

My notes for teaching the Old Testament

*especially
for the
women of
South Sudan
and Sudan*



**an historical
overview,
with
lessons
for today
from the
people of
those times**

by Mama Brenda foreword by Hon. Salwa Gabriel Berberi

Foreword

To live a Christian life according to God's instructions as revealed in His Holy Book, the Bible, is very hard. All Christians need to develop good knowledge of Christian values then choose to live by them every day of our lives. That way our church and world would be a better place.

All Christians need to understand how God has dealt with His people over the centuries. When this is appreciated, it becomes much easier to see what God is doing today. This is often behind the scenes. Our eyes see many awful events; we focus on them. We need to educate our hearts to look beyond what our eyes see, to perceive our loving Creator's hands on His people.

This course on the Old Testament will help anyone, especially Christian ladies, to see and understand the big picture of God's plan for humankind. God is working out His purpose day by day and year by year.

Hon. Dr Salwa Gabriel Berberí

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My Notes for Teaching the Old Testament

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Old Testament overview - learning from people who were there.

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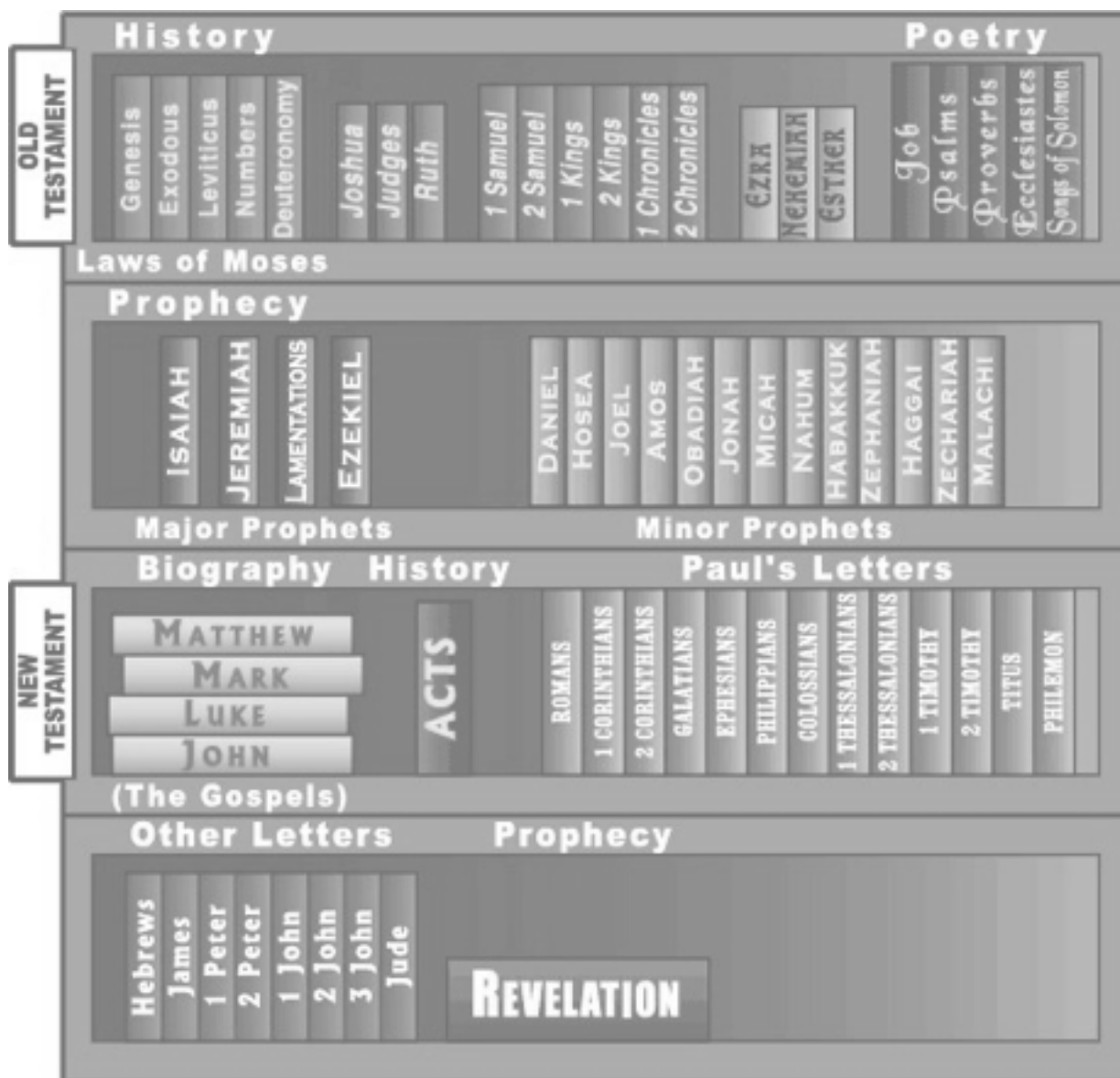
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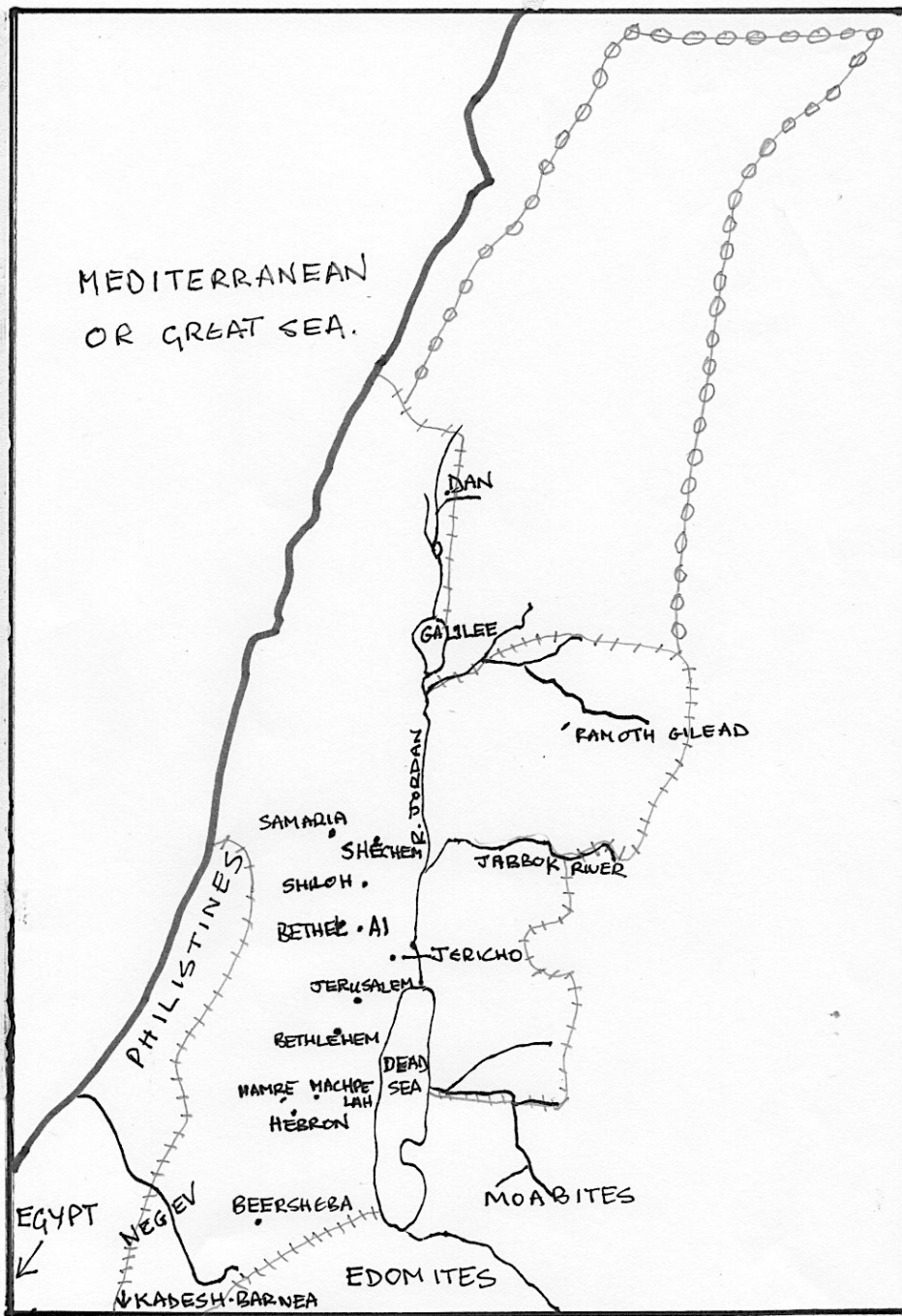
Bibliography

If every student does not have their own copy of this book and you have the facility copy notes for your ladies, you will need to copy the right hand side pages in each lesson, plus this contents page, the Bible library page, the two map pages and the timeline page, to go with the first lesson.

Old Testament overview - learning from people who were there.



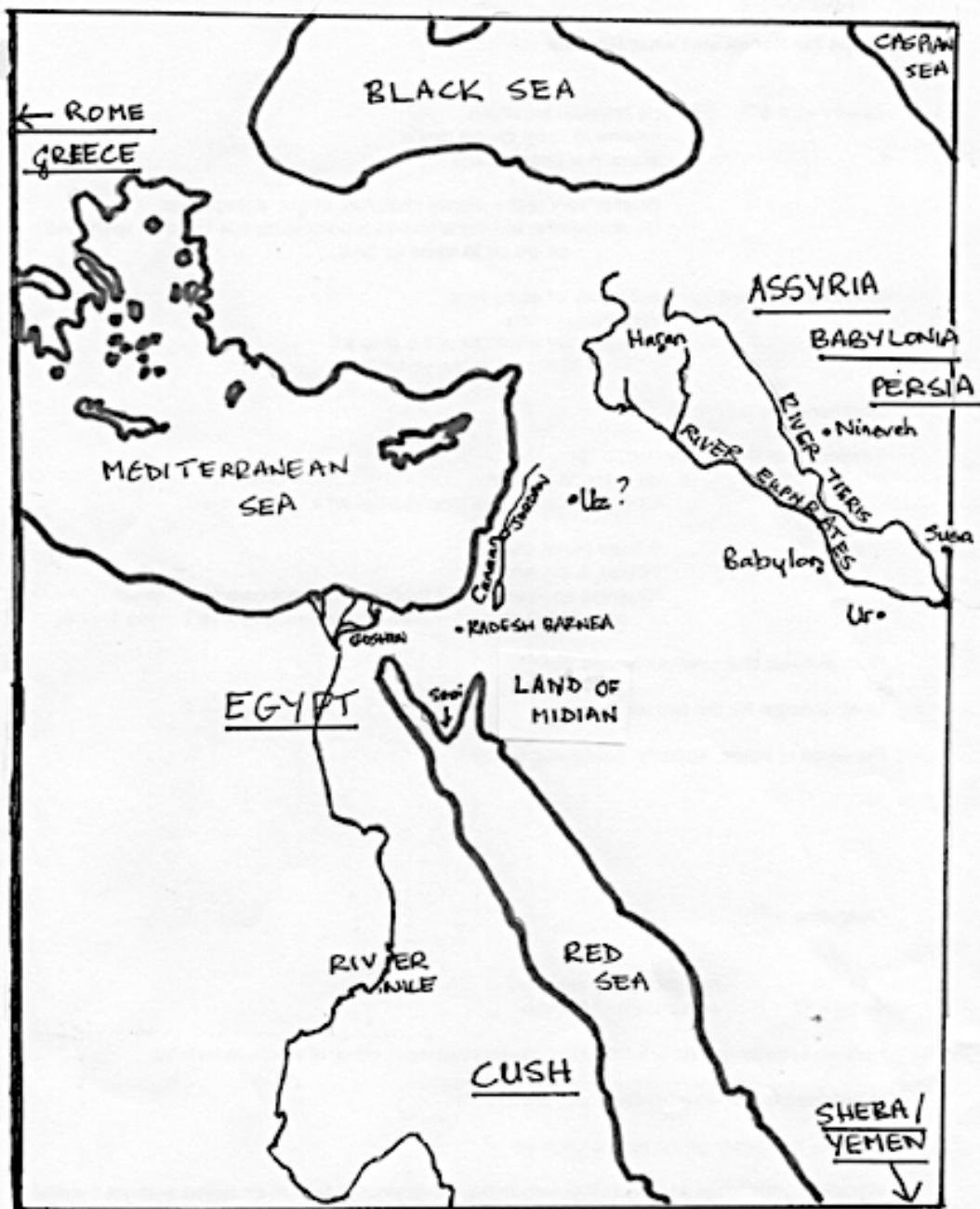
The Bible library is made up of 66 books, some history, some poetry (wisdom literature), some prophecy and some letters.



ISRAEL

++++ approximate boundary after conquest under Joshua.

o-o-o-o land added under Kings David + Solomon



Map of major empires of the Old Testament

Timeline 2000 B.C. - 1A.D. - the dates on this scale are vague, as many dates are in history - a broad sweep across a large canvas. They give us an idea of what follows what, what was at the same time as what, not an exact date. We need to see the context of Bible history, and then see the meaning for them and for us - applying truth to our lives now.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Hebrew history</u>	<u>Dominant power</u>	<u>Events in North East Africa</u>
2000 BC	Patriarchs - Abraham	Egypt	Many pyramids existed in Egypt
1900	Isaac		
	Jacob		
1800	Joseph		
1700			Kingdom of Cush -capital Kerma - south of 3rd cataract, on trade route
1600	slavery		
1500	exodus Moses		Arabia becomes a trading centre Cush, a colony of Egypt-mined gold
1400	Joshua		
1300	Judges		Jebel Barkal capital - black kingdoms of Nile until 300 BC
1200			
1100			
1000	Kingdom Saul David	Syria	
900	Solomon Divided kingdom		Queen Sheba visits, from Yemen?
800		Assyria	
700	Fall of Israel captivity		Black Pharoahs -c721-640B.C. including Nubian King Shabaka
600	Fall of Jerusalem captivity	Babylon	
500		Medo-Persia	Capital of Nubia moved to Meroe c590. Iron smelted
400	Restoration Nehemiah Ezra		Meroitic language written and read
300		Greece	
200			
100		Rome	
1 BC/1 A D			

Introduction to using this study guide.

I want you to understand how this book came to be, and the reasoning behind it.

Three major influences:

1. This set of statistics:

We remember 10% of what we read

We remember 20% of what we see

We remember 30% of what we hear

We remember 50% of what we see and hear

We remember 70% of what we collaborate on

We remember 80% of what we are involved in doing

2. I did a course to teach TESOL English - a method using student involvement and fun!

3. The experience of teaching Bible classes with ladies who did not want just an 'I speak and you listen' environment.

So - the studies in the last 10 years with Fusion - the name for our ladies' group: "a process in which different things combine together to form something new" (Macmillan School Dictionary, Oxford, 2004) - have involved teaching from me, finding facts and discussing scripture in small groups within a larger group context, having notes to keep and write on, and having homework - usually **reading the Bible** ahead for the next study. **Remember your Bible!**

No two sessions will be the same in structure - it will depend on the subject.

Work sheets (the numbered pages on the right hand side) sometimes have the answers to what the ladies have been discussing - so keep those sheets until after they have shared what they have found!! Sometimes you may need to give the notes out at the beginning, and gently encourage whole group answers and discussion. **Always consult your Bible!**

Think as you prepare of things that may be asked - my notes may help, you will also have some **cultural answers**. If you do not have the answer to a question that is raised, say so. Say you will research the answer and tell the group next time. Keep the promise!!

It is important to encourage the quieter members of the group to take part. Breaking into smaller groups for discussion can be helpful here. Be gentle how you reject an obviously wrong answer. Encourage the ladies to have paper and pencil with them, **alongside their Bibles!**

These studies have assumed that the ladies read and write, have **access to a Bible** they can understand, and that it is possible to print sheets for them, lesson by lesson. This may not be the situation where you are. Be creative. You may need to have some **Bible passages read to the ladies**. You may need to translate as you go, or translate notes beforehand! Understand the aim of the lesson and get there, not as a dictator but as a gentle friend, in the best way for **your** group. Use the material and adapt the method. The ladies who work orally only may well have better memories than the rest of us!

You may decide to make some lessons take two sessions. You are in charge. Enjoy studying together. Enjoy learning more about God.

Lesson 1 Leader's notes So why study the Bible?

This lesson will be new material to most, if not all, of the ladies, so will probably best led from the front, by you the leader. There is a lot in this lesson, with no story to help it along. If this is the first time your class has worked together, you could consider making it two lessons! Or push on and tell them it only gets easier!!

Don't give out notes to start with, or ask the ladies to close their books.

As a large group ask what they know about the Bible?

What is the Bible?

When was the Bible written?

Who wrote the Bible?

How was the Bible written?

Where was the Bible written?

Only then give out notes - teach through the first page as far as 'This truth is one of the keys for this lesson' at the bottom of page 4.

Who? section (opposite) - This may be too much information to use. Suggest you use 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 and 1 Peter 1:1; Psalms 23 and 90; Psalms 92 and Hebrews 1:1, 13:22-25 if necessary, to illustrate that we know who wrote some parts of the Bible but not all of it. Get a lady to read each of the Bible verse(s) to the class, and ask the class to share the relevance.

When you get to "This truth is one of the keys for this lesson", ask the ladies not to look ahead yet.

Lesson 1 So why study the Bible?

What? - What is the Bible?

Law - God's rules for living

History - the history of the Jews

Poetry - special descriptive writing - also known as wisdom literature

Prophecy - men speaking what God has told them to say 39 books in the Old Testament.

Gospels and Acts - story of Jesus and the early church

Letters from Paul, Peter and John - teaching Christians, including us

Prophecy - picture language of what God will do at the end of time 27 books in the New Testament.

When? - Our Bible was written over a period of 1600 years but finally came together as we know it in the 4th century AD (300-400 AD.) The Church Fathers in 100-300 AD gathered the sacred texts and evaluated them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit - which ones were seen to be used by God, authentic, helpful, used to encourage, and accepted by the Church over time? - these became what is technically called 'the canon of scripture'.

Who? - God inspired it but human authors wrote it

Authors: Matthew Mark Luke John Paul Peter James Jude

Moses (First five books of the Old Testament and at least one Psalm)

King David (Psalms)

King Solomon (Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon)

Joshua Samuel

Ezra (Ezra Nehemiah and perhaps 1 & 2 Chronicles)

Asaph and Sons of Korah (Psalms)

Agur and King Lemuel (end of Proverbs)

16 prophets

some lost in the mists of time

some who edited court annals into history records (?1 & 2 Kings)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 1 Peter 1:1; Psalms 23 & 90. Do we know who wrote each of these?

Psalm 92 and Hebrews 1:1, 13:22-25. Do we know who wrote each of these?

We know who wrote some parts of the Bible but not all of it.

How? - There are 3 languages used in the Bible with occasional other words, see Daniel 5:25-28.

Hebrew - the ancient Jewish language (used in Israel today)

Greek - the most used language 100BC-200AD

Aramaic - the language Jesus used most - see Mark 5:41

Where? - Countries involved in the Bible include Africa, Asia and Europe as well as the Middle East.

Where did Bible people live? Who did they have contact with? You may need to use the map on page 2.

Look up Genesis 11:31; Daniel 1:3-4; Acts 8:26-27; Acts 10:1-2; Romans 1:7; Acts 19:1, Ephesians 1:1.

Why? - God purposed and preserved His word - a single book with a single Author - a single theme - God the Holy Spirit revealing God the Son and the saving purpose of God the Father.

This truth is one of the keys for this lesson.

Teach the "observing, interpreting, applying" paragraph - perhaps have the words which you find easiest - "look, understand, do" or "what does it say? what does it mean? what shall I do?" on a blackboard or a whiteboard or on pieces of card.

Think through this illustration as a group -

Imagine the government has passed a law that "everyone must use a red cooking pot".

What does it say? Observe? Look?
Discuss.

everyone must use a red cooking pot.

What does it mean? Interpreting? Understand?
that if you have a cooking pot it must be a red one?
that if you have a red cooking pot you must use it?
that everyone must buy a red cooking pot?

Probably number the second option above.

What shall I do? Applying? Do?

paint my cooking pot red?
stop using my other coloured cooking pots ?
buy a red cooking pot?
stop doing any cooking!

Using the logic gained from this example, work through the references in the Observing, Interpreting, Applying sections on this page and page 6 - trying to get the ladies to look at the Bible reference before reading the notes!!

Studying the Bible

It is easy to misunderstand the Bible and to make it say things it does not say.

For example, in Psalms 14:1 and 53:1 yes, the Bible does say "there is no God". But in context the Bible says clearly, only fools say that!!

So here is a rule of thumb in 3 parts to help us get it right:

Observing the text or **What does it say?** or **Look**

Interpreting the text or **What does it mean?** or **Understand**

Applying the text or **What shall I do?** or **Do**
What does it mean
for today?

When you read the Bible for yourself use the column of words above that makes most sense to you!

1. Observing

- first read the passage, then answer the question:

Genesis 3:6 Question - Who ate the fruit?
Answer - Eve first but then Adam.

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11 Question - How many wise men were there?
Answer - We don't know but there were 3 gifts.

1 Timothy 6: 10 Question -What is the root of all evil?
Answer - Not money but the love of money!

Perhaps explain the Acts reference to the group. After that encourage them to get to the answers to the others for themselves.

Take a rock or stone with you as a visual aid for Psalms 18:2 and 19:14.
Some translations do not use the word 'rock' but a similar word, like 'strength'.

Perhaps explain the 1 Corinthians 8:13 application. Then for the others elicit answers from the group with everyone thinking it through speaking aloud.

The last section about asking questions of the text really amplifies "What does it say?". We can be so very familiar with a passage of scripture that we need to look carefully again to see what it is saying.

You may have run out of time by now! Don't worry.

2. Interpreting

- a). Acts 10:9-10. In many colder countries houses have sloping roofs because a flat roof would collapse under the weight of snow in the winter. So in UK this would need to be explained in the story because no-one would go and sit on a roof! For you it is perhaps easier to understand!
- b). Luke 14:26 - Hate? To emphasise how much we must love Jesus more than our family, the original language uses 'hate' our family - in English that needs to be explained - perhaps in your language too? It is a comparison.
- c). Psalms 18:2 and 19:14 talk of God as a rock - hard and unfeeling? - strong and dependable? The psalmist is using the good attributes of a rock to describe God, using things we know to describe Someone we do not fully understand.
We must be careful to discern scripture correctly.

1. Applying

- a). 1 Corinthians 8:13 - the problem for these Christians was eating meat offered to idols - the principle Paul sets is - if my action causes my sister to stumble I must stop doing it
- b). Luke 9:23 - we must go Jesus' way even if it is very hard
- c). John 21:15 - we must look after the younger Christians we know.

**Look / Understand / Do - learning to correctly interpret scripture
is the second key for the lesson**

Always ask questions of the text

-look objectively even if you have known the story since you were little!

Ask:

- who? who is involved in this passage?
- what? what is happening?
- when? what happened before and what happened after?
- where? where did this take place?
- why? why did it happen?
- how? how did it happen?

For next time - scan through Genesis - what major things happened? - who were the important people? Be ready to share your discoveries.

Lesson 2 Leader's notes Genesis

Don't give out notes at the beginning or ask the ladies to close their books.

Ask what things and people the ladies found in scanning through *Genesis*.
It is important that any homework that has been done is seen to be valued.

Work through the first paragraph on page 7.

What does this book of beginnings tell us the beginning of?
Try and elicit some of the answers in section 1:1-11:9 and then give out notes.

Make sure the ladies know where they are now -
just below where it says *Cush* on the map on page 2.

Lesson 2 Genesis

Genesis is the first book in what we call the Old Testament of the Bible. It is also the first of five books which the Jews call the Law - they are the same first five books as our Bibles - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. They are attributed to Moses who lived through much of what happened, but the account of his death must have been added by someone else! Creation and the earliest history was transmitted by word of mouth and in parts by written sources. These were probably collated by Moses inspired by God, the Holy Spirit. To western ears that sounds risky. But many of you will know lots of groups who have oral traditions which have been faithfully and reliably handed down the generations, before that group had written language. We trust God to protect the word He has given us.

1:1 - 11:9 Genesis is a **book of beginnings** -

- the beginning of the world as we know it
- the beginning of our universe - God's creation
- the beginning of man - God's creation
- the beginning of sin
- the beginning of family
- the beginning of the announcement of God's plan of redemption

It also tells of God's grief at making mankind, His response of the flood, and after the repopulation of the earth, mankind's wanting to go his own way and be in charge. These chapters would make a big study in themselves!

11:10 onwards we have the **beginning of the story of the development of the nation God called His chosen people.**

Genesis 11:10-26 Shem one of Noah's sons was 100 when he had

Arphaxhad was 35 when he had

Shelah was 30 when he had

Eber was 34 when he had

Peleg was 30 when he had

Reu was 32 when he had

Serug was 30 when he had

Nahor was 29 when he had

Terah was 70 when he had Abram, Nahor and Haran. All of these men had other sons and daughters, but God was choosing His chosen line.

Now look at where they were on the map of major empires, page 2.

Genesis 11:27-32 Haran (the person) died in Ur of the Chaldees.

Get the ladies to find the information from *Genesis 12:1-9*.

The route they took followed the Fertile Crescent - land where it was possible to grow food and look after animals. South of this crescent was scrub and desert. This was, therefore, the usual route for travelling from Canaan to Babylon, Nineveh, Ur etc. Remember that fact when you get to exiles and returnees with Ezra and Nehemiah, lessons 17 and 18.

Teach about the covenants with Noah, Abram, Abraham, and to the bottom of the page.

Terah, Abram and Sarai, with Haran's son, Lot, left to go to Canaan but stopped at Haran (the place), where Terah died.

Ur and Haran are both on the map, page 2. The large travelling family left Ur of the Chaldees and travelled north west to Haran, then south west to Canaan. So with today's boundaries - from south Iraq to south Turkey, to Syria and into Israel and Palestine.

Did you notice a **fact** in Genesis 11:30? Sarai had not had any children.

Then in Genesis 12:1-5 Abram, Sarai and Lot set out for Canaan because God had called Abram to go. God promised this leader of a group of nomadic herders:

12:2 from him would come a great nation

12:2,3 he would be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth

12:7 God would give him land

After the flood God had made a covenant with Noah - Genesis 9:12-17 - He made no demands of Noah - but He said He would never again destroy all earthly life with a flood.

God also made a covenant with Abram - Genesis 15:1-7 - he **will** have a son and the descendants will be as numerous as the stars. Abram believed God - against human understanding. This covenant made no demands on Abram.

