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Leader's Guide

THE LAYPERSON'S INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT By Robert Laurin

Welcome to the leader's guide for the book *THE LAYPERSON'S INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT* by Robert Laurin. This course is designed to provide a basic overview of the Old Testament and to help participants explore the contents, variety of literature, and meaning in the Old Testament. The book integrates scholarship on the historical context of the Old Testament with theological reflection on the meaning of the texts for ancient and modern readers.

This leader's guide was developed to facilitate learning through personal study and active participation in class. We assume that people who elect to take the class will be responsible for reading the assigned material and participating in class. You can encourage preparation by being prepared yourself. Also, try to create an open environment for personal sharing and respect for differences of opinion. In order to stimulate free discussion and honest sharing, you may need to discuss the authority of Scripture or ask people to refrain from claiming the authority of God or the church for their particular interpretation. Conflict and disagreement can be sources of creative thinking and energy and consensus is meaningless without an atmosphere of inclusiveness and openness.

Because the material in Laurin is sometimes detailed, historical research, you may need to do some additional reading or preparation for the class. A Bible commentary or Bible dictionary can be invaluable. Visit your local public or church library for these or other resources.

You will need to make a decision about translations of the Bible. Reading the passages from different translations of the Bible can be invaluable for recognizing the translator's theological choices. You may, however, want to work with one translation in class in order to avoid an over-emphasis on the linguistic differences between English translations. We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* or the *Revised Standard Version* as translations that most closely translate the original Hebrew. The Oxford Annotated versions of these Bibles provide excellent notes.

Be responsive to your group. The sessions are designed to provide step-by-step guidance for each session if you need it, but you may want to pick and choose from the material to suit the needs and interests of your group. In the introduction Laurin says that the Old Testament "shows God's involvement in the world . . . to bring men and women to respond to and encounter this God in their daily life" (page xi). We pray that your group will encounter God in meaningful and inspiring ways during this series.

*Melanie Johnson-Debaufre
Grant Ward*

**THE LAYPERSON'S INTRODUCTION
TO THE
OLD TESTAMENT**

Course Overview

SESSION	TITLE	TEXT
One	Encountering the Old Testament	Preface and introduction, pages vii, xi-xxix
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Five	The Preexilic Prophets: Eighth Century B.C.	Chapter 2, pages 60-63; Chapter 7, pages 105-117; 121-124
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SESSION ONE

ENCOUNTERING THE OLD TESTAMENT

TEXT: *Preface, Introduction (pages vii, xi-xxix).*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * get to know one another;*
- * share impressions of the Old Testament;*
- * recognize the varied nature of the Old Testament and explore possible approaches to it.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Prior to the session, read the assigned material in the text. Make a list of your impressions of the Old Testament. How would you describe it – exciting, strange, important, prophetic? How do you approach the Old Testament? Do you need historical information? Do you find it relevant to contemporary life?

On newsprint or chalkboard prepare an outline of the course, or make a copy of the “Course Overview,” (page 1 of this leader’s guide) for each member of the group. Have available a recent edition of the Sunday newspaper, copies of the book, Bibles, chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers. If possible, distribute the books ahead of time and ask the participants to read the preface and the introduction.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

10 minutes

1. Prayer and introductions. 5 minutes

Introduce yourself to the group, and open the session with a prayer. Encourage members of the group to consider offering an opening prayer in future sessions. Ask class members to introduce themselves and to tell why they are interested in studying about the Old Testament. Be ready to tell why you wanted to teach this class. You can keep answers brief by asking class members to complete a phrase, such as “I am here because . . .” or “I am interested in the Old Testament because . . .” Encourage those with one-word answers to elaborate, but remind those who may elaborate too much that there are time constraints.

2. Group impressions of the Old Testament. 5 minutes

Ask: What are your impressions of the Old Testament? The responses might include words or phrases, such as *ancient text, stories, precursor to the New Testament, too often overlooked, or violent*. List the responses on the newsprint or chalkboard. (Save this list for use with Session 13.) Offer some of your own impressions (from your preparation) if necessary.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-40 minutes

3. Examine the newspaper. 5-10 minutes

Distribute the different sections of the Sunday newspaper to members of the class. Ask the individuals to identify the section they have, the kind of writing it contains, and the purpose of the section. Ask if all the sections are read for the same reasons. For example, the want ads offer information for the purpose of exchanging goods and services, and the editorials give opinions in order to be persuasive or thought-provoking. Then ask: What information is needed to understand the material in the different sections? List the responses on the chalkboard or newsprint. For example, does one need to know language, history, the author's opinion and intent, or details about our culture (sports figures, idiomatic expressions, what is funny or not funny)? Is there truth in all the sections? Is truth different from fact in some sections (for example, news versus comics)?

4. Introduce the text. 10-15 minutes

If you have not already distributed copies of the book, do so now. Explain to the class that biblical scholars evaluate the Old Testament in much the same way as the class just investigated the newspaper. Have the class turn to page xvii, and ask for a volunteer to read the first paragraph of "How Does One Read the Old Testament?" Compare Laurin's list of tools with the list your group made about the newspaper. How are they similar?

5. Discuss how one reads the Old Testament. 15 minutes

Offer a brief description of Laurin's main points about reading the Old Testament:

1. *Much of the Old Testament is not history in the modern sense of the word.* There is a **great variety of literature** written over a period of at least one thousand years within the pages of the Old Testament that must be understood in the context of its purpose and style.
2. *The Old Testament is a history of a people, Israel.* It is a **selective history** in that not all the events of Israel's history are included, just as not all of the events of Jesus' life are recorded in the Gospels.
3. *The criterion for inclusion of events in the Old Testament was theological.* The events chosen were to illustrate that God was at work in the lives of the people, rewarding them for their faithfulness and punishing them for disobedience.
4. *The styles of writing are as varied as those in the Sunday newspaper we looked at today.* By understanding the literary style, we can begin to understand the context of the historical and theological reflection in a passage.

Ask the class to spend a few minutes sharing their own ideas about tools for interpreting the Old Testament. Do they agree with Laurin's position that it should first be studied like a piece of literature? How does one judge the various sources of biblical interpretation? Is it important to remember that historians and literary analysts have their own interpretive assumptions that they

bring to the text? What assumptions do we bring to the text? List the responses on the newsprint or chalkboard.

Ask four people to read aloud the Scripture passages on pages xxii-xxiii (**Exodus 14:21-25, 28; 15:1-2, 4-5, 8, 12; Isaiah 51:9-10; Psalm 80:8-10**). Have the class discuss how they are different. Can we identify history and fact apart from the metaphors and imagery? What are the theological themes of these passages? Which ones might have been used in a worship setting? Compare the information in the passages. What is similar (the event)? What is different (the details, the imagery)?

Authority Discussion:

You may find that your group needs to spend some time on the question of how the Old Testament can be considered authoritative in light of this historical approach. Laurin addresses this question in the first full paragraph on page xxi. Can authority be claimed for the Bible only through a literalistic reading? Is there authority in the general theological themes and events? This topic may arise throughout the course, so do not hesitate to take it up in the initial session.

CLOSING THE SESSION

10 minutes

6. Looking ahead.

Present your outline of the course, or distribute the copies of the “Course Overview,” and ask the class if they have any questions. Explain that the course is a survey of the Old Testament and that you will not be covering any one book or genre in detail. The class will not be reading the Bible or Laurin’s text from beginning to end.

Point out that the “Course Overview” has the reading assignments in the far right column. Ask the class members to read pages 1-15 in the text and Genesis 1-2; 3:1-24; 7-8 for the next session.

7. Closing prayer.

Read the following prayer or offer one of your own:

God of wisdom, give us a sense of commitment to working with this grand retelling of your presence in the lives of the Israelite people. Strengthen us as a community that respects and seeks out a variety of interpretations of your Word so that we may all learn from each other and grow together. Amen.

SESSION TWO IN THE BEGINNING . . .

TEXT: *Chapter 1 (pages 1-15)*

SCRIPTURE: *Genesis 1-2; 3:1-24; 7-8*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * *compare two traditions of the biblical creation account;*
- * *identify the relationship between the Gilgamesh Epic and the biblical Flood account;*
- * *explore the theological and interpretive implications of these comparisons for reading the primeval history in Genesis 1-12.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read pages 1-15 of Chapter 1 of the text and the Genesis passages. Make your own comparisons between the two creation accounts and the two Flood stories. Think about what these comparisons tell us about the theological approach of the writers. Does this affect your own approach to the primeval stories? Put the historical outline, found at the end of this guide, on newsprint or poster board to be displayed in the classroom throughout the course. If possible, make a copy of the outline for each member of the group. Make a copy of Handout 1A, "The Gilgamesh Epic," for each member of the group. Prepare the index-card assignments for Step 2. Have available newsprint and markers for use by two groups.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

20-25 minutes

1. Summarize the historical context. 5 minutes

Give a brief overview of the historical information about the Priestly History as summarized by Laurin, making the following points (or others of your choosing).

- a. The Priestly History (Genesis through Numbers) is a compilation of oral, worship, and legal materials from various times.
- b. It was probably put together during the postexilic period (after 587 B.C.) in response to Israel's need for strength and unity after the scattering and destruction of the Exile to Babylon.
- c. The compilation included older sources from the tenth and ninth centuries B.C. ("J" and "E"). See pages 2-3 of the text for an explanation of the use of "J" and "E."
- d. The primeval materials (Genesis 1-11) provide a background for the theological notion of a sovereign God and the understanding of Israel as chosen by God.

