grief Anticipated (5:8–23)**

Verses 8–23 pronounce a series of seven woes on various groups of sinners. Each is a short poem. Each begins with “Ah” (nRSV) or “Woe” (nIV, nASB). The prophet announced a response to the woes with the expression “therefore” found in verses 13, 14, and 24.

**5:8.** The first saying attacked the ruling classes, who used their power to seize land from the farmers who simply attempted to survive. The land seized became part of a larger estate for the wealthy (see also 1 Kings 21; Micah 2:1–2). The crime of the wealthy was not in the purchase of property, but in the manner in which they sought to acquire and monopolize what belonged to the poor property owner. Many of the wealthy in Israel sought to circumvent the laws that were intended to protect the poor. They were guilty of covetousness and selfish ambition.

The expression “add field to field” describes a practice that violated the spirit of the year of Jubilee (the plan for returning land to original owners each fiftieth year; see Leviticus 25). Jubilee recognized that the land belonged to God and was a gift to Israel. However, wealthy landowners prevented the poor from having houses of their own.

**5:9.** In defense of the poor, Yahweh promised that the rich would not inhabit their ill-gotten houses.

**5:10.** The land would lose its productivity. A “bath” is a liquid measure that equals approximately six gallons. A “homer” is a measure that equals approximately six-and-a-half bushels. An “ephah” is equal to one-tenth of a homer. The various measures indicate a small harvest and thus describe a poverty-stricken land.

**5:11–12.** The second woe is directed against those who engaged in drunkenness and debauchery. Drunkenness and riotous behavior characterized their parties and religious feasts (see also Amos 6:4–7).
The “lyre” had strings that ran over a bridge and were plucked by hand. The “harp” was an instrument played by the fingers. The “tambourine” was held and struck by the hand. The “flute” was a small pipe through which the musician would blow air.

The prophet did not condemn music. Indeed, music is a gift from God. Rather the prophet condemned the use of these musical instruments to drown out the voice of conscience. In Isaiah 24:8–12, the prophet proclaimed that such music would come to an end when the city and nation were destroyed.

The phrase “deeds of the LORD” refers to the blessings God bestowed on the people. However, the wicked were too preoccupied with their sin to see God’s grace. Psalm 19:1 states that the firmament declares the work of God’s hands. Those who constantly engaged in sin did not perceive the work of God about them. As the hands of God fashion judgment against the sinner, the sinner is also too preoccupied to see God at work. The “deeds of the LORD” is central to the prophet’s message (see Isa. 5:19; 10:12; 14:24–27; 19:12, 17; 23:9; 28:21; 30:1).

5:13. The verse begins with “therefore,” and then announces punishment. God would send the people into a foreign captivity. The reference is probably to the Babylonian exile. The prophet described the event as though it had already occurred. The exile was a punishment for sin.

The phrase “without knowledge” does not refer to ignorance but to sin. The nation had become so steeped in sin that it did not know the catastrophe that awaited them. Their sin blinded them to the signs of the times. Hunger and thirst would characterize the inhabitants of the land. The eating, drinking, and festivity described in verses 11 and 12 served their evil purposes. Now, the lack of food, drink, and feasts would serve as their punishment. The promise of Deuteronomy 28:36 would come to fruition.

5:14–17. These verses contain a fragment of a judgment saying against Jerusalem. Sheol is the underworld, the place of the dead.

5:18–19. This woe speaks of an unbelieving people. Isaiah used a picture of a heavy cart laboriously drawn not by work animals but by people. The cart they pulled was their own iniquity. They were tied to their own devices. The “cords of falsehood’ by which they attempted to “drag” the cart was their vanity. Sin is a severe taskmaster.
In verse 19, the sinners threw the prophet’s words back on the prophet. They used the name of Isaiah’s son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which carries the idea of haste, in a mocking tone in the Hebrew: “Let him make haste.” They attacked both Isaiah’s family and his person. By doing so, they mocked God. The reference to “the Holy One of Israel” was in mockery.

5:20. The fourth woe condemns the moral wisdom of the sinners. Those who subverted moral distinctions ushered in disorder. They substituted expediency for ethics. They gave lip service to truth, but their actions eradicated all moral imperatives. They worked hard at justifying that which was evil.

5:21. The fifth woe condemns an arrogant people. The leaders no longer relied on the wisdom of Yahweh. They probably justified this behavior under the guise of practicality. A breakdown in moral distinctions occurred. They truly believed that they were doing what was right. However, reliance on an autonomous mind leads to idolatry.

5:22–23. The sixth woe condemns the perversion of justice. The leaders perverted the judicial system by taking bribes. Judah had its men of valor, heroes. However, they were heroes of drinking, not defending the defenseless. They were derelict in their duties. In verse 23, the leaders justified the wicked for a bribe, a payoff, which was the same as depriving innocent people of justice.

Focusing on the Meaning

Isaiah put his audience in the shoes of God, describing in specific terms all that God had done for the people. Then the people had rejected God. What was God to do? God had already done all he possibly could have done to inspire loyalty to him and obedience to the covenant. Now judgment was coming.

Take time to reflect on the specifics of what God has done for you. The line in the hymn is right: “Count your blessings, name them one by one.” The next step should be that we walk in faithfulness to God, who has blessed us so marvelously.
Lesson 8: God’s Dilemma

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Refer to and tell the story in the introductory portion of the lesson in the Study Guide about the college student who wasted the opportunities that were lavished on him. Point out that this story parallels the parable in Isaiah 5 about God’s lavish provisions for his people and how they had wasted their opportunities. Point out that Judah, especially its leaders and the ruling wealthy class, had rebelled against God. They had failed to keep God’s covenant. Life’s pleasures, luxuries, and wealth were more important to them than serving God and meeting the needs of the poor. Now, punishment was coming. This is the message God commissioned Isaiah to deliver to a rebellious nation.

Guide Bible Study

2. Ask members to think of ways God has provided for them, especially during times of need. Ask, How did God meet those needs? How did you respond? Did you respond to him in thankfulness?

3. To provide the setting for today’s lesson, summarize the information in “Isaiah: Trust in a Holy God” in the Study Guide.

4. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 5:1–2. Ask the class to listen for how these verses are described (“my love-song,” Isa. 5:1) and how God had provided for his vineyard (5:1–2). Note that these verses form a song sung to an audience. The audience might have enjoyed the first and all of the second verse, except the last sentence. Lead the class to identify the ways in which the vineyard owner had provided for the vineyard (good location, good soil, cleared of stones, choice vines, watchtower, wine vat). Ask, What more could have God done? (Nothing) Ask, If someone today were to write a song like the song of the vineyard to describe life today, what would its lyrics say?
5. Have someone read Isaiah 5:3–4 while the class listens for what the vineyard produced in spite of God’s provisions (“wild grapes,” 5:4).

6. Invite someone to read 5:5–7 while the class listens for how God would respond to the poor harvest in spite of all his efforts. Receive reports, and then focus on verse 7. Use information from the Study Guide and “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide to explain the wordplays in this verse.

7. Point out that verses 8–23 consist of a series of woes. Each woe is introduced by “Ah” (nrsv) or “Woe” (niv, nasb). Ask, How would you define the word “woe”? Note from the Study Guide that it is “a nonverbal utterance akin to a moan or a sigh, expressing a combination of anger and sorrow.” Lead the class to scan these verses to find where each woe begins (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22). Enlist someone to read 5:8–13, 18–23. Point out that the greed and corruption of the wealthy land owners is singled out.

8. Assign each woe to a small group or pair. (Combine assignments if fewer than twelve people are in attendance.) Give these instructions: (a) Read the assigned Scripture in at least two translations. (b) Summarize the meaning of the woe, using information from the Study Guide as seems helpful. (c) Provide at least one example of how this woe applies to today. (A copy of these instructions is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

(1) Isaiah 5:8–10
(2) Isaiah 5:11–13
(3) Isaiah 5:18–19
(4) Isaiah 5:20
(5) Isaiah 5:21
(6) Isaiah 5:22–23

9. State that verses 24–30 describe the punishment Judah would receive because of the corruption. God had built a solid case against the wrongdoers of Judah and now punishment must take place.
Encourage Application

10. Give each participant a piece of paper. Have them list blessings God has provided for them. Receive reports. Then ask, How have we responded to God for his good provisions? Should our attitude toward God and others be different than it is now?

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Use the following thoughts to introduce today’s study: Many times we do not appreciate what we have in life until it is gone. Christians sometimes take for granted the obvious blessings of God such as health, family, children, spouse, and friends. Adults sometimes look back with regret that they have not been more appreciative of the good things and the good times they received when God gave them these gifts. Sadly at times, we do not fully recognize God’s gracious provisions, love, and care. It sometimes only comes after reflection or perhaps not at all. This was true for Judah. Even though God had given them many good gifts, they openly rebelled again him, which brought them into his judgment.

   Recall the song “My Way,” probably most identified with Frank Sinatra. (Find the lyrics to the song by doing a google search, or you might ask the class whether they recall the lyrics and try to reconstruct them.) Point out that the lyrics tell the story of a person reflecting on his life as he realizes his mortality. The singer takes responsibility for how he dealt with life’s decisions. He wants others to know that he did life as he wanted to without the help of anyone else. There seems to be sadness in the song. No mention is made of God, family, or help received from others.

Guide Bible Study

2. Invite someone to read Isaiah 5:1–7. Note how God provided all that was needed for a good vineyard: good soil, careful cultivation,
the finest vines, a watchtower for protection, and a winepress. Ask, *Assuming good weather with adequate rainfall, what would you expect at harvest time in such a situation?* Most farmers would expect good grapes; however, only bad, smelly grapes were produced.

3. Read verse 7 again. Notice that the owner of the vineyard is identified as the Lord and the vineyard represents Israel and Judah. Point out that the verse uses a wordplay in the Hebrew. God was looking for “justice” (*mishpat*), but found “bloodshed” (*mispah*). He was looking for “righteousness” (*cedaqah*), but heard only “a cry” (*ce’aqah*). Ask how that was similar to what happened in the vineyard (“wild grapes” instead of good grapes).

4. Use information from the *Study Guide* or “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide* to introduce the woes in Isaiah 5:8–23. Lead the class to find where each woe begins in these verses by scanning the verses looking for the word “Woe” (*niv*, *nasb*) or “Ah” (*nrsv*). Read Isaiah 5:8–13, 18–23. Note that the Hebrew word, *hoy*, for the word “woe” is a nonverbal expression like a moan or a sigh. It expresses anger and sorrow.

5. Enlist someone to read the passage of Scripture for each woe. After each reading, summarize the meaning in the time of Isaiah (see the lesson in the *Study Guide* and “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide*). Ask, *Can you think of a contemporary example of each woe?*

   (1) Isaiah 5:8–10
   (2) Isaiah 5:11–13
   (3) Isaiah 5:18–19
   (4) Isaiah 5:20
   (5) Isaiah 5:21
   (6) Isaiah 5:22–23

6. Point out that God had built a case against the leaders of Judah. Because of their corruption, the nation would receive severe punishment.
Encourage Application

7. Draw a line down the middle of a markerboard. On the left side at the top, write the words “Life’s Problems” and on the right side at the top write “God’s Solutions.” Have class members list life problems and how God responded to their problems to provide a solution. Write their responses on the markerboard, and have class members explain how God had provided the solutions for them.

8. Refer to and summarize “For Life Today” in the Study Guide.

NOTES

3. See Isaiah 8:1, 3.
FOCAL TEXT
Isaiah 6

BACKGROUND
Isaiah 6

MAIN IDEA
God gave Isaiah the hard assignment of delivering God’s message of judgment, even doom.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
Do we think every experience of worship and every message of God needs to be a feel-good time?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to analyze what they expect from an experience with God and determine to be more open to God’s purposes

LESSON NINE
Called to a Hard Job

ISAIAH
Trust in a Holy God

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Understanding the Context

The location of the prophet at the time of the vision may not be known, but the setting of the vision seems clear—the throne room of heaven where the holy God sits. In the vision, Isaiah was wondrously provided access to this most secret of heavenly places. One could only dream of such a place. As an earthly intruder, he observed the seraphim, who are utterly devoted to Yahweh, honoring the deity with every movement they make. Everywhere, there is a movement of praise for God. This is the center of holiness. This is the center of creation. From here all that is decreed happens everywhere in creation.