Genesis 17 God confirmed His covenant with Abram -
name changed from Abram (God is Exalted Father) to Abraham (father of many)

nations and kings will come from Abraham

Canaan will be an everlasting possession

Sarai is to be called Sarah

But there is a cost - they must keep the covenant - the sign is circumcision - every male in the household more than 8 days old must be circumcised. For the Jews this still happens at 8 days old, for Abraham this happened at 99 years, for Ishmael it happened at 13 years (17:24,25), for the men with Abraham it happened at a variety of ages!

A Covenant is a formal binding agreement

Notice the changes in the covenants - no demands in Genesis 9 on Noah
no demands in Genesis 15 on Abraham
circumcision required in Genesis 17 on all males

Plus see Genesis 16:6; Romans 4:3; Hebrews 11:8,9,12,13; Romans 4:1,10-12.

Abraham's trust in God's promises is counted as righteousness. We will see Abraham in heaven!

Work through the 4 applications to us today.

Number 1 is the most challenging.

Think about it for yourself.

Try and understand it for yourself.

Then help the ladies to work on it.

It may be that it is helpful to think about *God* and nothing else with eyes closed - so you cannot see the material world - but **you** know your group, **you** decide how best to teach your ladies these things.

So how does this lesson apply to us? Isn't it just ancient history? No!

1. God has a plan - before time was - before the universe was - before man was - God was. Try pushing your mind to take hold of this truth - nothing, **nothing** but God!
2. God created - you, me, animals, rocks, rivers, everything - God made it.
3. God planned people - we may sometimes wish He had not made some people - but we must remember, then and now, every man/woman is a special creation of our God.
4. We see that God requires us to have faith in Him, to believe Him and to obey Him.

Four big lessons there! And that is just the start of the Old Testament in our Bibles.

**Please read Genesis 12:1-5,11, 15:1-7,16,17, 18:1-15, 21:1-21,
23:1,2,19-21 for next time.**

Lesson 3 Leader's notes Sarah and Hagar Genesis 12:1-5,11, 15:1-7, 16:1-16, 17:1-27, 18:1-15, 21:1-21, 23:1-2,19-21.

Ask the ladies to keep their books closed and do not give notes out at the beginning.

Write out the references at the top of the study sheet on a blackboard, or large piece of paper, or a white board or on smaller pieces of paper, one for each group.

Put the ladies into groups of 4/5 - and ask them to make a list of major things that happened in Sarah's life and in Hagar's life from the given references.

This may take a while if the ladies are not used to finding information and listing it. Keep them on track.

When most groups have finished, get them to share answers in the order they come historically. Use an outstretched palm and your eyes in the direction of the group you are asking to give you the next piece of information. They will not all have picked the same things, so if you feel there is something missing ask - "Does another group have something that happened to Sarah before that?" while sweeping your outstretched palm and eyes across the group. You want the information, but it is not a military exercise, rather a gentle sharing - not for arguing about.

Then give out notes. Let them look at the 1-16 listed there.

Work as a whole group through the promises given to Sarah and Hagar.

Lesson 3 Sarah and Hagar Genesis 12:1-5,11, 15:1-7, 16:1-16, 17:1-27, 18:1-15, 21:1-21, 23:1-2,19-21.

Let's look at the story:

1. Sarah, beautiful wife of Abraham. They had a very successful business as herders.
2. They were far away from their original home
3. Sarah was childless - a stigma is attached to this in some cultures
4. God promised Abraham a son and heir
5. Sarah had a slave - Hagar. This was normal in the culture
6. Sarah suggested Abraham had a child with Hagar
What was she actually doing? - trying to solve a problem **in her own way**
7. Abraham agreed - Hagar was pregnant and she upset Sarah - Abraham did not want to be involved
8. Hagar ran away
9. Hagar had an encounter with 'the God who sees me'
10. Hagar returned to Sarah, and gave birth to Ishmael
11. 13 years later God promised Abraham a son with Sarah
12. God promised Abraham that Ishmael, also his son, would be blessed.
Three visitors came to Abraham and promised him that Sarah would have a son within a year, to be called Isaac. Who were the visitors?
Check in your Bible Genesis 18:1, 2, 13, 16.
14. Isaac and Ishmael played together - Sarah got Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away
15. God looked after Hagar and reassured Abraham. Ishmael became a skilful hunter and married an Egyptian wife
16. Sarah died aged 127 and Abraham mourned for her.

Now back to the story between the numbers 4-15 above.

Promises to Sarah: We usually think of God dealing with Abraham, but in dealing with Abraham He also dealt with Abraham's wife - she was the one who would have the baby!!

Ask the ladies to look at Genesis 17:19-21. What is the promise?

God will keep His covenant with a promised child to Abraham and Sarah one year on

17:15-16 Sarah will be the mother of nations and kings will be among her descendants

17:19 son to be called Isaac and God's everlasting covenant will be confirmed with him

Teach through the Sarah and Hagar sections including some group discussion.

God also makes **promises to Hagar**, Sarah's servant.

In dealing with the line of people he has chosen, God also makes promises to a servant caught up in the saga -

16:10 Hagar will have uncountable descendants including 12 princes

16:12 Ishmael will not get on with anyone - he will be like a wild donkey

21:18 a great nation will come from Ishmael

Sarah

What kind of position did Sarah have? Did that give her responsibilities?

How would she have felt about not having a child?

Genesis 16:1-15

It is easy to understand Sarah's thinking in telling her husband to have a child through her slave, Hagar. But who was she trusting?

Sarah had this idea, but she was not able to live with the consequences. We need to be prepared to cope with the consequences of our actions. It would be easy to think of Sarah as selfish, cruel and weak. Would we do any better?

Genesis 18:1-15

More than 13 years later - yes, 13 years later - Sarah is told she will have a son a year or more from now. She gives birth to Isaac. How patient would we have been? How easy is it to trust God to look after our future? Sarah's difficult problem with Hagar and Ishmael comes again.

Genesis 23:1-2 Will people praise God for your life? Or will they not miss you?

(This does not concern Sarah but it ties up an end for us - Ishmael was sent away - but in Genesis 25:9 Isaac **and** Ishmael bury their father.)

Hagar

Most of us will identify with Hagar because we are not the rich people in our country, we are not married to people who have power to make things happen in our community.

Hagar too received promises. See Genesis 16:10 to Hagar and 21:11-13 said to Abraham. But 21:17- 18 are spoken specifically to Hagar, a slave woman turned out of her home, that her descendants through Ishmael would be an uncountable number, including rulers and leaders. In English there is a saying - 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' - those who look after and train children are potentially raising leaders, thinkers, people of influence. This is a God-given responsibility. We need to make sure that we live for God in our families and teach our children the truths of Christian understanding and Christian living. That is a big responsibility!

And God still has work for us if we are not able to have a child. I know of Christian couples who could not have children, or who decided not to have children, and they have been used by God in their churches or in wider ministries somewhere else.
No child does **not** mean no ministry.

Genesis 16:12 In the sovereignty of God we hope for our children but we cannot guarantee what they will be like.

Ishmael was like a wild donkey - stubborn? self-willed? awkward? inconsistent?

Isaac was the son of God's promise, but even so was not perfect - still with human failings. That should encourage us.

Hagar did not have an easy life - most of us have our difficulties too. God spoke to her - He will guide us too if we look for Him.

Please read Genesis 24:1-66, 25:19-34, 27:1-28:9 for next time.

Lesson 4 Leader's notes Rebekah - where did it all go wrong?
Genesis 24:1-66, 25:19-34, 27:1-28:9

Do not give out notes at the beginning. Ask the ladies with books to keep them closed.
Share the story of Genesis 24:1-49 working through it as a group.

Lesson 4 Rebekah - where did it all go wrong?

Genesis 24:1-66, 25:19-34, 27:1-28:9

Abraham's wife, Sarah, died at the end of Genesis 23. Abraham was without his helpmeet of many years - he thought about the future - the future of these people God had given him.

He made his chief steward, his administrator and trusted servant, promise to get a wife for Isaac from Abraham's own people, not a local Canaanite girl.

Choosing a life partner for ourselves or for our children is a solemn responsibility - as it was for Abraham's servant - we need to be asking what God is looking for in that person. This may mean going against our usual traditions.

The servant said 'what if.....?' He wanted to be very sure of his master's wishes if there was a problem. Abraham said that Jacob is **not** to go back to the family's original home - God had given them a new land - a land of promise. Isaac must stay in the land of promise.

Having made the promise to his master, the servant packed up all kinds of presents on ten of Abraham's camels, and left with some men. See Genesis 24:10 and 32.

When he reached Nahor's town - Haran - in the land of the 2 rivers (look at the map on page two) he rested the camels by a well, expecting that a woman would soon arrive to draw water.

Then he prayed, conscious that he was there doing a job for Abraham. He prayed 'Oh Lord, God of my master Abraham'. We do not know whether the servant acknowledged Abraham's God for himself, but he asked God to show him the right girl - as a kindness to Abraham - and so he could do his own job well.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ we can have direct access to God for ourselves. It is always very wise to ask God to guide us in our lives - in decisions big **and** small, in our attitudes and our actions.

Rebekah said the right words and did the right things - she got water for the camels. The servant gave her a nose ring and 2 bracelets - see Genesis 24:22 and 30.

Having made himself known to Rebekah and her brother, Laban, and having washed his feet, the servant was offered food. He refused until he had explained why he had come. He told the whole story - verses 34-49. Thank you, God.

Give out the reference Genesis 24:50-61. What do you learn about the faith of the family, the servant ambassador and Rebekah, her nurse and her maids?

Genesis 24: 62-67. How was Rebekah wise?

Give out notes and then work through the 2 remaining sections.

Use question and answer to involve the whole group in finding the information, and in seeing and understanding the applications.

Work through the last paragraph reading the references, or better, having them read by others.

Rebekah was:

Willing to follow God Genesis 24:50-61

The family acknowledged the sovereignty of God

The servant ambassador acknowledged the sovereignty of God

Rebekah, her nurse and her maids willingly followed God

A wise woman Look at Genesis 24:62-67

Rebekah observed the local custom, perhaps her own family's as well, and publicly indicated she was not married.

Isaac and Rebekah married, and she helped him cope with the death of his mother. Even though she was in a new land and situation, she ministered to his needs.

Unsure of what God was doing Genesis 25:19-26, Genesis 25:27-34

Rebekah did not get pregnant as soon as she and Isaac hoped.

Isaac took the priestly role in praying for his wife.

Rebekah became pregnant with twins and God told her that she was carrying two different nations in her womb and that, contrary to custom, the older would serve the younger.

Esau, the elder, was a hunter by skill and by choice.

Jacob, the younger, preferred to stay around the campsite and liked cooking.

Esau was Jacob's favourite, but Jacob was Rebekah's favourite. Seeds of disaster!

In human terms this was where it started to go wrong.

A very hungry Esau arrived home to the smell of Jacob's red lentil stew - and sold his birthright - a verbal oath was a legal transaction.

Unwise (very unwise) in family matters Genesis 27:1-28:9

Isaac became frail and nearly blind. He called Esau to go and kill some wild game and bring him the stew he liked. Then Jacob would bless Esau before he died.

Rebekah overheard the conversation, told Jacob to fetch some game and said she would make the stew the way Jacob liked. She suggested to Jacob that he should take the food to Isaac, and wearing some of Esau's hunting clothes, with his hands and neck covered in goatskin, he would receive the blessing. Isaac was wary, but the hunting smell persuaded him and he blessed Jacob. Jacob would be lord of his brothers! Esau arrived, made the food, took it to his father.

The deception was now in the open. The birthright Esau gave for a plate of stew, has now gone to his brother, Jacob. What God had told Rebekah in chapter 25:23 has happened!

Genesis 27:41-46. Rebekah was frightened for her favourite son. She made up an excuse to explain to Isaac why Jacob should go away. Isaac believed the story and sent Jacob to Rebekah's family to get a wife. Esau heard what had happened and realised how much Isaac did not want Canaanite women in the family, so he went and married one, the daughter of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar.

It is a sad story of deception, favouritism, scheming - things that should be no part of our lives as Christians. But God had told Rebekah that her younger child would rule the older. We need to be very careful and honest in our family relationships.

Please read Genesis 28:1-4, 28:10-33:20, 35:1-29 for next time.

Lesson 5 Leader's notes Rachel, Leah and Jacob

Ask the ladies to keep their books closed. Do not give out any notes until it is suggested opposite page 18.

Lots of story here - deception again and the birth of the 12 tribes of Israel, and that is definitely not straightforward!! Then a page of summary thoughts, page 19. You know your group -

how can you best get all this information covered?

and keep everyone's interest?

Perhaps get four groups to work on one section each -

Genesis 28:1-4, 28:10 - 29:30

29:31 - 30:24

30:25 - 31:55

32:1 - 33:20, 35:1-29

Then share their group findings with the whole class. You will need to keep a tight rein on this so all of the groups understand the continuity of the story.

Lesson 5 Rachel, Leah and Jacob Genesis 28:1-4; 28:10-33:20; 35:1-29

Genesis 28:1-4; 28:10 - 29:14 So Jacob left Beersheba and headed for Paddan Aram. He stopped overnight at Bethel. The deceiver was met by God, and was so challenged that he wanted to go God's way, reassured of God's will for him. He travelled on, met up with three flocks and their shepherds. Then Uncle Laban's daughter, Rachel, arrived with Laban's flock, and Jacob was delighted to meet Rachel, a relative he had not met before.

29:15-30 Jacob worked for Laban for a month and then they talked about wages. The agreement was that Jacob would work for Laban for 7 years in order to marry the girl he loved, Rachel.

After 7 years, Jacob claimed his bride. Laban threw a feast. But the deceiver was deceived - the next morning Jacob realised that the woman he had slept with was the older sister, Leah. He complained to Laban. Laban's excuse was that the younger daughter could not marry before the older daughter. Jacob agreed to work another 7 years for Rachel but they married after Leah had had Jacob to herself for 7 days.

29:31 - 30:24 Leah was not a happy woman but she had four boys by Jacob:

Reuben, Simeon

Levi - through whom the Israelite priesthood would come

Judah - who is an ancestor in Jesus' family line

Rachel was very upset that she had no children and complained to Jacob "Give me children, or I'll die". Remember that phrase. Jacob said God had not allowed Rachel to have children and Jacob is not God!

So Rachel told Jacob to sleep with her maidservant, Bilhah.

Dan was born to Bilhah and then

Naphtali

Leah told Jacob to sleep with Zilpah, her maidservant.

Gad was born and then **Asher**

Leah's son, Reuben, collected some mandrakes from the fields and gave them to Leah. These vegetables were thought to have magic powers to induce pregnancy because of the similarity of shape to a man's reproductive organ. Verse 15 Rachel begged her sister for some of the mandrakes - and got a very sharp answer! But Leah then traded mandrakes for a night with Jacob.

Leah then had 2 sons and a daughter -

Issachar, Zebulun, Dinah

Verse 22 In God's time Rachel had a son. **Joseph** but she longed for a second son.

This lesson will not be easy to get in balance - there is so much story - but the facts need to be aired, for the ladies to see the real story, and therefore be able to see the applications to us in the summary thoughts, page 19.

What a story of deception and intrigue, sadness and bitterness, struggling to get what "I" want.

Genesis 30:25-43 Now Jacob and family thought of returning to his home.

Laban, who had been made rich by Jacob's work and planning, was not willing to let Jacob prosper, although he agreed to the plan. Laban would have the unblemished animals and Jacob would have the dark and speckled ones. Laban that day sent his sons to separate the speckled and dark sheep from the others, and took them 3 day's journey away. Jacob the deceiver is deceived again.

Jacob worked out a method to get speckled lambs - not a scientific plan, not a plan given him by God - but it worked. God does give us intelligence and common sense.

31:1-18 After 6 years of careful work with the flocks, and noticing that his brothers-in-law were not happy with his prosperity, Jacob, prompted by God, decided it was time to go. He consulted with Leah and Rachel out with the flocks so they were not overheard. The sisters knew what had been going on and said they should take what belonged to them, and Jacob should "Do whatever God has told you".

31:19-55 When Laban and the brothers went away three days' journey shearing sheep, Jacob and this large travelling group left - 12 children, maidservants, menservants, camels, donkeys and flocks! They headed for Gilead. Rachel, however, took her father's household gods and put them in the saddle bag of her camel. Was this vengeance on her father, or a failure to trust in the God she knows Jacob was following? Possession of the family gods would show that Jacob is the head of the group. Perhaps she wanted to show Jacob's importance. We don't know!

It took Laban seven days to catch up with them after he heard the news - and he got to them in the hills of Gilead. He asked why they had not said goodbye. Then he searched for his household gods and failed to find them because Rachel was using the camel saddle as a chair, but could not get up because she was having a period. She lied to her father. So the deceiver Laban was deceived by Rachel. 31:36-54.

Laban and Jacob made a treaty at the extremities of their lands - not to pass the stone pile in anger to attack each other - in the name of the God of Abraham and Nahor on Laban's side and the God of Isaac on Jacob's side. They ate a meal together to seal the covenant. Laban departed in peace and Jacob with his large travelling party set off again.

Now distribute notes or let ladies' open their books to put the whole story together. Revise the story together.

Apply it with the thoughts on page 19.

Genesis 32:1-12 There is reassurance for Jacob as he neared the land belonging to Esau, the brother he had wronged. Jacob sent messengers to Esau with a peaceful message - but the messengers returned saying that Esau was coming with 400 men. Very fearful, Jacob split all his people and animals into 2 groups, so that one group would stay safe. Then he prayed to God, and quoted God's promise back to Him.

32:13-32 He sorted out a gift for his brother, and instructed the men in charge of those herds on what to say and how to behave and sent them on their way. Jacob stayed at the camp. Then he sent his wives and sons and all his possessions across the Jabbok. He was alone, and a man wrestled with him until dawn. God had met with him. "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome". Jacob calls the place Peniel meaning "It is because I have seen God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Jacob was always, in human terms, the underdog - to Esau - to Laban - now to God. God came in a form where Jacob could win, wrestling, but God also could disable Jacob whenever He wanted. God held Jacob's future. Jesus came in a form we could understand, as a man, but He was still God, and He holds our future.

33:1-20 Next day Jacob saw Esau, was embraced by him, and introduced all the family. Esau went back to Seir and Jacob went to Shechem in Canaan, bought a piece of land there and set up an altar to the mighty God of Israel.

(Trouble in Shechem - a story in itself, but not for today!)

35:1-29 In verses 1-7 God told Jacob to go back and settle at Bethel where God had met him (Genesis 28:10-15). Jacob told his household to get rid of foreign gods and charms, to purify themselves because he was going to build an altar there to the God who had appeared to him at Bethel and had been with him everywhere he went. He buried the charms and idols. The immediate reality of the purity of the people showed God to the people around - no one pursued them! People do notice when our lives shine for Jesus!

Verse 8 Presumably Jacob's mother, Rebekah, had died while he was in Haran, but he had picked up the responsibility for her nurse, Deborah. Verses 9-15 are a re-affirmation of the change of name, and of the promises given to Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Jacob (chapter 28).

Verses 16-29 The whole group moved on to Bethlehem but Rachel went into labour before they got there. She had a bad time, delivered a son whom she named "son of my trouble" and died. His father renamed him Benjamin "son of my right hand". Now called Israel in the Bible account, Israel (ex-Jacob) moved on to Migdal Eder. During this time Reuben slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah, and Israel heard of it. Remember this little fact for another time time!

Death of Isaac - buried by his sons Esau and Jacob - mentioned there in birth order although the blessing had gone to Jacob.

All 6 thoughts could be discussed.

Think of questions to ask that will open up discussion.

1. We cannot deceive God - ever. Psalms 119:168; 44:20-21.

2. God's rules have not changed. One man and one woman = marriage. Your culture and my culture may have moved from this basis. They may call it progress. They may call it keeping up with current thinking. Whose thinking? What does God still say?
Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:4-8.

4. Job 42:1-3; Isaiah 45:5-8.

5. Can you rise to this challenge?

6. **You** are special to God.

You are special to God.

You are **special** to God.

You are special **to God**.

Part of living knowing **you are special to God** is treating other people well because they - not 'they all' but 'they each one' - are special to God.

Summary thoughts:

1. **Deceit breeds deceit. God sees everything. In Jacob, Rachel & Laban and in us!**
2. God's example for us in marriage was His creation of Adam and Eve, one man with one woman. By the time of this story polygamy was obviously acceptable in this society. Surrogacy using maidservants was obviously also acceptable in this society, as it was to Abraham and Sarah, using Hagar.

Acceptable in society is not the same as being acceptable to God! Be very careful.

3. "Give me children or I'll die!" Rachel had Joseph and wanted another child. She had Benjamin and died in childbirth.
Make sure the things you are desperate for are what God wants for you and yours.

4. God's chosen line came through Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob - the second son. The rescue of the nation of Israel will come through Joseph, Jacob's 11th son, the first of his well-loved wife, Rachel. The line of Israel's priesthood will come through Levi, Jacob's third son with Leah, the first but less loved wife. The line of Jesus will come through Judah, Jacob's fourth son with Leah, the first but less loved wife.

**God does not see things the way we do. His plans are beyond our understanding.
He is bigger than us!**

5. The deceiver is deceived but is also blessed by God. Jacob is promised land, descendants, God watching over him Genesis 28:13-15, but he goes through difficult times with Laban, and preparing to meet Esau, the brother he had wronged. At least 20 years after the original promise is given, God reconfirms the promise, adding that kings will come from Jacob's body, Genesis 35:9-13.

Walking with God is not the easy path - but it brings God's blessings.

6. In these stories that make up most of the life of Jacob, we know little about Leah and Rachel. Rachel was loved. Leah had the large family. There was rivalry between them. They agreed to move away from their father, saying that they and Jacob had no reason to stay. Rachel lied to her father. Rachel died near Bethlehem, leaving two sons. The only thing we hear of Leah after today's stories is in 49:31 - the place of her burial.

Many of us are like Rachel and Leah in that we are busy looking after our husband and children but we are not famous, we will not be written about in history books!

But every person He has created is special to God - He wants to be seen as special in the way we live our lives. Try to be - every day - a person God is happy to be with.

Please read Genesis 38:1-30 for next time.

Lesson 6 Leader's notes Tamar Genesis 38:1-30

Do not give out notes at the beginning. Ask those with books to keep them firmly closed.
Get the ladies to work in twos - read the story - pick out the details of Genesis 38:1-30

At that time it was obviously acceptable to have prostitutes at religious shrines.

Accepted by whom?

People?

Culture?

Custom?

God?

Lesson 6 Tamar Genesis 38:1-30

A shameful story, but God has kept it in our Bible.

Jacob's fourth son, Judah, decided to move out from home - he may well have felt uncomfortable because of his part in the events of chapter 37 which will be part of the next study.

He went to stay with Hirah from Adullam, and met a Canaanite girl. We do not have her name, only her father's name, Shua. Judah and his wife had 3 sons - Er, Onan and Shelah. Time passed.

There was a custom among Israel's people, and other cultures as well, that if the man died, a brother had the obligation to marry the widow, and produce a child, in order to inherit the dead brother's family land. We see an extended version of this in the story of Ruth (Ruth 4:13-17) and it is mentioned in Matthew's gospel (Matthew 22:24) when the Sadducees tried to trick Jesus with a question that related vaguely to levirate (brother-in-law) marriage. See also Deuteronomy 25:5-6.

Judah got a wife, Tamar, for his eldest son, Er. Er was put to death by God. Tamar was now a widow with no sons. Judah told Onan to marry his brother's widow to continue the family line. Onan obeyed and disobeyed. He married Tamar but whenever they had intercourse he spilled his semen on the ground - so no baby! God put him to death as well. Judah promised his youngest son, Shelah, to Tamar when he was old enough.

Time passed. Judah's wife died. Soon Judah and Hirah went to Timnah, where his men were shearing his sheep.

Tamar heard about these events and knew that Shelah was now old enough to be married, but Judah had not brought Tamar to be Shelah's wife. Tamar changed from her widow's clothes put on a veil and went to the side of the road going into Enaim on the way to Timnah. Judah saw her and thought she was a prostitute because of her veil. He asked her to have sex with him and Tamar asked how much he will pay - a young goat was the answer.

She asked him to leave her with a pledge or deposit until the goat came - Judah's seal and its cord and the staff. The seal was probably a small cylinder with markings on it which when rolled on a clay document made the equivalent of a signature. It was worn on a cord round the neck which went through a hole drilled in the cylinder.

They had intercourse, and went their separate ways. Judah sent Hirah to find the 'shrine prostitute' and deliver the goat. A shrine prostitute would have had a higher social status than a normal prostitute.

Give out notes or ask the ladies to open their books.
Run through the story - encourage the ladies in what they got right.

The ladies may already have commented on the wrongs in the story - if so gather up their thoughts and questions, or elicit the wrongs you see.

Wow!! And yetThis sentence needs as many exclamation marks as you can put into your voice!!!!!!!!!!

Get the ladies to read the four references about sovereignty by themselves, or to each other, or to the group - which ever works better for your study group. Talk about them.

Do you believe these truths?

Do the same again for forgiveness.

Then apply personally - this may be in discussion and sharing, or may be simply as a challenge. You know your ladies. Remember there are two sides to forgiveness - forgiving, and being forgiven (that is: accepting forgiveness).

He asked the local men but they told him there had never been a shrine prostitute there. Judah said to stop trying to find her or he would be a laughing stock.

Three months later Judah is told that Tamar is pregnant and is guilty of prostitution. He said she should be burned to death. As she was being brought to face her accusers, she sent a message to Judah with the pledge articles.

Judah recognised that he had done wrong by not giving her to Shelah. He took her into his protection but had no sexual relationship with her. In due time she produced twin sons, Perez and Zerah - sons of a union between father-in-law and daughter-in-law!

Judah was wrong to not keep his promise about Shelah.

Tamar was wrong to try to get what was right - the inheritance of her dead husband for a son - in her own way.

Judah was wrong to let sexual feelings control his behaviour and use a prostitute.

And yet, Judah and Tamar are in the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1:3.

God's sovereignty is beyond our understanding

**Job 42:2
Ephesians 3:20
Luke 1:37
Romans 8:28**

Do you understand how God works things out?

Would you have expected to find the child of an illicit relationship in the ancestry of God's perfect Son?

God's forgiveness is amazing.

**Isaiah 1:18
Psalm 103:11-12
Romans 3:21-24,29-30
Galatians 3:6-9
1 John 1:9
Colossians 3:13,
Matthew 6:12,14-18.**

How good are you at forgiving?

Please read Genesis 37, 39-50 for next time.

Lesson 7 Leader's notes Joseph

This lesson concludes *Genesis* and leads into *Exodus*.

Open books and give out notes at the beginning. Work through page 22 as a class, getting the story out as we have in previous lessons.

Emphasise the headings that are printed in bold.

