

# The Glory and Decline Of The Kingdom



**JUNIOR NOTES — 9 to 12 Years**

**STAGE THREE OF FIVE STAGES**

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 121, ST. AGNES 5097, SOUTH AUSTRALIA



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## FOREWORD

Having concluded stage two with the promises made to David, we take up the history from there and consider first the grandeur and glory of the Kingdom and then trace its sad decline. The waywardness and outright disobedience of both kings and people become a too familiar pattern. No wonder God grew weary and would spare His people no longer. So ultimately He sent them to Babylon for their own good and that they might know that He was Yahweh. But the story is not entirely gloomy. Such wonderful characters as Hezekiah, Daniel, Esther and other faithful servants inspire us to serve the true and living God too. Even children like Samuel and Josiah gave their lives over to serving God and children today should be encouraged by such wonderful examples. It is this that we must look for whenever we read the Bible — incidents and characters who show us by the example of their own faith and obedience what we must do to please God.

We learn too, of course, that only one — that child, whose life story we begin to follow at the end of our lessons,— was obedient in all things and far surpassed in his simple faith all those great men of old. This does not make us give up hope of pleasing God but rather makes us thankful that God should set before us a perfect example to follow. Let us then, learn to honour and obey Him in the days of our youth.

THE COMMITTEE

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“AND THE HAND OF YAHWEH WAS ON ELIJAH; AND HE GIRDED UP HIS LOINS, AND RAN BEFORE AHAB TO THE ENTRANCE OF JEZREEL”

1 Kings 18:46

# 1. THE KINGDOM IS ESTABLISHED

*“And Yahweh preserved David whithersoever he went.”*

## **Aim**

*To show how God established David as king over Israel.*

After the people of Israel had lived in the Promised Land for many years, they desired a king. God was really their king, but they wanted a king who could proudly lead them into battle — just like the nations around them. Saul became their first king, but he failed to be obedient to God. So God anointed David, a man after His own heart, to rule over His people.

2 Samuel 8 and 9

## **DAVID IS KING: 2 Samuel 7:1-17**

David was now king in Jerusalem. It was about 20 years since God had first sent the prophet Samuel to anoint him to be king (1 Sam. 16:12-13). Although he had only been a shepherd boy then, God was training him to rule His people. During the long years that followed, he had faced many troubles. However, he always remembered that God was with him, guiding him to this very time when he should at last be king in Jerusalem. In our lessons last year we learnt how God made David a wonderful promise, concerning his “seed”, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was to be the great son of David, who would sit on David’s throne forever. When that great king comes, he will rule not only over Israel, but over the whole world (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

## **DAVID OVERTHROWS HIS ENEMIES: 2 Samuel 8**

At the time when God made His great promise about David’s “seed”, David was feeling so thankful for God’s blessings, that he wanted to build a house of worship for Him. God was certainly pleased to see that David was so grateful, but He said: *“Thou shalt not build an house for My Name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood”* (1 Chron. 28:3). God’s Temple was to be built in a time of peace. Meanwhile it was David’s work to overthrow the enemies who surrounded his kingdom on every hand. We learn in 2 Samuel chapters 8 to 12 of the seven campaigns that David fought, to the North, South, East and West, until the enemies of Israel were defeated (see map). When he went out to battle, God helped

him win victories over the nations. “*And Yahweh preserved David whithersoever he went*” (2 Sam. 8:6, 14). David never gave up the idea of a house of worship for God. From his victorious campaigns he gathered much treasure which later would be used by his son when building the glorious temple that he had so desired to build (2 Sam. 8:10-11).

### **DAVID REMEMBERS HIS FRIENDS: 2 Samuel 9:1-4**

David was very busy, but no matter how much he had to do, he never forgot his friends. He sent his servants to see if there were any of Jonathan’s family still alive. “*Is there not yet any of the house of Saul*”, said David, “*that I may shew the kindness of God unto him?*” In the days when he had fled from Saul, Jonathan had been his best friend. They had both loved God and were full of faith and courage. Although Jonathan was Saul’s eldest son, he was glad when he knew that God had chosen David to be the next king. The two men had made a covenant of friendship together and David had promised to care for Jonathan’s family when he became king. So now David sent for Ziba, a servant in Saul’s house, who told him that Jonathan had one son still living, named Mephibosheth.

### **DAVID CARES FOR MEPHIBOSHETH: 2 Samuel 9:5-13**

Mephibosheth was lame. When Jonathan his father was killed in battle, his nurse had picked up his little son and fled with him for safety. In her panic she had fallen with him and he was badly hurt. Since then he had been lame in both his feet and could not walk properly.

When the king called for him Mephibosheth came in and bowed before him. He knew that a lame man was of no value to the king and was a little afraid of facing him. David however, was glad of the opportunity to help his friend’s son. He gave him back all the land that had belonged to Saul, his grandfather, and invited him to eat at the king’s table. Mephibosheth, of course, could not look after his family’s land; so his servant, Ziba, was appointed to see to it. David brought Mephibosheth to live in Jerusalem and told his servants, “*Mephibosheth shall eat at my table, as one of the king’s sons*” (v11) In this way David kept his promise to Jonathan and honoured his son.

Mephibosheth was very grateful for the privileges given to him by the king and remained loyal to David, for this was the only way he could show his thanks.



## LESSON FOR US

God had chosen David to be king when he was just a shepherd boy. He knew that the things David would learn while minding the sheep would teach him how to rule His people wisely. A shepherd must be able to guide his sheep into safe places and make sure they do not stray and hurt themselves. He must defend them against their enemies. He must be kind to each one, so that they will learn to love and trust him.

David was just like this with the people of Israel. He went out to battle with them and helped them to victory. We are told that he “*executed judgment and justice unto all his people*” (8:15) — which means that he was a fair and wise ruler, guiding them like a shepherd. He was never too busy to be kind to those in need and so they loved and trusted him.

We must grow to be like that towards each other — not just to our special friends, for that is easy, but to all those about us, both young and old who love the Truth. In this way, by the little kind and thoughtful things we do, we help and encourage each other in our walk towards the Kingdom.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only): 2 Samuel 12:7-25

We like to read the stories of David and follow his life as he grew from a shepherd boy to a brave young man, whose faith in God helped him slay the giant, Goliath. As he fled from Saul we admire his courage and come to love him as we see the lovely friendship grow up between him and Jonathan. At last he becomes a mighty soldier and a great king, faithful to God and grateful for all he had been given. The story, however, does not end there. Between the things we have spoken of in this lesson and the glorious reign of his son, Solomon, there were years of trouble, pain and sorrow. All this came upon David because he sinned against God.

The men of Israel were at war, fighting against the Ammonites. David should have been leading them into battle, but he decided to stay at home in his palace. Instead of being busy defending his people, as a good shepherd and king, he was idle and his thoughts were not with them at all. As he strolled at night upon his rooftop, he saw a beautiful woman, named Bathsheba, and desired her for his wife. David knew that she was the wife of another man, but he still took her to be his wife. One sin led to another and so, to try and cover up his first sin, he arranged to have her husband, a just and faithful man named Uriah, killed in battle.

In all this, God was not in David’s thoughts, but God knew all that David had done; nothing was hidden from His eyes. So He sent His prophet Nathan to speak to him. Nathan reminded David of all that God had done

in bringing him to the throne of Israel. *“Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of Yahweh, to do evil in His sight?”* Nathan asked him, *“Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon”* (12:9).

David had returned evil for all the love God had shown him. *“Now therefore”*, the prophet continued, *“the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me”* (12:10).

What could David say? He knew he had done wrong and God was going to punish him severely.

*“I have sinned against Yahweh,”* said David.

*“Yahweh also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die,”* was Nathan’s reply (v13).

What wonderful mercy God showed to David! He should have been put to death, but God saw the change in his heart and forgave him. Never again did he forget God’s love towards him. Yet he was never allowed to forget the tragedy of this story for the rest of his life. Trouble arose amongst his own sons, who brought him shame and sorrow. All these trials taught David to be very humble before God and this pleased God.

How deceitful sin is. It is so easy to do what we want to do and to try to cover up our sins. Never let us forget that God, who sees and knows all things, even the very thoughts of our heart, is a just God and will punish us if we sin against Him. We must humble ourselves as David did, admit that we have done wrong and trust in God at all times.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. How many years had passed since Samuel anointed David?
2. To show his thanks to God, what did David want to do?
3. Why would God not let David do it?
4. What work did God want David to do now that he was king?
5. Whom had David promised to care for?
6. What had happened to Mephibosheth when he was small?
7. What two things did David do for Mephibosheth?
8. Who was to look after Mephibosheth’s lands?
9. What had David done as a boy that helped him to be a good king?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell what David did, when he became king, to show his love for Jonathan.
2. David had been a shepherd. How did this help him to be a good king?
3. What lessons do we learn from David's kindness to Mephibosheth?

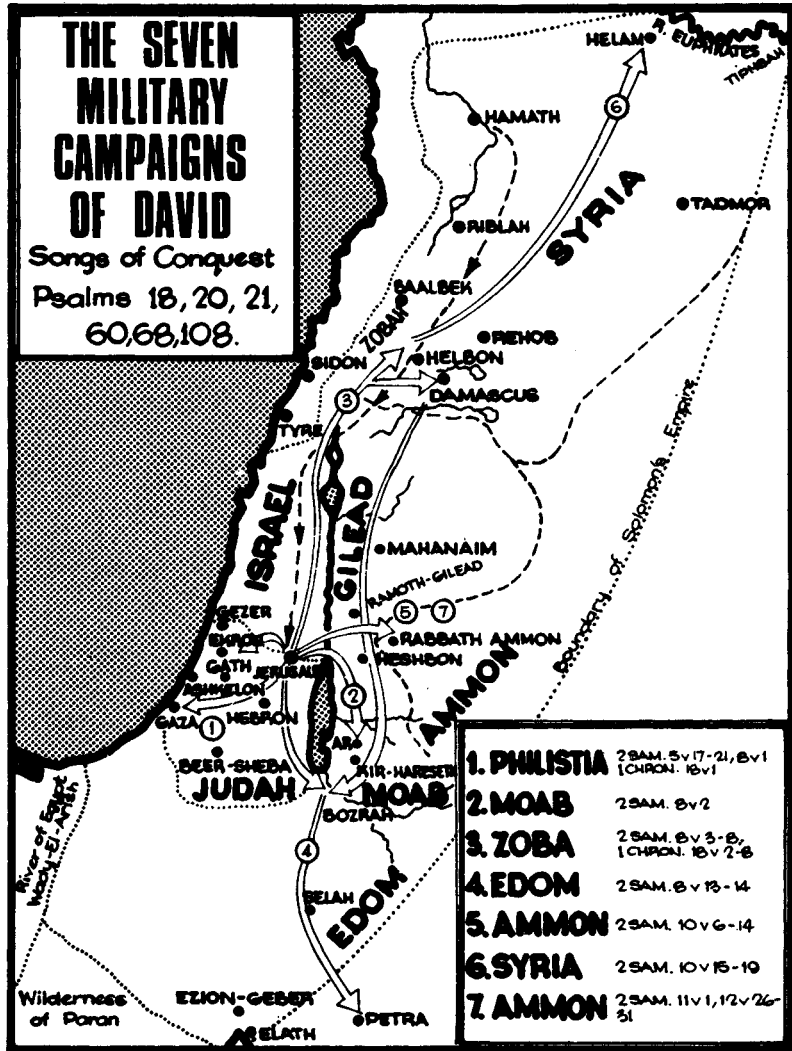
### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

4. David had sinned against God.
  - (a) Tell how God showed mercy to David.
  - (b) Tell how God punished David.
  - (c) What lessons do we learn from David's sin?



# THE SEVEN MILITARY CAMPAIGNS OF DAVID

Songs of Conquest  
Psalms 18, 20, 21,  
60, 68, 108.



## 2. THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

*“All Israel feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Solomon became king while David was still alive and began to rule wisely.*

David was now an old man. The hardships of his life as a soldier, fighting the battles of Yahweh, had worn him out. It was time for someone else to take over and rule God's people. David already knew who the next king was to be, but it was necessary to make an announcement to the nation.

1 Kings 3

### **SOLOMON BECOMES KING: 1 Kings 1:5-10, 32:40**

David was king for forty years. He reigned over Judah in Hebron for seven and a half years and then for thirty three years in Jerusalem over the whole of Israel (2 Sam. 5:4-5). He was a great king indeed, but his reign was not a peaceful one. When we look at the things David did, we can see how he was preparing for the reign of his son Solomon, whose name means 'peaceable', for God had chosen him to succeed David. *“Behold,”* God said, *“a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days”* (1 Chron. 22:9).

In the meantime, some of David's other sons were anxious to steal the kingdom for themselves. First Absalom tried to overthrow his own father and David had to flee out of his palace and across the river Jordan. Many of his faithful friends accompanied him and Absalom was eventually killed by Joab, captain of David's army, a hard man but a very loyal soldier. Then, when David was old and weak, Adonijah gathered some supporters together including Joab and Abiathar, the priest. He prepared a feast where he was going to announce that he was the new king.

However, the faithful prophet Nathan, Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and Zadok the priest, consulted with David. They knew that David had promised that Solomon should be king, for God had chosen him. *“Of all*

my sons,” said David, “(for Yahweh hath given me many sons), He hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel” (1 Chron. 28:5). Then David gave instructions for Solomon to be anointed king. “Cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule and bring him down to Gihon: And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel” (1 Kings 1:34).

So they blew the trumpet for all Jerusalem to hear and brought Solomon to sit upon David’s throne. Zadok the priest anointed him with oil out of the tabernacle and “they blew the trumpet and all the people said, God save king Solomon” (1 Kings 1:39). When David was told that this had been done just as he had commanded, he thanked God, saying, “Blessed be Yahweh God of Israel, who hath given me one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it” (1 Kings 1:48).

### **SOLOMON BEGINS TO REIGN: 1 Kings 3:3-15**

From a child Solomon had learned to love God. Both David his father and Bathsheba his mother had taught him to fear God and to keep His commandments. So when he first became king we read that “Solomon loved Yahweh, walking in the statutes of David his father”(v3).

One of the first things that Solomon did as king was to gather together all the captains and princes of Israel at Gibeon, where the Tabernacle was set up. Before all the people he offered upon the brasen altar a thousand burnt offerings, for he was determined to serve God well. v 4

That night, God appeared to him in a dream and said, “Ask what I shall give thee” (v5). Solomon realised how richly God had blessed his father David and now had blessed him too, to make him sit on David’s throne. Yet when he thought of the great work of ruling God’s people, he was not sure whether he was going to be able to rule them wisely. “I am but a little child”, he confessed to God. “I know not how to go out or come in” (v7). He needed God’s help to guide him in governing Israel well. “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this Thy so great a people?” (v9). With such an answer God was well pleased. “Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart”, He said (v12). God knew that it would have been quite natural for a king to ask for a long reign, or for great riches for himself, or for victory over his enemies (v11), but Solomon had asked for none of these. So God was pleased to give him wisdom as he had asked, as well as the things which he had not desired. “I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: ...and if thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy

*father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days” (vv13, 14).*

### **SOLOMON SHOWS HIS WISDOM: 1 Kings 3:16-28**

Not long after, when Solomon was back in Jerusalem, two women came before him with a problem that seemed too difficult to solve. These two women lived in the same house and had both given birth to a baby son. During the night one of the babies died. Each of the women now said that the living baby was her own. They argued before the king. One woman said that the other woman’s baby had died in the night and she had taken the living baby from its mother while she slept and put the dead baby in its place. “No,” said the woman, *“the living is my son and the dead is thy son”*. The other said, *“No, but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son”* (v22).

How could the king ever know who was the true mother of the living child? Thoughtfully he answered, *“Bring me a sword”* (v24). So they brought a sword to the king. *“Divide the living child in two,”* said Solomon, *“and give half to the one, and half to the other”* (v25). Immediately the true mother cried out, *“O my lord, give her the living child and in no wise slay it”*. But the other said, *“Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it”* (v26). It was easy now to see who was telling the truth. No true mother would want her own baby, as Solomon wisely knew. *“Give her the living child,”* he said, *“and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof”* (v27).

We can be sure that Solomon certainly did not mean to kill that little baby, but because he was wise, he knew how to find the baby’s real mother.

*“And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment”* (v28).

### **LESSON FOR US**

Solomon was so impressed by the need to get wisdom that the book of Proverbs is full of advice to search for wisdom, as though we were seeking hidden treasure (2:4). It was no wonder then that Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule His people, for he knew that *“wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it”* (8:11). True wisdom can only be found in the Bible. It teaches us how to speak and how to behave and how to make right decisions in our lives. We can learn that wisdom as Solomon did, by listening carefully to our mother and father as they teach us what God wants us to do. *“Be not wise in thine own eyes,”* David told his son, because that is not true wisdom; it is only pride and cleverness.

daily, by praying to God and reading His word in the Bible. The stories we read of faithful men and women of old will help us also to walk wisely before our God.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years)**

In these lessons the story of the glorious days of Israel's history is unfolding. Not only is it an exciting and thrilling story, but it takes our mind forward to the time when the greater "*Son of David*", the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:1) will be king over the whole world. In Ezek. 37:24 he is called by God "*my servant David*", for David means "the beloved" and we know that God also proclaimed him, "*My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3:17).

When Christ returns he will sit on the throne of David (Luke 1:32) and rule from Jerusalem over the whole world, for he must destroy all his enemies before he can reign over his kingdom in peace. Speaking of this time, David wrote in the psalms: "*Yahweh said unto my Lord (i.e. Christ), Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*" (Psa. 110:1). So God will send the Lord Jesus Christ back from heaven to overthrow all his enemies and then the earth will have peace and quietness. These things are spoken of in Isa. 9:6-7, where he is called: "*the Prince of Peace*". Just as Solomon asked God for wisdom, so God has given His Son "*the spirit of wisdom and of understanding*" (Isa. 11:2-5), for he will be a righteous king, caring for the poor and needy (Psa. 72:12).

We are now beginning to see how the reign of David and of Solomon point forward to the reign of Christ. Another way of saying this is that in his life David was a type of Christ and Solomon also a type of Christ. We can start to make a list of these types.

#### **DAVID**

- \* He sat on God's throne in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 29:23).

#### **SOLOMON**

- \* He built a glorious Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6).
- \* Other nations helped Solomon with workmen and timber (1 Kgs. 5:8-10, 18).

#### **CHRIST**

- \* Christ will reign in Jerusalem on the throne of Yahweh (Jer. 3:17).

- \* He will build a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7).
- \* Gentiles will help rebuild Jerusalem (Isa. 60:10, 13).



- \* His kingdom was wealthy (1 Kgs. 10:21, 27).
- \* People came from far away to hear his wisdom (I Kgs. 4:34).
- \* The nations will bring their wealth to Christ (Isa. 60: 11, 17).
- \* People from all nations will go up to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of Christ (Isa. 2:2-4).

## **QUESTIONS (9 – 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. How long did David reign?
2. Which one of David's sons did God choose to be king?
3. What does the name Solomon mean?
4. Who was Solomon's mother?
5. Who anointed Solomon with oil?
6. What was at Gibeon?
7. What did Solomon do at Gibeon?
8. When God appeared to Solomon, in a dream, what did Solomon ask for?
9. What else did God promise to Solomon?
10. What had Solomon learned about wisdom?
11. Where is the only place we can find true wisdom?

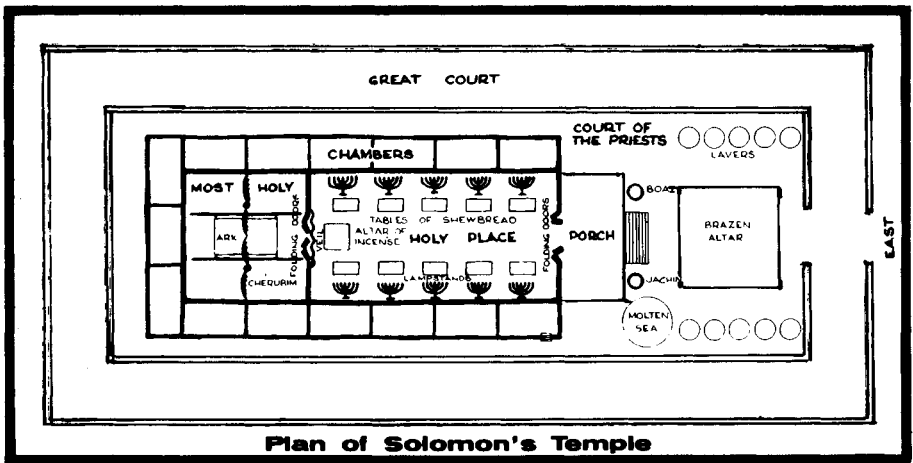
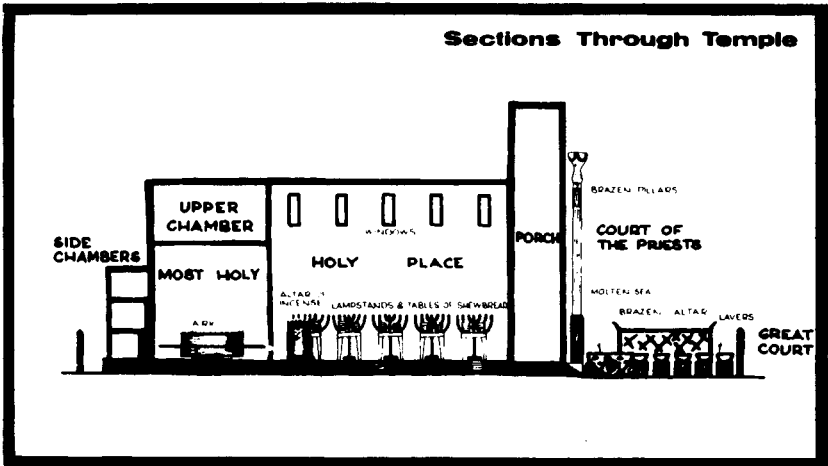
### **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell how Solomon was made king as David commanded.
2. Tell what happened when God appeared to Solomon in a dream at Gibeon.
3. Tell how Solomon judged wisely between the two women who came before him.

### **Additional Answers 9 11 – 12 years)**

4. Make a list showing three ways in which David was a type of Christ and three ways in which Solomon was a type of Christ.

# Plan and Side View of SOLOMON'S TEMPLE



### 3. THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

*“The house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods.”*

#### **Aim**

*To show how Solomon built a House for the Name of Yahweh God of Israel in Jerusalem.*

As we have already seen, God would not allow David to build a house for His Name, because he had “*shed much blood*”. Instead, his son Solomon was chosen to build the Temple according to the plans which God had shown to David (1 Chron. 28:11). David gathered many treasures during his reign and encouraged his son in the work. “*Yahweh be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of Yahweh thy God, as He hath said of thee*” (1 Chron. 22:11).

1 Kings 5 to 8

#### **DAVID MAKES PREPARATIONS: 1 Chronicles 28:10-20; 29:1-17**

Much of the preparation for the Temple was done by David. To him it was an exciting project and he could see God’s wisdom in waiting for a time of peace before such a house of worship was built. God gave David the pattern of the building (1 Chron. 28:11, 19), which he drew up in detail for Solomon. As he conquered his enemies, he collected treasures of gold and silver, of brass and iron, wood and of precious stones, “*which*” said David, “*I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God*” (1 Chron. 29:2). David’s enthusiasm for the work made the people of Israel keen to help too. The princes and captains all “*offered willingly*” gold and silver and brass and iron and whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasure of the house of Yahweh. “*Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to Yahweh: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy*” (1 Chron. 29:6-9).

So David turned the hearts of the people to God in the great work of building the Temple. In his prayer to God before all the people David said: “*All this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own*” (1 Chron. 29:16).

## **SOLOMON BUILDS THE TEMPLE: 1 Kings 5**

When Hiram, King of Tyre, heard of David's death, he sent messages of sympathy to Solomon, for Hiram had always admired David. He hoped now that Solomon would continue the friendship that he had enjoyed with his father. Solomon was only too happy to welcome these messengers. He sent straightaway to seek Hiram's help in building the Temple, knowing that he had already provided cedar out of the forests of Lebanon for David to build his palace in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 2:3). He told Hiram that the *"house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods"* (2 Chron. 2:5). Hiram could see that the God of Israel had richly blessed His people by giving David a wise son to reign in his stead. *"Because Yahweh hath loved his people, he hath made thee king over them"*, wrote Hiram in his letter to Solomon. *"Blessed be Yahweh God of Israel, that made heaven and earth; who hath given to David the king a wise son...that might build an house for Yahweh"* (2 Chron. 2:11-12).

