

A VISION OF RESTORATION

MAIN IDEA

The prophet Zephaniah proclaims the day of restoration when God's people shall be returned to righteousness, justice, and peace.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Zephaniah 3

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast. (Zeph. 3:19)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 10, "A Vision of Restoration" (Participant's Book, p. 55).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of this lesson: After considering texts from some postexilic prophets in earlier sessions, this session returns to a prophet who spoke to the people in a previous time. The book's opening verse dates the ministry of the preexilic prophet Zephaniah to about 630 BCE, during the reign of King Josiah. Point participants to a wall or online chart with a timeline if you obtained one at the beginning of the study.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 10.
- Continue to have the Christ candle available.
- If you plan to sing the hymn suggested in the Worship Leaflet, arrange to have an accompanist or choir member lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome class members as they arrive.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant's Books to those who did not bring theirs and Worship Leaflets for lesson 10 to everyone. Encourage participants to bring their Participant's Books and Bibles each week.
- Review simple ground rules and organization (such as time to begin and end, welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 10

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Light the Christ candle.
- Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

Sometimes it is challenging to feel God's presence in an intimate way. In the routine of daily life, we may feel distant from God, even though we know it is we ourselves who are responsible for this distance. Encourage participants, as Marjorie J. Thompson suggests, to practice a prayer of presence, in which they sit in silence, breathing out tension and breathing in peace. Then they turn their attention to God's presence, letting it fill their consciousness and resting in this presence. In the regular exercise of contemplation, we can gradually become more and more aware of the Holy One.

SCRIPTURE

Zeph. 3:14–20

3:14 Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.

¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

¹⁷The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing
¹⁸as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

¹⁹I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.

And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.

²⁰At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the LORD.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. The book's opening verse dates the ministry of the preexilic prophet Zephaniah to about 630 BCE, during the reign of King Josiah (2 Kgs. 22:1–23:30).
2. Passages that speak of the day of the Lord or “that day” can have both an immediate context as well as refer to the second coming of Jesus.
3. A number of psalms praise God for salvation, for stopping the enemy. Examples are Psalms 14; 18; 35; 63.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 56

- Invite the group to read Zephaniah 3:14–20 in unison or responsively, a leader and the group reading every other verse.
- Option: Use verse 14 as a litany response:
**Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!**
- Ask the group to begin by reading that verse in unison, and then have them repeat it as a response after each subsequent verse is read by a participant.

4. Confidence

Participant's Book, p. 56

- Form two small groups. To set the context for this lesson, invite one to summarize the bad news in Zephaniah 1 and the other the bad news in chapter 2.
- Also review for participants the information about Zephaniah's context included in the introduction to lesson 10 in the Participant's Book. Locate and point out Josiah and Zephaniah on a wall or online Old Testament timeline, if available.
- Point out that today's passage echoes women's songs in times of crisis and celebration in 15:20–21.
- "Do not fear" is a persistent biblical refrain. Invite participants to name examples of when this comforting affirmation has appeared in Scripture—for example, several times in the narratives surrounding Jesus' birth. If time allows, have participants search for these words using a concordance.
- Ask participants to review the fears enumerated in the Participant's Book. Discuss:
 1. Which of these fears are fears that haunt you?
 2. We read that Zephaniah acknowledges our fear and dispels it with a promise of a joy rather than a threat of judgment. What are your deepest fears? Where do you find solace?
 3. It is noted that if God can restore the fortunes to a small nation humiliated by the superpowers of the world and dragged away into slavery, then surely God can also banish our fears and our challenges. How do you respond? Do you think this means that God will keep bad things from happening?

5. Joy

Participant's Book, p. 58

- Ask participants to make observations about how the people benefit from God's continuing presence. If the following points do not emerge, make them:

1. God will change the shame suffered by the oppressed into praise and renown.
 2. In exalting those who are humble, Zephaniah finds both a divine rejection of abuses of power and a divine promise to protect those who are weak.
- Discuss:
 1. What does the unique image of God singing over God's people (v. 17) evoke for you?
 2. When does the presence of God feel the most real for you? The most absent or distant?
 3. What signs or reminders of God's presence bring you joy in the face of fear?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 59