2. Group work. 15-20 minutes

Divide the class into two groups and give each group an index card on which you have written one of the following assignments. If you wish, you may create your own assignments. Tell the class that one group will be looking at the two Creation stories in Genesis and the other at the Flood story and the Gilgamesh Epic. Give each group newsprint and markers. Tell the groups that they will have about 15 minutes to do the assignment, and then they will report to the class.

Assignment 1: Read aloud Genesis 1:1-2:4a. **Briefly** discuss the overall tone of the passage, the order of creation, and any things that you did not notice on previous readings. Then, read aloud Genesis 2:4b-25. List on newsprint the similarities and differences between these two accounts, giving special attention to how these differences reflect theological differences. For example, what role does humanity play in each? What kind of figure is God?

Assignment 2: Give this group Handout 1A, “The Gilgamesh Epic.” Read aloud Genesis 7-8; then read the selection from the Gilgamesh Epic. Make a list of the similarities and differences between the two. What are the theological implications of each? For example, in each what was the reason for the Flood? What role might these stories have played in their communities?

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

20-30 minutes

3. Group reports. 10-15 minutes

Ask each group to display its newsprint lists and report on its findings. Do not discourage discussion during this reporting, but ensure that both groups have time to report their findings. If a topic seems relevant to the discussion for Step 4, then ask the class to move on, but make a note of the topic and raise it again in that discussion.

4. Discuss the primeval material. 10-15 minutes

Discuss the interpretation of the creation stories and the Flood stories in light of the observations made by the groups. Start by asking how the material reviewed today will impact on their reading of the Scripture. Does the class see why scholars identify two creation accounts and that there is a relationship between the Flood narrative and the Gilgamesh Epic?

What is the theological interpretation of the creation today? Is it closer to the Priestly account (Genesis 1:1-2:4a – written after the Exile and return) or to the Yahwist account (Genesis 2:4b-25 – written during the divided-kingdom period)? Are there some theological insights in the “other” account that would be helpful in light of current concerns or faith experience?

What is the significance of identifying the elements of these myths in older cultural materials (for example, Gilgamesh, the Babylonian hero epic dated nearly one thousand years before the Priestly History)? How do these sources change our understanding of the biblical texts?

If there is time, you could look at Genesis 3:1-24 as the backdrop for the entrance of sin into the world. Does the story actually describe how sin entered the world, or does it show that the Israelites recognized sin in the world and sought to explain its existence? What does the story tell us about their concepts of sin? Are these notions relevant today? What theological insights into sin does the text offer? (See also, pages 12-13 of the text.)

You might summarize this session with the following observations from Laurin’s text:

- a. “Here it is very important to recognize that Genesis 1-11 deals with the beginnings of the natural world not in order to answer the questions *how* or *when* the world was created. The text sought initially to tell the Israelites *who* created the world, *why* it was created, and *what* part Israel had to play in it” (p. 8).

- b. “The authors of the Priestly History brought together various ancient traditions . . . to show that with the development of humanity has come the development of problems for humankind All of this, then, provides the backdrop to the story of Abraham and of Israel” (p. 8).

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

5. Questions and assignment.

Ask the class if there are any final questions or comments about today’s study. Make a note of any questions that may need more attention (for example, issues of authority, doctrine versus open interpretation, or literalism). You will need to be sensitive to the needs of the class members and find ways to address these issues in class. Ask the class to read pages 15-39 of Chapter 1 and Leviticus 26:3-20, 40-46 and Exodus 20 for the next session.

6. Closing prayer.

Close the session with the following prayer or one of your own.

God of history and of story, let us meet you in the wide variety of expressions we find in the Old Testament. Inspire us to new attentiveness and resourcefulness as we seek you in the narratives of an ancient people. Amen.

SESSION THREE

ISRAEL AND ITS COVENANT WITH GOD

TEXT: *Chapter 1 (pages 15-39)*

SCRIPTURE: *Leviticus 26:3-20, 40-46; Exodus 20*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * explore the meaning of the term “covenant”;*
- * compare the covenant at Sinai with suzerainty treaties of the Hittites;*
- * examine the obedience-blessing and disobedience-curse pattern in these covenants;*
- * discuss what covenant means in our lives today.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the assigned material in the text and the Scripture passages. Secure an article on “covenant” from a Bible dictionary. List the key points of the article on chalkboard or newsprint. Put the outline for Step 1 on chalkboard or newsprint. On separate pieces of paper, list each of the Scripture passages shown in bold in the outline. These will be distributed and read aloud. Spend some time thinking about what “covenant” means to you today and how your concept compares with God’s covenant with Israel.

Make a copy of Handout 1B (at the end of this leader’s guide), “The Sinai Covenant and the Suzerainty Treaty” for each member of the class.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

10-15 minutes

1. Summarize the text. 10-15 minutes

Display the newsprint or chalkboard, which outlines the material in the text. A summary is provided below, but feel free to add any ideas you wish to emphasize or to present materials in a different way. Remind the class that the rest of the Priestly History (Genesis through Numbers) is long and that you are only going to give a brief overview of the flow of the biblical text as described by Laurin. Point out that the development of the promise to Abraham and the covenant with Israel can be followed throughout the material. Distribute the pieces of paper on which you have written the Scripture passages, and ask people to read the passage at the appropriate time in order to illustrate the material that is described.

The Patriarchal Events (Genesis 12-50)

1. The Abraham stories (12:1-25:18)
The beginning of the divine promise
(Read Genesis 12:1-3)
2. The Jacob stories (25:19-36:43)
The inheritance of the divine promise
(Read Genesis 28:10-15)
3. The Joseph stories (37:1-50:26)

The continuance of the divine promise
(Read Genesis 48:15-16)

The Salvation Events (Exodus through Numbers)

1. Deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 1-18)
(Read Exodus 2:23-25)
2. Encounter at Sinai (Exodus 19:1-Numbers 10:10)
 - a. The covenant with Yahweh (Exodus 19:1-24:18)
(Read Exodus 19:1-6)
 - (1) Related to Abraham's promise;
 - (2) Includes regulations for response (Ten Commandments-Exodus 20:2-17; the Covenant Code-Exodus 20:22-23:33)
(Read Exodus 20:1-17; 23:9-11)
 - b. The Priestly Code (Exodus 25:1-Numbers 10:10)
 - (1) The tabernacle and priesthood (Exodus 25:1-40:38)
(Read Exodus 25:1-9)
 - (2) The laws regarding worship (Leviticus 1:1-27:34)
(Read Leviticus 1:1-4; 18:1-5)
 - a. Sacrifices
 - b. Festivals
 - (3) Preparations for departure (Numbers 1:1-10)
3. Wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 10:11-36:13)
(Read Numbers 14:19-24)

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-40 minutes

2. Define covenant. 5 minutes

Explain that "covenant" is one of the most important and persistent ideas in the Old Testament. Covenant describes a permanent and binding relationship based on commitment, with promises and obligations made on the part of those involved. Abraham is promised land and descendants; the laws in Exodus through Numbers reflect centuries of work by the community to discern the obligations of Israel to God; the prophets call the Israelites to obedience to the covenant and warn that disobedience brought Israel's separation from the land.

The covenant is renewed in the New Testament (note that in Greek "testament" is the same as "covenant.") Thus, the Bible is divided into two covenants.

3. Group work. 10-15 minutes

Divide the class into two groups. Give copies of Handout 1B, "The Sinai Covenant and the Suzerainty Treaty," to one group and an index card with the following assignment to the second group.

* Read aloud Leviticus 26:3-20, 40-46. Appoint someone to note the major points of your discussion and to report back to the class. What are your reactions to the juxtaposition of blessing and curses in this passage? What effect does the section on God's faithfulness (vv. 44-46) have on your understanding of the covenant? Are these patterns of blessing-curse and steadfastness present in the modern church's understanding of covenant with God?

4. Reports and discussion. 15-20 minutes

Have the groups report on their findings. Open a discussion by noting that the parallels with the suzerainty treaty illustrate that the covenant with Israel was initiated, stipulated, and maintained by God. The group investigating Leviticus should have found that while there are blessings and curses for obedience or disobedience to the covenant, the covenant itself cannot be broken because God, not the people, is the guarantor of the treaty.

Ask the class to compare this description of covenant with their own understanding of God's covenant with people today. Is the steadfastness of God a reason to neglect the stipulations of the covenant? Is certain behavior required of us as a party to the agreement? Where do we find guidelines for this behavior? For Christians, belief in Christ is a stipulation that makes the "new" covenant different from the "old"; but is the covenant exclusively based on our ability to believe?

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

5. Assignment.

Ask the class to read pages 41-60 of Chapter 2 for the next session. Also, ask them to scan the books of Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings for overall impressions, and ask them to choose a narrative about one leader (judge or king) and read it before the next class.

6. Closing Prayer.

Close the session by saying the Lord's Prayer together.

SESSION FOUR

DEUTERONOMIC HISTORY – JUDGES AND KINGS

TEXT: *Chapter 2 (pages 41-60)*

SCRIPTURE: *Judges 13-16; 2 Samuel 5:1-7, 17-21; 6:12-7:17; 11:1-12:15*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * review the theological themes of the Deuteronomic History;*
- * investigate and compare the roles of heroes and leaders, such as the judges and kings, in that history;*
- * explore the pattern of looking to the past for insights into the present and future.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the assigned text material carefully. There is a lot of information, so you may want to outline the main passages and ideas. Think about some of your favorite heroes or leaders. What makes them great? Has your perception of them changed with time? Prepare the index cards for Step 3. Have available Bibles and newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

10 minutes

1. Review the Deuteronomic history. 10 minutes

Tell the class that biblical scholars describe the books of Deuteronomy through Second Kings as the Deuteronomic History. These books include narratives about the history of Israel from its entry into Palestine to its destruction under the Babylonians in 587 B.C.