Tell the story of 42:24-50:26.

Use my nine main points with some detail. See the nine references opposite.

Lesson 7 Joseph Genesis 37:39-50

Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob - the second youngest - the first child of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel.

Genesis 37:1-4

37:5-11 Describe the dreams

37:12-36, 39:1

Genesis 39:2-6 Joseph's obedience to God showed

Does your obedience to God show? Discuss.

Genesis 39:7-9, 10-20

39:21-23

40:1-8

40:9-23

Genesis 41:1-24 Again Joseph gave credit to God, verse 16

Describe the dreams

41:25-36

41:37-57

Joseph knew that God had helped him to put the sorrows of his lost family and their actions behind him, and he knew that God had worked things out in the present. He was useful and he had two sons - the Hebrew Ephraim sounds like the words meaning twice fruitful.

Genesis 42:1-24

42:25-38

43:1-34

44:1-34

45:1-46:7

46:28-47:12

47:13-48:22

49:1-50:14

50:15-26

The number and names of the tribes of Israel always seemed to change - so this is a summary in case it confuses you like it easily confuses me! We will be meeting the tribes of Israel later in Exodus, Numbers and Joshua.

Exodus 1:1-8 more than 400 years later.

Compare this with what God had told Abraham in Genesis 15:13.

In lesson 2 we said that the book of Genesis shows us the story of the development of the nation God called to be His people. God is choosing His line, His chosen people.

Abraham

|

Isaac - the son of promise

|

Jacob later called Israel - not the elder son, Esau

|

Joseph - one of the 12 sons of Jacob (Israel).

These 12 sons become the names of, the ancestors of, the 12 Tribes of Israel.

But.....just to explain the differences in the lists of names in various parts of the Old Testament.....

1. From lesson 5: "During this time Reuben slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah, and Israel heard of it." Remember this little fact for another time! Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, had the right to his father's concubines, but only after his father had died. Here he arrogantly takes what should in future become his.
2. Genesis 48:10-20 Jacob (Israel) blesses Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. He gives the greater blessing to the younger, Ephraim, bypassing the firstborn Manasseh. Just as he himself was the second born but the one God worked through.
3. Genesis 49:1-4 Jacob (Israel) is dying - he blesses his sons, starting with Reuben, the firstborn, "who will no longer excel" verse 4. We need some help from a later historian in the Bible to understand the meaning of this. 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 "The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel)".
4. Reuben loses his birthright, his inheritance, but when Israel (the people) take the Promised Land, and land is allocated to the different tribes, Reuben's tribe is included again. The descendants of Reuben were still part of God's chosen people and needed land to live on. Levi is not included because the tribe of Levi were the priests and they had homes and pasture lands in and around the cities, but no other land allocation. Joseph's share is shared between his two sons.

The three sections at the end make us all think hard - but this may be especially so for some ladies who have lived through the frequent turmoil in Sudan and then in South Sudan since its independence.

Walk carefully - this teaching may produce decisions to forgive, of anger, or laying foundations for future decisions.

Have a look at *Genesis 41:50-52*. What is Joseph saying here - use your own words?

What was the 'trouble' he spoke of?

How had he got through it?

(The first 2 headings on page 22, in heavier type, may help you.)

Now look at *Genesis 50:15-21*. What has Joseph learned?

Express in your own words how he now responds to those who caused the 'problem'.

Can you echo Joseph's thoughts and actions? You may have huge 'trouble' in your life - so did Joseph - there is a way through it and there is also God's way through it - Joseph went God's way - can you?

Please read *Exodus 1:1-4:17; 12:1-42; 13:17-15:21* for next time.

Lesson 8 Leader's notes Moses and the Passover

Don't give out notes to start with. Ask those with books to keep them shut.

Give four ladies cards with one each of the first four references on, to read out one at a time. Elicit the information from the ladies.

How? *God's way* was through one man - Moses

Get the ladies to work in pairs to find in the story (Exodus 1:15- 2:10) ladies who *God* used to begin working out the "how?". Share answers and then give out notes or open the books.

Confirm their findings from Stephen's account in Acts. **God is making a way!**

40-80 years old

Work through this section together eliciting answers from what the ladies already know and what they are reading. **God is making a way!**

Lesson 8 Moses and the Passover Exodus 1:1-4:28, 12:1-42, 13:17-15:21.

Genesis 15:13-14 part of God's promise to Abraham - Israel will be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, but will come out with great provisions

Genesis 50:24 God will come to your aid - Joseph's death bed words to his brothers
- **God will make a way**

Exodus 1:6-7 The Israelites are now many people, becoming a threat to the new Pharaoh

Exodus 1:8-10 They are enslaved and progressively treated worse

How? God's way was through one man - Moses

1-40 years old - God's provisions for His appointed man

Exodus 1:15-21 midwives who feared God

1:22 Pharaoh tries again

2:1-3 Moses is born to a Hebrew family, who protect him as far as they can

2:4 The baby's sister, Miriam, watches

2:5-6 Pharaoh's daughter bathes in the Nile, just where the mini boat is

2:7 Miriam takes the opportunity

2:8-10 Moses' mother looks after her own baby until he is old enough to go to live with Pharaoh's daughter in the royal palace - probably at about three years old. Three precious years to teach the young Moses about his people and his God

Acts 7:17-23 Here Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is giving the Jewish leaders a lesson from their own history - Moses was well educated in the palace, as fitted the son of a princess. **God is making a way**

40-80 years old - murder, cultural shock, desert shepherd, God's call

2:11-15 hot headed murder, not accepted by his own people, fled to Midian

2:16-20 welcomed by Reuel (Jethro)'s family and settled in Midian

2:21-25 married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah - they had a son. God was concerned for the Israelites

Acts 7:23-29 story corroborated in Stephen's speech

7:30 after 40 years of shepherding in the desert Moses encountered God

Exodus 3:1-10 God attracted Moses with something he could not understand

3:11-22 Moses said - who am I to do this? What if the Israelites say "What is the name of this God who sent you?" God revealed Himself as "I am who I am" and told Moses to go and talk to the leaders of Israel. God said that Pharaoh would eventually let them go when a "mighty hand compels him" (3:20) and the Egyptians would load them with gifts. Compare with Genesis 15:14

4:1-17 Moses did not want to go to Pharaoh - God gave him a sign - he still did not want to go to Pharaoh - God was angry with Moses - God said that Aaron would go with him

4:18-28 Moses told Jethro what he was about to do and started to Egypt with his wife and sons, meeting Aaron on the way. **God is making a way.**

80-120 years' old

Work through together as a class until the two paragraphs bottom of page 26 and top of page 27.

Work in pairs to find the words in Exodus 12:1-11 marked opposite by a *, and Jesus/Passover Lamb. The exact words may vary from one translation to another.

1 Peter 1:18-19 "You were redeemed.....with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

Romans 3:23-25 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that comes by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement."

80-120 years old - conflict - Passover - rejoicing - disappointment

Exodus 5:1-9 Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and quoted the God of Israel - to which Pharaoh replies that he does not recognise the God of Israel, so the people cannot go. Pharaoh also says the Israelites can no longer use straw to make their brick quota, so making the job much harder. This action made the Israelites turn against Moses (5:22-23). God gave Moses an encouragement for the Israelites but they were too discouraged to accept it (6:5-9). Remember that sometimes when you are very discouraged - perhaps God IS encouraging you, but you are not willing to listen.

7:1-7 This is the **introduction to the plagues** that come on Pharaoh and Egypt in 7:14-11:10. Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? Who brought judgement on Egypt?

Plague	Pharaoh's reaction	Who hardened Pharaoh's heart?
1. Blood	No	Pharaoh
2 Frogs	Yes then No	Pharaoh
3 Gnats	No	Pharaoh ?
4 Flies in Egyptian areas	Yes then No	Pharaoh
5 Death of Egyptian livestock	No	Pharaoh
6 Boils	No	God
7 Hail but not in Goshen(Israelites)	Yes then No	Pharaoh
8 Locusts	No then Yes then No	God
9 Darkness over Egyptian area	Yes then No	God
10 Firstborn die	No then Yes then chased them	God

Check 7:22, 8:7, 8:18-19, 9:11, then the magicians are not mentioned again!
Our God is **totally powerful**.

The **institution of Passover** is an integral part of Israelite history and of Jewish thinking even today. It fits in between plague nine and plague ten.

Exodus 12:1-11 A perfect* year old male* sheep or goat is to be killed *. The blood is to be put on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they will eat the roasted lambs. They must eat it with bread made without yeast, and with bitter herbs. They must eat with sandals on, staff in hand and ready to leave.

12:12-13 That night God will kill all the firstborn, men and animals, in judgement on the gods of Egypt. "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you."

12:14-16, 24-28 "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord - a lasting ordinance." It is to be followed by a week-long festival of unleavened bread.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival.....with....sincerity and truth."

Work through the top half of page 27, **Back to the story**.....

Note on the numbers.

Exodus 12:37	600,000 men
assume	600,000 women
assume	600,000 children
Exodus 12:38	? herders
	? many other people - Exodus 9:20; 12:38 and 48.
	_____ Round figure - not exact - to get an idea of the size
2,000,000	of this people movement

The Sudan and South Sudan displacement/famine/refugee figures are also not exact, but accurate enough to give an impression.

'What did God tell Moses to do?' Answer 1, 2, 3 in pairs (See opposite)

Then 'What did Moses do?' Answer 1, 2, 3 in pairs (See opposite below)

Then share altogether to end.

Before His crucifixion Jesus celebrated Passover with His disciples, but He put a completely new meaning into it. Look at the * 11 lines back, on page 26 - can you make each of them refer to Jesus as our Passover Lamb? 1 Peter 1:18-19; Romans 3:23-25; 1 Corinthians 5:7 and then verse 8 - celebrate by living in sincerity and truth.

Back to the story.....

- 12:29-30 The death of the Egyptian firstborn.
- 12:31-36 Pharaoh said go. Egyptians gave them gold, silver and clothing. See Genesis 15:14. The Israelites travelled from Rameses to Succoth - 600,000 (603,550 Ex 38:26) men aged 20 and over + women + children + those driving flocks and herds + many other people - (? Ex 9:20). That is 5 times the population of Juba or one sixth of the estimated population of South Sudan 2016 + animals to get moving and organise!!!!
- 13:17-22 The Israelites move south, guided and accompanied by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire.
- 14:1-18 Pharaoh decided to chase the Israelite exodus. God said (vs4 and vs18) what would happen was to demonstrate His glory.
- 14:19-31 The great horde of Israelites and the chasing Egyptians camp that night separated by the angel of God and the pillar of cloud. In the morning Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters divided. The Israelites went across on dry land. Late in the night God looked down on the Egyptian army from the pillar of cloud and fire and threw it into confusion. At daybreak Moses stretched out his hand again and the sea came back. Not one of the entire Egyptian army survived. The Israelites feared God and trusted God and Moses.
- 15:1-21 A song of praise for what God had done. **God had made a way. 12:40-42.**

We need to finish the Moses story and jump ahead to finish this study.

As we will find the next time - the Israelites were a very difficult group to rule.

Numbers 20:2-12

Verses 2 - 5 opposition to Moses and Aaron

Verses 6 - 8 Moses and Aaron went to God for wisdom.

Verse 8 What did God tell Moses to do? 1.

2.

3.

Verses 9-11 What did Moses do? 1.

2.

3.

God had provided - but Moses had disobeyed.

Verse 12 Moses had not trusted God - he had done what he thought was right - Moses had not proved that God was right in what He (God) had said - he had doubted the holy, sovereign God.

There is a lot of material to cover in this lesson, but that is because there is a lot of material in the Old Testament!!

The ladies may want to comment on the 6 things to note.

If you have time to spare you could get ladies to share how God has made a way for them when there seemed to be no way. Some experiences may seem small and insignificant, but they were big to the person concerned and they may help others. If God has been seen to 'make a way', it is valid sharing.

Consequently, neither Moses or Aaron entered the Promised land.

Exodus 33:11 "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."
Deuteronomy 32:48-52, 34:1-7. Moses walked with God but he was still a sinful man. God requires obedience in His followers. And He definitely expects leaders He appoints live up to His standards. A solemn lesson.

6 things to note

- we have to be willing to receive God's encouragement.
- God brought judgement on Egypt.
- The magicians were very limited in power, God is unlimited!
- Christ is our Passover Lamb - averting God's judgement from us.
- People movements are not new - 6 million people is of a lot of people to move.
- Whatever God has used us to do in His service, we still need to honour Him as holy, and obey Him all the time.

Please read for next time about living in the Israeli camp - Exodus 15:22-19:25; 23:20-33; 34:29-35; 39:32-40:38. Numbers 1:51-2:34.

Lesson 9 Leaders' notes Wanderings and war

"Theologically, the tabernacle as a dwelling place of God on earth is of immense importance, as being the first in the series: tabernacle, Temple, the incarnation, the body of the individual believer, the church."

(From the Illustrated Bible Dictionary, IVP, Leicester, 1998 edition, Part 3/Tabernacle).

In the stories we are looking at today we think of this new portable building Moses is instructed to project build, the tabernacle. We do not realise and feel the significance of this in the lives of the Israelite people. God was seen to be with them. From our standpoint 3000 years later we need to take into our thinking the series mentioned in the quote above. The tabernacle in the wilderness, then the Temple that Solomon built, followed by the incarnation of Jesus - God in human flesh - the God/Man, then the indwelling Holy Spirit in the the believer, and finally the presence of God seen in the gathered community of believers. You may want to think that over. It may fit in today's lesson. It may fit when we come to Solomon. It may fit when the prophets are calling the people to show God in their lives.

Back to this lesson.

We will look at all the passages in two ways which will help us absorb the details and history:

1. the geography and the time involved
2. the major events

Give out notes or ask students to open their books.

Teach time and geography, making sure you are keeping the ladies with you.

Lesson 9 Wanderings and war

This study covers: Exodus 15:22-19:25, 39:32-40:38.
Numbers 1:1-4:49, 10:11-14:45, 16:1-17:12, 20:1-27:23, 31:1-36:13.
Deuteronomy 1:1-4:49, 7:1-11:32, 31:1-34:12.

We will look at this true history in two ways: **Time and geography**

We pick up the story when the Israelites had left Egypt and experienced the miracle intervention of their God protecting them from their enemies, and killing their enemies.

Although the words desert and wilderness are used for the wanderings of the Israelites, the land was not desert as in the Sahara or Empty Quarter of Saudi Arabia, all sand and no life. The wilderness was a group of areas which did not support life, some oases, and land that could feed some animals and people for a while but not continually. Moses had spent 40 years looking after sheep for Jethro a bit further east in a similar area called Midian, which we know now as north eastern Saudi Arabia. See the map on page 2. Nomads in Sudan and Darfur have to keep moving on to have enough pasture for their animals.

Three days after the miracle of the exodus, this vast column of people, belongings and animals were in the Desert of Shur, also called the Desert of Etham, and there was no drinkable water.

A month and a half after they left Egypt they were in the Desert of Sin, further south on the Sinai Peninsula.

Exactly three months after leaving Egypt they reached the Desert of Sinai, further south again, and camped in front of the mountain. They camped at Sinai for a good part of a year, received the rules to live by from God and celebrated their first Passover remembrance there.

On the 20th day of the second month in the second year after the exodus from Egypt, so a month after the first Passover remembrance, the Israelites started to move from Sinai to the Desert of Paran, near to Kadesh Barnea. We have no more time details until 38 years later - 40 years after the Exodus - when the Israelites arrived in the Desert of Zin, on the northern side of Kadesh Barnea. In those 38 years they had moved around the Sinai Peninsula, camping and moving, as God told them by the pillar of cloud and fire.

At Kadesh Barnea again, they were at the southern end of the land God had promised them so long before. On this second time around they headed north-east skirting round the east of

Get the ladies to find the information for each major event reference, and then share in the whole class. You may need to elicit information and help them.

You may think this is strange but it worked with my group. I asked them while we found the information in the major events to shout out "Praise the Lord" when the Israelites praised the Lord, and to say "grumble, grumble, grumble" when the Israelites grumbled. You should hear a lot more "grumble, grumble, grumble"s than "Praise the Lord"s!

You may want to teach some of the longer references to save time.

the Dead Sea, avoiding Edom and on to Moab, defeating King Og and King Bashan on the way. The lands of those kings were given to the tribes of Gad and Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh to settle in, but the men had to continue to help the rest of the Israelites capture the whole of the Promised Land first.

Major events

Back to the story when the Israelites had left Egypt and experienced the miracle intervention of their God protecting them from their enemies, and killing their enemies.

Exodus 15:22-26 Three days later and in the Desert of Shur, at a place called Marah, the water was bitter and the people grumbled. God, through Moses, provided for them.

Exodus 15:27 The Israelites arrived at Elim with 12 springs and 70 palm trees.

Exodus 16:1-32 The Israelites complained again. 'We had meat in Egypt. We are going to starve here.' Moses told them they were actually complaining against God, not just him and Aaron. The community saw the glory of God appearing in a cloud in the desert, and God said to Moses "Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'" So it was, quail came in the evening, and 'what is it', (the meaning of the word manna), was there in the morning. There were instructions about how much and when to collect the manna, which the Israelites promptly disobeyed. They could bake or boil the manna, and it was God's provision for them until they had celebrated the first Passover in Canaan after crossing the River Jordan and before they took Jericho. They ate of the produce of the land, unleavened bread and roasted grain the day after Passover, and the next morning the manna was not there for them.

Exodus 17:1-7 There was no water where they camped at Rephidim, and the people grumbled against Moses and queried whether God was with them. This time, on God's instruction, Moses had to strike a rock to produce water.

Exodus 17:8-16 The Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites. Joshua led some men to fight the attackers and Moses goes up on a hill overlooking the battle. While his hands were raised Israel prevailed, but when his hands were lowered the Amalekites prevailed. Aaron and Hur put a stone for Moses to sit on and supported a hand each until sunset when Joshua won the battle. You don't have to be in the problem to be active in praying for those who are!

Exodus 18:1-27 Moses had a visit from his wife and two sons, together with his father-in-law. Verses 9-12 Jethro rejoiced in what Moses' God had done, and worshipped Him. He also advised Moses that all the judicial responsibility was too much for one man, and he

Keep going - it's not 40 years yet!!!!

should appoint trustworthy men to be judges. Only the most difficult cases would still come to Moses. You can only do so much. You need to share responsibilities if there is too much for you, or be willing to pick up responsibilities if you see someone else is overburdened.

Exodus 19:1-25 Moses went up the mountain to talk with God, and came back with a message from God that the people had to prepare themselves and be very respectful near the presence of God. In their enthusiasm they were not to rush and push into His presence because His holiness would consume them. That is our God! He is not a man, He is God. He is holy. He is pure. He is all powerful. He is all knowing. We can only approach our God because of the atoning relationship we have with Jesus Christ who is fully man and fully God.

Exodus 20:1-21 Moses received the Law from God. We will look at this next time.

Exodus 32:1-33:23 Aaron allowed the people to worship a golden calf in the absence of Moses. There was severe punishment.

Exodus 39:32-40:33 Some of the Law was specifically about the Israelites' worship of God. Moses had established a Tent of Meeting where he met with God and the pillar of cloud guarded the entrance while they spoke. God instructed him in a very detailed way to make a Tabernacle which could be erected, disassembled and carried. This was completed and ready for use just before the time the Israelites celebrated their first Passover since Egypt. The phrases Tabernacle and Tent of Meeting were then sometimes used interchangeably.

Exodus 40:36-38 "In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out - until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels."

Numbers 1:1-54 God commanded a census to be taken, in tribal order.

Numbers 2:1-34 The camp was organised in a square of three tribes each side and the tabernacle in the centre.

Numbers 3:14-38 The three clans of the Levites, and Moses, Aaron and his sons, made up the four groups who protected a side each of the tabernacle from other Israelites inadvertently coming too close to it.

Numbers 10:11-13 The Israelites moved from Sinai to the Desert of Paran, near Kadesh Barnea.

Numbers 12:1-16 Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses. Miriam was punished and Aaron rebuked.

Interesting details. God provided totally for them. They had the skills and the materials. Can you see God providing details in your life?

Numbers 13:1-33 Spies are sent out into the Promised Land for 40 days. Ten reported that it was wonderful, but they could not go in, for fear of the people there. Two - Caleb and Joshua - said it was wonderful and "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." Verse 30.

Numbers 14:1-4 and 10 All the people grumbled. They suggested they needed a new leader and threatened to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua.

Numbers 14:20-38 God said those who had shown contempt for Him would not enter the Promised Land. The people would wander for 40 years until those who had seen God's dealings with them, and rebelled, had all died.

Numbers 20:2-13 No water again. Moses disobeyed in providing water, and Aaron was complicit in this. God says that neither of them will go into the Promised Land.

Numbers 20:22-29 Aaron was succeeded as high priest by his son, Eleazer, and dies.

Numbers 22:1-24:25 Balaam spoke truly from God.

Numbers 25:1-9 Camped across the river from Jericho. Israelite men are sexually immoral with Moabite women. Judgement from God, and 24,000 died.

Numbers 26:1-3, 63-65 A second census, proving that those who rebelled had died. So between Numbers 14:38 and 26:65, 38-40 years have passed. See Deuteronomy 2:14-15.

Numbers 31:3-6 1000 men from each tribe, so 12,000 men, were mobilised. Deuteronomy 2:2-9; 2:24-25; 3:8-11; 3:12-20 the beginning of the campaigns to conquer the Promised Land, and the allocation of land to the tribes.

Deuteronomy 3:21-29, 4:1-34:12 Moses spoke to the people about obedience to God and His laws, renewed the covenant, gave the succession as leader to Joshua. He blessed the tribes, before climbing to see the Promised Land, and then he died.

Note: Exodus 26:1; 26:29; 27:16; 28:6; 30:22-25; 35:30-36:1. God given skills - some perhaps learned in Egypt during their 400 years there, especially early in that time when they were popular with the Egyptians and there would have been cultural interchange. Then three months after leaving Egypt and travelling they have all the things they need for these crafts.

Numbers 12:3 What a man!

Please read for next time Exodus 20:1-17, Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:37-40

Lesson 10 Leader's notes The Law

Teach through page 33, and page 34 as far as point 2.

You are giving information which will then allow more class participation in the lesson.

Lesson 10 The Law Exodus 20:1-17, Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:37-40

The Law, the rules by which the Israelites were to live, was given by God to Moses while they camped near Sinai after leaving Egypt.

In our Bibles this Law comes in:

- Exodus 20:1-31:18, 34:1-39:31 - an account of what was said and written at Sinai
Leviticus 1:1-8:36, 11:1-27:34 - mainly relating to the Levites, the sons of Levi, the priests, offerings and festivals
Numbers 5:1-6:21 - rules with specific relevance to camp living, and beyond
Deuteronomy 4:1-14; 5:11-26:19; 31:1-13 - a farewell address from Moses, repeating the Law

Let's ask some questions here.

1. What does the Law contain?

When we read the whole of the Law in the references above we discover that there are three main divisions.

(1) There is religious ceremonial law:

Describing how the Tabernacle, the symbol of God's presence, was to be made and set up;
Giving the rules for the life and work of the priests, the sons of Levi;
Showing us pictures of the sacrificial Lamb, the sacrifices to atone for sin, the Passover celebration.

When we looked at the first Passover (page 26) just before the Israelites left Egypt, we said that Jesus Christ fulfilled all that those pictures represented. He is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.") The pictures are now not needed anymore. We have the reality in Jesus Christ.

We are His priests, 1 Peter 2:5 "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood."

And we are the symbol of His presence in our world today.

1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

You may want to ask some questions towards the end of section 1 (What does the Law contain? From halfway down page 33). Try to make sure the ladies are following you.

Use questions like:

How many kinds of Law were there?

What was the ceremonial law?

Do we still need to make sacrifices for our sins?

Work through point 2 together with all of the Old and New Testament references.

So we see that the ceremonial law is fulfilled in Christ and transformed in the mission He has given us in our world. We can still learn from it, but it is superseded in the reality of Jesus Christ and His presence in the world today.

We also see in the Law two other types: (2) moral law and (3) civil law. Moral law tells us how to behave ourselves, and civil law regulates how groups of people - nations, states and districts - live together.

The Ten Commandments summarise the moral law and are the basis of the civil law. Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17 say "You shall not murder", number six of the ten commandments. So the moral command to us as individuals is that we should not intentionally set out to kill anybody. The Old Testament Law expands its conditions in great detail to cover killing by accident, and the punishments for various situations. The judiciary of the state may have the right to take life if life has been taken.

Remember that when the Law was given there were no prisons because the Israelites were then a nomadic people! This changed as they settled into towns. The civil law in the Old Testament covers all kinds of details in life - criminal law, family law, treatment of animals - from rules for a king to not taking slaves of your own people - from treating servants as people not as animals, to not being mean with what you left to be gleaned around the fields.

2. So we do not have to follow the ceremonial law, but what about the moral and civil laws?

We cannot adopt the whole civil law because situations of life have changed over the centuries, but we need to take the moral law in its entirety and work it out its practical implications and applications to our lives.

Moses himself summarised the Law in Deuteronomy 10:12-13, 18-20 but the Israelites did not do well with following the moral law. Years later they were being called back by the prophets of God to **live** the right way, as well as to ceremonially **sacrifice** the right way.

Isaiah 1:10-17

Zechariah 7:8-10

Micah 6:8

Hosea 6: 6

Jesus summarised the Law: Matthew 12: 1-8

Matthew 22: 34-40

Matthew 22:37-40

Matthew 25: 31-46

Mark 12: 28-33

Discuss the two pages of the Ten Commandments, pages 35 and 36 - especially discussing applications for today as you go through.

For point 3 you will know the minor expletives that are used where you are.

Let God speak to the class on this (and other) issues.

3. So what do the Ten Commandments say for us today?

Christians have taken the Ten Commandments as a shortened version of the Law. I remember having to learn the Ten Commandments in day school when I was 8 or 9 years old. This moral code is the basis of the British legal justice system. Even in a largely un-Christian United Kingdom, that fact is still largely acknowledged. It means that with the way history has happened, many other countries which had British influence also have the morals of the Ten Commandments enshrined in their national laws.

1. **"You shall have no other gods before me." Deuteronomy 5:7**

'Before Me' meaning more important than. There should be nothing in your life or mine that is more important than God.

This prohibits God's people from having other gods - our exclusive allegiance is to God. This is not a philosophical idea but a practical loyalty.

2. **"You shall not make for yourself an idol.....You shall not worship them."**

Deuteronomy 5:8-10 Make no images of God.

A statue is lifeless, visible, finite.

Our God is life itself, invisible, infinite.

This is a command with punishment for disobedience.

3. **"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." Deuteronomy 5:11.**

We must not use the name of God worthlessly - supporting lies, supporting evil intentions, as blasphemy, in hollow mindlessness or thoughtlessly.