No choir is more majestic than the heavenly choir Isaiah witnessed. The complete otherness of God is celebrated. No earthly liturgy can duplicate what the prophet encountered.

The prophet sought to describe for his readers this unique experience. Attempts to verbalize what he saw pale in light of the reality. God’s holiness is incalculable!

In this vision, we learn that the opposite of holy is unclean. Only God is and can be holy; and, in light of God’s holiness, our uncleanness stands out. The uncleanness must and can be removed, but we can never achieve the holiness of the Holy One of Israel.

The Syro-Ephraimite war of 734 B.C. provides the background to this event. Syria and the Northern kingdom (Ephraim) had joined forces against Judah to force Judah to join a coalition of states against the rising Assyrian threat.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Isaiah’s Inaugural Vision (6:1–13)

Isaiah 6 is both a theophany and a commissioning. It includes a vision, a call, and a nullification. The Scriptures contain similar, although different, scenes (see 1 Kings 22:19–23; Ezekiel 1:4—2:1; Job 1—2). Some have argued that the passage is an inauguration vision in preparation for a
particular ministry as presented in Isaiah 7—8. Others view the chapter as Isaiah’s original call to his prophetic ministry. Verse 5 appears to support the concept that this is an inaugural call.

Chapters 2—5 appear to belong to the beginning of Isaiah’s ministry. They also set the stage for the introduction of the prophet Isaiah. Chapter 6 contains both a vision and a message. The message may be an appendage to the vision or the vision may introduce the message. Regardless, the two belong together.

A Vision That Recruits (6:1–8)

6:1. The actual date of the death of Uzziah is unknown. Suggestions range from 748 to 734 B.C. Uzziah is also known as Azariah in 2 Kings 15:1–7.

The reign of Uzziah was prosperous and peaceful. During the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah the boundaries of Israel and Judah mirrored the boundaries in the reigns of David and Solomon.

Following the death of Jeroboam II, the Northern kingdom fell into anarchy. The kingdom of Judah also declined. A revitalized Assyrian Empire placed pressure on the entire region. Isaiah’s vision occurred in the year that Uzziah died.

The statement “I saw the Lord” does not indicate that Isaiah saw a physical image of the invisible God. Isaiah’s view of the Lord was through a vision. The location of Isaiah when he saw the vision is unclear. Isaiah could have been in his home or in the temple.

The text does not claim Isaiah saw the Lord because the prophet was more spiritual than other people. Rather Isaiah saw Yahweh because Yahweh revealed himself to the prophet.

6:2. An entourage normally accompanies earthly monarchs. The seraphim accompanied Yahweh. Their name means the burning ones. This is the only passage in the Old Testament that mentions the seraphim. They are described as having faces, feet, and hands. They utilize human speech. They also have wings.

The heavenly court contained both the seraphim and the cherubim. The cherubim are positioned over the mercy seat of the ark. The seraphim stand around and above the throne as Yahweh’s attendants.
Each seraph possessed three pairs of wings. In reference to Yahweh, each seraph covered his face with two wings. The statement “they covered their feet” is probably a euphemism for the genitals. With the third set of wings, the seraphs flew about doing the will of the Lord. The seraphs stood ready to serve Yahweh.

6:3. The seraphs continually praise God. They engage in the unbroken task of singing the deity’s praises.

The word “holy” is the Hebrew word qadosh. The Hebrew word implies a sense of to separate, cut off. Terms such as separateness and unapproachableness capture the idea. That which is holy is always separated from the ordinary human sphere. God exists in absolute independence of creation. Yahweh is God, not human.

The threefold reference to “holy, holy, holy” is not a reference to the Trinity. Rather, the threefold repetition is for emphasis. It expresses the superlative. The threefold repetition signifies the perfection of the deity. Isaiah’s favorite designation for God is “the holy one of Israel” (see Isaiah 1:4, for example).

In this vision, Isaiah received a glimpse into eternity. The vision was an accommodation to the capacity of the prophet.

The expression “the whole earth is full of his glory” claims that the entire created universe reflects God’s glory. God’s “glory” refers to God’s attributes. The theater in which God manifests his “glory” is “the whole earth.”

6:4. The sound of the seraphim shook the threshold. As the threshold swayed at the sound of the seraphim, smoke filled the temple. The smoke might have resulted from the fire on the altar or from the incense.

6:5. In the presence of God’s holiness, Isaiah’s uncleanness is manifested. The opposite of holy in the Old Testament is unclean, not unholy. God is holy, but we are unclean. Our uncleanness becomes a major issue in the presence of the divine holiness. Confronted with his uncleanness in the presence of God’s holiness, Isaiah felt doomed to die. The cause of Isaiah’s concern is seen in the acknowledgment, “I am a man of unclean lips.” The seraphim had praised God with their lips, an act Isaiah could not replicate. One who is unclean cannot approach the holy God.
Not only was the prophet unfit to praise God, but the entire nation was unclean and unfit to praise God. Praise of God is a privilege, not a right. Only those whose guilt God has removed may praise God.

6:6. The seraphim did not banish Isaiah from the presence of the Lord. Instead they removed his uncleanliness before the presence of the Lord. One of the seraphs flew toward Isaiah with a hot coal from the altar.

This passage does not teach Isaiah’s conversion. We are all, believer and unbeliever, unclean in the eyes of God. The biblical writers often use fire as a form of purification. Touching the hot coal to Isaiah’s lips symbolized the removal of uncleanliness.

6:7. The necessary propitiation for Isaiah’s uncleanliness had been made. His uncleanliness was removed.

“Guilt” refers to the violation of the ethical demands of God. The removal of the guilt removed the obstacle in the path of divine forgiveness and human service. Guilt prevents human service to God. Guilt stands in the way of human service and divine forgiveness. Uncleanliness must be removed in order for there to be divine forgiveness and human service to the deity.

The Divine Calling (6:8)

For the first time in the vision, the Lord spoke. The Lord asked, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” The question is rhetorical, designed to elicit a response from Isaiah. The use of the plural pronoun “us” is the plural of majesty. It may also include the heavenly court. We may see in the use of the plural pronoun another glimpse of the divine nature. This is not a reference to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Isaiah’s response was immediate. Before the removal of his uncleanness, Isaiah was doomed; he had no hope. With the removal of his uncleanliness, Isaiah stood ready to serve the sovereign Lord. Without knowing the mission, Isaiah proclaimed, “Here am I; send me!” Only after Isaiah acknowledged his guilt was he able and ready to serve the Lord.
A Message of Nullification (6:9–13)

6:9. The divine command followed immediately. The people of the land were commanded to do the very thing that would bring about their destruction. The prophet was to instruct the people to hear, but of course they would not listen. They would do the very opposite of the message they had heard from the prophet.

Note the expression “this people.” The Lord did not refer to them as my people. They belonged to the Lord, but they were unfaithful to the Lord.

The actual saying in these verses may have been a contemporary proverb. The prophet demanded continual hearing on the part of the people. However, they could not comprehend the message. The more they heard, the more insensitive they became.

6:10. The prophet’s work would result in the hardening of the heart of the people. The prophet’s message would have the opposite result desired by a prophet. The Lord continued to refer to people as “this people,” not my people.

No person will repent from sin until that person first sees that he or she is a sinner. The ability to see one’s sin is a gift from God, but the gift would be withheld from this people. Only those who have been freed from their uncleanness would understand. The tragedy of the verses is that when Isaiah preached, the minds of the people would not understand and the people would not turn from their sin.

No amount of preaching would turn the people of God. This was a veiled announcement that the Assyrians and the Babylonians would bring about an end to Israel and Judah.

6:11. Knowing the grave nature of the mission, Isaiah cried out, “How long, O Lord?” The prophet was truly concerned for his people. He interceded for the nation. The prophet did not seek to modify God’s judgment. That he could not do. Therefore, the prophet had no choice but to proclaim the message of God even if it resulted in hardening the heart of his people. The prophet was both compassionate and committed.

The Lord’s answer is sobering. The cities of Judah that had no time for God, the Lord had no time for them. They would become ghost towns, a desolate landscape. Individual houses would stand vacant with
no one to inhabit them. This would be the result of war that the Lord would bring upon the land of Judah.

6:12. The Lord had chosen Israel and had given Israel a land flowing with milk and honey. Now, the Lord would remove Israel from the land of promise. The verse provides a general description of the exile.

6:13. The reference to “a tenth” indicates a small proportion. The Lord would not leave even a small proportion. Everyone would face God’s judgment and exile. Again, the prophet made use of hyperbole to illustrate the fate awaiting Judah. All that would remain following God’s judgment was a stump.

Focusing on the Meaning

From the highest peak of a mountain to the deepest recesses of the earth, this chapter takes the reader on a roller coaster ride. How can anyone witness the holiness of God and not be moved? Many in Judah knew of the Lord’s holiness, but they closed their eyes and ears to their own destruction.

Several important facets of the passage remain contemporary to all generations, including these:
- The Lord is a holy God, incomparable to everything else.
- The Lord deserves the praise of all creation, including people.
- Since God is holy, we cannot approach God in our state of uncleanness.
- Uncleanness must be removed.
- We cannot remove uncleanness on our own, but the removal of uncleanness results from Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.
- With the removal of our uncleanness, we can approach God.
- When we approach the Holy One, we are compelled to do as the Lord commands, no matter how difficult or strange the assignment seems to us.
- Failure to remove the uncleanness always results in devastation.
Lesson 9: Called to a Hard Job

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Write this question on the board before class begins: “What is the hardest job in America?” Refer to the question as you begin the class. Ask, What do you think are the toughest jobs today? Jot down responses on the markerboard. Ask, Why do you think these are the toughest jobs?

2. Ask, Who are some biblical characters who had difficult job assignments? (Ideas: Moses bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, Joshua settling the Israelites in the Promised Land, Paul and his establishment of many churches, and the most difficult job assignment of all, the work and ministry of Jesus.) Note that in today’s lesson God gave Isaiah the hard assignment of delivering his message of judgment and doom to a people who rebelled against him. This was a hard and dangerous assignment.

Guide Bible Study

3. Refer to the study aim for this lesson in the Study Guide and invite someone to read it.

4. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 6:1–4, and ask participants to listen for what Isaiah saw. Ask, What did Isaiah see? Receive reports, and provide further explanations and insights from the Study Guide and “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide. Lead the class to imagine experiencing what Isaiah saw. Ask, What would your reaction be to these events?

5. Prior to the class session, enlist a class member to summarize the small article, “Seraphs and Cherubs,” in the Study Guide. Call for the summary now.
6. Have someone read Isaiah 6:5–7 while the class listens for Isaiah’s response and what happened next. Ask, *What does the word “woe” mean?* Note this explanation from the *Study Guide*: “It’s an untranslatable emotional expression like our word *ah* that can express anger and/or grief. Here it expresses grief. . . .” State that Isaiah realized he was a sinful man in the presence of God in his throne room in heaven. Isaiah felt “ruined” because of his sin and thought this experience would end his life. However, one of the seraphs flew a live coal to Isaiah and touched his mouth, symbolizing the removal of his sin and guilt. This vision may suggest that there is no painless way of dealing with sin.

7. Invite someone to read Isaiah 6:8–13 while the class listens for God’s call and the message God gave to Isaiah. Note that Isaiah responded in a positive way to the Lord’s question, “Whom shall I send?” even though Isaiah had no idea of the assignment God had for him. State that God calls all people to do his will and accomplish his purpose. State the following:
   - God initially calls individuals to a restored relationship with him through Jesus Christ.
   - God wants us to grow into mature disciples of his.
   - God wants to reveal his unique purpose and call to each person.
   - God places a desire and passion in each individual to do the things God calls him or her to do.
   - God gives spiritual gifts to equip each individual for the calling.

8. Explain the message God gave Isaiah to deliver in 6:9–13 by using information in the *Study Guide* and in “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide*.