While some of the materials are older, such as the song of Deborah in Judges 5, the work was probably compiled after the return from the Exile, when Israel sought to rebuild its nation physically, religiously, and culturally. Read aloud from page 41 in the text, starting with “At some unknown time and place . . .” and reading to the end of the paragraph.

Display the historical outline you prepared for Session 2. Point out that the Deuteronomic History includes a restatement of the Law in Deuteronomy, the conquest of Palestine in Joshua, the period of the judges (twelfth-eleventh centuries B.C.) in Judges, the periods of the monarchy (1022-922 B.C.) and the divided kingdom (922-587 B.C.) in Samuel and Kings.

Finish by summarizing the main theological goals of the Deuteronomic historian. Since the historian was looking back in history to gain perspective on Israel’s present (after the Exile), the compiler interprets the material in terms of theological lessons the Israelites can learn from their history. Display the newsprint on which you have put the following (this is based on Chapter 2, page 43). Ask someone to read the passage associated with each part of the plan.

Interpreting the History

The Deuteronomic Plan

1. Israel must follow one God and actively deny and destroy the idols/gods within Israel.

(Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

2. The right place to worship God is in God's sanctuary in Jerusalem.
(Read Deuteronomy 12:1-7)
3. Right worship of God is not worthwhile unless accompanied by everyday justice and morality.
(Read Deuteronomy 5:1-21)

Ask the class members to keep these criteria in mind as they look at today's Scripture passages. Point out that the entire history presented in Joshua through Kings is interpreted according to these principles. Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20 as an example of the criteria.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-45 minutes

2. Popular heroes and leaders. 5-10 minutes

Ask the class to think about American history for a moment and to identify some of the heroes or great leaders of the past. List the responses on newsprint or chalkboard. They may include people, such as Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Harriet Tubman, John F. Kennedy, General George Patton, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discuss the qualities of the heroes or leaders. Do we consider them courageous, forward-looking, wise? How do we tell stories about these people? Are we always factual? Do we emphasize the good points of the person? Do we want to know the bad points? Encourage the class to give examples of "historical" narratives that teach a lesson about what it means to be a "good" American (for example, Johnny Appleseed's frontier spirit or Ben Franklin's ingenuity).

3. The heroes and leaders of Israel. 15-20 minutes

Divide the class into two groups. Tell the class that we are going to study about a judge (a charismatic leader who served an "adjudicator" or "helper" before the period of the monarchy) and one king (perhaps the most famous of Israel's kings). Remind them that there are many more judges and kings they can read about in these texts.

Give each group an index card on which you have put an assignment. You may use the following or create your own assignments.

Assignment 1: Read the story of Samson (Judges 13-16) and consider the following questions:

- What were Samson's heroic qualities?
- Did Samson obey God immediately and explicitly?
- What goals of the Deuteronomic historian are reflected in the telling of Samson's story?

Be prepared to share your observations with the class.

Assignment 2: Read excerpts of the story of David (2 Samuel 5:1-7, 17-21; 6:12-7:17; 11:1-12:15) and consider the following questions:

- What were David's heroic qualities?
- What goals of the Deuteronomic historian are reflected in the telling of David's story?
- Did David obey God? What is the effect of telling about David's mistakes? Is it related to the goals of the historian?

Be prepared to share your observations with the class.

4. Share and discuss. 10-15 minutes

Have each group share its findings about Samson and David. Open a discussion about the role these narratives play in "looking back" in history to explain and direct the present. Since the Deuteronomic historian saw the devastation of the Exile and the need for Israel to be united again around its religious institutions, the writer related the history of Israel with special attention to the fluctuation of Israel's leaders between obedience and disobedience. This puts the Exile into perspective and gives constructive advice about what to do to improve the current situation.

Compare the presentation of heroes and leaders in these texts with your discussion of American heroes (Step 3). Do we tend to portray heroes as "good guys," or do we pay attention to their mistakes? Perhaps American history is less attentive to the mistakes or flaws of its leaders and their actions because we have not experienced profound devastation such as the Exile. Do you think the goals of the Deuteronomic historian are good suggestions for living a life in obedience to God today?

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

5. Assignment.

Ask the class to read pages 60-63; 105-117; and 121-124 in the text. Also, ask the members to write down a brief definition or description of the terms "prophet" and "prophecy." Tell them not to use a dictionary or a biblical reference work, but simply to note their first reactions to who a prophet is and what he or she does.

6. Close in prayer.

Have the class stand in a circle, and ask them to offer prayers for the continued work of the group.

SESSION FIVE

THE PREEILIC PROPHETS: EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.

TEXT: *Chapter 2, (pages 60-63); Chapter 7 (pages 105-117; 121-124)*

SCRIPTURE: *1 Kings 18 and 21 ; Amos; Micah*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * develop a definition of prophecy;*
- * examine the prophets' call of obedience to God and their understanding that disobedience brought disaster;*
- * identify the prophets as the "conscience" of the nation and the "troublers" of kings, priests, other prophets, and the people.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Before reading the text for this session, make some notes about your definitions of "prophet" and "prophecy." Then read the assigned material in the text and the Scripture passages. In light of this reading, would you change your definitions? Display the historical outline prepared for Session 2, and take a few minutes to review the time periods of Elijah, Amos, and Micah so that you can add any necessary historical information. The assignments for Step 2 can be put on newsprint or on 3 x 5 inch cards. Have available paper and pencils.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

10-15 minutes

1. Define prophecy. 10-15 minutes

Write the word "prophecy" on newsprint or chalkboard. Ask: What elements should be included in a definition of prophecy? Responses might include *foretelling the future, social critique, preaching, action, or ancient*. Add your definition from your preparation. As a group try to formulate a few sentences that define prophecy. List these on the chalkboard or newsprint.

Ask the class to turn in the text to the section entitled "The Emphases of Prophecy" (pages 109-110). Summarize this section for the group. You may want to highlight certain phrases or sentences to read to the group. Ask: How do these emphases compare with our group's definition? Do you want to modify your definition?

Which of these emphases do they think are still important messages for today? Does prophecy have to be a "blueprint" of the future for it to be relevant today?

If the class perceives prophecy as mainly prediction of future events (foretelling), you may want to discuss this issue further (see pages 61-63 and 105-110 in the text).

If you have extra time, encourage the class to name people that they consider to be modern prophets or prophets of an earlier time. Ask them to tell why they consider these people to be prophetic.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-40 minutes

2. Study three prophets. 20 minutes

Point out that as an introduction to the concept of prophecy in the Old Testament you will be studying about three preexilic prophets.

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group one of the assignments you have put on newsprint or index cards.

Assignment 1: Read about the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 18 and 21. Ask a member of the group to take notes and to summarize the discussion for the class. Consider the following questions:

- Who are the main characters?
- What is the role of Elijah in the narrative?
- What are the predictive elements, and how far off are the predictions?
- What was the message for the people hearing or reading the Deuteronomistic History in the postexilic period?
- Would you add to or change anything about your definition of prophecy?

Assignment 2: Read Amos 2; 5:4-5, 14-15, 21-24; 7:7-9; 9:11-15. Try to identify the major points of Amos's message from these passages. (See pages 112-114 of the text for more information, if needed.) Consider the following questions:

- What was Amos's message for the people in the eighth century (during the period of the divided monarchy)?
- Could Amos's message be transposed for churches today? Compose a prophecy to the modern church by rewriting Amos 5:21-24 using modern imagery and language.

Assignment 3: Read Micah 1:2-9; 3; and 6:1-8. Try to identify the major points of Micah's message from these selections. (See pages 122-123 of the text for additional information, if needed.) Consider the following questions:

- What was Micah's message for the people in the eighth century (during the period of the divided monarchy)?
- Could Micah's message be transposed for today? Compose a prophecy to modern leaders by rewriting Micah 3:9-12 using modern imagery and language.

3. Group reports and discussion. 10-20 minutes

Reconvene the class and ask each group to give a short summary of its discussion. On newsprint or chalkboard record the information about the role or emphasis of each prophet and the meaning of the prophecies for the people of the prophet's time.

Ask whether the class members have any additional aspects of prophecy they would add to their definition. Are there some parts of the definition that they want to modify? If the issue of predictive prophecy versus prophecy as a critique of the present was raised, ask if these studies

have given the group any new perspectives on the topic. This is a question that will probably continue to surface, so do not hesitate to discuss it here.

Have the groups who had the task of rewriting the prophecies for today present them now. Ask the group participants if doing this was awkward. Were there differences of opinion about what modern phenomena should be included in the condemnation?

Ask the class to suggest people they consider to be modern-day prophets or prophets who spoke out in an earlier time. How can the modern church be prophetic? Are there parallels between Palestine in the eighth century (B.C.) and our country in the twenty-first-century (A.D.)? Remind the class that Ahab saw Elijah as a “troubler” of the nation and as his enemy. Ask: Is this true of prophets throughout history? Will prophets always disturb the status quo? Would anyone in the group like to be a prophet?

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

4. Assignment and prayer.

Ask the class members to read Chapter 8, pages 125-136, of the text and Jeremiah 1:4-10; 8:18-9:3; and 20:7-9 for the next session.

Offer the following prayer or use one of your own:

God of justice, we long for a world in which your love rules in all our hearts, and we want to do our part to make it so. Still, when prophets speak, we do not always hear them, and when we are called to speak, we shrink from the task in fear. Grant us wisdom to see where change is needed, courage to meet the future, and faith to follow you in all our ways. Amen.

