The Young People-Adult Quarterly International Church School Lessons for Christian Teaching (Ages 18 and up)

Vol. 123 | No. 2

Second Quarter December, January, February – 2021-22



Studies In Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Ezra, Job Isaiah, Nahum Luke

Dr. Mozella Mitchell – Writer Rev. Adrian V. Nelson, II, J.D., M.Div. – Editor Department of Church School Literature Rev. Patrick Barrett, II, M.Div. – General Secretary Christian Education Department "⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

 ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under the Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: The third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy, catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body;

and life everlasting.

Amen.

*catholic means universal



WORSHIP PROGRAM

December, January, February 2021-2022

MUSICAL PRELUDE

December: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #92, or "Emmanuel," Norman Hutchins, <u>https://www.youtube.com/</u> watch?v=av1omSNOFwE.

January: "My Times Are In Thy Hand, " AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #78, or "My Times," LaShun Pace, <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKuS7-el9i</u>.

February: "We Shall Overcome," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #640, or "Glory," Common and John Legend, <u>https://www.youtube.com/</u> <u>watch?v=A3FiZ82aAd8</u>.

CALL TO WORSHIP

December: Led by an adult (1st Sunday); a young adult (2nd Sunday); a youth (3rd Sunday); and a child (4th Sunday).

Leader: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host, praising God and saying, (Luke 2:13 NRSV)

All: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" (Luke 2:14 NRSV) **January**: Led by the pastor or a minister (1st Sunday); the Sunday Church School Superintendent (2nd Sunday); the Young People-Adult teacher (3rd Sunday); the Intermediate-Senior teacher (4th Sunday); the Beginner, Primary, or Junior teacher (5th Sunday)

Leader: For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; (Isaiah 61:8a NRSV)

All: I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. (Isaiah 61:8b NRSV)

February: Led by a young adult or college student (1st Sunday); a high school student (2nd Sunday); a middle school student (3rd Sunday); an elementary school student (4th Sunday).

Leader: Therefore, hear me, you who have sense, far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong. (Job 34:10 NRSV)

All: Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice. (Job 34:12)

CHORAL INVOCATION

(Sung corporately)

"Surely the Presence of the Lord" (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #222)

MORNING HYMN

December: "O Come, All Ye Faithful," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #95)

January: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #80)

February: "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #653)

RESPONSIVE READING

Luke 1:68-75 NRSV

Leader: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

People: He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,

Leader: As he spoke through the mouth of his prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

People: Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant,

Leader: The oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us,

All: That we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Rally Song: "Stand Up," Cynthia Erivo, <u>https://www.youtube.com/</u> <u>watch?v=sn19xvfoXvk</u>. (Note: "Stand Up" was co-written by Cynthia Erivo and Joshuah Brian Campbell , a member of the AME Zion Church.)

STUDY PERIOD

Learners study the lessons in their classes.

CLOSING ASSEMBLY

Class members will commit and dedicate themselves to trusting in the justice of God and working toward making the justice of God a reality in all of God's creation.

SUNDAY SCHOOL BENEDICTION

Sunday school is over for another day. Hear us, Heavenly Father, as to Thee we pray. Through the week be with us in our work and play; Make us kind and loving, help us to obey. Amen.

UNIT I: GOD REQUIRES JUSTICE ADULT UNIT I: God Requires Justice ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Justice and Obedience to the Law ADULT TOPIC: The Protection of Justice

LESSON 1 DATE: December 5, 2021

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 5; 10; 27; 28:1-2 PRINT PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 5:1b[begin with "Hear"]-3; 10:12-13; 27:1-10

Home Daily Bible Readings

М	Deuteronomy 5:6-21
Т	Deuteronomy 5:23-33
W	Romans 12:1-2, 9-21
Th	Deuteronomy 10:1-11
F	Matthew 5:17-20
Sa	Deuteronomy 27:14-26
Su	Deuteronomy 5:1-3;
	10:12-13; 28:1-2
	T W Th F Sa

The Law of Justice Follow the Path of God's Law Discern the Good, Acceptable, and Perfect The Written Law and the Ark of Wood-Jesus Fulfills the Law Curses upon Disobedience Obey the Statutes and Ordinances

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or Leaner

Celebration - "Trust and Obey" - #443 A.M.E.Z. Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Deuteronomy 5:1b [begin with "Hear"]-3; 10:12-13; 27:1-10 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We cherish the blessings God promises as a benefit of obedience. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. ² The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. ³ The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.

The Essence of the Law

¹² So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.

The Inscribed Stones and Altar on Mount Ebal

¹Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged all the people as follows: Keep the entire commandment that I am commanding you today. ²On the day that you cross over the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and cover them with plaster. ³ You shall write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over, to enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you. ⁴So when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I am commanding you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall cover them with plaster. ⁵And you shall build an altar there to the Lord your God, an altar of stones on which you have not used an iron tool. ⁶You must build the altar of the Lord your God of unhewn stones. Then offer up burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God, ⁷ make sacrifices of well-being, and eat them there, rejoicing before the Lord your God. ⁸You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very clearly.

⁹Then Moses and the levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying: Keep silence and hear, O Israel! This very day you have become the people of the Lord your God. ¹⁰Therefore obey the Lord your God, observing his commandments and his statutes that I am commanding you today.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



The study this quarter focuses on justice as presented in a variety of Old Testament Scriptures. Justice originates in the nature of God and is given to God's people as a gift under the Law. The history of God's covenant people shows that kings who exercised God's justice according to God's law were considered good kings. Over time, adverse circumstances caused God's people to raise questions about God's justice.

Unit I, "God Requires Justice," has four lessons that explore how leaders of God's people must rely on God's Law as they administer justice. Deuterono-

my demands that God's people be just and equitable. In 2 Samuel, King David demonstrates justice by showing kindness to Mephibosheth. Isaiah describes a reign of justice and righteousness. In First Kings, the Queen of Sheba recognizes Solomon as a king who "executes justice and righteousness." Through the prophet Nahum, God metes out justice to Judah's enemies.

People often struggle to do what they know is right. How can people find the strength and motivation to do what is right? Deuteronomy 10 teaches that obedience to God's Law is for our own well-being.

In groups of three or four, discuss your struggles with knowing and doing what is right. Focus on some of the following issues. Are there times when you do not know for certain what is right and what is wrong? Have you tried to do right and wound up with negative results? When we do what we know is right, does it help us to live a less painful and less conflicted life? Do we, in general feel more secure when we have clear rules to live by? Share and compare your findings with the larger group.



EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Deuteronomy 5:1b-3: Deuteronomy (meaning "second giving of the law") is addressed to the generation of Israelites born during the 40 years in the wilderness. The preceding generation was disobedient and died on the way to the Promised Land. Therefore, the people are admonished to "hear, O Israel" (a regular refrain in Deuteronomy–5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9) the words of the law that will ensure a stable nation. Commentators have noted that the structure of the covenant in Deuteronomy is similar to that of an ancient peace treaty–identifying the parties involved in the treaty, Yahweh and Israel, and their ongoing relationship (1:1–3:27), enumerating the terms of the agreement, the law of Moses (4:1–26:19), and concluding with the consequences of keeping or rejecting the terms of the finalized agreement, blessings and curses (27:1–31:13). The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) are repeated, recalling their original context, in Deuteronomy 5:1-21. At this stage, Moses is actually giving his farewell address to those who will be entering the Promised Land, as he himself would not be entering the Promised Land with them. Moses wants the Israelites to prosper by being obedient to God's laws.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13: The question of what the Lord requires of His people (Deuteronomy 10:12) is asked again by the prophet Micah (Micah 6:6-8). In both cases, the answer is not a list of ritual observances, but rather a sincere love of God reflected by keeping His Law and dealing with others justly. (See

also Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; 12:7.) Prior to this point, Moses had reminded the people of rebellion and idolatry (Deut. 9:7-24); they knew what was right and refused to do it. Thus, the question is appropriate. "Moses set before them a rhetorical question that forced self-reflection to determine how best to live as people of God" (*Standard Lesson Commentary 2021-2022, Large Print Edition*, p. 124). The answer to the question is very straightforward and simple; in other words, God's requirements are not complicated and difficult. Yet, it was made clear that God demanded total commitment of love to Himself and walking in justice and obedience as laid down in the words of The Law.

Deuteronomy 27:1-10: Here Moses is urging the people to be faithful and obedient in a time when he will not be with them, that is, when they enter the Promised Land, which will be after he has passed from the scene (See Deuteronomy 31:2; 34:1-5) and Joshua will have taken the reigns of leadership. This was sort of a farewell speech, showing sincere concern for their future welfare. Moses commanded that the agreement between Yahweh and Israel be solemnized by a grand ceremony, the antiphonal reading of curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience read from two neighboring mountaintops in the Promised Land, Gerizim and Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:11-28:68), a "yet to occur ceremony in which Israel would commemorate its covenant with God... they were to remember God's covenant and renew their obligation to obey his commands" (Ibid., p. 125). The command to make the altar for sacrifice from "unhewn stones" (from shalom, indicating a whole, uncut stone) is repeated in the Old Testament (Joshua 8:31) and once in the deutero-canonicals (1 Maccabees 4:47). One could see this command as an indication that humans can do nothing to make the ugliness of sin that requires sacrifice attractive. Israel's obedience to God and His Law shows "how they were to live according to the covenant. Moses recognized this requirement, and it is the main reason imperatives like obey, keep, serve, do are found throughout this week's Scripture text. A people obedient to the commands of God would have a proper understanding of justice and just living (see Leviticus 19:15-16; Deuteronomy 16:20; Isaiah 1:17; Zechariah 7:9)" (*Ibid.*, p. 127).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

What is right and just consist in the doing, the action of the person or group. We all learn this, even if only gradually, as life's lessons make it clear to us. But God reveals this fact of life to His people, and our greatest example of it is in Jesus Christ, Himself, God's Son whom He sent to exemplify obedience for all time.

Break into two groups. Ask each group to discuss their thoughts as to whether following God's commands is always in our best



interest. Is it everyone's understanding that customs change with cultures, but absolute standards of right and wrong do not? Do values in accordance with God's standards benefit both the individual and society at large? Do we seek to do the right thing, even when it is difficult to do so? How does praying to God to show us what is right and wrong help us to overcome in difficult situations? How about asking ourselves the question, "What would Jesus do?" Share your findings with the larger group.

iTHINK: (5 – 7 min.)

1. Before class, write a few advertising slogans that seem to be saying something about right and wrong on the board (if you are meeting in-person). For example: No Rules, Just Right (Outback Steakhouse); Have It Your Way! (Burger King); American by Birth. Rebel by Choice (Harley Davidson); Just Do It (Nike); Do What Tastes Right (Wendy's). Begin class by discussing what each of these slogans seem to imply and whether the participants agree with each idea.

2. Play a brief clip from WingClips.com about a character having to make a difficult choice. (The clips on this site have been selected by believers, but screen them to ensure that they are appropriate for your group.) Discuss the criteria the character may be using to make his or her choice.

3. "I am commanding you today, **for your own well-being**" (Deuteronomy 10:13). On the board (if you are meeting in-person) or a large sheet of paper, list the blessings promised for keeping the commandments from Deuteronomy 28:3-14. With those blessings, mix in blessings *not* promised in those verses. Give participants time to read Deuteronomy 28:3-14 and underline the blessings promised in those verses.

4. Divide the class into five groups, assigning each group one of these verses: Deuteronomy 5:1; 6:4-5; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9. Each verse contains the command, "Hear, O Israel." Have each group try to summarize what Yahweh wanted to hear and understand in ten words or less.

5. Write the Ten Commandments from Deuteronomy 5 on the board (if you are meeting in-person). Explain that while these commandments are clear, some of the decisions we face may fall into "gray areas" of these commandments. For example: Am I considering buying a new car because I really need one, or because I covet the cars of my friends? Is putting my parent in a nursing home for the purpose of offering the best care, or am I dishonoring my parent by not caring for that parent in my home? Have participants consider similar dilemmas and close with silent prayers asking for God's guidance.