So Hiram agreed to supply Solomon with timber and skilled workmen, in exchange for wheat, barley, wine and oil from Israel (2 Chron. 2:10). Each month 10,000 men were sent from Israel into the forests of Lebanon to help, while back in Israel thousands were set to work in the quarries to cut and shape the beautiful stones for the foundations and walls. Many more workers were needed as well to help prepare the brass and other metals used in the building. All the work was done well away from the Temple site. No sound of it was heard in Jerusalem. So skilful were the craftsmen that when the time came to set up the building *"neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house"* (1 Kings 6:7). Everything fitted perfectly together, just as God had planned. So Solomon began to build in the fourth year of his reign and it was finished in the eleventh year — seven and a half years of careful and skilful work.

## **THE PLAN OF THE TEMPLE:**

The Temple was in some ways like the Tabernacle which God had told Moses to make in the wilderness. The Tabernacle was still being used in Israel in David's day. It was a tent, divided into two rooms, called the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Whenever the children of Israel broke camp and moved on their journeys, the Tabernacle was taken down, carefully covered and carried along by the Levites. Like Solomon's Temple, it was a place of worship, where God placed His glory, and Israel came to worship and sacrifice to Him (Exod. 40:17-38). Now that Israel was established as a nation in their own land, God was replacing the Tabernacle

with a Temple of stone, a more permanent and glorious place of worship, to stand on Mount Moriah at Jerusalem. It was the dwelling place of God in Israel, where the priests and the Levites could serve Him on behalf of all the people.

The Temple was about twice the size of the Tabernacle. It was of stone, panelled with wood and completely overlaid with gold. Around three sides of the Temple, rooms were built three storeys high for the priests to use and for storerooms. On the eastern end was an entrance porch. In front of the porch were two very tall pillars of brass. They were given names: one was called Jachin, and the other Boaz. In the courtyard outside the porch stood a huge water tank made of brass, called the Sea, and ten smaller lavers where the sacrifices stood, five on the north side and five on the south side. The great brazen altar for the burnt sacrifice stood in the courtyard too.

Inside, the Temple was divided like the Tabernacle into two rooms. The first, towards the eastern end, was the Holy Place. Into this the priests would go to light the ten golden lampstands and to place the shewbread on the ten golden tables. The golden altar of incense stood in front of the veil that separated the Holy from the Most Holy Place. On the other side of the veil were found the Cherubim and the Ark of the Covenant over which God's glory shone. Only the High Priest could enter here, and on only one day of the year, on the Day of Atonement. These two rooms were separated by doors (1 Kings 6:31) and by the veil, which was beautifully embroidered with the figures of the Cherubim.

The Most Holy Place was a cube in shape — 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide and 20 cubits high (exactly double the measurements of the Most Holy in the Tabernacle).

The two Cherubim which Solomon had made were of olive wood overlaid with gold. They stood 10 cubits high with wings outstretched, each wing measuring 5 cubits. These Cherubim were placed side by side in the Most Holy, *“so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house”* (1 Kings 6:23-27).

When the Ark of God was brought in by the priests it was placed under the outstretched wings of the Cherubim in the Most Holy place. On top of the Ark were its Cherubim which rose up out of the golden Mercy Seat. Inside the Ark were the two tables of stone on which Moses had written the ten commandments.

When finished, the whole Temple was a place of grandeur and rare beauty, a fit dwelling place for God among His people.

## LESSON FOR US

Solomon's Temple is no longer standing in Jerusalem. Many centuries ago it was destroyed, for when the people turned from worshipping Yahweh, He allowed their enemies to take them captive into a far country.

God is building today a far greater Temple than Solomon's. It is a Temple made up of "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5) — people who let Him shape their lives so that they will be just right to fit into His living Temple. The Lord Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone in that building (Eph. 2:20) and all the other stones must be like him. Our lives will be pleasing to God only when we follow his example, for he obeyed God in all things.

We know that when he returns and God's Kingdom is set up, the whole earth shall be filled with God's glory (Num. 14:21), for all men everywhere will praise His Name. .

Let us try hard now to learn God's ways and be wise so that we will be able to be part of that Temple God will set up on earth.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)

### THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE: 1 Kings 8

When the Temple was finally completed and stood in all its glory, Solomon proclaimed a special feast to dedicate it to God. It was time now for the Ark to come into its resting place in the Most Holy. What joy there was in Israel on that day as the Ark came up from Zion. The Levites lifted up their voices in praise and played upon their musical instruments, "*praising and thanking Yahweh, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever*" (2 Chron. 5:12-13).

So the priests brought the Ark in and placed it under the wings of the two great Cherubim. As long as Israel remained obedient to God, there it would stay. When the priests came out from the Most Holy, the cloud of glory filled the Temple, so that they could not stay there to continue their service. Here was the sign of God's presence, showing them that He was pleased with all that had been done.

Then Solomon stood up on a special platform, where all the people could see him. The people stood and the king blessed them and spoke of the great privilege God had given to him in allowing him to build a house for His Name in Jerusalem. Then he kneeled down and spread his hands toward heaven and offered his prayer to God on behalf of all the people (2 Chron. 6:13). "*Yahweh, God of Israel,*" he said, "*there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or in earth beneath...will God indeed dwell on the earth?*"

*Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded” (vv23, 27).*

He was a faithful God, who kept His promises, as He had done to David, and placed His Name in Jerusalem (vv24, 29). He was a merciful God and would hear the prayers of those who walked before Him with all their heart (v23).

So Solomon prayed to God that, whatever troubles should come upon His people because of their sins, if they turned toward this Temple and prayed, He would hear. *“If they pray toward this place, and confess thy Name and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel”* (vv35-36). Even if Israel should be taken as captives to a far country, He asked God to forgive them and bring them back into the Land, which He had given to their fathers (vv33-34).

So Solomon prayed with all his heart before God and encouraged the people to walk before Him with a perfect heart also (V61). Then suddenly, as he ended his prayer, fire fell from heaven upon the sacrifices on the brasen altar and consumed them all. The people were afraid at the sight of such a miracle and fell upon the ground and worshipped Yahweh saying, *“For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever”* (2 Chron. 7:1-3). The week following was the Feast of Tabernacles and how joyfully it was kept in that year, for the people were *“glad and merry in heart for the goodness that Yahweh had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel His people”* (2 Chron. 7:10).

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. What treasures did David collect for the building of the Temple?
2. Whose help did Solomon ask in building the Temple?
3. Where was all the work done for building the Temple?
4. Where did the Temple stand when it was finished?
5. What was the main difference between the tabernacle and the Temple?
6. What were the names of the two main rooms of the Temple?
7. Name the furniture in the Holy Place.
8. What furniture was in the Most Holy Place?
9. What furniture stood in the court?
10. What kind of “Temple” is God building today?
11. Who is the “chief corner stone” in the Temple God is building today?

## **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell what work the men of Israel did to prepare for the building of the Temple and how it was all put together.
2. (a) Imagine you were walking into the court of the Temple for the first time. Describe what you would see there.  
(b) Inside the Holy Place what would you notice that everything was covered with?  
(c) You could not go into the Most Holy Place. Who was the only person allowed in there? When could he go in?

## **Additional Answers (11 - 12 years only)**

3. Describe how the Ark was brought to rest into the Most Holy Place.
4. (a) Solomon knew that God was a faithful and merciful God. In his prayer when he dedicated the Temple, what did Solomon specially ask God to do for His people if they were in trouble?  
(b) What happened when Solomon ended his prayer?  
(c) What did the people say?



## 4. THE GLORY OF SOLOMON

*“King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Solomon’s fame spread throughout all countries and God was praised.*

When Solomon asked God for wisdom, God promised not only wisdom but riches and honour as well, “so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days” (1 Kings 3:13). God was not slow in keeping His promise and before long all the world knew of Solomon’s fame.

1 Kings 4:20-34; 10

### **GOD BLESSES ISRAEL UNDER SOLOMON: 1 Kings 4:20-28; 10:16-29**

When Solomon was king over Israel, the nation was at rest as God had promised (5:4). “Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (4:25). The people had multiplied “as the sand which is by the sea in multitude” (v20). They were happy and content, for he ruled them wisely. Solomon’s kingdom extended as far to the north as the River Euphrates and to the border of Egypt in the south. The surrounding nations were at peace with him and his fame spread far and wide, for Israel had become a mighty nation. Kings of other countries sent him presents — of gold and silver, of beautiful robes, of spices and horses (10:25). The men of Israel were busy too, constructing fine buildings according to his plans. He even built a great seaport and sent ships off to far countries, from which they brought back gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks (10:22). He built huge stables for the many horses and chariots that he brought from Egypt (10:26-29).

So Israel became wealthy and famous and more glorious than any other nation around her.

## **THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON: 1 Kings 4:29-34**

At Gibeon God had promised to give Solomon wisdom, riches and honour. Everyone soon came to hear of his wisdom, for his wisdom *“excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men”* (vv30-31). God gave him wide knowledge of the things He had created. *“He spake of trees from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl and of creeping things and of fishes”* (v33).

Solomon was a careful observer; he looked about him and took notice of all that he saw. He had wise words to say about what he observed and these sayings were collected together and written in a book. We are told that *“he spake three thousand proverbs and his songs were one thousand and five”* (v32). It was God who had given him this wisdom and He has kept many of these sayings on record for us in His holy Word. We can read his words in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, for they are recorded there so that we too might be wise.

So amazing was his God-given wisdom and knowledge that *“there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom”* (v34).

## **THE VISIT OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA: 1 Kings 10:1-13**

About two thousand kilometres south of Israel lay the kingdom of Sheba, a rich and prosperous country, famous for the many wonderful spices which were grown there. These famous spices were exported to countries far away by means of camel trains which passed through Israel. So it was that the Queen of Sheba came to hear reports of the glory of Israel and the amazing wisdom of the king. The stories were told so often that she could not resist going to find out for herself if what she kept hearing was really true. She thought she would put Solomon to the test with difficult questions. So she set off on the long journey to Jerusalem with a very great camel train bearing gifts fit for the king, gifts of *“spices, and very much gold, and precious stones”* (v2).

She was most interested in what she had heard *“concerning the name of Yahweh”* (v1), for it was quite clear that such wisdom came from God. When she put to him the hard questions she had prepared, he was able to give clear and wise answers to them all. God had hidden nothing from the king, for he could tell her all she wished to know. Then she was conducted on a tour of Jerusalem, to see the glorious Temple he had built for Yahweh,

and his palace with its beautiful ivory throne of judgment (v18), and all the other buildings he had constructed. She noticed how contented the people were and how happily his servants attended him. She admired the way his officers were dressed and was amazed at the abundance of food on his table. When she had viewed all these things, we are told that “*there was no more spirit in her*” (v5) — it took her breath away. She could see that the reports she had heard could not possibly have described the splendour of it all.

“*And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom*” (vv6-8). Yet in all this she could tell that the glory had come from God and she praised the God of Israel. “*Blessed be Yahweh thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because Yahweh loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice*” (v9).

When she returned to her own land, Solomon let her take as a parting gift “*all her desire, whatsoever she asked*” (v13). So his fame and the fame of Yahweh, God of Israel, spread to all the ends of the world.

## **LESSON FOR US**

God blessed Solomon with riches, honour and wisdom as long as he obeyed Him and walked in His ways (1 Kings 9:4). He has promised, too, to bless all those who believe and obey His commandments. To such people who love Him, He has promised “*glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good*” (Rom. 2:10). It is not hard to think of many ways in which God has blessed us. He has given us our daily food and clothes, loving homes, health and strength, and friends in the ecclesia. Most of all He has blessed us with a knowledge of the Truth. If we try hard to serve Him right up until Christ comes, then He will bless us with “*eternal life*” (Rom. 2:7). That is the greatest blessing we can hope for.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

It is not hard to find in this lesson more ways in which the reign of Solomon was a type of the future reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can add the following points to our list.

## Solomon

- \* He sat on God's throne in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 29:23)
- \* He built a glorious Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6)
- \* Other nations helped Solomon with workmen and timber (1 Kings 5:8-10, 18)
- \* His kingdom was wealthy (1 Kings 10:21, 27)
- \* People came from far away to hear his wisdom (1 Kings 4:34)

## Christ

- \* Christ will reign in Jerusalem on the throne of Yahweh (Jer. 3:17)
- \* He will build a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7)
- \* Gentiles will help rebuild Jerusalem (Isa. 60:10, 13)
- \* The nations will bring their wealth to Christ (Isa. 60:11, 17)
- \* People from all nations will go up to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of Christ (Isa. 2:2-4)

## QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)

### Short Answers

1. What is meant by the quotation, "*Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree*"?
2. How far did Solomon's kingdom extend to the north and south?
3. What did Solomon buy from Egypt?
4. What presents did kings from other countries send him?
5. Where can we read some of Solomon's wise sayings?
6. Who came to test Solomon's wisdom with hard questions?
7. What did the Queen of Sheba think when she saw the glory of Solomon's kingdom for herself?
8. What did she notice about the people?
9. Whom did the Queen of Sheba praise when she heard Solomon's wisdom and saw his glory?
10. What did Solomon give her as a parting gift?

### Detailed Answers

1. Tell what it was like in Israel when Solomon was king.
2. (a) Why did the Queen of Sheba come to visit Solomon?  
(b) What did she say when she had heard his wisdom and seen his glory?

### Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)

3. Tell five ways in which Solomon's reign is a type of the reign of Christ.

## 5. THE KINGDOM IS DIVIDED

*"I will surely rend the kingdom from thee and give it to thy servant."*

### **Aim**

*To show how the kingdom of Israel was divided.*

God had blessed Solomon with all that a man could desire. The wealth, peace and happiness of his kingdom made life very pleasant, but as time went on he forgot that God had provided it all. God was not in all his thoughts, and he turned his mind to other things — things that God had especially forbidden. In His anger, God said: *I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant*" (1 Kings 11:11).

Kings 12

### **SOLOMON FORGETS TO BE WISE: 1 Kings 10:26-29; 11:1-13**

After Solomon had finished building the Temple, God appeared to him a second time and said: *"If thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked...then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever"* (1 Kings 9:4-5). As time went on however, he forgot what his father David had taught him: *"Solomon my son...serve God with a perfect heart and with a willing mind...if thou seek him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, He will cast thee off for ever"* (1 Chron. 28:9).

Long before there was a king in Israel, God had given careful instructions for future kings. These are found in Deut. 17:14-20. There were three things that God warned kings not to do. In these three things Solomon failed.

- \* *"He shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses"* (v16). Compare 1 Kings 10:28-29.
- \* *"Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away"* (v17). Compare 1 Kings 11:1-2.
- \* *"Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold"* (v17). Compare 1 Kings 10:27.

In all these things Solomon's heart was turned away from God. Of these three things, the one which finally led him astray from true worship, was the

marrying of many wives from foreign countries, who brought into Israel the worship of their idols. They never learned to worship Yahweh, but they taught Solomon to bow down to their idols. *“When he was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods”* (11:4). He even built altars for them to sacrifice to their gods and joined them in their false worship. *“His heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God, as was the heart of David his father”* (11:4), and God was angry (11:9-10). So God told Solomon that the kingdom would be taken away from his son and would not continue. Yet, for David’s sake, he would not take it all away. Judah and Benjamin, whose border reached right to Jerusalem, would remain as the kingdom over which David’s descendants would reign. The other ten tribes would be torn away and given to another (11:34-36).

Solomon’s wisdom had brought peace and happiness to Israel. His foolish sins would bring great sorrow and suffering to God’s people.

### **REHOBAM IS KING: 1 Kings 12:1-15**

So Solomon died, having reigned over Israel for 40 years (1 Kings 11:42-43) and Rehobam his son, reigned in his stead. The people gathered together at Shechem to anoint him king over Israel.

Now many in Israel had grown discontented, because Solomon had taxed them heavily to raise the money to pay for all the buildings he had constructed during his reign. This taxation became a great burden to the people and they hoped that the new king might make things easier. They chose a man called Jeroboam to speak to Rehobam for them. *“Thy father made our yoke grievous,”* said Jeroboam, *“make his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee”* (v4).

So Rehobam the king told the people to give him three days to think about it and he would then give them his answer.

First he asked the old men, who had been his father’s counsellors, *“How do ye advise that I may answer this people?”* The old men suggested that it would be wise for Rehobam to do as the people asked. *“If thou wilt speak good words to them,”* they said, *“then they will be thy servants for ever”* (v7).

Rehobam was not happy with this advice. For one thing, he knew that Jeroboam had hated his father, Solomon, and so he did not really want to agree to his request. So he turned to the young men who had grown up with him and asked their advice. Like Rehobam, they had been brought up in the ease and luxury of court life. They had no idea what was good for the people. So they advised the king not to give in to the people at all, but to threaten to make things much more difficult. There was no wisdom in this

advice, but it pleased the proud young king. When the people returned after three days, he answered them roughly. *“My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke”* (v14). He wanted them to see that he was a strong king and that they must bow down to his wishes. In all this, Rehoboam did not think to turn to God for advice.

### **THE KINGDOM IS DIVIDED: 1 Kings 12:16-24**

When the people heard his answer and could see that life would only get more difficult for them, they were angry. *“To your tents, O Israel,”* they cried out. *“Now see to thine own house, David”* (v16). They flung these angry words at the king. So they rebelled and would not have Rehoboam reign over them. Instead they asked Jeroboam to be their king and set him up as king in Shechem. When Rehoboam could see that his foolish words had turned the people against him he fled for his life back to Jerusalem. Only Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to him, just as God had told Solomon (11:13).

Yet Rehoboam was not quite ready to give up so easily. He gathered together all the fighting men of Judah and Benjamin and prepared to go into battle against his brethren in the north. If he acted speedily, he thought he could turn the other ten tribes back to him and put an end to their rebellion.

While he was preparing for war, God sent a prophet to him to stop him. *“Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel,”* the prophet said. *“Return every man to his house; for this thing is from me.”*

This was the beginning of many sorrows for God’s people. The glorious reign of Solomon was over, for by his sins he had turned its strength and glory into shame and unhappiness. The ten tribes in the north became known as the kingdom of ISRAEL, while the two in the south were called the kingdom of JUDAH.

### **THE SIN OF JEROBOAM: 1 Kings 12:25-33**

Now that the people had made him king, Jeroboam wanted to make sure that they would not turn back to *“the house of David”*. He knew that the people would soon want to go up to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh at the Temple, and he was afraid that they would realise that they had made a mistake. They might even want to have Rehoboam as their king again and kill him. So he thought up a very evil plan. He made two golden calves and said to the people: *“It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt”* (v28). He put one in Bethel, in the south of his kingdom, and one in Dan, right up in

the north. Foolishly the people believed him and worshipped before these idols. He proclaimed a feast day and made a house for these idols and appointed priests from the lowest of the people. All of this sounded a little bit like the things they had done before — but it was all evil; none of it was what God had commanded. It was idolatry, which God hates. So Jeroboam is known in the rest of the history of Israel as the man “*who made Israel to sin*” (1 Kings 14:16; 15:34 etc.).

## **LESSON FOR US**

We should take careful notice of the instructions God wrote down for kings. The things God was warning kings against were the pleasures of the world. Solomon allowed the pleasures of the world to take the place of God in his heart. God tells us, “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 John 2:15-16). “*Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*” (James 4:4). So we must love God and His ways, doing all that we can to please Him. He tells us in Deut. 17:18-20 how a king could do this. He had to copy out the law of God and “*read therein all the days of his life.*” We each have a Bible and must read it each day, so that we may learn to be faithful to God all the days of our life.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

Who was Jeroboam? He had been a very hard-working officer in Solomon’s day. The king had been pleased with his diligence and put him in charge of the work done by the families of the tribe of Joseph. He was obviously ambitious and stood out as a leader among the people.

One day as he left Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah met him in a field. No one else was there. Ahijah suddenly caught hold of the coat which Jeroboam was wearing — it was a new one — and tore it into twelve pieces. He gave ten pieces into Jeroboam’s hand and said: “*Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee*” (1 Kings 11:31). He went on to tell Jeroboam that God would not give him the other two tribes but would keep them for the house of David, “*that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem*” (v36). If he obeyed God and promised to keep His commandments (v38), then God would surely establish his kingdom.

God had already revealed to Solomon His decision to divide the kingdom (vv11-13). Now God had made known the man He had chosen to take part of the kingdom away from the house of David.



It seems that Jeroboam must have been very pleased to hear this astounding prophecy, for the news soon reached King Solomon's ears. The king was angry and tried to kill Jeroboam, but he fled into Egypt and stayed there till Solomon died.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

- 1. Who turned away Solomon's heart from worshipping God?
- 2. How long did Solomon reign over Israel?
- 3. Where did the people gather to make Rehoboam king?
- 4. What did the people want Rehoboam to do?
- 5. What did the old men tell Rehoboam to do?
- 6. What did the young men tell Rehoboam to say?
- 7. How did the people feel when Rehoboam gave his answer?
- 8. Whom should Rehoboam have turned to for advice?
- 9. Which two tribes stayed with Rehoboam?
- 10. How many tribes chose Jeroboam to be their king?
- 11. What was the name of the kingdom in the north?
- 12. What was the name of the kingdom in the south?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. (a) What three things did God warn kings not to do?  
(b) What one thing did God say every king over Israel must do?  
(c) What lessons do we learn from this?
2. Tell what wicked things Jeroboam did to make the people follow him as their king.
3. (a) Tell what happened after Rehoboam gave his answer to the people.  
(b) How did God stop Rehoboam from fighting against the other ten tribes?

### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

4. Tell how God revealed to Jeroboam that he would be king over Israel.

## 6. ELIJAH THE PROPHET

*“There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how God sent a drought upon the land but cared for Elijah and blessed the widow of Zarephath for her kindness to Elijah.*

The northern kingdom of Israel began very badly. As we have seen the first thing that Jeroboam did was to change the true worship of God to idolatry. One wicked king followed another. Before long there was a king on the throne named Ahab, who *“did evil in the sight of Yahweh above all that were before him”* (16:30). He made God more angry than any other king. Not only did he follow in Jeroboam’s sins but he married a very evil woman — Jezebel, the daughter of the king of the Zidonians.

1 Kings 17

### **GOD SENDS ELIJAH TO WARN AHAB: 1 Kings 16:31-33; 17:1**

Israel had forgotten Yahweh their God. They had forgotten His commandment, which said: *“Thou shalt not make thee any graven image”* (Deut. 5:7-8). The wife of Ahab, that wicked woman Jezebel, had set up altars to her god, Baal, throughout Yahweh’s land and encouraged the people to bow down to idols and serve them. King Ahab also made a temple for Baal in Samaria, where he reigned over the ten tribes and worshipped his graven image.

No wonder God was angry. He sent His prophet Elijah to announce to the king that there would be a famine in the land. So Elijah came before the king, dressed in his rough sheepskin cloak tied with a leather girdle (2 Kings 1:8), and cried out for all to hear. *“As Yahweh God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word”* (17:1). God would punish the people for their sins and give them time to remember their God and repent of their wickedness.

### **GOD PROVIDES FOR ELIJAH: 1 Kings 17:2-9)**

Ahab was very disturbed by this news and Jezebel was angry. They searched everywhere for Elijah (18:10) but God had sent him to the brook Cherith on the other side of Jordan to hide. God told Elijah, *“It shall be,*

*that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (v4). Every morning and every evening the ravens came, bringing bread and meat to feed the faithful prophet. So God sustained Elijah while Israel suffered from drought. Soon, however, even the brook Cherith dried up, because there had been no rain. God spoke again to Elijah, saying, “Arise get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee” (v9).*

## **ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH: 1 Kings 17:10-16**

Zarephath was in Zidon, where Jezebel herself had come from. Yet God had sent Elijah there to care for him. When Elijah came to the gate of the city he saw the widow woman gathering sticks. He called out to her: *“Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink” (v10). As she went to get the water, he said, “Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand” (v11). In such a time of drought, water and food were scarce, as Elijah knew. The poor widow must have recognised Elijah, for she turned and said, “As Yahweh thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (v12).*

How could this poor widow help Elijah, when she had only enough for one last little meal for herself and her son and then they must die? But Elijah gave her hope and encouraged her to trust in Yahweh the God of Israel, who had sent him to her.

*“Fear not,” he said, “go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son” (v13). “For thus said Yahweh, God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that Yahweh sendeth rain upon the earth” (v14).*

The widow believed Elijah and trusted in the God of Israel. She went and did as Elijah said. From that time on her flour and oil never failed, no matter how often she used them to cook for Elijah and herself and her son.