Honest women and men do not need to resort to oaths: their word is sufficient.

We know major expletives contravene this law but what about 'minor' expletives?

Many are euphemisms for 'major' ones.

Like: for heaven's sake
 what the heck/what the hell
 for God's sake
 God knows

This is a command with guilt potential.

4. **"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

Use a Sabbath to remember what God has done in creation (in Exodus 20:8-11) and in rescuing His people (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

One day in seven is to be different. This is a creation gift, a deliberate device, to stop work and money from taking over seven days out of seven. It is to be to the benefit of all - the boss, the workers, the servants, the animals. Mark 2:27 - the Sabbath was to benefit man, not for men and women to have rules to obey.

See also Luke 13:10-16: Luke 6:1-11.

7. Control of the mind is not reserved for men - women need to control their minds.
In this instance especially in sexual thinking? wishing? imagining?
Are some of these thoughts you have, not what you would like to explain to Jesus?
By the way - He knows them anyway!

8. Stealing covers many issues - boundary markers and true weights are still valid examples. But so are ideas, like using written material from the Web as your own writing when you copy it word for word into your essays for the teacher.

10. There is a line between saying things are nice, or we like them, and desperately wanting what someone else has for ourselves. Think carefully - think.....think....keep control of YOUR mind.

5. "Honour your father and your mother." Deuteronomy 5:16

This is not only or even primarily to children of a young age. We are all children even if we are also parents, especially in an extended family. 'Honour' means to respect, appreciate, esteem, as well as including to obey. This is a command with incentive.

6. "You shall not murder." Deuteronomy 5:17

Killing with intention is wrong. Any form of illegal or unauthorised killing is wrong. The basic reasoning here is from *Genesis 1:24-27*. Men and women are special creations, made in the image of God, and are therefore worthy of greater respect than animals. God has the right to take life. The state may have the right to take life. We do not have the right to say who lives and who dies. *Matthew 5:21,22* Jesus widens the definition of murder - to include murder of the spirit?

7. "You shall not commit adultery." Deuteronomy 5:18

Many laws about family matters also fit in this area.
Matthew 5: 27-28 Jesus also widens the definition of adultery!

8. "You shall not steal." Deuteronomy 5:19

19:14 says don't move boundary markers and
25:13-16 talks about using true weights

9. "You shall not give false testimony." Deuteronomy 5:20

19:15-21 at least two or three honest witnesses required.
19:18-19 if a witness is proven to be lying he must be punished with the punishment he was trying to inflict on the accused.

10. "You shall not covet." Deuteronomy 5:21

This takes me being able to control my mind and you being able to control your mind. My neighbor, according to the parable of the Samaritan, is anyone I meet - not just my next door neighbour

For the next time please look at *Joshua 1:1-8:35*, *Judges 1:19-2:23*, *Ruth*, and *1 Samuel 1:1-3:1*.

Lesson 11 Leaders' notes Battles, backsliding and belief

Work through page 37 together as a class eliciting the information.

Rahab. Some Bible translations say she was an innkeeper, some say she was a prostitute. Either way she was not working in a job that good people would have approved of. Perhaps that is why some translators found it difficult to say she was a prostitute. But she saw what was happening and believed that the God of the Israelites was going to win.

She believed.

God looked for her faith, not at her job.

It appears Rahab told lies, yet we know God accepted her faith.

See Proverbs 6:17; Matthew 5:37; John 8:44.

Rahab's family were saved because they obeyed and put the scarlet cord in the window. It is a picture like the blood on the doorposts and lintels during the death of the firstborn and Passover, when God passed over the houses which had blood on the lintels and doorposts. Both these pictures point to the blood of Jesus given for our salvation.

Lesson 11 Battles, backsliding and belief Joshua 1:1-8:35, Judges 1:19-2:23, Ruth, 1 Samuel 1:1-3:1

Israel's leadership had passed from Moses to Joshua. He prepared the people to cross the River Jordan, reminded the two and a half tribes who already had their land that their men were needed to fight with the rest of the Israelites, and sent two spies to check the situation in the land and especially in Jericho, their next objective.

Joshua 2:1-24 The spies went to Rahab who lived in the city wall. She was probably a prostitute. She hid them, misled the king's soldiers and said to the Israelite spies "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you." Joshua 2:9. She said that she had helped them and asked for their protection for her and her family. They promised that if she kept the secret, and when the attack came, placed a scarlet cord in her window, she would be safe. She let them through that window, down the outside wall of the city. They hid in the hills for three days before returning to the Israelite camp and reporting to Joshua.

Joshua 3:1-5:12 When Joshua heard the news he started a sequence of events designed to re-emphasise to Israel that their God was powerful and was the living God. He was taking the Israelites into the Promised Land. These events also underlined to the watching Canaanites how completely powerful and authoritative the God of Israel was. Joshua moved the camp to the edge of the Jordan, opposite Jericho, where the people could see the river in flood. Then he instructed the people to watch for and follow the ark of the covenant, which was normally in the tabernacle, but was now being carried by Levites. But they must keep a safe distance from it. When the priests carrying the ark of the covenant got to the river they were to walk into the water, wait for the water to stop flowing and their feet to be on dry ground, then move to the middle of the river and watch all Israel walk past them.

One man from each tribe had to go back into the river bed and pick up a stone as a memorial of what they had seen God do. They camped at Gilgal, and Joshua re-instituted circumcision, which had not been observed in their wanderings. The Israelites then celebrated Passover, using local unleavened bread and roasted grain. The next day there was no more manna.

Joshua 5:13-15 Joshua was confronted by the commander of the army of the Lord, whom he acknowledged and obeyed. This was certainly an angelic appearance, and may have been a pre-incarnation appearance of Jesus Christ.

Joshua 6:1-27 The Israelites took Jericho. Rahab and her family were kept safe.

Joshua 7:1-8:29 Israel was defeated at Ai and sin was discovered. Judgement was imposed and then the Israelites took Ai. Joshua built an altar and led Israel in a renewal of their covenant with God and in the reading of the Law "to the whole assembly of Israel,

Encourage the ladies to stop after the hectic story, and think about these six ideas, listed opposite.

Work through the rest of the page and next page 39, encouraging the ladies by involving them in reading references and finding information in passages, as your time allows.

including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them." Joshua 8:35.

Let's pick up on some ideas from page 37 for ourselves -

- Even those doing the work of God must be prepared to show faith to the extent of getting their feet wet in faith!
- It is important to remember and be reminded of Who our God is and what He has done. Take time to think about God acting in your life, and thank Him.
- Even leaders need to acknowledge the leadership of the commander of God's armies.
- Sin must be dealt with.
- We must always be aware of how our God wants us to live, what His plans and rules for our lives are.
- God brought Rahab into the lineage of Jesus - a Canaanite woman, who trusted Israel's God is a direct forbear of our Lord Jesus Christ. (See Matthew 1:5)

The conquest and settlement of the land took 25 to 30 years.

The author of the book of Joshua was not only setting out a history. He was showing what God had done and how the people had worked with their God and sometimes how they had not. He includes stories, official lists of those conquered, and lists of land allocations. In Joshua 11:23 we read that Joshua took "the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war."

Joshua 12 is a list of defeated kings. **Joshua 13** starts "when Joshua was old and well advanced in years the Lord said to him, "You are very old and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over"."

There follows a list of areas still to be captured. The book then continues with lists of land allocations, including towns for the Levites, until **Joshua 21:45** "**Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled.**" The men of Gad, Reuben and half of Manasseh returned to their families and their land east of the River Jordan, Joshua 22:9.

Joshua was coming to the end of his life. He again gathered the people to Shechem where Abraham had built an altar, Genesis 12:6-7. Joshua summarised the history of the previous 70 years and challenged the people to serve God faithfully.

"Joshua said to the people. "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God, for He is jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, He will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after He has been good to you." 24:19-20. The people promised to serve God and obey Him.

Can you think of an example from your own life to bring the last paragraph home to the ladies - or are there influences where you are now that are tempting Christians away from following Jesus totally?

Joshua 24:28-32 Joshua died aged 110 and was buried in his allocated land. Joseph's bones, which Israel had brought with them from Egypt, were buried in Shechem, land which Jacob had bought nearly 500 years before (*Genesis 33:19*). This was in the area allocated to Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Verse 31 "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel."

Joshua 21:45 "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." God kept His promises.

Joshua 24:19-20 "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God, for he is jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you." Will Israel keep her promise?

Judges - Israel failed to totally take and consolidate the land. Joshua had died, and then the generation, who had seen what God had done in the Israelite conquest of Canaan, also died. Then "the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals ...They provoked the Lord to anger...and the Lord handed them over to raiders...He sold them...They were in great distress". *Judges 2:11-15*. "Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of the raiders...But when the judge died, the people turned to ways even more corrupt than their fathers...They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways." *Judges 2:16-20*.

Look for other judges 3:9, 3:15, 3:31, 4:4, 6:11-12, 10:1, 10:3, 11:5, 12:8, 12:11, 12:13, 13:24-25

Major judges	Minor judges
Othniel	Shamgar
Ehud	Tola
Deborah	Jair
Gideon	Ibzan
Jephthah	Elon
Samson	Abdon

This sad period of Israel's history, regularly doing evil in God's sight, covers 250-300 years. The last verse of the book of Judges says that there was no authority figure in the tribes of Israel, and everyone did as he or she saw fit. So the answer to the question at the end of the Joshua section (above) is - No! Israel did not keep her promise.

Israel took other people's ideas and worshipped other people's gods. We know they were wrong. But how strongly do we hold on to what we know God wants, when other people are involved in other - attractive - beliefs?

Tell the **story** of Ruth, or elicit the story if the ladies know it, or if you have time get them to tell you the story from the Bible book of her name. Make sure that those who are not familiar with the story now have the outline of it in their minds.

Names may vary a little from one translation to another - as from Arabic to English!

Ruth going to the threshing floor at night with a request of marriage rings alarm bells in my culture but in her culture it may not have been unusual. The significance of uncovering Boaz' feet, lying down there, and asking him to spread the corner of his garment over her is understood by Boaz. She and Boaz were careful that she was not seen at the threshing floor to protect her (and his) good name.

All five **effects** opposite are worth thinking about and may be discussed if time allows.

Remember, Jesus used *Genesis 2:18-25* as His authority for one man to have one wife, in *Matthew 19:3-9*.

With the story of Elkanah and Hannah, and then the birth of **Samuel**, the scene is set for the next great leader of the Israelites. A godly man came from a godly mother and father, even though the world they lived in was not living *God's way*.
God has His people in every situation.

Ruth

The story in the book of Ruth is set in the period of the Judges - a glimmer of hope in a dark world. Not everyone behaved badly as most of the people mentioned in Judges.

Story

Famine. Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Killion (or Chilion) go from Bethlehem to Moab.

Elimelech dies. Mahlon & Killion marry Orpah & Ruth.

Ten years after arriving in Moab, Mahlon & Killion die.

Naomi hears of end of famine and plans to go back home. Orpah stays in Moab.

Naomi and Ruth go to Bethlehem. They arrive at barley harvest time.

Ruth gleans in Boaz' field. Boaz is kind to Ruth.

Ruth gleans in barley harvest and wheat harvest. Naomi schemes.

Ruth goes to the threshing floor at night with a request of marriage.

Ruth leaves with barley and a promise before anyone is up.

Boaz goes to the town gate and in the presence of witnesses redeems the land and the name of Mahlon.

Boaz and Ruth marry. Ruth has a son, Obed.

Effects

Naomi has so demonstrated her God that Ruth believes in Him too.

Boaz also represents His God well.

Ruth has a husband.

Naomi has a grandson, an heir to Mahlon's land.

God has brought a Moabite woman into the ancestral line of Jesus (see Deuteronomy 23:3 and Matthew 1:5).

Samuel

1 Samuel 1:1-3:1 Here we have another encouraging story.

We meet Elkanah, his wife Peninnah and her children, and his other wife, Hannah.

Hannah had no children. Each year at the feast Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion of meat because he loved her. Each year Peninnah reduced Hannah to tears at this feast. One year Hannah stood up at the feast, wept and prayed, promised to give the child to the Lord if only she could have a son. Eli, the priest had seen her and thought she was drunk because she was praying quietly but forming the words with her mouth. What a commentary on the state of worship in the temple that Eli should even think such a thing! Hannah had a son, Samuel. When he was weaned, at about three years old, she took him to Eli at the temple and gave Samuel to God's service. Her song in 1 Samuel 2 is very similar to Mary's song when she is told she will become the mother of Jesus, (Luke 1:46-55). 3:1 now follows the time of the judges - people were not living close to God. But Hannah was an exception. She trusted, loved and gave - she believed God (it seems that Elkanah did too) even when the world around her did not.

Things to think about!

Please read any part of 1 Samuel 3:1-31:13, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1:1-11:43 for next time.

Lesson 12 Leader's notes Kings

Work through 1 Samuel 3 with the ladies.

Use the summary of 1 Samuel chapters 4-7.

Choose people to read the parts of Narrator, Elders, God, Samuel, People - let them look at the text (on pages 41 and 42) to understand it for themselves before reading.

It may be helpful to have a label on each reader so the rest of the group can follow who is saying what. Ask all five ladies stand out the front to read this dramatic reading.

Lesson 12 Kings 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11 also 1 Chronicles 10:1-29:29, 2 Chronicles 1:1-9:31

So what happened to Samuel? We know he grew physically, but he also grew spiritually. Have a look in 1 Samuel chapter 3:

Verse 2 Eli was getting old, his sight was not good and we know from chapter 2:22-25 and chapter 2:34 that his sons were wicked and rejected by God.

1 Samuel 3:4 and 6 God called Samuel, but Samuel ran to see what Eli wanted.

Verse 7 although Samuel was living at the temple he did not know God for himself.

Verses 8-10 God called Samuel a third time and Eli realised it must be God calling Samuel, and told him what to say, how to address God. Samuel did as Eli said.

Verses 11-18 God speaks to Samuel and tells him that He was going to judge Eli because he had not controlled his sons. Samuel laid down again and then got on with his normal jobs, dreading the moment when he would see Eli, who told Samuel he had to tell Eli what God had said.

Eli's reaction was "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes."

Verses 19 and 20 give a summary of the hidden years of Samuel's life.

1 Samuel 4-7 are the sad story of the stealing of the ark by the Philistines. It was supposed to be the symbol of God's presence with His people. The death of Eli and his sons is also recorded. By chapter 8:4-22 time has passed and the elders of Israel are looking to the future.

A class dramatic reading:

Narrator: So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him,

Elders: "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

Narrator: But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him:

God: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

Thank the participants.

Pick up teaching again from "God knew the Israelites would want to be like other nations"

Narrator: Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said,

Samuel: "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: he will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

Narrator: But the people refused to listen to Samuel.

People: "No! We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

Narrator: When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. The Lord answered,

God: "Listen to them and give them a king."

Narrator: Then Samuel said to the Israelites,

Samuel: "Everyone go back to your own town."

God knew the Israelites would want to be like the other nations.

In the Law of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 He had told the people that a king

- must be of their own people,
- must not be over wealthy,
- must not take many wives,
- must have a copy of the Law with him and read it every day,
- must not consider himself better than his brothers.

The people of Israel had until now been a **theocracy** - a group of people governed by God. Now they were asking to be a **monarchy** - a group of people governed by a king, a fallible human

Make sure the words theocracy, monarchy, democracy and anarchy are understood.

Teach through King Saul

Teach through King David

who may or may not do as God says. In our time the great demand is for **democracy** - a group of people governed by representatives chosen by the whole group. At the end of Judges we had **anarchy** - everyone doing what they thought right.

King Saul - God told Samuel to anoint a man he would meet the next day. This man would deliver the people from the Philistines. God had heard His people's cry, 1 Samuel 9:15-16. Soon afterwards Samuel called an assembly to publicly make known the Lord's choice of king, 1 Samuel 10:17-25.

Saul won a big battle in chapter 11 and Samuel tried to retire from leadership as there was now a king, 12:1-4. But soon he had to reprimand Saul for disobedience to God, and to tell him that God had appointed another leader because of Saul's disobedience.

Saul, and his son Jonathan, continued as mighty warriors, but within those stories we see Samuel anointing David, then David joining Saul's service, David killing Goliath, Saul becoming jealous of David and eventually trying to kill him, 1 Samuel chapters 13-20.

David was now trying to keep out of Saul's way. Twice David was in a position to kill King Saul, and was encouraged to do so by his men. He refused because he would not harm the king whom God had anointed, 1 Samuel chapters 21-30. In chapter 28 Saul visits a medium, the witch of Endor - another act of disobedience to God.

Saul died in battle with the Philistines, 31:4-6. He had reigned for 60 years.

King David - David lamented over the deaths of Saul and his son, Jonathan, who was his good friend.

2 Samuel 1. David was anointed king over the tribe of Judah, but the other tribes followed a son of King Saul. This went on for seven years and before David became king over all Israel. Chapters 2-5.

The ark was brought to Jerusalem, David's new capital city, where he had his palace. David received assurances from God that under his rule Israel would have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed, that from his children would come the successor in the kingship, and that successor would be the one to build a permanent house for the ark. 2 Samuel 6-7. David's battles continued as he extended peace for his people, chapters 8-10, and we also see his very caring and gentle nature when he seeks out any of Jonathan's family to be kind to.

However:

David had an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba.

He had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, murdered.

He had big problems with his dysfunctional family and faced some uprisings against him.

2 Samuel 11-22.

Use the summary words for **King Solomon's** life and reign with as many references as you have time for. Perhaps five groups of ladies could look up one heading each, looking at the Bible references. I suggest you put 'wives' and 'disobedience' into one group.

The 'What did God think' section is an important round up for the lesson on Kings - don't lose it because of time.

What did God think?

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|---|
| 1 Samuel | 8:7-9 | In wanting a king the people were rejecting God. |
| | 9:17 | God gave them what they wanted. |
| | 13:13-14 | Saul's disobedience meant his kingdom would not last. |
| | 15:10-11 | God was grieved that he had made Saul king. |
| | 16:7 | God was more concerned about heart attitude than good looks, from the story of the anointing of David. |
| 2 Samuel | 5:9-10 | David was powerful because God was with him. |
| | 7:4, 8-16 | David would not build the permanent Temple. That would be done by his son Solomon. His (David's) throne would be established forever. |
| | 12:24 | Forgiven of his adultery and murder, God gave David a son with Bathsheba. |
| 1 Kings | 2:1-4 | As he died David told Solomon of God's promises. |
| | 3:5-14 | God gave Solomon a dream. |
| | 9:1-9 | God gave Solomon another dream, with great potential for good and bad, dependent on the word "if". |
| | 11:1-9 | King Solomon disobeys. |
| | 11:29-39 | Consequences. But note the last three words of verse 39. Compare with Matthew 1:1. |

Now into the first book of Kings. David was dying. His son, Adonijah proclaimed himself king with a sacrifice, and a big feast for his supporters and court officials. Bathsheba went to David, who sent Nathan, the prophet, to anoint Solomon king and bring him back to the throne shouting 'Long live King Solomon'. David gave last instructions to Solomon, urging him to keep obeying the Lord. David died after ruling seven years over Judah and 33 years over the whole of Israel.

King Solomon - 1 Kings 2:12 "Solomon succeeded his father David as king, and his royal power was firmly established." Solomon's life and reign can be summarised in six words:

wisdom	1 Kings 3:5-15, 4:29-34, 9:1-2, 9:4-9, 10:1-5,9,10,13,
administration	4:1-28, 5:1-18, (note - a recorder), 11:41 (written histories)
temple	6:1,7,14-38, 7:13-14,51, 8:1-5,22-30, 8:52-53, 9:1-3.
wealth	7:1, 9:15,20-23,26-28, 10:14-29.
wives	11:1-6.
disobedience	11:7-13,14,25,26,29-40.

11:42-43 Solomon died, having reigned for 40 years, and was succeeded by his son, Rehoboam.

Writings - David wrote some psalms. Especially famous are Psalm 23, the shepherd psalm, and Psalm 51, his repentance after the illicit relationship with Bathsheba.

Solomon wrote some of Proverbs, some of Ecclesiastes and probably Song of Songs.

What did God think?

1 Samuel 8:7-9, 9:17
13:13-14, 15:10-11
15:17-23
16:7, 11-12
2 Samuel 5:9-10
7:4-5a,8-16
12:24-25
1 Kings 2:1-4, 3:7-14
9:1-9, 11:1-8,29-36

Please read 1 Kings 16:29-33, 17:1-19:18 for next time.

Lesson 13 Leader's notes The Divided Kingdom

We pick up at 1 Kings 11:28-39 which is where we finished the section on Solomon's disobedience last time. See if anyone can tell you what the prophet Ahijah had said to whom!

Teach through the next two paragraphs - eliciting the information from the ladies as they look up the references.

Let the ladies find that some were good kings and some were bad kings in these references. Encourage them to find on the chart here and on page 46, all the king's names and check the * stars for the good ones, or crosses X for the bad ones.

Lesson 13 The Divided Kingdom 1 Kings 16:29-33, 17:1-19:18, and 1 Kings 21:1-22:53, 2 Kings 1:1-25:30, 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:21

1 Kings 11:28-39 this is before the death of King Solomon. The kingdom will be divided because of Solomon's disobedience.

1 Kings 11:41-43 Solomon died.

1 Kings 12:1-15 Rehoboam, Solomon's son refused to ease the slave-labour load on his people.

12:16-17, 20-24 The ten tribes formed their own kingdom under Jeroboam and a very annoyed Rehoboam was told by God not to fight to regain his now divided kingdom.

12:26-33 To safeguard his kingdom Jeroboam set up alternative worship places, with golden calves as idols.

God had said in the Ten Commandments and the Law that the people should have no other gods before Him, not worship idols, and not be involved in adultery. As they took the land God had promised them, they were told again and again not to adopt the ways of the people there, not to have other gods or worship idols.

After the split, for the next 350 years, there were many kings (and one queen) in Israel (the ten tribes) and Judah (including Simeon, which was surrounded by Judah).

Some were good. Some were good with reservations!

1 Kings 15:11-14, 22:41-42, 46

2 Kings 18:1-7, 23:1-25

Some were bad, and some were very bad.

1 Kings 14:21-24, 16:29-33

2 Kings 10:28-32, 16:2-4

These dates are obviously not exact to the year, but this is an easy way to see 350 years of history in Judah and Israel:

Date	Judah	good	bad	Israel	good	bad
B.C.930	Rehoboam		x	Jeroboam		x
920						
910	Abidjan		x	Nadab		x
900	Asa	*		Baasha		x
890				Elah Zimri		x x
880				Tibni Omri		x x
870	Jehoshaphat	*		Ahab		x
860						
850	Jehoram		x	Ahazariah		x

Note the end of both kingdoms and the exiles to Assyria and Babylon.

B.C. 840	Ahaziah		x	Joram Jehu		x x
830	Qn Athaliah		x			
820						
810	Joash		x	Jehoahaz		x
800						
790	Amaziah	*		Jehoash		x
780	Azar/Uzziah	*		Jeroboam II		x
770						
760				Zechariah		x
750	Jotham	*		Shallum Menahem		- x
740	Ahaz		x	Pekahiah Pekah		x x
730				Hoshea		x
720	Hezekiah	*		721 ISRAEL	INTO	EXILE
710						
700						
690	Manasseh		x			
680						
650						
640	Amon		x			
630	Josiah	*				
620						
610	Jehoahaz Jehoiakim		x x			
600	Jehoiachin		x			
590	Zedekiah		x			
580	586 JUDAH	INTO	EXILE			

The fall of Israel 721 B.C. to Assyria. 2 Kings 17:18-23

The fall of Israel 586 B.C. to Babylonia. 2 Kings 25:1-21, 27-30

These stories of Ahab also involve Elijah who was a major prophet in Jewish thinking, although not a writing prophet like Isaiah.

He spoke God's words to the people and to Ahab.

Teach (or revise if the ladies know the story) through 1 Kings chapters 17, 18 and 19 up to verse 18.

King Ahab and the prophet Elijah - famous stories and typical of what happened under the 'bad' kings

- 1 Kings 16:29-33** Samaria is now the capital of Israel - the ten tribes.
Ahab's wickedness listed.
- 1 Kings 17:1** No introduction. No biography. "Now Elijah...said to Ahab". This typifies Elijah's ministry - he was bold and direct in word and action.
- 1 Kings 17:1** Elijah confronted Ahab and said there will be no rain for the next few years except at God's word.
- verses 2-6 Elijah was protected by God.
- verses 7-9 Elijah saw the lack of water and was sent to Zarephath.
- verses 10-11 He found a widow gathering sticks. He asked for water and bread.
- verse 12 The widow said "no can do".
- verses 13-14 Elijah encouraged her to make him some bread, and then some for herself and her son, because he believed 'God will make sure the flour and oil do not run out while there was no rain'.
- verses 15-16 She proved God right!
- verses 17-18 Her son became ill. Her only hope was dying.
- verses 19-23 Elijah cried out to God for the boy, and he came back to life.
- verse 24 The widow had called Elijah 'a man of God'. Now she knew that as truth.
- 1 Kings 18:1-2** God told Elijah to go and present himself to Ahab.
- verses 2-6 The situation - severe famine, Obadiah the chief steward was a believer, Queen Jezebel was killing the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken and hidden 100 prophets, King Ahab and chief steward Obadiah were searching the land for anywhere there was grass to keep the horses and mules alive.
- verses 7-8 Obadiah and Elijah meet and Elijah told Obadiah to go to Ahab and tell him he had found Elijah.
- verses 9-15 Obadiah was reluctant - saying Ahab had looked everywhere for Elijah - what would happen if the Spirit of the Lord took Elijah away while Obadiah went to the king? Elijah promised to speak with Ahab that day.
- verses 16-18 Who is the troubler of Israel?
- verses 19-20 A challenge is issued to the priests of Baal.
- verse 21 A challenge is issued to the people.
- verses 22-24 What was the challenge?
- verses 25-29 The priests of Baal prepared the sacrifice. They called, they danced, they cut themselves in frenzy, prophesied frantically. There was no fire.
- verses 30-35 Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord there, arranged the wood and the sacrifice. Then what happened? How many times? What was the result?
- verses 36-38 At twilight, the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, reminding the people of their heritage. He

Jump to 2 Kings 2:1-15 to complete the story of Elijah -
we have an ending even though we did not have much beginning!!

Digression - Elijah was important in Jewish thinking and is mentioned several times in the Gospels.

prayed "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

Fire fell and consumed the sacrifice.

verse 39 The people acknowledged God and fell prostrate.

verse 40 Elijah commanded the priests of Baal to be captured and killed.

verses 41-44 Elijah sent Ahab to eat and drink while he and his servant climbed Mount Carmel again. He prayed for the curse to be lifted and dispatched his servant seven times to go and look to the sea. Nothing. Then the last time he saw a cloud as small as a man's hand rising from the sea.

verses 44-46 Elijah's servant told Ahab to go in his chariot while he could. Wind, heavy rain, and Elijah ran ahead of Ahab to Jezreel- about 20 miles! How?