SESSION SIX

THE PREEXILIC PROPHETS: SEVENTH CENTURY B.C.

TEXT: *Chapter 8 (pages 125-136)*

SCRIPTURE: *Jeremiah 1:4-10; 8:18-9:3; 20:7-10, 14-18; 26:10-11; 28:1-15; 30-31; Habakkuk 2:1-4; 3:17-19*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * discover that the prophets were human, like us, and experienced difficulties in their faith;*
- * learn about the prophets' reason for hope and perseverance in the midst of the hard times;*
- * examine the relevance of the prophets' situation and their message for our time.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the assigned material in the text and the Scripture passages. There are more Scripture references than you may be able to use in one session. This will be determined by the size and makeup of your class. By this time you should have a feel for how much discussion will be generated by questions and the readings. Feel free to modify the lesson plan for your particular class. You should, however, read all of the passages to get a feel for Jeremiah and Habakkuk, their times and responses. The goal for this session is to use questions and biblical texts to facilitate the discussion of faith in difficult times. Do not cut short relevant personal sharing for the sake of including another text. Display the historical outline prepared in Session 2. If available, a map of Babylonia would be helpful, particularly in pointing out the location of Babylon. Using the information on page 130-133 in the text, prepare a brief outline of Jeremiah's life for use with Step 2. List on the chalkboard or newsprint the questions found under Step 2.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

5-10 minutes

1. Introduce the session. 5-10 minutes

Indicate on the historical outline the time period of Jeremiah and Habakkuk.

Tell the class that you will begin by reading about Jeremiah, his call, his life, and his message of hope. Note the dates of the fall of Jerusalem and the last kings, during whose reigns Jeremiah was active. Unlike the prophets we studied about in the last session, Jeremiah lived in the last days of Judah and witnessed its fall. (See pages 130-133 in the text.)

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

35-45 minutes

2. Read about Jeremiah's call. 15 minutes

Ask the class to read Jeremiah 1:4-10. They can either read silently or follow in their Bibles while one person reads it aloud. Ask them to compare Jeremiah's experience of God's call with their own experience of God in their lives. Ask those who are willing to, to share about the beginning of their own experience of God. Use the following questions that you have put on newsprint or chalkboard to help in the sharing. If you have a large class, you may want to divide the class into groups for this sharing.

- Does this passage sound familiar?
- Have you been reluctant to respond or offered excuses for not responding to God's call?
- Was there a feeling of excitement and joy that accompanied that experience of responding to God's call in your life?
- Have you struggled with doing or saying something in a situation when you knew it was right but would be unpopular?

3. Possible points of discussion. 20-30 minutes

The following are suggestions for discussion. Depending on the amount of time you have, choose the ideas that might be most useful or interesting for the group to discuss.

- **Jeremiah, the “Weeping Prophet.”**

Ask for volunteers to read aloud the following passages: Jeremiah 8:18-9:3; 20:14-18.

Ask: What was the prophet feeling? Why was he feeling that way? Can you identify with Jeremiah?

- **The cost of “prophethood.”**

Ask for other volunteers to read aloud the following passages: Jeremiah 20:7-8; 26:10-11.

Ask class members whether they have experienced a “cost” in speaking and living for God. What is the cost of being a disciple in America today?

Additional-time option: If the group is interested, discuss Jeremiah in the context of nationalism. Are there times when you, like Jeremiah, would criticize your country? Are there times when you would not? Do you subscribe to the idea “My country, right or wrong,” or to the completion of the saying “when right, to keep it right, when wrong to make it right”? What might Jeremiah have said in response to this question? What contemporary situations can you list where the voice of a prophet could do some good?

- **Jeremiah's faithfulness.**

Have a class member read aloud Jeremiah 20:9.

Ask the class to think about the following questions: What keeps you going when rough times come in faith? Have you ever tried to walk away from God? What has brought you back or kept you from going?

- **Habakkuk's response.**

Briefly outline the historical situation at the time of Habakkuk's ministry (page 127 in the text). Habakkuk 3:17-19 seems to indicate that things were not going well for Judah during Habakkuk's lifetime, “yet I will rejoice in the LORD . . . the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:18).

Ask: How is it possible to rejoice in the midst of the difficult times in our lives? Read aloud Habakkuk 2:4.

Does this offer any insight for living a life of faith in difficult times? What does the term “living by faith” mean to you?

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

4. Assignment and prayer.

Ask the class members to read Chapter 9, pages 137-146, in the text and to scan Ezekiel for the next session.

Ask a member of the class to end the session in prayer.

SESSION SEVEN

THE EXILIC PROPHETS

TEXT: *Chapter 9 (pages 137-146)*

SCRIPTURE: *Ezekiel 18; 37:1-14; Obadiah*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * explore the role of the prophets in helping Israel to deal with the disaster of the fall of Jerusalem;*
- * examine the hope for the future found in prophetic literature;*
- * reflect on ways that people explain or deal with disaster.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the assigned material in the text and the Scripture passages. Be prepared to give a summary of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the situation of the Israelites in Judah and Babylon. Display the historical outline prepared in Session 2 and use it for reference. Make a list of questions you would ask yourself or God after a disaster in your life or in the life of others. What are some of the answers to these questions that come from your faith, the Bible, or popular philosophy? Put on newsprint or chalkboard the questions for the group work in Step 2. Have available newsprint and markers for use by three groups.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

5-10 minutes

1. Set the context. 5-8 minutes

Summarize the historical situation at the time of the Fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.) and the Exile (587-539 B.C.). Summarize the information on pages 137-138 of the text and remind the class of the time period of Ezekiel and Obadiah by referring to the historical outline. If there are questions about the references to Second Isaiah, remind the class that Isaiah in its entirety will be covered in the next session. Finish your summary by noting Laurin's point on page 137 of the text that the Exile "was an extremely crucial time for the Jews. Dispersed, dejected, and with their leadership stripped of its power, they needed strong voices to help them maintain their unity and religious commitment and to provide some guidance for the future."

Ask the class whether times of crisis and disaster make people more or less likely to listen to prophetic voices than times of security and comfort. Invite the class to offer examples of events or prophetic figures in history that illustrate their observations.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-40 minutes

2. Explore questions raised by crisis. 5 minutes

Ask the class to consider how people are affected by a major crisis. What questions do you, other people, or whole nations seem to pose to God and to themselves when they suffer great hardships?

Put the following questions on newsprint or chalkboard (or use your own questions) to aid the discussion.

- Why?
- Is God cruel and unjust?
- Who did this to us?
- What did I do to deserve this?
- Is someone else to blame?
- Is there any hope?

3. Examine Ezekiel and Obadiah. 20 minutes

Tell the class that the books of Ezekiel and Obadiah offer glimpses of the questions the Israelites asked during the devastating crisis of the Exile and of the answers the prophets offered to the people.

a. Group work. 15 minutes

Divide the class into three groups. Assign one group Ezekiel 18, one group Ezekiel 37:1-14, and one group the book of Obadiah. Ask each group to read its assigned passage and consider the following questions (that are on newsprint or chalkboard):

- What questions do the Israelites seem to be asking?
- What response does the prophet offer?
- Do you think this a helpful or hurtful suggestion?

Give each group newsprint and markers to record their findings.

b. Group reports. 5 minutes

Reconvene the class and ask each group to briefly outline the content of its passage. Have each group share its findings for the first two questions. Either post their newsprint or combine the findings of all three groups on another sheet of newsprint with two columns, one headed "Israel's Questions," the other "Prophetic Responses."

4. Discuss Israel's response to crisis. 15 minutes

Evaluate and discuss Israel's questions and the prophets' "answers" in the aftermath of the devastation of the Exile. Encourage the groups to share their responses to the third question, about the helpfulness of the prophets' responses. Encourage the class members to share personal experiences with crisis that illustrate their approach to the kinds of questions Israel was asking.

Use any of the following questions as discussion starters or advancers:

- What role does admitting one's guilt play in healing and getting on with life?
- Do you agree with Ezekiel that a sense of individual responsibility is more important than looking for faults in others? Is this argument always true?
- What function does hope for a brighter future play in one's response to major difficulty? Is there a time when false hope placates rather than inspires?

- On page 146 of the text, Laurin states, the “Book of Obadiah illustrates for us, by its fierce desire for the annihilation of the Edomites, the fact that logical theology often goes hand in hand with human hate.” Do you agree or disagree?

CLOSING THE SESSION

10 minutes

5. Evaluation.

This session is the midpoint in the study series. Invite the class to offer any observations or suggestions about the study so far. What has been most helpful or most difficult? Record the responses on newsprint or chalkboard and consider these responses as you prepare for the next sessions.

6. Assignment and prayer.

Ask the class to read Chapter 10, pages 148-149 and 151-166; Chapter 3, pages 65-74; and Chapter 4, pages 75-79 in the text for the next session. Also, ask the class to read the book of Ruth.

Close the class by asking the members to name people (individuals, nations, or ethnic groups) who are going through crisis periods right now. Have the class respond to each suggestion with the phrase, “Lord, hear their cries.” End by saying, “amen.”