- Ask volunteers to name some of the personal fears they identified previously. Then ask the group to list fears that might be foremost for those who experience shame and extreme deprivation and for whom participants may be praying. Compare and contrast the lists. Discuss some of the following:
 1. How do you respond to the idea that once we have recognized the differences between our own fears and those addressed by Zephaniah, we can be confident that the same God will banish all our fears as well?
 2. Beyond our prayers of solidarity, how do you think we should respond to those experiencing extreme deprivation? What actions might ensure that they, and we, experience the promises of the restoration of creation and to right relationships?
 3. How do you interpret the statement that "prophets sing God's song and sometimes interrupt the program with a change of tune"?
 4. How can we as a community of faith speak prophetically to our culture about the promise of God's presence?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Discuss what role the following might play in order for your local community to hope for what Zephaniah described: humility, unity, integrity, obedience.
 2. Have each participant write a psalm of praise to God for God's workings in their past, present, and future.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 10

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.

- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord’s Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the candle.
- Bless participants as they leave. Say, “(Name), do not fear. The Lord is in your midst.”

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	May 4	God’s Worldwide Covenant with Abraham	Gen. 12:1–8
T	May 5	A New Covenant of the Heart	Jer. 31:31–34
W	May 6	Divided Peoples to Become One	Ezek. 37:15–23
T	May 7	Just Living in Church and World	Rom. 12:9–21
F	May 8	Cultivate Peaceful and Just Relations	1 Thess. 5:12–22
S	May 9	Joyful Feasts Draw Newcomers	Zech. 8:18–23

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that participants pray a breath prayer this week as a part of their devotional time. As they breathe in, their prayer is “The LORD is my light and my salvation.” On the exhale, they pray, “Whom shall I fear?” (Ps. 37:1).
2. Encouraging them to note in the coming week at least one way in which they discern God’s presence in their community, the nation, or the world.

PEACE AND JUSTICE REIGN

MAIN IDEA

The prophet Zechariah delivers God's promise of a new world of peace and prosperity for God's people.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Zechariah 8

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid. (Zech. 8:15)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 11, "Peace and Justice Reign" (Participant's Book, p. 61).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of this lesson: As the Participant Book notes, although their names are similar, Zephaniah and Zechariah lived about a century apart. While Zephaniah prophesied in the time leading up to the Babylonian exile, Zechariah lived at the end of the exilic period when the people were beginning to return to Judah. Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai; the two prophets encouraged reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem following return from exile.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 11.
- Continue to have the Christ candle available.
- Consider if you will use the YouTube clip in which Don McLean sings "By the Waters of Babylon (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTnspbSjKVc>). If so, obtain equipment for viewing.
- If you decide to make placards as suggested under the optional ideas for "Stepping into the World," obtain paper and markers.
- If you plan to sing the hymn suggested in the Worship Leaflet, arrange to have an accompanist or choir member lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome class members as they arrive.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant's Books to those who did not

bring theirs and Worship Leaflets for lesson 11 to everyone. Encourage participants to bring their Participant's Books and Bibles each week.

- Review simple ground rules and organization (such as time to begin and end, welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 11

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Light the Christ candle.
- Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

In any group there are those who are eager to jump in and answer every question, offering their insight and observations freely. Then there are those who prefer to hold back, pondering the questions carefully. Some of these persons will eventually offer well-thought-out responses, but others may never get the opportunity to contribute. Be alert to ways to give these less-assertive participants the chance to speak, perhaps by asking for their input directly. Try to walk the fine line between inviting their responses and intimidating them into further silence.

SCRIPTURE

Zech. 8:1–8, 11–17

8:1 The word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying: ²Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. ³Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. ⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. ⁵And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ⁶Thus says the LORD of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts? ⁷Thus says the LORD of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; ⁸and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness. . . .

¹¹But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. ¹²For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. ¹³Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.

¹⁴For thus says the LORD of hosts: Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, ¹⁵so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid. ¹⁶These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, ¹⁷do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the LORD.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai; the two prophets encouraged reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem following return from exile (Ezra 5:1; 6:14).
2. The “mountain of the LORD” refers to the literal Temple Mount, but is also used by the prophets in a figurative sense (Isa. 2:2–3; 25:6). This promise of God’s continual presence and restoration looks forward to images of a new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:1–5.
3. The LORD promised Abram that his ancestors would be a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3). Disobedience turned that to a curse, but Zechariah promised that the ability to bless the world would be restored.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 62

- Form two groups. Ask one group to read Zechariah 8:1–8 in unison, and the other to read verses 11–17 in unison.
- Option: Invite the participants to listen as you read to Zechariah 8:1–8, 11–17 aloud. Then invite them to again listen, seeking to hear a phrase or an image that strikes them. Read verses 1–8, and invite their responses. After a moment of silence, read verses 11–17, and again elicit responses.