KEY VERSES: So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

A	DULT	GENERAL LESSON T and	God Requires Justice FITLE: David Administers Justice Kindness Fhe Mercy of Justice				
		LE	SSON 2				
DATE: December 12, 2021							
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 9 PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Samuel 9:1-7, 9-12							
Home Daily Bible Readings							
Dec. 6	М	2 Samuel 1:1-12	Death of Saul and Jonathan Mourne				
Dec. 7	Т	2 Samuel 1:17-27	A Lament from a Just Heart				
Dec. 8	W	Luke 18:1-8	A Cry for Justice				
Dec. 9	Th	Matthew 20:29-34	Mercy from the Son of David				

 Dec. 10 F
 2 Samuel 3:1-5; 5:1-5

 Dec. 11 Sa
 Psalm 21

 Dec. 12 Su
 2 Samuel 9:1-7, 9-12

A Cry for Justice Mercy from the Son of David David Made King over All Israel The King Rejoices in God David Shows Kindness to Saul's Descendant

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration - "No Not One!" - #258 A. M. E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – 2 Samuel 9:1-7, 9-12 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We are encouraged by David's kindness toward Mephibosheth as an act of justice and equity. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

¹ David asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" ² Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!" ³ The king said, "Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" Ziba said to the king, "There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." ⁴ The king said to him, "Where is he?" Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar." ⁵ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. ⁶ Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, "Mephibosheth!" He answered, "I am your servant." ⁷ David said to him, "Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always."

⁹ Then the king summoned Saul's servant Ziba, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. ¹⁰ You and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him, and shall bring in the produce, so that your master's grandson may have food to eat; but your master's grandson Mephibosheth[a] shall always eat at my table." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. ¹¹ Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do." Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. ¹² Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People rely on the kindness and support of others. How can people show radical kindness to one another? King David acted justly, remembered his promise to Jonathan, and was kind to Jonathan's son.

We may sense that there is a growing incivility in our culture and often ponder by what means it may be overcome. For instance, we may find it difficult to be kind to those we view as threats. If able, break into small groups. Allow each group to brainstorm about individuals or groups that some may view as threats. Also, discuss ways we may discover that our preconceived ideas about someone



change as we get to know that person. Can groups prove that they are not a threat, as sometimes perceived? Discuss how some people are capable of building friendships that bridge political, social, and other divides.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

<u>2</u> Samuel 9:1-7: The idea that a king would grant privileges to a relative of the royal line that he disposed of is a radical departure from the norm. David did so because Jonathan, the son of King Saul, recognized David as God's anointed, even though Jonathan was next in line for the throne. Jonathan showed his al-

legiance, figuratively, by giving the symbols of his authority to David (1 Samuel 18:4) and by risking his life in David's defense against Saul (19:1-7; 20:1-42). Mephibosheth's debilitating injury occurred when he was five years old. His nurse, while preparing to flee after the death of Saul and Jonathan, dropped him, causing the injury (2 Samuel 4:4). Further intrigue involving Ziba and Mephibosheth occurred during Absalom's rebellion against David (1 Samuel 16:1-4; 19:24-30). Later, when David felt obligated to punish any of Saul's remaining relatives for his treachery against the Gibeonites, David again spared Mephibosheth for the sake of Jonathan (2 Samuel 21:1-9).

2 Samuel 9:9-12: The name *Mephibosheth* means "dispeller of shame." In a sense, David allowed Mephibosheth to dispel the shame of faithless King Saul by inviting Mephibosheth to his table. Mephibosheth is referred to as Meribbaal ("Baal is advocate") in 1 Chronicles 8:34; 9:40. David's ascension to the throne of Saul was neither smooth nor bloodless. Those of the family of Saul and former allies of Saul struggled to maintain power (2 Samuel 2–4). "In spite of potential threats to his rule, David determined to keep his promises and spare the lineage of his friend and his former king" (*Ibid.*, p. 131). Another example of a member of a deposed line being invited to the king's table is found in Jeremiah 52:31-34. King Evil-Merodach of Babylon showed such favor to Jehoiachin, deposed king of Judah. A number of years had passed since the

death of Saul and Jonathan, and David had been busy defending his rule, so to speak, and establishing his kingdom. In the meantime, "Saul's family was hiding. Knowing that David had been crowned king first in Judah, and then all Israel, any remaining sons of Saul would have to fear that they would be executed to prevent their trying to regain the throne" (Ibid.). No one knew what David actually had in mind in seeking to know whether any of the family of Saul and Jonathan still survived, not even Jonathan's son Mephibosheth and the servant Ziba, both of whom came in obeisance at the king's call and paid homage to him. But David's pledge to his dear friend Jonathan surprisingly turned out to be the motive.



ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

Reflect on the high points of the story of David's actions with regard to Jonathan. How does the story show the relationship between justice and mercy? If able, break into groups, and share the importance of issues in the story, such as the value of keeping our word, showing radical kindness to someone in need, finding value in people regardless of their backgrounds or physical abilities., taking personal risks for the sake of doing the right thing, being committed to breaking down artificial barriers that separate people. Share your findings with the body as a whole.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. On the board (if you are meeting in-person), write: "Any friend of . . . is a friend of mine." Begin class by discussing why one would or would not offer friendship to someone they have not met, purely on the basis of that person's relationship to a friend.

2. Divide the class into two groups, if able. Ask one group to name a promise that is hard for people to keep (ex: Lose weight). The other group should try to name another hard promise beginning with the last letter of the preceding promise (ex: Take more time off work). The first team continues by building on the preceding answer (ex: Keep a budget). When one team is stumped, start over, trying to keep the string of promises going. Use this activity to introduce the lesson about how David kept a difficult promise.

3. Work with the class to make a list of the events occurring in this text. For example: David wanted to show favor to a relative of King Saul; David felt he owed a debt to Jonathan; David granted privileges to a man who was disabled; etc. Go through the list, asking the class to mark each event as surprising (S) or expected (E). They may have differing opinions, but each should be able to justify their position.

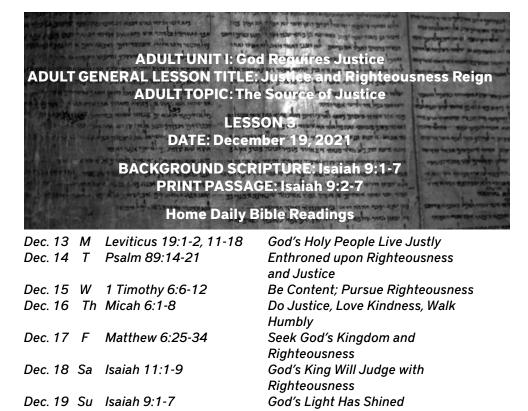
4. In the week before this session, ask a participant to prepare a short report on the bloody transition in power between Saul and David from 2 Samuel 2–4. Introduce today's Scripture study with



that report. Note the risk David would be taking by bringing a relative of Saul into the palace after all the intrigue that had occurred before that time.

5. Write the acrostic WHO (Weak, Hostile, Outsider) on the board (if you are meeting in-person). As you close the session, have participants think of people they know who fit in those categories. Encourage individual prayer as participants ask God to help them show radical kindness to people in their lives WHO need it.

KEY VERSE: David asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" 2 Samuel 9:1



EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" - #92 A.M.E. Zion Bicentennial Hymn

Declaration – Isaiah 9:2-7 (*Read together by the class, or by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We celebrate the justice, righteousness, and peace that the one called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace brings to God's people. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. ³ You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴ For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶ For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁷ His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



People suffer injustices and ill treatment. Will there be a time when people can count on being treated fairly? God's kingdom will be one of justice and righteousness. We know how people feel when taken advantage of, mistreated, or charged with some misdeed they have not committed. Often, we may seek the services of an advocate (attorney, union steward, social worker, agent, etc.) to ensure that we are treated fairly. Generally speaking, injustices of every kind tend to be in the nature of human treatment of one another; and we are faced with the perpetual task of seeking justice and avoiding being wronged.

Break into groups (if able) and elaborate on the types of injustices that individuals and groups face in society (such as in social encounters with one another, business dealings, political setups, racial, cultural, and gender equality, etc.). Talk about utopias people have yearned for where there would be no injustices, no mistreatments, no wrong-

doing; or how we may have even hoped for or imagined having a mighty hero willing to come to rescue. Why is the Superhero ideal so popular in society?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Isaiah 9:1-5: This beautiful prophecy is given during the reign of King Ahaz of Judah and is part of the larger discourse of Isaiah 7–12. Ahaz was facing a military crisis and was considering an alliance with Assyria to counter the threats of an Aram-Israel alliance. Isaiah promised Yahweh's intervention. Ahaz's temptation to create a human solution to a problem through alliances rather than wait for Yahweh's solution was one shared by other kings of Judah (2 Chronicles 16:1-10; Isaiah 30:1-5). The Immanuel prophecy (chapter 7) and this prophecy are often explained in terms of "prophetic perspective" or "double fulfilment." That is, they refer to an event in Isaiah's day, but also point centuries ahead to Jesus the Messiah. Isaiah celebrates the light that he speaks of as having already come in a heavy darkness that has prevailed in the people, a light witnessed by the people. "They *have seen*...this light and *on those...a light has dawned*.... Light is a figure of speech for God, Himself, or for his divine presence (see Isaiah 60:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 John 1:5; Revelation 21:23; 22:5). Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:2 to refer to Jesus (Matthew 4:16). Jesus' ministry was like a great light bursting on an unworthy people" (*Ibid.*, p. 139).

Isaiah 9:6-7: Isaiah 9:6 is included in the lyrics of the first Act of Handel's Messiah and is known to many from this work (https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=_f7jhk-ljDo). There is joy, the ultimate reason for which is "the birth of an extraordinary child. He is given to us by God. This is not said of other births, although this child was to have been a sign to Ahaz-a sign he refused to see. Some identify the child as Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz. But this does not match the chronology of Hezekiah's birth. And, more importantly, no mere human king is in view, but rather an end-times figure, the Messiah. Furthermore, neither Hezekiah nor anyone else from Isaiah's time accomplished what is in this passage.... The set of names we see starting here reminds us of 'throne names' used for newly crowned kings. These names give us the nature and character of this child and his perfect rule" (Ibid., p. 141). The title "Mighty God" (el gibbor), for instance, refers to a hero, champion, or warrior. Variations of gibbor are used to describe a variety of powerful men in Scripture, including Boaz (Ruth 2:1), David (1 Samuel 16:18), and even Goliath (1 Samuel 17:51). The idea of peace (shalom) in Hebrew is far more than the absence of immediate conflict, but rather it speaks of wholeness and completion. The Prince of Peace would not make temporary truces, but would restore relationships to the state in which they were intended. This Prince of Peace "brings peace between God and humanity by way of reconciliation and redemption (see John 14:27; Ro-mans 5:1-11)" (*Ibid.*, p. 142).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

We have no problem seeing this famous prophecy as referring to Jesus as the coming Messiah, even as far back in history as it was foreseen. We easily and joyfully celebrate it as such at Christmastime. Break into groups (if able) and

elaborate on the following issues and questions. Explain how we understand that some events and prophecies in the Old Testament point both to their historical contexts and to the future coming of the promised Messiah. Do we view Jesus as the ultimate hero figure, one with all power who can right all wrongs? Do we believe that we can



have a deep sense of peace because of Jesus' presence, even when our world seems to be in turmoil? Are we sustained by a trust that troubles are temporary, but Jesus is eternal? Are these beliefs and ideas especially significant during this time of year? Are our troubles integrated into our Christmas celebrations?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Create a matching quiz for the class to introduce the lesson. Participants will match political/military liberators with the nations that honor them. Lead into a discussion of the ultimate liberator, Jesus the Messiah.