SESSION EIGHT

THE POSTEXILIC WRITINGS

TEXT: *Chapter 3 (pages 65-74); Chapter 4 (pages 75-79); Chapter 10 (pages 148-149, 151-166)*

SCRIPTURE: *Ruth; 1 Chronicles 29:14-19; 2 Chronicles 7:11-22; Nehemiah 10:28-39; Jonah*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * review the history of Israel as seen from the perspective of the postexilic Chronicler;*
- * evaluate the literary character and quality of the books of Jonah and Ruth;*
- * interpret the lessons of Jonah and Ruth for the postexilic community and for modern readers.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the assigned material in the text. Be prepared to summarize the historical events around the return from the Exile (see Step 1). Display the historical outline prepared in Session 2. Read the books of Jonah and Ruth. Note your first reactions. What do you think their moral teachings were for the postexilic community? Are there any lessons for you or your community today? Have available newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk, and at least seven copies of the same translation of the Bible.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

15-20 minutes

1. Summarize the historical context. 5 minutes

Briefly summarize the Israelites' return from exile in 538 B.C. Have someone in the class read Ezra 1:1-4 as an introduction to your presentation. Relate the historical details, such as dates and major characters (see pages 65-67 and 148-149 in the text); focus especially on the hardships the newly returned exiles faced, both physically (famine and drought) and politically (competition with Samaritan Jews and difficulty getting the temple rebuilt).

2. Review the Chronicler's History. 15 minutes

Remind the class that with the Chronicler's History, comprised of First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, we have reached the last of the large histories that make up nearly all of the first sixteen books of the Old Testament. Like the Priestly and Deuteronomistic Histories, the Chronicler's History is not specifically a factual recounting of Israel's past, but a theological interpretation of its past in light of Israel's present. The Chronicler, therefore, interprets history in light of the chaos of the Exile and the postexilic experience.

Tell the class that, according to Laurin, the postexilic community questioned its relationship to the past and the validity of the great promises to its ancestors. Read the following quote from Laurin (page 67): "So the Chronicler selects and edits the material to speak to the people and to their uncertainty about the fulfillment of the promise. This promise is carried by those who keep worship pure. The point is simple: History is determined by one's attitude toward the worship at Jerusalem. If the present community in Judah wishes to have a future, they must exert all effort to keep the cult pure."

To illustrate Laurin's point, ask the class to listen for references to the Exile and to the centrality of the temple and right worship as they read aloud the following passages: 1 Chronicles 29:14-19 (David speaking); 2 Chronicles 7:11-22; Nehemiah 10:28-39.

Discuss why worship and temple practices might become the most significant part of the postexilic community. Ask the class to speculate about the role that worship and ritual play in binding a community together. Is the stronger presence of the "peoples of the nations" a significant factor? Does worship provide ways to separate one group from others? Is this always a positive thing? Encourage the class to briefly share their own experiences of the role of worship and ritual in community life.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-35 minutes

3. Introduction to Jonah and Ruth. 5 minutes

Tell the group that while the Chronicler's History reinterpreted the history of Israel in light of its present situation, it is the last great historical piece we have from the Israelite community before Christ. Some scholars note that after the Exile the Israelites had so little self-determination (under the Persians, Seleucids, and Romans, successively) that their literature reflects much narrower personal and utilitarian purposes than the sweeping histories of a nation that could have confidence in its future. Even the Chronicler's attention to pure worship illustrates that Israel turned its attention to specific and visible forms of promoting unity.

Jonah and Ruth stand as examples of this movement toward less historically inclined literature. Laurin describes Jonah as a story, written sometime in the fifth century B.C., designed to teach a religious and moral lesson. He describes Ruth as a "very old story" retold in postexilic days to protest the "too-easy identification of nationality and faith" (page 75).

4. Read Jonah dramatically. 5-10 minutes

Ask the class members to assume parts for a dramatic reading of Jonah. You will need the following characters:

--the Lord	--Sailors (two or more)
--Jonah	--Captain
--Narrator	--King of Ninevah

Distribute copies of the Bible in the same translation. Encourage the class to have fun with this. You may want to have them stand up, clear the chairs, and act it out. Extra people can be additional sailors (who read in unison) or the fish that swallows Jonah (by catching him or her in their arms).

5. Evaluate and interpret the stories. 20 minutes

Ask the class members to share their impressions of Jonah and Ruth. You may need to offer your own brief summary of Ruth if several people have not read it. Were these stories entirely familiar? Did the stories contain things they had never heard before? Do they find Jonah funny in any way? What elements of Jonah make it a good story (for example, exciting adventures, an antihero, a sea monster, humor, the unresolved ending)? Point out that Jonah has been variously

classified as historical narrative, allegory, parable, and midrash (teaching story). See Laurin pages 154-155. How would class members characterize these books? Why do they think they were included in the Scriptures?

After discussing Jonah and Ruth as literary pieces, consider the question of interpretation. What lessons do the stories teach? Would other listeners have answers different from those of the class? For example, make a list of the possible lessons for the postexilic community. You can help by offering some of Laurin's suggestions on pages 75-76 and 155-156 in the text:

- Exclusivism is protested.
- God is gracious to everyone.
- God continued to work through reluctant or disobedient Israel.
- Nothing thwarts God's plan of salvation for humanity.

Next make a list of the lessons from the stories that the class sees for today. Compare this list to the preceding one. What are the differences? the similarities? In what ways are Jonah and Ruth time-bound or timeless? Encourage the class to offer personal reflections and stories about the lessons of Jonah and Ruth for today.

Discuss the references in Jonah to the repentant animals and the strange ending "and also many animals." Is this comedy, instruction, or both? Does God save the animals to show Jonah the importance of every living creature?

CLOSING THE SESSION

2-5 minutes

6. Assignment and prayer.

Ask the class to read the sections in Laurin on Isaiah (pages 117-121, 141-145, and 149-151) for the next class. Also, assign Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12 for the next session.

Close with a prayer of your own or the following:

God of all creation, make us mindful of the expanse of your gracious forgiveness. When we hate others, love them in spite of us that we may learn from you. When we think more of our own reputations than of the good of others, remind us of angry Jonah who mourned the plant but did not rejoice with one-hundred-and-twenty-thousand Ninevites . . . and also many animals. Amen.

SESSION NINE ISAIAH AND THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE

TEXT: *Chapter 7, Chapter 9, and Chapter 10 (pages 117-121, 141-145, and 149-151)*

SCRIPTURE: *Isaiah 1; 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12; 58*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * review the discussion about the literary unity of the book of Isaiah;*
- * explore the common threads of the prophetic message throughout the book;*
- * discover the two-sided mission of Israel (and God's servants) in the "servant songs" of Isaiah.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the text and the Scripture passages for this session. Put on newsprint a chart illustrating the proposed divisions of the book of Isaiah (see Step 1). Additional information about the unity of Isaiah and the interpretation of the "servant songs" may be found in a Bible commentary. Check with your pastor or the local library for a copy of *Harper's Bible Commentary* or another Bible commentary. Make a list of the major concepts that are present in prophetic literature regardless of its historical origin. Can you find these concepts in the Isaiah passages for this session? How does the twofold mission of calling both self and others to righteousness contribute to your understanding of your faith (see Laurin page 142)? Write the closing prayer on newsprint. Have available newsprint and markers.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

10-15 minutes

1. Review the unity discussion. 10-15 minutes

Give a brief presentation on the problem of Isaiah's literary unity. Begin by reading Laurin's statement on page 117: "The Book of Isaiah evidences most clearly the fact that prophetic literature is largely of a compilatory nature. Although we now have one book called *Isaiah*, it really comprises three large collections from widely separated periods of time."

Tell the class that Laurin's opinion is based on the work of scholars during the modern period. The evidence includes differences in vocabulary and style, but also historical allusions in chapters 40-66 to the Exile and the return from Babylonia. Point out that Isaiah 44:24-28 speaks of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple and specifically names Cyrus as the instrument of God.

Display the chart presenting the proposed divisions of the book of Isaiah:

ISAIAH 1-39

A compilation of prophetic material from the eighth century B.C. Most often attributed to the prophet Isaiah who prophesied from 742-701 B.C. to Judah and its kings. This was a time of relative security and prosperity. Assyria was the external threat.

ISAIAH 40-55 (Second Isaiah)

Prophetic poetry from the time of the Exile. Speaks of the last days of Babylonia (550-539 B.C.). Assyria is no longer a threat, and Persia is now seen as the savior of Israel. Cyrus is named the “anointed one” (Greek, “messiah”) of God. Israel is called the servant of God.

ISAIAH 56-60

(Third Isaiah)

Prophetic poetry from Palestine from the period after the fall of Jerusalem through the reconstruction (587-538 B.C.). Discussion returns to the importance of righteous living and right worship, but in the context of the extensive suffering of Israel.

Conclude by noting that the historical situation of biblical materials has been important throughout Laurin’s book, but that to a point, Isaiah defies the scholarly attempt to break it up. There are strong themes, such as righteous living and right worship, that permeate the book, and it is clear that an editor went to great pains to unite the material. Within Isaiah there is an overall unity, in spite of the diversity of themes and historical circumstances.

You may want to move to the next section of the session by quoting from the introduction to Isaiah 1-39 in *Harper’s Bible Commentary*: “Its [Isaiah’s] value was determined less by the text’s perfection, measured according to most historical standards, than by how well it could meet some specific religious expectations of future readers, who continually endeavored to preserve and understand it.”¹

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-40 minutes

2. Finding the common threads. 15-20 minutes

Tell the class that the book of Isaiah provides an excellent opportunity to trace the voice of Israel’s prophets throughout its history. Have the class divide into two groups. Ask one group to look at Isaiah 1 and the other to look at Isaiah 58. Allow about ten minutes for the groups to list on newsprint the major points of the prophetic message found in their assigned Scripture reading. Encourage them to note other prophets who took up similar issues. If the groups need help, the lists might include justice, right worship, hope for the future, the sovereignty of God, or the need for repentance and forgiveness.