**Encourage Application**

9. Refer to the questions in the *Study Guide*. Form four groups in the class and assign one question to each group. Plus assign these three questions to all of the groups: *Do we think every experience of worship and every message of God needs to be a feel-good time?* (the Question to Consider) *What do we expect from an experience with*
God? What can we do to be more open to God’s purposes? (A copy of these instructions is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.) Allow about nine minutes for this assignment and then receive reports.

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Lead participants to name things they have experienced in life that have been especially hard for them to do. List ideas on the board. (Examples: completing their education; getting the job they wanted; balancing family, work, school, finances; disciplining a son or daughter; having to fire someone at work; being fired at work.) Ask, Where did you find strength to deal with these problems?

2. Invite someone to read the study aim for this session from the Study Guide.

Guide Bible Study

3. Set Isaiah 6 in context by summarizing information from “Understanding the Context” and “Isaiah’s Inaugural Vision” in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 6:1–4 while the class listens for what Isaiah experienced. Share insights on these verses from the Study Guide and “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide.

4. Invite someone to read Isaiah 6:5–7 while the class listens for Isaiah’s response to the vision of the Lord. Point out that Isaiah said he was “ruined” (6:5, NIV) because he was “a man of unclean lips.” However, Isaiah’s sin was atoned for by the live coal that a seraph had taken from the altar and that touched his lips. This may suggest that there is no painless way of removing sin.

5. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 6:8 while the class listens for God’s call to Isaiah. State: When the Lord said, “Whom shall I send?” (6:8) Isaiah seemed to respond quickly, even though he did not know what
the specific job assignment would be. Ask, In what ways has God called you? How did you first hear and respond to Jesus as your personal Savior? How have you grown as a disciple of Jesus? Who was important in helping you to grow in your faith? How has God called you in his service today? Have you responded to that call?

6. Have someone read verses 9–13. Describe Isaiah’s specific job assignment. This assignment was not a pleasant task for Isaiah to carry out. Ask, How would you feel if God had given you a similar task? Point out that God knew it would take great courage and boldness to deliver this message. It was God’s desire that his people turn to him in repentance; however, he knew they would not. They would be taken into exile. It was God’s plan that he would not completely destroy his people. Like a tree that was cut down and a stump left, a small remnant would remain to continue God’s purpose.

Encourage Application

7. Refer to and summarize the small article “A Question About Sermons” in the Study Guide. Ask, Why do you think some people expect that every message of God needs to be a feel-good experience? Continue by asking, What do we expect from an experience with God? What can we do to be more open to God’s purposes?

8. Summarize “For Life Today” in the Study Guide.

NOTES

1. A statement often attributed to the leadership guru, Peter Drucker, is that when he was asked to identify the four hardest jobs in America, he listed these: president of the United States; university president; CEO of a hospital, and pastor.
FOCAL TEXT
Isaiah 10:5–7, 12, 15–27b; 11:1–10

BACKGROUND
Isaiah 10:5—11:16

MAIN IDEA
Isaiah prophesied that God was working actively in the events of his day and the days to come.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
What is God doing in history?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to describe how Isaiah saw God acting in the events of his day and state what God is continuing to do in history
Understanding the Context

The historical setting for Isaiah 10 is difficult to determine. Verse 9 refers to Carchemish, which fell in 717 B.C. Most of the oracles in chapters 7—12 were delivered during the reign of Ahaz, who died about 715 B.C. Therefore, these messages might have occurred between 717 and 701, the year of Sennacherib’s invasion.

These verses are strongly theological and express a strong sense of the Lord’s sovereignty. For Isaiah, the rise and fall of nations was in the hands of God. What would replace the evil empires in the world? Isaiah expressed hope in a new, messianic kingdom ruled by a righteous king from the line of David. As God controlled the fate of all prior kingdoms, so Yahweh would raise up the ideal kingdom.

Unfortunately, the people of Isaiah’s day did not have a model king or kingdom. All they knew was a nation either compromising with the Assyrians or appeasing the Assyrians. They knew the Assyrians to be the cruelest of all people in the Near East. Even the davidic king of Judah, Ahaz, compromised with the Assyrians. Therefore, the vulnerable people in Judah suffered the most.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Isaiah 8:16—12:6 addresses the rise of the righteous davidic king, a king in David’s line and like him. In the midst of the Assyrian crisis, Isaiah prophesied that God was actively at work. Ultimately, the Lord would raise up a righteous ruler. However, Isaiah first spoke to the Assyrian situation. The oracles portray the Assyrian king as arrogant. When a divine tool becomes too arrogant, God will intervene (10:5–19).

Assyria’s Arrogance (10:5–7, 12, 15)

The Assyrian king believed that his own power enabled him to threaten the land of Israel and Judah. God had a different idea.
10:5. The Lord raised up foreign, pagan nations as instruments to punish Israel and Judah. Babylon and Assyria were among those nations. The Assyrians did not recognize that the Lord had given them the power by which they conquered the Near East. Judgment would come to Judah, but woe to that nation by whom the Lord brought divine judgment. The Assyrian army was the instrument, but the Lord’s fury was the real power behind the club. Therefore, the nation itself and the power of that nation were controlled by God.

10:6. God alone had the power to raise up and send a nation like Assyria against Judah. The reference to Judah changed from my people to “the people” described as a “godless nation.” Consider the irony. Judah, the object of God’s affection, has become a “godless nation” and would be judged by an even more godless nation—Assyria. The terms “spoil,” “plunder,” and “tread down” illustrate the utter lack of concern on the part of the Assyrian armies.

10:7. Assyria was an unwitting instrument in the hands of Yahweh. The Assyrians were clueless that they were doing the bidding of Yahweh, the God of the nation they sought to destroy. However, the Assyrians were themselves without excuse.

10:12. Assyria boasted of its power. God now boasted what he would do to the Assyrians. The work within Judah might appear to be the work of the Assyrians, but in reality, it was the work of Yahweh. The Assyrians must face divine punishment, but only after the Lord was finished with the punishment of Judah. When God was finished using Assyria, God would punish them. Their self-glorification would end in divine retribution. The instrument of God is not beyond divine accountability.

10:15. Assyria’s arrogant boasting would not go unpunished. Assyria was only an ax, not the one who wielded the ax. Isaiah used four examples to drive home the point: ax, saw, rod, and staff. These are merely instruments and have no power without the hand that holds them. They are all lifeless. The real power is in the hand that holds them.
The Great Fire of God (10:16–19)

10:16. Verses 16–19 indicate that the Lord would bring down the Assyrian king. Isaiah referred to the Lord as “Sovereign.” Yahweh is the warrior god, as seen by the expression “hosts,” which means armies. The God of the armies would wage war against the armies of the Assyrians. The Assyrian army was the best army the world had witnessed; yet, Yahweh would decimate these mighty warriors. Assyria’s glory—military magnificence—would become kindling for a fire.

10:17. Israel would have understood the metaphor of “light” for God. To Assyria, Israel’s God would become a consuming fire. However, before Yahweh consumed the Assyrians, Assyria’s magnificence would become “thorns and briers,” an indication that Assyria would decline before its final destruction. Assyria’s would die “in one day.” God would raise up another nation to consume the Assyrians. Eventually, the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrians.

10:18–19. After the “thorns and briers” burn, the flames leap higher to consume the high trees in the forest. Indeed, the Assyrian army was composed of warriors from many conquered nations and was like a forest of many trees. Isaiah compared Assyria’s fall to that of a sickly person gradually wasting away as death approaches. The prophet successfully mixed the metaphors of fire and sickness. Assyria eventually would pine away to nothing. Only a remnant of trees would remain, so few a child could count them.

Return of the Remnant (10:20–23)

10:20. The verse begins with the eschatological formula “on that day,” which means soon but not now. For years King Ahaz relied on the Assyrians and promoted Assyrian culture in Judah. With the fall of Assyria, Judah would have to depend on Yahweh. Assyria was not protector but smiter.

10:21. “A remnant will return” (10:22) translates the name of Isaiah’s son, “Shear-jashub” (7:3). The expression indicates that a true remnant would lean on Yahweh, not the Assyrians. The Lord is “the mighty God.”
10:22. Reliance on Abraham as one’s ancestor (Genesis 15) would not guarantee survival. Only a remnant of Abraham’s offspring would return. For the masses, there would be no salvation.

10:23. The warrior God, not the Assyrians, would bring an end to everything. God’s purpose is irrevocable. The whole earth would feel the effect of Yahweh’s work.

No Fear of Assyria (10:24–27a)

10:24. Verse 19 describes the future of the Assyrians as a small forest; therefore, Israel should not fear the Assyrians. In verse 24, Yahweh spoke of Israel as “my people” rather “the people” or “a godless nation” (10:6). “Zion” indicates the place where God dwells. Since Yahweh was in Zion, the people had nothing to fear.

10:25. When Yahweh instructs people not to fear, there is good reason. The expression “in a very little while” indicates soon, but not now. Yahweh’s indignation would end and not last forever. With the end of the Lord’s wrath, divine indignation would turn against the Assyrians. Indeed, the Babylonians eventually annihilated the Assyrians.

10:26. The warrior God would raise up a scourge against Assyria. The phrase “rock of Oreb” refers to Gideon’s defeat of the Midianite princes centuries earlier (Judges 7—8). Too, as the Egyptian army that pursued the Israelites into the wilderness perished in the sea during the Exodus, so too, the Lord would cause the Assyrians to perish.

10:27. “On that day”—soon but not now—the Lord would break Assyria’s yoke on Israel and Judah. As an animal labors under a yoke, so Israel had suffered under the Assyrian yoke. Yahweh would bring an end to this slavery.

A Shoot of Newness (11:1–3a)

Isaiah 11 presents a new beginning, a new hope for God’s people. Verses 1–10 describe characteristics of the messiah and the kingdom of peace. A new shoot from the stump of Jesse would produce a new davidic
monarch. The new monarch would reunite Judah and Israel, defeat the nations that oppressed the land, and return the exiles from the Assyrian provinces.

11:1. In contrast to the small, dying forest of Assyria, the prophet announced that Judah’s future was bright. “Jesse” was the father of David, king of Israel. All that remained of David’s kingdom was the small, insignificant Judah. The once great kingdom of Judah and Israel was now described as a “stump.” Isaiah pointed to a small “shoot” from the stump as Judah’s hope.

11:2–3a. The new leader would be endowed with wisdom. The Lord would endow the one who was to sit on the throne of David. Isaiah listed three pairs of parallelisms to describe the gifts bestowed on the “shoot” to come from Jesse: “wisdom and understanding”; “counsel and might”; and “knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” “The spirit of the Lord” assures these gifts. Individuals may possess some of these traits. However, only Yahweh’s Messiah will bear all of the traits. The list is only selective.

“Wisdom and understanding” belong to Yahweh and are derived from him. They refer to the ability to appraise situations rightly and to render just decisions.

“Counsel and might” represent the practical sphere of life. These words refer to ability to carry out wisely laid plans.

“Knowledge and the fear of the Lord” refer to the content of the gifts. The expression “the fear of the Lord” is interpreted as the love of God’s instructions according to Proverbs 1 and Psalm 19. “The fear of the Lord” is the heart and soul of biblical religion. This is not the same as being afraid of God or even having reverence for God. Rather it is the love of God’s instructions. Love of God’s instructions is foundational to a right relationship with God.

Righteous Judge (11:3b–5)

11:3b. The love of God’s instructions brings joy to the messianic figure. He will not base his judgment on the ordinary sources of information. Absolute justice is based on absolute knowledge. Only absolute love for God’s instructions can lead to true justice.
Lesson 10: History = His Story

11:4. “The poor” and “the meek” are the most vulnerable in society. Leaders in Isaiah’s day did not treat society’s most vulnerable citizens with justice. Yahweh’s true judge would demonstrate fairness for the weak. Those who arbitrated often took bribes, bribes the poor could not afford to pay. In the ideal messianic kingdom, there is no acceptance of bribes. Yahweh’s ruler will demonstrate absolute fairness. Perfect equity is assured.

The wicked who abused the poor would become the objects of the Lord’s wrath. The expression “rod of his mouth” and “breath of his lips” harken back to “the fear of the L ORD,” the love of God’s instructions. The wicked do not love God’s instructions and will die by the very words they reject. God speaks, and the wicked perish.