2. Open class by playing "[I Need a] Hero" by Gloria Estefan from a CD or music or video-sharing site. Discuss the attributes we look for in a true hero. How many of those qualities will we find in our text today?

3. Divide the class into four groups (if able). Give each group pen and paper and one of the four titles (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Peace of Peace) in Isaiah 9:6. Each group should try to write a job description for Jesus based on their assigned title.

4. Ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 7:1-2. Help the participants summarize the political threats facing King Ahaz at that time. On the board write: 1) A Wonderful Counselor who gives reliable guidance; 2) A Mighty God who provides strength and protection; 3) An Everlasting Father who soothes and comforts; 4) A Prince of Peace who brings calm, even during times of trouble. Go through the list asking how each was needed during Ahaz's time and how Jesus brings each to us today.

5. Many Christmas cards contain the text of Isaiah 9:6. Bring a box of such cards to class and distribute them to participants. Have them to address a card and write a personal message of encouragement to someone who needs to appreciate the hope of eternal peace and justice found in Jesus' reign.

KEY VERSE: His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peacefor the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. Isaiah 9:7

ADULT UNIT I: God Requires Justice ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Justice for God's Beloved People ADULT TOPIC: The Consequences of Justice

LESSON 4 DATE: December 26, 2021

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Nahum 1 PRINT PASSAGE: Nahum 1:1-3, 6-8, 12-13, 15

Home Daily Bible Readings

Dec. 20	М	Psalm 33:1-12
Dec. 21	T	Isaiah 61:4-9
Dec. 22	W	Luke 1:26-37
Dec. 23	Th	Psalm 72:1-8, 11-14
Dec. 24	F	Luke 1:46-55
Dec. 25	Sa	Luke 2:1-7
Dec. 26	Su	Nahum 1:1-3, 6-8,
		12-13.15

God's Chosen Nation A People Whom God Has Blessed Mary, the Servant of the Lord May God's King Rule Justly God Lifts Up the Lowly Jesus Born into an Unjust World God Avenges God's People

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or learner

Celebration - "How Great Thou Art"-#47 A.M.E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Nahum 1 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

Affirmation – We experience hope through the belief that God's justice will prevail. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

¹ An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

The Consuming Wrath of God

² A jealous and avenging God is the Lord, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. ³ The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

⁶ Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and by him the rocks are broken in pieces. ⁷ The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble;

he protects those who take refuge in him, ⁸ even in a rushing flood. He will make a full end of his adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

Good News for Judah

¹²Thus says the Lord, "Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. ¹³And now I will break off his yoke from you and snap the bonds that bind you."

¹⁵ Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People are often discouraged by the injustices in our society. How can we hold on to hope that justice will be served? Solomon is known as a king who "executes justice and righteousness," and the prophecy of Nahum is one of the many examples of how God delivers justice.

Break into small groups (if able) and discuss your sense of injustice, and the specific injustices you see happening in the world today, in your surroundings, city, state, neighborhood, school, family, church, etc.

Share your concern for those who suffer under oppressive leaders, the anger people feel when injustice does not seem to be punished immediately, people's longing for world peace and justice and why. Discuss what you think God is doing in terms of bringing about justice in our world today.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Nahum 1:1-3: Nahum can be considered a sequel to the Book of Jonah, which was devoted to the story of Jonah and God's call of him to prophesy to Nineveh, Assyria. Nineveh was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River across from the city of Mosul in modern-day Iraq. Violent conflicts there in recent years are not dissimilar to the cruelty of the Assyrians of Nahum's day. In Jonah's day, the people of Nineveh repented and were spared God's judgment. Soon thereafter, however, Assyria returned to their warlike ways and conquered Israel (2 Kings 17:5-23). Nahum prophesied about a century after Jonah. While it is true that God's primary nature is that of love (1 John 4:8), God's love cannot be separated from God's willingness to punish those who prey on the innocent. Isaiah refers to this as God's strange/alien work of judgment (Isaiah 28:21). While we may view jealousy as a petty emotion, the mean-

ing of the Hebrew word is deeper. In saying that Yahweh is jealous (Nahum 1:2), the prophet is not expressing God's envy of false gods who vie for Israel's attention, but rather the zeal, ardor, and passion God holds for God's people. "This attribute refers to God's passionate reaction against any infringement on His holiness or any attempt to share His glory. His jealousy demands undivided loyalty and reveals itself as wrath against rejection of Him or His lordship. [Speaking of God's vengeance, the prophecy declares that], the universal judge leaves no sin unpunished and metes out the just deserts of the wicked. The threefold repetition of the Hebrew word for 'avenge' strongly emphasizes an inescapable and appropriate retribution" (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*).

Nahum 1:6-8: Even though Nineveh deserved to be punished, God had not done so earlier as "God waits patiently because he wants everyone to repent; he does not wish for anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). God does not react in haste (see Jonah 3). But [God limits his patience]. And when his patience ends, he still has the power to hold the guilty accountable. The people of Noah's day had gone too far from God and acted wickedly, so God sent the flood (Genesis 6-8). Having promised never to destroy the whole world with water again (9:8-11), God still reserved the right to act in judgment (examples: chapter 19; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 6:12-17). [Nahum 1:3 describes God more as a righteous warrior as in Rev. 19:11-16.] Unlike human fighters, he has all of nature at his command as his weapons. The whirlwind forms in the sky and reaches to earth; the storm can yield thunder and lightning, hail, destructive rains, and more.... No one can withstand God's indignation and his fierce anger-no person, no nation, no power. Not even the strongest-willed has the ability to resist God" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2021-2022, Large Print Edition, pp. 148 and 149). Yet God's fierceness is tempered with goodness and love. "He creates good things (examples: Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). He gives good gifts (Exodus 3:8; James 1:17). Those who trust in him experience his goodness in protection from harm. The phrase he cares for those anticipates Jesus' self-disclosure that he is the good shepherd who knows his sheep and cares for them (John 10:14-15)" (*Ibid.*, p. 149).

Nahum 1:8, 12-13, 15: Nineveh would not escape God's judgment, but God's people whom they had harmed, would be avenged and released from oppression. "The people of Nineveh would foolishly behave as though they were secure as a result of their political alliances and national strength. In this case, the Ninevites might combine with their numerical superiority to create a false sense of security. [Assuring Judah of the end of their affliction by Nineveh, God addresses them in loving embrace while telling them of the suffering Nineveh would endure.] The opening words of [verse 15] are similar to those of Isaiah 52:7, which itself is quoted in Romans 10:15. In Isaiah's context, the good news was that Babylonian exile would end and the people of Judah would be restored to their land. For the Apostle Paul, the words in Romans find their ultimate meaning in the march of the news regarding Jesus Christ. For Nahum and pre-Babylonian Judah, the good news was that Assyria would fall" (Ibid., pp. 150 and 151).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)



We celebrate the knowledge that God will punish evil and reward good in God's time. Thus, we do not let temporary difficulties shake our faith. Discuss the fact that mercy and judgment intertwined in God's nature. Is this a fact to be revered? Would we rather that our enemies repent than face God's vengeance? Explain. Do we expect that God will discipline us when we turn from God's

ways? How do we plan to avoid being enemies of God? Explain.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Cast a one-minute role play in which a child is complaining about what he or she perceives to be favorable treatment of a sibling. The child should grumble using "always" and "never" statements (Ex: He ALWAYS gets his way! You NEVER make her do her chores! She ALWAYS gets to have friends over and I NEVER get to!). After the role play, discuss why such complaints are usually inaccurate. Introduce the idea that God's people voiced similar grievances when they did not see their enemies immediately punished.

2. Write these two phrases on the board (if able): "just deserts" and "just desserts." Point out the fact that while the phrases sound the same, their meanings are *very* different. The former means, "what someone justly deserves." The latter means "only sweet treats." Lead into the Bible lesson by observing that while it may have seemed that the cruel Assyrian Empire was getting "just desserts" for decades, a time would come when they would get "just deserts"!

3. Have two volunteers read selections of Jonah and today's text antiphonally. The first reader should read Jonah 3:10–4:1; Jonah 4:2; Jonah 4:5. The second reader should alternate with the first reader, reading Nahum 1:1-3; Nahum 1:6-8; and Nahum 1:12, 13, 15. Have participants discuss the comparative results.

4. Divide the class into groups. Assign each group to write a short essay entitled, "Why a Loving God Must Punish Evil," using today's Bible text as a resource.

5. Identify agencies that help serve political refugees, especially, if possible, those from the same geographic areas about which Nahum prophesied (northern Iraq). Find ways that your group can help such an agency.

KEY VERSE: A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. Nahum 1:2



Dec. 28	Т	Matthew 2:1-8, 16-18
Dec. 29	W	Revelation 6:9-17
Dec. 30	Th	Psalm 94:1-10
Dec. 31	F	Psalm 94:11-23
Jan. 1	Sa	1 John 3:4-13
Jan. 2	Su	Genesis 4:1-13

Stephen Prays for Mercy for His Persecutors Herod's Vengeance Martyrs Long for Justice Shine Forth, God of Vengeance! God's Just Acts Love One Another Abel's Blood Cries Out for Vengeance

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or learner

Celebration – "Lord, I Hear of Showers of Blessings"-#464 A.M.E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Genesis 4:1-13 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

Affirmation – We repent of thoughts and actions that could harm others and ask for God's mercy and forgiveness. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

Cain Murders Abel

¹ Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord." ² Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. ⁶The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." ⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



Unit II, "God: The Source of Justice," has five lessons that focus on God's justice in the lives of God's people and in the gift of the Law. Stories in Genesis reveal God's justice in the face of human injustice. Included are stories of Cain's murder of his brother Abel as well as Hagar and Ishmael being cast out of Abraham's household. Exodus demands justice for all people including one's enemies. In Deuteronomy, judges, officials, and priests work together to administer justice for God's people, in particular. Deuteronomy demands justice for marginalized people.

Some people become angry when their best efforts don't result in the anticipated outcome. How do people

deal with anger and disappointment? God punished Cain because he allowed his anger to turn to rage and then to murder.

Break into small groups (if able) and elaborate on the following questions or issues. Have you ever been told to "count to ten" or "take a deep breath" as ways to keep from lashing out in anger? If so, did the trick help? Do you regret times that you have let your anger damage your relationships? Have you ever wished that you could take back harsh words or spiteful actions? Can you cite examples of how anger born from envy erupts in estrange-





ment, crime, and even war? Do we find it easier to blame others for problems than to accept personal responsibility for them? Why is this ever the case, do you think? Should not the proximity of family breed support rather than hostility? Share your findings with the rest of the group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Genesis 4:1-7: The Hebrew word for "to know" (yada) has to do with knowledge gained by seeing and experiencing. It is used, as it is here, to refer to sexual relationships (also Genesis 4:17, 25; 19:5, 8; 1 Samuel 1:19; etc.). It is also used to mean experiencing good and evil (Genesis 3:5, 22) and intimately knowing God (Exodus 10:2; 1 Samuel 2:12; etc.). The name "Cain" (Hebrew, gavin) is a play on words seen in Eve's statement that she had "produced" (Hebrew, ganiti) a son. The reason for Yahweh's acceptance of Abel's offering and rejection of Cain's is unclear. Some argue that the reason for the favor shown the former was that Abel brought "firstlings" rather than an offering of his excess. Another explanation for Yahweh's accepting Abel's offering was that Adam's family knew that Yahweh expected blood sacrifice for atonement. It is inferred that Yahweh (in a world that had not yet known death) had Adam sacrifice animals to make "garments of skins" to replace their homemade fig leaf garments (Genesis 3:21). God's warning that anger born of jealousy would consume Cain is echoed in James's warning about envy leading to murder (James 4:1-3). "It is little wonder Cain felt snubbed. God recognized this and initiated a conversation with him by asking questions. This echoes his approach to Adam and Eve after they sinned (Genesis 3:9, 11, 13). God was not ignorant of their deeds and thoughts. Like a good teacher, he drew them out of their negative inner monologue. This tactful approach from the powerful Creator emphasizes God's loving desire for relationship. Though he was not pleased with Cain's sacrifice, God still actively sought out a relationship with the man. From the very beginning, then, we see the Lord seeking to save the lost (see Luke 19:10)" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2021-2022, Large Print Edition, p. 156).