1 Kings 19:1-2 Ahab told Jezebel what had happened and she threatened Elijah.

verses 3-4 Elijah was afraid. He went to Beersheba, left his servant there and went a day's journey into the desert, laid down under a broom tree and wanted to die.

verses 5-9 He slept, was woken by an angel with food and water, went back to sleep, was woken again by the angel and ate and drank. He travelled forty days and forty nights to get to Horeb (Sinai) where he found a cave and sheltered there.

verses 9-13 God came and asked a question. Elijah talked about his zeal, the Israelites wickedness, and said he was the only one left.

verses 13-18 God tells him to stand on the mountain 'in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by'. A powerful wind wreaked havoc, then an earthquake, then a fire, but the Lord was not in any of these events. Then a gentle whisper. Elijah pulled his cloak over his face and went to the mouth of the cave. God asked the same question. Elijah gave the same answer. Then God said for Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Aram, Jehu king over Israel and Elisha as his successor. God also told him he was not the only one verse 18!

2 Kings 2:1-15 Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. (Genesis 5:22-24)

Digression: Malachi 4:5-6 The prophecy that Elijah would come again before the Lord's coming. Matthew 17:9-13 and Luke 1:11-17. Zechariah is told his son, Jesus' cousin, would 'go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah', and Jesus identifies his cousin, John the Baptist, as the promised Elijah Matthew 11:13-14. Matthew 17:1-5 at the Transfiguration, Moses representing the Law and Elijah representing the Prophets both appeared with Jesus.

God restored his defeated prophet. Exhausted and threatened, Elijah hit rock bottom. God fed and watered him, twice; asked him for his appraisal of the situation, twice; assured Elijah of His personal interest in him, and then recommissioned him.

Remind yourself of this story when life's events get on top of you - don't lose sight of God: He has not lost sight of you.

Please read chapter 1 verses 1-2 of most of 'the prophet books' for next time.

Lesson 14 Leader's notes Prophets to the northern kingdom, Israel, Amos, Hosea, Jonah

Teach through page 49 and the top paragraph on page 50.

You may find it useful to ask some questions after the first sentence to see who in the class knows what.

Check that '**priest**' is understood.

You could ask what an Old Testament priest did in relation to God and man.

Do we have to go through a priest now? Some Christian groups use the word 'priests' for their local leaders, but all Christians are priests to God. See Revelation 5:9-10.

Speak carefully here - we are not trying to undermine anyone's church structure!

Teach '**king**'. Check 'king' is understood.

Teach '**prophet**'.

Perhaps ask if someone can give the definitions of 'priest' and 'prophet' -

to God for people and to people from God

Teach '**prophecy**', getting the ladies to compare the Isaiah and Luke references.

Lesson 14 Prophets to the northern kingdom, Israel, Amos, Hosea, Jonah

Jesus is sometimes referred to as our prophet, priest and king.

In the Law delivered by Moses the tribe of Levi were set apart as priests. **They were to be those who spoke to God for the people.** They offered the required sacrifices on behalf of people. They were the authority figures who spoke on health issues - cleanness after a skin condition, enforced the rules on cleanness and uncleanness. Abraham and Moses also acted as priests in their leadership positions.

Jesus represents us to God in taking our sin on Himself so God's righteous wrath is satisfied and we can have a right relationship with God again. Jesus is our great High Priest. Compare to Hebrews 4:14.

A king is a ruler who should care for his people. We have seen that Israel asked for a king and it did not work out too well. **Jesus is our King - to whom we owe allegiance - and who rules carefully over His people.**

A prophet is one who speaks to people on behalf of God. In the Old Testament accounts we come across good prophets and bad prophets. There were those who spoke from God and some people listened while some did not. There were false prophets who pretended to speak from God and some people listened while some did not. **Jesus is an absolutely true prophet of God because He is God - He came from God to speak to us.** See John 10:27.

People with these roles should have stood before God as his servants and stood before men as people of God. Some did. Some did not. Now, after the life and death of Jesus Christ, we, who claim allegiance to Him, must all live before God as his servants, and live before the everyday world as people of God.

Now we need to define 'prophecy'.

Old Testament prophecy involved **forth telling** the message God had given, which may be rebuke, challenge, a call for repentance and/or **foretelling** events or scenarios of the future. This is where we can get the most confused. Have the foretold events happened or are they still future? Have a look at Isaiah 61:1-3. This is one long sentence in Hebrew. Now look at Luke 4:14-21. Jesus stopped part way through the long sentence, because what He read was now being fulfilled, but the rest of the sentence was for a later time. It may help to think of looking into the distance. You can see some hills but from where you are standing you cannot tell if in front of you are hills, hills, hills, or whether there are hills, some open country and more hills. Jesus is God. He knew the right place to stop in the prophecy to say that this part was now fulfilled. It is very easy for us to misinterpret prophecy, and then argue about our interpretations! Don't go down that road. Spend your energy working at living the way God wants with what you know for certain, not deciding what a prophecy means when God has deliberately left it unclear.

Introduce Amos, Hosea and Jonah as a group.

Introduce **Amos**.

Work through the Amos second paragraph references together. Yes, God loves us, but He is much bigger than just where we are!

These are three sample visions from Amos - pictures of personal holiness or not, honesty and care of the poor, and eventual restoration of Israel. Remember they were not in exile yet!! Perhaps one lady could read the first reference and then the group can find the meaning together. Then the second and third pictures.

Maybe a quiet moment is appropriate here.

Introduce **Hosea**.

Go through the references to find what Hosea added to Amos' prophecy.

Last time, we looked at Elijah, the bold, visual prophet. We mentioned his successor, Elisha. Look up 2 Kings 2:15. We think of the prophets as individuals working in isolation, but here we see that there were supportive groups - perhaps groups that kept the written record of prophecies given. See also 2 Kings 4:1-7.

Between 2 Kings 2:19-13:20 Elisha walks with kings and foreign dignitaries, and people like us. The drama of Mount Carmel was for Elijah. The walking with leaders and with ordinary folk was for Elisha.

There were three prophets whose names and writings we have, who listened to God and spoke to the people of Israel, the ten northern tribes, until the fall of Samaria to the Assyrian army and the consequent exile in 721 B.C.

Amos

Amos came from Judah but God sent him to Samaria, the capital of Israel, although Judah and Jerusalem are also mentioned in his prophecies. He may have known Elisha, and he is very likely to have known Hosea. He would have heard about Jonah.

Amos 7:14-15 His job was looking after flocks and sycamore-fig trees. He wrote well and had a wide knowledge of the world.

Amos 9:5-7; 6:14 His God was not just the God of Israel and Judah, but the One who holds in His hands the destiny of all peoples. Amos 1:3; 1:6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:13; 2:1; 2:4; 2:6 He gave God's judgements against Israel's neighbours and against Israel.

Amos shared visions the Lord had given him.

Amos 7:7-9 Amos saw God standing by a wall built true to a plumbline, God said He was going to take a plumb line to His people to see how far from His true way they were living.

Amos 8:1-6 God told Amos that Israel was ripe to be picked for judgement because of their ongoing bad treatment of the poor and their dishonesty. There would be a time of wailing not rejoicing.

Amos 9:11-15 There would be a day when Israel would be restored. The Jews of Jesus' time thought that would happen at the coming of their Messiah. We have not seen it yet, but it will happen in God's time.

If we were able to see the plumbline God holds to our lives, how out of true would my life be? How out of true would your life be?

Hosea

Hosea came from Israel, the northern kingdom, and prophesied there. His ministry just overlapped that of Amos.

In Hosea 7:11; 8:10; 10:6; 11:11 he says that the judgement prophesied by Amos would come from Assyria. We know little about Hosea, except that God asked him to live out a very difficult parable.

Work through the story of Hosea - a very difficult history.

Perhaps another pause for thought.

Introduce **Jonah**.

Teach through Jonah, getting ladies to find references and information as needed.

Hosea 1:2-2:13; 3:1-4:1 Hosea lived out the story with which God challenged Israel.
"Take a wife who is an adulteress", or who will become an adulteress. He did.
They had a son, Jezebel.
Gomer then had a daughter, Lo-Ruhamah. Was Hosea the father? See 2:4,5.
Then Gomer had another son, Lo-Ammi. Was Hosea the father? See 2:4,5.
She is not my wife 2:2 - the marriage was broken by unfaithfulness.
In that culture the husband bought the wife's clothes, 2:7, 10 so she was exposed to shame, as Israel was when God 'found' her in Egypt, in slavery and with nothing.
3:1.2 "Buy back your adulterous wife from the slave market."
They lived under the same roof, 3:3.

Hosea 4:1-13:16 Judgement is coming.
Hosea 14 an appeal for Israel to return to the Lord (verse 1), seek His forgiveness (verse 2), and experience His love (verse 4). Your choice, Israel.

"Hosea, this is how much love you are to show your wife. You will be a laughingstock - but you are demonstrating to Israel how much I have loved, and do love, her." My summary of Hosea's mission from God.

**Walking by faith means we must constantly make the right choices.
We must constantly listen for our Shepherd's voice and follow.**

Jonah

Jonah lived before Amos and Hosea. Amos spoke about judgement from God and used word pictures in his prophecy. Hosea was called to act out a parable and teach from it. God told him what to do and what to say. Jonah was called to **be** the parable.

The dominant world power in Jonah's lifetime was Assyria and their capital city was Nineveh, a great and impressive city. They were always attacking different people groups and trying to gain land, dominance and power, often in very brutal ways.

Over the years people have had problems with the book of Jonah. What was the big fish? How do we know what Jonah said in the fish? Who was Jonah? Did he really live? If we believe that God is the sovereign ruler of the universe, including people, then these are no problem to us. God organised. God preserved His prophet. Jonah wrote his story and God preserved it for us so we could learn from it. Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. The evils of Nineveh are mentioned in Nahum 1:11, 2:1,13, 3:1, 4 and 16. Jesus referred to Jonah in Matthew 12:39-41.

The Lord said to Jonah "Go to Nineveh".
Jonah said "No." See Jonah 4:2. He could not cope with the idea of God being concerned about the people of Nineveh. They were his enemies. He wanted to see them defeated, not saved!
Do you feel like that about some people, tribes, races? Is that right?

Another pause for thought.

'That great city' for your ladies (and you!) could be a person they had never thought to pray for, a situation, a family they could show concern for. Jonah's 'that great city' was an outrageous idea to his thinking.

God loves every person he has made.

Jonah hurried off in the opposite direction.

The Lord sent a great wind. It was bad enough to terrify experienced sailors. They discovered, and Jonah told them, that he was the cause of their problem. Even so, the sailors did not like the idea of throwing anyone overboard. Finally, they did. Then there was a great calm, and the sailors acknowledged God. God had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. (This gave the sailors a good story to tell when they got home.)

In the fish, reality struck. Jonah acknowledged that God was everywhere, that He had preserved Jonah's life. He expressed hope, thanksgiving, obedience and knowledge that salvation came from God. The climax comes at the end of 2:10 - the central pivot of the story and the centre of truth and understanding.

The Lord commanded the fish and it spat Jonah on to dry land.

The Lord told Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh.

No detail is given of where he was and how he got to Nineveh. But this time he went.

Jonah obeyed, and preached "Forty days and forty nights and Nineveh will be overturned" from the first day he got there. The Ninevites believed God, declared a fast and dressed in sackcloth and ashes as a sign of humble repentance. We do not know how deep their belief was, but they took Jonah's message seriously and acted.

God saw the change in the Ninevites, and did not bring about the calamity He had threatened.

Jonah was very annoyed. His project had been successful but it was not the outcome he wanted. He said that God was gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, relenting from sending calamity. He had the words but they had not got through in his thinking. If God was all these wonderful words, then He was a forgiving God - willing to forgive the wicked, nasty Ninevites! We can be like Jonah at times. We may want God to work in the lives of those we love and pray earnestly for, our children or our parents, but do we want Him to bless and reach out to the President? the members of the government? the other tribes we live beside? the man who is always drunk? the woman who has turned to prostitution or selling marriage? the shop keeper who will not help us any more when we have no money? people of another faith?

God challenged Jonah "Do you have any right to be angry?" He says the same to us.

Jonah made a shelter. God made it better for him. God provided a worm. God provided an east wind. Some of these were not provisions Jonah appreciated.

God longed that Jonah would want what He wanted. We are often grateful for what God has done for us, but we do not think it through. He did those things because He loves us. He wants us to love other people - not just the easy ones!

**Jonah 4:11 God speaking "Should I not be concerned about that great city?"
What 'great city' is God asking you to be concerned about?**

For next time have a look through the long book of Isaiah and read chapters 1-12.

Lesson 15 Leader's notes Prophets to the southern kingdom, Judah - Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Joel, Habakkuk

This course is an overview of the Bible. So we have to cover a lot of ground each lesson. We see how the Old Testament fits together, rather than studying the detail of one writer. Today we are glimpsing eight Old Testament prophets. How I wish we could look in more detail, but that is not for this course.

When teaching this I wrote the eight names of the prophets in today's lesson on a large piece of card and put it up. I said "you probably don't think we can make it through eight prophets today. Well we'll see". After the first two I said "Two done, six to go" and smiled. We got there!

Habakkuk needs the most involvement so make sure you have time on your side when you get to the bottom of page 55 !!

Teach the first four paragraphs.

Let half the class find the **Isaiah** references one at a time, while the other half find the **Micah** references.

Work through the bottom paragraph altogether noting

- the similarities in the Isaiah/Micah pairs.
- Isaiah's dramatic call. We are all called to live for God as the expression of our Christian faith. Some have very dramatic calls. Many do not.
- and the picture of God's people. God said he looked for justice and righteousness.

Lesson 15 Prophets to the southern kingdom, Judah - Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Joel, Habakkuk

Despite the messages from God through Jonah, Amos and Hosea, God's people did not listen and in 733 B.C. parts of Israel were captured by the Assyrians. Then in 721 the rest of Israel was captured and its people exiled. Hosea probably went to Judah at that time.

Isaiah and Micah lived in Judah about this time as well. Isaiah was the grandson of King Joash, was brought up at the king's court and spoke with various kings throughout his life. Micah lived about twenty miles south of Jerusalem, on the Philistine border. He spoke to the common people, but they were both concerned about moral attitudes and empty religious observances in the life of God's people.

The book of Isaiah has been called a mini-Bible because it has 66 chapters as the Bible has 66 books. There is a break between chapters 39 and 40, as there are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Chapter 1 talks about sin as does *Genesis* 3. Isaiah chapters 34-35 talk about the coming of the King of Righteousness and the redemption of Israel, as do the prophets at the end of the Old Testament. Chapter 40 talks about the voice crying in the wilderness and three of the four Gospels talk about John the Baptist in their early chapters, before leading into the person and work of Christ. Isaiah ends with a vision of the new heavens and new earth, as does the book of Revelation.

Some writers have believed that the book of Isaiah was the work of two men, not one. But it is not a problem for us. It is more than likely that chapters 1-39 were written early in Isaiah's ministry and chapters 40-66 were written later when there were different circumstances and needs. Those who have studied these things much more than I have, say that the phrase "the Holy One of Israel" as a title for God occurs 12 times in chapters 1-39 and 14 times in chapters 40-66. That phrase only occurs six times in the rest of the Old Testament. So it was a title favoured by Isaiah in all of his prophecies. Compare Isaiah 6:3 and 5:16. How holy is God in your understanding?

I hope you enjoyed reading the first 12 chapters of Isaiah in your homework. In reading them we get a feel for the whole book, for the contents of the whole book, and can see similarities between Isaiah and Micah in their prophecies given to different audiences.

Isaiah 1:2-4, 12-15	Micah 1:3-7, 2:1	a sinful nation, woes and judgement
Isaiah 1:16-17	Micah 6:8	the moral behaviour God is looking for
Isaiah 4:2-6	Micah 4:1-5	'last days' - Israel's eventual redemption
Isaiah 6:1-8		Isaiah's call
Isaiah 5:1-7		vineyard - a picture and interpretation

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 is sometimes called the suffering and the glory of the Servant (our Lord Jesus Christ). The detail in the prophecy is amazing when compared to the crucifixion accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But we should not be amazed because Isaiah was only the channel of the prophecy. The author was God.

On to **Zephaniah**. Teach paragraph two and work through paragraph three together, asking several ladies to read one group of verses and then another group of ladies to read the second group of verses.

Perhaps tell the ladies "Keep your finger in Zephaniah or put a bookmark in your Bible, then it will be easier to find the other little books.

Introduce **Nahum** and **Jeremiah**.

Teach through the Nahum paragraph - Nahum is two books before Zephaniah which you have marked! Check the references as a class together.

Teach to the bottom of the page, using the references yourself.

In chapters 39-66 of Isaiah God shares with us glimpses of the future. Right in the centre of those chapters, in Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 we have a prophecy of the ministry of the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many of the other prophecies still belong to the future but Isaiah 53 has been fulfilled. Hallelujah!

Zephaniah was the next of the prophets we know about. He was a great, great, grandson of King Hezekiah, and was very aware of current political issues. He probably knew of the writings of Amos, Isaiah and Micah. He may have known a young Jeremiah.

Zephaniah prophesied judgement and destruction, Zephaniah 1:2-3,14-18; 2:1,8-9,12-13, and the coming of the day of the Lord, Zephaniah 3:8-10, 12-13, 16-17, 19-20. We know the judgement and destruction happened, but we are still waiting for the day of the Lord.

Nahum and Jeremiah's ministries overlapped, in that order.

Obadiah probably overlapped with Jeremiah as well, but some people think he lived earlier. If you compare Obadiah verses 1-9 with Jeremiah 49:7-22 it seems as though one used the other's material, or they both used a common source.

Nahum spoke of the destruction of Nineveh, using the capital city to represent the whole Assyrian Empire. Remember that Jonah had been sent to Nineveh, and second time around he went, still rather unwillingly, to preach judgement unless they repented. They repented, much to Jonah's annoyance. Perhaps 150 years later, after the Assyrians had overrun Israel and exiled its population, Nahum again prophesies the fall of Assyria. The response of the Ninevites to Jonah's message did not have a lasting effect, Nahum 1:11-14, 3:18-19. Nineveh was destroyed just before 600B.C. by the Medes and Babylonians, and records from the time talk about the fulfillment of Nahum 2:6 and 3:15. 270 years later another conqueror fought a battle near the site and did not know that Nineveh had ever been there. Nahum 3:7,18-19.

Jeremiah is another major prophet, with a book of 52 chapters. He was a priest, and God called him while he was quite young, to be a prophet, Jeremiah 1:4-6. God told him not to marry, Jeremiah 16:1-2. He was not a public speaker. He was a quiet person who liked the simple life in the country. He had very hard messages to deliver. At times he was very open and honest about his feelings, Jeremiah 15:10. He suffered death threats. He landed up in a dungeon, with his secretary, Baruch, at his side, so the rulers did not have to listen to his messages. The prophecies and events of the book of Jeremiah are not in chronological order. Jeremiah's faithful secretary, Baruch, who wrote down the prophecies, eventually went with Jeremiah and a remnant of the people, into Egypt when most of the people had been deported to Babylon. He probably died there.

Get the ladies to look at Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:8-12.
Another split fulfillment.

Five prophet books done - three to go!

On to **Obadiah**, five books before Zephaniah (if your bookmark is still in place there).

Just two more prophets for today!

Joel

Habakkuk. Work through the questions at the bottom of page 55 and come up with answers for the five sections.

Then go on to page 56 and see if you agree with my summaries.

Jeremiah was given the job by God of telling people that the kingdom of Judah would be destroyed, that evil would be rewarded with judgement. This message was interspersed with pictures, with judgements against other nations and with one highlight in Jeremiah chapters 31-33, the new covenant and restoration of Israel. Chapter 31:31-34 is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12. The first covenant was sealed with the blood of animals. The new covenant prophesied here by God through Jeremiah was sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ. We know that happened - hallelujah! - but the restoration of Israel is yet future.

Obadiah.

The book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, just 21 verses in one chapter. Verses 1-14 are about the judgement on Edom for their pride and rebellion, and verses 15-21 are about the 'day of the Lord' - deliverance for Zion and the Lord's kingdom established.

Edom was where Esau lived, the elder brother who sold his birthright and was disinherited. Jacob and Esau did become reconciled later. Edom was the country that would not let the Israelites go through on their way from Sinai to the Promised Land. The Edomites often attacked Israel from their strongholds in the mountains.

Five years after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. the Babylonians crushed the Edomites on their way down the military road to Egypt. Some people made their way into what was later called southern Judea and were known as Idumeans. King Herod, visited by the Wise Men, was an Idumean, put in power by Rome. Edom as a nation died out.

Joel

No-one is sure who Joel was or when he prophesied. He talks of a locust horde devastating Judah before 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord' Joel 2:31. He knew that there needed to be repentance before there could be spiritual revival. Joel 2:28-29 was quoted by Peter as having been fulfilled at Pentecost, Acts 2:17-21.

Habakkuk

Habakkuk lived at the same time as Jeremiah, but his writings are very different because they are a record of his conversation with God about evil, intended to help godly people understand what was happening in their world. It is of great relevance to us today.

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1:2-4 | What is actually being said in the first complaint? |
| 1:5-11 | What is actually being said in God's first response? |
| 1:12-2:1 | What is actually being said in the second complaint? |
| 2:2-20 | What is actually being said in God's second response? |
| 3:1-19 | Habakkuk's prayer or response. |

Rewrite Habakkuk 3:17-19 for **your** life today. Not from the position you would like to be in, but from the situation you **are** in. That was the reality Habakkuk came to.
Can you believe what you have written?
If you cannot believe it, it is very unlikely your ladies will do so!
Verse 19 says "The Sovereign Lord" - HE makes all the difference.

Our first complaint

Why? Lord Why? Why all the evil?

Why is our country going from bad to worse?

Even the justice system is suspect, and those who live for you are fewer and fewer.

God's reply

I am doing something amazing in your day - something you will find hard to believe. In your eyes things will get worse. Those in charge will believe in their own ability, the strength of their minds.

Our second complaint

Oh eternal God, we are your people, we are not perfect, but the other people who believe something else are worse than us. Is it right for You who cannot look on evil to allow the goodies to be overrun by the baddies. You are setting us up to be made a laughing stock, and for the others to be affirmed in their own beliefs. Come on, God - I need some answers.

God's reply

What I have said will happen. There will be no delay in My timing.

But, woe to thieves and those who gain from extortion - they will become victims
woe to those who build great structures by plundering other people - they will be shamed
woe to those who build their country on crime and bloodshed because the time will come when 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea'
woe to those involved in pornography and sexual exploitation, abuse of alcohol, cruelty to animals, abuse of the environment, slaughter of whole populations - disgrace will come to you
woe to those who believe in the power of idols which have no life or breath - they are silent, **but God IS** - He is the One with the power.

Habakkuk's response

I have heard all about you, Lord. I am filled with awe by your amazing works.

I wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike the people who invade us.

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails and the fields lie empty and barren;

even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty,

yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation.

The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

Rewrite Habakkuk3:17-19 for your life today - can you believe that?

Please read Ezekiel 1:1-3, Daniel 1:1-6, Esther 1:1-22 for next time.

Lesson 16 Leader's notes Daniel, Ezekiel and Esther

This timeline of dates will help some ladies to understand the sequence of events. Some ladies will find it confusing. Encourage as necessary! If you are not used to thinking with figures in reverse order, then Before Christ/BC figures **are** confusing because they go backwards.

Talk through the list opposite. In the history we have seen so far, we have noted the exile of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria. Habakkuk 1:6 talks of the rise of the Babylonian Empire, therefore before the events of 607 and 605, but followed by the downfall of Jerusalem and three deportations to Babylon in 605BC, 597BC and 586BC.

As a vassal state Judah had to pay tribute money. It therefore paid Nebuchadnezzar to leave some people there who would provide income. Nebuchadnezzar liked to use the best people in his conquered territories to introduce fresh ideas and strengths into his authority structure.

Let the ladies scan as a class for any names they recognise in the timeline - Daniel? Ezekiel? Nebuchadnezzar? Esther? Ezra? Nehemiah?

Now we move on.....

Work through Daniel together

Classical Babylonian literature was written in a complicated script, but normal communications in multiracial Babylon were in Aramaic, which was written in an easily learned alphabetic script. Aramaic, albeit in a later version, was the language Jesus would usually have spoken.

Lesson 16 Daniel, Ezekiel and Esther

- 721 B.C. The northern kingdom finally fell to Assyria and most people were taken into exile there.
- 607 After 300 years in power Assyria was defeated by Babylon.
- 605 Egypt was crushed by Babylon at the Battle of Carchemish. Babylon had become the master of the world. Judah had been a vassal state of Egypt, and then became a vassal state of Babylon. The Temple was looted. A group of young potential leaders were taken to Babylon, including Daniel.
- 597 Ten thousand religious leaders and royal family members were deported from Judah to Babylon, including Ezekiel. See 2 Chronicles 36:6-7; 2 Kings 24:14-16; Daniel 1:1-3. Ezekiel begins preaching in 593.
- 586 Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed much of Jerusalem and there was the final deportation of people from Judah to Babylon, although a remnant went to Egypt. See Jeremiah 39:11-12; 40:1-6.
- 562 Nebuchadnezzar died. There was a struggle over the succession. Belshazzar took over in 553 B.C.
- 539 Cyrus of Persia took over Babylonia. Darius the Mede in Daniel 5:31 may have been Cyrus' name in Babylon or may have been the name of Cyrus' governor in Babylon. He is not the same person as Darius I - see three lines down here.
- 538 The first return to Jerusalem was authorised by Cyrus. Judah had become a Persian province.
- 521 Darius I came to the throne
- 516 The Temple was completed - great celebration
- 486 Xerxes I came to the throne
- 480 Esther became Queen of Persia in the reign of Xerxes.
- 464 Artaxerxes I reign begins.
- 458 Ezra sent to Judah by Artaxerxes.
- 445 Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem with Artaxerxes' approval. Jerusalem's walls rebuilt.
- 424 Xerxes II
- 423 Darius II

We are going to look at three people who lived in or around Babylon, but neither they nor their family came from there, but from Judah.

Daniel arrived in Babylon in 605 as a young man of about 16 years, with a group of specially chosen young men - specially chosen for their strength, health, good looks, knowledge, good sense and ability to cope - to be specially trained in Babylonian culture and language - to be specially fed on the finest food and wine from the king's kitchens - for three years, with the possibility of becoming advisers in the royal court, Daniel 1:1-5. The four we read about are all from the tribe of Judah. So we have four young men, uprooted from their culture and families; given Babylonian names; looking towards Babylonian education, major tests to see if they were good enough for what the king wanted; facing another alternative if not.