11:5. The ideal messianic figure will gird himself as a warrior dresses for battle. “Righteousness” parallels “faithfulness” in verse 5, indicating that they are the same. The messiah does what is right and, therefore, demonstrates faithfulness to Yahweh’s instructions. The belt was worn by one ready to wrestle an opponent. The Lord’s messianic figure would come fully prepared to defend the defenseless. He who is girded with righteousness and faithfulness is prepared to engage any foe.

Universal Peace and Removal of Sin (11:6–10)

Verses 6–9 describe the ideal messianic kingdom, which represents the polar opposite of human kingdoms. All enmity in creation will disappear. The wolf, the leopard, and the lion are animals of prey. In contrast, there is the lamb, the kid, and the calf, each susceptible to the animals of prey. What makes the passage so remarkable is that a small child will lead them, not just the domesticated animals but wild animals of prey.

11:7. The noble lion will find itself at peace with the domestic animals. Animals of prey will behave like domestic animals. This peace is permanent and perpetual as seen in the young lying down together.

11:8. The most ancient of enemies—human and serpent—will live in peace. The most helpless of human beings, the recently weaned child, will not suffer harm from the snake, humanity’s most deadly enemy in the ancient world. These verses describe the complete reversal of the curse
of Genesis 3. The enmity between humans and the animal kingdom is symptomatic of the sin condition that affects the entire creation. In this ideal messianic kingdom, the condition of sin has been removed.

11:9. In the present world, humanity does harm; in the ideal messianic kingdom, humanity will do no harm.

The “knowledge of the Lord” is a reflection of the love of God’s instruction. Where there is the love of God’s instructions, there is no harm or injustice. Theoretical and practical knowledge come from loving God’s instructions.

The “holy mountain” is Zion, the place of Yahweh’s dwelling. The people of Yahweh dwell in Zion, and Yahweh dwells in their midst. The knowledge of God covers the land and the sea.

Before there can be peace, though, there must first be a love for God’s instructions.

11:10. Jesse’s root is the basis that produces the new trunk from which the Messiah will come. As the root sprouts into a branch, the people will gather about the new line of David. What follows will be a homecoming and salvation (Isa. 11:11–16).

**Focusing on the Meaning**

Isaiah saw God actively participating in the events of his day. God was no passive, wimpy deity. Have we come to the place in our modern culture that there is no room for God? We can explain the origin of just about everything around us, good or bad. How would you respond to someone in our day explaining that events around us are the work of God?

Is God finished working in history? Was the incarnation God’s final involvement with humanity? How does God get involved in the contemporary world around us? Since no nation lasts forever, how do you think people in the future will describe the rise and fall of the United States?
Lesson 10: History = His Story

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Ask, Who are some Bible characters through whom God acted to change the events of history for his purposes? (Examples: Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Paul.) Ask, How did God work in and through the lives of these people to change the course of history? Can you think of some people in recent times who have changed history? Do you think God is related to what they did? How?

   Point out that this lesson’s Scriptures provide an opportunity to consider what God is continuing to do in history in our day as we look at how Isaiah saw God acting in history in his day.

Guide Bible Study

2. Prior to the session, enlist a participant to summarize the first three paragraphs in the Study Guide under the heading, “Assyria, Instrument of God?” to explain the historical background. Call for this report now.

3. Have a member read Isaiah 10:1–4. Ask the class to identify from verses 1–2 the acts for which Judah was to be punished. Ask, Do we consider these to be sins? Or do we consider sins to be only individual actions that seem directly to break the Ten Commandments? Why did God condemn the people for these actions?

4. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 10:5–7, 12 while the class listens for why Assyria was to be punished. Note that “woe” (NIV) is the first word of verse 1, which introduces God’s judgment on Judah. Point out that this “woe” (NIV) was aimed at Assyria. Both Judah and Assyria would receive judgment. Ask, Why was Assyria to be punished when God had used them to punish Judah? Continue by asking, What do you think about the statement, “What goes around, comes around?” Do you think this is sometimes true? Note that
Isaiah clearly understood that Assyria was used by God to punish Judah. However, after Judah was punished, God turned the tables on Assyria and punished them for their evil deeds.

5. Prior to class, write the words “wrath,” “greed,” “sloth,” “pride,” “lust,” “envy,” and “gluttony” on small but readable posters and display them around the room. Read verse 12 again. Refer to the posters, and state that the concept of the seven deadly sins was introduced in early Christian history. Ask, *What do you think is the worst sin of these seven?* After discussion, state that many theologians identify “pride” as the worst. Ask, *Why do you think “pride” may be the worst of these sins?* (Perhaps because it is the source of all the others.) Point out that God condemned Assyria for its “haughty pride.”

6. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 10:15–19. After the reading, ask, *Of all the tools you have at home, what tool is the most useful to you? What use is this tool if it is not used by you or somebody else?* State that Assyria was only a tool in the hands of God to punish Judah. Assyrian power did not come from its own strength but from God. Their pride would lead them to their downfall.

7. Read Isaiah 10:20–27. Enlist someone in advance to summarize the small article, “In That Day.” Ask, *What do you think is the most frequent command in the Bible?* After discussion, state that it is, *Do not fear* (see 10:24). Point out that God’s message through Isaiah in this passage was that Judah’s punishment was nearly over. The remnant of Judah would rely on the Lord and turn to him in obedience. After this, God would pour out his judgment on the Assyrians. Ask, *What are you afraid of today? Have you taken your fears to God? Have you sought his answer for your needs?*

8. Read Isaiah 11:1–10 and note that “the stump of Jesse” (11:1) represents a descendant of the father of King David. The gist of the passage is that a new king—a messiah—would come. Ask, *How would this king be different from Judah’s current rulers?* (see 11:2) *What would this new king do?* (see 11:3–5) *How would this new king’s actions be different from the actions for which Judah was being condemned?* Lead the group to contrast 11:3–5 and 10:1–2.
Emphasize that this new king would be a righteous judge, delivering the innocent and punishing the wicked. Ask, *What would life be like under this new way of ruling?* (see 11:6–10) Point out that the ultimate fulfillment of this promise was in Jesus.

**Encourage Application**

9. Refer to “Applying This Lesson to Life” in the *Study Guide*. Ask participants to group themselves by twos or threes to review and discuss what these paragraphs and the lesson Scriptures suggest to them. Receive reports after about five minutes.

**Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions**

**Connect with Life**

1. Begin by pointing out that the ancient Greeks believed that as the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter repeated each year, so did history follow a cycle. Since history was just the repetition of destined events, which could not be affected by human power, the Greeks understood that history had no meaning or goal. Unlike the Greek view, Christians believe that God created the world with purpose, that God acts within history for his purposes, and that at the proper time God will close out history.

**Guide Bible Study**

2. To introduce today’s lesson, relate the following information about Assyria:
   - The Assyrians were a nation of brutal warriors determined to advance their empire westward to take over Israel and Judah.
   - For many years Israel and Judah fought against Assyria with little success.
   - Many revolts against Assyria failed including the final revolt of Israel in 722 B.C., which led to the demise of the Northern kingdom.
With a change of leadership in Assyria in 701 B.C., King Hezekiah decided to revolt again against Assyria. Hezekiah asked for help from Egypt against the Assyrians. The result of this action was that all of Judah outside of Jerusalem was destroyed by the new emperor.

Add further insights from “Assyria, Instrument of God?” in the Study Guide and “Understanding the Context” in this Teaching Guide. Ask, Why do you think God used such an evil empire to judge Israel and Judah?

3. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 10:1–4 while the class listens for why Judah was to be punished. Call for responses, and write them on the board.

4. Invite someone to read Isaiah 10:5–7, 12. Explain these verses using information in the Study Guide and in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide. Ask, Do you think God sometimes uses unbelievers as well as believers to accomplish his plan?

5. Read verse 12 again. Write the word “pride” on the board. State that Isaiah indicates that Assyria was guilty of the sin of “pride.” Point out that of what is called the seven deadly sins (wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony), the sin of pride is seen by many theologians as the worst. Ask, Why is pride so bad? (Perhaps because it is the source of the others) Note that pride carries with it destructive attitudes such as:
   - You have all of life under your control.
   - The world revolves around you.
   - You are all-powerful, all-knowing.
   - You do not have to follow the rules other people have to follow.
   - You have all the answers.

State that Assyria may have had all of these attitudes.

6. Have someone read Isaiah 10:15–19. Point out that Isaiah said that Assyria was only an ax, a rod, a club. It was the Lord who allowed Assyria to do anything. Because of Assyria’s great pride, in only one day the Lord would reduce Assyria’s army to only a few soldiers.
According to 2 Kings 19:35, the Assyrian army was decimated in only one night. Invite someone to read Proverbs 16:18.

7. Invite someone to read Isaiah 10:20–27. Explain that after God punished Judah, a repentant remnant would survive the judgment and turn back to the Lord.

8. Have someone read Isaiah 11:1–10. Explain these verses using information in the Study Guide and in “Bible Comments” in this Teaching Guide. Note that “the stump of Jesse” (Isa. 11:1) refers to a descendant of Jesse, the father of King David. A new king would come and give justice to the poor and the needy and would do away with the wicked. This new king would be a righteous judge, who would deliver the innocent and punish the wicked. Christians interpret the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy as being Jesus.

Encourage Application

9. Refer to and summarize “Applying This Lesson to Life” in the Study Guide. State that after reading, studying, and teaching the Bible many years, a teacher became convicted by the teachings of the Bible to begin contributing food items to the local food bank in the community. Ask, How does this experience relate to these Scripture passages? In what ways are we helping the needy and the poor in our church and community? How are we ministering to vulnerable, needy people in our church and community? What does this lesson’s Scripture say we should do?
FOCAL TEXT
Isaiah 30:1–5, 8–17; 31:1

BACKGROUND
Isaiah 30—31

MAIN IDEA
Isaiah proclaimed the futility of trusting in human alliances and strength and called for trust in God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
In God we trust—really?

TEACHING AIM
To lead the group to summarize Isaiah’s message on trusting in God rather than in human alliances and strength and to state how human means and trust in God are best related.
Understanding the Context

The people of Judah faced a major decision concerning their future. They had to decide between Yahweh’s plan for the well-being of Judah and their own autonomous plan. The Lord’s plan would succeed. The popular plan of the nation would fail. The prophet set the decision within the larger geopolitical sphere of Egypt and Assyria. The probable historical setting for the passage is the years just before the collapse of Assyria and the intervention of Egypt into the politics of the Levant. Assyria eventually fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C., and Egypt faced defeat at the hands of the Babylonians in 609 B.C.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Isaiah 30 is called an instruction speech¹ that explains why the Lord had delayed the deliverance of Judah from Assyria. The chapter presents a choice between two plans—God’s plan or Judah’s. Verses 1–26 express the Lord’s displeasure with Judah’s plan to seek assistance from Egypt.

Judah’s Plan (30:1–14)

Judah was caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place, between Egypt to the south and Assyria to the north. Assyria’s aggression toward Judah in the days of Hezekiah led the leaders of Judah to seek an alliance with Egypt. The prophet condemned this alliance as a rejection of the Lord. Judah’s only true ally was Yahweh, not Egypt.

30:1–5. The section begins with the characteristic woe expression—“Oh” or alas (“woe,” NASB, NIV). Judah was behaving like a rebellious child and acting independently of the Lord. The “rebellious” child theme of Isaiah 1 continues.

The leaders of Judah devised an elaborate alliance with Egypt in the face of the Assyrian threat. They chose to play a game of power politics by siding with one superpower that they thought would replace another
superpower. However, Egypt could not provide assistance to Judah. Any alliance with Egypt would not make Judah safe. Reliance on Egypt was foolishness. Egypt’s influence in the southern Levant (the land in the eastern Mediterranean area between Mesopotamia and Egypt) was short-lived. In reality, Babylon ultimately replaced the Assyrians as the superpower of the Near East.

Rejection of any alliance with Egypt did not imply that submission to Assyria was easy. The prophet was not suggesting that Judah do nothing or go into seclusion from the political environment. Instead, foreign policy decisions must rely on the Lord. Judah must demonstrate confidence in Yahweh. Judah’s reliance on military might was a major miscalculation.