Genesis 4:8-12: Why did Cain pay no attention to God's warnings but went headlong into avenging his anger and jealousy, might one wonder? Why did Cain pretentiously lead Abel out into the field to slay him? One conclusion is, "Maybe this was where Abel raised his sheep, or where Cain raised his own crops. Or maybe he meant to hide the evidence of his sin against his brother, burying him where he was struck or making the murder look like a workplace accident [Who can tell? One thing for sure is] Cain is an example of the extreme opposite of what a Christian ought to be. His problem was that he 'belonged to

the evil one,' the devil (I John 3:12). As a result, he did wrong instead of right. But instead of repenting, Cain went wild with jealousy" (*Ibid.*, p. 157). What does this say to us about hating on another Christian who appears more righteous than we are or criticizing and picking on such a one because he or she is more admired and appreciated that we are? It speaks volumes about our inner feelings of envy, hatred, dread, and jealousy and how we may act upon them. As for Cain's actions and their consequences, the ground having already been cursed with his father's disobedient actions, so was Cain the son cursed and forbidden from working the land from which his brother's blood cried out: "No piece of land anywhere would cooperate with the first person who defiled the soil with human blood. He was therefore consigned to a life of roaming without a homeland" (*Ibid.*, p. 158).

Genesis 4:13-15: Cain's fear associated with being a fugitive is explained in the verses following our lesson text, that other family members would track him down and execute him for Abel's murder (Genesis 4:14). But more than that possibly, as one source says the concept of the "punishment" could signify one or all of three meanings: "(1) It can refer to the wicked deed Cain committed. While in English, we would think of punishment as a consequence of a misdeed; this sense implies that the action has natural consequences of its own that will now play out. (2) The word could refer to the guilt Cain bore or felt because of what he did. And finally, (3) it could refer to the sentence that he has received; the most natural English understanding. This final sense is preferable because Cain did not ask for forgiveness or mercy" (Ibid.). But he received mercy anyway because God is merciful. "He recognized the truth in Cain's concern. People are inclined toward evil from birth (Genesis 8:21), and the desire for revenge is often a powerful motivator to act with evil, violent in-



tent. Vengeful people do not trust God or leave vengeance to Him; they take it upon themselves to repay evil. They organize mob actions against the Cains of the world. They authorize and deputize someone who is willing to do whatever necessary to rid the world of any and all threats to their community. Cain would have to live with the consequences of his sin, but he would live nonetheless. We often experience the same. While our sins come with consequences, we know that through Christ, we are spared death that is the natural consequence of sin (Romans 6:23). The text provides no clue as to what Cain's *mark* might have been. Perhaps, it was a unique physical feature that served as a deterrent. Or perhaps it was a visible sign of a sevenfold level of *vengeance*, should anyone lay a hand on him" (*Ibid.*, pp. 158 and 159).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Can we see ourselves in Cain? Someone has said, we are not only our brother's keeper, we are also our brother's brother? How does this answer Cain's question to God?

Break into groups (if able) and elaborate on the following questions and issues. Do we seek to please God with our offerings or someone else? Do we attempt to rid ourselves of unchecked sin that can lead to hatred and violence? Can we accept our role as being our brother's/sister's keeper rather than their rival? How do we put this into action? Discuss how Venus and Serena Williams might be examples here. We probably submit to God's just requirement that their sin be punished, but how grateful are we that our merciful God makes a way to pay for our sins, allowing us to escape the just consequences of our sins?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Discuss ways that people use to keep from acting out of anger.

2. Help participants find and define common English expressions that have their sources in our lesson text (ex., "raising Cain," "to 'know' in the biblical sense," "his face/countenance fell," "my brother's keeper").

3. Use commentaries and other references to discover explanations for God accepting Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's sacrifice.

4. Rewrite James 4:1-3 as a letter to Cain, warning him not to let sin control him. See Genesis 4:5-7).

5. Help participants identify one or two people with whom they have a conflict and examine what role their envy, jealousy, or resentment may have in such conflicts. End the session focusing on taking personal responsibility for interpersonal conflicts by singing the chorus "Standing in the Need of Prayer" (esp., "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord"). Instead of singing, you may wish to play it from a music or video-sharing site.

KEY VERSE: The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" Genesis 4:10

ADULT UNIT II: God: The Source of Justice ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Hagar and Ishmael Not Forgotten ADULT TOPIC: Improbable Hope

> LESSON 6 DATE: January 9, 2022

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 21:8-21 PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 21:8-20

Home Daily Bible Readings

- Jan. 3 M Genesis 16:1-15 Jan. 4 T Psalm 5
- Jan. 5 W Matthew 5:3-12
- Jan. 6 Th Genesis 17:23-27
- Jan. 7 F Genesis 25:12-18
- Jan. 8 Sa Psalm 106:1-5
- Jan. 9 Su Genesis 21:8-21

The Lord Blesses Hagar and Ishmael Hear My Prayer, O God The Pure in Heart Will See God Abraham and Ishmael Are Circumcised The Twelve Tribes of Ishmael Remember Me, O Lord God Hears Ishmael's Voice

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or Leaner

Celebration - "God Will Take Care of You"-#77 A.M.E.Z. Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Genesis 21:8-20 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We believe that God is at work even in the midst of hopeless situations. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁸ The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." ¹¹ The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. ¹³ As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." ¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. ¹⁸ Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰ God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People sometimes face situations that feel hopeless. How can people find assurance when their circumstances change? Genesis shows that even though Hagar and Ishmael's circumstances changed, God was still with them

Break into small groups and discuss various situations of hopelessness today and cases you have noticed where persons or groups have experienced unexpected changes that gave them reassurance and renewed hope. What situations can you point to where hopeless situations have resulted from mistreatment by people in positions of power? Explain how these have come about. Do you know of social practices, though culturally accepted, that exploit women and children, nonetheless? Are there circumstances that cause us to think that there may be a benevolent force



watching over us, like when we experience vindication in seeing those who have mistreated others experience the consequences of their actions, or when we have seen situations thought to be hopeless changed almost overnight? Share your findings with the larger group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Genesis 21:8-13: Hagar likely became a part of Abram's household as part of the spoils granted to him due to his deception in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20). We recognize that these spoils were as much a curse as a blessing when we see that they brought conflict between Abram and Lot (13:1-7) and finally a perpetual enemy nation through Ishmael. Islam teaches that Ishmael is the ancestor of prominent Arab tribes and of Muhammed himself. Today's text recounts the second time Hagar was separated from Abraham's household. The first occurred when Hagar was pregnant with Ishmael and ran away due to Sarah's mistreatment (Genesis 16). At that time, when she was serving as a chosen surrogate for Sarah, "Hagar looked down on Sarah (Genesis 16:4), and Sarah retaliated with harsh treatment. When Hagar fled, God comforted her and encouraged her to return to Abraham and Sarah, with the promise that God would bless her offspring (16:9-12).... Eventually, God made it clear to Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son (Genesis 18:1-15). Isaac, the child of this miraculous conception, would become the heir to God's promise to Abraham. Yet with Ishmael still in the mix as Abraham's firstborn son, the situation was ripe for more conflict" (Ibid., p. 163).

Genesis 21:15-16: A female servant serving as a surrogate mother, a *pi-legesh*, was an accepted cultural practice of the day. According to this practice, Hagar should have been accorded the same privileges as a wife, privileges ignored when Abraham sent her away. "Sometimes humans take initiative, and then God responds to their actions. This had been so in Abraham's case-at least since Sarah decided to have a child by Hagar. It is one thing to say that God wanted Sarah to cast away her servant and Abraham's son; it is another thing to say that God allowed it and saw it as a way to carry out his larger promises for his people. Those larger promises revolved around Isaac-not Ishmael. So, God told Abraham to accept the will of his wife" (*Ibid.*, p. 165).

Genesis 21:17-20: "Inevitable conflict arises between the child of the promise and the child of expediency (vv.8-21). Yet, while one is undeniably chosen to perpetuate the promise (v.12), both are loved and cared for by God. This is clearly seen in the crisis faced by Hagar and Ishmael, where God redresses a situation of hopelessness; once again, in the midst of death (v.16), God extends his grace in abundant provision (v.19) and blessing (vv.18, 20). Ishmael means 'God hears'" (Asbury Bible Commentary). "God had already promised that Ishmael would become a great nation (Genesis 17:20), and God planned to keep his promise. The only other person to whom God made such a promise was Abraham (12:1-2). Ishmael would have 12 sons (25:12-18) as would Isaac's son, Jacob (49:1-28). These Ishmaelites show up in Joseph's story (see 37:25-28). They were nomadic people, generally living in northern Arabia.... God kept his promise to Hagar. His presence with the boy serves as a reminder that, though God looks after his chosen people in a special way, he also cares for people beyond that group (compare Matthew 5:45). Indeed, God set apart Abraham's family through Isaac precisely to bless all nations (Genesis 12:3). How great to serve a God who has always loved the whole and chose to demonstrate it through his Son (John 3:16-18)" (*Standard Bible Commentary 2021-2022, Large Print Edition*, pp. 166 and 167).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups (if able) and let each group respond to the following questions and issues. Do we hold ourselves accountable to God's and not human standards of justice? Think of and explain ways the two might conflict when we have to choose between them. When those in authority act unjustly toward us, do we oppose them, or do we trust that God will ultimately hold those with such authority culpable for their actions? Explain your answer. Do we stand up for oppressed and exploited people? Should we do so? Do we trust that the promise that God hears is not empty piety but powerful reality? Do we wait patiently on the Lord when facing a seemingly hopeless situation?

iTHINK: (5–7 min.)

1. Start a story by saying, "If I had known what kind of day I would have, I would have stayed in bed. I turned off my alarm, and then . . ." Go around the room, having one person at a time add to the story, with the situation getting more dire at every turn. Discuss afterward by asking, "How do you react when you have a really bad day?"

2. Search the Internet for rags to riches stories–accounts of famous people who rose from seemingly hopeless situations to positions of prominence. What do these imply?

3. Create monologues by Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar in which each one recounts the events of today's text from their personal perspectives.

4. Each participant should be given a copy of the lesson text and three highlighters of different colors. They should use one color to highlight something God (or God's representative) said, another color to highlight something God heard, and another color to highlight something God did in response. What impact does this have on you?

5. Have the teacher tape large sheets of paper to a classroom wall (if you are meeting in-person). Using concordances, participants should find a Bible verse in which a person is instructed to "fear not" or "do not be afraid." Using washable markers, participants should write their verse(s) on the newsprint and be ready to explain the reason for the command.

KEY VERSES: And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Genesis 21:17-18. ADULT UNIT II: God: The Source of Justice ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: The Laws of Justice and Mercy ADULT TOPIC: Unbiased Actions

> LESSON 7 DATE: January 16, 2022

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Exodus 23 PRINT PASSAGE: Exodus 23:1-12

Home Daily Bible Readings

Jan. 10 Exodus 23:13-19 м Jan. 11 Exodus 23:20-33 Т James 2:1-13 Jan. 12 W Jan. 13 Th James 2:14-26 Jan. 14 F 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 Jan. 15 Sa Psalm 85 Jan. 16 Su Exodus 23:1-12

Serve God Alone Blessings for the Obedient Mercy Triumphs over Judgment Faith without Works Is Dead Seek the Advantage of Others Steadfast Love and Faithfulness Treat Others Justly

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" - #11 A. M. E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Exodus 23:1-12 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We aspire to be impartial in showing justice and mercy. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

Justice for All

¹ You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. ² You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; ³ nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.