Reconvene the class and have each group present its list. What are the similarities between the lists? Tell the class that scholars have dated these texts about two hundred years apart. Which concepts have persisted in the materials? Are these themes common to other books? For example, both call the people to acts of everyday justice; this concept is also in Amos and Ezekiel. Also, both call Israel to right worship, as do Micah and Ezra.

¹Gerald T. Sheppard, “Isaiah 1-39,” *Harper’s Bible Commentary*, ed. James L. Mays (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 544.

Working from the lists made by the groups, ask which concepts continue in prophetic messages today. Is there a need for everyday justice in modern America? How is right worship related to justice? Encourage people to identify prophetic messages that they would deliver to the modern situation. Ask them to identify figures or institutions that are attempting to share these messages.

3. Explore the “servant songs.” 15-20 minutes

Ask the class to read aloud the four “servant songs” in Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). Ask different people to read the Scripture passages. As they read, ask the other class members to identify the mission of the servant.

Ask the class members to share what they heard to be the mission of the servant. Be prepared to summarize the material on pages 142-145 of the text to help the group clarify this difficult material. Important points may include the following:

- Scholars have difficulty identifying the servant, but the text itself suggests it is Israel (41:8; 49:3).
- Laurin suggests that Israel has a twofold mission: to itself and to the world.
- Laurin notes that the songs have “not given a detailed delineation of any one person, but a broad picture of the servant whom God intends to use for worldwide mission. Israel is that servant, the church is that servant, and so is Jesus; each contributes in a unique way” (page 145).

Encourage the group to discuss the issue of suffering as part of God’s plan for the servant. What does this mean for modern servants of God? Is suffering always a good thing? In light of such things as child abuse and poverty, should suffering be seen as redemptive? Ask if anyone can identify people who have suffered for the sake of their message. How do the class members, as people of faith, see themselves as servants?

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

4. Assignment and prayer.

For the next session, ask class members to read pages 80-87 in Chapter 5 of the text. Also, ask them to read any five psalms of their choosing before the next session.

Close by reading in unison the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (on newsprint):

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

SESSION TEN

WORSHIP AND THE PSALMS

TEXT: *Chapter 5 (pages 80-87)*

SCRIPTURE: *Psalms 1, 13, 15, 23, 60, 85, 88, 113, 132, 150*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session, we intend that participants will*

- * explore the character of music in the life of the church;*
- * investigate the book of Psalms as a worship resource;*
- * use the Hebrew poetry styles found in the Psalms.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the assigned material in the text and the Scripture passages. Reflect on the role of music in your worship community. Scan your church hymnal, and make a list of the different types of hymns. Are they historically bound or are they universal in nature? Review for reference pages 81-85 in the text on the three kinds of Hebrew parallelisms and the types of psalms. Write on newsprint the list of psalms and questions for Step 4. Have available several copies of the hymnal used in your church, paper and pencils, and newsprint and markers. If everyone in the group is not using the same translation of the Bible, put Psalm 100 on newsprint for the opening prayer.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

10-15 minutes

1. Open with a unison reading. 5 minutes

Read Psalm 100 in unison from Bibles or, if everyone does not have the same translation of the Bible, use the copy you have put on newsprint.

2. Examine your church hymnal. 10 minutes

Begin by asking the class what role music plays in the life of the church. Responses may include *enhances worship, artistic expression, familiar material, something people can do together, fun, and expresses reverence*. List the responses on newsprint.

After sharing for a few minutes, distribute the hymnals and ask the class to skim through them. First, ask them to list the kinds of hymns they find. This list may include *praise songs, holiday songs, pleas for aid, or patriotic songs*. List these on newsprint.

Ask each member of the class to choose a hymn. Tell them to notice the date of the hymn and the name of writer of the words. Is there anything in these hymns that reflects the time of their composition (historical allusions, archaic language)? Can we identify what might have been going on in the life of people in a particular historical period from the hymns written during that period? Why or why not? Then, ask the class members to identify the universal or timeless characteristics of the hymns they chose (doctrine, tune, imagery). What is it about certain hymns that influences us to regularly sing them in our worship?

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

25-30 minutes

3. Present the Psalms. 10 minutes

Tell the class that the book of Psalms is also a hymnal. It includes 150 poems, which had been set to music, from a long span of time in the history of Israel.

Point out the hymn types described on pages 84-85 of the text. Ask the class to skim these types. List them on newsprint. What are the differences between Laurin's list and the list of hymn types described in Step 2? Did you list wisdom songs or songs of royalty? Can the class think of current hymns that might fit these categories?

Read to the class the following sections from the text:

“Part of the continuing value of these books lies in the fact that they are not so closely tied to specific historical events that they reflect situations that will not be repeated” (page 80).

“ . . . in all of [the psalms] we are listening to people expressing themselves in the situations of daily life against the background of faith in Yahweh. Although some of them were deliberate compositions for formal worship, and though all of them came to be used in worship, they are all theological responses to life” (pages 83-84).

Ask the class members to compare Laurin's assessment of the purpose of the psalms to the purpose of hymns in their own community. Does your own use of music show the tension between songs not being time-bound in meaning but still reflecting the particular responses of a community or individual? Is the purpose of the music different depending upon its use (solo material, group singing, choir presentation, or liturgy)?

4. Examining the Psalms. 20 minutes

Display the newsprint on which you have listed several different psalms and the questions that follow. This list can include Psalms 1, 13, 15, 23, 60, 85, 88, 113, 121, 132, and 150. Have at least one psalm from each hymn type listed on pages 84-85 in the text.

Ask each member of the class to select one psalm. Ask them to consider the questions as they silently read the psalm they chose.

- Identify the psalm type.
- Which parts of the psalm seem historically bound?
- Which parts have universal meaning?
- What role might the psalm have played in the worship life of Israel?

After about ten minutes, ask volunteers to share their observations. Identify any similarities in the universals that the group describes. Which events in the history of Israel seem to have had significant impact on their theological thinking and worship life (the monarchy, the Exile, Israel's precarious geographical position—surrounded by hostile powers). Are there major historical events that have made an impact on your own theological thinking and your worship resources (for example, the Reformation, or the exploration and colonization of America)? What elements

does your hymnal have in common with Israel's (praise of God, calls for help, community building)?

CLOSING THE SESSION

10-15 minutes

5. Write a psalm.

As a group, write a psalm to be used in closing the session. Have each member compose a two-line stanza. You may want to quickly summarize the poetic parallelisms on page 81 in the text. Offer examples of synonymous and antithetic parallelisms (from the text), and ask the class members to try to write their two lines in one of these styles. Remind them that two complementary ideas can be a synthetic parallelism. Allow people to work in pairs if they wish.

6. Assignment and closing.

Ask class members to read pages 93-95 and 99-101 of Chapter 6 in the text. Also ask them to look through the book of Proverbs and to select several proverbs that are interesting and meaningful to them.

As a closing have each person read in succession the stanzas they wrote earlier. You may want to collect these stanzas after class and arrange them into a psalm which can be copied and distributed to the class at the next session.

SESSION ELEVEN

INTRODUCTION TO WISDOM LITERATURE

TEXT: *Chapter 6 (pages 93-95, 99-101)*

SCRIPTURE: *Proverbs 1:1-7; 2:1-11; 3:1-4, 13-18; 22:1-16; 28:1-10; 30:5-9*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * investigate the international nature of wisdom literature;*
- * explore the purpose of wisdom literature;*
- * discover what the book of Proverbs offers to our understanding of the good life.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read all of Chapter 6 in the text in preparation for this session and the next session. Read the suggested Scripture passages. Make a list of your own sources of wisdom. “Wisdom” can include theological insight, but it should more likely include practical advice and information. Where does our society find wisdom? Have available copies of several different magazines (such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Time*, *Vogue*, *Reader’s Digest*) for Step 1. Copy the sayings (“teachings,” “proverbs”) for Step 2 onto six index cards. Make a copy of Handout 2 at the end of this guide, “The Structure of Job,” for each participant. Have available newsprint and markers and paper and pencils.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

10-15 minutes

1. The good life. 15 minutes

Tell the class that for the next two sessions you will be considering the wisdom literature in the Old Testament. This includes the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Read the following from page 93 of the text: “Human beings from the earliest times have been searching for the good life, the best way to live.” Remind the class that wisdom literature considers the questions of how to live the “good life” (practical information) and what is the meaning of life (theoretical or theological reflection). (See page 93 of the text.)

By way of introduction, ask the class to look through some magazines to find modern wisdom about living the “good life.” Tell the class to look for advertising slogans or article titles that offer explicit or implicit suggestions about how to live the “good life.” List the findings on newsprint.

Ask the class to briefly define the “good life” being promoted by these magazines. Write this definition below the list. Save this list and definition for use with Step 3.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-40 minutes

2. Introduction to wisdom literature. 15-20 minutes

Briefly give several introductory points about wisdom literature. On pages 93-95 of the text Laurin points out the following:

- Wisdom includes both practical information (such as the importance of diligence, honesty, and skill) and theoretical reflection (about the meaning of life).
- Wisdom literature in the Old Testament includes Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, but wisdom literature is common throughout the ancient Near East (especially in Egypt);
- In contrast to other ancient wisdom sources, biblical wisdom literature should be read against the background of Israel's covenant relationship to God.