## **THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH’S SON: 1 Kings 17:17-24**

Some time later, a sad thing happened. The widow’s son fell sick and died. The poor woman was very distressed. She thought that God was punishing her for her sins. Elijah took her son out of her arms and carried

him up to the room where he lived in the widow's house. He laid him upon his own bed and cried out unto God for help. Then he stretched himself out upon the child three times and cried unto God, "*O Yahweh my God, I pray thee, let this child's life come into him again*" (v21). God heard his prayer and brought the boy to life again. How happily Elijah would have taken the child downstairs and given him into his mother's arms once more. "See," he said, "*thy son liveth*" (v23). With her heart full of joy and thankfulness she said to Elijah, "*Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Yahweh in thy mouth is truth*" (v24).

## **LESSON FOR US**

God's people Israel had forgotten Him, but a poor Gentile woman in another land had heard of the God of Israel and believed in Him. We are all Gentiles by birth, but we have heard of Yahweh the God of Israel. We read of his mighty acts every day in our Bible. If we have such faith as the widow of Zarephath, God will always provide for our needs, as He did for her and her son. Troubles came upon her, as they will surely come upon us, but God gave her joy and gladness in the end, because she trusted in Him. Let us trust in Him too and He will give us everlasting joy in His kingdom.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 – 12 years only)**

One of the most important lessons that God wanted His people to learn was that "*man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Yahweh*" (Deut. 8:3). In the days of Ahab the people of Israel had shut their ears to the word of God. They did not want to hear. They were so full of Baal-worship that they had no thought to spare for Yahweh. To teach them a lesson, God sent a famine, which meant that their daily bread would soon run out. If they would not listen to His word, He would not give them bread.

God saw that the widow of Zarephath was a different kind of person altogether. She believed in the God of Israel. She trusted His prophet Elijah and listened to the Word of God which he spoke. She was not hard of heart like Israel, but kind and obedient to Elijah's word. Because of the great faith she showed, God provided her with her daily bread right through the drought. So long as her faith continued, she never lacked meal and oil to make her bread.

The Lord Jesus Christ mentioned this poor widow, who was rich in faith, when he tried to teach the word of God to people in his home town of Nazareth. Their hearts were hardened and they did not believe him (see Matt. 13:58) so he told them that although there were many widows in

Elijah's day, he was not sent to the widows in Israel. He was sent to a widow in Zarephath, because God knew that she had faith in him (see Luke 4:24-28).

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. Who was Ahab's wife?
2. What god did Ahab and Jezebel worship?
3. What commandments had Israel forgotten?
4. What warning did Elijah give to Ahab?
5. Where did God send Elijah to hide?
6. How did God care for Elijah in the drought at Cherith?
7. When Elijah asked for "a morsel of bread", what did the widow of Zarephath have left?
8. How did God help the widow of Zarephath, because she fed Elijah?
9. What sad thing happened to the widow of Zarephath's son?
10. How did Elijah help the widow of Zarephath when her son died?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell how God provided for Elijah during the drought
  - (a) At Cherith.
  - (b) At Zarephath.
2. Tell how Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son to life.

### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

1. In the scriptures oil is used as a symbol of the word of God. What lessons do we learn from the widow's cruse of oil?

## 7. THE CONTEST ON MOUNT CARMEL

*“If Yahweh be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how God proved to the people on Mount Carmel that He was the true and living God.*

The drought continued in Israel for three and a half years (see Luke 4:25). The land was dry and parched. The springs and brooks were gradually drying up and food was scarce. In the third year of the drought, God spoke to Elijah: *“Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth”* (v1). So Elijah prepared to announce to Israel the good news of coming rain — but first, the people must be made to see that Yahweh was the true and living God.

1 Kings 18

### **ELIJAH RETURNS: 1 Kings 18:1-24**

While Elijah was on his way to meet Ahab, the king himself was out with his chief servant, Obadiah, looking for grass and water for the royal horses and mules. Ahab went one way and Obadiah went another way by himself. Suddenly Obadiah a man *“who feared Yahweh greatly”*, was startled to come face to face with Elijah the prophet, whom he had not seen since the day that he had announced the beginning of this terrible drought. Elijah now asked him to go and tell his master that he had come to speak to him.

As Ahab approached the prophet Elijah, he said to him, *“Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”* (v17).

*“I have not troubled Israel,”* Elijah replied, *“but thou and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Yahweh, and thou hast followed Baalim”* (v18).

Ahab had learned nothing in the past three years of drought. He still thought that Elijah was the cause of all his troubles.

*“Gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel and the prophets of Baal”*; Elijah told the king (v19). So Elijah stood before them there on the mountain and said to them all, *“How long halt ye between two opinions? If Yahweh be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him”* (v21). He suggested a contest right there on the mountain to test quite clearly who was the true God. They were to offer a bullock to Baal and call on their

gods to send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifices. Likewise Elijah would prepare a sacrifice and call on the name of Yahweh. *“The God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken”* (v24).

### **THE CONTEST ON MOUNT CARMEL: 1 Kings 18:25-29**

So the contest began. *“Choose you one bullock for yourselves,”* Elijah told the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, *“and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under”* (v25). When all was ready they called unto their god to send fire. From morning till noon they cried to their god, *“O Baal, hear us”* (v26). Again and again they cried, leaping up and down before their altar, *“but there was no voice, nor any that answered”*.

Elijah had been very patient. He knew their cries were in vain, for the gods of the nations are only dumb idols (see Psalm 135:15-18). Now Elijah began to mock them. Perhaps they should shout louder, their god may be taking a journey or even asleep! All afternoon they cried out frantically and cut themselves with knives. Still no answer came.

### **YAHWEH ANSWERS WITH FIRE: 1 Kings 18:30-40**

It was by now the time of the evening sacrifice. The prophets of Baal were exhausted. Elijah called to all the people, *“Come near unto me”*. He began to repair the altar of God that had not been used for so long. He took twelve unhewn stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel, and set them one upon another. Then he dug a trench around the altar. He put the wood in place and cut the bullock in pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he called for four barrels of water and poured it over the sacrifice and the wood and filled the trench round about. Three times this was done until the sacrifice and the wood and the altar were well soaked.

Everything was now ready. Elijah stood before all the people and began to pray. *“Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word”* (v36). The people were silent as they listened to this simple, faithful prayer. Suddenly, *“the fire of Yahweh fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench”* (v38). When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, *“Yahweh, He is the God; Yahweh, He is the God”* (v39).

One thing remained to be done. *“Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape”*, Elijah said. So they caught the prophets as they tried to flee for their lives and slew them.

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## **GOD SENDS RAIN: 1 Kings 18:41-46**

Elijah knew that it was going to rain. He went up to the top of mount Carmel and “*cast himself down upon the earth*” to pray to God. He sent his servant to go and look towards the sea. The servant looked and saw nothing. Seven times Elijah sent him, while he continued in prayer. At last the servant returned and told him that he saw a little cloud rise out of the sea, “*like a man’s hand*”. This was the sign Elijah was waiting for. He sent his servant to find King Ahab, with a message that he should prepare his chariot quickly and get down from the mountain before the rain stopped him. Dark storm clouds were gathering fast and heavy rain began to come from the sea. The king hurried back in his chariot, knowing that once the rain came he could easily be bogged in the valley. Yet though he drove fast, God gave Elijah strength that day to run before the king to the city of Jezreel.

## **LESSON FOR US**

All Israel suffered in the long drought, because they had turned to worshipping idols. In Deut. 11:16-17, God warned Israel that He would not send rain if they turned away from Him to worship other gods. When the people could see that Baal had no power and cried out, “*Yahweh, He is God*”, and killed the prophets of Baal — then God sent rain. What a lesson this is for us, never to turn from worshipping the true God. “*For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil*” (1 Pet. 3:12).

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

- 1. How long did the drought last in Israel?
- 2. Who did Elijah say had troubled Israel?
3. Who came together to the top of Mount Carmel?
4. How were they to decide who was the true God?
5. What happened when the prophets of Baal called to their god to send fire?
6. What altar did Elijah use for his sacrifice?
7. How did Elijah make the sacrifice ready?
8. What did Israel say when Yahweh answered by fire?
9. What did Elijah tell the people to do to the prophets of Baal?
10. What did Elijah’s servant see that showed him that rain was coming at last?
11. Why did God give Elijah special strength for that day?



## Detailed Answers

1. On Mount Carmel it was easily proved who was the true God.
  - (a) Tell how the prophets of Baal called on him for an answer.
  - (b) Tell how Elijah prepared the sacrifice and God answered his prayer.
2. (a) Tell why God stopped sending rain on Israel.
  - (b) Tell how Elijah waited and watched for the sign of rain again.



## 8. ELIJAH AND THE STILL SMALL VOICE

*“There came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Elijah learned from the still small voice that God still had a work to be done in Israel.*

At Mt. Carmel, God had shown the Israelites in a wonderful way that He was the true God and that there is no other. Surely now they would serve God and keep His commandments. However, when Ahab told Jezebel all that had happened on Mount Carmel, she was very angry. Her heart was filled with hatred, to think that Elijah would dare to kill her prophets of Baal. She sent a terrible message to Elijah, saying, *“By tomorrow about this time I will make thy life as the life of one of them”* (v2).

1 Kings 19

### **ELIJAH IN DESPAIR: 1 Kings 19:1-4**

Elijah was a great prophet, faithful and full of courage. Yet when he heard the terrible threatening words of Jezebel, it was more than he could bear. He became very downhearted, for it seemed that so many were against him. How could he possibly turn the hearts of the people away from idols to serve the living God, whom he loved. It had seemed like a great victory on Mount Carmel, but still that wicked Jezebel reigned in Samaria. Feeling lonely and despairing, he fled south to Beersheba with his servant. From there he travelled alone a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under the shade of a juniper tree. Weary and worn out with worry, he wished that he might die. *“It is enough,”* he prayed to God, *“take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers”* (v4). Then he lay down and slept.

### **GOD STRENGTHENS ELIJAH: 1 Kings 19:5-8**

While he slept, an angel touched him and said, *“Arise and eat”* (v5). He woke up and looked and found to his surprise a meal prepared before him — a freshly baked loaf still hot on the coals and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down to sleep again. He was woken again by the angel touching him and saying, *“Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee”* (v7). Elijah obeyed and found that the food he received from the

angel gave him strength to continue his journey. He travelled for forty days and forty nights, until he came to Horeb, “*the mount of God*” (v8).

It was at Horeb many years before that Moses saw the burning bush (Exod. 3). It was here at Horeb that the tribes of Israel had gathered to receive the Law, “*and there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount*” (Exod. 19:16). It was also at Horeb that God revealed to Moses His wonderful Name (Exod. 34). So now many years later the prophet Elijah came and climbed Mount Horeb and sheltered in a cave.

### **ELIJAH HEARS THE STILL SMALL VOICE: 1 Kings 19:9-21**

Then the voice of God came to Elijah and He said, “*What doest thou here, Elijah?*” (v9). And Elijah said, “*I have been very jealous for Yahweh, God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy Covenant, thrown down thine altars and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life, to take it away*” (v10). God understood just how Elijah was feeling, but while he felt lonely and depressed he was not in the right frame of mind to continue God’s work with Israel. So God told Elijah to go and stand upon the mountain that he might see God’s glory and power pass before him. As he stood there the quietness was suddenly shattered as a fierce wind tore the mountains, breaking off huge pieces of rock and sending them crashing into the valley below — “*but Yahweh was not in the wind*” (v11).

The wind was followed by an earthquake — “*but Yahweh was not in the earthquake*”.

After the earthquake, was a fire — “*but Yahweh was not in the fire*”.

Then after the fire came a “*still small voice*” (v12). It was a gentle whisper that came to Elijah’s ears as he wrapped his face in his cloak and went to the entrance of the cave where he had sheltered from the terror of God’s mighty power. “*What doest thou here Elijah?*” the voice said. Elijah gave the same answer as before: “*I have been very jealous for Yahweh of hosts...and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life*”.

Elijah had been able to show to Israel God’s mighty power in stopping the rain and in sending fire from heaven on Mount Carmel. What Israel needed now was the “*still, small voice*” to teach them God’s ways. So Elijah must go back to Israel for he was not the only one left who worshipped God. “*Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel*”, God told him, “*which have not bowed unto Baal*” (v18). These faithful men and women needed

encouraging, for many of them would have had to hide from Jezebel's anger too (see 18:4).

So Elijah was strengthened and encouraged by God to return to Israel and go on with the work.

## **LESSON FOR US**

We may sometimes find ourselves lonely, because we have tried to please God rather than please ourselves. Jesus tells us to count ourselves happy when this happens, "*for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*" (Matt. 5:10-12). God is still with us. He will never forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Then there are the brethren and sisters and their children. So we never stand alone. Elijah himself found that there were thousands more in Israel who took courage from his example and he needed their faithful example to help him too.

The "*still small voice*" of God still speaks to us from the Bible. We can always turn to it for guidance and strength, for we must not give up when things get difficult but keep on with the work of God until Christ comes (see Mark 13:13).

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

There were three special things that God wanted Elijah to do.

- \* First, he must go to Damascus and anoint Hazael to be the next king of Syria.
- \* Secondly, he must return to Israel and look for a man called Jehu. He was to anoint Jehu to be king of Israel for God would destroy the house of Ahab, his wife and his sons, by the hand of Jehu.
- \* Thirdly, Elijah must anoint a man to take his place as a prophet in Israel. The young man whom God chose to succeed Elijah, was Elisha.

These were important tasks that Elijah must do for God before his work was finished. In fact, God has also reserved a special work for Elijah to do after Christ returns. It will be Elijah who will go to the Jews still scattered in all the countries of the world to tell them that Christ has come and to lead them back to the land of Israel.

What a wonderful prophet Elijah was. He loved God's ways and hated everything that was evil. God is like that and we must be like that too. As the Psalmist said, "*I love thy commandments above gold; yea above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts...I hate every false way*" (Psa. 119:127-128). Let us make sure that is our attitude to the world and all its evil ways.

## QUESTIONS

### Short Answers

1. What did Jezebel plan to do when she heard of what happened on Mount Carmel?
2. What did Elijah do when he heard Jezebel's message?
3. What did Elijah pray for as he sat under the juniper tree?
4. Who woke Elijah?
5. What did Elijah see when he awoke?
6. How long did Elijah's journey take to Mount Horeb?
7. God showed His mighty power to Elijah in three terrifying ways. What were they?
8. What did Elijah hear after the fire?
9. What did God say to Elijah on Mount Horeb?
10. How many faithful were still left in Israel?
11. What did God want Elijah to do now?

### Detailed Answers

1. (a) Tell why Elijah fled from Israel.  
(b) Tell how the angel strengthened him to go on the long journey to Horeb.
2. (a) Tell what Elijah saw and heard on Mount Horeb.  
(b) What lesson was God teaching Elijah?

### Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)

3. (a) Elijah was told to go and anoint three men...Who were they?  
(b) What special work will Elijah do after Christ returns?

## 9. ELISHA CONTINUES GOD'S WORK

*"The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha."*

### **Aim**

*To show how Elisha was anointed to continue the work of leading God's people of Israel and Elijah was taken away.*

In lesson 8 we saw how Jezebel hated Elijah and was determined to kill him. She had already put to death some of the prophets during the time of famine and many had hidden from her in caves (1 Kings 18:3-4, 13). Now God was sending Elijah back to encourage the faithful men that were left in Israel, so that they might be able to teach the people how they must serve the true and living God. These "*sons of the prophets*", as they were known, needed a leader. Elijah had been their leader but the time had come for a younger man to take his place. God told him to go back and anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat, to be the next prophet to lead the people.

1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-18

### **ELISHA IS CHOSEN: 1 Kings 19:19-21**

Elijah returned to Israel to look for Elisha, as God had told him. He found him ploughing in a field with his servants. As Elijah passed by, he took off his mantle (or cloak) and placed it on Elisha. The young man would have known straight away what this meant — for Elijah was showing him that he must follow him and take up the work that he was doing as God's prophet.

Immediately Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah, who had kept on walking. "*Let me I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee,*" Elisha said (v20). So Elisha returned and killed two oxen and made a feast for all the people on his farm. His work as a farmer was finished. Now he must follow Elijah and learn as much as he could about the work of teaching God's people.

### **ELIJAH DEPARTS: 2 Kings 2:1-7**

The two men became very close companions. Everyone was used to seeing Elijah with his servant Elisha, but the time came when Elijah must be taken away.

As they were leaving Gilgal, Elijah said to Elisha, "*Tarry here, I pray thee;*

for *Yahweh hath sent me to Bethel*" (v2). Elisha knew that God would take Elijah away that day and he was determined to stay with him as long as he could. "*As Yahweh liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee*" (v2). So long as Elijah was alive, he would not leave him. Then they both went down to Bethel. The "*sons of the prophets*" at Bethel came out to meet Elisha and said, "*Knowest thou that Yahweh will take away thy master from thy head today?*" (v3). Sadly Elisha replied that he did know. "*Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.*" Then God sent Elijah to Jericho. He suggested that Elisha should stay at Bethel, but still Elisha would not leave him. The "*sons of the prophets*" at Jericho also knew that Elijah would be taken away that day. But again Elisha replied, "*I know it, hold ye your peace.*" He did not want to talk to them about it.

Then Elijah said, "*Yahweh hath sent me to Jordan.*" Again Elisha told him, "*As Yahweh liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee*" (v6). So the two of them went down to the river Jordan, while fifty of the "*sons of the prophets*" came and watched afar off to see what would happen (v7).

### **GOD TAKES ELIJAH: 2 Kings 2:8-11**

When they came to the bank of the river Jordan, Elijah "*took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters*" with it (v8). The waters of the river Jordan parted, leaving a dry path for the two men to cross to the other side.

When they had crossed over, Elijah turned to Elisha and said, "*Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee*" (v9).

Now Elisha loved and respected Elijah like a father and it was the law in Israel that the firstborn son, who became head over the house when his father died, received "*a double portion*" or twice as much of his father's goods as the other sons. It was a sign that he was the new head over the family. Elisha wanted to continue the great prophet's work, as head of the prophets of God. So he said to Elijah, "*I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me*" (v9). He was not asking for twice as much power as Elijah but asking that he might take his place and carry on his work. He wanted the "*sons of the prophets*" to recognise him as their new head, in Elijah's place, so that the work of teaching God's people would prosper. It was not however something which Elijah could give. He had asked a hard thing, which only God could answer. "*If thou see me when I am taken from thee,*" Elijah told him, "*it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so*" (v10).

So the two men went along talking together, when suddenly, "*behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both*

asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (v11).

Elisha was no doubt astonished, but he remembered Elijah’s words and watched him taken from his sight. “*My father, my father,*” he cried out, “*the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof*” (v12). God had blessed him in letting him see his beloved master taken up in the whirlwind and in seeing the fiery chariot as God’s angels came between them. Then he saw him no more.

## **ELISHA BECOMES THE HEAD OF THE PROPHETS: 2 Kings 2:12-15**

Elisha was now left alone on the other side of Jordan. He took hold of his clothes and tore them in two pieces. Then he took up Elijah’s mantle that had fallen from him as he was snatched away in the whirlwind. Remember how Elijah had first laid it on him when he was in the field, as a sign that he should follow him? Now he took it up and went back to the river Jordan. He stood by the bank and wrapped up Elijah’s mantle and struck the waters as he had seen Elijah do. “*Where is Yahweh God of Elijah?*” he cried (v14). Then the waters parted as they had done for Elijah, and Elisha passed over to the other side on dry ground.

So Elisha returned to Jericho, where the sons of the prophets met him. They had seen him cross back on the dry path over the river and came out to meet him. They bowed down before him, and said, “*The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha*” (v15). God had heard Elisha’s request and answered his prayer. He was sure, and the “*sons of the prophets*” were sure, that God had given him the double-portion of Elijah’s spirit.

## **LESSON FOR US**

The “*sons of the prophets*” were those faithful men in Israel who studied God’s law and showed others how to worship the true and living God. We must be like them. We must study God’s Word daily to find out what God wants us to do. If we love His Word we will become the close companions of all those who love the Truth. We will be eager to learn from those who teach the Truth faithfully.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. In Elijah’s day, what were the groups of faithful men in Israel called?
2. What was Elisha doing when Elijah found him?



3. What did Elijah do to Elisha when he first saw him?
4. Why was Elisha sad as he followed Elijah to Bethel and Jericho and then Jordan?
5. What was the wonderful miracle Elijah performed when he came to the river Jordan?
6. What did Elisha ask Elijah to do for him before he was taken away?
7. What came between Elijah and Elisha as they walked on the other side of Jordan?
8. How was Elijah taken away?
9. What did Elisha cry out when he saw Elijah taken away?
10. How did Elisha cross back over Jordan?
11. What did Elisha say when he struck the waters of Jordan?
12. What did the “*sons of the prophets*” say when they saw Elisha return?

### **Details Answers**

1. Tell how Elijah chose Elisha to follow him.
2. Tell what happened after Elijah and Elisha left Gilgal together and how they crossed Jordan together.
3. Tell how Elijah was taken up into heaven.

### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

4. (a) When the two men crossed the river Jordan what did Elijah say to Elisha?  
(b) What did Elisha ask for?  
(c) How did the “*sons of the prophets*” know that God’s spirit rested on Elisha.

## 10. ELISHA AND THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

*“About this season, thou shalt embrace a son.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how God blessed the Shunammite woman who had lovingly cared for Elisha.*

Elisha travelled throughout the northern kingdom of Israel, teaching the people and performing many miracles. His miracles not only showed Israel the greatness of the God of Elisha, but taught the people wonderful lessons which should have strengthened their faith. In this lesson Elisha showed that nothing was too hard for God — He could even bring back to life those who had died.

2 Kings 4:8-37

### **FAITH AND KINDNESS REWARDED: 2 Kings 4:8-17**

As Elisha travelled from city to city he often passed through Shunem. One day a wealthy woman who lived there invited him to eat and refresh himself. From that time on, whenever he passed by, she urged him to join her and her husband in a meal. She realised that he was “*a holy man of God*” and discussed with her husband a plan she had in mind to build a little room for him, since he often went that way. “*Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall,*” she said to her husband, “*and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick*” (v10). It was nothing fancy, just a simple little room containing the things he would need. At last the room was finished and the prophet was delighted to turn aside from his travels and rest there.

Elisha was very grateful. He called the Shunammite woman and asked what he could do for her in return for all her kindness. The woman however was quite content. She did not want any special honour given to her, for she had been pleased to help God’s prophet. So Elisha said to Gehazi, his servant, “*What then is to be done for her?*” (v14).

Gehazi knew that there was only one thing the kind woman lacked which would make her perfectly happy. “*She hath no child,*” he said, “*and her husband is old*” (v14). Immediately Elisha knew what could be done. She was not just kind, but a faithful woman as well, who loved to have the

privilege of serving the prophet of God. So he called her and told her that God would give her a son. This, indeed, was her heart's desire, but she could scarcely believe it. "*Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid,*" she exclaimed (v16). Yet just as Elisha had said, the time came that she gave birth to a son. Such a reward no doubt seemed to her far more than she deserved for her kindness to the prophet, but God knew that her heart was faithful; so He blessed her.

### **HER JOY IS TURNED TO GRIEF: 2 Kings 4:18-30**

That little boy was greatly loved. As he grew up he used to follow his father out into the fields. One day he went out with the reapers, but suddenly felt sick and said to his father, "*My head, my head*". His father was very busy with the harvest and told a lad to carry him in to his mother. She nursed him on her lap, but he only grew worse, until at mid-day he died.

She took her little son up and laid him on the bed in Elisha's room and shut the door. Then she sent a message to her husband, saying, "*Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again*" (v22). He was surprised; it was no special occasion that he could think of. He did not know, as yet, that his son had died. His wife simply said, "*It shall be well*" (v23).

Then she saddled the ass and urged her servant to hurry on with all speed towards Mount Carmel. As she drew near, Elisha saw her coming and sent Gehazi off to see if all was well. When he questioned her she said, "*It is well,*" but would not stop or say more till she had reached Elisha. She fell down before him and caught hold of his feet, but Gehazi tried to thrust her away. Elisha stopped him. He could tell that something was very wrong. This poor woman was very distressed and urgently needed his help. God had not yet shown him what was troubling her.

At last she poured out her sorrow. "*Did I desire a son of my lord?*" she asked. "*Did I not say, Do not deceive me?*" (v28). Immediately Elisha knew what was wrong. The boy had died. Quickly he gave Gehazi his staff and ordered him to make all haste back to the Shunammite's house. He was not to stop on the way for anyone. Then he must lay Elisha's staff on the child's face.