⁴ When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

⁵ When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free. ⁶ You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. ⁷ Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. ⁸ You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

⁹You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Sabbatical Year and Sabbath

¹⁰ For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; ¹¹ but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

¹² Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

It can be tempting to treat friends with more leniency and enemies with more harshness than they deserve. How can people treat others justly? Exodus demands justice for all people including one's enemies. It is interesting to consider where we as humans get our morals and ethics from. Have you ever considered how we learn to do right and to avoid doing wrong, or do you assume that we are born into the world with a set of moral practices?

Break into two small groups (if able) and discuss this issue. We know that our parents, teachers and other adults teach us right from wrong and a sense of ethics that tell us how we are to treat others; but where do they or from where did they get morals and ethics? Perhaps, you will say, from their parents. But we can go on asking the same questions to all past generations until we come up with an answer that tells us whether human's have an innate sense of right relations with one another. Can you answer the question of whether humans are innately good or innately evil, whether we are natural predators or competitors toward one another, or do we learn somehow in living together to live and let live? If we research the point, we will find that every culture and every religion have some form of the Golden rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Now, consider the following questions or issues. Do we as humans look for consistent rules to live by? Do we find it difficult not to let our preconceived notions affect the way we treat others? Do we have a tendency to step on others in our desire to get ahead? Are we naturally kind to those treating us kindly and harsh to those treating us harshly? Do we for the most part want to take justice into our own hands. Are we living in a "dog eat dog" world? Share your findings with the rest of the group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Exodus 23:1-8: One commentary rightly summarizes chapter 21:1 to 23:33 of Exodus: "The Lord sets forth the ordinances of His covenant. Civil and penal laws are presented at 21:1-22:15; laws controlling morality at 22:16-27; 23:1-9; laws of worship at 20:22-26; 22:28-30; 23:10-19. Through 22:17 the statutes are in the form of case law ('If . . . then,' with appropriate penalties); afterwards laws of the unconditionally imperative type ('you shall not') predominate. The purpose of these social codes was to regulate Israelite life in the Promised Land" (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*). Actually, Exodus 20 gives the Ten Commandments, and the chapters that follow give some details and examples of how those commands must be practiced. Verses 1-8 give examples of ways the ninth commandment (bearing false witness) can be violated-joining a conspiracy, following the crowd, unjustly "evening the playing field," failing to act or report, bribery, etc. The Hebrew word *natah* (to bend or stretch) is used three times in the first six verses. The implication is that "bending" the law or "stretching" the truth is a violation of God's command to testify accurately.

Exodus 23:9-12: Although the law was given for the people of Israel, just treatment of those who were not descendants of Abraham living among them (the *alien*) was stressed more than 30 times in Exodus–Deuteronomy. Verses 10-12 comment on the fourth commandment, Sabbath keeping, both Sabbath days and years. As Jesus would comment later (Mark 2:27), the purpose of the Sabbath was not to put a burden on people, but to relieve the burden of constant work. "Like the weekly Sabbath, on which it was patterned, the sabbatical year was intended for the good of man and of creation (20:8-11 ...). It reminded Israel that God, the true owner of the land, had entrusted it to them (Lev. 25:2). The land was to lie fallow, and what grew of itself was reserved for the poor, who would not have been able to save sufficient food resources. Leviticus 26:34-35 suggests that the sabbatical year was not always observed, but it is clearly in place at Neh. 10:31" (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*).

ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

We are ultimate beneficiaries of God's initial revelation to the chosen people, as summarized thus: "The Lord liberated His people from Egypt to bring them to Himself, to make them His special possession among all peoples. In order to enjoy this blessing, however, they were to obey Him and keep His covenant. The revelation at Sinai manifested the holy character of the Covenant-God and defined the character and behavior appropriate for God's covenant people" (*Ibid*.). We are blessed to be among the chosen people of God and a "new universal covenant" through the intercession of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom the Book of Hebrews describes as the perfect and final revelation of God (see Hebrews 1:1-4).

Break into small groups (if able) and consider the following questions and issues.

Do we as Christians see all people as special creations of God? Explain this in connection with the selection of God's chosen people to whom He gave the covenant and the law through Moses. Do we accept that morality should be absolute, not selective or situational? Do we trust that God will reward good and punish evil in His time and in His way? Do we accept that God's standards of justice require us to go against the crowd? Give examples of this in your personal, social, religious, social, and political experience.



iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Find some lists on the Internet by searching for "Everything I need to know I learned from . . . " Share those lists with the class and ask why they are or are not valid.

2. Write the following quip on the board (if able): "We know all people are equal-but some are just more equal than others!" Discuss the meaning of the quip. How have we seen people act that way? How can we avoid acting that way?

3. Assign half of the class to paraphrase the lesson text to create a list of rules for interpersonal relationships. Have the other half of the class paraphrase the text to list behaviors that destroy interpersonal relationships. Ask for examples of how they have seen each practiced in the world today.

4. Point out the term "resident alien" in the text (vv. 9, 12). Use a concordance to find other references to aliens in Exodus–Deuteronomy. Who are the resident aliens in our culture (not just by nationality, but also by values)? How do these verses apply to us?

5. Brainstorm a list of the types of people who may seem hard to love. Have participants suggest ways to approach and interact positively with them.

6. Have participants plan an activity that helps those in need.

KEY VERSES: You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit. Exodus 23:2-3

ADULT UNITII: God: The Source of Justice ENERAL LESSON TITLE: Justice, Judges, and Priests **ADULT GENERAL** ADULT TOPIC: Incorruptible Leaders LESSON 8 **DATE: January 23, 2022** BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 17:8-13; 19:15-21 PRINT PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 17:8-13 **Home Daily Bible Readings** Jan. 17 True and False Witnesses М Deuteronomy 19:15-21 Matthew 18:15-20 Jan. 18 Т Addressing Church Conflicts Jan. 19 W Matthew 18:21-35 The Duty to Forgive

Jan. 20 Th Exodus 18:13-26

Jan. 21 F Ephesians 4:25-32

Jan. 22 Sa Deuteronomy 10:14-22

Jan. 23 Su Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 17:8-13 Addressing Church Conflicts The Duty to Forgive Moses' Court of Appeal Speak Truth and Act on It God Is an Impartial Judge Appoint Leaders to Administer Justice

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or Learner

Celebration – "We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessings" - #28 A.M.E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 17:8-13 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We value persons who make decisions based on God's justice. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

Municipal Judges and Officers

¹⁸ You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. ¹⁹ You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. ²⁰ Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Legal Decisions by Priests and Judges

⁸ If a judicial decision is too difficult for you to make between one kind of bloodshed and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another–any such matters of dispute in your towns–then you shall immediately go up to the place that the Lord your God will choose, ⁹ where you shall consult with the levitical priests and the judge who is in office in those days; they shall announce to you the decision in the case. ¹⁰ Carry out exactly the decision that they announce to you from the place that the Lord will choose, diligently observing everything they instruct you. ¹¹ You must carry out fully the law that they interpret for you or the ruling that they announce to you; do not turn aside from the decision that they announce to you, either to the right or to the left. ¹² As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the Lord your God, or the judge, that person shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. ¹³ All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



People sometimes distort justice. What actions can we take to prevent manipulations of justice? In Deuteronomy, judges, officials, and priests were required to work together to administer justice for God's people.

Break into small groups and consider the following questions and issues. Would you say that you are living in a just society? Why or why not? What is the need for authori-

ty figures in a society? What are the consequences when authority figures misuse their authority? Who holds authority figures accountable for their actions in our society? What actions can we take to prevent manipulations of justice? Do we assume that there must be some transcendent standards for a just society? Why or why not?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Deuteronomy 16:18-20: Where there is no justice, there is no peace, so Israel's peaceful existence together as a people depended on just and impartial judges and officials who demonstrated justice through their actions. The material in Deuteronomy 16 and 17 reflects the kinds of structures and guidelines necessary for a civil society to function smoothly. As the people are establishing themselves in the Promised Land, they need to create standards for those who will have the task of ensuring justice among the people–officials such as judges and priests, among others. The work of a judge in ancient Israel was constantly susceptible to corruption and abuse from the very things that also kept communities functioning–things like giving gifts of hospitality or regarding wealthy individuals with respect got in the way of fair dealings. Standards of impartiality for judges were necessary to ensure all could expect justice. In ancient times and still today, the powerful tend to make the laws. A king or queen, for example, often creates law by his/her decree. But in Israel, the law was given by God, so even the king or queen was subject to God's law.

Deuteronomy 17:8-13: The directions in 17:8ff describe the process for obtaining justice if the judges found themselves at a loss to decide the case. By directing that the next step would be to seek a ruling from God through the

Levitical priest, the text most likely refers to the practice of casting the sacred lot, which was believed to be guided by God's will and reflected God's righteousness. More than just helpful for maintaining a smooth and functioning society, justice and righteousness are seen as part of the divine order, gifts of God. Rules about justice and impartiality were important for judges, but, also for regular people to live peacefully together. "The priests, the Levites and the judges are to decide upon the issue of guilt. Strict adherence to God's law is to be vigorously enforced by them. Anyone not heeding the judgement of the priest or judge will be cut off" (Bible Panorama). "We do not know the precise details of the Israelite judicial system.... There were graded courts to take care of difficult cases (Ex. 18:21-26), with priests who judged and also other judges. This passage stresses that the judicial office is divinely ordained, and that verdicts were to be accepted on pain of death





ELEVATE: (10 min.)

We tend to agree that because humans are sinful, civil authority is necessary to keep order, but we are also aware that divine standards must be followed. Break into small groups (if able) and respond to the following questions and issues. How is it that we are able to accept religious authority (church) and civil authority (state) as independent of each other but hold both accountable to God's standards? Do we believe that a truly just society will only exist when all are ruled by divine standards of righteousness and anticipate that rulers will insist upon God's righteous standards? Do we seek to remove unjust leaders from office or trust that God will remove even the most powerful leaders who flout divine standards of righteousness? Share your findings with the rest of the group.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. If meeting in-person, create a stack of 10 to 20 index cards. Each card should bear the name of a famous civil ruler of the past or present. Divide the class into two teams, each one choosing a captain. Captains should draw a card and give a clue to the rest of the team as to the name on the card. A point is scored for each correct answer. After the game, ask which of the leaders were good and which were bad? How can we make that judgment?

2. Find and play a video of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech from 1941. What are the four freedoms he lists? Are they achievable? Is so, how? If not, why not?

3. Write these two headings on the board (if able): **Good leaders do... Good leaders don't...** Have participants skim through the lesson text to find qualities that would fit under one of the categories. Write them on the board as they are found.

4. If meeting in-person, using Scrabble tiles, place these two words on the game board, crossword style: ANARCHY and FREEDOM (intersecting with the letter R). Ask how the two are similar. Ask how they differ. Allow volunteers to read the lesson text aloud. How do the principles allow for maximum freedom that does not dissolve into anarchy?

5. Give each participant a sheet of paper and have them create an acrostic using the word LEADER. Each line should contain a characteristic of a godly leader.

KEY VERSE: You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. Deuteronomy 16:18

ADULT UNIT II: God: The Source of Justice ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Justice and the Marginalized ADULT TOPIC: Countercultural Compassion

> LESSON 9 DATE: January 30, 2022

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 24:10-21 PRINT PASSAGE: Same

Home Daily Bible Readings

Jan. 25 1	De	uteronomy 26:1-11
Jan. 27 Ti Jan. 28 F Jan. 29 S	h Ps Ma a Lei	mes 5:1-11 alm 82 Itthew 9:27-38 viticus 19:32-37 uteronomy 24:10-21

hit

God Executes Justice for the Poor Remembering Our Marginalized Ancestors Woe to Those Who Mistreat Workers Justice for the Weak and Orphaned Jesus' Compassion for the Helpless Do Not Oppress the Alien Justice for the Poor

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or learner

Celebration – "O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee" #678 A.M.E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Deuteronomy 24:10-21 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

Affirmation – We share love with those who are rejected by others. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

¹⁰ When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. ¹¹ You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. ¹² If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as the pledge. ¹³ You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the Lord your God.