4. The Remnant

Participant's Book, p. 63

- (*optional*) View the YouTube clip.
- Note that, despite the similarities of their names, Zephaniah and Zechariah lived about a century apart. Ask participants to flesh out the context of this passage, referring to the introduction to the lesson. Contribute the following information if it does not emerge:
 1. For seventy years in exile the people had suffered at the hands of the Babylonians.
 2. Along with Jerusalem, the Temple had been plundered and destroyed, and the Ark of the Covenant had been carried off.
 3. The mood of the time is described in the opening of Psalm 137 (and in the words of the YouTube clip): “By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137:1).
- The term *remnant* is used by all the postexilic writers (Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah). Discuss:
 1. What is a remnant? How does Zechariah apply this understanding to the people? How does he use the concept of remnant to bring hope?
 2. Why was the destruction of the Temple so significant? What institution did the Jews develop to replace the Temple?
 3. Contrast the central act of worship in the Temple with the acts that came to be central in the synagogue. In what ways do you think this shift in the focus of worship might have nurtured and sustained the remnant?
 4. Zechariah turns the title of remnant into a badge of honor. In an age when the church is experiencing a discouraging decline in numbers, how might we reclaim and be transformed by the concept of the remnant?

5. Faith

Participant's Book, p. 64

- Discuss the following, or present a talk about faith:
 1. In addition to belief, how else can faith be defined? How do these two facets of faith nurture each another?
 2. Describe what is meant by the following: God's keeping faith with the people in turn inspires faith on the part of the people toward God.
 3. Do you agree with the idea that the people's covenant responsibility is to keep faith by pursuing personal and social righteousness? Why or why not?
 4. If another Christian asserts that faith is about bringing others to Christ and not about engaging in any social action, how would you respond?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 65

- Ask participants to think of a time in their lives, either recently or at some past time, when they faced a significant transition. Invite one or two volunteers to briefly describe that time. Ask:
 1. What aspects of this transition caused you anxiety? Was it apprehension about the unknown, uncertainty, something else?
 2. What resources did you draw on to help you make this transition?
 3. We read that in such times of uncertainty we should remind ourselves of God's faithfulness in the past so we can build our faith in God in the present. What evidence in Scripture sustains your sense of God's faithfulness? What are historical events where you believe you can see God at work? What events in your own life affirm God's faithfulness?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Distribute paper and markers. Invite participants to make their own "Keep Calm and . . ." placards with their affirmations of God's faithfulness. Suggest that participants create a symbol to take the place of the crown.
 2. On a board or newsprint, print this sentence: "Even if [some unfortunate event the news is predicting] happens, I can [believe or do something] because God [a Scripture thought]." Invite participants to fill in the blanks.
 3. Create a litany of hope and expectancy for God's ongoing presence and work in the world using a verse from Zephaniah as the refrain.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 11

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the candle.
- Bless participants as they leave. Say, "*(Name)*, go in peace. Speak the truth to one another, and render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace."

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	May 11	Seeking Divine Help in Troubled Times	Ps. 86:1–13
T	May 12	Land Now Belongs to Babylon	Jer. 27:1–11
W	May 13	Choose to Love and Obey the Lord	Deut. 30:15–20
T	May 14	Surrender and the People Will Live	Jer. 38:14–18
F	May 15	Jerusalem Will Fall	Jer. 21:1–7
S	May 16	Jerusalem Defeated and Zedekiah Exiled	2 Kgs. 24:20b–25:7

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting participants reflect on this question: How is my faith sustained and challenged by God's faithfulness in my life?
2. Remind the group that in a previous lesson they considered leadership. Ask them to give thought to the following: What are the qualities any leader needs?