Elisha expected the Shunammite woman to follow his servant, but she would not leave Elisha. She knew God's power was in him. He was the one she had come to seek. So Elisha arose and went back with her.

## **LIFE FROM THE DEAD: 2 Kings 4:31-37**

Gehazi hurried on ahead and did as his master had said, “*but there was neither voice, nor hearing*” (v31).

So he returned to Elisha with the news, “*The child is not awaked*” (v31).

When at last Elisha reached the house, he went up to his room and found the child on his bed. Gehazi had not been able to waken him; he was indeed dead.

He shut the door, leaving his servant and the child’s mother outside. He prayed to God for he knew that he had no power of his own; God alone could help. Then he went up to his bed and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon the boy’s mouth, his eyes upon the boy’s eyes and his hands upon the boy’s hands. As he stretched himself upon the child, the little body grew warm. He got up and walked to and fro in the house. Then he came back and stretched himself on that little body again. Suddenly he sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

God had heard his prayer and put life back into that little body. He was alive from the dead.

Elisha sent Gehazi to call the Shunammite. When she came in, he said, “*Take up thy son*” (v36). Suddenly the strength went out of her and she fell at his feet. How grateful she was for this second miracle of life from the dead. Before taking up her son, she bowed down before Elisha in thankfulness and praise.

## **LESSON FOR US**

God is not unmindful of all that we do. He knows our hearts and will reward us for our faithfulness.

The Shunammite woman did not expect any reward. She helped Elisha because she saw it as a privilege to help God’s servant. She was content and happy. We must have the same attitude. We must serve God because we love Him and are thankful for all His daily blessings. No matter how much we do we will never earn life from the dead, but God will give us eternal life if we have the same faithful and happy attitude that she had.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Short Answers**

1. What did the Shunammite woman do for Elisha?
2. How did God reward her?

3. What happened to the Shunammite's son one day?
4. Where did the Shunammite woman put her son when he died?
5. Where did the Shunammite woman go when her son died?
6. What did Elisha tell Gehazi to do?
7. What news did Gehazi bring back to Elisha?
8. What was the first thing the boy did when his life was given back?
9. What will God give us if we have the same attitude as the Shunammite woman?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell how the Shunammite woman showed kindness to Elisha and how God blessed her.
2. (a) What did the Shunammite woman do when her son died?  
(b) How was he brought back to life?



## 11. NAAMAN THE LEPER

*“Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian of leprosy and why Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was smitten with leprosy.*

The prophet Elisha became well-known and respected throughout Israel. He was quite a different kind of man from Elijah, but the spirit of God was upon them both, to preach the word of God and to do wonderful miracles. In his life-time Elisha was welcome in the courts of the kings of Israel and even the king of Syria respected him. He prophesied during the reigns of the next four kings of Israel, in all for at least 60 years. If only the kings of Israel had believed God and served Him as Elisha did, Israel would have been a happy kingdom.

2 Kings 5

### **NAAMAN THE SYRIAN SEEKS HELP: 2 Kings 5:1-7**

The kingdom of Syria lay to the north of Israel and the people were very warlike. Though there was no war between Israel and Syria at this time, bands of Syrians often swooped down upon the border towns, destroying the villages and taking what they wanted.

On one such occasion a young maid was taken captive back to Syria. She became a servant in the household of the captain of the Syrian army, whose name was Naaman. He was a very clever soldier, *“a mighty man in valour”*. Unfortunately Naaman had a terrible disease — leprosy. Nothing could be done for him, for leprosy was incurable. The king of Syria thought a lot of his captain, Naaman, and would have done anything he could to help him.

The little captive maid from Israel was well-treated in the house of Naaman and she was sad to see the signs of leprosy in her master. She remembered the miracles which Elisha the prophet had done in her own country. *“Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!”* she said to her mistress, *“for he would recover him of his leprosy”*. She sounded so confident of the power of Elisha to cure her master that her story came to the ears of the king. He was only too happy to try any suggestion for curing Naaman and decided to write at once to the king of

Israel. Naaman took the letter himself, with generous gifts of gold and silver and ten sets of clothes, and came to present himself before the king of Israel. The letter said: *“I have sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy”* (v6). King Joram was angry and dismayed when he read these words. He rent his clothes and said, *“Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?”* (v7). He knew it was an impossible request. He thought the king of Syria must be trying to make a quarrel with him. It never occurred to this wicked king that God could help. The little maid in captivity had much more faith than the king of Israel.

### **NAAMAN’S PRIDE IS PUT TO THE TEST: 2 Kings 5:8-12**

News of King Joram’s embarrassment soon reached Elisha. He sent a message to the king, saying, *“Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel”* (v8). No doubt the king was only too ready to send Naaman away. So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and all his servants to the house of Elisha the prophet.

To his surprise, Elisha the prophet did not appear to welcome him. Instead, he sent a messenger to him with a strange command: *“Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thou shalt be clean”* (v10).

Naaman felt insulted and went away angrily. He had thought that the prophet himself would have come out to him and called on the name of Yahweh his God, and waved his hand over the place and his leprosy would have been suddenly cleansed. As for washing in the muddy Jordan...! *“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?”* he said in disgust. *“So he turned and went away in a rage”* (v12).

### **NAAMAN HUMBLER HIMSELF AND IS CURED: 2 Kings 5:13-16**

Naaman’s servants were anxious for their master to be cured. So they came forward and asked him to be reasonable. *“My father,”* they said, *“if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?”* (v13). This was good advice! Naaman’s pride had made him unreasonable. He listened to his servants. Humbled by their advice he went down to the river Jordan and dipped himself seven times, just as Elisha had commanded. After seven times, *“his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean”* (v14).

So Naaman, clean at last and very thankful, returned to the house of Elisha. This time Elisha was glad to receive him for he was a changed man. *“Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel,”* the grateful captain confessed. He knew his disease had been incurable, but the God of Israel had healed him by a miracle. To show his gratitude he offered Elisha a present, but Elisha would take nothing. *“As Yahweh liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none,”* he said (v16). Though Naaman urged him, he refused. Elisha knew that he had no power of his own; it was the power of Yahweh, God of Israel, that had cured the man.

### **GEHAZI LIES AND IS PUNISHED: 2 Kings 5:20-27**

Elisha had a servant named Gehazi. He had been the one who had carried Elisha’s command to Naaman and had witnessed the cure of the captain of the king of Syria’s army. Though he knew it was God’s power that Elisha had used, he felt that such a great man had got off very lightly. Surely he should be made to pay for the prophet’s services. So Gehazi ran off after Naaman.

When Naaman saw him running toward him, he recognised him as Elisha’s servant and stopped his chariot and got down to meet him. *“Is all well?”* he asked. Gehazi assured him that all was well, but that his master had sent him after him. Two young prophets, he said, had come to visit him and perhaps the captain could give him a talent of silver and two changes of clothes for them. Naaman was only too glad to be of help and urged Gehazi to take two talents. So Naaman’s servants brought the gifts and carried them to a place that Gehazi had secretly arranged to hide them in. Naaman and his servants went on their way back to Syria, and Gehazi went in and stood before Elisha.

*“Where have you been, Gehazi?”* Elisha said.

*“Thy servant went nowhere,”* Gehazi answered.

Yet Elisha knew that his servant lied. When Gehazi had realised how rich the Syrian captain was, he became covetous — he wanted some of that rich present for himself. His greed had made him tell a lie and one lie led to another. Elisha had given God the glory for the wonderful miracle of curing Naaman’s leprosy, but Gehazi’s sin had dishonoured God. *“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever,”* Elisha said. Gehazi left that room *“a leper as white as snow”* (v27).

So God’s power was shown both to heal one who was humble and to punish one who sinned.



## **LESSON FOR US**

Naaman was cured after he had washed in Jordan exactly seven times. He had to forget his pride and humble himself to obey God. If he had washed only six times, he would still have been leprous. His cure was not in the waters of Jordan, but in his obedience to the prophet's command.

So God expects us to believe all that He says in the Bible by His prophets and apostles, and to do all that He tells us there to do. Only then will we be saved from eternal death. Those, however, who only make a show of serving God, like Gehazi, are fools and their end is death. God knows the hearts of all men and He wants us to serve Him with our whole heart.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

Leprosy is a terrible disease. It causes the parts of the body to decay and die little by little. It is just like sin. Sin leads to death. *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die"* (Ezek. 18:4). We all sin and we all will die. It is like an incurable disease.

Only a miracle could cure leprosy. When Naaman humbled himself and believed Elisha's words, he went down into the river Jordan and dipped himself seven times. It was just like baptism — he went completely under the water and came out a new man. His body was no longer leprous and he praised and thanked God.

As we grow older, we realise how sinful we really are. When we study the Word of God, we find that God wants us to turn away from our sins and obey Him. The first act of obedience to God is baptism (Mark 16:16). Our past sins are washed away and we have hope of life eternal, if we continue to praise and thank God. So Naaman's cleansing is a lesson to us that we all need cleansing from sin.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. What disease did Naaman have?
2. Who told Naaman where he could be cured?
3. What did the king of Syria say in his letter to the king of Israel?
4. What did Joram do and say when he read the king of Syria's letter?
5. What did Elisha tell Naaman to do?
6. What did Naaman think of the River Jordan?

7. What good advice did Naaman's servants give him?
8. What happened when Naaman obeyed Elisha?
9. What did Naaman say when he was healed?
10. Why did Gehazi run after Naaman?
11. What did Gehazi do with the things Naaman gave him?
12. What happened to Gehazi?

### **Detailed answers**

1. The little maid in captivity had more faith than the king of Israel;
  - (a) Tell of her faith and kindness;
  - (b) What did king Joram say when he received the king of Syria's letter?
2. Tell what happened when Naaman visited Elisha's house and how he was cured?
3. Tell the story of Gehazi's foolishness and his punishment.

### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

4. The cleansing of Naaman's leprosy is an important lesson to us.
  - (a) Tell what leprosy is like as a disease.
  - (b) How is sin like leprosy?
  - (c) What does baptism do for us?



## 12. JUDGMENT ON THE HOUSE OF AHAB

*“There was none like Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how God raised up Jehu to destroy the whole house of Ahab and Jezebel, and all the worshippers of Baal.*

When Elijah fled to Mount Horeb, God sent him back to Israel with further work to do. One of his tasks was to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel. God had chosen Jehu to destroy completely the wicked house of Ahab. Ahab and Jezebel had done so many terrible things in Israel, that there was only one way to get rid of their evil influence — the whole family must die. Elijah prophesied of their horrible deaths, but it was left to Elisha to anoint Jehu to be king.

2 Kings 9; 10:18-28

### **JEHU IS ANOINTED: 2 Kings 9:1-15**

Ahab was now dead. He had been killed in a battle with the king of Syria and his evil son Joram now reigned over Israel. Jezebel however, was still alive, as wicked as ever and still turning the hearts of many in Israel away from Yahweh to worshipping Baal.

Elisha the prophet, called to him one of the sons of the prophets and gave him a message. He was to take a flask of oil that Elisha would give him and go to look for Jehu the son of Nimshi, one of the captains of the army of Israel. He must call him aside and go alone with him into an inner room; then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, *“Thus saith Yahweh, I have anointed thee king over Israel.”* Then said Elisha, *“Open the door and flee, and tarry not”* (v3). Such a startling event, while Joram still reigned, would instantly cause trouble in Israel. The young prophet went as he was told and having anointed Jehu, prophesied of the work God had chosen him to do. *“Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of Yahweh, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish”* (vv7-8). Then the messenger fled and Jehu came out to the other captains of the army, who had been waiting for him to appear. They could tell that he had heard some astonishing news. *“Is all well?”* they

asked. When he told them the young prophet's message, they were quick to proclaim him king. They took off their cloaks and laid them under his feet on the top of the stairs and blew their trumpets, shouting "*Jehu is king!*" (v13).

### **JEHU DESTROYS THE HOUSE OF AHAB: 2 Kings 9:16-29**

Jehu was ready to set about the task God had given him straight away. He told the captains to let no-one leave the city to spread the news, while he would go immediately to Jezreel where he knew he would find King Joram.

Joram was resting in Jezreel, recovering from wounds he had received in the same battle in which his father Ahab had been killed. Ahaziah, king of Judah had come down to visit him. The two kings were related, both belonging to the house of Ahab (Joram was Ahaziah's uncle).

On the watchtower of Jezreel, the watchman saw a band of men speeding across the plain towards the city. Joram told him to send out a horseman to see if they came in peace. The messenger raced off to meet the horsemen, but did not return with an answer. A second messenger was sent out, but he did not return either. Instead the band of men galloped on toward the city. The watchman could by now recognise the horseman out in front, for no-one rode their horse as hard as Jehu.

Joram was beginning to feel alarmed. His chariot was made ready and he and Ahaziah went out to meet Jehu. When he came near, he called out to the captain of his army, "*Is it peace, Jehu?*" "*What peace,*" Jehu replied, "*so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?*" (v22).

Suddenly, realising what Jehu was up to, Joram turned and fled, calling out to Ahaziah, "*Treachery, O Ahaziah*" (v23).

Jehu took out his bow and with all his might shot an arrow at Joram. The arrow hit him between the arms, so that he sank down in his chariot and died. Ahaziah fled for his life, but eventually Jehu caught up with him and he too was slain.

### **JEZEBEL IS KILLED: 2 Kings 9:30-37**

So Jehu came into Jezreel. He was now the king and the news had reached Jezebel. She was not the sort of person to flee. Instead she dressed herself carefully and "*painted her face*" (v30) and looked out of the window of her palace. She called out a challenge to Jehu as he entered in at the gate of the city. He looked up and saw her there, and called out to those inside the palace, "*Who is on my side? Who?*" (v32). Two or three men

looked out of the window at Jehu and he said, *“Throw her down”* (v33). So they threw her down and she died and he trod her underfoot with his horse. He called for men nearby to bury her, *“for”*, he said, *“she is a king’s daughter”* (v34). But when they came to bury her the scavenging dogs of the city had been there first. All that was left of Jezebel were her skull, and her feet, and the palms of her hands. When they came to tell Jehu he said, *“This is the word of Yahweh”*, for Elijah had prophesied, *“In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel”* (v36).

## **THE WORSHIPPERS OF BAAL DESTROYED: 2 Kings 10:18-28**

Jehu went on to destroy all the seventy sons of Ahab and Jezebel. Then he had a plan to destroy the prophets of Baal, who had served Jezebel, together with all those who had worshipped Baal. He tricked them into coming together for a great sacrifice to their idol. *“Ahab served Baal a little”*, Jehu said, *“but Jehu shall serve him much”* (v18). He made sure that they all came; anyone who stayed away would die. So Jehu sent throughout all Israel and all the worshippers of Baal came. They gathered together in the Temple of Baal, that Jezebel had built, *“full from one end to another”* (v21). Jehu ordered them to bring out the black robes that the Baal-worshippers always wore and each one put them on. *“Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of Yahweh”* commanded Jehu, *“but the worshippers of Baal only”* (v23).

Meanwhile he had chosen eighty soldiers to guard the temple, so that none escaped. Then, when the people were inside sacrificing to Baal, Jehu gave the signal. *“Go in, and slay them; let none come forth”* (v25). So all the worshippers of Baal and the false prophets were put to death in one day. They brought out the idols and burned them; they broke down the altars and the temple of Baal as well. *“Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel”* (v28).

## **LESSON FOR US**

In the Law, Israel were taught to love Yahweh their God with all their heart, with all their strength and will all their mind. They could not worship Yahweh and Baal. They were taught on Mount Carmel that Yahweh was the true God, but Ahab and Jezebel still taught the people to worship Baal. So they were only fit to be destroyed. If we love God and His ways, we will hate the things that He hates. The Psalmist wrote: *“O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day”* (Psa. 119:97). When he thought of how good and right God’s laws were he wrote: *“Therefore I hate every false way”* (v128).

Of the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved his Father perfectly, it was said: “*Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness*” (Psa. 45:7).

That is the lesson for us. We must love God with all our heart and hate all the ways of wickedness.

God will destroy all wickedness when He sends the Lord Jesus Christ back to the earth to reign for ever.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. How did Ahab die?
2. Whom did God raise up to destroy the house of Ahab?
3. Who was Jehu?
4. Who anointed Jehu?
5. Why did Jehu go to Jezreel?
6. How did king Joram die?
7. What did Jezebel do when she heard Jehu was coming?
8. What did Jehu tell the men in the palace to do with Jezebel?
9. Who had prophesied that Jezebel would die like this?
10. Whom did Jehu invite to a great sacrifice to Baal?
11. What lesson do we learn from the way Jehu destroyed the whole house of Baal?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell how Jehu was anointed.
2. Tell how Jehu slew the king of Israel.
3. Tell how Jehu tricked the worshippers of Baal and destroyed them all.

## 13. JONAH THE PROPHET

*“The people of Nineveh believed God.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how God’s mercy was shown even to a Gentile nation.*

The prophet Jonah prophesied in Israel after Elisha had died. In his days God delivered Israel from her enemies in the north, but Jonah knew that unless the people repented of their wicked ways and turned back to God, He would not spare them forever. He would punish them by sending other stronger nations against them who would drive them out of their land (see Deut. 28:15, 25). Jonah himself had a lesson to learn about God’s mercy.

Jonah 1 to 3

### **JONAH DISOBEYS GOD: Jonah 1:1-3**

The word of God came to Jonah with a strange command: *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me”* (v2). God would give the people of Nineveh forty days in which to repent or they would be destroyed (3:4).

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, that mighty and cruel nation whom Israel feared most of all.

Jonah loved his own people dearly and spent all his efforts in teaching them how to worship their God, so that He might bless them. He could not understand why God was giving Israel’s bitterest enemy the opportunity to be saved from the punishment they so rightly deserved. He was afraid that they would repent and God would use them to punish Israel.

So Jonah decided to take matters into his own hands. If only he could get far away from Nineveh, they would not hear God’s message calling on them to repent and so they would be destroyed. He knew very well how wrong it was to disobey God, but he was prepared to give his life to spare his people.

He went straight to the port of Joppa and found, to his relief, a ship which was sailing for Tarshish, a land far off to the west. He paid his fare and went on board.

### **GOD SENDS A STORM: Jonah 1:4-17**

The ship set sail and the long journey began. For the moment it seemed that Jonah had escaped the task of preaching to the Ninevites. God, however, is true to His word and able to see all that is done. Nothing is

hidden from His eyes. The word that He speaks will be done and no man can change that (see Isa. 55:10-11).

Before long God sent a great wind into the sea. A furious storm arose which threatened to break up the ship. The sailors were terrified and cried to their gods to save them. These gods were only idols and of course could give them no help. They threw the tackling out of the ship to lighten it, but the storm still raged around them.

Down below, Jonah was fast asleep. The captain of the ship found him there and roused him. *“What meanest thou, O sleeper?”* he cried, *“Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not”* (v6). Everyone on board was convinced that this terrifying storm was a punishment sent from God. So they cast lots to see who was to blame, *“and the lot fell upon Jonah”* (v7). They all began to question him: *“What is thy occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?”* (v8).

Jonah was wide awake now. The storm did not frighten him, for as he told them, *“I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land”* (v9). He confessed that he had been trying to flee from the presence of Yahweh and they were filled with fear when they realised the power of the God whom Jonah worshipped. Something had to be done, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous. *“What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?”* they said (v11). *“Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea,”* Jonah replied. *“So shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you”* (v12).

Though the men were anxious and feared for their own safety, the thought of deliberately throwing Jonah overboard into the raging sea horrified them. They tried to row harder to bring the boat to land, but they could not. So they cried unto Yahweh. It seemed that they must do as Jonah said, but prayed that God would not hold them guilty, for they believed Jonah, that God had sent the storm because of him.

Then they took Jonah up and threw him into the sea and the sea became calm. Jonah had spoken the truth — his God was indeed the Lord of all earth and sea. They immediately offered a sacrifice to Him to show their thanks and vowed that they would serve Yahweh. So the men were saved by sending Jonah to his death.

Yet Jonah did not die. God, in His great love and mercy, had prepared a great fish to swallow him up. There he remained in the belly of that great fish for three days and three nights.



## **JONAH OBEYS GOD'S WORD: Jonah 2 and 3**

While Jonah was miraculously kept alive in the belly of the great fish, he remembered his God and his own foolishness in trying to run away from doing God's command. He prayed that God would save him, deciding that he would do as God had asked. So Jonah humbled himself and repented of his disobedience. *"And Yahweh spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land"* (2:10).

The word of God now came to Jonah the second time, commanding him to preach His words to Nineveh. So Jonah went to Nineveh. It was a huge city, about 80 kilometres in circumference. As Jonah began to enter into the city he cried out for all to hear, *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown"* (3:4).

The people of Nineveh were shocked at the judgment Jonah was proclaiming and they *"believed God"*. When the king heard his urgent message, he took off his royal robes and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, as a sign of sorrow and repentance. All the people, from the least to the greatest, did likewise. The king proclaimed a fast and ordered everyone to *"cry mightily unto God"* and to turn from their evil ways. *"Who can tell,"* the king of Nineveh said, *"if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?"* (v9). When God saw how they repented and turned from their evil ways, He did indeed show mercy and destroyed them not.

## **LESSON FOR US**

This story speaks a lot about repentance. God wanted Nineveh to repent of their evil ways or He would destroy them. To *"repent"* means to be sorry for our past sins and change our ways. Jonah disobeyed God but he humbled himself and was saved from drowning. When the men of Nineveh heard Jonah's preaching they repented — they had a change of heart and prayed to God to forgive them. Each one of us must consider our ways every day. If our parents or teachers point out to us where we have displeased them we must humble ourselves and change our ways. The words of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost are important for each and every one of us. *"Repent",* Peter said, *"and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"* (Acts 2:38).

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

### **JONAH LEARNS OF GOD'S MERCY: Jonah 4**

Jonah was not happy. The very thing that he dreaded had happened. He felt very angry, *"I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness"*, he prayed. Jonah thought God should only show such kindness to Israel, certainly not to their enemies. He prayed to God to take away his life. God, however, preserved Jonah as he had to learn that God is *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9). God would only destroy those who refused to listen to His word — whether they were Jews or Gentiles.

The apostle Peter had to learn the same lesson many years later. He learned that *"in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"* (Acts 10:35). How grateful we can be that God is like that, for we are Gentiles to whom God has shown His truth and given us a hope of salvation.

### **THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH: Matthew 12:38-41**

The Lord Jesus Christ used the story of Jonah as a sign to the Jews of his day. The Scribes and Pharisees doubted that he was the Messiah, the *"anointed"* of God. So he used this sign to point forward to his death and resurrection. It was his resurrection from the dead that made many later believe in him.

*"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (v40).

God brought Jonah out of the belly of the fish after three days, in which he was as good as dead. Then he went straight to Nineveh, where he preached to the people for forty days, calling on them to repent.

Jesus was in the grave for three days after which he rose from the dead. (See Luke 24:5-7; Acts 2:31). After that, he taught his disciples for forty days, before he was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:3, 9).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the first to be raised from the dead and given immortal life, but God has graciously offered this same hope of immortality to all who believe and obey Him (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

## QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)

### Short Answers

1. Where was Nineveh?
2. What message did God tell Jonah to proclaim against Nineveh?
3. What did Jonah decide to do?
4. What was Jonah doing while the storm raged?
5. How did the sailors find out that Jonah was to blame for the storm?
6. Whom did Jonah worship?
7. What did Jonah say the sailors must do to him?
8. What did the sailors do before they threw Jonah overboard?
9. What happened when the sailors threw Jonah overboard?
10. Jonah did not drown. What happened to him?
11. Where did Jonah go after he reached dry land?
12. What did the people of Nineveh do after they heard Jonah's message?

### Detailed Answers

1. Jonah tried to run away from doing what God had commanded.
  - (a) Why did he try to run away?
  - (b) What did he do?
2. Tell what happened when God did send a great storm and how Jonah got safely to land.
3. Tell what happened when Jonah finally reached Nineveh.

### Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)

4.
  - (a) What does repent mean?
  - (b) Who does God show mercy to?
  - (c) How is this helpful to us?

## 14. HEZEKIAH — JUDAH'S GREATEST KING

*"Ye children of Israel, turn again unto Yahweh your God."*

### **Aim**

*To show how Hezekiah turned the hearts of the people back to God.*

Of all the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, not one loved Yahweh their God. Among the kings of Judah in the south some were exceedingly wicked, but some followed the example of David. The greatest of these was Hezekiah. His father, Ahaz, was a wicked man who *"walked in the ways of the kings of Israel"* (2 Chron. 28:2). He burnt sacrifices to Baal, and shut up the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Because of Ahaz, *"Yahweh brought Judah low"* (v19). It is amazing that his son should prove to be the greatest of Judah's kings. *"He trusted in Yahweh God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him"* (2 Kings 18:5).