¹⁴ You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. ¹⁵ You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt.

¹⁶ Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death.

¹⁷ You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. ¹⁸ Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

¹⁹ When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



Some people are poor and marginalized. How can their dignity and worth be respected? Deuteronomy demands justice for all who are poor or marginalized. How do we usually regard those considered to be poor in our society? Do we tend to look down on them and disparage them? Or, do we look upon them with love and compassion? What do you think should be the case and why? Share your thoughts with one another in the whole group. Does our government have successful programs that address poverty? Is it sig-

nificant that the government should have such? Is there a connection between crime and lack of resources? It appears to be a natural occurrence that some people have more material goods than others do. Do you think that the distribution of resources among people can ever be fair? Why or why not?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Deuteronomy 24:10-15: The law allowed Israelites to Ioan money, but collecting interest and demands of collateral were regulated (Exodus 20:25; Leviticus 25:36-37; Deuteronomy 23:19-20; 24:10-13). The collateral (pledge)

securing the loan was regulated-offered by the recipient of the loan rather than demanded by the one making the loan and even returned temporarily when needed. Gross misuse of collateral included using pledges in pagan worship and temple prostitution (Amos 2:7-8), taking an item crucial for earning a living (Deuteronomy 24:6; Job 24:3), and even demanding a child as collateral (Job 24:9). Even greater compassion was commanded of the very weakest of the community (Deuteronomy 24:17; James 1:27). Wages could not be withheld or be subject to garnishment. Wages were due at the end of the workday (Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Matthew 20:8; James 5:4). "Look at the specific reasons, goals, purposes, and motives embedded in the legal materials. Israel should obey these laws so that Yahweh may bless them (22:7; 24:19) and so that the land will not be defiled (21:23; 23:14; 24:4). The death penalty was demanded so that Israel would remain holy to Yahweh by purging the evil from among them (21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7). These instructions also provide for Israel to express humane concern and love for both people and creatures (21:14, 17; 22:1-3, 6-7, 16, 19, 29-30; 23:15, 20; 24:5-7, 10-15, 17-22; 25:1-10). The holy purpose of these miscellaneous ethical, religious, and civil laws is clear: they all hang on the 'great commandment' to love God and neighbor. By this they would be God's holy people" (The Asbury Bible Commentary).

Deuteronomy 24:16-21: A spurious interpretation of the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6) was used to justify punishing family members for the transgressions of another, an interpretation condemned by the prophets (Jeremiah 31:29-30); Ezekiel 18:2-4). More than simply regulating oppression of the poor, the law included a provision to allow the poorest of the poor to har-



vest from fields of others. This practice was called "gleaning." It was a feature of the Levitical holiness code (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22) and played a crucial role in the life of Ruth (Ruth 2). "The law provided numerous reminders to God's people to uphold justice for those who needed it most (Exodus 23:6, 9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Proverbs 22:22). Concern for [the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widows] extends into the New Testament as well (see Matthew 25:35-36); Acts 6:1-5; I Timothy 5:3, 16; Hebrews 13:2; James 1:27). God

desires justice for needy individuals and his people are to desire the same. Following God's commands by just living requires extra attention to vulnerable people" (*Standard Lesson Commentary 2021-2022, Large Print Edition,* pp. 189-90). While poverty will be an ever-present problem (Matthew 26:11), compassion and contentment of believers can alleviate it in the church (Acts 4:32-35; 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

While we trust God to supply all our needs, we seek to help meet the needs of others. We gladly support ministries that help individuals in need. We affirm that it is morally wrong to use economic pressure to keep certain people subservient. And we stand against business practices that hurt the most marginalized among us.

Consider the following statements and challenge: "Ignorance and want continue to manifest themselves today. Unlike Scrooge, we should not desire that injustice be hidden from our eyes. Our heavenly Father has made it clear that his heart and his compassion are with those in need. Are ours?" (*Ibid.*, p. 191). Discuss how we, as individuals and groups, may increase our commitment to those so significant to God's sense of justice?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. If meeting in-person, set up a Monopoly[®] board with one player owning and fully developing all properties except for Mediterranean and Baltic Avenues and having 90 percent of the money in the bank. Ask participants to predict the likely outcome of such a game. Ask for suggestions for rules that could be implemented to ensure a more equitable outcome.

2. Before class, ask a participant to prepare a very brief report on the legislation called War on Poverty introduced by Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s. What was it? How effective has it been? What are obstacles that have prevented the total elimination of poverty? Move from there to looking at what the Bible prescribed for alleviating poverty.

3. Divide participants into three groups, assigning one to be bankers, another to be the Internal Revenue Service, and another to be business owners. Have each group read the lesson text and come up with some changes that they would make in their business practices if the text were obeyed.

4. Summarize the content of the lesson text. Then write the following on the board: "For you always have the poor with you" (Matthew 26:11) and "There was not a needy person among them: (Acts 4:34). Discuss how both statements can be true.

5. Arrange for a class workday at a local food bank, especially one that specializes in soliciting business donations to distribute to the poor.

KEY VERSE: Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. Deuteronomy 24:18

ADULT UNIT III: Justice and Adversity ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Nathan Condemns David ADULT TOPIC: Speaking Truth to Power

> LESSON 10 DATE: February 6, 2022

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 12 PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13-15

Home Daily Bible Readings

Jan. 31 М 2 Samuel 11:1-13 Feb. 1 2 Samuel 11:14-27 Т W 1 John 1:5-10 Feb. 2 Feb. 3 Th Psalm 51:1-14 Feb. 4 F Psalm 32 Sa 1 John 2:1-11 Feb. 5 Su 2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13-15 Feb. 6

David's Sin with Bathsheba David Murders Bathsheba's Husband Walk in the Light Create in Me a Clean Heart Redemption through Repentance Christ, the Sacrifice for Our Sins Nathan Tells a Pointed Parable

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or Leaner

Celebration – "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing"-#20 A.M.E.Z. Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – 2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13-15 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We admit our sins, ask God's forgiveness, and make godly choices. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

¹ and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." ⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶ he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷ Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸ I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die." ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Unit III, "Justice and Adversity," has four lessons that deal with situations in which justice seems absent. In II Samuel, Nathan condemns David for his acts of injustice toward Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband. In Ezra, after years of exile in Babylon, Ezra returns to Jerusalem and determines to restore respect for God's Law. Session 3 tells the story of Job's faithfulness to God after several tragic events in his life. The Scriptures in Job question the presence of God's justice when Job has suffered greatly.

People often see acts of injustice being committed. How are we called to respond when we witness unjust acts? Nathan sought God's guidance and received wisdom for how to address David's sin. It is nothing new to us to see leaders abuse their power, whether in the society or in the church; that is one reason that in a democratic society, we establish checks and balances for leadership positions.

If able, break into small groups and discuss the following questions and issues. Looking at your country's history and the



history of other countries in the world, recall well-known leaders, even some of the best, who were tempted to abuse their authority. What about in the history of the church? Share with your group historical or present-day church leaders who have abused their powers. We know that no one is above the law, but who is to confront those in power who cross the line and act unjustly? We know that in many cases there are laws in place to bring leaders who step out of line to justice, and it takes courage to subject leaders to the judicial process. Recall persons you know and admire who have taken risks to confront abuses of power. Share your findings with the group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

2 Samuel 12:1-6: Samuel had warned that placing civil authority in the hands of a human king would result in abuse of that authority (1 Samuel 8:10-18). Moses had given a similar warning centuries earlier (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). David, among others in Israel's history, exhibits the truth of these warnings. Prophets existed before the monarchy, but their number and role seemed to



increase after a human king was enthroned. While kings were chosen by succession in the line of David and priests were chosen by succession in the line of Levi, prophets were called directly by God to hold both religious and civil authority in check. They "were servants of the Word of God, which has authority, even over kings. The prophets needed courage and were sometimes in sharp conflict with the kings (1 Kin. 22:8; 2 Kin. 1:3, 4; Mark 6:17; cf. Acts 7:52)" (The ESV Reformation Study Bible). Sometimes, Old Testament prophets used parables to speak against evil in their nation (1 Kings 20:35-40; Isaiah 5:1-7; Ezekiel 19). This was a very clever ruse on the part of Nathan, which proved highly effective. As we see in David's response, it succeeded, for in pro-

nouncing judgment on the rich man in Nathan's story, "David has condemned himself. His response is an exclamation, not a legal decision. He mentions first death, then restitution" (*Ibid.*). "Ex. 22:1 orders fourfold restitution for stolen sheep. Some commentators have detected here a hint of David's subsequent loss of four sons: the first son of Bathsheba (vv. 14, 18), Amnon (13:28, 29), Absalom (18:14, 15), and Adonijah (<u>1 Kin. 2:24, 25</u>)" (*Ibid.*).

2 Samuel 12:7-9: "In a manner typical of prophetic judgment speeches..., Nathan begins with an accusation including a description of the Lord's providence (vv. 7, 8) and an accusing question and indictment (v. 9). He concludes by announcing the judgment and the penalties corresponding to the crime" (Ibid.). The Hittites were Canaanites, living in the land Yahweh gave to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 15:18-20). Hittites lived among the people of Israel and had interactions with them. Abraham purchased his family burial ground from Ephron the Hittite, for example (Genesis 23). Sins tend to catch up with the sinner no matter how long it takes. "Clues in the surrounding text indicate that this conversation between Nathan and David took place months after the offenses occurred..., on the occasion of the child's birth (see 2 Samuel 12:14-15, below). By then David had had time to rationalize his sins away and bury them in his mind. But try as he might, he could not forget what he had done, and he now stood exposed before an all-knowing, all-seeing God (Psalm 11:4-7; 139:7-12). David, himself, was [surely] the rich man [in the story]" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2021-2022, Large print Edition, pp. 196-97). In Nathan's reminding David of the great favor that the Lord had shown him, it was clear that, "Disobeying the Lord in the face of such extravagant evidence of favor was a wicked, sinful betrayal David had violated the foundational commandments against coveting, adultery, and murder (Exodus 20:13-14, 17)" (Ibid., p. 197).

<u>2</u> Samuel 12:13-15: "When charged by God's prophet, David responds with an immediate and unqualified confession; contrast Saul's confessions in 1 Sam. 15:24, 25, 30....) Ps. 51, according to its superscription, is a fuller picture of David's repentance" (*ESV Reforma*-

tion Study Bible). "Prophets often spoke truth to power only to find that power was not willing to listen (examples: 1 Kings 18:16-18; Jeremiah 36:1-26) or made excuses (example: 1 Samuel 15:13-21). But unlike Saul before him, *David* offered no excuses. Nor, did he lash out at Nathan for denouncing him. Instead, he confessed the awful truth in the plainest language.... David was anointed king because he was a man after God's own heart (compare Acts 13;22). His confession here is surely one indication why. Contrasting David with a later king, the Lord said that David had 'followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.... Only once later did the Lord add the qualifier, "except in the case of Uriah the Hittite' (1 Kings 15:5). David deserved to die for his crimes (see 2 Samuel 12:5, above). But, the Lord once



again showed Himself to be compassionate, gracious, and forgiving of transgression and sin (compare Exodus 34:6-7). Even so, David would experience both punishment and consequence" (*Standard Lesson Commentary*, pp. 198 and 199). Even though the child of the first union of David and Bathsheba died, their son Solomon would continue both the royal line and be an ancestor of Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 1:6).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

If able, break into smaller groups and discuss examples of how we wrestle with the moral lapses of great heroes of the Bible such as David, Jacob, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac etc., as well as Christian leaders today. Can we differentiate between ignoring a moral lapse and forgiving a moral lapse after remediation? How might we encourage and support godly, prophetic voices that challenge evil in high places. Can you think of contemporary ones in your community or society? Share names, character and efforts of those. Do you think we should attempt to be direct, yet ,winsome when standing against abusive leaders? Are you willing to condemn any practice of preying on the weak as heinous? Share examples of these. Report your findings to the group.

iTHINK: (5 – 7 min.)