The book of Daniel is not in chronological order as you can see from the chart. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was the first ruler in Daniel 1-4, followed by Belshazzar in Daniel 7, 8 and 5, see verse one in each of these three chapters. The Babylonian Empire ends and the Medo Persians take over in Daniel 6, 9-12. We are not looking at some of the famous stories, but they are mentioned in the chart - see if the ladies can find them - chapter 3, chapter 5, chapter 6.

Daniel was totally convinced that the Lord is sovereign.

On to Ezekiel.

Daniel 1:6-14. In this situation these young men, led by Daniel, decided not to eat the rich food, some of which would have been forbidden by their own religious food laws. Daniel talked carefully and reasonably with the man whom the king had appointed to look after them, winning his approval for a ten-day test.

Daniel 1:15-16 They passed the food test.

Daniel 1:17-20 They passed the three-year test.

Daniel 1:9,17 God gave Daniel respect from the man in charge, all four of them the ability to learn well, and for Daniel, the ability to understand visions and dreams. (Does he remind you of Joseph?)

Daniel 1:21 Daniel was still a court adviser aged about 82.

Ezekiel mentions Daniel as righteous, Ezekiel 14:14, and wise in Ezekiel 28:3.

The book of Daniel has history and dreams. It has inspired people and caused many, many books to be written about the interpretations of the visions. It covers the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar of Babylonia, and Darius and Cyrus of the Medo/Persian Empire.

Babylon		Medo/Persia
Nebuchadnezzar chapter 1 deportation and new lifestyle	Belshazzar chapter 7 Daniel's dream of four beasts	Cyrus/Darius chapter 6 den of lions
chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar's dream - statue of four metals	chapter 8 Daniel's dream of a ram and a goat	chapter 9 Daniel's prayer and meeting with Gabriel
chapter 3 - gold image and fiery furnace	chapter 5 the writing on the wall	
chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar's 2nd dream and madness	Babylonian Empire ends	chapters 10, 11, 12 vision dream

The key phrase for understanding Daniel is that 'the Lord is sovereign'.

Meanwhile **Ezekiel** arrived in Babylonia in 597 part of a major deportation from Judah. Daniel was already an adviser at court by this time.

Ezekiel 1:3 Ezekiel was from a priestly family.

Ezekiel 24:15-18 he was happily married.

Ezekiel 3:24; 8:1 he lived in a house of his own, about 50 miles from Babylon.

Ezekiel 1:1-3 God called him to be prophet while he was working with other exiles, digging a shipping canal, the River Kebar, five years after they had arrived in Babylonia.

Work through the section together, eliciting the information from the ladies as they find the references, if you have the time.

**Key ideas for understanding Ezekiel are 'God's holy name' and the restoration of believing Israel so that the world will know 'that I am the Lord'.
Ezekiel 36:16-38**

On to **Esther**.

Cush can be "the upper Nile region", "Ethiopia", "both sides of the Red Sea", or "part of the Arabian Peninsula". It can also be spelled **Kush**. Translators make their choices.

After his call Ezekiel was unable to speak except with direct words from the Lord, Ezekiel 3:26.

He was meticulous in recording the dates events happened. Here they are translated into dates we can understand.

Ezekiel 1:3 God called him to be prophet in 593 B.C.

From 593 - 588 B.C. Ezekiel preached about God's judgement on Jerusalem - chapters 1-23.

The only hope he gave the people from God was for the exiles to live at peace with themselves and with God during their exile.

Ezekiel 24:1-14 In January 588 B.C. God told Ezekiel that the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's forces had started, a siege which would end with the fall and destruction of the exiles' holy city.

Ezekiel 24:15-19 In 588 B.C. God told Ezekiel that his wife, 'the delight of your eyes' would die. He was not to shed any tears, not to do the usual mourning rituals.

He was to act out at the death of his wife the way the exiles were to behave over the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel 24:20-24. They were not to mourn openly.

Ezekiel 24:25-26 The first exiles arriving after the destruction in 586 B.C. would verify what Ezekiel had said.

Ezekiel 25-32 God, through Ezekiel, pronounced a series of judgements on seven nations April 587 - April 585 B.C.

January 585 B.C. The first fugitives from Judah arrived, Ezekiel 33:21-22, and Ezekiel was able to speak normally again.

Ezekiel 33-48 are pictures of encouragement for Israel.

Ezekiel acted out many of his messages, and drew bold pictures verbally and in his actions.

Key ideas for understanding Ezekiel are 'God's holy name' and the restoration of believing Israel so that the world will 'know that I am the Lord'.

Ezekiel 36:16-38.

Esther became Queen to Xerxes in 480 B.C. after the deaths of both Daniel and Ezekiel, and 58 years after the first Jews went back to Jerusalem, sent by Cyrus.

Just a note of interest - Esther 1:1 Xerxes ruled over Cush.

'Let's have a celebration' could be the subtitle for the book of Esther.

Business and politics at the Persian court often involved large, grand feasts.

The validity of the book of Esther has been questioned because *God* is not mentioned in it. But *God's* actions can be seen throughout the book!!

Work through the story together.

Esther 1 Xerxes and his nobles spent six months planning a military campaign against the upcoming Empire of Greece. This was followed by the feast of 1:5. No expense was spared 1:5-7. Xerxes was a considerate host 1:8. His queen, Vashti, was giving a banquet for the ladies. On the seventh day of his feast, Xerxes sent his seven eunuchs to bring Queen Vashti, wearing her crown, for Xerxes to show off her beauty. She refused (which was not done in that culture!). He was furious.

1:13-22 A quarrel between a king and a queen became the talk of the town!

Three examples to follow - Daniel, Ezekiel, Esther - all exiles - all in a land that did not feel comfortable to them. All stood firm for *God*.

Esther 1 Queen Vashti refuses to show herself off at a feast and causes a gender storm in the citadel at Susa.

Esther 2 A lonely king, Xerxes, is talked into having a beauty contest to find a new wife. Esther, a beautiful young woman, a Jewess who had been raised by her uncle Mordecai, wins. Another feast. Mordecai uncovers a plot to kill the king.

Esther 3 An important official threatens the Jews in Persia, but verse 15 the local people were bewildered that the Jews should be threatened.

Esther 4 Mordecai persuades Esther to get involved. v14 "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Her reply is "And if I perish, I perish."

Esther 5 She goes to the king and is allowed in. She invites the king and the important official, Haman, to a feast the next day. Offer accepted. They attend and are invited to another feast given by Esther the next day. Haman is furious with Mordecai and builds gallows to hang his enemy.

Esther 6 Sleepless night for the king and he sends for the history of his reign to read. He reads of Mordecai and the plot to kill the king. Xerxes asks how Mordecai was rewarded. He was not rewarded. Haman is asked how the king should reward someone he wishes to honour. He thinks that the king is thinking of him! But no!

Esther 7 After the second feast Esther appeals for her life and those of her people. Haman is hanged on the gallows he built to hang Mordecai.

Esther 8 Mordecai becomes the chief official to Xerxes. Esther pleads for her people and Mordecai words another edict to go to every corner of the Empire revoking Haman's edict against the Jews. It is dispatched quickly in every script and language of the Empire.

Esther 9 Many influential people went out of their way to be helpful to the Jewish community. The feast of Purim is established to remember these events in Susa and the whole Persian Empire.

**Three people. All exiles. In a land that did not feel like home.
Being what God wanted them to be.**

Stay true to YOUR beliefs wherever YOU find yourself.

Esther 4:16 "If I perish, I perish."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, "Our God is able to save us from it (the fiery furnace). But even if he does not want to, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3:17.

Don't set out to antagonise those who disagree with your beliefs - rather be courteous and wise:

Like Daniel with the man in charge of training him, Daniel 1:8-14

Like Esther dressing in her royal robes to go to the court, Esther 5:1-3

Remember that God is sovereign - Daniel; and God is holy - Ezekiel.

Please read Ezra 1:1-4; 2:68-3:13; 4:5, 7:8-10; for next time.

Lesson 17 Leader's notes Going back to Jerusalem Ezra, Haggai and Zechariah

This lesson does not give the students the right answers unless they write them in for themselves, as you will have to do too! I hope by now they are used to sorting information.

Work through sections 1-7 checking the information in the Bible references.

Lesson 17 Going back to Jerusalem Ezra, Haggai and Zechariah

God had told of Judah's captivity in Babylon more than 100 years before it happened, Isaiah 39:6; Micah 4:10. Jeremiah foretold that it would last for 70 years, Jeremiah 25:11-12. Have you remembered that in talking to Abraham God had told him that his descendants would go to Egypt, and then be enslaved? Genesis 15:13-14

We saw that come true in Genesis and Exodus. Now we also see Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah's prophecies coming true.

1. What was the situation for the people of Judah in Babylon?

2 Chronicles 36:20, they worked for the government.

Ezekiel (last lesson 16) - digging canal, own house, relatively free.

2. What was the situation in Jerusalem?

2 Chronicles 36:17-19, treasures from the Temple, and the king, taken away to Babylon.

The Temple was burned and the walls of Jerusalem broken down.

2 Chronicles 36:21 the land regained productiveness, liking its many Sabbath rests.

Compare with Leviticus 26:40-45.

3. What were the terms of the people returning? See Jeremiah 25:11.

Ezra 1:1-4 'God has asked me, Cyrus, to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any Jews living here can go to accomplish this, and those around them, Jews or people from other backgrounds, shall provide them with silver and gold, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.'

4. Who went?

Ezra 2:1-2, 3, 21, 36, 40, 41, 42, 43, 55, 58, plus servants (men and women). The numbers do not reconcile easily - perhaps some wives and children are not listed - perhaps the specific numbers are those who belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, not counting those from other tribes.

So, not quite 50,000 people trekked 900 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem with camels, horses, mules and donkeys.

5. Cyrus' edict was issued in 538 B.C. See 2 Chronicles 36:22-23.

6. How did the returnees get on?

They arrived in Jerusalem in 537 B.C.

Ezra 2:68-69 Families gave to the funds needed for the rebuilding.

Ezra 2:70 Everyone settled in the places their family had come from before the exile.

Ezra 3:1-6 Three months later they all met in Jerusalem and rebuilt the altar of the God of Israel, under the leadership of Joshua the priest, and Zerubbabel the civic leader.

Introduce **Haggai** and work through sections 8 - 12 together as a class, checking the references as you go.

The prophecy of **Zechariah 2:1-9** also says

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a little while I will shake all nations, and the desired of nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'The glory of the present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty." Probably a prophecy of the peace we have through the death of Jesus in Jerusalem, and also a prophecy for the last days of the reign of Christ (the desired of nations) and peace throughout the world. This is another glimpse into the future and far future from where they were standing.

Ezra 3:7 They started to organise for the rebuilding of the Temple.

Ezra 3:8-9 Early in 536 B.C. the men supervised by the priests and Levites started laying the foundations of the Temple.

Ezra 3:10-11 There was great praise to God when the foundations were completed.

Ezra 3:12-13 Mixed emotions in much noise.

7. Opposition.

Ezra 4:1-2 Local enemies came, offering to help. They were people the Assyrians had brought into the area, after Israel had been exiled to Assyria. They had their own gods but, like Cyrus, believed in worshipping any god of the area. They did not realise how big our God is - He is not for one area alone, He is supreme in all the world.

Ezra 4:3 Zerubbabel and Joshua said 'No help needed - this is our job.'

8. Haggai - prophecy 1. Haggai was an older man and probably saw the destruction of Jerusalem before being taken off into exile.

Haggai 1:1-11 520 B.C. God's message comes to the Jews in Jerusalem.

Verses 7-8.'Think carefully - build the house so that I (God) may be honoured'.

Haggai 1:12-14 The people feared God. They were reassured of His presence with them. They started working on the Temple again.

9. Haggai - prophecy 2.

Haggai 2:1-9 Two months later. God's message through Haggai is to Zerubbabel and Joshua, telling them not to be discouraged thinking that this Temple was not as grand as that of Solomon. 'Be strong.....and work. For I am with you.' Verse 4.

10. Zechariah's ministry started within weeks of Haggai's second message. He told the people that God was angry with their forefathers for not obeying. The people repented saying 'The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve.' Zechariah 1:1-6.

11. Haggai - prophecy 3.

A few weeks later Haggai spoke from God again, Haggai 2:10-19.

Being defiled is easier than being holy. Being at the site of the Temple did not make the people holy. They had to obey in life; get on and build the Temple.

There had been poor harvests since their return from Babylon. Obedience would bring God's blessing.

12. Haggai - prophecy 4. Same day.

This was given to the governor of Judah saying that God is in control of all time and all Empires. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, will be the guarantee that Messiah will come, descended from David.

Work through sections 13 - 17.

Teach 13 by getting the ladies to find what Zechariah says about the coming Messiah.

Work as a class.

Teach 14 and 15.

For 16 and 17 get the ladies in pairs, to look up the references and answer the questions.

13. Ezra 5 Following Haggai's and Zechariah's early ministry, Zerubbabel and Joshua set to work rebuilding the Temple. Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates wrote to Darius in 519 B.C. asking him to search the archives and check if King Cyrus had in fact issued a decree for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Ezra 6 Yes, he had! Darius instructed governor Tattenai not to interfere with the rebuilding but to provide money, provisions, animals for sacrifice, on penalty of death for not doing so. The governor complied. The Jews worked. The Temple was completed in March 516 B.C. - 70 years after its destruction. The people celebrated the dedication of the Temple, organised the priests and Levites, and in April celebrated the Passover. Zechariah's ministry had continued through the rebuilding. He talked about the coming Messiah - 6:12-13; 9:10-14; 11:12-13; 13:7; 14:4. He also talked about events to come 12:1-3,9; 13:1-2; 14:3; 14:16-19; 14:20-21. The prophecies of Zechariah in chapters 9-14 were given well after the completion of the Temple.

14. Ezra 4:4-5, 24 Sustained, determined efforts to discourage the Jews in their God-given project through the reigns of Cyrus and Darius. Opposition is nothing new!

15. Ezra 4:6 486 B.C. When Xerxes came to the throne - 51 years after the people got back to Jerusalem! 30 years after the Temple was rededicated the walls of Jerusalem were still in ruins.

Ezra 4:7 465 B.C. When Artaxerxes came to the throne - 73 years after they got back to Judah, the walls of Jerusalem were still in ruins. The Jews have given up because of threats and discouragement.

Ezra 4:7-23 Spying is not a new profession. It is old. Every king, emperor, conqueror has had people who are his 'eyes' and 'ears' and report back to him what is happening far from the centre of the Empire. Work stopped again.

16. Ezra 7 Now we meet Ezra. Again these chapters are not in strict chronological order, but there is plenty of information to dig out! Are you ready?

Ezra 7:11-12 Who was Ezra?

Ezra 7:11-12 Who wrote this decree?

Ezra 7:13-14 Who can go? why are they going?

Ezra 7:15-20 What can the gifts (from?) be used for?

Ezra 7:21-24 What did the king's local treasurers have to do and not do?

Ezra 7:25 Everyone who lived there had to have knowledge of Jewish laws.

Ezra 7:26 Punishments?

Ezra 7:27-28 Ezra's summary and action.

So Ezra was being sent to Jerusalem, with provisions, to re-establish the worship of his God.

Work through the references in section 18.

The children went with their mothers when the marriages were dissolved. In *Genesis 21:14* Ishmael went with Hagar. In Babylonia, the community these people were leaving and thus had knowledge of, divorced women kept their children and had to wait for them to grow up before they could remarry. This was according to the Code of Hammurabi, the local civic law.

Basic rule: Don't get involved with people and groups who do not want to go God's way.

We need to clarify the marriage issue here in case it is a problem to someone in the class. A Christian should only marry a Christian. *2 Corinthians 6:14*. The verse also applies to business relationships. If someone becomes a Christian after marriage and the partner does not, then the believer has a responsibility to stay. *1 Corinthians 7:13-16*.

On a broader front, *2 Corinthians 6:14* says "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers". Think of two animals yoked together to pull a plough. They have to go in the same direction because they are yoked together. They have to go at the same pace. We are not to put ourselves in a situation where we are yoked to doing the same as someone else if he/she does not have the same beliefs as us. That does not mean we cannot have non-Christian friends or non-Christian contacts. We have to be involved with people to be able to share Jesus with them, but not in a yoke situation like a marriage or business partnerships.

17. How did he go about it?

Ezra 8:15

Ezra 8:16-20

Ezra 8:21-23

Ezra 8:24-30

Ezra 8:31-32

Ezra 8:33-36

18. An unexpected problem

Ezra 9:1-4

Ezra 9:5-15

Ezra 10:1-6

Ezra 10:7-8

Ezra 10:9-15

Ezra 10:16-17, 44

Ezra had taken those Jews who wanted to go, back to Jerusalem. Not all the Jewish people went back. Some were quite satisfied with the lives they had in Persia. With the authority of Artaxerxes, Ezra taught the laws of God and helped the people to sort out their mixed marriages.

Now what does the issue of Ezra 10:17 - mixed marriages - mean for us?

Deuteronomy 7:1-9 This is at the end of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness before they took the Promised Land. They were told to destroy completely the peoples they drove out. Why? Because the religious practices of these people would lead Israel astray. They did not do this completely, and were plagued with problems from not keeping their beliefs pure, as we have seen. It was their own fault.

Israel was called to be a "people holy to the Lord your God", Deuteronomy 7:6.

In 1 Peter 2:9 God, through Peter, says that Christians are "a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light".

Ezekiel 36:36 "then the nations will know that I am the Lord, **when I show myself holy through you** before their eyes". (My emphasis).

Basic rule: Don't get involved with people and groups who do not want to go God's way.

However: you may need to work alongside them, but live Jesus' way in front of them.

Or: you may have the opportunity to talk with them about God and Jesus, so learn to keep close to God in the situation.

For next time please look at Nehemiah 2:11-20; 3:1-5, 28-32; 8:9-12; 9:5-12 and Malachi 3:6-18.

Lesson 18 Leader's notes Nehemiah and Malachi

Ask the ladies to name the four people associated with Babylon who we have looked at in the last two sessions. (Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Ezra). And the three prophets. (Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra again). Ezekiel and Daniel were also prophets. The revision in the first paragraph (page 65) will be useful as there is a lot to understand and remember.

Introduce **Nehemiah** and work through the story to the first paragraph of page 66. Give the reference and ask the question to elicit the information for the four questions.

1:1,11; 2:1 The ancient royal cities of the Persian empire were Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana and the newly built Persepolis, (see Ezra 6:1,2; Nehemiah 1:1). Persepolis was built in the reigns of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes.

Lesson 18 Nehemiah and Malachi

Two lessons ago we looked at three people who lived in Babylon, were Jews, and in their own spheres influenced the mighty Babylon.

Ezekiel encouraged the exiles to live to demonstrate God where they were, to show the holiness of God which would eventually be seen by all people.

Daniel lived faithfully for God and was an advisor of King Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar. Then he continued under the Persians, Darius and Cyrus. He firmly believed in and spoke of the total sovereignty of God.

Esther lived later, under Xerxes, when the Jews through Esther and Mordecai were well respected.

Last time we looked at the time of **Ezra**. He was sent back to Jerusalem in the Persian province of Judah by Artaxerxes, living there and teaching the laws of God.

Artaxerxes would have known Esther - she was probably his step-mother and still alive in 446 B.C. - and he obviously respected the Jewish people.

Now today we meet **Nehemiah and Malachi**. Nehemiah had a job in the citadel of Susa. He was cupbearer to the king. A cupbearer chose the king's wine, and tasted it. The king had a relationship of trust with his cupbearer. His life depended on it.

Nehemiah had brothers in Jerusalem. His brother Hanani arrived from Judah and Nehemiah quizzed him about the situation there.

1. **What was the situation in Jerusalem?** Nehemiah 1:3 We know that the Temple had been rebuilt and dedicated in 516 B.C. In 446 B.C. Nehemiah's brother reported that the returned exiles were "in great trouble and disgrace" with walls and gates of Jerusalem still not repaired.
2. **What was Nehemiah's reaction?** Nehemiah 1:4 He sat down. He wept. He fasted. He prayed. He stopped and thought. What he had heard made him sad for his people and broken because of the state of God's city. He went without food to clarify his prayers in his own mind.
3. **How long did Nehemiah wait before acting?** Four months. Perhaps the king was not in Susa and then came back. Perhaps Nehemiah needed that time to know what God was asking him to do.
4. **What did he then do?** Nehemiah 1:5-11 He prayed the night before he would see the king, saying that God had been faithful to His covenant but His people had acted wickedly, reminding God that He had promised if they returned to Him, He would bring them to the place He had chosen as a dwelling place for His name - Jerusalem - and asking God to give him success in the presence of the king. He actually says "in the presence of this man", emphasising that God is the God of heaven, but the king is just a man. His prayer is an encouragement to us, but it was not meant for the ears of Artaxerxes! Artaxerxes realised that his trusted servant was unhappy, and asked why. Nehemiah dared to be honest with the king, and got an honest and generous response,

2:4 Some situations do not give us much time to think what to pray.

King Artaxerxes (and his queen) saw the problem and its implications to part of his Empire, saw the convictions of the man he trusted, then acted decisively and generously. He was not a believer in Nehemiah's God, but he believed his people had the right to worship their gods and he respected this man who had obviously served him well. God used Artaxerxes. God can use whoever He wants to use.

God used Artaxerxes. See also Isaiah 44:28, 45:1 prophecies of God, given around 695-685 B.C., that God would use a man called Cyrus, which happened in about 538 B.C.

Ask the ladies if they think Nehemiah's example is a practical one to follow.

Continue to work through the story checking the references as a class, including the first paragraph on page 67.

Builders - priests
 goldsmiths
 perfume makers
 merchants

"what is it you want?" "Then I prayed to the God of heaven and I answered the king." Help me now, Lord, with the right words, and to remember all the things You and I have talked about together in the past month!

Nehemiah asked the king to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. The king agreed and asked how long he would be away. Nehemiah then asked for safe conduct letters and wood for the building work. The king also sent army officers and cavalry with Nehemiah. Artaxerxes had trusted Nehemiah with his life, and now he was taking care of Nehemiah's life.

Nehemiah 1:1-2:10 give us a good example to follow:

**listen - talk to God about it - think and continue to talk to God -
take considered action - keep praying**

Nehemiah was being sent to Jerusalem as the Governor there. He had people to do what he said, soldiers to guard him, people for whom he had responsibility, a king to report to - a big change for even a trusted cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah 2:11 Nehemiah and his entourage travelled to Jerusalem. After three days, with a few men, he went to see the situation for himself. Nehemiah 2:12 and 16. He went at night so he did not attract attention. "I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem" - Nehemiah knew what God wanted him to do - the result of those four months of praying, weeping, thinking and fasting.

Nehemiah 2:16-18 Nehemiah spoke with the Jews, the priests, the nobles and the officials, encouraging them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem which had been damaged for so long. He also explained why he was there and why he was in charge, because of God and because of the king. So they began this good work.

But three non-Jewish men of influence (Nehemiah 2:10,19) were not pleased. Sanballat was governor of Samaria (the old northern kingdom). Tobiah was probably governor of Transjordan (east of the Jordan river). Both had political reasons for not wanting Jerusalem to become a viable city. Geshem the Arab may have been governor of a large area from northeast Egypt to north Arabia and south Palestine, and he would not have wanted his lucrative spice trade threatened. We read Nehemiah's answer to their threat in Nehemiah 2:20 "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." We might say 'This is God's city - you have no right to interfere'.

Who built the wall? Nehemiah 3:1-32 The long, the short and the tall - everyone except the nobles who felt they were too good to do manual work! 3:12 is the only mention of female labour. What trades were involved?

As the work went on Sanballat and Tobiah were very annoyed and mocked the Jews. Nehemiah's response (4:4-5) was to acknowledge the threats and to ask God to take care of

Ask the ladies to read Nehemiah 5 in small groups.

Ask these questions: What was the problem?

What did Nehemiah say the nobles and officials should do?

Did Nehemiah do anything that surprised you?

Was Nehemiah's testimony good?

Share answers and revise the paragraph

The governor's acted picture 5:13 - sometimes drastic times call for drastic actions. Nehemiah was not a performer by nature, but here he made a very important statement in a way that would not be forgotten.

Work together as a class through the references in Nehemiah 6.

Teach through the last paragraph on page 67 getting the ladies to read out the references.

the situation. Sometimes we take on board the threats and forget that our God is all powerful. Nehemiah got it right. We must follow his example.

The people worked enthusiastically and the wall got to half height. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs and a few others then plotted to come and fight against Jerusalem. Nehemiah 4:9 "But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat." The same example again - **pray and do something, pray and do.**

Nehemiah placed armed Jewish families at the vulnerable parts of the wall and encouraged them to remember God and fight for their brothers, sons, daughters, wives and homes. The plotters had been outflanked. The Jews went back to work, but everyone was armed, some kept watch, everyone was ready to fight. Nehemiah kept the trumpeter with him, and told the people to go to wherever the trumpet was sounded. "Our God will fight for us" Nehemiah 4:20. He instructed the people to stay in the city overnight but work or guard from dawn to dusk.

Nehemiah 5 trouble within. The circumstances together with the greed of some people were causing poverty and distress to the poorer Jews. People were being sold as servants to pay taxes. Verse 6 Nehemiah became very angry. He called the nobles and officials to account and they had no answer. He told them to give back fields, houses, olive groves and the interest charged. He made them take an oath to do it. Verse 13 this fair and thoughtful governor acted out a picture of retribution for disobedience. The people kept their promise. Verses 14-19 in the 12 years of his first governorship Nehemiah and his men did not collect the tax in food allowed them, nor acquire land, and fed 600-800 people a day. He practised what he preached. Do you always do this?

6:1-9 another plot by Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. What was Nehemiah's reaction?

6:10-13 yet another plot thwarted. The enemies were getting desperate. Nehemiah's reaction? See verses 11-13.

6:15-16 the wall was completed. Jerusalem was secure. The surrounding nations knew that the work had been done with the help of our God. Destroyed in 586 B.C., the walls were rebuilt in 52 days in 445 B.C. after 141 years. According to an ancient writer work continued to embellish and improve the walls for another two years. We read of the dedication of the walls in Nehemiah 12:27-47. It was a great occasion.

6:17-19 The nobles of Judah and the plotters were in constant communication. Tobiah continued to harass Nehemiah by letter. Many of the nobles were related to Tobiah.

Family connections and past work connections can sometimes hold us back in our Christian walk. These people think they have influence over us. But do they?