PRACTICE JUSTICE

MAIN IDEA

Jeremiah tells us that God is a God of justice and will recompense evil.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 21

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Thus says the LORD: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. (Jer. 21:12a)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 12, “Practice Justice” (Participant’s Book, p. 67).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of this lesson: Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of King Zedekiah. The king viewed as seditious Jeremiah’s words prophesying that further judgment was coming. But with Zedekiah’s revolt in 586 BCE, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple and exiled the king and many of the leading citizens to Babylon.
- Also read and familiarize yourself with the verses in Jeremiah immediately preceding today’s Scripture passage, Jeremiah 21:1–7.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 12.
- Continue to have the Christ candle available.
- If you plan to sing the hymn suggested in the Worship Leaflet, arrange to have an accompanist or choir member lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome participants and guests, and greet them by name.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant's Books to those who did not bring theirs and Worship Leaflets for lesson 12 to everyone. Encourage participants to bring their Participant's Books and Bibles each week.
- Review simple ground rules and organization (such as time to begin and end, welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 12

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Light the Christ candle.
- Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

On occasion, participants may be deeply involved in exploring a question for longer than you had planned. In a desire to cover everything, you may be tempted to forge ahead, cutting off discussion. While this may be appropriate if the group has gotten off on a tangent, at other times it may be best to let the group continue their conversation, at least for a time. Consider what questions and activities really are key to the lesson, then allow for the movement of the Spirit in and through your interactions with the group.

SCRIPTURE

Jer. 21:8–14

21:8 And to this people you shall say: Thus says the LORD: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. ⁹Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out and surrender to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have their lives as a prize of war. ¹⁰For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good, says the LORD: it shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

¹¹To the house of the king of Judah say: Hear the word of the LORD, ¹²O house of David! Thus says the LORD:

Execute justice in the morning,
and deliver from the hand of the oppressor
anyone who has been robbed,
or else my wrath will go forth like fire,
and burn, with no one to quench it,
because of your evil doings.

¹³See, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley,
O rock of the plain,

says the LORD;

you who say, “Who can come down against us,
or who can enter our places of refuge?”

¹⁴I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings,
says the LORD;

I will kindle a fire in its forest,
and it shall devour all that is around it.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. The words of Jeremiah would have been seen as seditious to the King. Zedekiah was hoping for a message of deliverance. Jeremiah gave a message of surrender!
2. This chapter continues the running battle between Jeremiah and Pashhur (Jer. 20:1–2; 21:1). The king was looking for a message of deliverance when one was not forthcoming. This is reflected when Jeremiah renamed Pashhur (liberation) to “Terror–all–around” (20:3).
3. The Hebrew words translated *pestilence*, *famine*, and *sword* are collocated in twenty-four verses of the Old Testament, primarily in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Together they speak of inescapable judgment.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 68

- Either read Jeremiah 21:1–7, or summarize what it says for the group. Then have participants read the Scripture passage aloud.
- Option: After summarizing 21:1–7, invite participants to imagine overhearing Jeremiah as he is speaking to Pashhur and the priest Zephaniah. Jeremiah has just delivered a sobering and stark message these men are to convey to King Zedekiah, and now he is speaking further, with an equally stark message they are to deliver to the people. Read today's Scripture passage. Then ask:
 1. If you were one of the people of Judah hearing Jeremiah speak, what would your reaction be? What would you think? What might you do? How would you feel?

4. Presumption

Participant's Book, p. 68

- Ask volunteers to summarize the information made under "Presumption" that reiterates the history leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. Flesh out the points made by class members by adding any of this missing information to their comments:
 1. Babylon had already defeated the Assyrian Empire, thereby capturing the northern kingdom, and was now able to take over the southern kingdom of Judah. Egypt threatened from the south.
 2. There was a succession of kings who tried to placate first one and then the other of these two mighty powers.
 3. Finally Babylon was provoked to invade and take over Jerusalem, sending most of the citizens into exile.
 4. Several puppet kings were installed by Babylon afterwards.
- Discuss:
 1. In contrast to how historians view these developments, Jeremiah has a different perspective. How does he view these historical events?
 2. We read that the people were presuming on God's grace. What is meant by this statement?
 3. Why did Jeremiah's words fall on deaf ears?
 4. Remind the group that in the preceding week, they received an e-mail suggesting that they reflect on what qualities they look for in a leader. God's chief requirement for kings and other leaders was that they pursue and uphold justice for oppressed people. Is this high on our list of priorities for our leaders today? Why or why not?