1. Begin class by playing the song "I Just Can't Wait to Be King," from the animated film *The Lion King*. It can be found on video-sharing websites. Ask participants to list powers a king has that an ordinary citizen does not. How can those powers be restrained?

2. On the board (if in-person), write scrambled names of historical figures who stood up to power (ex: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X). After participants work on this exercise, discuss why it is necessary for people like them to confront abuse of power.

3. Help the participants analyze Nathan's parable by asking: Who do the main characters of the parable represent? What actions in the parable parallel a real-life abuse of power? How effective was this approach? You may wish to divide the class into groups, having one group analyze Nathan's parable while the other groups analyze other confrontational parables (ex: Isaiah 5:1-7; Matthew 21:33-46).

4. Hold a mock trial for David. Have a prosecutor explain the charges. Have the judge pronounce the sentence.

5. Create a checklist that will help participants evaluate their fitness for wielding power. Some questions might be: In what way(s) might I be tempted to abuse power? How well do I take correction? Who among my closest friends would be willing to hold me accountable?

KEY VERSE: Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" 2 Samuel 12:7a

ADULT UNIT III: Justice and Adversity ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Ezra Seeks God's Law ADULT TOPIC: Restoring Law and Order

> LESSON 11 DATE: February 13, 2022

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ezra 7:1-26 PRINT PASSAGE: Ezra 7:1-10, 23-26

Home Daily Bible Readings

Feb. 7	М	Psalm 19
Feb. 8	Т	Joshua 1:1-9
Feb. 9	W	1 John 3:18-24
Feb. 10	Th	Psalm 119:1-16
Feb. 11	F	Psalm 119:97-112
Feb. 12	Sa	Ezra 7:11-22
Feb. 13	Su	Ezra 7:1-10, 23-26

God's Law Is Perfect Meditate Continuously on the Law Obey God's Commandments Teach Me Your Statutes How I Love Your Law! The King's Letter to Ezra Ezra Leads the Exiles Home

DE

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or Learner

Celebration - "More About Jesus" - #263 A. M. E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Ezra 7:1-10, 23-26 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Affirmation – We value how God works through various types of people to bring God's plan into fruition. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

The Coming and Work of Ezra

¹ After this, in the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, ² son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, ³ son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, ⁴ son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, ⁵ son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of the chief priest Aaron- ⁶ this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that the Lord the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was upon him.

⁷ Some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants also went up to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸They came to Je-

rusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹ On the first day of the first month the journey up from Babylon was begun, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the gracious hand of his God was upon him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

²³ Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, or wrath will come upon the realm of the king and his heirs. ²⁴ We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

²⁵ "And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them. ²⁶ All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on them, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment."

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People sometimes face situations in which they fear others will oppose their efforts. What motivates people to behave benevolently toward others? God's hand was on Ezra, and he was able to return to Jerusalem, in an effort, to restore respect for God's Law.

We tend to admire those who undertake a mission with boldness in both society and the church. Can you recall such persons and their character and successes? What difficulties did they face and how did they overcome them? Can you imagine what it is like to assume leadership of a group prone to hostility or indifference? In undertaking a greatly challenging mission, does it help to have the backing of a powerful political leader? Does education and training help leaders in bringing stability to a culture? What examples can you think of where this has been the case, say, in your community or church?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Ezra 7:1-7: Artaxerxes I was the son of Xerxes I, the ruler of Persia in the Book of Esther. One might wonder whether the influence of Esther was a major influence for Artaxerxes' favorable treatment of the Jews in Ezra and Nehemiah (see Nehemiah 1). "The Book of Ezra described two waves of Jewish captives returning to their homeland. It is extremely important for understanding the Book of Ezra to distinguish between the two waves" (*Standard Lesson Commentary*). The first group of pilgrims returning to Jerusalem during the reign

of the Persian King Cyrus was led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua son of Jozadak. Their mission was to rebuild the temple and refurbish it in part with the items taken from it by Nebuchadnezzar. "After opposition (4:1-5) and a brief delay (4:24), the temple was completed in 516 BC (6:15). Today's lesson focuses on those who returned to Judah in 458 BC, 80 years after the first return. This return was led by Ezra, an expert in God's law, whose life focused on proper worship of God" (*Ibid.*). Ezra and Nehemiah were part of the second group of pilgrims, those who would solidify the gains made by the first returnees. Nehemiah would deal with civic leadership (including refortifying the city), while Ezra's mission was teaching The Law to the returning exiles. In the genealogy, we see Ezra's lineage traced back to Aaron-showing him to be a priest. But, he was more than a mere priest, for "He is described as a *teacher*, or scholar, of the *Law of Moses*.... The ease at which Ezra understood the complex nuances of law is indicated by his description as *well versed*. This implies his skilled comprehension" (*Ibid.*). Traditionally, Judaism credits Ezra with establishing the Great Assembly of scholars and prophets, the forerunner of the Sanhedrin, as the authority on matters of religious law.

Ezra 7:8-10: The contrast between the Babylonian Empire and the Persian Empire, when it came to conquered cultures is striking. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon sought to acculturate, to make Jews into Babylonians (Daniel 1). Persia, after conquest of Babylon, would allow Jews to retain their culture while still being loyal subjects of the empire. The 17th-century Christian minister and founder of the American State of Rhode Island, Roger Williams saw the treatment of the Jews by Persia in this and other passages as support for limiting government interference in religious matters. Williams published The Bloody Tenet of Persecution, arguing for a separation of church and state based on biblical reasoning. "The arrival of the travelers [including Ezra and those with him: priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants numbering almost 2,000] gave evidence that the providence and blessing of the gracious hand of his God was upon Ezra. Ezra's role as a scribe and teacher is seen by the ways the Law of the Lord affected his life and the lives of others. It was not enough that he wanted to ... teach God's Law. The desire to practice observance of God's Law implied a full understanding of the law's life-changing effect. Ezra's dedication to his calling undoubtedly changed Israel for the better and encouraged proper worship as the travelers returned to their homeland (compare Nehemiah 8)" (Ibid.).

Ezra 7:23-26: "Whether Artaxerxes regarded Israel's *God* as the one, true God is undetermined. However, at the very least, he held a high regard for the Israelites' God. The king ordered obedience to the commands of God as they related to *the temple* of God. The expression *the God of heaven* admits that Ezra's God is not just the God of Israel; this God is much greater, and Artaxerxes recognizes the scope of God's domain.... Artaxerxes had developed a very high regard for *Ezra* and empowered Ezra to establish just and consistent guidance on the *laws...of God*. Undoubtedly, Ezra's identity as an expert on God's laws allowed him to accurately *know* and *teach* others in the same regard.... In a

surprising move, Artaxerxes required people to obey both *the law of the king* and the *law of...God*. Years before, Darius the Great made a similar demand, requiring obedience to 'the God of heaven' and the word of the king (Ezra 6:9-12)" (*Ibid.*).

ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

It is of great significance that we encourage and assist one another in participation in Bible education in our churches. Are you aware of leaders among you who dedicate themselves to deep Bible study and exposition? Do you appreciate and follow them? This does not mean that we should neglect to value those church leaders who care for the day-to-day practical matters of the church. What do you think would happen if our civil governments did not allow the church to worship freely and in peace? Do we know that the church is growing daily to the perfection God has in store for her, and that each generation is expected to build on the work of those who came before them? In what sense do you think this is being accomplished? Give examples.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Before class, perform an Internet search for a list of slogans of major universities. Select ten slogans, write them on separate posters, and display them around the room. As class begins, ask participants what they think these slogans are. Continue to discuss why education is valued and from where that intrinsic value comes.

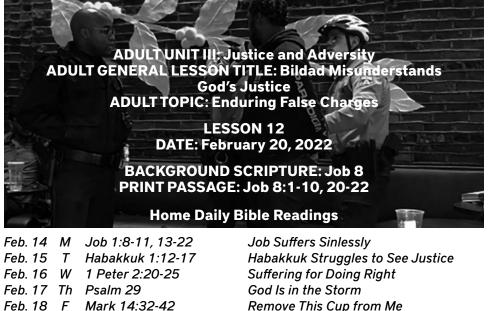
2. If your congregation has a church library, ask a person in charge of it to promote it during the first few moments of class time. What is the value of creating and maintaining a church library?

3. Imagine that Artaxerxes I was invited to address a joint session of Congress on the topic "The Role of Religion in a Secular State." Help participants create a draft outline of his address using points from his letter in Ezra 7:11-26. (Note: This includes portions of the background Scripture along with a portion of the print passage.)

4. Create a timeline of the events in the Book of Ezra. Some events to include: Cyrus's decree, rebuilding the temple, second group of pilgrims led by Ezra, events of the Book of Esther, prophets (especially Zechariah and Haggai).

5. Although Pastor Appreciation Day is still months away (October), create a class subcommittee to meet and create a list of suggestions as to how the class will acknowledge it.

KEY VERSE: For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra 7:10



- Feb. 19 Sa Job 38:1-11
- Feb. 20 Su Job 8:1-10, 20-22

Remove This Cup from Me God Speaks from the Whirlwind God's Justice Is Unfathomable

EXALT!

Invocation - Teacher or Learner

Celebration - "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" - #160 A.M.E. Zion Bicentennial Hymn

Declaration – Job 8:1-10, 20-22 (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively)

Affirmation - We will seek to carefully discern when others misinterpret God's ways. (Spoken together by class and teacher).

Bildad Speaks: Job Should Repent

¹Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: ² "How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?³ Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? ⁴ If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression.⁵ If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, ⁶ if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place. ⁷ Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great. 8"For inquire now of bygone generations, and consider what their ancestors have found; ⁹ for we are but of yesterday, and we know nothing, for our days on earth are

but a shadow. ¹⁰ Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words out of their understanding?

²⁰ "See, God will not reject a blameless person, nor take the hand of evildoers. ²¹ He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy. ²² Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more."

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People tend to rationalize why bad things happen. How do people respond when they are faced with tragedy-natural disasters, birth defects, atrocious crimes, etc.? Job remained faithful to God after several tragic events in his life, even while his friends questioned God's justice and Job's innocence

Many people have been hurt by other persons who have had the best of intentions. One cannot help recalling Henry G. Bohn's proverb here in an 1831

newspaper, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." How often have you experienced harm rather than help and comfort from those who came to assist you in your time of need?

Break into small groups and examine questions coming from those in your group regarding the difficulties they have had with understanding suffering and its



causes. Talk with one another about struggles with the issue of suffering on the part of friends and family members, as well as others not so close. What are some of the various ideas people offer about why people suffer? Are any completely satisfying? Do we usually look for someone to blame when suffering occurs? Is it realistic to desire a world where there is no pain? Does suffering bring wisdom, as some have said? Share your findings with the larger group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Job 8:1-10: "The Book of Job is among the oldest biblical texts, and it deals with one of humanity's oldest challenges: maintaining hope in the face of suffering. The text also addresses another shared experience: the desire for justice in the midst of suffering. Job's suffering was the catalyst for his friends' arrival. At the onset of the Book, Job was described as 'blameless and upright,' one who actively 'feared God and shunned evil' (Job 1:1). However, Job experienced

undue tragedy. His flocks and servants were taken or killed (1:13-17), his 10 children died (1:2, 18-19), and he was afflicted with intense physical suffering (2:7). Without an explanation for the tragedies, Job remained faithful to God and 'did not sin in what he said' (2:10). Job's friends-Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar-are introduced when, on hearing of Job's suffering, they 'met together...to go and sympathize with him, and comfort him' (Job 2:11). When they reached Job, they were shocked at his appearance and were unable to recognize him. They raised their voices, wept, and took a posture of mourning, remaining silent 'for seven days and seven nights' (2:12-13)" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2021-2022, pp. 210-211). When the friends finally communicate with Job about the causes of his suffering, each of their appeals made in long sessions of reasoning is flawed and unacceptable to Job, who addresses his appeals to God regarding the reason and justice of his predicament. Actually, the true reason for Job's suffering is the freedom given Satan to inflict pain (Job 1–2), a reason never revealed to Job or anyone else in this Book. Bildad's view of suffering is like the Eastern concept of karma, that suffering is deserved because it is directly related to the actions of a person. Caste systems, social stratification stemming from the resources a person has and obstacles he faces, is fed by the idea that one's lot in life is deserved. Even Jesus' disciples sought a direct correlation between individual instances of suffering and the sufferer's personal guilt (John 9:2). Bildad's view put a double burden on the one who suffered. Not only was pain caused by that person's sin, that pain continues because of that person's lack of faith and his ineffective pravers.