You may also want to add the following:

- The biblical wisdom literature does not, however, usually refer directly to salvation beliefs (that is, covenant promises).
- The Hebrew sage's goal is to help the readers live a good life.
- The idea of retribution is common. Proverbs upholds the idea that living the good life is rewarded and that straying from the wise path leads to destruction. Job and Ecclesiastes question this notion.
- The literary forms of wisdom literature include the short saying, the poem, and the disputation speech. All three are evident in the Old Testament wisdom books.²

In order to illustrate the similarities and differences between the Old Testament wisdom literature and its contemporaries in the ancient Near East, have the class compare three pairs of sayings. Tell the class that each pair of sayings includes one passage from Proverbs and one passage from the *Teachings of Amenemope*, a collection of Egyptian wisdom sayings from 1000-600 B.C.³

Distribute the six index cards on which you have put the "Teachings" and "Proverbs." Have each of the people who received a card read aloud from the card. After each pair of "Teachings" and "Proverbs" has been read, ask the group to identify the similarities and differences of the pair. List the responses for each pair on newsprint.

Pair A

Teachings:

Guard thyself against robbing the oppressed
And against overbearing the disabled.
(*The Teachings of Amenemope*, 2:1-2)

Proverbs:

"Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate;
for the LORD pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them."
--Proverbs 22:22-23

²Roland E. Murphy, "wisdom," *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985), 1135.

³James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 237-243.

Pair B

Teachings:

Do not laugh at a blind man nor tease a dwarf
Nor injure the affairs of the lame.
(25:1-2)

Proverbs:

“Those who mock the poor insult their Maker;
those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.”
--Proverbs 17:5

Pair C

Teachings:

Lift him [the evil man] up, give him thy hand;
Leave him (in) the arms of the god;
Fill his belly with bread of thine,
So that he may be sated and may *be ashamed*. (2:v1,5).

Proverbs:

“If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;
for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,
and the LORD will reward you.”
--Proverbs 25:21-22

Ask the class what these comparisons suggest about our interpretation of Old Testament wisdom literature.

3. Examining Proverbs. 15-20 minutes

Have class members work in pairs. Ask each pair to read one of the following Scripture references: Proverbs 1:1-7; 2:1-11; 3:1-4, 13-18; 22:1-16; 28:1-10; and 30:5-9. Depending on the size of the class, you may have to add or subtract passages. Display newsprint on which you have written the following questions, and ask the pairs to consider these questions as they read their Scripture passage.

- What is the “good life”?
- What is the purpose of wisdom?
- What is gained by right living?

After a few minutes, ask each pair to share its observations. Compare the descriptions of the good life from the proverbs to the definition of the modern-day good life from Step 1. What does Proverbs teach about what is important in life? Are there things in either definition that the class

disagrees with? You may want to mention that this material is literature from the educated and monied class in Israel. How many of these proverbs seem to show a concern for wealth?

Discuss the purpose of the book of Proverbs as it is described in these passages. Laurin describes it as “a guide to successful living” (page 100) with an emphasis on the sovereignty of God (Proverbs 1:7). Ask: What do you think “successful living” entails? Do you agree that living a good life is rewarded with happiness and even wealth? Remind them that Job and Ecclesiastes protest against this idea and that the class will consider their protests during the next session.

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

4. Assignment and prayer.

Ask the class to read pages 95-99 and 101-103 of Chapter 6 in the text for the next session. Give each participant a copy of Handout 2. As preparation for the next session, ask three class members to each read one of the starred passages about one of Job’s friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar) and Job’s responses to the friend’s words. Ask them to list the friend’s explanations for Job’s suffering and Job’s responses to them.

Close the session by reading Proverbs 2:5-8.

SESSION TWELVE

WISDOM TEXTS: JOB AND ECCLESIASTES

TEXT: *Chapter 6 (pages 95-99, 101-103)*

SCRIPTURE: *Job 4-7; 11-13; 18-19; 38:1-7; 42:1-10; Ecclesiastes 1; 3:16-22; 9:7-10*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * hear voices that argue against the predominant theology of the Old Testament;*
- * determine the value of their messages for our lives;*
- * evaluate the role of questioning and doubt in a life of faith.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Reread the assigned material in the text and the suggested Scripture passages. Using pages 95-96 and 102-103 of the text, be prepared to summarize the books of Job and Ecclesiastes. Prepare a list of the points each of Job's friends made (see the starred passages on Handout 2, "The Structure of Job"). You may have to use your list if any of the persons you asked to do this did not prepare. What are the questions you would ask God if you had the chance? What answers do others offer to your questions? Are they satisfactory answers? Have available copies of Handout 2, and newsprint and markers.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

5-10 minutes

1. Unanswered questions. 5-10 minutes

Ask: What questions about life do not have easy answers? What are some questions you would ask God about if you had a chance to do so? For example, why do children suffer? Other questions could include: Is humanity essentially good or evil? Is God actively involved in the world? Is there a purpose to suffering? On page 95 of the text, Laurin suggests the following questions: "Why is this world so disordered if there is a God? Or what kind of God do we worship?" List on newsprint the questions identified by the class.

Then ask the class to consider the institutions and people who have offered answers to any of these questions. This list may include the church, the Bible, ministers, teachers, friends, and political leaders. Have the class members always found these answers satisfactory? Are they more likely to question these explanations or to accept them?

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

35-40 minutes

2. Setting the context. 5 minutes

Ask the class members if they have heard of the book by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. This title typifies a question the group may have considered: Why does tragedy strike innocent people (see page 95 of the text)? Ask the class whether Kushner's title is a title that would be used by the Old Testament writers you have studied up to this point. Would the writer of Deuteronomy, the prophets, or the writers of the book of Proverbs have used this title for their books? Up to this point, Old Testament writers have connected "bad

things” with the sins of “bad people.” Israel loses battles because the people sinned and disobeyed God, not because Israel was outnumbered or out-strategized. Remind the class that as part of the biblical genre of wisdom literature, Job and Ecclesiastes take up questions about the meaning of life. In them, you will hear voices opposing the idea in the book of Proverbs and elsewhere that righteousness is rewarded and evil is punished. This opposition leads to questions not only about life, but also about the nature of God.

3. Job and his friends. 10-15 minutes

Briefly summarize what happened to Job in the first two chapters of the book of Job (see pages 95-96 in the text). Then have those persons whom you asked to summarize the arguments of Job and his friends give their reports (see the starred chapters on Handout 2, “The Structure of Job”). List the summaries, beginning with Eliphaz, followed by Job’s response. Continue in the same manner with Bildad and Zophar.

Are there similarities between the questions Job asks of his friends and God and the list of questions from Step 1? What does the class think about the answers or explanations provided by the friends? Do they agree more with Job or with his friends?

4. Job’s resolution. 10-15 minutes

Read aloud Job 38:1-7 and 42:1-10. Ask the class to summarize the answer Job gets from God and Job’s resolution at the end of the story. Does Job get answers to his questions? Read the following to the group (Laurin’s conclusion about the theological point of the book of Job): “At the beginning the author had, in essence, raised the question: ‘Can a person have faith in God in such a mixed-up world?’ The friend had answered: ‘Certainly, for the world is **not** mixed-up. All sufferers are sinners.’ But neither Job nor we can accept this, as God has revealed. The Lord answers: ‘Yes, for although the world is in a mess, I still have loving reasons. All sufferers are not sinners.’ So Job comes to a faith that all the vicissitudes of life are known and cared for by a loving, sovereign God. Innocent people like Job may suffer, but God can still be trusted” (page 97).

Ask if the class members agree with this evaluation of the message of Job. Does it answer their questions about the nature of God and the reasons for suffering in the world?

5. Doubt and faith. 10 minutes

Summarize the content of the book of Ecclesiastes (see pages 101-103 in the text). Read to the class Laurin’s assertion that “Job had proclaimed trust in a purposeful, loving, albeit mysterious, God. But the author of Ecclesiastes saw God only as enigmatic and mysterious” (page 101).

Read aloud a few passages from Ecclesiastes: 1:1-18; 3:16-22; 9:7-10. Ask the class why they think books like Ecclesiastes and Job are in the biblical canon. While the narrative section of Job is about the “patient” Job, the majority of Job is about the “protesting” Job (see page 98 of the text). Laurin (and many other biblical interpreters) explains the presence of Ecclesiastes as a reminder that “from the human perspective alone life does appear this way—with no purpose, no destiny, and no goal” (page 103).

Ask: Do you agree with this assessment? Do you think there is a place for doubting and questioning in a life of faith? Are there questions that can go “unanswered” while one still believes in God and God’s promises? Ask those who are willing to, to share personal stories about the role of doubting and questioning in their own faith journeys.

CLOSING THE SESSION

5 minutes

6. Assignment and prayer.

Ask the class to read chapter 11, pages 167-171, in the text. Ask them to list their impressions of the book of Daniel. For example, what is the book about? How would you describe it?

Close in prayer, asking the class members to silently pray for the person on their right. Conclude by asking God to bless our efforts not only to find answers but also to ask questions as we continue on the journey of faith.

SESSION THIRTEEN

APOCALYPTIC DANIEL AND HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS

TEXT: *Chapter 11 (pages 167-171)*

SCRIPTURE: *Daniel 3:8-30; 6:6-24; 8:9-14; 12*

OBJECTIVES: *In this session we intend that participants will*

- * define apocalyptic literature;*
- * examine the message of Daniel for its audience;*
- * consider Daniel's message for contemporary Christian life.*

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the assigned material in the text and the suggested Bible passages. Some helpful additional information about Daniel and apocalyptic literature may be found in a Bible dictionary such as *Harper's Bible Dictionary* or *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Your pastor may have one that you can use, or check with your local library. Additional resources are listed on pages 171-172 of the text. Using text pages 168-170, prepare a summary of the debate about the historical information, setting, and authorship of Daniel, focusing especially on the information about Antiochus IV, Epiphanes. How do you communicate to a group experiencing persecution? What message and medium would be effective? What ideas give hope for the future?