2 Chronicles 29 and 30

### **HEZEKIAH'S FIRST WORK: 2 Chronicles 29:1-19**

Hezekiah was 25 years old when he began to reign. The first thing that he did in the first month of his reign, was to open the doors of the Temple and repair them. He realised that it was necessary to turn the hearts of the people back to God. They must learn again how to worship Him in spirit and in truth. The doors had been shut for many years; the golden lamps which should have burned continually had gone out; incense had not been offered; burnt offerings had not been made upon the altar all that time. No wonder God had brought trouble upon them.

First of all the Levites and priests must sanctify themselves and cleanse the Temple. He gathered them together and encouraged them to do the work faithfully, *"for Yahweh hath chosen you"*, he said, *"to stand before Him, to serve Him"* (v11). So the priests and Levites had to set everything else aside and prepare their hearts and minds for the great work King Hezekiah had planned. When they were ready, the priests went into the inner part of the Temple and brought out all the uncleanness that they found there, and everything that did not belong in the Temple they put outside in the court. The Levites carried it from there down to the brook Kidron and destroyed it. When everything was once again clean and set in order for worship, they came and told the king.

## **HEZEKIAH OFFERS A NATIONAL SIN OFFERING: 2 Chronicles 29:20-36**

The very next morning, king Hezekiah rose early, for he had eagerly planned an opening ceremony. He gathered together the rulers of Jerusalem and they accompanied him up to the Temple. They took with them seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs and seven he-goats for a sin offering. The priests were already there waiting to offer them upon the brazen altar. In this way, both the king and the rulers confessed before God that they had sinned, for they had neglected to worship Him as they had been commanded to in the Law. While the priests were offering the sacrifices, the Levites played on their musical instruments as David had appointed many years before. Then the priests blew the trumpets. It was not a light-hearted tune, but a solemn one reminding them that they must lift up their hearts to God in heaven and ask His forgiveness. When the offerings had been made the Levites sang praises unto Yahweh with the words of David. Then the king and all those who had joined him in worship bowed their heads and offered a prayer of thankfulness and praise to God on high. Now that they had confessed their sins and vowed to serve Him in the right way, Hezekiah suggested that any who wanted to could bring their own special offering to God. So the day which had begun so solemnly ended in gladness and thankfulness.

Hezekiah himself was very happy. He had carefully planned the whole day, arranging it in just the same way that David had set down before he died. It was a wonderful beginning to his reign.

## **HEZEKIAH INVITES ALL ISRAEL TO KEEP THE PASSOVER: 2 Chronicles 30:1-9**

King Hezekiah could see quite clearly that God's people had strayed a long way from true worship. It was necessary to get back to the old ways. One of the things that God had commanded them in the Law, was to go up to Jerusalem and keep the feasts. The first feast for the year was the Passover, which should have been kept in the first month, but that time had passed while they had been busy cleansing the Temple. However, under the Law God allowed those who could not keep it in the first month to keep it in the second month (see Num. 9:10-11). So Hezekiah made plans to call all Israel and Judah together to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover in the second month. He decided to send a letter to all Israel, from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north of the land.

It was a wonderful letter. "*Ye children of Israel*", wrote Hezekiah, "*Turn again unto Yahweh God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He will return*

to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria” (v6). He reminded them in this way of the wonderful promises God had made to their fathers long ago. He pleaded with them to humble themselves and come up to Jerusalem to God’s Temple. In the days of Solomon they had all come there to keep the feasts, but after the kingdom was divided the northern ten tribes had stayed away. Here was now a warm hearted and generous invitation to them all to come and worship together. Hezekiah knew that the kings of Assyria, who had already taken some of Israel into captivity, would soon be back unless the people turned their hearts to God and asked for His help. “Yahweh your God is gracious and merciful,” he reminded them, “and will not turn away His face from you, if ye return to Him” (v9).

### **THE PASSOVER IS KEPT: 2 Chronicles 30:10-22**

When the messengers went out to the tribes in the north many “laughed them to scorn, and mocked them” (v10), but others did humble themselves and came willingly to Jerusalem. In Judah however, all the people were moved by the king’s letter and they all gladly accepted his invitation. So when the time of the feast drew near, there was a huge, excited crowd gathered in the city. Any altars that were still found there from king Ahaz’ days were taken away and destroyed in the brook Kidron outside the city. So the people did their best to prepare themselves for keeping the Passover, but it had been so long since a feast like this had been kept, that many of the people did not even know what God expected them to do. Hezekiah prayed for them, “The good Yahweh pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God” (vv18-19). God heard his prayer and accepted their offerings.

So they kept the feast for seven days with great gladness. The Levites and priests praised God each day, singing and playing with all their might on their instruments. The king encouraged the Levites to go amongst the people and teach them “the good knowledge of Yahweh” (v22).

### **THE PEOPLE STAY ANOTHER SEVEN DAYS: 2 Chronicles 30:23-27**

Everyone was so happy that at the end of the feast they all agreed to stay another seven days. Hezekiah and the princes gave them thousands of bullocks and sheep so that they could continue to sacrifice to God as they worshipped Him and were taught His Law by the Levites.

*“So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem” (v26).*

The priests blessed the people and God was pleased. *“Their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, even unto heaven” (v27).*

## **LESSON FOR US**

We read that *“in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered” (2 Chron. 31:21).* What better example can we follow than this — *“with all his heart”*. God is satisfied with nothing less. Israel thought they could worship idols and still say that Yahweh was their God, but God was not in their hearts. Hezekiah knew that they must get back to the old ways and so must we. He searched in the Law of Moses and read the stories of king David and then he knew what God wanted him to do. We too must read the Bible carefully, every day, and we will find, like Hezekiah, that it will give us much happiness to serve God with all our heart.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

When the priests blessed the people, they spoke the words that Aaron was instructed by God to use:

*“On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, Yahweh bless thee, and keep thee:*

*Yahweh make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:*

*Yahweh lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num. 6:23-26).*

With these beautiful words the High Priest asked God to show favour to those who called upon His Name. So Hezekiah instructed the priests to bless all those who had served God so gladly those two weeks in Jerusalem.

Even today these words are used in the ecclesia, when one is baptised into Christ and received into fellowship with their brethren and sisters. It is a joyful occasion and we know that God rejoices too. So long as we worship Him with our whole heart, as Israel did with king Hezekiah, we too will receive God’s blessing. He will bless us now and bless us with everlasting joy in His kingdom.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

1. What was Hezekiah's father like?
2. What was the first thing Hezekiah did when he began to reign?
3. What work did Hezekiah give the priests and Levites to do?
4. What offerings did Hezekiah and the rulers make for their sins?
5. Which feast did Hezekiah keep in Jerusalem?
6. Whom did Hezekiah invite to the feast?
7. What did the people think of Hezekiah's letter?
8. What did they do with the idols they found in the city?
9. How long did the feast last?
10. What did the Levites do each day of the feast?
11. In everything that he did, how did Hezekiah do it?

## **Detailed Answers**

1. What was the first thing Hezekiah did and how did the priests and Levites help him?
2. Tell how the Passover was kept in Hezekiah's day.

## **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

3. What were the words of the blessing that Aaron used to bless Israel?



## 15. HEZEKIAH — THE CHALLENGE FROM ASSYRIA

*“I will defend this city, to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David’s sake.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Hezekiah trusted in God to deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians.*

In the fourth year of Hezekiah’s reign the cruel enemy of Israel, the Assyrians, marched down from the north and within three years they had overthrown the kingdom of Israel. That was the end of the northern kingdom. In the south, the men of Judah were filled with fear but Hezekiah was able to keep the Assyrians away for a while by promising to pay tribute. Yet Hezekiah knew that this could not last forever. He must prepare himself and his people for an Assyrian invasion.

2 Chronicles 32; 2 Kings 18:13-16; 19

### **HEZEKIAH PAYS TRIBUTE: 2 Kings 18:13-16**

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, made up his mind to come south against the kingdom of Judah and overthrow it. He captured the cities of Judah one by one and Hezekiah knew that Jerusalem was in very great danger. He sent a letter to the king of Assyria who had his headquarters near a city called Lachish, to the south-west of Jerusalem. In this letter he asked Sennacherib to turn back from Jerusalem and he would pay him whatever he asked. The tribute that Sennacherib demanded was three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. It was a lot of money. The only thing that Hezekiah could do was to take all the silver out of the temple of Yahweh and from his own treasures. Then he stripped the gold off the doors and pillars of the Temple! What a sad day for Jerusalem, but it gave Hezekiah a little time to strengthen the city and prepare for war.

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### **HEZEKIAH PREPARES FOR WAR: 2 Chronicles 32:1-8**

During this time Hezekiah had the walls of Jerusalem repaired. They had to pull down some of the houses inside the city so that the stones could be used to strengthen the walls and build high towers (Isa. 22:10). When a city

is besieged and the enemy camps right around on every side no-one can go out or come in. Therefore it is necessary for the city to have plenty of water. Just outside Jerusalem on the east, was a spring of water, called Gihon. The king met with his princes and mighty men to discuss a plan which he had for bringing this water inside the city walls. A great many men were set to work digging a tunnel from the spring right through the rock to a pool inside the city. Then they blocked up the spring outside so that the Assyrians could not find it. *“Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?”* they said (v4). Others were set to work making weapons and shields. So Hezekiah did his best to prepare the city and his people for the coming of the mighty Assyrian army.

King Hezekiah knew, however, that unless they put their trust in Yahweh all these preparations would be useless. When he had appointed captains over his soldiers, he called them together to encourage them. *“Be strong and courageous,”* he said, *“be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him.”* He knew that no matter how many thousands came to fight against them, they were only men after all. *“With him”*, he said, *“is an arm of flesh; but with us is Yahweh our God to help us, and to fight our battles”* (vv7-8). The king sounded so confident that his captains believed him and took heart.

## **THE ASSYRIANS COME TO JERUSALEM: 2 Chronicles 32:9-20**

While the army of Assyria lay siege against Lachish, Sennacherib sent three of his chief officers up to Jerusalem with a great army. They came to weaken the already frightened people. Standing by the very place where Hezekiah had blocked off the spring of water, their leader, Rabshakeh, began to shout boastfully against the king and the city. *“Thus saith Sennacherib, king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust?”* he said (v10). Perhaps they trusted in Egypt; if so, Egypt was like a weak reed; Egypt could not help them. Perhaps they trusted in Yahweh, the God of Israel; but none of the gods of the other nations had been able to help them against the great king of Assyria. *“Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand?”* (v14). So Rabshakeh blasphemed Yahweh, God of Israel, but in this he was quite wrong. The gods of all the other nations whom his father had destroyed were nothing. They were only idols; they had no power to

help. The God of Israel, however, was a living God. He heard these blasphemous words and was prepared to use His mighty power against the king of Assyria.

While the Assyrians were boasting in this way, the people inside Jerusalem crowded around the walls to watch what was happening. Then Rabshakeh cried out in the Jews' language so that all the people who were listening would know what he meant. He *"spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man"* (v19).

### **HEZEKIAH PRAYS FOR HELP: 2 Kings 19:1-7**

When this report came to the ears of king Hezekiah, he rent his clothes and went into the Temple to pray. He sent a message to Isaiah the prophet, asking him to pray also for his people. Isaiah sent him back words of great encouragement: *"Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard"* (v6). God was going to turn Sennacherib back: *"he...shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land"* (v7).

### **A LETTER FROM RABSHAKEH: 2 Kings 19:14-19**

After this Rabshakeh returned to join Sennacherib and the rest of the Assyrian army. However, just in case the people of Jerusalem should heave a sigh of relief, he wrote a threatening letter to the king, mocking the God of Israel. This time Hezekiah took the letter with him when he went into the Temple to pray and spread it out before Yahweh. *"O Yahweh our God, I beseech thee,"* he prayed, *"save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou, O Yahweh, art God alone"* (v19).

### **THE PRIDE OF ASSYRIA IS DESTROYED: 2 Kings 19:32-37**

God heard his prayer and sent word to him through the prophet Isaiah concerning the king of Assyria.

*"He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there...By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith Yahweh. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake"* (vv32-34).

How faithful God is to those who love Him. He had chosen this city to put His name there. Israel had often disgraced His name by their wickedness, but here was a king of Judah who loved and honoured His name and hated to hear God's enemies blaspheme it. So that very night the

angel of God went out into the sleeping camp of the Assyrians and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand of them. In the morning they lay dead in their beds. God had done what Hezekiah and his army did not have the strength to do. In one blow He had brought down the pride of this mighty nation.

Sennacherib himself did not die then. He returned to his own land as Isaiah had prophesied (2 Kings 19:7) and was later murdered by two of his sons, as he bowed down to worship his heathen god.

The news of Yahweh's victory over Assyria quickly spread and surrounding nations sent gifts of thankfulness because of this great miracle (2 Chron. 32:23).

## **LESSON FOR US**

This lesson shows Hezekiah as an outstanding example of faith. Hezekiah believed that Yahweh was a living God and that He could do all things. He prayed to God for help, because he knew that God would hear the prayer of a faithful and humble man. He acted in faith by preparing himself to face the enemy and encouraging the people to put their trust in God. He also loved Zion, that is Jerusalem, and Psalm 125 which Hezekiah probably wrote, teaches us to trust in Yahweh and to love Jerusalem, His chosen city.

*"They that trust in Yahweh shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so Yahweh is round about His people from henceforth even for ever."*

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

- 1. Who sent their army against Jerusalem?
- 2. What did Hezekiah pay to the king of Assyria for him to go away?
- ♣ 3. How did Hezekiah make sure they had enough water in the city?
- ♣ 4. Who was fighting on Hezekiah's side?
- 5. Why could the gods of the nations not help them against the king of Assyria?
- 6. What did Rabshakeh think of Yahweh?
- 7. What did Hezekiah do when he read the letter from the Assyrians?
- 8. For whose sake did God save Jerusalem?
- ♣ 9. Who killed the Assyrians?
10. How did Sennacherib die?

## **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell how Hezekiah prepared Jerusalem and his people for war.
2. Tell how Rabshakeh came and put fear into the hearts of the people of Jerusalem.
3. (a) What did God say He would do when Sennacherib came against Jerusalem?  
(b) How were the Assyrians destroyed?

## 16. JOSIAH'S STAND FOR THE TRUTH

*"I will bring evil upon this place...but thine eyes shall not see all the evil."*

### **Aim**

*To show how Josiah steadfastly followed Yahweh all his life and tried to make his people do the same.*

King Hezekiah had died and Judah was left in the lands of his wicked son Manasseh. This evil king set about to undo all the good work that Hezekiah had done in turning the hearts of the people back to God. He built altars to Baal and worshipped the sun, moon and stars; he even put altars in the Temple in Jerusalem; and many other shocking things Manasseh did in his long reign of 55 years. Near the end of his life, however, he humbled himself and tried to change his ways, but he had done a lot of harm. His son, Amon, reigned after him and was just as evil as his father. He reigned for only two years and his servants killed him in his palace. Judah was in a very sorry state. They had gone backwards and forgotten their God. What they needed now was a wise ruler to draw them back to worshipping Yahweh in truth. The next king would be just the right one, but at this time he was only a boy.

2 Chronicles 34; 35:1-19

### **JOSIAH BEGINS TO REIGN: 2 Chronicles 34:1-7**

Little Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign, but by the time he was sixteen we are told that *"he began to seek after the God of David his father"* (v3). It seems that his mother was his teacher; she brought him up to love God so that he *"walked in all the ways of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left"* (2 Kings 22:2). By the time he was twenty he began to cleanse the land of all the idols and altars of Baal. He broke them down and crushed them into dust and scattered the dust on the graves of the false prophets. So he went throughout all Judah and the neighbouring cities, until he had got rid of every sign of idolatry. The people were impressed by his eagerness to turn the nation back to God.

### **JEREMIAH PROPHECIES: Jeremiah 1:14-16**

At about the same time, while the people of Judah helped their young king smash the idols and destroy the altars of Baal, Jeremiah the prophet

began to preach. He prophesied of the terrible judgments that God would bring on His people from the north. Just as Assyria had come from the north to threaten Judah in Hezekiah's day, so the king of Babylon would soon come to overthrow Jerusalem completely. Yet here was Josiah, setting a good example to his people and they appeared to follow him willingly. This was unfortunately not good enough. The people obeyed their young king because they loved him and were impressed by his enthusiasm, but God, who knows the hearts of all men, knew that their hearts were far from Him. "*Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart,*" said Jeremiah (Jer. 3:10).

### **JOSIAH CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE: 2 Chronicles 34:8-19**

Josiah was doing his best to serve Yahweh his God. He decided next to repair the Temple. The Levites had gone throughout the land and collected money from the people to assist in the work. Workmen were chosen to do the repairs, carpenters, builders and masons, and they were given the money to buy hewn stone and timber. There was no need to keep any accounts of how the money was spent, for "*the men did the work faithfully*" (v12).

One day while they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the Temple, Hilkiah, the high priest, found a large scroll. When he examined it he found that it was a copy of the law of Moses. He showed it to Shaphan the scribe, and said, "*I have found the book of the law in the house of Yahweh*" (v15). Shaphan was a wise and faithful friend of the king.

He realised the importance of this discovery and knew, too, how glad Josiah would be to hear this news. He went in to the king to report that all the repairs had been completed and the money had been paid to the workmen. Then he showed him the scroll that Hilkiah the high priest had found.

The law of Moses is contained in the first five books of our Bible. Genesis tells of creation and the sin of Adam and Eve that changed everything; it tells also of the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Exodus tells of the escape of the children of Israel from Egypt; Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell of their wilderness wanderings before Israel entered the land and of the laws God made. As we learned in lesson 5, there was a special commandment for kings, telling them to write out a copy of God's law in a book. "*And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them*" (Deut. 17:18-19).

When Shaphan had finished reading, king Josiah was so distressed to

find that they had not obeyed these laws for so many years, *“that he rent his clothes”* (v19).

Not only should the king have read from the law daily, but it should have been read aloud to the people every seven years at the feast of Tabernacles. It was normally kept in the side of the Ark in the Most Holy Place of the Temple, but had been lost during the wicked reigns of the last two kings. Now that the blessings and cursings had been read to him from Deut. 28, Josiah could understand the urgent message of Jeremiah. Israel had disobeyed for so long. It was no wonder that God would send the Babylonians from the north to punish them and lead them away into captivity.

### **GOD IS PLEASED WITH JOSIAH: 2 Chronicles 34:20-28**

Josiah was very distressed. Would God indeed bring upon His people the terrible judgments he had just read about in the Law? There was a way he could find out. He sent Hilkiah, Shaphan and three other faithful servants to Huldah the prophetess who lived in Jerusalem, saying, *“Go, enquire of Yahweh for me”* (v21). So they came and told her what the king had said and how worried he was about the future. Sadly the prophetess replied that God would indeed punish His people. He had warned them for so many years through His prophets, but few had listened to the prophets or changed their ways. Yet Josiah had set his heart to obey God from the time he was a child. God had a special message for him. *“Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place...and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith Yahweh”* (v27). God would not bring evil upon Jerusalem in Josiah’s day. Through his faithfulness he had saved the people of the land for a little while and given them the chance still to repent and change their ways.

So they returned from the prophetess and told the king all that she had said.

### **JOSIAH CONTINUES TO BE FAITHFUL: 2 Chronicles 34:29-33; 35:1-19**

When Josiah realised the mercy that God was showing him, he could see that others too might receive such mercy if they could be taught to serve Him in truth. So he gathered all Judah and Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites, all the people great and small, and read in their ears all the words of the scroll that had been found in the temple. He made a covenant with God, promising to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments



with all his heart and with all his might. Then he made all those who were present with him agree to it.

It was now drawing near to the time of Passover. So Josiah decided to keep a great Passover feast. He carefully studied the instructions given in the law of Moses to make sure that he obeyed God in all things. He looked up the history of the lives of David and Solomon and learned from them how to arrange the priests and the Levites for the Temple services. Thousands of animals were gathered and slain for the sacrifice. He was so determined to do his best that *“there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet”* (v18).

Everything evil Josiah destroyed out of the land; idols, and the priests that worshipped them; images, altars and high places — everything condemned in the law of Moses. This is why God said of him: *“like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Yahweh with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses”* (2 Kings 23:25).

### **LESSON FOR US**

How important are the early years of instruction from our mothers. If we learn to love God and His word of truth when we are children, we will grow up to be eager to please Him. Josiah was a wonderful example to us of someone who never turned aside to the right hand or to the left from all the things his mother taught him. He was steadfast — that is, he did not change. He searched God’s Word to find out what was right and did it. God blessed him for that and He will bless us too if we persist in obeying Him as Josiah did.

### **QUESTIONS 9 — 12 years)**

#### **Short Answers**

1. How old was Josiah when he began to reign?
2. Who did Josiah follow as his example?
- 3. What did Josiah do when he was only 20 years old?
4. What terrible judgments did Jeremiah say God would bring on His people?
- 5. Why did Jeremiah say that God was going to punish Judah?
- 6. When the Temple was cleansed what did Hilkiah find?
- 7. Why did Josiah rend his clothes?
8. What did Huldah the prophetess say God would do?

9. Why did God say He would not bring evil on Jerusalem in Josiah's day?
10. Why was Josiah's passover the greatest one since the days of Samuel?

### **Details Answers**

1. Tell what happened when Hilkiah found the scroll in the Temple.
2. Tell what wonderful lessons we learn from the life of Josiah.



## 17. THE KINGDOM OVERTHROWN

*“It shall be no more until he comes whose right it is and I will give it him.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Judah refused to listen to God’s prophets and as a result of this Jerusalem was overthrown and the people taken into captivity.*

God had said in the days of Josiah, *“I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen”* (2 Kings 23:27). Josiah himself had been righteous, and so God had shown him mercy by not bringing this evil in his days. It was a sad day for Judah when Josiah died and it was not very long before God’s judgements were felt in the land.

2 Chronicles 36; 2 Kings 23:31-37

### **THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH: 2 Chronicles 36:1-10**

Josiah had three sons, who each reigned after him. Not one of them had the lovely ways of his father, nor did any of them dedicate themselves to serving God as Josiah had done. They all *“did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh”* (2 Kings 23:32, 37; 24:9, 19).

First was Jehoahaz. He only reigned for 3 months. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, put him in prison and made the people of Judah pay tribute of gold and silver. Finally Pharaoh took him away to Egypt where he eventually died.

In his place Pharaoh set up Jehoiakim as king in Judah. He had to tax his own people heavily so that they could continue to pay tribute to Egypt. Yet he himself lived in luxury in Jerusalem. Jeremiah, the prophet, rebuked him openly for his covetousness. His father, Josiah, had not been like that. His father had been just and fair: he had cared for *“the poor and needy”* in Judah and was known for his kind deeds (see Jer. 22:13-19).

Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years. During the third year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, fought against Pharaoh in a great battle. Babylon won and so Jehoiakim now had to pay tribute to Babylon instead of Egypt. If only he had listened to Jeremiah he might have saved his own life. Jeremiah knew that God was sending Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. He told the people plainly that they would be taken captive to Babylon and

would stay there for seventy years. The sensible thing was to believe this prophecy and do whatever the king of Babylon asked. Jehoiakim was foolish; he was too proud to listen to Jeremiah and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.

### **JEHOIAKIM BURNS THE WORD OF GOD: Jeremiah 36**

God had tried many times through His prophets to turn back the hearts of the people, for He was always ready to show mercy. In the reign of Jehoiakim, He told Jeremiah to write out all the prophecies He had told him on a scroll. *"It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin"* (v3). So Jeremiah called for a scribe named Baruch, a faithful man and close friend of the prophet. He listened to Jeremiah and wrote down on a scroll all that God had told him. Then he went out and read it aloud to any who stopped to hear. The people had gathered to mourn the evil things that had come upon them. The words of God on the scroll were words of anger, but full of hope to any who listened carefully. One man who stopped to hear, went and told it all to the princes. They summoned Baruch to them so that they could hear Jeremiah's words for themselves. When Baruch finished reading *"they were afraid...and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words"* (v16). Then they asked him, *"How didst thou write all these words at his mouth?"* (v17). So Baruch told them, *"He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book"* (v18). They all knew what kind of man Jehoiakim was and knew that Jeremiah and Baruch were in danger of losing their lives when the king heard about it. So they advised him to hide. *"Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be"* (v19).