The Bible teaches that we must respect our parents. God created family to be a support and encouragement for us. But the Bible also teaches that our responsibility to God is paramount. Compare Exodus 20:12, Psalm 68:6, Deuteronomy 6:5, and Matthew 22:37-39. Yes, we have a responsibility to respect and honour our parents. This responsibility outworks differently as we move from child to adult, from single adult to family person, and as our parents move from independent and capable, to being dependent. Yes, God has put us in families and perhaps

Here are some lessons for us all about public meetings.

When you take any public meeting remember your objective should not be simply to give a talk, but that your talk should be heard, be Bible-based and be understood with application to life.

Day 1 Ezra read the Law. Ezra stood on a high wooden platform
Nehemiah 8:4 **Make sure the preacher can be seen and heard**
Ezra opened the book
8:5 **Open the Bible frequently.**
The Levites helped people to understand what was being said
8:8 **Make sure people understand.**
It was a day of rejoicing and sharing 8:9-12

Day 2 They rediscovered the Feast of Tabernacles which had not been celebrated since the days of King Solomon, and they celebrated it with great joy. It had not been celebrated with such joy since the time of Joshua, nearly a thousand years before.

9:1-38, 10:28-39 they celebrated and continued to listen for seven days and then there was an assembly at which they confessed their disobedience, and then made promises.

Intermarriage was still a problem as it was for Ezra, and in the book of Nehemiah the people make more promises to God after the tabernacles celebration.

Malachi 1:2-5 paraphrased.

God loves you

It doesn't look like it

He loves you, descendants of Jacob. The descendants of Esau are no more.

That translation is called the Septuagint, meaning 70, and is referred to as LXX, the Roman numerals for 70.

Malachi 3:1 talks of a messenger preparing the way for the Lord. 4:5 speaks of Elijah coming before the Lord comes. Check Luke 1:11-17; Matthew 11:13-14; 17:12-13; Mark 9:11-13.

given us good, close friends, but Jesus told us that the biggest responsibility we have is to God. You cannot love God by proxy - you can only love God as an individual, as a responsible, sentient being. And that love is to be with everything you have, with all the time you have - so all the time!

Beware of putting too much importance on what other people think you should do or say. The most important contributions to your thinking process are what God thinks and your willingness to obey Him.

7:1-3 **Nehemiah** appointed his brother, Hanani, to be in charge of the city. Why?
Verse 2 What a commendation! Would people say that of you?

8:1-18 The people had been summoned to assemble in the square in front of the Water Gate. They confessed their failure to live God's way, acknowledged that God had kept the covenant, realised they were slaves still, ruled over by kings because of their sins. They made an agreement not to intermarry with local non-Jews, not to trade on the Sabbath, let the fields rest every seventh year, and give for the work and upkeep of the Temple.

11:1-12:26 They drew lots to decide who would live in Jerusalem - one in ten of the total Jewish population.

Nehemiah returned to King Artaxerxes to report after 12 years in Jerusalem. He later came back, perhaps as governor or perhaps leaving his brother as governor.

Leadership attributes we see in Nehemiah - thought, exact planning, good work relationships, wise distribution of information, courtesy but honesty even to enemies, making sure people knew the mandate and authority he had.

While Nehemiah was away **Malachi** started prophesying. He challenged the people living in Judah and Jerusalem to understand that God loves them even though they doubted it, Malachi 1:1-5, and rebuked their intermarriage with local non-Jews and their relaxed attitude to divorce, 2:10-16. "I hate divorce" says the Lord". He challenged the priests over offering defiled sacrifices with a wrong attitude and over their wrong teaching, 1:6-2:9.

Malachi is the last voice of prophecy in the Old testament. There followed a period of 400 years of silence from God before the birth of Jesus.

The Old Testament was originally written mainly in Hebrew, but in 285 B.C. 70 scholars translated it into Greek - the main language of the then Empire.

In this time there was bitter persecution of the Jews, and in 63 B.C. Rome took over Judah, the Jews were taxed, but kept some political freedom. The stage is set for Jesus.

Malachi 3:6 "I the Lord do not change". That truth is a solid rock for us - all the actions we have seen God take since Genesis, all we have learned of Him, all we have seen Him do - He has not changed, He does not change, He will not change. He is totally up to date, but in Who He is, He does not change. Not in Malachi's day. not in Jesus' time on earth, not ever - "**I the Lord do not change**".

Lesson 19 Leader's notes Wisdom literature

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs

There are five books in the section in our Bibles known as 'the writings' - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs (also called Canticles and Song of Solomon).

God put them there for us to learn from. We understand that they are not history, Law or prophecy. We accept they are wisdom literature. But nothing we say helps us interpret them all. They are five very individual books.

Teach through page 69. It is designed to be the link from what we have already studied into wisdom literature. It sets the parameters within which we are working.

Use some questions to lighten the page opposite, such as:

Tell me what you know about narrative literature

What is the most difficult aspect of working with/teaching the Law?

How should we deal with prophecy?

(From the quote opposite)

Which group of people existed in Israelite and other Near Eastern societies who do not often exist in our day?

Why must we look at the books of wisdom literature in our Bibles?

The answer is in the next to last paragraph, but also these writings are easily misquoted, so we need to correctly understand them at some level.

Lesson 19 Wisdom literature Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs

Everything we have looked at so far in this Old Testament overview has been narrative - story, or teaching - the Law, or prophecy.

Narrative - story is easy to understand even if we sometimes need help with the culture. It is what we learn from it that makes us think, how do we apply the lessons to ourselves?

Teaching from God - the Law is not always as easy to understand, and we have to think carefully about how we apply it today.

Prophecy needs our brains to work. Is this prophecy for then, for now, or for the future, or is it a combination?

Now we come to a different form of language - wisdom literature.

"The Jews speak of the Old Testament as the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Included within the third division are Psalms and wisdom materials, such as Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These wisdom books are associated with a class of people called "wise men" or "sages" who are listed with the priests and prophets as an important force in Israelite society, Jeremiah 18:18. Wise men were called upon to give advice to kings and to instruct the young. Whereas the priests and prophets dealt more with the religious side of life, wise men were concerned about practical and philosophical matters. Some of their writings, like Proverbs, were optimistic, as they showed the young how to behave in order to live prosperous and happy lives. Other materials such as Job and Ecclesiastes, were among more pessimistic as they wrestled with difficult philosophical and theological questions such as the problem of evil and the prosperity of the wicked (see also Psalms 37; 73). Both viewpoints - the optimistic and the pessimistic - are also found in the literature of other nations in the ancient Near East." (The NIV Study Bible: Introduction to Proverbs, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1985, page 942).

Sometimes these writings are hard to understand and hard to interpret. BUT God has put them into the canon of scripture, and preserved them for us through the centuries. Therefore we must find a way to understand and benefit from these words.

The authorship and origin of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon are the subject of much discussion and diverse views. This is an overview of the Old Testament and for our purposes, we take Solomon to have some involvement in them.

You need to think of some proverbs you hear in your culture, in your language or those you come across in languages around you. For example in my country: 'An Englishman's home is his castle' and 'Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun'.

The proverbs selected opposite encourage day by day living for God, and give a proposed outcome to balance the idea. They do not give promises.

Teach through the first six paragraphs - involving two readers in reading the two proverbs mentioned.

This is a very simple outline - introduction

main text

epilogue - which finishes where the introduction started
- with the fear of the Lord.

Hezekiah is mentioned in Proverbs 25:1 as collecting Solomon's writings, not writing his own.

Get the ladies to work in pairs to read and share their sentence. Others will probably have ideas to add!

Proverbs

A proverb is a saying. All cultures have wise sayings about a variety of subjects. In the Bible's book of Proverbs the sayings are about how to live a godly life. They are to encourage day by day living God's way. They are **not** promises.

Have a look at **Proverbs 22:6** "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." If you say this is a promise, how do you explain the children who have been taught to live a godly life, and then made a different life choice for themselves? Your teaching was still valid: but the child is not a robot - he/she has freewill to choose.

Have a look at **Proverbs 3:5-6** "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight." Does everything always work out well for someone who trusts God? Has your path always been "straight" when you have followed His way? My husband has been a preacher and teacher for more than 45 years, but 37 years into that time our Sovereign God took away Colin's ability to speak naturally, with cancer of the voice box.

Proverbs in the Bible are wise sayings - sayings of probability - "eat today and you will be healthy tomorrow" - eating today cannot guarantee health tomorrow. What if you eat and then trip and break your ankle?

The proverbs God has put into the Bible are to show a way, not promise an outcome.

These proverbs vary in their length, and format. Some are comparisons. Some are positive and negative. Some are statements of fact.

Now let's look at the **sections of the book of Proverbs.**

- 1:1-7 introduction -the good living of verses 2-5 is brought about by verse 7, the conscious awareness of, and total respect for, God.
- 1:8-31:9 sayings attributed to Solomon, the wise, Agur and Lemuel
- 31:10-31 epilogue - an acrostic poem about the ideal wife. In Hebrew each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet e.g. A B C D

Look up each Proverbs reference and share the main meaning in one sentence:

1:8-9; 10:1; 11:1; 11:13;
14:30; 15:1; 17:1; 17:3;
19:21; 22:1; 22:2; 23:10-11;
24:30-34; 27:15-16;
30:7-9; 31:4-9

The book starts with the fear of the Lord, 1:7, and ends with it too, 31:30.

Work through Proverbs 31:10-31 together. The ladies may well have more to add to what I have suggested opposite.

Ecclesiastes

'Meaningless' summarises a life that has no *God* framework. So it is the contrast to Proverbs, which is advice to live *God's* way, in His presence.

Teach through the five paragraphs.

Involve readers.

This book is so different from anything else we have looked at because of its lack of a *God* framework, although He is mentioned.

Let comments come from the class. Ask *God* to give you right and helpful responses.

Something for us ladies to live up to! Proverbs 31:10-31 - the wife of noble character.

Her husband trusts her completely, verse 11

She is loyal to her husband and he knows it, verse 12

She plans and works hard, verses 13-19

She helps those in need, verse 20

She provides for her household, verses 21-22

Her way of life brings respect to her husband, verse 23

She uses her gifts to provide for her family, verse 24

She has concerns and plans but not worries, verse 25

She speaks with wisdom and uses her time well, verses 26-27

She lives in total respect of God, verse 30

Her works speak for her in the family and in the public arena., verses 28, 29, 31.

This is a challenge for us all - it brings no guarantees but we must do our part.

Ecclesiastes

The name of the book comes from a word meaning teacher. Who was the Teacher? Maybe Solomon, but the phrase "son of David" could also be used for a later descendant of David. However, God put these writings into our Bibles and preserved them for us. We need to have a way of understanding them.

In Proverbs God is frequently mentioned. In Ecclesiastes He is rarely mentioned. 2:24-26 the Teacher says that God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness to those who please Him and that otherwise all is meaningless, but does not explain how to please God. 3:1-8 is an often quoted true piece of writing, but with no consideration of God.

In 3:9-20 the Teacher talks of the burden God has put on man, that God has set eternity in the heart of man, that man does not understand God's ways and that the gift of God is for people to enjoy themselves. He also sees that God brings judgement but is there anything after death? No, says the Teacher.

5:4 God gives wealth and honour and then not health - meaningless - others get the wealth.

12:1 and 7 God is known as the creator. The teacher has looked at life from birth to death. He sees nothing beyond. He sees meaninglessness. He acknowledges that God exists. The only way to live is 12:13-14 "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring everything into judgement." Many other people in the Old Testament had vibrant relationships with God, and found life very meaningful.

Is your relationship with God duty? or love?

1:1-2 these are the Teacher's words about a life lived without the conscious awareness of, and total respect for, God. "Everything is meaningless".

Song of Songs

I do not know how your ladies will react to this subject matter.

Read through the rest of the lesson and you will discover that the main points I have made do not actually refer to much of the text of Song of Songs. They refer to principles, and move our thinking from whispers behind hands to straightforward Biblical understanding.

Teach through page 72.

Make sure you hold on to the control of the group.

Enjoy the 3 x 'Love is' towards the bottom of the page.

We try to understand and analyse - these three books of wisdom literature stretch our minds.
This is my summary.

Perhaps it is love that is the common theme for Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs.

Living loving God. Proverbs.

Living without loving God. Ecclesiastes.

What is love? Exclusive, powerful and precious. Song of Songs.

Song of Songs.

Here we have a love song, with intimate language and raw emotions. We struggle to accept that this is in the Bible. But it is part of the canon of scripture that God has preserved for us.

Our 'problem' is that the whole book is a love poem.

Through the centuries the Church has struggled to read, understand and learn from this book. Some have held that it is a picture of the love relationship between God and Israel, or the relationship between Christ and the Church, or between Christ and the individual believer. Some see it as a poetic drama of the beloved's love for her shepherd more than for the king enticing her into the royal harem. Perhaps it is a series of amorous events and thoughts.

1:1 calls this song the greatest of songs, "Song of Songs", so we need to try and understand it!

Let's back track to Genesis. When God created man and woman, He brought the woman to the man as his helper and partner, with the intention that in having intercourse they became 'one flesh'. They were naked and they felt no shame, Genesis 2:20-25. Then sin came and Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness.

The devil has had a wonderful time ever since, making us think wrongly or confusedly about sex. Sex and intimacy are God's gifts within God's plan. The devil has tried to make any talk of sex and intimacy embarrassing, furtive, something daring and secretive. God made two sexes one flesh for making the next generation and for a special enjoyment that only each individual couple can know. God made two different sexes to make one couple. My relationship with my husband is not for public enquiry or discussion, but it is a real fact and not something to be ashamed of. It is God given.

We still find it hard that feelings, and touches that are special and between a couple, should be written about in our Bibles!

What can we learn?

1. Love is exclusive 2:16
2. Love is powerful, 8:6-7 as strong as death
 unyielding as the grave
 mighty flame - like the very flame of the Lord
 cannot be quenched
3. Love is precious - it cannot be bought 8:7

"God intends that such love - grossly distorted and abused by both ancient and modern peoples - be a normal part of marital life in his good creation." (From the NIV Study Bible: Introduction to Song of Songs, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1985, page 1004).

Lesson 20 Leader's notes Psalms - Israel in song

In the book of Psalms "we see the life of the believer pictured in all of its experiences of joy and sorrow, victory and failure." (From *What the Bible is all about* by Henrietta C. Mears, The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association: Minneapolis, 1966 edition, page 183.)

Teach through **Basics** page 73.

Psalm 1 the first verse has one thought in line one, and two similar thoughts in line two.

Verses 2,4,5 and 6 are one thought per line.

Verse 3 has two ideas in line one and one in line two from the same picture, and the second idea in line two applies it to the "He" in the first word of the verse.

You may want to play with Psalm 1 in the class:

What are the two ideas in verse 2

Are they the same idea expressed in different ways?

Can we love and be involved in God's rules all the time?

Verse 6 What is the truth that both these phrases can parallel?

God enjoys those who walk His way, but those who do not follow Him will be judged.

Who wrote the individual psalms?

See who the ladies know. Get them to scan through the book of Psalms and find names.

Teach, checking the references for instrumental and musical notes.

Lesson 20 Psalms – Israel in song

Basics.

We have now come to Psalms - the second of the Writings in the order of our Bibles, but the first book in the Jewish Writings.

In Hebrew the title of the book means Book of Praise. So it was the Jewish hymnbook of praises to God, and they were usually sung. With translation into Greek in 3rd century B.C. the word Psalms began to be used.

It is a book of **poetry**. For me that means it has to have rhyme and rhythm. That is because I was taught to think that way in school 1952 -1965. Modern English poetry is much freer. Hebrew poetry has a large element of parallelism - the same or similar thought expressed at least twice in different words, in the same sentence, with about the same number of syllables - sometimes!!

- Psalm 1 :1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers.
- 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
 - 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.
 - 4 Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
 - 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
 - 6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Who **wrote** the individual psalms?

The names in the psalm headings tell us more than 70 psalms were written by David, 1 by Moses, some by Solomon, some by Asaph, some by the sons of Korah, 1 by Ethan the Ezrahite, 1 by Heman the Ezrahite, and more than 30 'orphan' psalms (we do not know who wrote them!). The headings over the psalms appear to have been added later than the date of writing. When the heading says 'of' or 'for' or 'to', does it mean 'written by' or 'a favourite of', 'belonging to' or 'offered to'? We don't know. It would be interesting to be sure, but the content of the psalm is more important than the heading.

Also in the headings are **ancient titles** which define the kind of psalm but no-one is now very sure what they meant! There are also instrumental and musical notes - see Psalms 5, 6, 22, 57, 89 and 100.

'**Selah**' is also found within 39 psalms - see Psalm 46. Again no-one is sure of the meaning. Perhaps the best idea is that it suggests a pause to think.

Teach the first paragraph opposite.

Look up the references for paragraph two.

The next highlighted paragraph is important.

Considerations.

Check out the 'speak of Christ' references together as a class.

Teach the 'cursing' - imprecatory psalms.

Teach after they have found and read the Psalm 55 reference.

The great Christian thinker of the 20th century, C.S.Lewis wrote "The ferocious parts of the Psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness and that.....is hateful to God". (From Reflections on the Psalms by C.S.Lewis, Inspirational Press reprint: New York, 1994, page 148).

Teach last paragraph.

How did the **collection** come to be? The number of popular songs grew as more were written and sung. Some were used a lot, some were lost in the mists of time. King Solomon probably organised the collecting of his father King David's psalms, as the liturgy at the new Temple developed. Perhaps musicians and choir leaders also helped. There followed a long period of unrest and general lack of interest in God before the exiles to Assyria and Babylon.

Some Jews returned from Babylon and rebuilt the Temple in 516 B.C. Ezra arrived in 458 B.C. and organised the priests and Levites - the scene was set for a revival in organised worship at the Temple and also in the synagogues, which had been started in the Babylonian exile when the Jews had no Temple focus. The synagogues concentrated on the Law, personal devotion and prayer, as they could not observe the sacrifices. The divisions in the Psalms as we have them probably came after this time.

There are several psalms which seem to have been separated or joined up at various times. For example Psalms 42 and 43 were at some time one psalm - see verses 42:5,11 and 43:5.

But don't let these details distract from the text of the Psalms - preserved by God for us to learn from and use in our private and public worship.

Considerations

Do the Psalms speak of Christ?

Yes, they do! Jesus said they did in Luke 24:44.

Check out Psalms 22:1-21 a picture of Jesus' crucifixion

16:10 His resurrection (quoted in Acts 2:31)

98:9 His coming again to judge, ... and many more.

There are many references in Psalms used by Jesus and the Early Church to show that Christ's coming and mission were long anticipated.

Cursing - the imprecatory psalms - where the writer is asking God to pay people back, for example Psalm 55:12-19.

Just think of what Jesus said about Capernaum in Matthew 11:20-24. Jesus is saying that these bad things **will** happen to Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because their people did not listen to God. Similarly, the psalmist is asking God to remember these people have ignored Him and engaged in evil, which is contrary to God's nature. We have the advantage over the psalmist because we live after Jesus has said "I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Remember: as the last paragraph has reminded us, we live after the psalmists wrote. We need to add the perspective of redemption in Jesus Christ and of the promise of Jesus coming again to the Hebrew perspective in which the psalms were written.

I have used the word PSALMS twice as different acrostics to make sure the ladies understand the term acrostic.

Perhaps write each acrostic on to a large card and explain this is a teaching aid in many situations, if teachers can think up correct and useful phrases. Remembering the truth of the phrase is the most important goal for using an acrostic.

For example:

F	Forsaking	S	Standing	L	Learn about
A	All	I	In	O	Obey
I	I	N	Need	V	Vow (promise)
T	Trust			E	Enjoy time with
H	Him				

If you are working in a language other than English, you may have to improvise!

Song of Ascents is interesting to me as a choir singer - I can visualise (and hear?) the Jews singing as they walked up to Jerusalem, or as they walked up steps during a Temple service. Understanding the phrase makes the scene come to life.

Give five groups one Psalm each from pages 75 and 76, and set a time limit.

Then get each group to share their understanding of the psalm, and present an application or encouragement or something to think about from the psalm.

I am trying to get them to not just gather information for themselves, but begin to think how they can use that information with other people.

Acrostic Psalms	Psalms	Praise in
	Set up to use	Songs of experience to
	Alphabetical	Almighty God who
	Letters as a	Loves us
	Memory	More than we can under-
	Stimulation	Stand

Psalm 119 is the obvious acrostic psalm, but so are Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111-112, 145 and Lamentations, which follows Jeremiah. Psalm 119 has a section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The acrostic idea does not cross language translation very well. Speakers of those languages may be creative in their own teaching for their students' memories.

Songs of ascents probably relate to songs to sing going up to Jerusalem for the annual feasts at the Temple, or for certain parts of Temple worship - perhaps both.

Psalms 120-134

Now to put all your knowledge to use.....

You need to work small groups and

come up with an understanding of the psalm you are given

an application of the psalm to life

something to learn, do or think through

and then present it as a group to all the other groups.

Group 1. Psalm 23 compared to 1 Samuel 16:1-13, 17:34-37. And John 10:11-13.

Think about what a shepherd does and what God does.

Group 2. Psalm 51 compared to 2 Samuel 11:1-12:23. Think about sin, confession, restoration.

In *Words of Wisdom*, Tyndale House: Wheaton, 1967, Foreword, Dr. Billy Graham recommended reading one chapter of Proverbs and five Psalms every day.

This way you read them all in one month.

Psalm 119 and four others will have to be on a not busy day!!

Sounds a good idea, but can we actually do it? There's a challenge!

Group 3. Psalm 86 What attributes of God give David the ability to have confidence in approaching Him?

Group 4. Psalm 99 compared with Exodus 19:16-25, 1 Samuel 7:5-9, Numbers 12:1-15.

Group 5. Psalm 120 and 121. Compare the psalms - where is the psalmist in his own mind? What makes the change of thinking?

Notice Psalm 137 - a Babylon experience!

Don't forget there are psalms outside of the book of Psalms - Exodus 15:1-18; Judges 5:2-31; 2 Samuel 22:2-51; Habakkuk 3:2-19.

Next time. One more wisdom book to go.....

Lesson 21 Leader's notes Job and his wife

Enjoy this reassuring lesson!

This lesson takes a lot of consideration - so I have put *Selah* after several challenging paragraphs. Go through the paragraph and then have a minute of silence to try and feel what the characters in the story feel. Consider how you would react. You may need to sharpen the focus each time on what to think about.

Teach through the first three paragraphs.

Yes - that does mean chapters 4-31. Twenty-eight chapters of philosophical argument, followed by chapters 32-37, another six chapters of philosophical argument.

Now to the story. Get the ladies to read Job 1:1-5 and pull out the information.

Lesson 21 Job and his wife

Job is the first of the Wisdom Writings in our Bibles. It has much philosophical argument wrapped in a story. Its format bears little similarity to Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes or Song of Solomon - the other Wisdom Writings. In some ways we feel that it is more narrative, but the philosophical content shows the antiquity of human discussion about the problem of evil. It does not qualify as history because, although Job's way of living puts him in a time frame, there is nothing else to date it by. The book of Job contains a detailed story which stands totally alone in the Scripture that God has preserved for us. It has details that are only otherwise mentioned in our Bibles in Daniel and Revelation, and occasional other references. It is an absolute treasure.

The book of Job is possibly the oldest story in the Old Testament - probably from before writing and therefore handed down orally. It may have been committed to writing in the explosion of written material from the time of Solomon.

Job is mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14,20 for his righteousness and in James 5:11 where his perseverance is mentioned. Paul quotes Job 5:13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19.

Let's break the book of Job into meaningful pieces.

1:1-5	Context of Job
1:6-12	Context of the heavenly realms 1
1:13-19	Facts of the story
1:20-22	Job's first reaction
2:1-6	Context of the heavenly realms 2
2:7-10	Job's second reaction
2:11-13	Job's three friends come and sit with him
3:1-26	Job speaks
Chapters 4-31	Philosophical arguments from Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Job
Chapters 32-37	Elihu, a younger man, intervenes
38:1-42:6	God deals with Job
42:7-9	God speaks to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.
42:10-17	Job's new context

1:1-5 Context of Job

Uz was a large area east of Jordan. See map on page 2.

Job was not sinless, but he was morally good and spiritually godly. His substantial wealth was measured in herds of animals and numbers of servants - as was Abram's, Genesis 13:1-7, and his grandson, Jacob's, Genesis 32:13-16 (and those animals were just a gift for Esau, not the main flocks!). Job was an important man. His seven sons had their own houses and the three daughters were based with Job. They feasted at the various family houses. As these feasts ended Job was in the habit of making the family purified and then sacrificing a burnt offering on behalf of each of them, just in case any of them had sinned "and cursed God in their hearts" Job 1:5. He regularly acted as a priest in this way, and this was before the ceremonial

1:6-12 Ask the ladies to read and pull out the information. Make sure, perhaps with questions, that everyone knows exactly what is going on in this history. Teach through to verse 12.

Selah. Who in heaven has absolute power? How do we know from this Bible passage?

1:13-19 read and check information in the paragraph

Uz was east of the river Jordan

Selah - all the animals, all his wealth, all his descendants gone. Think if that happened to you.

1:20-22 Encourage the ladies to read - what is the most important phrase?

Selah - what would your reaction have been? Why?

laws of Moses existed.

Job 1:6-12 Context of the heavenly realms (1)

A complete change of scene. Now we are in heaven's throne room or council chamber as in 1 Kings 22:19 "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left", Psalm 89:5-7; Jeremiah 23:18, 22.

Selah

On this day there is an additional presence. Satan, literally 'the accuser', has come with the angels. How often the Evil One comes in alongside something that is good. God asks him where he has come from. God is omnipresent - present everywhere. Obviously Satan is not, but he replies that he has been to lots of places. God then initiates a conversation about Job, whom 'the accuser' cannot accuse of anything. So he tries to accuse Job of being a 'fair weather Christian' - being a believer when everything is fine. 'The accuser' challenges God and says "But stretch out your hand and touch everything that he has, and he will surely curse you to your face". Job 1:11.

Selah

Who challenges who first? Yes, God challenges 'the accuser'.

Verse 12 "The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord."

1:13-19 Facts of the story

Back to the land of Uz.

A messenger comes to Job: some local warlords have attacked and taken the oxen and donkeys. I was the only one left.

Another messenger comes: the fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants. I was the only one left.

Yet another messenger comes: more warlords came as three raiding parties and took all the camels. I was the only one left.

One more messenger: your sons and daughters were feasting at the oldest brother's house, and a mighty wind swept in from the desert and the house collapsed on top of them. They are all dead and I am the only one to escape.

Selah

1:20-22 Job's reaction 1

Job got up, he tore his robe and shaved his head as symbols of mourning.

He fell to the ground in no, not in anger.....not in self-pity.....but in worship. Verse 21.

"In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." Verse 22.

Selah

Teach through the page opposite using the **Selah** pauses.