30:6–7. The “Negeb” (pronounced Negev) is the desert land south of Judah and toward the Sinai peninsula; it is not the same as the Sinai. This is the territory through which one must travel to get to Egypt. The desert is always ominous and hazardous. Crossing the Negeb with heavy cargo of payment for the Egyptians was terribly demanding. Why run such a risk to pay an ally that would not be able to deliver protection? Egypt could not deliver what Judah sought. The prophet dismissed Egypt as “worthless and empty.” Judah’s alliance with Egypt represented a reenactment of the Exodus backward. Egypt was like “Rahab,” the destructive, cosmic power of chaos (see Psalm 87:4; 89:10). As Yahweh made “Rahab” a harmless dragon, so Egypt would become innocuous.

30:8–14. Yahweh wanted the proclamation against foreign alliances written down. This order underscores the certainty of what the prophet proclaimed. A later generation could not change it; neither could the prophet make changes to it.

Verses 9–14 form a reprise of verses 1–7. This is a prophetic speech of judgment. Judah is again called a “rebellious people.” They refused to listen to the instructions of Yahweh as proclaimed by the Lord’s “seers” and “prophets.” The people of Judah had attempted to still the voices of the prophets. The inhabitants of Judah desired to be free from the teachings of God. The leaders wanted to be on their own, free from accountability to Yahweh.

Verse 12 is a prophetic sentence, announced by “Therefore,” pronounced on the people of Judah for their refusal to heed God’s
instructions. The people had placed their “trust in oppression and deceit.” The word “deceit” means a perverse tyrant and refers to the pharaoh of Egypt. Everything Judah did was antithetical to the Lord’s way.

The prophet described their punishment with the words “break,” “bulging,” “collapse,” and “crash” (Isa. 30:13). The most vivid image is that of breaking “a potter’s vessel” (Isa. 30:14). The metaphor of Yahweh as a potter and Israel the vessel is common in the prophetic witness. The ruthless smashing of the pot would leave nothing to identify as belonging to that particular pot.

The Lord’s Plan Offered and Rejected (30:15–17)

30:15a-c. The prophet conveyed the way out for Judah’s dilemma. Four words announce the solution: “returning,” “rest,” quietness,” “trust.” These are synonyms for faith. For Isaiah, faith was the utter reliance on Yahweh for everything in life. Faith represents the opposite of Judah’s actions described in verses 1–14.

30:15d. Immediately, the prophet announced, “But you refused.” Without thinking or reflecting, Judah refused God’s plan. Without apology, the leaders of Judah chose their own path.

30:16a-b. Judah chose to rely on Egypt’s military arms: “horses” and “swift steeds.” Judah sought a military solution to provide peace, shalom. Instead, they encountered more insecurity.

30:16c–17. “Therefore,” announces the outcome of Judah’s policy. Judah’s “pursuers shall be swift.” Judah’s “swift steeds” would be no match for the swift enemy Yahweh would send. Judah’s foolish militarism would not save them. Judah would not be able to beat Assyria at its own military game. Judah would suffer from anxiety, fear, and isolation.

The Lord’s Plan Reiterated (30:18–33)

30:18. Yahweh’s intention was positive. Both the beginning and the ending of the verse include the word “wait.” The Lord was waiting on them. They were to wait on the Lord. The Lord was willing to wait for an appropriate time “to be gracious” to Judah. Judah should wait on the
Lord and by doing so receive God’s blessings. This call to wait was in stark contrast to Judah’s feverish plan to ally itself with the Egyptians. The prophet used two important terms—“gracious” and “mercy”—to speak of Yahweh’s desired actions toward Judah. God had nothing but good intentions toward Judah. The God of the Old Testament is a God of grace! In the present context, the words “gracious” and “mercy” are active verbs. God wants to grace you and to mercy you. Along with grace and mercy, Isaiah announced that Yahweh is “a God of justice.”

Isaiah had shown Judah a way out, a way to blessings. Judah must decide its own fate.

30:19. The prophet addressed Zion, Jerusalem, as the place of Yahweh’s dwelling. The Lord would answer those who cried out from Zion. God is the answerer of prayers. The Lord was always attentive to Judah and was always prepared to intervene. The idea expressed in the verse is that God cannot answer a prayer that is not uttered, however. God waits on the worshiper.

30:20–22. The identity of the “Teacher” in the passage is not clear. The Lord may be the “Teacher” as interpreted by the capitalization of “Teacher” in the New Revised Standard Version and the New American Standard Bible. This name for God is unique in the biblical witness. “Teacher” can also refer to the prophetic tradition or to an unnamed individual.

Verses 9–11 presented the people as refusing to listen. Now a “Teacher” would instruct them. Verse 11 saw Israel stray from the way; now Israel would walk in the way. As sheep recognize the voice of their master, so Israel would recognize the voice of Yahweh. The result was that the people of Judah would “defile” their idols. “Defile” means to make unclean, the opposite of holy. The idols would become as “filthy rags.”

30:23–26. Yahweh’s grace and mercy would result in a fruitful new land. “Rain” indicates God’s graciousness. The land of Judah was semi-arid. Without rain, crops failed. The land of Israel depended on the rain, rain that only Yahweh could send. The Lord could call on all of the cosmos to provide for Israel and to punish Israel’s enemies. In the end, Yahweh would heal Judah.
An Announcement that the Lord Would Strike Down Assyria (30:27–33)

30:27–30. The prophet painted a word picture of the ferocious coming of Yahweh in judgment on Assyria. The devastation of Assyria would lead to festal singing, gladness, and instrumental music. Each blow by the Lord against Assyria gave occasion for celebration and exultation.

30:31–33. Verse 31 specifically mentions Assyria, which can also represent any foreign power. The context certainly includes Assyria. Assyria faced terror at the hands of Yahweh, the great equalizer. Much is left unsaid by the prophet. However, God’s judgment on Assyria was further evidence of Yahweh’s grace and mercy shown on behalf of Judah. Judah must trust the Lord as a condition of rescue. Ultimately, Assyria and her king fell. Nineveh, Assyria’s capital, fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Assyria’s final defeat came in 609 B.C.

Woe Oracle (31:1–3)

Isaiah presents an ominous note to those who would consider turning to Egypt for assistance as an ally against Assyria. The key concept in the passage is the word “help” (31:1). Who can truly “help” Judah—Egypt or Yahweh? The simple answer was that the Egyptians could not help Judah against the Assyrians, who were themselves God’s instruments of judgment against Judah. The name “Egypt” was a metaphor for military strength with its horses and chariots.

Reliance on military power for salvation constitutes self-deception. Egypt did not possess any intrinsic power to defeat the Assyrians. Only Yahweh holds such power. When Yahweh acted, neither Assyria nor Egypt could prevail.

Focusing on the Meaning

The passage raises troubling issues for Christians, particularly those of us who are fortunate to live in the United States. Isaiah proclaimed the futility of trusting in human alliances and strength, and the prophet called for trust in God. We place the statement on our currency, “In God We Trust.” However, we spend billions of dollars on our military. We
make alliances as a protection against other nations. Therefore, do we really trust in God? Or do we give lip service to “trust” and hedge our bets by using our prosperity to build up our military and to make alliances with other nations?

How can a Christian be patriotic to one’s country while at the same time trusting completely in the Lord to protect and defend us against all enemies, foreign and domestic? Isaiah proclaimed that the Lord did not need Egypt’s assistance in dealing with the evil Assyrians. However, the people of Isaiah’s day believed that God needed help.

It is true, we must cherish our freedom. We must protect our freedom. However, is the protection based on our own might or on the Lord? What does it really mean for a Christian living in the United States to trust God? Does trust in God require a passive approach when threatened? The Apostle Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). It is not easy to trust the Lord in an evil world.

**TEACHING PLANS**

**Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities**

**Connect with Life**

1. Have class members take out a United States coin or paper currency. Ask them to find the official motto of the United States, “In God We Trust.” Relate the following facts about this motto:
   - This motto was first used on the 1864 two-cent coin. Within a few years other coins added this motto.
   - A 1955 law made “In God We Trust” mandatory on all United States coins and currency.
   - In 1956 this motto was legally adopted as the United States’ official motto.
2. Ask, Do we, as a nation, really believe this motto is true? If we believe it is true, what evidence can we point to that proves we trust in God? If we as a nation do not believe in this motto, then why is it on our money?

Guide Bible Study

3. Summarize the historical background of the setting of today’s lesson. Consult information in the second paragraph in the lesson introduction and under “In Egypt We Trust? (30:1–5)” in the Study Guide and in “Understanding the Context” in this Teaching Guide.

4. Enlist someone to read verses 30:1–5 while the group listens for what Judah had done and how God felt about it. Call for responses. Continue by asking, Why do you think Judah did not consult God but turned instead to Egypt? Do you think the people of Judah were afraid they would hear something they did not want to hear from God? What life decisions have you consulted God about? Have someone write answers on the markerboard. Some answers may include decisions related to marriage, children, job, church, and other important issues. Ask, How did you go about discerning what God’s will was in these concerns? How do you determine the decisions you need to bring to God and the decisions for which you feel you already know God’s answer?

5. Invite someone to read Isaiah 30:8–11. State that Judah wanted to hear only good news and pleasant thoughts from the prophets. They did not want to hear bad news from the Lord or other solutions to their problems. In their rebellion, they closed their minds to even listening to what God had to say to them. Ask, Why do we choose to do things our way rather than consulting God and following his direction?

6. Have someone read Isaiah 30:12–17 while the class listens for what God wanted Judah to do and how they responded. Receive reports. Explain these verses using information in the Study Guide under “The Outcome of Misplaced Trust (30:12–17).” Ask, Why are these verses so hard for us to apply?
7. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 31:1, and ask, *What did Judah really do wrong? Was it more Judah’s action in allying with Egypt or more an attitude that shut out the Lord and his guidance?*

**Encourage Application**

8. Refer to and summarize “Applying This Lesson to Life” in the *Study Guide*. Invite comments about the group’s response to it.

9. Refer to and summarize the case study in the *Study Guide*. Call for responses to it. Continue by asking, *Does God use other people to help us better understand his will for our lives? If yes, How does God sometimes do this? If God does not use others, How does God help us work through our problems of life? How do we discern between what are our answers and what are God’s answers to our problems?*

**Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions**

**Connect with Life**

1. Ask, *What percentage of Americans do you think say they believe in God?* After several guesses have been made, state that according to a recent Gallup poll more than ninety percent of Americans responded that they believed in God.³ Now ask, *How many Americans would you say really put their trust in God? Do we as Christians put our full faith in God? Do you allow God to direct your decisions and guide your steps?*

2. Refer to and read the study aim for this lesson.

**Guide Bible Study**

3. Set this passage in historical context by using information in the second paragraph in the lesson introduction and under “In Egypt We Trust? (30:1–5)” in the *Study Guide* and in “Understanding the Context” in this *Teaching Guide*. 
4. Invite someone to read Isaiah 30:1–5. Explain the verses using information in the *Study Guide* and in “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide*. Ask,
- Why do you think Judah did not consult God?
- What life decisions have you consulted God about?
- How do you go about discerning what God’s will for your life?
- How do you determine what decisions you need to bring to God and what decisions you feel you already know God’s answer?
- What decisions do you make completely on your own without consulting God?

5. Enlist someone to read Isaiah 30:8–11. Ask, *Why did God want it written down that Judah would not listen to his instruction? Does it show a lack of trust by Judah? Do we just want to hear good and pleasant things? Do we sometimes live in a world of make believe?* State that Judah did not really trust God and did not want to have anything to do with God or God’s purposes. Explain the verses further using information in the *Study Guide* and in “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide*.

6. Read Isaiah 30:12–17. State that Judah’s rejection of God’s message made them like a high bulging wall, which will fall unless it is fixed. The city was compromised because of this weakness. The potter’s smashed vessel was useless for any practical purpose. Without God, Judah was doomed. Ask, *Where is salvation found? Where is strength found according to these verses?* Refer to verse 15a.