So the princes, realising the seriousness of all they had heard, went into the king, who sat by the fire in his winter palace. When they had explained why they had come, Jehoiakim chose one of them to read from the scroll. Not many lines had been read, before Jehoiakim realised that it was the same story he had heard from Jeremiah many times before. He would show what he thought of these threatening words! Taking up the penknife lying on the table before him, he slashed the scroll and threw the pieces in the fire. Most of the princes felt easier in their own minds now. If the king was not afraid, well, they would not worry either.

But it was God's Word! Three of them were horrified at his behaviour, but the king took no notice. He sent his men out to find Jeremiah and Baruch, *"but Yahweh hid them"* (v26).

So God's Word was despised. How could Judah be saved with such wicked, godless men as their leaders.

Jehoiakim's action only brought worse punishments from God upon him. *"He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost"* (v30).

When Nebuchadnezzar came again to Jerusalem he bound Jehoiakim in chains, to take him away to Babylon, but for some reason he changed his mind. He killed him in Jerusalem and threw his body over the walls. It was a lesson for all who passed by of what would happen to those who rebelled.

### **JEREMIAH'S WORDS ARE NOT HEEDED: 2 Chronicles 36:9-16; Jeremiah 38:1-13**

Jehoiakim's own son Jehoiachin now reigned. He had only reigned for three months when Nebuchadnezzar surrounded Jerusalem and brought him captive to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar then set up Zedekiah, Josiah's other son, as king in Jerusalem. During his reign Jeremiah continued to warn the king and the people, but they brought forward false prophets who spoke what the people wanted to hear.

On one occasion Jeremiah was accused of betraying his country to the king of Babylon because he said, *"He that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live"* (Jer. 38:2). The princes said to the king, *"Let this man be put to death for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war"* (Jer. 38:4). They took him and threw him into a dungeon full of foul-smelling mud. There they left him to die, for the city was being besieged at this time by Nebuchadnezzar. But an Ethiopian eunuch pleaded to the king for his life and rescued him.

Still Zedekiah *"humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of Yahweh"* (2 Chron. 36:12).

### **JERUSALEM FALLS: 2 Chronicles 36:17-21**

Finally, in Zedekiah's eleventh year, the besieged city, now gravely weakened by eighteen months of famine and fear, fell to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:1-2). Zedekiah, still ignoring Jeremiah's advice, tried to flee at night time, but the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar caught him and took him before their king. They made him watch while his sons were put to death. Then they put out his eyes and took him off to Babylon, where he died (2 Kings 25:4-7).

As for the city of Jerusalem, that city which God had chosen to put His

Name there, it was destroyed.

The Babylonians broke down its walls and burnt all its palaces. They even burnt the glorious temple that Solomon had built as a house of worship. All its treasures they took away to Babylon, together with the rest of the people who had not been killed by the sword. There they stayed until seventy long years had passed.

God would not be mocked. He kept His Word and punished the disobedient and rebellious as He had said.

## **LESSON FOR US**

From this lesson we learn two things about God's wonderful character — He is merciful and longsuffering, yet just and by no means clearing the guilty (Exod. 34:6-7). God demands obedience — we must obey Him. If we make mistakes; He will be quick to help us as soon as we try to change our ways. If, however, we refuse to hear His words and go our own way, He will punish us as we deserve. Our attitude to our own parents must be the same. We must obey them or accept the punishment they said they would give us. If we are obedient to our parents, we are learning to be obedient to God.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

At the time of the fall of Jerusalem, while Jeremiah made a last effort to make the people listen to God, two great prophets were already in Babylon. Daniel had been taken captive in the reign of Jehoiakim (Dan. 11:1-3, 6) and Ezekiel was taken away in the reign of Jehoiachin (Ezek. 1:2). There in Babylon Ezekiel's words agreed with Jeremiah's. He spoke of Zedekiah as a "*profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end*" (Ezek. 21:25) and so it all came to an end when Jerusalem fell. God said it should remain like that, without a king in the line of David, "*until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him*" (v27). This is a very exciting prophecy, for the one who has the right to the throne of David in Jerusalem is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has not yet reigned as king, but even at his birth this prophecy was confirmed, for the angel Gabriel said to Mary: "*The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*" (Luke 1:32-33).

We believe that he will soon return from heaven, where he is now awaiting the set time when God will send him to set up that kingdom. Only then will Jerusalem become a great city. Once again even a more glorious

temple shall be built where all nations shall come to worship and God's Name shall be placed there forever. May this wonderful prophecy soon be fulfilled and may we through our faith and obedience to God share the happiness of the kingdom age.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

- 1. Were Josiah's sons as righteous as their father? What were they all like?
- 2. Which prophet in Jerusalem kept trying to make the people hear God's Word?
- 3. What did Baruch write on the scroll?
- 4. What did king Jehoiakim do when they read him the words on the scroll?
- 5. Who was the last king of Judah?
- 6. Where did they throw Jeremiah?
- 7. Who rescued Jeremiah?
- 8. What happened when Zedekiah tried to escape?
- 9. What happened to the temple when Nebuchadnezzar broke into the city?
- 10. What happened to the people of Jerusalem when the city was destroyed?
- 11. How long did Israel stay in captivity?

### **Detailed Answers**

- 1. Tell how God told Jeremiah to write His prophecies on a scroll and what happened to the scroll.
- 2. Jeremiah's words should have shown the people what God was really like. What should they have learned?

### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

- 3. (a) Will there ever be a king to reign on David's throne again?  
(b) Who will it be?  
(c) When will it happen?

## KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

Judah	Period of Reign	Israel	Period of Reign	Prophet
Rehoboam	17 yrs.	Jeroboam 1	22 yrs.	Shemaiah Ahijah
Abijam	3 yrs.	Nadab	2 yrs.	
Asa	41 yrs.	Baasha	24 yrs.	Hanani Oded Azariah
		Elah	2 yrs.	
		Zimri	1 week	
		Omri	12 yrs.	
		Ahab	22 yrs.	Elijah
Jehoshaphat	25 yrs.	Ahaziah	2 yrs.	Micaiah Jehu
		Jehoram	12 yrs.	Elisha
Jehoram	8 yrs.			Eliezer Jahaziel
Ahaziah	1 yr.			
Athaliah	6 yrs.	Jehu	28 yrs.	
Joash	40 yrs.	Jehoahaz	17 yrs.	
		Jehoash	16 yrs.	
Amaziah	29 yrs.	Jeroboam 2	41 yrs.	Jonah Hosea
Azariah or Uzziah	52 yrs.			Isaiah Amos
		Zechariah	6 mths	
		Shallum	1 mth.	
		Menahem	10 yrs.	
		Pekahiah	2 yrs.	
Jotham	16 yrs.			Micah
		Pekah	20 yrs.	
Ahaz	16 yrs.			
		Hoshea	9 yrs.	
Taken into captivity				
Hezekiah	29 yrs.			Nahum
Manasseh	55 yrs.			
Amon	2 yrs.			Zephaniah
Josiah	31 yrs.			Joel
Jehoahaz	3 mths			Jeremiah
Jehoiakim	11 yrs.			Habakkuk
Jehoiachin	3 mths			
Zedekiah	11 yrs.			

Taken into captivity

(some of the prophets ministered during several reigns)



## 18. NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

*"Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets."*

### **Aim**

*To show how God blessed faithful Daniel and his friends in Babylon and revealed the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to them.*

Nebuchadnezzar, the king, took many captives to Babylon each time he came down against the kingdom of Judah. Among the early captives, were Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The king was determined to teach them the *"learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans"*, because he could see that they were clever and noble young men. In this way he hoped to wipe out all thought of the God whom they had worshipped in Judah and persuade them to worship and honour the gods of Babylon. He did not realise, however, that these young captives were men of outstanding faith who would rather die than forsake Yahweh their God.

Daniel 1 and 2

### **DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS ARE PUT TO THE TEST: Daniel 1:3-21**

As part of his plan to persuade the young princes of Judah to become worshippers of his Chaldean gods, King Nebuchadnezzar changed their names and made them answer to names which honoured the gods of Babylon. Then he commanded them to be served every day with meat and wine from his own table. Daniel and his friends realised that such meat and wine had no doubt been dedicated first to the king's heathen gods, for this was the custom of the land. So they asked the officer in charge of them to give them pulse and water instead. He was afraid to disobey the king's command but agreed in the end to put it to the test for ten days. At the end of this time it was obvious to all that Daniel and his friends were *"fairer and fatter in flesh"* than all those who ate the king's portion (v15). God had blessed them in the eyes of the king's officer because of their faithful obedience to Him. Though in a heathen land, far off from the land God had given their fathers, these young men continued to worship their God, and He continued to bless them, giving them *"knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"* (v17).

## **NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM: Daniel 2**

One night king Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a strange and terrifying dream. It disturbed him so much that he could not get back to sleep. He called for all his wise men that they might explain the meaning of such a troubling dream, for he was determined to find out what it meant. So they came and said to the king, *"Tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation"* (v4). Nebuchadnezzar knew that his wise men were very clever, but he did not want them just to make up interesting stories to put his mind at rest. He wanted to know the truth. So he refused to tell them the dream. This seemed to them to be most unreasonable. How could they possibly know what the king had dreamed upon his bed! But the king would not change his mind. Either they told him the dream and the interpretation, or they would die. *"There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter,"* they complained, *"there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things...there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh"* (vv10, 11).

The king was furious and sent out a decree to slay all the wise men — *"and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain"* (v13).

When Daniel heard of the king's command to kill them all, he asked the captain of the guard, *"Why is the decree so hasty from the king?"* (v15). When the captain explained the reason, Daniel immediately asked for time and he would make known to the king both his dream and the interpretation. So Daniel and his three friends prayed to God to save their lives by revealing to them the king's dream. God heard their prayers, and showed Daniel both the dream and its meaning. Full of confidence, Daniel went in before king Nebuchadnezzar. *"There is a God in heaven"* he said, *"that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days"* (v28).

## **DANIEL REVEALS THE DREAM: Daniel 2:31-35**

In his dream the king had seen before him a great image towering over him. It was extremely bright and glowing and its whole appearance was terrifying.

The HEAD of the image was of fine GOLD.

The BREAST AND ARMS were of SILVER.

The BELLY AND THIGHS were of BRASS.

The LEGS were of IRON.

The FEET were of IRON AND CLAY.

As he looked he saw a stone, thrown by an unseen hand, strike the image on the feet, smashing them to pieces. As the feet crumbled the whole image

toppled and fell. It broke completely into pieces and the wind blew it away “like the chaff of the summer threshing floors” (v35). The stone that struck the image grew and grew till it became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

### **THE INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM: Daniel 2:37-45**

This then was Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel went on to reveal to the king the meaning of it all.

“*The God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory,*” Daniel explained. “*THOU art this head of GOLD*” (vv37, 38). The four metals which followed represented four world empires which would come after Babylon.

The SILVER stood for MEDO-PERSIA.

The BRASS stood for GREECE.

The IRON stood for ROME.

The feet of IRON AND CLAY represented DIVIDED EUROPE, which we see today as partly strong and partly weak.

The image that stood before him represented the KINGDOM OF MEN, for every empire that was shown in that image was ruled over by men who neither knew nor obeyed the God of heaven. They were all hard, cruel and warlike. Their only purpose in life was to make themselves powerful and rich, by making life miserable for the hundreds of thousands of poor people who were oppressed by them. We today are living during the last days of the kingdom of men. The same wickedness which was seen in the ancient kingdom of men, is still seen amongst its leaders today. They are all godless men who enjoy power over the people and the fame and riches of their position.

### **THE STONE POWER: Daniel 2:44-45**

What did the stone represent? It was only small to begin with, but it struck the feet of iron and clay causing the whole image to be destroyed. The STONE power represents the KINGDOM OF GOD.

The Lord Jesus Christ will return from heaven to destroy the kingdom of men. First of all he will overthrow the armies of the nations, which will have come into the land of Israel to fight against Jerusalem (Zech. 14:2). From there his kingdom shall grow until it fills the whole earth. It shall be established upon the ruins of all the other nations of the world.

Unlike the kingdom of men, the Kingdom of God will have a king who is wise and just, ruling in the fear of God (2 Sam. 23:3). He will be kind and compassionate and will care for the poor and needy. (See Psalm 72 which

gives a beautiful description of the king who will reign over God's Kingdom). The world shall be at peace when all men obey him and in the end God's glory shall fill the whole earth (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:9).

When will this happen? Daniel was able to show that these things would come to pass in the days when the whole image stood upon its feet of iron and clay. *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever"* (Dan. 2:44).

## **LESSON FOR US**

The dream which troubled Nebuchadnezzar is exciting for us because it speaks of our day, reaching right down from that head of gold to the time when the stone-power will be revealed. Any day now the Lord Jesus may appear. He himself gave us words of warning: *"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come"* (Matt. 24:42). He wants us to remain faithful to him, so that we may be able to help him change the world into a glorious and happy place to live.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

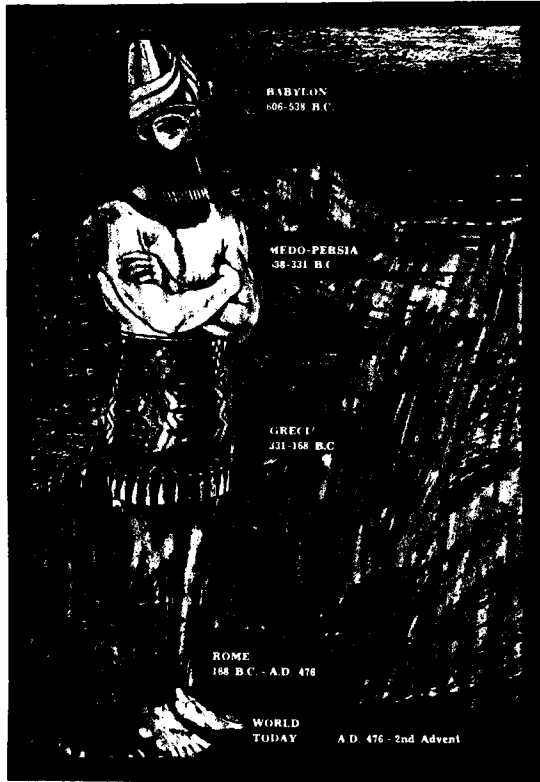
1. What did Nebuchadnezzar want to teach Daniel and his fellow captives?
2. Why did Nebuchadnezzar change the names of Daniel and his friends?
3. Why did they refuse to eat the king's meat?
4. What did they ask for instead of meat and wine?
5. How did God bless Daniel and his friends?
6. Why did Nebuchadnezzar refuse to tell his wise men his dream?
7. What did the wise men say to the king when he would not tell them his dream?
8. How did Daniel know what the king had dreamed?
9. What happened to the image when the stone struck it?
10. What does the stone represent?
11. Who will destroy the Kingdom of Men?
12. Where will the Kingdom of God be established?

## Detailed Answers

1. Describe the dream that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed.
2. (a) Tell what the stone did to the image.  
(b) Tell what happened to the image.  
(c) Tell what happened to the stone after that.
3. (a) Tell what the kingdom of men is like.  
(b) Show how the Kingdom of God will be very different.

## Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)

4. Trace the picture of the image Nebuchadnezzar saw and write down  
(a) What each part was made of.  
(b) What empire each part represented.  
Draw the stone in the picture and show what it did and who it represented.



## 19. IN THE FIERY FURNACE

*“When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how the faith of three Jews saved them from death in the fiery furnace.*

When Nebuchadnezzar had heard Daniel reveal his dream, he knew that he had spoken the truth and he praised Daniel’s God. He promoted Daniel and his three friends to positions of honour in his kingdom, making Daniel the chief of the wise men. Yet for all this, he did not humble himself before the God of heaven. Like all kings before him, he could not imagine his kingdom coming to an end. He loved to walk about his palace and view the splendour of the great city of Babylon, *“the golden city”* (Isa. 14:4), and consider his power and fame. He was always making plans to add to its glory, so that his kingdom might be established for ever. One plan he had was to set up a huge, golden image, that all his subjects should bow down and worship.

Daniel 3

### **NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S GOLDEN IDOL: Daniel 3:1-7**

Nebuchadnezzar set up his golden image on the plain of Dura where all could see it. It was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide (about twenty seven metres high and about three metres wide). He planned a special ceremony and invited all the governors and officers of the provinces which he had conquered to come to the dedication of the image. Amongst those who received an invitation were Daniel’s three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, though Daniel himself was not there. The king had earlier changed their names to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego (Dan.1:7), for these names honoured the gods of Babylon.

A herald came forward and made an announcement to all those who had gathered at the king’s commandment. The king had decreed that all should bow down and worship the image when they heard the music begin to play.

*“Whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace”* (v6). So at the appointed time the orchestra began to play and all the people assembled there fell down and worshipped the great golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. There were three men, however, who did not bow down. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego remembered the commandment of Yahweh their God, saying, *“Thou shalt have none other gods before Me...thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them”* (Deut. 5:7-9).

## **THE JEWS ARE ACCUSED TO THE KING: Daniel 3:8-18**

The wise men and councillors of Babylon were not at all pleased that Nebuchadnezzar had promoted Daniel and his three friends to such honoured positions in his empire. They looked for opportunities to criticise them, but these young men behaved so wisely and so well, that they found nothing to complain about. Their religion was so different from the Chaldean worship that this seemed to be the only way in which they could find fault. So it was that the Chaldeans noticed that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego had refused to bow down to the golden image despite the king's decree. They lost no time in coming to the king to report the matter.

*"There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up"* (v12).

Nebuchadnezzar was furious and demanded to see the men. They had always carried out their duties so faithfully, that he thought there must be some mistake. He would give them another chance.

*"But if ye worship not,"* the king warned them, *"Ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace, and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"* (v15).

Nebuchadnezzar knew that their God was a revealer of secrets, but he could not believe that He had power over fire, for the Chaldeans themselves worshipped a god of fire. The three young men would not be moved. Their minds were made up.

*"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace,"* they said. They had complete faith in Yahweh, for they knew He could do all things, even deliver them from such a fiery furnace, if it was according to His will. *"But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up"* (v18). They knew that whatever happened to them it would be according to God's will and they were prepared to accept that.

## **FAITH QUENCHES FIRE: Daniel 3:19-30**

The king was beside himself with rage. How dare these Jews defy him! He would not tolerate such disobedience and commanded that the furnace should be heated seven times hotter than usual. He got his strongest soldiers to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego and to throw them into the flames. So these three were bound right there and then in their coats and hats and flung into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. The heat of the fire was so intense that those who threw them in were themselves

burned to death, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego fell into the midst of the roaring flames. So the King's anger was satisfied as he watched those who had challenged him being punished.

Suddenly the king started from his seat with a look of amazement on his face. *"Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire,"* he demanded of his counsellors. *"True, O king,"* they replied. Yet to his astonishment he could see not three, but four men, walking and apparently unharmed in the midst of the fire, and the appearance of the fourth was like *"the Son of God"* (v25). That fourth one was indeed an angel of God, sent by Him to look after His servants.

Then Nebuchadnezzar himself came as near as he could to the door of the furnace and said, *"Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth and come hither."* The three faithful Jews walked out of the fire (v26).

All the king's officers gathered around and stared in amazement at these men, *"upon whose bodies the fire had no power."* Not a hair of their head was singed neither were their coats charred, nor was there even a smell of fire upon them (v27). It was a miracle and they had all seen it with their own eyes. What could the king do but praise their God.

*"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God"* (v28). So Nebuchadnezzar made a decree that no one in his kingdom, whatever nationality they were or whatever language they spoke, should speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. If they did they would be put to death and their houses ruined, *"because,"* he said, *"there is no other God that can deliver after this sort"* (v29). Then he promoted the young men to a place of greater honour in his kingdom than before.

## **LESSON FOR US**

These three Jews in Babylon were outstanding examples of faith, for *"through faith...they quenched the violence of fire"* (Heb. 11:33-34).

They had promised in their heart to obey God's commandments, not just when things were going well, which is easy, but in times of difficulty and trial as well. They knew God could save them, but even if He did not save them, they would still obey His commandments.

We may not have to face being thrown into a fiery furnace, but the test is the same. Our faith must be seen in our actions. They had grown up to



believe God and to love Him. So they were prepared to face such a terrible test of their faith when it came. God tests the faith of all those whom He loves. We must prepare our hearts now to learn of His ways so that whatever trials come on us we may be able to stand as firmly as they did on their faith.

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. What did Nebuchadnezzar set up on the plain of Dura?
2. What did everyone have to do when the music played?
3. Who refused to bow down to the golden image?
4. What was the punishment for not bowing down to the golden image?
5. What answers did the three Jews make when Nebuchadnezzar gave them another chance?
6. What command did Nebuchadnezzar make when the three Jews refused to obey him?
7. How many men did Nebuchadnezzar see in the fiery furnace?
8. Who was the fourth one in the furnace?
9. What did Nebuchadnezzar call these three Jews when he saw that the fire had no power on them?
10. What decree did Nebuchadnezzar make after the three Jews had come out of the fire unharmed?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. (a) What command did Nebuchadnezzar make about the golden image?  
(b) Why did Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refuse to bow down to the golden image?  
(c) What lesson do we learn from this?
2. (a) Tell what happened when the Chaldeans came to Nebuchadnezzar and complained that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to bow down to the golden image?  
(b) Tell how God saved them.

## 20. DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

*“Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how God delivered Daniel from the lions because he trusted in Him.*

God had shown Nebuchadnezzar in a dream that his kingdom would be overthrown by the Medes and Persians, represented in the image by the breast and arms of silver. So it came to pass that Darius the Mede reigned in Babylon while Daniel was still living there. One hundred and twenty princes ruled the whole kingdom of Medo-Perisa; three presidents were appointed over them; and of these three presidents, Daniel was made the first, *“because an excellent spirit was in in”* (v3).

Daniel 6

### **THE PRINCES FIND NO FAULT IN DANIEL: Daniel 6:1-5**

The princes and presidents whom the king had set over his whole kingdom were envious of Daniel. They would love to find fault with him for they hated having to answer to the Jew. In all that he did however, Daniel was faithful and diligent, for he followed the principle: *“Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men”* (Col. 3:23). They knew full well that the king found him thoroughly trustworthy. It seemed hopeless to try to break the king's confidence in him. *“We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel,”* they said amongst themselves, *“except we find it against him concerning the law of his God”* (v5). The fact that Daniel was steadfast in worshipping his God, even here in Babylon, gave them an idea. So they laid a trap for him.

### **A PLOT IS LAID AGAINST DANIEL: Daniel 6:6-9**

The princes and presidents were united in their hatred of Daniel. They presented the king with their clever plan.

*“King Darius, live for ever,”* they said. *“All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty*

*days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions” (v7).*

Such a clever plan could not fail. It was very flattering to the king and would give him honour and prestige before all his subjects. The king, of course, was not aware that Daniel had not been consulted; they had lied about that. To him it sounded like a good idea and so he was persuaded to sign the writing, making it a decree that could not be changed, “*according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not” (v8).*

### **DANIEL IS CAST INTO THE LIONS’ DEN: Daniel 6:10-17**

As soon as Daniel heard what had been done, he saw that it was a plot against his life. He was an old man by now, probably ninety years of age. God had blessed him and made him prosper all these long years while captive in Babylon. He had cared for him and saved him and his faithful friends out of many troubles. Daniel had trusted in God to deliver him and would now still put his trust in Him.

He went into his house and knelt down before the open windows and prayed to God. Far out to the west lay the city of Jerusalem, from which he had been led away captive when he was only a lad. Now that city which he loved lay in ruins; but the God who had said He would put His Name there was a living God. Solomon had asked God at the dedication of the temple to hear the prayers of His servants, who turned toward Jerusalem in faith (2 Chron. 6:36-39). Three times a day Daniel used to pray before these open windows and he would not cease to pray and give thanks to God now, though his life was in danger.

It was this very steadfastness that made the other presidents and princes sure that they could trap Daniel. They came together to spy on him and were soon able to catch him disobeying the king’s decree as he bowed in worship to his own God. Off they went to the king. Had he not just signed a decree, that anyone who prayed to any God or man except the king, must be thrown into the den of lions? The king agreed that it was so, “*according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not” (v12).* Their wicked plan had worked. “*That Daniel which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day” (v13).*

The king could see at once what they were up to, but it was too late. He had signed the decree without giving a thought to Daniel, for he knew quite well that Daniel had always been faithful to the God of Israel. He had learned to trust the old man and admire him, but now, through his own pride, he had signed a law that meant Daniel’s death. He was very distressed and tried everything he could think of to change that law, so that

Daniel might be saved. All day he argued and searched out the matter, but nothing could be done. Meanwhile his evil councillors gloated over the success of their cruel plan.