5. Judgment

Participant's Book, p. 70

- Revisit the information from the first verses on Jeremiah 21 that the group heard, also summarized at the beginning of "Judgment" (Participant's Book, p. 70). Point out that Zedekiah, a puppet king, was required to pay tribute money to the Babylonian king. After a while, Zedekiah refused to pay and tried to stage a revolt. The Babylonians responded by besieging Jerusalem. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, the king was looking for help wherever he could get it. It is at this point that Jeremiah 21 opens. Discuss:
 1. Why was the king's request for the prophet to seek God's help logical?
 2. Why has Yahweh turned against the king, offering judgment instead of comfort?
 3. Do you think the kings of Judah should have seen God's judgment coming? What prevented them from discerning it? In what way, if at all, are we like them?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 71

- What theological tensions can you identify in the Bible?
- While God's love is unconditional, we are called to be obedient and faithful. Yet our tendency, as human beings, is to emphasize one side of the equation over the other. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Does your personal theology tend to emphasize God's grace or lean toward obedience and personal holiness? How do you hold these two concepts in tension?
- How does the prologue to the Ten Commandments provide insight in understanding how to keep these two ideas in appropriate tension?
- In what ways, if at all, do you think we in the United States might be guilty of presuming upon God's grace?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Verse 13 of today's text indicates a mind-set of invincibility. What damage is done when people or nations live into arrogant attitudes? What responses counter such attitudes?
 2. Explore opportunities for advocacy and justice that your group can engage in together.
 3. Discuss evils that continue to perpetuate in the world and why some persons or groups are not punished.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 12

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.

- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord’s Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the candle.
- Bless participants as they leave. Say, “(Name), may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ go with you.”

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	May 18	Justice for Aliens, Orphans, and Widows	Deut. 24:17–22
T	May 19	God Requires Godly Rule by Kings	Deut. 17:18–20
W	May 20	Who May Enter God’s Holy Presence?	Ps. 15
T	May 21	God’s Justice for the Unjust King	Jer. 22:11–19
F	May 22	The City Suffers for Its Disobedience	Jer. 22:20–23
S	May 23	Injustice Ends the Line of David	Jer. 22:24–30

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that they read Psalm 86:1–1 as a prayer in the coming week.
2. Encouraging them to give some thought to those persons or groups in our American society who suffer from injustice. In what ways, either directly or indirectly, are we complicit in perpetuating that injustice?

REPENT OF INJUSTICE

MAIN IDEA

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God exhorts the people either to repent of injustice and deliver those who are oppressed or to face destruction.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 22

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Act with justice and righteousness. (Jer. 22:3a)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 13, “Repent of Injustice” (Participant’s Book, p. 73).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of this lesson: Today’s lesson builds on the previous week. In chapter 22, God sends Jeremiah again to the palace with a message, again including stern warnings of judgment. But this time there is also hope: if the king and people will repent, God will restore the nation to a position of strength and peace.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 13.
- Continue to have the Christ candle available.
- If you plan to sing the hymn suggested in the Worship Leaflet, arrange to have an accompanist or choir member lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome participants and guests and greet them by name.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant's Books to those who did not bring theirs and Worship Leaflets for lesson 13 to everyone. Encourage participants to bring their Participant's Books and Bibles each week.
- Review simple ground rules and organization (such as time to begin and end, welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 13

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Light the Christ candle.
- Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

For learners of all political stripes, the picture of the desolation promised to the wayward nation in Jeremiah is a clear message about the state of our own nation. For some, the passage speaks to the ever-diminishing influence of the U.S. church. For others, it is the hollowing out of our commitment to ensure a safety net for the vulnerable. If necessary in discussions, remind participants of the ground rule about respecting the opinions of others. Try to steer the conversation to what our own responsibility is in choosing ethical leaders and supporting just and compassionate governing.

SCRIPTURE

Jer. 22:1–10

22:1 Thus says the LORD: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, ²and say: Hear the word of the LORD, O King of Judah sitting on the throne of David—you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. ³Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. ⁴For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. ⁵But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. ⁶For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah:

You are like Gilead to me,
like the summit of Lebanon;
but I swear that I will make you a desert,
an uninhabited city.

⁷I will prepare destroyers against you,
all with their weapons;
they shall cut down your choicest cedars
and cast them into the fire.

⁸And many nations will pass by this city, and all of them will say one to another, “Why has the LORD dealt in this way with that great city?” ⁹And they will answer, “Because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.”

¹⁰Do not weep for him who is dead,
nor bemoan him;
weep rather for him who goes away,
for he shall return no more
to see his native land.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. The dead king for whom the people were not to weep in Jeremiah 22:10 was godly King Josiah, who had been killed in battle in 609 BCE; rather, the people were to weep for his evil son Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum, per Jer. 22:11) in exile (2 Kgs. 23:29–34).
2. The successor to Jehoahaz was Jehoiakim, the king who occupied the palace of Jeremiah 22:1.
3. Other places where the Lord swears by himself include Jeremiah 49:13; 51:14. There is no stronger affirmation than this.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 74

- Form two groups for the Scripture reading—one to read Jeremiah 22: 1–4, and the other to read verses 5–10. Suggest that participants listen for the change in tone from the first portion of the passage to the second.
- Option: Ask participants to listen as you read the passage. Suggest that they imagine being the king, hearing Jeremiah deliver this message. How do they imagine the king reacted to this message? With surprise? Anger? Confusion? Some other emotion?