7. Have someone read Isaiah 31:1. Ask, *What happens when we act on only our strength and power and not bring in God and God’s will for our lives? Do we make decisions in life without gathering all the facts?* Point out that Egypt had many horses, horsemen, and chariots. Judah thought they had from Egypt all the war machinery they would need to fight off Assyria. However, Egypt was using Judah to wear down the Assyrians so that Egypt would only have to fight a weakened army. Ask, *What did Judah really do wrong? Was it more Judah’s action in allying with Egypt or more an attitude that shut out the Lord and his guidance?*
Encourage Application

8. Lead the class to apply the Scriptures by using the questions in the Study Guide, as follows: What are some things that are easy for us as humans to place our trust in? What are some times in which you trusted in yourself or someone else rather than in the Lord? What are some times in which trusting the Lord has required you to go against your own judgment? How can we balance trusting in the Lord and still being free to make decisions?

NOTES

FOCAL TEXT
Micah 1:1–6; 2:1–3; 3:1–8

BACKGROUND
Micah 1—3

MAIN IDEA
God judges people who oppress others in their desire to have more things for themselves, holding leaders especially accountable.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
Should you not know justice?

TEACHING AIM
To lead adults to identify thewrongs Micah’s prophecy condemned and to state what this prophecy says about the kind of world God wants
One can review John Steinbeck’s short stories and novels and find some common ingredients. *The Grapes of Wrath*, for example, presents an intimate view of poverty, through the eyes, feelings, and experiences of one family. In addition, Steinbeck in the opening lines of his lengthy list of titles always takes note of a place, the cultural feeling and theme about to unfold, and something of the plot to follow—with perhaps a major character included.

The influence of the King James Version of the Bible on Steinbeck’s writing is evident from book titles and comments by characters (see, for example, Isaiah 63:3; Revelation 14:19–20). Not much imagination is needed to assess that surely John Steinbeck read and understood the Old Testament prophets, including Micah.

Micah provides a succinct example of the many-faceted roles of the Old Testament prophets. He exhibited the *forthtelling* dimensions of the prophets, describing *what is* as compared to *what ought to be*. As well, he sometimes moved to the prophetic, *foretelling* mode.

In Micah’s day, matters of faith among the Hebrews had gone awry. Possibilities for change were ebbing away. If integrity in the worship of God could not be restored, however, not just cultural erosion would continue—the culture would be taken away.

That Micah was from Moresheth, likely the same as Moresheth-gath appearing in Micah 1:14, a small town about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem, gives one small clue about him. However, the reader needs to review the prophet’s vocabulary, identify his points of reference, and give attention to events happening beyond a small context. One will likely conclude that Micah was well-educated, was knowledgeable of the
public life of his people, was deeply steeped in Hebrew theology, and projected life out of a deep sense of calling to speak the word of God.

The events to which Micah made reference involve the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all kings of the Southern kingdom. These three plus Uzziah find reference in Isaiah as well (Isaiah 1:1). Best guesses put them ruling between 750–740 B.C. and 686 B.C., a time frame that extends beyond Micah’s pronouncements.

Although Micah essentially addressed conditions in Jerusalem, he used the kings as reference points for matters occurring or about to occur in the Northern kingdom. In effect, Micah delivered a message to all of the Hebrews. We might assume that Amos and Hosea in the Northern kingdom knew (or knew of) Micah and Isaiah in the Southern kingdom. These prophets were saying about the same things at the same time in history. No other confined span of time reflects this level and extent of prophetic address.

Judge and Witness for the Prosecution (1:2)

In contemporary criminal court settings, roles are clearly defined. There will be a judge, an attorney for the prosecution, an attorney for the defense, an accused person, witnesses, and generally a jury.

These roles can be seen in Micah’s presentation, particularly with reference to God. God plays the roles of the primary witness and the judge.

Micah first called for the attention of the people of the Southern kingdom. “Hear” and “listen” are imperatives and together request the people to pick up on the sounds Micah made. But, most importantly, the people needed to incorporate the meaning of the sounds they heard and act on those understandings.

Out of the Courtroom (1:3–4)

Micah’s use of metaphorical language heightens the dramatic actions of God. God would be stepping into the immediate mortal context. Such action, described as God using the high places of the planet to step into the fray of mortality, would have the effect of melting mountains and destroying valleys. The topography of the land would feel the effects of God’s burning judgments.
Something for Everyone (1:5–9)

Judgment would be brought upon the Hebrews, named as Israel and Jacob for good measure. No one would be missed. The judgment for the Southern kingdom would be equally as harsh for the Northern kingdom, Samaria.

Micah’s warning in chapter 1 is akin to Amos. Recall the study of Amos (lessons one through three) to see how Amos identified those enemies of the people of God, lying geographically all about. Then Amos drew the same conclusions regarding Israel (see especially Amos 1—2).

Micah 1:6–9 depicts the destruction that erupted upon Samaria. Presumably 2 Kings 17:1–18 describes the Assyrian invasion that gave Jerusalem: Look what happened up there! It is an omen for you, too.

Threats from the Inside (2:1–3)

Micah moved attention away from threats from beyond Jerusalem and Judah to those matters that worked negatively from the inside. The economic leaders lay awake at night, unable to sleep as they were so obsessed with building their portfolios. Can we identify anyone we may know who bends the rules and devises schemes outside ethical practices in the marketplace?

For the Hebrews, property was the sign of identity and citizenship. To strip weaker members of society of their property was the same as taking away their sense of family and standing in the larger community.

The landed gentry, though, continually wanted more property. Micah clearly identified the land grabbing as a product of covetousness, and a clear breaking of the Tenth Commandment (see Exodus 20:17).

Undoubtedly, the affluent were incapable of considering any self-limitations, criticism of their practices, or desire for anything other than pleasant affirmations of their aggressions and intrusions. Neither were they willing to acknowledge that they had abandoned the principles of Hebrew theology and ethics and that their despicable actions were as devastating as any outside threat.
Leaders Who Depart from God (3:1–4)

Leadership has been dissected, analyzed, described, and extruded into formulas intended to offer no failure. Are leaders born or developed? Yes. Can some people be leaders in one capacity but the fit is just not there in others? Yes. After all is said and done, no one is a leader unless that person has followers, people who believe in the leader’s vision and recognize the leader is all about the followers and not her or his personal agenda.

Micah understood basic leadership principles—enough so that he challenged the so-called leaders of the time that they were doing not just a poor job but a horrible job. In their self-appointed positions with titles and awards, these leaders used and abused those who did not follow them. Micah’s image of the leaders strikes deeply into our imaginations. They were people who tore the skin from the people and the flesh from their bones. Moreover, the leaders ate the flesh of the people. No doubt this image is metaphorical, but the reality was that the people were being eaten up, destroyed, and brutalized by the leaders.

Micah used the example of God taking care of the people like a shepherd does of sheep in 2:12–14. Here Micah charged that the leaders were killing the sheep. The upshot was that the leaders were beyond repentance and help. If the Assyrians came, Israel was beyond help.

False Prophets Miss the Message (3:5–8)

All of the true prophets of God had lots of the false variety with which to deal. Micah, like the other true prophets, had to find a lot of courage to make it through these hazardous-to-their-health engagements.

Micah pulled no punches. The false prophets, identified by their willingness to be paid to say whatever was needed, would have to bear the same judgment as the larcenous landowners.

In Micah 2:7, Micah referred to his words as doing “good to one who walks uprightly.” In 3:8, however, Micah verified to the others what he had determined for himself—he was a true prophet, full of the power of the Spirit of the Lord, declaring justice with all his strength.
Focusing on the Meaning

In Micah’s social context, a few people had gathered power to themselves and created mechanisms to perpetuate their material gains. These mechanisms abridged clear directives from Scripture. The rich failed to recognize the image of God in others. In their mind, people were means to an end. Whatever it took to make more money or have more land was okay.

Micah presented what amounted to a minority report. He pointed out the off-course patterns of those who had forgotten God. The judgment of God was not toward people being wealthy but about how they had become so. In this case, those who treasured their ill-gotten gains had essentially sealed themselves off from contact from God and God’s instructions. They would have to bear the consequences of choosing mammon over God. Judgment came.

Such dynamics have run through human history and continue to do so, meaning that our own generation suffers from these same maladies. The call from God for justice for all, for no mistreatment of fellow human beings, continues to ring out. As in Micah’s generation, fewer people seem to respond to God’s call than those who follow mammon. Prophets are still needed.

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Bring recent newspapers or news magazines and distribute them among the class. Ask, *Do you see any recent events or activities that make you think the world is not how God intended it to be?* Take a few minutes to accept answers. If you like, note them on the markerboard. Ask, *What are some human frailties that might*
be the cause of these problems? Examples might be greed, pride, or injustice. Encourage as many answers as possible.

Say, *It is clear that the world is not how God intended it to be, but sometimes God’s people lose sight of how their actions feed into the problems. Our next two lessons are about another eighth-century prophet who brought God’s message concerning the problem and the solution.*

**Guide Bible Study**

2. Read Micah 1:1. Introduce the Book of Micah with a short lecture, noting that the prophet lived in the last half of the eighth century before Christ; that he came from a small town in southern Judah, which was the Southern kingdom; and that these prophecies likely occurred sometime between 730 and 722 B.C. Note that the Northern kingdom was called Israel and its capital was Samaria. The Southern kingdom was Judah, and Jerusalem was its capital. Refer to “Micah: God’s Requirements” as well as to the charts in the *Study Guide* for additional information for setting Micah in context.

In advance, write on the markerboard this brief outline of Micah:

- **I. Samaria and Jerusalem judged for their sins (1:1—2:13)**
- **II. Judgment on the leaders (3:1–12)**
- **III. Deliverance for the nation (4:1—5:15)**
- **IV. The Lord’s lawsuit against Israel (6:1–16)**
- **V. Israel’s lament and restoration (7:1–20)**

3. Invite someone to read Micah 1:2–7. Note that the *Study Guide* defines “idolatry” as “granting any measure of devotion that belongs to God to any other object or idea. In doing so we place our trust and sense of security in something less than God.” Lead a discussion with questions such as, *How would you change or explain this definition of “idolatry”? What are some objects, people, or ideas in which we place our trust or sense of security? What terms or images in this passage indicate God’s reaction to idol worship? Do you think people today take seriously God’s anger toward idol worship?*
4. Enlist someone to read Micah 2:1–3 while participants listen for the actions God condemned. Ask, *What might be some modern examples of people described in verse 1 or of actions described in verse 2?*

5. Have someone read Micah 3:1–8. Say, *As the Study Guide notes, there are two wrongs described in this passage: injustice in verses 1–4 and deception in verse 5–8. In verses 2–3, why did Micah use the metaphor of cannibalism for the wrong of injustice? Does the image overstate the evil of injustice?*

   Note that 3:5 and 3:9–11 are descriptions of deception among the religious leaders who were also civic leaders. Ask, *What do you think the ancient leaders were doing that prompted the descriptions in these verses? Then ask, What might be modern equivalents of these kinds of deception?*

**Encourage Application**

6. Divide the class into small groups of six or fewer people each. Say, *The Study Guide also says that “one of God’s greatest desires is that we treat everyone equally and with a deep measure of mercy.”* Distribute paper and pens and instruct each small group to write at least five sentences that describe what it would look like to “treat everyone equally and with a deep measure of mercy.” (For example, see James 2:1–4.) Encourage the groups to consider both church and non-church settings. After several minutes, call for groups to read their sentences.

**Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions**

**Connect with Life**

1. Refer to and summarize the lesson introduction in the *Study Guide* about how God intended the world to be and what it is like. Say that we are about to study the words of the prophet Micah, who warned Israel and Judah that their actions were keeping the world from being what God intended.
Guide Bible Study

2. Read Micah 1:1. Lead the class to review the first paragraph in the Study Guide under the section “The First Wrong: Idolatry.” Also refer to the chart, “Eighth-Century Kings and Prophets.” Lead the class to understand the political situation in the eighth century, with the downfall of the Northern kingdom of Israel and the decline of the Southern kingdom of Judah. Note the dates of Micah’s ministry and his focus on the kings of Judah. Add additional information from “Understanding the Context” in this Teaching Guide and from “Micah: God’s Requirements” in the Study Guide. Display the outline of the Book of Micah provided in step 2 of “Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities.”