Job 8:20-22: The flawed theology of Job's friends had tangible effects on Job. Instead of helping a friend by meeting his physical needs, they saw their duty as one of correcting their friend's thinking. Bildad had said that, "The accumulated wisdom of humankind must be consulted (vv.8-10)" in sorting out the ultimate answer (The Bible Panorama). In the verses not included in our text, he cites an ancient proverb, claiming "that the wicked will perish in the midst of their prosperity even as papyrus and reeds wither when deprived of water (vv.11-13). Any prosperity of the wicked is only apparent and at best momentary. It is no more lasting than the flimsy spider's web (vv.14-15) and the luxuriant growth of an uprooted tree (vv.16-19)" (Ibid.). While this is a true statement, it does not answer the issue at hand and in no way sums up the overall ways of God in dealing justly with humankind and the universe. "In concluding Bildad contrasts the fate of the righteous and the wicked. His words that God does not reject a blameless (same Hebrew word as 1:1, 8) person are hurled at Job as the taunt of Jesus' enemies were hurled at him, charging that if he were innocent God would rescue Him (Mt 27:43)" (Ibid.). We are left with no ultimate answer to the problem of suffering in the Book of Job and must wait upon the revelations of God, who deals extensively with the issue in the sending of His own Son Jesus Christ to be subjected to suffering. One thing we do know now is suffering will only end at the end of the age when God's plan is complete (Revelation 20:10-21:4).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

It is our calling as Christians to serve suffering people without judgment, for we know that through His own suffering for our sake, our Savior has given new meaning to the issues of suffering. In fact, He has called upon us as His followers to take up the cross of suffering and follow Him. Break into small groups and research and discuss the meanings of "suffering servant" as it appears in the Scripture in reference to the Jew, to Jacob's son Joseph, and to Jesus as the Messiah. In our time, do you suppose we should avoid easy explanations for every instance of suffering we encounter? How might we discourage persons



from blaming the victim when encountering suffering? How might we encourage-expressing empathy rather than superiority when encountering others' suffering? How might there be an increase in support of rescue efforts, medical missionaries, food drives, and other ways to respond to suffering? Consider the problems of the present COVID-19 world-wide pandemic within this context? In what ways are we being called upon to respond to suffering on a worldwide scale?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Collect a list of sayings that correlate a person's suffering to his or her actions. Ex: "Lie down with dogs, get up with fleas"; "Hoist by one's own petard"; "Play with fire and you will get burned"; etc. Have the class explain the common meaning of these. Do participants agree or disagree?

2. Search the Internet for an image of the iconic *Peanuts* cartoon of Lucy offering psychiatric help for five cents. Print out or project that image to begin class. Discuss: Is her advice worth the price? What is the least helpful advice you have received? What made it so?

3. Put these two headings on the board (if in-person): What Job needed; What Bildad offered. Help the class fill in the first column from Job 1-2 and the second column from Job 8.

4. Give participants copies of the lesson text and art supplies. Have them create a line of Bildad's "lack of sympathy" cards by using ideas expressed in the lesson text.

5. Discuss the view of the church held by unbelievers they know. Are they more likely to view the church as a place of condemnation or a place of restoration? What can we do to be seen as the latter?

KEY VERSES: Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: "How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?" Job 8:1-2

ADULT UNIT III: Justice and Adversity ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Serving a Just God ADULT TOPIC: Hope for Justice LESSON 13 DATE: February 27, 2022 BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Job 42 PRINT PASSAGE: Job 42:1-6, 10-17					
Home Daily Bible Readings					
Feb. 21	М	Genesis 18:20-33	Abraham Pleads for Justice		
Feb. 22	Т	Psalm 37:1-11	Trust in God's Coming Justice		
Feb. 23		Psalm 37:21-28, 34-40	The Lord Loves Justice		
Feb. 24		Romans 14:13-23	Righteousness, Peace, and Joy		
		<i>Matthew 12:1-13</i>	Jesus Demonstrates God's Justice		
		Job 19:23-29	Job Cries Out for a Redeemer		
Feb. 27	Su	Job 42:1-11	Job's Fortunes Are Restored		
EXALT	!				

Invocation - Teacher or learner

Celebration – "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"-#492 A.M.E. Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Job 42:1-6, 10-17 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

Affirmation – We will value God's love and justice by living God's Word. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

Job Is Humbled and Satisfied

¹Then Job answered the Lord: ²"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³ 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ⁴ 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' ⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Job's Fortunes Are Restored Twofold

¹⁰ And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹ Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money[a] and a gold ring. ¹² The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³ He also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵ In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶ After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, old and full of days.

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Even the most downcast people can still have hope. How does our hope keep us focused on what is important? Job had a frank, heartto-heart conversation with God, and God blessed Job's faithfulness.

If able, break into small groups and share with those in your group responses to the following questions and issues. Are we more likely to ask why bad things happen to us than to ask why good things happen to us? Why or why not, do vou think? Why do some of us react to our own suffering with self-pity and bitterness, and ask the question, "Why me?" Are you inclined to seek answers to life's problems immediately? Explain your answer. How many persons do you know who seek the strength to bear suffering bravely and wisely, no matter



the cause? What are such persons like? What type of character do they exhibit? Share your findings with the larger group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Job 42:1-6: The Book of Job appears to be set in patriarchal times before any of the Old Testament was written. Job's reactions to suffering took place without the benefit of written revelation. So, the persons involved in the story spoke and acted out of their knowledge and wisdom and experience of received oral traditions. Interestingly, when Job is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, he is always viewed as a historical figure rather than an allegorical one (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11). In our time, he is viewed in both ways and as a true to life exemplification of the problems we struggle with regarding suffering. Although Job's responses during his suffering appear angry and confrontational toward God; words of his three friends appear to be pious and deferential toward God, Job's words were declared to be true and his friend's words provoked God's anger (Job 42:7). In the first six verses of chapter 42, however: "Appropriately, Job is now more than humbled: he must repent for his rash words doubting God's justice during his deepest suffering. Because of his experience, his re-pentance is unforced and sincere....Job could not see physically through the whirlwind out of which God spoke (38:1; 40:6); he expresses a deeper meaning. He knew God with words, but he now experiences His living presence in his inner being. He meets Him as Savior and friend and, above all, God." (ESV Reformation Study Bible).

Job 42:10-17: "Job is restored, and those who refused to be near him in his dark hour (19:13-20) are forgiven. [Job's previous acquaintances did not offer him comfort until after his health and fortunes were restored. This may indicate that, like Job's three featured friends, they also believed Job was being cursed by God.] Commentators have objected to this restoration, since so many through the ages have suffered without being restored. But, God had allowed Satan (the Adversary) to strike Job to prove that His servant would remain true. The reader knows that Satan was proved a liar: Job never cursed God (1:11; 2:5) and God was glorified. It was the good pleasure of God to reward His servant. The 'steadfastness of Job' was known to God (James 5:11). Job's cry, 'I will argue my ways to his face' (13:15), can be compared with Jacob's, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me' (Gen. 32:26) (Ibid.). The age of Job when he died is consistent with the ages of the Jewish patriarchs at the times of their deaths. "Here is a good principle for every Christian. Whatever our trials and tribulations are on earth, our final future with God is unmitigated with bountiful blessings. Note that at the end of the Book, Job still does not know why he suffered. He simply learns to trust Almighty God who permitted suffering for His purposes, and for His servant's final good. His doubts and the arguments of others are dissipated when he listens to God as He speaks to him, and humbly repents and trusts Him. These are lessons we all still need to learn" (Bible Panorama).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Remembering the words of Isaiah 40:31, "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint," we trust that God will ultimately set things right. We approach God with humility. recognizing the value of waiting on the Lord. Share with the group the problems and struggles we have with waiting although we know that God will bring about justice in the appropriate time. Do we take the time to talk to God and to listen to God? Do we believe we can seek God for the cause of and relief from our suffering?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. If meeting in-person, give each participant an index card on which they will write the name of their favorite novel or movie. Collect and shuffle the cards and redistribute them. Have a person with the new card guess who wrote it. The person should then identify himself or herself and tell why he or she liked the <u>ending</u> of the book or movie chosen. Lead into Bible study by noting that Job's tragic story also had a happy ending.

2. Display a carrot, an egg, and some coffee beans. Discuss how each of these change after being put into boiling water. (The carrot gets soft, the egg hardens, and the coffee gets deeper and richer.) Use that object lesson to introduce how Job changed after he was in "hot water."

3. Divide the class into two groups. Group One should search Job's discourses in the Book and try to find ten ways Job challenged God. Ex: "Why can't I just die?" (3:2); "God is torturing me!" (6:4); "Wicked people prosper while I suffer!" (10:3). Group Two should list ten questions God had for Job in chapters 38–41. When lists are complete, have Group One read an item from their list followed by Group Two reading an item. Then, the whole class should read today's key verse. Continue until all items from the lists have been read.

4. Give participants paper and pencils and copies of the lesson text. Each person should make a simple line drawing of an aspect of Job's restored life (Job 42:10-17). After participants display and explain their drawings, ask what attitude changes in Job preceded those blessings (vv. 1-6).

5. Close by playing Kris Kristofferson's "Why Me?" from a music or video-sharing website. Kristofferson turns the typical "Why did God let bad things happen to me?" question to a "Why do I deserve God's blessings?" question. Point out that one of the possible responses Kristofferson offers is to show others that God is just.

KEY VERSE: "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." Job 42:3

Photo Credits

Page 11: "King Haile Selassie of Ethiopia" https://www.pinterest.com/ pin/8444318041113199/

Page 12: "Two younger white men help a badly beaten black man to his feet during the Detroit race riots (1943)" https://www.reddit.com/r/ HistoryPorn/comments/7qp0y4/two_younger_white_men_help_a_ badly_beaten_black/

Page 14: "The oldest tribe of India, Jarawa in Andamans" https:// www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/latest-news-oldest-tribe-india-jarawa-in-andamans-33252.html

Page 14: "Last Member of 65,000-Year-Old Tribe Dies" https://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2013/03/25/last-member-of-65000-yearold-tribe-dies/

Page 36: "Rabbi and Founder Wentworth Arthur Matthew with Torah Scroll" https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2010.38.7

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

- 1. You shall have no other gods before me.
- 2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- 3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
- 4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- 5. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- 6. You shalt not kill.
- 7. You shall not commit adultery.
- 8. You shall not steal.
- 9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Published quarterly for \$3.00 per copy by The A.M.E. Zion Publishing House, 3225 West Sugar Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28269. Postmaster: Send address changes to: The Young People-Adult Quarterly, Post Office Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770. Lessons and/or Readings are based on the Uniform Series International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching, Copyright © 2015, National Council of Churches, Used by permission. All rights reserved. (USPS 697-000)

layout + design by Rev. Lea'Vee L. Jordan-Patterson | www.sanctuaryadvertisingdesigns.com