4. A Word of Warning

Participant's Book, p. 74

- In chapter 22 Jeremiah again addresses the mistaken notion that the mere presence of the house of David is a guarantee of Yahweh's protection. Discuss:
 1. The king erroneously believed God would protect him, no matter what. Why do you think he was under this impression? On what evidence was the king relying?
 2. How does God, through Jeremiah, characterize the once-glorious house of David?
- Report to the group the following: The dead king for whom the people were not to weep in Jeremiah 22:10 was King Josiah, a godly ruler who had been killed in battle in 609 BCE. The people were to weep for his evil son Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum) in exile. The successor to Jehoahaz was Jehoiakim, the king Jeremiah is to address in Jeremiah 22:1. Discuss:
 1. Jeremiah's message to Jehoiakim from God condemns him for oppressing those on the margins of society. What specific acts of injustice on Jehoiakim's part does Jeremiah target? What was Jehoiakim's fate?
- Ask someone to read aloud 2 Samuel 7:12–16. Ask:
 1. God had promised that a descendant of David would always be on the throne of Judah. Did God break this promise? If not, how do you explain the Babylonian exile?

5. Repentance

Participant's Book, p. 76

- After his father's death, Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin reigned for only three months before being exiled to Babylon. The Participant's Book presents information from the verses subsequent to today's passage. Invite participants to quickly scan Jeremiah 22:24–30.
- Discuss:
 1. What metaphors are employed in God's message about what will happen to Jehoiachin (Coniah)?
- Point out that buried in this passage is a word of hope easily overlooked. Although the Hebrew word for repent, *shub*, does not appear in this passage, the idea is there.
 1. From what was the king to turn away? To what was he to turn?
 2. Have you ever felt that you or a loved one was beyond hope spiritually? How does this passage offer hope?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 77

- The destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity were devastating to Judah, bringing to an end the nation as they had known it. Ask:
 1. How did the exile transform the way the people worshiped and their identity as a nation?
- This lesson began with two questions: "Will righteousness be rewarded?" and "Will evil face retribution?" Ask:
 1. In the Babylonian exile, both things happen simultaneously. In what way?
 2. How do you respond to the following statement: "To be passionate about justice is not 'liberation theology': it is simply theology. It is not the 'social gospel': it is simply the gospel"?
 3. How does the tragic fate of Judah offer us hope for transformation and restoration?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Ask someone to again read aloud Jeremiah 22:3. Discuss how well our present leaders at various levels of government perform the tasks mentioned in Jeremiah 22:3. Invite participants to give further thought and prayer to evaluating candidates running for office.
 2. In discussing Jeremiah 22:10, ask why the Lord would prohibit mourning the death of a godly king (Josiah) and command weeping for the exile of an evil king (Jehoahaz). Why wouldn't it be the other way around?

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 13

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the candle.
- Bless participants as they leave. Say, "*(Name)*, act with justice and righteousness."

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	May 25	Receiving a New Vision of God	Gen. 28:10–17
T	May 26	Justice for Gentile Believers	Acts 15:10–17
W	May 27	The Up or Down Choice	Deut. 28:1–6, 15–19
T	May 28	Jesus, a Migrant from Egypt	Matt. 2:13–15
F	May 29	Ephraim Spurns God's Love and Suffers	Hos. 11:3–6
S	May 30	Once a Slave; Now a Brother	Phil. 8–21

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that participants formulate a list of questions that reflect the mandates of Jeremiah 22:4 that could be asked of candidates for office in upcoming elections.
2. Pointing out that next week's lesson is the final one in the study.