3. Enlist someone to read Micah 1:2–7. Explain “high places” and “the high place of Judah” in verses 3 and 5. Refer the class to 2 Chronicles 28:25, and explain that the people of Judah were worshiping foreign gods as well as the Lord. Refer to the small article “The Difference Between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms” in the Study Guide, and either read or summarize the content for the class. Emphasize that the Northern kingdom of Israel had turned to idolatry, and the Southern kingdom of Judah (which was Micah’s audience) had tainted their worship of God by adding in idol worship. Lead the class in a discussion of whether the false religion of Israel was better or worse than the tainted religion of Judah.

4. Have someone read Micah 2:1–3. Then read Exodus 20:17. Refer to and summarize the information in the Study Guide in the section, “The Second Wrong: Coveting (2:1–3).” Lead the class to define coveting in their own words. Ask, When does wishing you had something that someone else possesses become the sin of coveting? Note that verse 2 seems to focus on personal real estate—houses, land, fields. Ask, Can you think of examples where individuals, corporations, or nations are guilty of the sins described here?

5. Invite someone to read Micah 3:1–4. Ask the class to name some examples of similar injustices today.
Note that Micah 3:1 addresses both the Northern and Southern kingdoms. Ask, *Do we ever complain that others—individuals, cultures, religions, or nations—allow injustice that we ourselves also tolerate?*

6. Enlist someone to read Micah 3:5–8. Ask, *What are some examples of “prophets” who are paid in some way to tell people what they want to hear? Why is deception, especially among religious and civil leaders, so deserving of God’s punishment?*

**Encourage Application**

7. Refer to the questions at the end of the lesson in the *Study Guide,* and lead the class in answering each question, as follows: *What are some examples of modern idols? What are some ways we can seek to end injustice? What are some examples of deceptive prophetic messages today? When we are surrounded by so many ideas and images, how can we avoid coveting?*
FOCAL TEXT
Micah 6:1–8

BACKGROUND
Micah 6

MAIN IDEA
God wants justice, kindness, and faithfulness rather than even the most elaborate and extreme religious ritual.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
What does God want from us?

TEACHING AIM
To lead participants to respond to God by living in a relationship of faithfulness to him and of justice and kindness toward other people.
Amnesia is serious forgetting. Theological amnesia set in among the Hebrews rather regularly. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, we may well stand open-mouthed at how those people could have such a meaningful relationship with God, on one hand, but then not many years would pass and the relationship went sour. We need to be aware of our own tendencies toward such amnesia, however.

The forgetting-God phenomenon was no doubt jarred by the appearance of Micah, whose name means, *Who is like Yahweh?* Just walking through the marketplace or engaging in conversation, Micah reminded the people of God’s nature. Coming out of their ancient history, God’s self-description of God’s character to Moses was, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Holiness is perfection, even beyond anything we can imagine as perfect.

The people of God were expected to express as best they could the character of God. Micah’s charges from early in his book were that they had fallen short. In Micah 6, the prophet continued the resulting judgment of God for the shortfalls of the people. A new thought is seen, however. Micah reminded the people that the lesson they should have learned was simple, as simple as this: genuine beliefs about God result in acts of integrity.

**Interpreting the Scriptures**

**Back to Court (6:1–2)**

Micah called the people back to court as in Micah 1:2, this time with the challenge to “rise, plead your case before the mountains” (Micah 6:1). The Israelites would find that they were overmatched, “for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel” (6:2).

Verse 2 gives us insight into the place of creation in God’s order of things. Just as the image of God was implanted in the first humans, so does something of God’s character and nature reside in the created
world. We can identify the physical laws by which we live life—for example, gravity. Are not moral laws built into the universe?

Who Is at Fault? (6:3)

Verse 3 changes the context and shows God as a parent speaking to the children. Any contemporary parents reading this verse can identify with the range of emotions in the questions. One can, on one hand, hear the mournful plea, *Is it me? Is it me? What have I not done or said that has thrown you off track? Have I been too hard on you? Are my expectations of your behavior too high?* On the other hand, the tone of a rising anger registers, “Answer me!” Micah demonstrated that God has spoken, continues to speak, and will be speaking in the future; but humans can turn a deaf ear.

Remember Your History (6:4–5)

*Remember your history* is an often articulated imperative in the Old Testament. Verse 4 is a succinct retelling of the Exodus. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam played key roles in moving the people away from Egypt. Those three represented heroic figures for the people of Micah’s time. Lack of attention to values important to the whole culture and more attention to self-aggrandizing behavior can cause any group to forget their past. And, we can forget our past as we fail to retell the stories of heroes and heroines who have moved among us.

In contrast to the heroic figures, God through Micah reminded the people of the near disasters at the hands of adversaries to the heroic figures. Numbers 22—24 tell the story of Balak intending harm on the Hebrews through trying to set Balaam to cast a curse on the people of God. God intervened in such ways that Balaam’s intended curse became blessing.

As the people entered Canaan, their last encampment before the Promised Land was Shittim. The next camp was Gilgal, immediately west of the Jordan. Between those stops the people walked through the Jordan River on dry ground (Joshua 3—4). The question remained for the people of Micah’s day to answer: *If God has done such redemptive acts for you, why are you not responding gratefully and joyfully? Rather, you have chosen to live rebelliously in the face of God’s salvation.*
Revised History (6:6–7)

The response of the people to God sounds like a child caught in the act of going against the judgment of a parent but making a weak attempt to give reason for the act. All parents have heard the tone! All of us as children have used the tone!

The Jerusalemites attempted a revisionist approach to why they framed their theology and ethics, or lack thereof, the way they did. They picked up on parts of the Torah’s expectations. Their point of misunderstanding was they had come to honor the framework, the externals, and not the spirit of Torah, God’s instructions. The people’s response indicted them further with God. They had attempted to substitute the rituals of worshiping God for the reality of worshiping God in how they lived, with justice, kindness, and faithfulness.

The Way of True Religion (6:8)

Verse 8 is the response from God to the question from anyone asking for the appropriate content—and most importantly, actions—of true religion. The truth of true religion is plain. What is the good, the right, what God truly wants from us? In short, we are to reflect in our lives the character of God. More specifically, we are to follow three imperatives:

1. “Do justice”—be fair; work toward finding and implementing God’s purpose in this world.
2. “Love kindness”—adore mercy and compassion so much that one absorbs those qualities and exhibits their characteristics to all around.
3. “Walk humbly with your God”—the “with” is important. We are to “walk humbly with” God, in relationship to God. Walking humbly requires sensitivity to who and what we are aside from God.

Paul to the Romans asked that they judge themselves soberly (Romans 12:3)—not too highly, but not too lowly, either. In other words, where are we in our status in creation? In relationship to God, we are the created and thus dependent on God for everything that comes to us.

James 2 relates squarely to Micah 6:8. James spoke of parties who maintained they believed, but James called for a faith that did something,
just as Micah did. The good deeds are not for winning a relationship with God but for relating appropriately to God and demonstrating it.

**God’s Judgment on Untrue Religion (6:9–16)**

The rest of Micah 6 demonstrates yet another appeal from God for the people of Jerusalem to return to right relationship with God. If they would not, then God could no longer stand by and watch their patterns of injustice, unloving acts, and arrogance. Judgment would come. The people of the Southern kingdom reflected the same ungodly behavior as the Northern kingdom. Those people suffered God’s judgment; so would the people of Judah.

**Focusing on the Meaning**

From Micah specifically, we should recognize that Israel and Judah were a specially-selected group of people. Through their long history, God had intervened on their behalf so their lives would reflect the difference the presence of God could make.

In the New Testament, Jesus said, “From everyone to who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of himself they will ask all the more” (Luke 12:48b). God had entrusted much to Israel and Judah, and God had told them clearly and simply what he expected of them. They failed to follow through, however, and now they were being called to account. What part of this history applies to us, to whom God has given so much and explained his requirements so clearly?
TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Invite the class to think of television shows or movies that feature courtroom dramas. Spend a few minutes recalling the shows. Ask, Why do you think courtroom dramas have been so popular over the years? Again, spend a few minutes in discussion; draw some conclusions if possible about the appeal of courtroom drama. If you used a similar activity in lesson 5, as an alternative invite anyone who has served on a jury to describe the experience briefly.

2. Point out that the idea of getting justice has always been an important part of human experience, as we will see in our passage in Micah. Review the outline of Micah from last week’s lesson, noting that this Bible study is on the Lord’s lawsuit against Israel.

Guide Bible Study

3. Invite someone to read Micah 6:1–2. Say, The prophet called on the mountains to witness the proceedings. Who or what is witnessing how we live our lives? Say, If we were on trial in the Lord’s court of justice, what might be the Lord’s charges against us?

4. Distribute paper and pens to each person. Before having someone read Micah 6:3–5, say, In this passage, the Lord was reminding his people of how he had rescued them from some difficult situations in their history. Write down at least three situations in your history where you believe God has rescued you. Invite comments.

5. Enlist someone to read Micah 6:6–7. Ask, What are some of the acts of worship you see in this text? Say, Religious sacrifices were important in ancient Israel and had been ordained in the law of Moses. So, why would some of their acts of worship—or ours—not be acceptable to God?
Lesson 13: God Has Told Us

6. Lead the class in reading Micah 6:8 aloud together using the printed Scripture passage in the Study Guide. Then instruct the class to turn to Deuteronomy 6:4. Explain that this is called the Shema (pronounced sheh-MAH) because the first word, shema, is the Hebrew word for hear. Next turn to and read Leviticus 19:18. Finally, turn to and read Mark 12:28–33. Lead the class in a discussion with questions such as these: How are the Great Commandments like Micah 6:8? How are they different? Or, where do they overlap and where are they different?

Encourage Application


Invite the class to give examples of how people can demonstrate these commands. After receiving several examples, lead the class to discuss whether the examples are better carried out by individuals, by groups, or by both. Conclude by challenging each person to select one example for personal commitment this coming week.

Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. In advance, invite a lawyer, judge, or other person who is knowledgeable about courtroom procedures to provide a brief presentation about basic elements of a courtroom trial, that is, the general process of a trial and the role of the participants—judge, jury, prosecutor, defender or advocate, witnesses, plaintiff, defendant, etc. Introduce the speaker and allow a few questions. Be sure to limit the time to five minutes or less. Thank the speaker. If finding such a person is difficult, ask the group whether any of them has been on a jury before. Ask the person to describe the various roles played by the people in the courtroom.

Say, Our passage in Micah today is placed in the setting of a judicial trial. Let’s see who the participants are and what the outcome is.
Guide Bible Study

2. Review the outline of Micah from last week’s lesson, noting that this Bible study is on the section on the Lord’s lawsuit against Israel. Have someone read Micah 6:1–2. Ask, *What do you think is the setting of this “courtroom,” and who or what are the participants?*

3. Invite someone to read Micah 6:3–5. Explain the verses using information in the *Study Guide* and in “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide.* Be sure to clarify the background of the experiences in which God had helped the people in verses 4–5.