Sadly the king gave the command for Daniel to be brought out and cast into the den of lions. His last words to Daniel were words of great encouragement.

*“Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee”* (v16).

Then they brought a stone to seal the mouth of the den and the king sealed it with his own seal and the seal of his councillors.

### **DANIEL IS DELIVERED: Daniel 6:18-23**

The king was very distressed and passed the night fasting. He could not eat, nor did he want music to soothe him. The whole situation seemed to be hopeless, yet Daniel’s faith and courage had impressed him. Daniel’s God had been known to work great miracles before. The king’s mind was restless and he could not sleep. Impatiently he waited for the morning. As soon as it was light he got up and went in haste to the den of lions.

How unhappy he was knowing that he had thoughtlessly brought all this about. He cried out to Daniel, *“O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?”* (v20).

To his great relief he heard Daniel’s voice, *“My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me”* (v22). Daniel had found favour with God for his upright and honest behaviour and God had saved him from death. How happy the king was to hear his voice. They brought Daniel up out of the pit and just as he had said there was not a scratch to be found on him *“because he believed in his God”* (v23). It was his faith which had *“stopped the mouths of the lions”* (Heb. 11:33).

### **KING DARIUS MAKES A NEW DECREE: Daniel 6:24-28**

King Darius lost no time in punishing those wicked men who had tricked him with their scheming. They were to suffer the very thing they had planned for Daniel. They were thrown into the den of lions, with their wives and children, *“and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den”* (v24).

Then the king made a new decree and sent it throughout the kingdom.

*“I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end”* (v26). The king recognised that not only could

Daniel's God deliver him and rescue him from the lions, but He is a God who lives forever. Darius' decree sounds very much like the words of Dan. 2:44 in which Daniel made known to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the interpretation of his dream. Daniel was able to show Darius what he had once shown Nebuchadnezzar, that the Kingdom of God would one day replace the kingdom of men. His kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace. So Daniel used his deliverance from the lions to teach the good news of the kingdom of God to this gentile king.

## **LESSON FOR US**

Once again we have a wonderful example before us of faith and obedience. We may never be called on to face such a challenge as a den full of lions, but God does want us to show the same faith. If Daniel's faith and trust in God could stop the mouths of lions, we can be sure that God will also help us in our trials if we are faithful too.

Nothing should stop us from praying and thanking Him as Daniel did. Remember too, that God would not have sent His angel to save Daniel, if he had not been trustworthy and honest in all his daily duties. Our behaviour must be upright always so that no one can find fault with our words and actions. By our good behaviour we can show those around us, that we believe in God and are looking forward to being in His kingdom.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

The same hateful attitude shown by the presidents and princes towards Daniel has been shown to God's people in all generations. This feeling is called 'anti-semitism'. The Jews are descendants of Shem (Gen. 11:10-26. Shem was an ancestor of Abraham) and are therefore called 'semitic'. Anti-semitism means 'hatred of the Jews'. In the promises God made to Abraham, He said, "*I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee*" (Gen. 12:3). Those who have blessed the Jews, Abraham's seed, God has blessed.

There are many examples in the Bible of those whom God has cursed because of their hatred towards His people. (In lesson 22 we will learn of "Haman the Jews' enemy"). The presidents and princes of the Medes were moved against Daniel by their hatred of him because he was a Jew (Dan. 6:18) and their wives and their children must have shown the same feelings that is why God punished them too.

In our own time, a man rose up called Hitler who had an evil plan just like

these men, but he intended to kill all the Jews. He put to death six million, an unbelievable number and caused many other Jews to flee to the land of Israel. This was just what God had said would happen before Christ's return. So Hitler's evil work brought about another part of God's great purpose with Israel. Soon He will send the Lord Jesus Christ to save His people from the great Russian enemy which will come into the land. After that, the Jews will no longer be hated and despised, but God will make them head of the nations (Deut. 28:13; Jer. 3:17). All people will see that God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is being fulfilled: "*In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed*" (Gen. 12:3). Let us love the Jews, because they are the descendants of Abraham, for that is why God loves them (Rom. 11:26).

## **QUESTIONS (9 – 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

- × 1. Why were the princes and presidents envious of Daniel?
2. What was the decree that the princes and presidents asked king Darius to agree to?
- × 3. What did Daniel do when he heard the king's decree?
4. What did the princes and presidents tell the king about Daniel?
5. Was king Darius pleased to find out that Daniel had broken his decree?
6. What did king Darius do that night while Daniel was in the lions' den?
7. What did Daniel say to the king when he came to the lions' den in the morning?
8. Was Daniel hurt at all by the lions?
9. What was done to the wicked princes and presidents?
10. What was king Darius' new decree?

### **Detailed Answers**

- 1. Tell the story of how Daniel was cast into the lions' den, and was saved.
2. What did king Darius learn
  - (a) About Daniel's God?
  - (b) About the Kingdom of God?
- 3. How is Daniel a good example to us in this story?

### **Additional Answers (11 – 12 years only)**

4. (a) Why did the presidents and princes hate Daniel?  
(b) In His promise to Abraham, what did God say He would do to those who cursed the Jews?  
(c) What did God do to those in this story who hated Daniel?  
(d) Why should we love the Jews?



## 21. THE JEWS RETURN TO JERUSALEM

*“Build the house of Yahweh, God of Israel, which is in Jerusalem.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Cyrus made a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple there.*

While Daniel was a captive in Babylon, Jerusalem lay in ruins. The beautiful Temple built by Solomon had been burnt to the ground. Its golden lampstand and golden cups and bowls which had been holy to Yahweh, were taken away to decorate the palace of the kings of Babylon. The gates and walls of the city had also been broken down as the enemy smashed their way in. Many of the people, even old men, women and children, had been cruelly killed by the sword. Those who survived were led away captive in chains to a far-off land. As they wearily trudged along, they wept when they remembered the city they had loved, the city of Zion which they thought would never be destroyed. God’s prophets had warned them of these very things, but they had stubbornly refused to listen. Many times He had sent His prophets, for He was always ready to show mercy to His people, but they would not hear. They must endure the punishment of their sins. Jeremiah had said that they would stay in Babylon for seventy years (Jer. 25:11). Now the seventy years was coming to an end. Those, like Daniel, who had been led into captivity when they were young, were now old men. Some of them remembered Jeremiah’s words and were beginning to hope that they might yet return to Jerusalem.

Ezra 1; 3; 4:1-6, 17-23; 5:1-2; 6

### **THE DECREE OF CYRUS: Ezra 1**

*“After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you,”* God had said through Jeremiah, *“and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place”* (Jer. 29:10). Faithful men and women in Babylon had calculated that it was now seventy years since Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Jerusalem (see Dan. 9:2, 16-19) and they wondered how God would keep His promise. Not only had Jeremiah foretold these things, but two hundred years earlier Isaiah had mentioned by name the very king who would rule in Babylon when the time came to fulfil these words.

Darius had died and Cyrus, the Persian king, ruled. He was the one whom Isaiah had named, for God had said of Cyrus: *“he...shall perform all*



*my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (Isa. 44:28). What a remarkable prophecy this was spoken all those years before. Perhaps Daniel in his position of honour in Babylon had shown these very words to Cyrus, for he did indeed send out a decree early in his reign giving the Jews freedom to return to Jerusalem. Such an amazing prophecy made him realise that God indeed rules in the kingdom of men, setting up kings and removing them according to His wisdom (see Dan. 4:17). So Cyrus made a proclamation throughout his whole kingdom: “Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, Yahweh God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh, God of Israel” (Ezra 1:2-3).*

Many Jews had settled comfortably into the land of their captivity and they and their children chose to stay behind. The decree of Cyrus commanded them to contribute to the work of rebuilding in Jerusalem, by giving silver and gold and cattle and goods to those who returned. Cyrus the king brought out the cups and vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away when he destroyed the temple seventy years before. This was indeed a precious treasure to take back to Jerusalem. A prince of Judah, named Zerub-babel, was put in charge and he became the governor of the city. With him went about forty two thousand Jews from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin as well as priests and Levites. All these had their names written down in a register.

This was only a small number, when we consider that the land of Israel had been emptied of all its inhabitants seventy years earlier. Nevertheless there were enough for the work and they were full of enthusiasm to return to their beloved city and to set about rebuilding it.

### **THE ALTAR IS FIRST BUILT: Ezra 3:1-7**

So these faithful Jews made the long journey home, a much happier company than before. They returned to their own cities and tried to begin again with their farms and vineyards which had been deserted for so long. The Samaritans in the north, and the Moabites and Edomites on the east, were not at all pleased to see them back. They made life very unpleasant for them and the Jews became afraid for their safety.

Then Joshua the High Priest, and Zerub-babel the governor, built the altar, so that they could begin once again to offer acceptable offerings to God. They knew that God was their strength. He had made it possible for

them to return and He would protect them and make the work prosper, so long as they put their trust in Him. The people came out of their cities and gathered in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles and the priests went about the work of daily worship, *“as it is written in the Law of Moses, the man of God”* (v2). The first Feast of Tabernacles had been kept when God delivered Israel out of Egypt. Now they could keep that Feast to rejoice that God had led them out of Babylon.

### **THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE IS LAID: Ezra 3:8-13**

Cyrus the king had also given them a grant of money to use for rebuilding the Temple (6:4). The Levites were organised to see that the work was done. They paid stone-masons and carpenters to begin the foundation and brought trees from Lebanon especially for that purpose, just as Solomon had done. In the second year of their return the foundation was laid and the people all gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate. The priests, dressed in their robes, blew their silver trumpets and the Levites played their instruments and sang praises to Yahweh, *“because He is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel”* (v11). The people were grateful for God’s overshadowing care and excited at the thought of a Temple once again in Jerusalem. When the singing finished *“all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised Yahweh, because the foundation of the house of Yahweh was laid”* (v11).

Among the crowd who gathered there that day were many very old men, priests and Levites and chief of the fathers. They could remember the glory and splendour of Solomon’s Temple, which had been the centre of worship for all Israel. They had lived during the reign of Zedekiah when Nebuchadnezzar had come with his army to destroy both the Temple and the city. The sight of this new foundation reminded them of what they had lost. They wept when they remembered the days of old.

But the rest of the people shouted for joy. They were full of hope that from now on God would bless them. The noise of their joyful shouting, mixed with the loud weeping of those who mourned, was heard afar off.

### **THE WORK STOPS: Ezra 4:1-6, 17-23**

The enemies of Israel looked on as the Jews began to rebuild the ruined city. It did not suit them at all to have this people back here again, a people who kept themselves separate from their neighbours. At first they tried to join with them in the work. *“Let us build with you,”* they said to Zerubabel, *“for we seek your God, as ye do”* (v2). These were the Samaritans, a mixed people whom the Assyrians had left in the land when they took the

northern ten tribes captive. Their worship was false. Some had heard of Yahweh and knew something of His law, but they worshipped idols. Zerub-babel and Joshua quickly saw the danger of letting such people join them. *“Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto Yahweh God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us”* (v3). When the Samaritans did not get their own way, they tried to weaken the hands of the people by interfering in the work. Finally they wrote a letter to the king of Persia making false accusations against the Jews. Cyrus had died and the new king of Persia believed their deceitful words and sent back a letter demanding that the Jews stop the rebuilding at once. So the work which had begun so faithfully and so enthusiastically ceased, until God sent His prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them to take it up again.

### **THE WORK IS FINISHED: Ezra 5:1-2; 6**

Fifteen years went by before the work was taken up again. This time the people refused to let anything hinder them. The two prophets urged them on and Zerub-babel and Joshua set a wonderful example of faith and hard work. They could see now that they had been too easily discouraged, but God would bless their efforts if they only trusted Him. Their enemies again tried to interfere and wrote to the king of Persia. This time however, the king made a search through the records of the history of Persia and found the decree of Cyrus. So he sent back to the Samaritans his decision that the work of rebuilding that Cyrus had commanded should be allowed to continue. *“Let the work of this house of God alone,”* he wrote, *“let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place”* (v7). Not only that, but he made the Jews’ enemies give a contribution of cattle and sheep, wheat, salt, wine and oil, as the priests of God required—*“let it be given them day by day without fail,”* he said. If anyone should dare to alter this decree, the beams of his house would be torn down and set up as a gallows to hang him on. With these strong words, the king of Persia replied to the enemies of the Jews. They dared not argue any more.

How wonderfully God had helped them. In another four years the work was finished. There was no weeping this time, *“for Yahweh had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king (of Persia) unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel”* (v22).

## **LESSON FOR US**

Faithful Jews in Babylon read the Law of Moses and the prophets carefully, and learned how God was going to bring a blessing upon His people and upon Jerusalem. When we read the Bible each day, we will learn from the prophecies written long ago, that God will one day bring peace to Jerusalem and make it the chief city in all the world. He will build a temple far more glorious than Solomon's, which all nations will come to visit, that they may worship the king, the Lord Jesus Christ. The only way we can be sure of being there to share this glorious and happy time, is by learning God's ways and obeying His commandments every day.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

Another Jew also found favour in the eyes of the king of Persia. This was Ezra, a descendant of Aaron, who was also a scribe with a very deep understanding of the Law of Moses. God had moved him to return to Jerusalem now that the temple was established, to guide the people in the proper way to worship. His special work was to appoint magistrates and judges in the land and to teach the laws of God to all those who had settled there again. So God provided faithful men to build the altar and the temple, and now a faithful priest to turn the hearts of the people to God's laws that they might prosper. *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments"* (Ezra 7:10).

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

1. How long did God say His people must stay in Babylon?
2. Who had mentioned Cyrus by name two hundred years before?
3. What did Cyrus let the Jews do?
4. What did Cyrus himself give the Jews to take back to Jerusalem?
5. What was the first thing they built back in Jerusalem?
6. When they kept the feast of Tabernacles what were they rejoicing about?
7. What part of the temple was built in the second year?
8. The people shouted when the foundation was laid. What were they shouting about?
9. Who were the Samaritans?

10. Why would Zerub-babel not let the Samaritans help them build the Temple?
11. What finally made the people stop building the Temple?
12. Which two prophets encouraged them to start building the Temple again?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. (a) Seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, faithful men in Babylon were getting excited. Why?  
(b) What was the decree Cyrus made?
2. Tell what happened when the foundation of the Temple was laid.
3. (a) One king of Persia stopped the work of rebuilding the Temple. Why?  
(b) When the next king of Persia read the decree of Cyrus what did he say?

### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

4. (a) Who was Ezra?  
(b) What was his work?

## 22. ESTHER

*“Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Esther, the Jewish maid, became queen of Persia, and by her faith saved her people from destruction.*

God had said He would punish His people for their disobedience, by driving them out of their land which He had given to them. Those who led them captive hated and oppressed them, so that their lives were made very miserable. As we have seen in our last few lessons, there were among the captives faithful men, who came to the notice of the rulers of the land because of their upright and honest behaviour. Their faith made these rulers show favour at times to the Jews. One such man named Mordecai, sat in the gate of the king's palace in Shushan, the capital of Persia. He had a beautiful young cousin named Esther, whom he cared for in this strange land. It was Esther's faith that saved her people from complete destruction at the hands of those who hated them.

Esther 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

### **THE QUEEN OF PERSIA IS BANISHED: Esther 1; 2:1-4**

The king of Persia at this time was called Ahasuerus, *“the mighty”*. His kingdom reached as far as India in the east and to Ethiopia in the west. He made a feast and invited all the nobles and princes of his realm to attend, so that he might show them the splendour and riches of his palace in Shushan, and the glory and honour that surrounded him. This feasting went on for months, and at the end of that time he held a feast for seven days for all the people who lived and served the king in Shushan. Queen Vashti held a feast at the same time for the women in the royal house. On the seventh day, Ahasuerus summoned Vashti to come to him that he might show his princes her beauty, but Vashti refused to come. The king was furious that she should dare to insult him by such arrogant disobedience and cause him such embarrassment in front of his princes. When he consulted with his counsellors, they agreed that for the sake of the king's honour, and the respect due to all husbands by their wives, Vashti should be queen no longer. *“Let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she,”* was their advice (v19). So a royal decree was sent throughout all the

provinces in the kingdom of Persia that “*every man should bear rule in his own house*” (v22).

Then the king’s counsellors made another suggestion which the king gladly agreed to. Officers were appointed to go into all the provinces of his kingdom to choose the most beautiful maidens they could find and bring them all back to Shushan. There, in the house of the women, they could spend a whole year preparing themselves to be presented before King Ahasuerus. “*Let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti*” (2:4).

### **ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN: Esther 2:5-20**

Among the many maidens chosen for this honour was the young Jewish girl, Esther, who soon came into favour with Hegai, “*the keeper of the women*”. It was obvious that not only was Esther very beautiful, but she was also humble and gracious. She prepared herself like the other women with oil of myrrh and sweet perfumes, and accepted whatever suggestions Hegai made about her appearance and her clothes. When the time came for her to go in before the king, “*Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her*” (v15). The king loved Esther above all the other women, and was pleased to set the royal crown upon her head and to make her queen instead of Vashti. When the marriage took place, a feast was held in honour of Esther and all the people in the kingdom of Persia rejoiced.

In all this time Esther had not revealed to anyone that she was a Jew, for Mordecai her cousin, had warned her not to.

### **HAMAN, THE JEWS’ ENEMY: Esther 3**

The king had in his court an Agagite (that is an Amalekite) named Haman, to whom he gave a position of high honour. All the king’s servants bowed to him — all except Mordecai. He knew that God had cursed the Amalekites (Deut. 25:17-19) and that worship, such as these courtiers were giving, is for God, not men. The king’s servants tried to persuade Mordecai to change his mind, but for conscience sake he refused. When they told Haman, he was very angry. Why should this Jew not pay him reverence like everyone else in Shushan? His anger soon turned to hatred, not of Mordecai only, but of all the Jews. “*Wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai*” (v6).

The only way that Haman could carry out such a monstrous plan, was to

get the king to agree. So he informed the king about “*a certain people scattered abroad*” in all the provinces of Persia. Their laws were different from the laws of other people “*neither keep they the king’s laws*” (v8). It was not wise for the king to tolerate such a people, but rather they should be destroyed. This sounded quite reasonable to Ahasuerus. So he took off his royal ring and gave it to Haman to seal such a decree, when it was written. “*And the letters were sent by posts into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day*” (v13).

The king did not know that Haman meant the Jews, nor did he yet know that his beloved Queen Esther herself was a Jew.

### **ESTHER’S FAITH TESTED: Esther 4**

While the king and Haman sat down to drink, Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sack-cloth and ashes, and cried out with a loud and bitter cry in the midst of the city. In every province of the kingdom, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping.

Esther was distressed to hear of Mordecai’s grief and sent her servant to find out what was wrong. He sent back a copy of the king’s decree and told her that she must go into the king and personally plead for her people. Then Esther was afraid, for she knew that if anyone approached the king without being invited, it meant death. “*I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days,*” she said (v11). When Mordecai was told these words, he sent back a reply that made Esther tremble all the more. “*Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews*” (v13). She would die because of the decree anyway, but if she would not speak to the king, God would find another way to save His people. “*Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*” Mordecai said (v14).

This made Esther realise that God indeed had brought her to this position of honour, and if she put her trust in Him, He might yet be merciful and deliver the Jews from their enemies, as He had often done in the past. She asked Mordecai to gather together all the Jews in Shushan to fast for three days and pray for her, and she and her maidens would fast too before she went in to the king. So Esther was prepared to sacrifice her life for the sake of her people. “*So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish*” (v16).

### **ESTHER’S BANQUET: Esther 5**

After three days, Esther put on her royal robes and went into the inner court of the king’s house. When Ahasuerus caught sight of her there, he



was delighted to see her and held out to her his golden sceptre. So far God had blessed her. *“What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom,”* said the king (v3). Esther was greatly relieved to see that the king was pleased, but wisely she did not rush in with her request. Instead she invited the king and Haman to a banquet. At the banquet she did not find the right opportunity to speak to the king about Haman’s cruel decree.

So she proposed a second banquet. How puffed up with pride and joy Haman was to receive another special invitation. When he boasted of it to his wife and friends he could not help noting the one thing that spoiled his perfect happiness. *“All this availeth me nothing,”* he said, *“so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate”* (v13). His wife and friends thought that could be easily put right. *“Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet”* (v14). It seemed like a good idea to Haman and he immediately sent and had the gallows set up on high.

### **ESTHER SAVES HER PEOPLE: Esther 7**

The next day, Esther made her request. She and her people were the victims of an evil plot to destroy them. The king was astounded. Whoever had dared to suggest such a terrible thing! *“The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman,”* Esther cried (v6). The king was very angry. To think that this man whom he had trusted, had used his honoured position for such evil plans. One of his servants told the king of the gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai. *“Hang him thereon,”* the king commanded. So Haman, the Jews enemy, was hanged. The king then made another decree allowing the Jews everywhere to fight to save their lives and their property on the day when the first decree was to be carried out.

By the faith and courage of Mordecai and Esther, God’s people were once more delivered from their enemies.

### **LESSON FOR US**

Esther was beautiful, but it was not simply her beauty that made her famous. She was humble and gracious, for she had learned that these qualities are pleasing to God and men. She remained obedient to Mordecai, who was like a father to her, even after she became queen of Persia. She could trust Mordecai because he was a man of great faith. He had always taught her to have faith in God. They really believed that God would hear their prayers and it was this that gave Esther courage to risk her

life for her people.

God guides our lives and tests our faith all the time, to see if we really believe Him. We never know when the things we do may change the lives of others, and so we must always be ready to stand up for what we believe and let people know that we worship God.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

We mentioned in Lesson 19 that the Jews have had enemies in all generations who have hated and cursed them. Haman, "*the Jews' enemy*," is probably the worst example in the Bible. His hatred made him want to kill not just Mordecai, but all the Jews everywhere. When he was hanged instead, the king gave all his property to Esther (8:1). Mordecai was given a position of honour higher than Haman had ever had, for "*Mordecai the Jew was next unto the king Ahasuerus*" (10:3). The Jews were at peace and Mordecai looked after their welfare. So Haman's curse was turned into a blessing for God's people and Haman himself was cursed ("*I will curse him that curseth thee*," God had said to Abraham - Gen. 12:3).

The hatred people show today for the Jews will grow more bitter between now and the return of Christ, but when he comes, God will turn their curse into a blessing. He will save His people and their enemies will be destroyed (Zeph.3:8; Joel 3:1). The Jews (like Mordecai) will be given positions of honour and dwell in their land in peace (Zeph. 3:20; Ezek. 39:27-28; Isa. 62:1-2). The wealth of the Gentiles who have hated the Jews will be given into the hands of those who will set up God's kingdom (Isa. 60:9-11).

We ourselves must have the faith of Mordecai and Esther, if we wish to share the joys of the kingdom age.

### **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

#### **Short Answers**

1. What happened when Ahasuerus summoned Vashti to his feast?
2. What advice did the king's counsellors give when Vashti disobeyed the king?
3. What suggestion did the king's counsellors make about finding a new queen?
4. What was Esther like?
5. Who was Mordecai?
6. Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down to Haman?

7. What wicked plan did Haman think up?
8. How did Esther find out about Haman's wicked plan?
9. What did Mordecai tell Esther she must do?
10. What did Esther ask Mordecai to do for three days?
- 11. When Ahasuerus saw Esther standing in the inner court, what did he do?
12. What did Haman's wife tell him to do?
- 13. What happened to Haman in the end?

### **Detailed Answers**

- 1. Tell how Vashti disobeyed the king and Esther became queen instead.
2. (a) Tell how Mordecai made Haman angry.  
(b) What wicked plan did Haman think up?  
(c) How did Haman get the king to agree?

### **Additional Answers (11 – 12 years only)**

4. Tell how God brought Haman down and lifted Mordecai to honour.
5. How will God turn the curse of Israel's enemies into a blessing when Christ returns?

## 23. NEHEMIAH BUILDS THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM

*“Let us rise up and build.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and organised the rebuilding of its walls and gates.*

God has never forgotten His people. Though Israel often forgot Him, God never forgot Israel, whether they were far off in captivity, or scattered into the four corners of the world as they are today. In the reign of Ahasuerus, while Esther was Queen, God delivered His people from their enemies and cared for those who had returned to Israel to rebuild the temple. Now in the twentieth year of Ahasuerus, the thoughts of the king’s cup-bearer were far to the west in the land of his forefathers. This faithful man, whose heart longed after the city of Jerusalem, was Nehemiah. His brother Hanani, had just returned from Judah with a very sad story of the state of things there. This disturbing report was to change the whole of Nehemiah’s life.