RETURN TO LOVE AND JUSTICE

MAIN IDEA

Hosea reminds us that love and justice are God's standards.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Hosea 11–12

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God. (Hos. 12:6)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 14, “Return to Love and Justice” (Participant’s Book, p. 79).
- Familiarize yourself with the context: with this final lesson we return to a time before the fall of Israel. The book of Hosea has two major divisions: chapters 1–3 and chapters 4–14. The latter section, which includes today’s Scripture, contains prophetic oracles against northern Israel for covenant infidelity. The oracles come prior to Israel’s exile by Assyria in 722 BCE. Hosea speaks to the material prosperity of northern Israel, which went hand in hand with economic injustice.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 14.
- Continue to have the Christ candle available.
- If you plan to sing the hymn suggested in the Worship Leaflet, arrange to have an accompanist or choir member lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants by name.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant's Books to those who did not bring theirs and Worship Leaflets for lesson 14 to everyone.
- Review simple ground rules and organization (such as welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 14

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Light the Christ candle. Note that today is the Day of Pentecost. When we focus on the flame of the Christ candle, we are also reminded of the flames associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

Sometimes the Scripture passage contains unusual or hard-to-pronounce names, either of locations or of biblical characters. For adults, it can be just as intimidating to encounter words they can't pronounce as it is for children. Prior to asking persons to read aloud, look ahead and identify any such stumbling blocks, pointing out their pronunciation. If no one—including you—knows how to pronounce a particular word, encourage the reader to substitute a letter of the alphabet for the word and just continue reading.

SCRIPTURE

Hos. 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14

11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

²The more I called them,
the more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.

.....

⁷My people are bent on turning away from me.
To the Most High they call,
but he does not raise them up at all.

⁸How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.

⁹I will not execute my fierce anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and no mortal,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.

¹⁰They shall go after the LORD,
who roars like a lion;
when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west.

.....

12:1Ephraim herds the wind,
and pursues the east wind all day long;
they multiply falsehood and violence;
they make a treaty with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

²The LORD has an indictment against Judah,
and will punish Jacob according to his ways,
and repay him according to his deeds.

.....

⁶But as for you, return to your God,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.

⁷A trader, in whose hands are false balances,
 he loves to oppress.

⁸Ephraim has said, “Ah, I am rich,
 I have gained wealth for myself;
 in all of my gain
 no offense has been found in me
 that would be sin.”

⁹I am the LORD your God
 from the land of Egypt;
 I will make you live in tents again,
 as in the days of the appointed festival.

¹⁰I spoke to the prophets;
 it was I who multiplied visions,
 and through the prophets I will bring destruction.

¹¹In Gilead there is iniquity,
 they shall surely come to nothing.
 In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls,
 so their altars shall be like stone heaps
 on the furrows of the field.

¹²Jacob fled to the land of Aram,
 there Israel served for a wife,
 and for a wife he guarded sheep.

¹³By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt,
 and by a prophet he was guarded.

¹⁴Ephraim has given bitter offense,
 so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him
 and pay him back for his insults.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. The book of Hosea is widely seen in terms of two major divisions: chapters 1–3 and chapters 4–14, the latter including prophetic oracles against northern Israel for covenant infidelity prior to that nation’s exile by Assyria in 722 BCE. The historical context is that of the material prosperity of northern Israel (Hos. 12:8), which went hand in hand with economic injustice (12:7).
2. The verbal parallels between Hosea 12:8 and Revelation 3:17 indicate that the danger of self-delusion that can accompany prosperity revealed itself in the first century CE as it did in the eighth century BCE.

Bible Study

3. **Scripture Reading** Participant’s Book, p. 80
 - Before reading the passage, explain that parallelism is a feature of Hebrew poetry that is evident in Hosea’s oracles. For example, the

phrases “give you up, Ephraim” and “hand you over, O Israel” refer to one action, not two (Hos. 11:8).

- Note that Admah and Zeboiim are two cities in the vicinity of Sodom and Gomorrah that suffered the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Ask four volunteers to read aloud the Scripture passage, with each of the four reading one of the following: Hosea 11:1–2, 7–10; 12:1–2, 6–14.

4. Infidelity

Participant’s Book, p. 81

- Invite group members to share what they know about the context of Hosea’s prophecies. If the following key points do not emerge in the discussion, share them now:
 1. Hosea was a northerner, preaching at least twenty years after the prophet. Hosea lived and prophesied prior to the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel, also referred to here as Ephraim.
 2. The principal worship centers of the north—Bethel, Shiloh and Shechem—were all in Ephraim.
 3. The last part of Hosea, in which today’s Scripture is included, contains Hosea’s oracles to northern Israel for covenant infidelity.
 4. The oracles come prior to Israel’s exile by Assyria in 722 BCE. Hosea speaks to the material prosperity of northern Israel, which went hand in hand with economic injustice.
- Invite participants to make observations about the nature of the religion of Baalism.
- Discuss:
 1. Baalism was essentially worship of the life process. How did worship of the Baals characterize the relationship between God and nature? What does Hosea have to say about this relationship, and in what ways did his characterization differ from Baalism’s view?
 2. How does Hosea describe infidelity? How, if at all, does our society demonstrate the same kind of infidelity?
 3. Hosea views Israel’s prosperity as a sign that the people have abandoned God and God’s concern for justice. Instead, they are profiting from exploiting their fellow Israelites. How does this contrast with the perspective of the gospel of prosperity?