Job 2:1-6 Invite the ladies to read and share what they have learned.

Selah - as human beings and as women, we probably feel 'Job does not need any more problems.' But here we are looking at God's belief in Job and at the throne room of heaven, at the scene of all ultimate authority.

Job 2:7-10 We knew this was going to happen.

Events that hurt our closest friends and family can sometimes make us react in ways that doubt God. We need to make sure that our faith is more important than the circumstances. That is hard - but necessary.

Selah - can we react the way Job did?

Job 2:11-13 ask the ladies to read on their own and then share what they have learned.

Selah - do my, do your, words help, or merely satisfy me that I have said something?
Could I do anything else which would comfort or help?

Job 3:1-26 summarise these verses with the ladies as a class.

Job 2:1-6 Context of the heavenly realms (2)

We are in the throne room of heaven again with God. The same characters involved. There is the same conversation plus this from God. "And he (Job) still maintains his integrity though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." There is the same kind of response from 'the accuser' - "Strike his flesh and bones and he will surely curse you to your face." God gave Satan permission to damage Job's life but he must spare it.

Selah

2:7-10 Job's reaction 2

'The accuser' strikes Job with boils all over his body. Note that Satan is able to do this, but his power is limited by God. He is not omnipotent - all powerful - **God is**. Sitting among ashes - a sign of mourning - Job scrapes at the boils to get some relief. His wife tells him to give up trusting God, curse God and die. Later in history, Leviticus 24:10-16, it is made clear in the Law that those who curse God will die. Job says her reaction is like that of a foolish woman. He does not say she is a foolish woman, but in that reaction she has not been wise. Perhaps her care for her husband at that point of time became larger than her trust in God? If so, it was a wrong decision, but we understand how she got there!

Job then says what is an amazing but true thought. "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" We are pleased when life is good, happy and easy. We thank God. But when things are not easy, happy and good - do we thank God or do we blame God? Verse 10, "In all this Job did not sin in what he said."

In the last few years there has been a tendency in England for Christians, when everything is happy, to say 'God is good'. But God is **always** good **all** the time. Sometimes we don't feel like expressing that truth, and we struggle to say 'God is good' when things are not the way we would like them to be. We must learn to be like Job.

Selah

2:11-13 Job's 3 friends come and sit with Job

This was not the work of three short phone calls. Do you remember how long messages and information and arrangements took before phones? They heard, verse 11, and they met together by agreement to go and be with Job and comfort him.

They were disturbed by what they saw. They had no words. Their presence was the gift of encouragement they brought. In England we always have to have words for every occasion - even when words do not satisfy. Your presence, your time, show that you care, and sometimes speak louder than words. A silent hug can be good in my culture!

Selah.

3:1-26 Job speaks

Job is the one who breaks the silence of seven days and seven nights. He wishes he had never been born verses 1-2. Verses 25-26 tell of his lack of peace, quietness and rest. But he does not blame God.

Work through page 80. We will not read chapters 4-37. Use my summary in the notes and move on.

Selah. Think of the times life has been difficult. We may not understand now, but God had His purpose in it, and He walked through it with us. Yes, it was hard as we walked through.

Job 38:1-42:6 - use only these selected verses:

38:4-39:30 What were the questions God asked Job?

I counted the number of question marks in those verses, in the NIV Bible translation I was using - 40 - your translation may have more or less. All of them show us how great our God is. Perhaps the ladies could pick out a question each, one that especially speaks to them of how great God is.

My favourite is Job 38:31-33. You are welcome to share it with me!

40:6-8 Ask a lady to read, and then question what it means. Our thinking can be just as devious as God suggests Job's was.

Job 42:7-9 Invite a lady to read the verses and then to comment on them.

42:10-17 Get a lady to read the verses. Make sure the ladies have understood that our obedience does not necessarily bring wealth or health. The 'prosperity gospel' is not true to the teaching of the Bible.

Selah. God the almighty One, the all-powerful. We are human, frail and sinful, but we are loved by a great God.

There is a place for reading the speeches of the comforters, but not in an overview of the Old Testament. Wait until your philosophy degree.

There are however three shining jewels in the thirty-three chapters we have skipped over.

Make sure you look at the next lesson and leader's notes in good time. It is different!

**Job chapters 4-31 Philosophical arguments from Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Job
Chapters 32-37 Elihu, a younger man, intervenes**

These four men make many arguments, but we have the advantage over them because we have seen the scene in heaven. We have learned that God is using Job's situation to teach spiritual powers a lesson.

Selah

Job 38:1-42:6 God deals with Job

In chapter 37 Elihu talks of God in terms of thunder, driving winds, His roar, His majestic voice. Chapter 38 "The Lord answered Job out of the storm." Perhaps God was also answering the storm going on in Job's mind?

Put 38:2-3 into your own words.

What were the questions?

40:1-2 God challenges Job. How?

40:3-5 Job says he has no answer.

40:6-41:34 God speaks out of the storm again. Verse 8 He asks Job if Job would say God was unjust, in order to make Job seem right?

42:1-6 summarise what Job says to God.

42:7-9 God speaks to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

Verse 7 God tells the three friends that they have not spoken truth about God. Job had spoken truth about God.

God told them to make burnt offerings for themselves and Job would pray for them "and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly".

In verses 7 and 8 God says four times "my servant Job". That's where we started the story - 1:8 "my servant Job".

42:10-17 Job's new context

The cosmic contest with 'the accuser' is over and Job is restored. Until he got to heaven Job did not know the reason for everything that happened. We do not have all the answers in our lives yet, but God wants our complete trust whatever the circumstances. The fact that God gave Job more than he had before, is not a promise that if we trust we will be rewarded in the 'now'. Plenty of God's saints have died poor in money, but rich in God.

Selah

You will have noticed that I have jumped chapters 4-37. God gives the reason in 42:7 - the three friends have said things that are not right about God. However, Job says three things in his discourses that we cannot leave out - see Job 19:25-27; 23:10; 28:28.

A definite **Selah** to those three statements!

Lesson 22 Leader's notes Who is the God who has done all these things?

The object of this lesson is to look at all of the Old Testament and see what we have learned about God, and what God has done in the history of those 39 books. There are no easy answers for both columns (page 81) for all the books, but it will be good to revise what we have looked at and think about it again. Some words and phrases may come up again and again. No problem. You may have no answers for some of the books.

Try doing this exercise yourself before presenting it to the ladies.

I also suggest you have 3 sections for the time and divide it up carefully:

1. Explain the aim of the lesson to the class altogether. I have included a page of theological terms (page 83) - words representing an aspect of God. Don't be scared off by long words. They are good fun. This page is in the Lesson section so the ladies will have it to take with them for further thought, together with pages listing the books of the Bible, (pages 81-82), with space for **their** answers. 1 Samuel to 2 Chronicles and Proverbs to Song of Songs need only one answer to each question for each group of books. Teach through the attributes so the ladies are a little familiar with these words. Leave time for 2 and 3!
2. Group time. I suggest you have groups of 4/5 ladies, and set them to work through the Old Testament books finding answers. You can go around the groups and listen in, make suggestions and encourage good answers.
3. The last section involves enough time at the end for ladies to share their group answers with the whole class, and say why they have decided on that answer, if appropriate. Sometimes more than one answer is right.

This exercise also opens the door to thinking about God rather than just knowing the stories.

Theology is 'theos' meaning God plus 'logos' meaning words. So, it means words about God.

You may want to talk about Genesis 1-11 and Genesis 12-50 as a class for them to get the idea. The answers I would give to those sections would be -

The attribute of God that leaps out to me from Genesis 1-11 is God the creator. Omnipotent would also be good.

God/history? He made our world and brought us into time and space, because He wanted to.

The attribute of God I would choose for Genesis 12-50 is a covenant (promise) making and keeping God.

God/history? God caring about the humans He made, establishing a relationship with them.

The book most of these attributes come from (page 83) is on Colin's website - www.colinsalter.net click on 'Christian Theology in a Sudanese Context', if you want more help.

Have fun! Nudge, encourage and suggest as needed.

Lesson 22 Who is the God Who has done all these things?

You have made your way through 21 lessons and today we are looking at what you have found. So, what do we learn from the Old Testament about the nature of God, and about His dealings in history?

What will **you** put in these two columns?

The nature of God **What was God doing in history?**

Genesis 1-11 _____

Genesis 12-50 _____

Exodus _____

Leviticus _____

Numbers _____

Deuteronomy _____

Joshua _____

Judges _____

Ruth _____

1 and 2 Samuel

1 and 2 Kings

1 and 2 Chronicles _____

Ezra _____

Nehemiah _____

Esther _____

Job _____

Psalms _____

Here are the answers I would have written on page 81: hope they help you.

	The nature of God	What was God doing in history?
Genesis 1-11	creator	made us and our world because He wanted to
Genesis 12-50	covenant keeping	establishing a relationship with man
Exodus	just	taking His people back to the land He promised them
Leviticus	promise keeping	giving instructions for the place where His holy presence would be seen
Numbers	just	getting His stubborn people to the right place involved God exercising discipline
Deuteronomy	just	giving laws to make His people to be just
Joshua	faithful	Israel occupied Promised Land
Judges	patience	godly judges were lights in a dark time
Ruth	love, omnipotent	love to Ruth, to Naomi, bringing a Moabitess into the lineage of Jesus
1 and 2 Samuel	faithful, just	good kings honoured by God, bad kings rebuked, God's wrath is felt in the exiles
1 and 2 Kings		
1 and 2 Chronicles		
Ezra	patience	Temple foundations rebuilt
Nehemiah	omniscient	God knew who to send to Jerusalem and how it would work out
Esther	omnipotent	the right people in the right places at the right times
Job	omnipotent	God's complete power versus Satan's incomplete power, God's creation and power acknowledged
Psalms	faithful	God's people talk to Him in praise, fear and thankfulness

The nature of God

What was God doing in history?

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

Song of Solomon _____

Isaiah _____

Jeremiah

Lamentations _____

Ezekiel _____

Daniel _____

Hosea _____

Joel _____

Amos _____

Obadiah _____

Jonah _____

Micah _____

Nahum _____

Habakkuk _____

Zephaniah _____

Haggai _____

Zechariah _____

Malachi _____

More of my suggestions, this time for page 82:

	The nature of God	What was God doing in history?
Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon		He wanted people to walk His way Without Him life was meaningless ?
Isaiah	Holy One of Israel, judge, restorer	showing a vision of the far distant future
Jeremiah Lamentations	omnipotent	vision of judgement and distant restoration
Ezekiel	holy	restoration of Israel to show the world that God is God;
Daniel	omnipotent	showing He knew the future. He is sovereign
Hosea	love	?
Joel	judgement	?
Amos	judgement	eventual restoration
Obadiah	eternal	God's kingdom will be seen
Jonah	omnipresent, love	God cares about the world He made
Micah	judge, restorer	God knows the future
Nahum	omniscient	foretelling fall of Assyria
Habakkuk	omnipotent	sovereignly outworking His purpose
Zephaniah	judgement, restorer	One day God will be seen to be victorious
Haggai	holy	Messiah will come from the line of David
Zechariah	omnipotent, restorer	peace when the "desire of nations" comes
Malachi	God does not change	ever!

Attributes of God - what God is like.

God is Spirit - He exists in a different life form from us.

God is eternal - He is apart from and outside of time.

God is omnipresent - He is everywhere present at the same time.

God is a person - He is a Living Being who can think, feel and decide.

God is omnipotent - He is able to do anything His character allows Him to do.

God is omniscient - He knows everything.

God is holy - He is purely God; He is 'other'.

God is love - He actively cares for our well-being.

God is just - He treats everyone fairly while being true to His character.

God is merciful - He does not give us what we deserve.

God is faithful - He can always be trusted.

(From Christian Theology in a Sudanese Context: Colin Salter, chapters 7-20, Khartoum, 2004).

God does not change - He is always the same in His being and promises.

God is patient - He is slow to anger.

God is creator - He made our world out of nothing.

There is no definitive list of attributes or description of God - He is beyond our understanding. You will find many lists in different books - but this page is a good starting place for thinking about God!

Lesson 23 Leader's notes Christmas

Today we are going to work through two presentations to a ladies' group for Christmas and Easter. The Christmas one uses some Old Testament material, and the Good Friday one is a meditation.

I have set it out as if I was speaking. You will be taking a Christmas meeting and a Good Friday one for your ladies' group. I hope that by hearing and seeing your presentation, some of the ladies will be able to use it with ladies in their home churches or groups.

It will be good to have the ladies keep their books closed and/or not give out notes at the beginning. Before you start hand out the readings for the beginning of sections 1, 2 and 3, and any other readings you want read out. Remember who you have given them to!

Section 1 Bible readings opposite could be used as follows-

One lady to read all five references, or

One lady to read Genesis chapter 2 references and another lady to read chapter 3 references, or

Five ladies to read one reference each.

Your choice - you know your ladies. If everyone does not have a Bible, or a Bible in the language you are using, write the references on individual pieces of paper and give them out before you start.

Please notice the pronoun God uses in Genesis 3:22 in what He says. See also 1:26. These are important words in the doctrine of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - all together before man existed. Put this information away in your mind for another study.

Lesson 23 Christmas

What do you think of when you think of Christmas? Perhaps you think of getting some new clothes for your children, or of wishing you could get some new clothes for them. Perhaps you think of getting together in church to celebrate.

What are you celebrating?

I have been learning about the Old Testament recently, and I would like to share some thoughts which I hope will add to our understanding of Christmas. I have asked some ladies to help me with the Bible readings.

Listen to the readings and be ready to answer some questions.

1. Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17, 20-24; 3:1-13, 22-24.

Where did God put Adam?

What restrictions was Adam given?

What did the serpent (a name used for Satan, the great deceiver, or as he is called in Job, the accuser), what did he suggest to Eve?

What did Eve, and then Adam, do?

What had happened to their relationship with God?

What would happen if Adam and Eve ate from the tree of life?

In what state would they be?

So what did God do?

God put Adam in a beautiful garden, the Garden of Eden

Adam was told not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The serpent tempted Eve to doubt God's words.

Eve ate and then Adam ate.

Their relationship with God, which had been good, was immediately broken.

If they then managed to eat the fruit of the tree of life, they would live forever -
forever in a state of disobedience to God, in a state of sin.

In love God closed off the way to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden to prevent them eating from the tree of life. He thus opened the way to the possibility of healing the relationship between God and man.

God was making a way.

2. Genesis 49:1,8,10

Judah was the fourth son born to Jacob, not the first, but Jacob says that the tribe of Judah will be a leader, will have the sceptre, the symbol of authority, until the One Who holds ultimate power comes to claim it - Jesus when He comes again. When the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians several hundred years later, the name of the major tribe of the ongoing southern kingdom was Judah. Jesus was a descendant of Judah. We also know that Judah was not perfect. He was the man who failed to keep a big promise, slept with a prostitute and became the father of twins with his daughter-in-law. Yet he is in the line of Jesus, see Matthew 1:3.

Also in the family history of Jesus are Rahab, a prostitute who believed God; Ruth, a Moabitess whose people were banned from being part of God's people but who followed Naomi's God; and Bathsheba who was King David's adultery partner and mother of King Solomon, Matthew 1:5-6.

God wanted His people to show His righteousness so that other nations would believe, but they failed dismally. **God showed that He would bring other people into His kingdom.**

3. Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25.

A virgin, or young woman, (depending on your Bible translation), would conceive and have a son. She would call Him Immanuel - meaning 'God is with us'.

Matthew records that "all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet" and quotes Isaiah 7:14.

Matthew explains the situation. Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. This agreement was binding but there was no sexual relationship until after the marriage.

So Mary was a virgin. but she was expecting a baby "through the Holy Spirit".

Can you imagine how difficult this was for her?

And Joseph?

What did the neighbours say?

Luke 1:26-38 tells us about Mary's encounter with an angel, who told her she was to have a son. He specifically told her "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born of you will be called the Son of God."

A virgin birth! And Mary agreed.

God had prepared a human mother for God the Son. The Holy One, Jesus, had a heavenly Father, an earthly mother and the man, Joseph, Mary's soon to be husband, who although no blood relation to Jesus, looked after Him as a son.

God made the preparation necessary for His plan of salvation to happen.

God showed that people other than Jews would be in His kingdom - that's us!

God prepared a human mother to nurture His Son Jesus.

The planning for Christmas started a long time ago in the heart of God.

Galatians 4:4 "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

Add these thoughts to your understanding of Christmas.

You are allowed to say "Wow. That's amazing. Thank you, God!" Amen.

May you be blessed by God this Christmas.

(You may want to pray after this message. A quiet few minutes after a message can help people anchor in their minds what they have heard.)

Lesson 23 (continued) Leader's notes Easter

Good Friday meditation.

This is meditation is written exactly as I would use it.

I would use it slowly and thoughtfully, giving the ladies time to think.

I would have hymns or songs about Jesus and the Good Friday events where it says 'Hymn'. Some hymns I know talk about different parts of Jesus' life, or other things. Here I would only choose to use the verses about Jesus and the events of Good Friday, to keep everyone thinking only about Jesus and Good Friday!

Use it as it is right for you and your ladies, and for the purpose of your meeting.

A meditation for Good Friday

Have you ever noticed how different people report things slightly differently? Perhaps you and a friend are telling a third person about an event, and as you go along you begin to wonder if you and your friend are talking about the same thing? If we try to put together the stories of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we struggle to find a detailed order. The stories have different details - but it doesn't matter - we don't need to throw the Bible away - God used the different things the gospel writers' heard or were told, to produce their take on the events. Everything that God allowed to be collected into our Bible, and preserved through the centuries for us, He wanted there.

So let's turn to the events of Good Friday. Jesus had been arrested and held overnight - not in a police cell - but baited and mocked by a hostile group of guards who were probably employed by the chief priests. For legal reasons, when daybreak came a trial could be held. The chief priests had a theological accusation to make against Jesus, and they had no power to give a death penalty. So they took Jesus to Pilate saying He claimed to be a King, and made up a false charge of working against Caesar, the head of the Empire. Then a visit to Herod for political expediency and back to Pilate, who gave up trying to release Jesus and sentenced Him to be crucified. So the grim procession left to go outside the city wall. This was about nine o'clock in the morning.

Hymn

Luke 23:32-34 Two other men, both criminals, were led out with Jesus to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him, along with the criminals - one on His right, the other on His left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up His clothes by casting lots.

Forgive them. For the trials? For betting on the seamless robe His mother made? For hammering nails through His hands and feet? For using the crucifixion position to produce the most pain? For being instruments in the judicial murder of the Son of God? What we know is that Jesus, in that time of extremity, asked His Father to forgive their ignorance.

Hymn

John 19:26-27 When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved, standing nearby, He said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Dying, giving His life for us - He provides for the human who gave birth to the human Jesus. He gives His closest disciple the responsibility for His mother. There were younger brothers of Jesus - perhaps they did not yet believe in Him - later His brother James became leader of the Jerusalem church.

Hymn

Luke 23:39-43 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Jesus. "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God" he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Three men on three crosses. Jesus and two criminals. One mocking, the other acknowledging Jesus' innocence and power, plus his own sins. Paradise meant a place beyond the immediate heaven of earth's atmosphere, beyond the further heaven of outer space and its constellations - into the very presence of God Himself.

This now newly Christian man did not bow at Jesus' feet or pray the sinner's prayer. But Jesus heard this thief in agony, confess his sin and recognise Jesus' purity - and Jesus promised him eternal life THAT same day!

Hymn

Matthew 27:45-46 From the sixth hour (twelve noon) until the ninth hour (three in the afternoon) darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God is complete purity - hence Jesus' cry of abandonment by God as He carried the sins of mankind.

Hymn

John 19:29 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

Wine vinegar - drink of ordinary people - a sponge, a stalk - someone thought to bring them.

Hymn

John 19:30 When He had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."

Earlier in John's gospel Jesus had said "My food is to do the work of Him who sent me and to finish His work." In the prayer before Jesus was arrested, also in John's gospel, Jesus says, "Father, I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me with the glory I had with You before the world began."

What was finished? The work His Father had given Him to do.

What was that work? To atone for the sins of mankind - yours and mine - to make a way back to the intimate presence of God for each of us.

Hymn

Luke 23:46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When He had said this, He breathed His last.

Jesus called out - not the gasping breath of a tortured man, but the conscious act of a man in agony but in total self-control. Not a victim, but a victor.

Hymn

From Mark and Luke and John -

"At that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom" - symbolic that the way to God was open for all, and that God had made it so - from the TOP to the bottom. Jesus and the repentant thief had gone to heaven!

"The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." Was it fear of divine retribution, or an honest acknowledgment?

"It was the Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached. Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Jewish Sanhedrin Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. With Pilate's permission, Joseph came and took the body of Jesus away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no-one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there." Two brave and caring men.

"The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how the body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."

Hymn

Dear heavenly Father, our Almighty God.

Thank You that You loved us so much You planned a way for us to get back into a good relationship with You.

Thank You that You sent our Lord Jesus Christ to die in our place, to pay the debt our sin demanded.

Help us to remember the events and words of Good Friday, and to think about them as we await the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning.

Amen.

Leader's notes 24 Naomi - living through depression

From the book of Ruth, using the timeline of **Basic facts**, the ladies need to add on the right hand side of the page opposite what they think are Naomi's feelings and reactions.

The ladies can work in pairs. Show them my completed chart here, not to copy but to inspire!

Basic facts	Feelings and reactions
Famine	
Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Killion go from	
Bethlehem to Moab	
Elimelech dies	Grief
Mahlon and Killion marry Orpah and Ruth	
Ten years after arriving in Moab, Mahlon	Grief
and Killion die	Problem after problem
Naomi hears of the end of famine and plans	
to go back	
Orpah stays in Moab	
	Bitter "God against me"
Naomi and Ruth go to Bethlehem	
They arrive at barley harvest time	Bitter
	"God brought me misfortune"
Ruth gleanes in Boaz' field	Not Naomi's idea
Boaz is kind to Ruth	Naomi interested by
	contact with Boaz
Ruth gleanes in barley harvest; wheat harvest	A little bit of interest
Naomi schemes	More interest from Naomi
Ruth goes to the threshing floor with a request	
of marriage	
She leaves before anyone is up, with barley	
and a promise	
Boaz goes to the town gate and in the presence	
of witnesses redeems the land and the name	We presume Naomi was
of Mahlon	pleased
Boaz & Ruth marry	Naomi is fulfilled - the
	family land is safe - Ruth
Ruth has a son, Obed	is married - Naomi has
	Obed to care for

Lesson 24 Naomi - living through depression

From the book of Ruth, using this timeline of basic facts, add Naomi's feelings and reactions to the right hand side of the timeline.

Basic facts	Feelings and reactions
Famine	
Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Killion go from	
Bethlehem to Moab	
Elimelech dies	
Mahlon and Killion marry Orpah and Ruth	
Ten years after arriving in Moab, Mahlon	
and Killion die	
Naomi hears of the end of famine and plans	
to go back	
Orpah stays in Moab	
Naomi and Ruth go to Bethlehem	
They arrive at barley harvest time	
Ruth gleanes in Boaz' field	
Boaz is kind to Ruth	
Ruth gleanes in barley harvest, wheat harvest	
Naomi schemes	
Ruth goes to the threshing floor with a request	
of marriage	
She leaves before anyone is up, with barley	
and a promise	
Boaz goes to the town gate and in the presence	
of witnesses redeems the land and	
the name of Mahlon	
Boaz and Ruth marry	
Ruth has a son, Obed	

Have the ladies share their answers with the class.
Then work through the story again using the top paragraph of page 91.

This paragraph highlights the events that encouraged Naomi, things that we can learn from.

Learn from Ruth.

Truth and promise.

Naomi experiences grief and then more grief - problem after problem.
She feels God has made her life bitter.
She and Ruth return to Bethlehem. Naomi is angry and upset.
She thinks life is unfair.
She seems to be living on in spite of God, not living with God.
Ruth is a support for her.
Naomi is still depressed and does not suggest Ruth goes gleaning - Ruth, the foreigner, has to make that suggestion. Through her work Boaz provides for them.
Slowly Naomi shows interest in what is going on - and perhaps realises that God knows what He is doing.
Naomi's hopes come to pass. The family's land is redeemed. Boaz and Ruth marry and have a son, and Naomi is once more enjoying a full life.

She had been encouraged by Ruth's love and care. She was encouraged by the welcome back home. She was encouraged by Boaz' involvement. Slowly, with the provisions God has made for her, she moves from emptiness to fullness, from bitterness to fulfillment.

God sometimes puts us in situations where we can come alongside someone to help them in a down time.

That is what Ruth did.

She walked beside Naomi on the long walk from Moab to Bethlehem.

Ruth suggested that she should find a way to support them both back in Bethlehem.

She stayed with Naomi even when Naomi had nothing to offer her in a strange country nor was the happiest of company.

She walked and suggested and stayed, but we do not read that she lectured Naomi.

Grief is real and affects different people differently. Grief may involve denial, anger and depression before there is acceptance of circumstances, with the ability to move on.

"Snap out of it" and "Pull yourself together" are not helpful phrases and attitudes. Gentle coming alongside and allowing time to heal is much more likely to help.

Coming alongside someone with an arm round their shoulder, and some dinner in a dish, is a real ministry.

If depression happens to us, remember: God allows difficult things to occur in our lives - and He is there with us as well. Don't let go of God. He will not let go of you, not ever, never!!!

Leader's notes Lesson 24 (continued) Wisdom/knowledge

Work through the information in the top four paragraphs of page 92.

My aim is a gentle nudge in the direction of 'more knowledge requires more wisdom'; encouraging the ladies to know how to make the best use the knowledge we have now got from this course.

Invite the ladies to find these verses, read them, and apply them to daily life.

You may find the ladies' answers to these questions interesting!

Give time for discussion, or you may prefer to give out a sheet of paper which can be returned to you when completed by students.

Why don't you say this altogether to one another - catching the eyes of other people?

This is Jude 24 paraphrased - To Him who is able to keep us from falling and to present us before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty. power and authority. through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever! Amen.

Lesson 24 (continued) Wisdom/knowledge

We have covered a lot of information in this book and on this course.
Hopefully it is knowledge to help us spiritually grow and for us to use in helping other people.

The book of **Proverbs**, which guides us into living in a godly way, says in
1:7 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." and in
9:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Knowledge is information we have gained through learning or experience.

Wisdom is the good way we use our knowledge.

The fear of the Lord is living out a total respect for God.

Some ways to live in total respect for God are:

Romans 12:10
1 Corinthians 8:1
James 3:13
1 Peter 3:15
2 Peter 3:18

And there are many more we could look at.

From what **you** have learned:

1. what was the most surprising?
2. what was the most interesting?
3. what was the most useful?

This is Jude 24 paraphrased - To Him who is able to keep us from falling and to present us before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty. power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever! Amen.

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