4. Enlist someone to read Micah 6:6–7. Ask, *Who is “speaking” in this section? If this were a single person speaking, what tone of voice do you think he or she might be using? sincere questioning? whining? sarcasm? an expression of reverence? something else?* Say, *The people of Israel were used to worship based on sacrifices, including of crops and animals. This passage might be seen as rather exaggerated descriptions of how they might worship through sacrifice.*

   Ask, *How would you paraphrase the meaning of the passage? Since Christians do not worship through this kind of sacrifice, what might be the modern equivalents of how people worship? Then ask, Can you think of some ways these examples of “worship” might be exaggerated?*

5. Read Micah 6:8a. Ask, *What are some ways God has shown people “what is good”? Can you think of some illustrations?* Read Micah 6:8b. Ask, *If you asked this question of most people today, what do you think would be their answers? Do you think people in Christian churches would answer differently than non-church members?* Read Micah 6:8c. *Do you think this entire passage (Micah 6:1–8) is meant to discourage people from these types of acts of worship? Why? What is the intent of the passage, then? (To encourage living one’s faith rather than merely engaging in rituals while failing “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”)*

Explain each of the terms using information in the *Study Guide* and in “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide*. Ask, *What are some examples of ways people like us demonstrate these commands? What are some ways we disobey them?*

Point out that the *Study Guide* under the heading “The Prophet Mediates the Case (6:8)” states, “Notice that none of these three things call for specific actions, but do require conscious decisions to go against our natural tendencies.” Ask the class to explain what our “natural tendencies” might be with regard to acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

**Encourage Application**

6. Direct attention to and read the small article, “The Covenant Lawsuit,” in the *Study Guide*. Ask, *What do you think are some of the ways that we as believers break our covenant with God?*

7. Lead the class to name some of the things they have learned from this study of the eighth-century prophets.

8. Direct attention to the small article, “Justice and Mercy,” in the *Study Guide*, and lead the group to respond.
FOCAL TEXT
John 20:1–18

BACKGROUND
John 20:1–18

MAIN IDEA
Jesus’ resurrection confirms his identity and mission as God’s Son and calls us to follow him and tell others about him.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE
What have you seen of Jesus, and whom have you told?

TEACHING AIM
To lead the class to describe Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the risen Jesus and to tell of their own experience with Jesus.

EASTER LESSON
Seeing the Lord
Understanding the Context

This passage, John 20:1–18, can teach us much regarding how our faith should be like that of the human characters in this narrative. Jesus’ resurrection called them to a different way of looking at life.

Certainly for those first-century followers of Jesus, those few days surrounding the crucifixion-resurrection rushed at them, leaving them distraught and difficult to comprehend what had happened. Their previous experiences did not provide reference points for perceiving and understanding what had happened—Jesus did not stay dead. The crucifixion-resurrection happening was too big for their mortal minds to manage and neatly package, even as it is for ours.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Mary and the First Day (20:1–2)

20:1. The other Gospel accounts (Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12) include Mary Magdalene and other women. John focused on Mary Magdalene only. Her reactions through this episode presented the contours of the resurrection account John wanted to emphasize.

Jesus met this woman from a place on the Sea of Galilee and relieved her of seven demons. She was full of vices (Luke 8:2). She is one of the only ones who followed Jesus to the cross and then to the tomb. Sometime before sunrise, however, Mary arrived and found, to her horror, the tomb was open.

20:2. Mary hurried to report to Peter and the other disciples that someone had stolen the body. Could a robber have been looking for loot, since the body had been left in the tomb of a rich man? Had some of the detractors of Jesus stolen the body to distress the disciples? Mary said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb” (John 20:2). She repeated a variation of this statement two more times in this passage (20:13, 15).
More than One Witness (20:3–4)

Peter could not hurry enough to beat the “other disciple” to check Mary’s report. The “other disciple” likely was John’s self-identification. Something of Jewish law may be seen with the two male witnesses represented. Regard for women’s testimonies in these matters was not high.

Weighing the Evidence (20:5–7)

The details regarding the grave clothes are interesting and pertinent. The linens used for wrapping the body were lying in one location, and the cloth on Jesus’ head lay in another spot. The garments had been removed and set aside in an orderly fashion. Jesus’ body did not dematerialize through the cloth. Such orderliness also indicated no thievery happened. Looters never respect the contents of a place. They rifle through everything, strewing items they do not want everywhere.

What happened to the grave clothes after the disciples left the tomb? Apparently the disciples did not think their presence was necessary for substantiating the resurrection. This is one signal for us to recognize a shift in thinking that began with the disciples regarding validating the resurrection.

Belief—Deductive and Inductive (20:8–9)

John had already looked in but allowed Peter to be the first to enter the tomb. John went in for a closer look, which did not take long. Something transpired in his mind. A move from making a decision based on hard evidence to intuiting a reality occurred.

Somehow several things converged—the facts of the empty tomb and the grave clothes, the many times Jesus had said he would die but rise again, and John and Peter’s latent hopefulness that Jesus indeed would come back to life. John stands as the first of a long succession of believers since that day who have built their lives around the risen Jesus, without seeing the resurrection happen or being able to explain how it happened.
We Believe One by One (20:10–13)

20:10. Why did Peter and John leave Mary (and with the other Gospels—the other women) to go home? Perhaps their pastoral care skills were not yet highly developed! A lesson for all of us is that we may well come to a conclusion on a matter, but others come at their own pace.

20:11–12. Mary still had not recognized the situation clearly. Her grief over losing Jesus was overwhelming. Grief can cause us not to know where we are, or to be unable even to move out of a location. Only after the two disciples had left did Mary inspect the tomb for herself. New characters had arrived—heavenly beings, angels, messengers from God!

20:13. Notice that the angels, sitting as bookends where Jesus’ body had been laid, did not declare *no weeping*, but asked Mary, “Woman, *why* are you weeping?” (italics added to quotation for emphasis). The question caused Mary to stop, reflect on the situation, and attempt to find some clarity.

Crisis—Shutting Down or Opening Up (20:14–16)

20:14. Another figure appeared, not recognizable to Mary, no doubt because of her heavy weeping. Grief, probably more than any other emotion—if it can be limited to only an emotion—may be one of the most limiting factors for us. We can lose track of time and where we are, but still feel the need to find a centering.

20:15. The character asked, now the second time in the last few verses, why she was weeping. Mary was still addled from the last few, quick events. So, with tear-filled eyes, she guessed the figure was the caretaker for the tomb area. She accusingly addressed the person, asking him to give her the location of the body. We have to wonder how she could have imagined the cemetery caretaker would have been moving a body around! Too, even if she could find the location, how would she and those with her successfully relocate the body?

20:16. Perhaps in some of the same ways that conviction and intent came together for John, Mary gained clarity on the situation when she heard
her name, The personal nature of Jesus’ calling her name, in the way he had over the time he had known her, cut through the grief.

As we experience Jesus calling us by name, the abyss between faith and fact closes. And, Mary replied with the title she had typically called Jesus, “Teacher.” Life began to take on a new tone and texture. Where there had been a closed door, an entrance to something better appeared.

**Seeing and Believing (20:17–18)**

20:17. By implication from Jesus’ words, “Do not hold on to me” (20:17), Mary must have rushed to hug Jesus. His exhortation was to interpret to her he had become something more than the physical body by which she had known him. Note the language from John. Jesus said, “I am ascending . . . ,” meaning a transition was occurring even as they talked.

20:18. Mary ran to find the disciples, one more time. Mary’s experience of coming to affirm Jesus’ resurrection is somewhat like what Thomas’s would be within a few days. Both entered into a new way of thinking, a new way of looking at life.

**Focusing on the Meaning**

We can learn from the experience of Mary going out to the tomb—on the first day of the week. Unexpectedly, for her, a tremendous revelation awaited her. Can we gather for worship for a sense of readiness to meet the Lord on the first day of the week? Each Sunday is a new opportunity to worship with those who hold in common the touch of the risen Lord.

Contemporary Christians lack the opportunity to inspect the grave clothes or even to speak with any of those original followers who moved about the tomb. First-hand accounts are two millennia in our past. From this point in Scripture (John 20), we have the records of those who considered the resurrection a real event. Their lives reflected the power of the ever-present, although invisible, Lord. Their successors, each generation a little further away from the resurrection, continued in faith in Christ because of what their predecessors had taught and lived for.
Thus, the deductive evidence has mounted over twenty-one centuries and now millions of people have stepped over the divide between what can be established by sensory perception and that which is perceived by one’s spirit.

TEACHING PLANS

Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

Connect with Life

1. Bring one or more printed optical illusions and let the class review and discuss them for a few minutes. You can do a search on the internet for “optical illusions.” There are also picture books that have elaborate drawings or photographs with hidden or obscure objects. Say, These optical illusions just show that we don’t always see what’s right in front of our eyes. Ask for reasons that people don’t always see what’s right in front of their eyes. (Reasons might be: not paying attention, not looking closely enough, requiring a different perspective, stuck on seeing something from one perspective, and so on.)

2. Say, Today’s lesson is about people who had issues with seeing something that was right in front of their eyes. Let’s see whether we can relate to their experiences.

Guide Bible Study

3. Briefly retell the story of Jesus’ last days in Jerusalem, concentrating on his crucifixion and burial. If you like, you can lead the class to recall the events. If time permits, you can read selected Gospel passages. Do not assume that everyone in the class today is familiar with the account.
4. Note that there are three “scenes” in our passage today (John 20:1–18). Scene I is 20:1–2. Scene II is 20:3–10. Scene III is 20:11–18. Lead the class to act out the three scenes, using the dialog from the passage. Depending on your class size, you may choose to divide into three groups and assign one scene to each. You may also call for volunteers for each of the major characters: Mary Magdalene, Peter, the “other disciple,” the angel(s) at the tomb, and Jesus. You may also want to have a narrator to read the Scripture. Allow a few minutes for the “actors” to prepare, and then call for the impromptu presentation.

5. Thank the actors. Then ask them for some of their thoughts about the experience or about the passage. Ask the rest of the class for thoughts they may have had during the dramatic presentation.

Encourage Application

6. Read John 20:17, and note this statement in the Study Guide: “Initially, Jesus prevented Mary from clinging to him. This does not seem to be because he was untouchable (20:27), but because Mary now had a mission to tell others Jesus was alive.” Ask, What are some reasons Mary might not have told people Jesus was alive? Allow enough time for thoughtful answers, which might include these: fear that she was mistaken, that no one would believe her, or that she would be ridiculed.

Then ask, Do we still have this same mission to tell others that Jesus is alive? Do we do so? Why or why not? You may want to write these questions on slips of paper or the markerboard and allow the class to answer them in small groups.

7. Refer to the small article, “Encountering Jesus,” in the Study Guide. Invite the class to recall instances when they have encountered Jesus in unexpected situations such as these. Again, you may want to work in small groups or pairs, or you may ask the entire class to share their experiences.
Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

Connect with Life

1. Refer to and summarize the introductory paragraphs of the lesson in the Study Guide.
   Say, *Today’s lesson is about people who had issues with seeing something that was right in front of their eyes. Let’s see whether we can relate to their experiences.*

Guide Bible Study

2. For some background on the passage, briefly recount the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. (Remember that there may be people in your class who are not familiar with this story.) You may choose to read Scripture from the Gospels as your time permits. John 20:38–42 has details about the burial, including the stone rolled in front of the tomb.

3. Invite someone to read John 20:1–2. Ask, *Why do you think Mary Magdalene ran to tell Peter and the other disciples? What other actions might she have taken?*

4. Enlist someone to read John 20:3–10. Ask, *Why do you think that “the other disciple” outran Peter to reach the tomb first? Why do you think he did not go into the tomb? Why do you think Peter did enter the tomb? Why does the passage carefully describe the linen cloths and the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head?* (See the Study Guide for information.)

5. Have someone read 20:8–9. Ask, *What do you think the author was trying to say about seeing and believing?* (See the Study Guide for information.)

6. Invite someone to read John 20:11–18. Note that the text identifies the two individuals inside the tomb as angels in white. Ask, *Why do you think Mary did not recognize the angels and at first thought that Jesus was the gardener?*
7. Read John 20:16–17 again. Ask, Why do you think Mary did not recognize Jesus until He said her name? Note that Jesus’ words to Mary are best translated, Stop holding on or clinging to me. State that there is no reason to think Jesus was untouchable; in fact, Jesus challenged Thomas to touch him in John 20:27. Ask, Why do you think Jesus wanted Mary to stop clinging to him?

8. Read John 20:17 again. Ask, Who do you think Jesus means by “my brothers”? How does one become a brother or sister to Jesus?

Encourage Application

9. Refer to and summarize the small article, “Where Was Jesus’ Body?” in the Study Guide. Ask whether people have heard other theories that attempt to explain away the resurrection (for example, some say that Jesus didn’t really die on the cross; he simply fainted and was revived later). Lead a discussion with questions such as these: Why do people still have doubts about whether Jesus rose from the dead? Is it “wrong” for sincere Christians to sometimes doubt or wonder about this? What does it take to believe? Are there degrees or levels of believing? Are there circumstances in our lives that lead us to believe (or doubt) more strongly?

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