5. Parental Love

Participant’s Book, p. 82

- Explain that Hosea uses parental images to affirm God’s love for Ephraim. Invite participants to tell what they recall about the word *hesed*.

- Discuss:
 1. The familial metaphor exemplifies what scholar Abraham Heschel called “God’s pathos.” What does Heschel mean by that?
 2. According to Hosea, idolatry wounds the heart of God. How do you respond to the idea that covenant requires not just obedience but intimacy?
 3. What about the image of God as parent is comforting for you? What is problematic? How do you contrast God as parent with human parents?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant’s Book, p. 84

- Discuss:
 1. Certain practices in our society could be labelled Baalism. To what does that observation refer? How do you respond?
 2. Israel “plays the harlot” with Baal, much as today we “play the harlot” with materialistic society. What behaviors in our culture might you call harlotry?
- Form two groups. Ask one group to read Luke 12:13–21, the parable of the Rich Fool as well as the information in the Participant’s Book about it. Ask the other to read Luke 15:20–24a, the parable of the Loving Father, and the information about it. In the total group, have each smaller group report on their New Testament passage and its relationship to the Scripture passage in Hosea.
- Discuss:
 1. How does each passage illuminate the thrust of Hosea’s message?
 2. If we do not take vows of poverty, what other vows might we make to turn away from our culture’s obsession with material prosperity?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Write a prayer of confession, asking God’s forgiveness for pursuing prosperity instead of love, justice, and righteousness.
 2. Read the following: The best way to avoid the self-delusion that accompanies prosperity is to take a vow of poverty. Designate one side of your space to represent strong agreement and the other strong disagreement. Invite participants to place themselves along this line according to their degree of agreement. Ask: Why did you place yourself where you did?

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 14

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord’s Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.

- Extinguish the candle.
- Bless participants as they leave. Say, “(Name), hold fast to love and justice.

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Jun. 1	Faith Community Discerns Path of Wisdom	Acts 6:1–7
T	Jun. 2	Parents Joyfully Pass on the Faith	2 Tim. 1:3–9a
W	Jun. 3	Learning the Fear of the Lord	Ps. 34:11–18
T	Jun. 4	Violence Not a Wise Choice	Mat. 26:47–52
F	Jun. 5	Vast Scope of Solomon’s Wisdom	1 Kgs. 4:29–34
S	Jun. 6	Prize Wisdom and Insight	Prov. 4:1–9

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that participants read Deuteronomy 8:11–20 and invite God to speak through it.
2. Encouraging learners to ponder what the daily Bible readings communicate about God’s wisdom.

About the Writer

MARTHA BETTIS GEE is a writer, editor and educational consultant. A certified Christian educator, she has served as Director of Christian Education for churches in Knoxville, Tennessee and Columbus, Indiana. She is retired from the Presbyterian Mission Agency, where she served for sixteen years as Associate for Curriculum Development and for seven years as Associate for Child Advocacy and Networking. She has written and edited studies for the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, Abingdon Press, and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, among others. She lives in LaGrange, Kentucky with her husband.

Coming Next Quarter

God is experienced as wisdom in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. During this quarter, we explore the many facets of wisdom as recorded in the book of Proverbs, in the Gospels, and in the letter written by James.

Unit I, “Wisdom in Proverbs,” in four sessions, explores the nature of God’s wisdom as found in the book of Proverbs. These sessions describe how Wisdom calls to us and the value of Wisdom and the gifts she offers, and they end by exploring the metaphor of the feast of Wisdom.

Unit II, “Wisdom in the Gospels,” offers four sessions, one session from each of the four Gospels that examines the wisdom of God seen in the teachings and life of Jesus.

Unit III, “Faith and Wisdom in James,” offers a five-session study of wisdom as seen in the Letter of James. These sessions explore the interaction of faith and wisdom, including practical advice regarding faith in action and taming the tongue. The study ends by contrasting two kinds of wisdom.