Nehemiah,1; 2; 4 and 6

### **SAD NEWS FROM JERUSALEM: Nehemiah 1**

Hanani reported that the Jews who had returned from captivity were very unhappy. There were enemies on every side who kept on attacking them. The people were poor. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates burned. Nothing seemed to be going right. It was a sad picture indeed.

Nehemiah was very distressed when he heard this news. He sat down and wept, and mourned, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. Day and night Nehemiah prayed for his brethren in Judah. He knew that they suffered because they had sinned, for he remembered the words written in the law of Moses (see Deut. 4:25-30). If they disobeyed Him, God had said He would scatter them among the nations, as He had indeed done. Yet for all this, Nehemiah knew also that if they confessed their sins and repented, and turned again unto God, He was ever ready to forgive them and cause them to return. Such was Nehemiah’s hope, for he loved God and loved his people, the Jews. So he decided that he would like to return to the land to see what he could do to help, for the people must learn to serve God willingly and seek God’s forgiveness. Then only would they

prosper. It was about four months after Hanani had brought back his report, that Nehemiah prayed that God would give him favour in the sight of King Ahasuerus. *“Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man”* (v11).

### **NEHEMIAH SPEAKS TO THE KING: Nehemia 2:1-8**

As Nehemiah served the king with wine, he could not help but show the sadness he felt deep in his heart. The king noticed this at once and asked him, *“Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart”* (v2).

Nehemiah was afraid then, for he knew that to appear sad before the king could mean death. So he told him the reason for his unhappiness: *“Why should not my countenance be said, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?”* (v3). The king could no doubt see how deeply distressed Nehemiah was and said, *“For what dost thou make request?”* (v4). Nehemiah realised that the king was genuinely interested, and here was his opportunity to ask permission to return to Jerusalem. Right then he prayed silently to God to bless him as he made his request known to Ahasuerus. Then he asked the king to release him so that he might go back to Jerusalem to build up the city. The king only wanted him to set a time for his return, and promised to give him letters of authority to the governors of the provinces he would pass through. He also asked for a letter to the keeper of the king’s forest for timber to make the beams of the gates of the city, for Nehemiah’s great desire was to build up the walls and gates of Jerusalem again.

### **NEHEMIAH ENCOURAGES THE PEOPLE: Nehemia 2:9-20**

So Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, accompanied by captains and horsemen of the king of Persia’s army. When the neighbouring Samaritans and Ammonites heard of it, they were most annoyed to learn that *“there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel”* (v10). Nehemiah waited three days in Jerusalem. Then he went out at night with a few men to inspect secretly the damage that had been done to the walls and gates. As yet, he had not told anyone of the wonderful plan that he had prayed to God about. So the little band of men quietly toured the ruins of the city, and Nehemiah could see that Hanani had been right. Later he gathered the Jews together and told them what he had in mind. *“Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach”* (v17). He told them how God had blessed him,

and the way in which the king had answered his request to return. He was so earnest and enthusiastic, that the people gladly agreed to support him. *“Let us rise up and build,”* they said, and immediately began to plan what they could do to help.

When Sanballat and Tobiah, who lived not far away, and who had been so annoyed when Nehemiah returned, heard of this plan, they laughed them to scorn. They accused Nehemiah of rebelling against the king, but Nehemiah was quite ready for such criticism and said: *“The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem”* (v20).

Then many families came forward and offered to rebuild a certain section of the wall, until there was work going on right around the city.

### **THE WALLS GO UP: Nehemiah 4**

The families who re-built the wall worked hard. They were glad to have a leader like Nehemiah. When Sanballat and Tobiah tried to stop the work, Nehemiah turned to God for help and never allowed the people to lose heart. Sanballat was indignant and said, *“What do these feeble Jews?...will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?”* (v2). Tobiah jeered at them, saying, *“If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall”* (v3). Nehemiah kept on encouraging the people and ignored their rude remarks. But all the Jews’ neighbours were really very angry to see the wall go up, and plotted to join together and fight against Jerusalem. *“Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them”* (v9).

Nehemiah armed the people with swords, spears and bows, and told them not to be afraid, but to remember how great and terrible their God was, who would help them fight for the safety of their families. From that time on half of the workmen carried weapons and kept watch, while the other half steadily continued to build. Even the builders worked with a tool in one hand and had their swords ready by their sides. Nehemiah kept by him all the time a man with a trumpet, who could sound the alarm if trouble arose. If the trumpet was blown, everyone had to rush to where Nehemiah was. So the work proceeded and everyone came from their villages and lived inside the city. At night they took it in turns to keep guard, and each day they pressed on with the work. Everyone could see now how urgent it was to let nothing stop them from finishing the walls.

## **THE WALLS ARE FINISHED: Nehemiah 6**

It was just as well that Nehemiah was a determined man, and knew that God was on his side for at one time Sanballat tried to trick him into meeting him outside the walls. Seeing that it was a wicked plan to capture or kill him, Nehemiah replied, *"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"* (v3). They tried this trick four times, but Nehemiah was not deceived. Another time they sent a letter to everyone in the city accusing Nehemiah of setting himself up as king. *"There are not such things done as thou sayest,"* said Nehemiah, for he knew they had made it all up (v8). Yet again they tried to trap Nehemiah by trying to make him afraid and suggesting that he hide inside the temple. *"Should such a man as I flee?"* answered Nehemiah. *"I will not go in"* (v11).

So by constant prayer to God, Nehemiah was strengthened to stand against all the efforts of their enemies as they tried to weaken their hands and stop the work. At last in fifty-two days the wall was finished.

### **LESSON FOR US**

Nehemiah was a man of prayer and action. In everything he did he asked God's help and guidance, and in this he is a wonderful example to us. He did not rush into things, but made careful plans and then, after praying for God's blessing, he made known to others what his plans were. This was wise, for it is too easy to talk a lot about things we want to do before giving careful thought to them. Even while he was standing in front of the king, he spoke to God silently and quickly. The king would not have known he was praying, but prayer was so much a part of his daily life that his mind was always ready to turn to God. This is the frame of mind we need to develop as we grow up — always thinking thoughts which will please God.

He was also a very determined man. His enemies thought up lots of ways to trick him, but he knew what was right and stuck to it. Let us never be taken in by people trying to stop us from serving God. We have a work to do — our daily Bible readings, our Sunday School lessons and Bible marking, as well as the many things we can do to show the kindness of God to others. We must be too busy doing that, to stop and listen to the people in the world. Let us work together with other families who love the Truth, and God will make us prosper, just as He did for the families in Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

Ezra, the scribe, had returned to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Ahasuerus (called “*Artaxerxes*” in the book of Ezra, which is a title meaning, “the great king”). It was in the twentieth year of the king that Nehemiah returned. Together they tried to turn the hearts of the people to God by showing them out of the law of Moses, what God was commanding them to do.

On one occasion (Neh. 8), the people asked Ezra to read the book of the Law to them and explain it. They gathered in the street near the Water Gate and Ezra stood up on a wooden platform so that everyone could see and hear. He was an old man now and the people knew that he understood God’s laws well. When he arose and opened the book, the people stood up and prayed. Thirteen priests and Levites helped Ezra, probably by repeating Ezra’s words to groups of the people, to make sure that they each understood clearly the laws of God one by one. “*So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*” (Neh. 8:8). The people were very sorry when they listened, because they realised how far they had slipped from God’s ways, and they wept. But Nehemiah and Ezra told them not to mourn or weep, but to be happy that at last they understood and could now begin to do what was right. The Levites calmed the people by saying, “*Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved*” (v11). They had stood from early in the morning till mid-day, paying careful attention to all that was said. Now they felt relieved and happy. So everyone went home and enjoyed a happy meal with their families, and sent gifts to those who were not as well off. The next day the chief of the people came again to Ezra. This time they found that it was the time of the year when the Feast of Tabernacles should be kept. So they sent a message out to all the people in their cities and villages, telling them to go into the mountains “*and fetch olive brances, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written*” (v15). So everyone gladly made little shelters or booths on the roofs of their houses and in the streets of Jerusalem and in the temple courts. They kept the feast for seven days according to the law. Each day, Ezra “*read in the book of the law of God*” (v18). It had not been kept so happily since the times of Joshua. So Ezra and Nehemiah strengthened the hands of the people and showed them how to serve God with gladness.



## QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)

### Short Answers

1. Who was the cup-bearer to the king of Persia?
2. What news did Hanani bring back from Jerusalem?
3. Why had God scattered Israel among the nations?
4. What did God's people have to do if they wanted to return to their land?
5. Who noticed that Nehemiah looked sad?
6. What did Nehemiah do in front of the king, before he asked to go back to Jerusalem?
7. What did Nehemiah want to do when he got back to Jerusalem?
8. What did Nehemiah do one night soon after he got back?
9. What did the people say when Nehemiah told them his plan?
10. Who tried to stop the work of rebuilding?
11. How long did it take to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem?
12. What did Nehemiah say when Sanballat wanted to meet him outside the walls?
13. What sort of man was Nehemiah?

### Detailed Answers

1. (a) Tell what Nehemiah did after he heard Hanani's report about Jerusalem.  
(b) Tell what happened when he served the king wine.
2. (a) Tell what Sanballat and Tobiah said when they saw the people begin to build.  
(b) Tell how Nehemiah encouraged the people to go on building until the wall was finished.
3. How did Sanballat try to trick Nehemiah several times and what answers did Nehemiah give?
4. Nehemiah and the families in Jerusalem rebuilt the walls. What work can we do for God?

### Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)

5. (a) What was so important about the way in which Ezra read the book of the Law?  
(b) What effect did it have on the people?

## 24. THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

*“Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how Zacharias and Elisabeth had a son in their old age who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah.*

As we have already seen, Haggai and Zechariah were prophets who returned from Babylon at the end of the seventy years captivity. They encouraged the people in re-building the temple and in restoring the worship of Yahweh. The last prophet in the Old Testament was Malachi. He prophesied in the time of Nehemiah, when one of the biggest problems in Judah was marrying out of the Truth. Marriage with outsiders is one of the surest ways to turn people from God to false worship, and Malachi spoke strongly about this. He was the last prophet God spoke through before the coming of John the Baptist. For nearly six hundred years Israel had been ruled over by mighty nations; Babylon, Persia, Greece and now Rome, just as God had shown Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. The Jews longed to be free of foreign rule. If only they would realise it, God had brought these nations against them to punish them so that they might learn to humble themselves and turn back to Him. As always, there were a few faithful in Israel who still read the Law and the Prophets. These men and women waited anxiously for the coming of Messiah, the “*anointed*” of God. They believed that Messiah would come and set them free. They looked for signs in the world affairs, just as we do today, for we believe that Christ, the “*anointed*” king of Israel, will soon come a second time.

Luke1:5-25, 57-80

### **ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH: Luke 1:5-7**

Among those who waited for the coming of Messiah was a faithful priest of God, named Zacharias. He and his wife Elisabeth were happy serving God. *“They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”* (v6). One thing had always disappointed them — they had not been blessed with children. Now, however, they were both old and Elisabeth was past the age of child-bearing. Not only had they prayed that God would give them children, but also that Messiah would come. This was their constant prayer.

### **ZACHARIAS IN THE TEMPLE: Luke 1:8-22**

When David had arranged the temple services many years earlier, he had set the priests in twenty-four courses, so that each had their turn to do

the priestly work in the temple (1 Chron. 24:19). When Zacharias' turn came, his service was to burn the incense in the Holy Place. Outside, the people came to pray as the incense ascended.

Suddenly, as Zacharias approached the altar, an angel of God appeared standing on the right side of the altar of incense. The sight of the angel made Zacharias afraid, but the angel spoke to him and said: "*Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John*" (v13). Not only would this make Zacharias and Elisabeth happy, but the angel said that many would rejoice at his birth. He would be a very special child, for God would have a great work for him to do. Because of his special work, he would not be allowed to drink wine or strong drink. (You may remember that this had also been forbidden by God in the case of Samson. See Judges 13:4-5 and Num. 6:2-3). The reason for this was that John's mind must be kept clear at all times, so that he could concentrate on the work God had for him to do. This work was so important that "*he would be filled with the Holy Spirit*" from his birth (v15). What was this great work that he would do for God that required such careful preparation from the time he was born? The angel told Zacharias, that this son who would be born to him and Elisabeth in their old age, was the one who would "*make ready a people prepared for the Lord*" (v17). He was to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would be a herald, who would announce the good news to Israel that Messiah was coming. The hearts of the people of Israel must be made ready to welcome him. They had lived for the last four hundred years without a prophet of God in their midst. So it was necessary for someone to put the people in the right frame of mind to receive their Messiah. "*Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God*" (v16).

Zacharias was stunned. He could scarcely believe all that he heard. "*Whereby shall I know this?*" he asked the messenger of God who stood before him, "*for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years*" (v18). In answer to his question, the angel revealed who he was. "*I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God*" (v19). This was the angel who had appeared to Daniel in Babylon hundreds of years earlier (see Dan.8:16; 9:21). This angel had told Daniel of the coming of Messiah and now he was telling Zacharias that his son would be the one to announce that Messiah had come! No wonder Zacharias was astonished at such a message. The angel went on to tell Zacharias the sign he would have. "*Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season*" (v20). This would be a sign to Zacharias and to all who knew

him, that this message was indeed from God.

Outside the people waited, wondering why Zacharias took so long. When at last he appeared, he was unable to tell them what had happened, for just as the angel had said, he was dumb. It was obvious though, from the way he looked and made signs that he had seen a vision in the temple.

### **ELISABETH HAS A SON: Luke 1:23-25, 57-66**

When his turn of service was finished in the temple, he returned to his house in the hill country of Judea. There he and Elisabeth eagerly waited for the birth of their son. At last the happy time came, and all their friends and relatives gathered round to share their joy. They were delighted to hear that *“the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her”* (v58), in giving Elisabeth a son in her old age.

As was the custom in Israel, the little boy was circumcised on the eighth day, and everyone gathered with the family to celebrate. They all expected him to be named Zacharias, after his father. Elisabeth, however, had learned from Zacharias that the angel Gabriel had already named him John. *“He shall be called John,”* she said, which means *“the grace of God”*.

Everyone was puzzled, for that name had not been in the family before. They made signs to Zacharias, to see what his wish was. Since he still could not speak, they gave him something to write on and he clearly wrote: *“His name is John”* (v63). Everyone was surprised; and then they witnessed something even more amazing. Zacharias was suddenly able to speak again. After nine months of silence, *“his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God”* (v64). This was a miracle indeed and they were afraid, because this was something they did not understand. News of these amazing events spread quickly throughout the district, and everyone wondered, *“What manner of child shall this be!”* (V66).

### **ZACHARIAS PROPHECIES: Luke 1:67-80**

Not only was Zacharias able to speak again, but he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied. *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people”* (v68). He spoke of Messiah, the one whom we know as Jesus, who was yet to be born. God had long ago promised that He would send Israel a saviour, just as He had promised to Abraham and to David (see Gen. 22:17-18; 2 Sam. 7:12-16). Now He was about to fulfil His word and John would become the one to run on ahead with the good news.

*“Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go*

before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways" (v76).

These startling events were the beginning of many amazing things in Israel. The little boy grew and "*the hand of the Lord was with him*" (v66). He then went out into the deserts and there he stayed till he was ready to make his announcement to all Israel.

## **LESSON FOR US**

Zacharias and Elisabeth are wonderful examples to us. They were upright in their behaviour, obeying all God's commandments. They prayed always, not only for what they wanted, but that God's purpose might be fulfilled in the earth. They knew that the coming of God's promised son would bring great joy and happiness both to them and to all Israel, but they never dreamed that they would play such an important part in his appearing. They were humble people and it is such people that God chooses.

Let us show those same qualities in our life, so that when the Lord Jesus appears a second time, we will not be afraid when his messenger calls us to come and meet him.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES (11 — 12 years only)**

The coming of John the Baptist was mentioned by the prophets long before his birth. Zacharias would have known well the words of Isaiah: "*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD*" (Isa. 40:3).

Malachi also spoke of him: "*Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Yahweh of hosts*" (Mal. 3:1).

## **QUESTIONS (9 — 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

- x 1. What kind of people were Zacharias and Elisabeth?
2. What was Zacharias doing in the temple?
3. What were the people doing outside the temple?
4. Who appeared to Zacharias in the temple?
5. What was the first thing the angel said that would make Zacharias and Elisabeth very happy?
- x 6. What was the great work God had for this son to do?
- x 7. What was the baby to be called and what does it mean?

8. What good news would he announce to Israel?
9. What sign did the angel give Zacharias?
10. How did Zacharias let the people know what his son should be called?
11. What amazing thing happened after Zacharias told them his son's name?
12. Where did John live when he grew up?

### **Detailed Answers**

- ×1. Tell what happened in the temple when Zacharias was serving there.
2. Tell the story of the birth of John the Baptist and how he was named.
3. How are Zacharias and Elisabeth good examples for us to follow?

### **Additional Answers (11 — 12 years only)**

4. Which prophets foretold the coming of John the Baptist?



## 25. THE MESSIAH IS BORN

*“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.”*

### **Aim**

*To show how God overshadowed the birth of His Son and many rejoiced when he was born; though his enemies sought to kill him.*

Not long after the angel Gabriel had appeared to Zacharias in the temple, he was sent by God with another message, this time to a young woman who lived in Nazareth. This message was even more important than the first, for it had to do with the birth of Messiah — the one whom John was later going to announce. The time had come for God to fulfil His promise of a “seed”, or Son, who would be the Saviour of the world. The Son of God was about to be born, and for the great privilege of being the mother of that precious child, He chose Mary, a young maiden of the line of David.

Luke 1:26-38; 2

### **THE ANGEL SPEAKS TO MARY: Luke 1:26-38**

Mary was startled by the sudden appearance of the angel, who addressed her as *“thou that art highly favoured”* (v28). She was overwhelmed by his appearance and his gracious words of greeting. As she collected her thoughts the angel reassured her, saying, *“Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God”* (v30). God had found her so gracious and upright in all her ways, that He had singled her out for this great blessing. *“Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end”* (vv31-33). These wonderful words would have immediately brought to Mary’s mind many familiar prophecies about Messiah. All Israel knew that Messiah would come in the line of David and sit on David’s throne; that he would be king over Israel, *“the house of Jacob”*, and his kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom. These were well-known prophecies, spoken over and over again by the prophets of old. Though Mary knew these things, how could she have such a son, since as yet she was not married.

She was engaged to Joseph, a godly man also of the line of David, and they hoped to marry later and have a family of their own. Yet the angel was announcing to Mary that she should first give birth to a special son.

So the angel explained: *“The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God”* (v35). God would be the father of this child. Therefore God’s spirit would overshadow her before she married Joseph. When the child should be born, he would not be Joseph’s son, but God’s own Son.

Unlike many to whom God at other times spoke wonderful promises, Mary did not hesitate when she heard the angel’s message. She accepted his words and God’s choice of her in a humble and gracious manner. *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord;”* she said, *“be it unto me according to thy word”* (v38).

## **THE BIRTH OF JESUS**

The prophet Micah wrote that the birthplace of Jesus would be Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2), but Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. God’s word never fails however, and this time it was fulfilled in a wonderful way.

The Roman emperor had made a decree that everyone should return to their own city to be enrolled for taxing. Mary and Joseph both belonged to the house or family of David. So they had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David, to be enrolled there.

The journey was long and hard and it was nearly time for the baby to be born. Since many had travelled to Bethlehem to enrol, the inn was full and no room could be found for Mary and Joseph to stay in. The only shelter they could find was in a stable, and there the baby Jesus was born. *“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger,”* a feeding stall for the animals (v7).

So in these very humble surroundings, in the very city where David the shepherd boy had been anointed king, David’s greater son was born. No one in that city that night, was aware that the most wonderful event in history was taking place.

## **THE GOOD NEWS TOLD TO THE SHEPHERDS: Luke 2:8-20**

Yet out on the slopes of Bethlehem that night, the angels of God proclaimed this wonderful news to the shepherds who watched their flocks. In the midst of their night watch, they were suddenly surrounded by a dazzling light, which was so unreal, that it filled their hearts with fear. An



angel of the Lord appeared to them and said, "*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger*" (vv10-12). As the angel finished speaking, they saw a multitude of angels with him, praising God and saying, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*" (v14). The faithful shepherds were greatly excited by all they had seen and heard, and hurried into the city. When they came and found Mary and Joseph and the baby just as they had been told, they told everyone they met the good news that Christ was born in Bethlehem. Everyone was astonished at their story. When Mary heard what they said, she kept her thoughts to herself. The shepherds meanwhile returned to their flocks, "*glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them*" (v20).

### **THE BABY JESUS TAKEN TO THE TEMPLE: Luke 2:21-38**

According to the law of Moses, every infant boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day, the baby was named Jesus, just as the angel had said. On the fortieth day Mary went with Joseph to Jerusalem to make her offering for her firstborn son and present him to God. In the temple was an old man called Simeon, to whom God had given a promise that he would not die till he had seen the Lord's Christ.

God directed him to the temple that day and when he saw the baby Jesus, he took him up in his arms and praised God. Moved by the Holy Spirit he said, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation*" (vv29-30). At the same time a very old prophetess named Anna came into the temple. When she realised who the baby was, she gave thanks to God and went and spoke of Jesus to everyone who had been waiting for Messiah to come.

### **WISE MEN COME FROM THE EAST: Matthew 2:1-12**

Mary and Joseph returned to Bethlehem, where they lived for some time. Meanwhile, far away in a land to the east, wise men looked for a sign which would tell of the birth of Messiah, the king of the Jews. When they saw a new star in the heavens, they knew the time had come. They set off immediately on the long journey to Jerusalem, bringing precious gifts. As soon as they arrived they began asking excitedly, "*Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him*" (v2).

When news of this reached wicked king Herod, he first called to him the chief priests and scribes and demanded of them where Christ should be born. They told him that Bethlehem was the place according to the prophet Micah (Mic. 5:2). So Herod called the wise men and asked them exactly when they had first seen the star. Then he sent them off to Bethlehem, asking them to find the young child, so that he too could come and worship him. Herod, however, only wanted to find the child that he might kill him. As the wise men departed, *“lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was”* (v9). Now they knew that their searching and their long journey had not been in vain. Full of joy, they went into the house where Joseph and Mary now stayed, and when they saw the little child with Mary, they fell down and worshipped him. They opened up their treasures that they had brought from their far-off land and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

That night, God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, but to go home a different way.

### **HEROD’S TERRIBLE DECREE: Matthew 2:16-18**

When the wise men had gone, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to flee at once into Egypt with Mary and the baby, and stay there till God sent him word again, *“for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him”* (v13).

Herod soon realised that the wise men had discovered his wicked plan. He became mad with rage and sent out a terrible decree, that all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding districts from two years old and under, must be put to death.

While in Egypt Jesus was safe, the mothers of Bethlehem mourned their little babies as that evil man carried out his horrible decree.

It was not long in fact before Herod died, and the angel of God once more appeared to Joseph in a dream. It was now safe for them to return to Israel.

They did not go back to Bethlehem though, but returned to Nazareth, where Jesus spent his childhood. *“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him”* (Luke 2:40).

### **LESSON FOR US**

Let us consider the faith of many who lived in Israel at this time. They had studied the prophets carefully and were expecting Messiah to come. They

had waited so eagerly, that when he was born, they were filled with gladness and spread the good news to all their friends. It was a time of great rejoicing.

The second coming of Christ will cause even greater joy, not only to Israel, but to all the world. We can learn of his coming by studying the prophets, just as they did. The more we talk of these things, the more excited we will get. So let us read our Bibles everyday to find out all we can about his second coming, and talk with our parents about what will happen when he comes. Then we will be prepared for him and be very happy to share in his glorious kingdom.

## **QUESTIONS (9 – 12 years)**

### **Short Answers**

- x 1. What was the name of the son promised to Mary?
- x 2. Who would be the father of this child?
- x 3. Where was Jesus born?
4. Why did Mary and Joseph come to Bethlehem?
5. There was no room in the inn; so where was Jesus born?
- x 6. Who was told the wonderful news of Jesus' birth?
7. What had God told Simeon?
8. What did the prophetess Anna do when she saw the baby Jesus?
9. Why did wise men come from the east to Jerusalem?
10. Why did Herod send the wise men to Bethlehem?
11. What gifts did the wise men bring to Jesus?
- x 12. What terrible decree did Herod make?
13. Where did the angel tell Joseph to flee to?

### **Detailed Answers**

1. Tell what you know of the angel Gabriel's words to Mary.
2. Tell what happened on the slopes of Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born.
3. Tell of the visit of the wise men to Jerusalem and how they followed the star to Bethlehem.

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