Put on index cards the assignments for the group work in Step 3. Have newsprint and markers available.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

5-10 minutes

1. Defining apocalyptic. 5-10 minutes

Ask the class to describe the elements of apocalyptic literature. These elements might include visions, symbolism, and prophecy about end times. If the class has a lot of ideas, you may want to list the responses on newsprint.

Tell the class that Daniel is the primary example of apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament. Offer as a definition Laurin's description of apocalyptic writing as a type of literature that is "characterized by (1) an abundant use of symbolism to relate supernatural revelations regarding the course of history. Strange animal figures and great cosmic disturbances predominate. These revelations are given through visions, dreams, or journeys through heaven. . . . (2) Apocalyptic is also esoteric; its message is intended to be kept secret until some later period . . ." (pages 167-168). Note that the word "apocalypse" in Greek means "revelation" or "opening up." In this sense the secret things revealed in an apocalyptic work are hidden in imagery and obscure visions in order to keep them secret until the right moment. Laurin also suggests that apocalyptic eschatology (thinking about the end times) is characterized by a belief in the cataclysmic end of time and a pessimistic view of the present (page 168).

Were any of the class members' descriptions of apocalyptic included in Laurin's definition? Would you add anything to Laurin's definition? What books in the New Testament have apocalyptic flavor (Revelation, 1 Thessalonians)?

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

30-35 minutes

2. **The dating and structure of Daniel.** 10-15 minutes

Begin by telling the class that scholars disagree on the dating of Daniel. As Laurin notes on page 168, the book claims to be about Daniel, a Hebrew exile during the Babylonian captivity. The first six chapters contain stories about Daniel and his friends in captivity, told in the third person. In chapters 7-12 the voice of Daniel takes over telling of his own visions of what is to come. The dating of Daniel could be determined according to the content, which would point to about 550 B.C. But as Laurin points out, Daniel makes many errors about the Persian period, while being remarkably accurate about the period of Greek rule in the second century. For example, Daniel refers to the suspension of the burnt offering in the temple and the setting up of an idol there as lasting for 1,335 days (Daniel 12:11), which equals about three-and-a-half years. We know that Antiochus IV, Epiphanes, did both of these things in 167 B.C.; this period lasted for about three-and-a-half years. Most scholars agree with Laurin's position that Daniel was written during this period of intense persecution. The writer probably drew on some circulating stories about the faithfulness of Daniel and his friends in Babylon and used Daniel to speak to the writer's own age of persecution.

Finally, read aloud Laurin's statement that if the book were dated during the Exile, "the purpose of the book, then, would be to encourage faithfulness among the exiles by detailing the unfolding plan of God for the establishment of God's kingdom" (page 169). Then read "the book of Daniel was written during the brief period of intense persecution by Antiochus IV, Epiphanes. It was intended to encourage faithfulness to Yahweh and to give hope in the face of death by promising the imminent coming of God's kingdom" (page 170). What differences are there between these purposes? What does this say about apocalyptic literature in general? Does it have a universal applicability to people in a time of persecution or crisis?

3. **Group work and reports.** 20 minutes

Have the class divide into two groups. Give each group one of the index cards on which you have put the following:

Assignment 1—Read aloud Daniel 3:8-30 and 6:6-24. Discuss the messages these stories might have had for the Jewish community experiencing persecution under Antiochus IV, Epiphanes. What is the message for us today? Would the message be different for Christians undergoing a time of persecution today?

Assignment 2—Read aloud Daniel 8:9-14 and chapter 12. In light of the information in Laurin about the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus IV, Epiphanes, how would you interpret these visions about the "end times"? What is the role of symbolic language and promises of victory in a text for a persecuted community? Do these reassurances of God's future triumph have a message for us today?

After about 10 minutes, ask each group to share the content of its texts and its observations about the meaning of the text for the Jews then and for our world today.

Note that in America Christians have not generally suffered persecution because of their faith. Would the book of Daniel have special meaning in a country where Christians are persecuted? What groups or countries today might write apocalyptic literature?

CLOSING THE SESSION

10-15 minutes

4. Review and evaluate the course.

Ask the class members to reflect on the course. What particular ideas or books of the Bible caught their attention in a significant way? Have their impressions of the Old Testament changed as a result of their work in this course. If you saved the list of “Impressions of the Old Testament” from Session 1, compare the answers given then with those given now. In addition, encourage the class members to offer any critiques of the course and your leadership (in class or after class) that might help your growth as a teacher.

5. Closing prayer.

Go around the circle and ask each person to share one thing that he or she is thankful about from this course. Use this as a closing prayer.

For use with Session 2.

HANDOUT 1A

Excerpts from the Gilgamesh Epic

(a Babylonian Hero epic; 1000 years before the Priestly history)

That city was ancient, (as were) the gods within it,
When their heart led the great gods to produce the flood.

[The gods said to Utnapishtim]

‘Tear down (this) house, build a ship!

Aboard the ship take thou the seed of all living things.

The ship that thou shalt build,
Her dimensions shall be to measure.
Equal shall be her width and her length.
Like the Apso [sky] thou shalt ceil her.’

On the fifth day I laid her framework.

One (whole) acre was her floor space,
Ten dozen cubits the height of each of her walls,
Ten dozen cubits each edge of the square deck.¹

[Whatever I had] {of all the living beings} I laded upon her:

All my family and kin I made go aboard the ship.
The beasts of the field, the wild creatures of the field,
All the craftsmen I made go aboard.

With the first glow of dawn,
A black cloud rose up from the horizon.
Inside it Adad thunders,
While Shullat and Hanish² go in front,
Moving as heralds over hill and plain.

Gathering speed as it blew, [submerging the mountains],
Overtaking the [people] like a battle.
No one can see his fellow,
Nor can the people be recognized from heaven.
The gods were frightened by the deluge,
And shrinking back, they ascended to the heaven of Anu.³

¹The ship was thus an exact cube.

²Two heralds.

³The highest heaven in the Mesopotamian conception of the cosmos.

The gods cowered like dogs
Crouched against the outer wall.
Ishtar cried out like a woman in travail,
The sweet-voiced mistress of the [gods] moans aloud:
“The olden days are alas turned to clay,
Because I bespoke evil in the Assembly of the gods.
How could I bespeak evil in the Assembly of the gods,
Ordering battle for the destruction of my people,
When it is I myself who give birth to my people!”

The Anunnaki gods weep with her,
The gods, all humbled, sit and weep,
Their lips *drawn tight*, [. . .] one and all.
Six days and [six] nights
Blows the wind, as the south-storm sweeps the land.
When the seventh day arrived,

The sea grew quiet, the tempest was still, the flood ceased.
I looked at the weather; stillness had set in,
And all of mankind had returned to clay.
The landscape was level as a flat roof.
I opened a hatch, and light fell upon my face.
Bowing low, I sat and wept,
Tears running down my face.

On Mount Nisir the ship came to a halt.

When the seventh day arrived,
I sent forth and set free a dove.
The dove went forth, but came back;
Since no resting-place for it was visible, she turned round.
Then I sent forth and set free a swallow.
The swallow went forth, but came back;
Since no resting-place for it was visible, she turned round.
Then I sent forth and set free a raven.
The raven went forth and, seeing that the waters had diminished,
He eats, circles, caws, and turns not round.
Then I let out (all) to the four winds
And offered a sacrifice.
I poured out libation on the top of the mountain.

Seven and seven cult-vessels I set up,
Upon their pot-stands I heaped cane, cedarwood, and myrtle.
The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer.
When at length the great goddess⁴ arrived,
She lifted up the great jewels which Anu had fashioned to her liking:
'Ye gods here, as surely as this lapis
Upon my neck I shall not forget,
I shall be mindful of these days, forgetting (them) never.
Let the gods come to the offering;
(But) let not Enlil come to the offering,
For he, unreasoning, brought on the deluge
And my people consigned to destruction.

[Note: As recompense for the needless harm he whimsically caused, the god Enlil gives Utnapishtim immortality.]

Pritchard, James B., *The Ancient Near East, Volume 1, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Copyright © 1958 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

⁴An allusion to one of the common epithets of Ea.

For use with Session 3.

HANDOUT 1B

The Sinai Covenant and the Suzerainty Treaty

Harper's Bible Dictionary says, "The framework of the Sinai Covenant has significant affinities with suzerain-vassal treaties from the ancient Near East, specifically, the Hittite treaties of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. and the Assyrian treaties of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. In these documents a suzerain makes a treaty with a lesser kingship."¹

Read aloud the following passages that parallel the elements of a suzerainty treaty.

1. Identification of the suzerain and the suzerain's beneficial acts toward the vassal: **Exodus 19:1-8** and **20:1-2**.
2. Stipulations of the treaty: **Exodus 20:3-17** (see also chapters 22-23).
3. Public reading of the treaty and ceremonial meal: **Exodus 24:3-11**.
4. Blessings and curses: the other group will look at these in **Leviticus 26**.

Questions

1. Who initiates the covenant? Who makes its stipulations?
2. The strong parallels with the Hittite suzerainty treaties add a political and legal sense to the covenant. Does this influence our understanding of the covenant with Israel? What is the role of the Law in the covenant? What does it mean to break the Law?
3. As the suzerain initiated and maintained the treaty with the vassal, so Israelite obedience is not a covenant stipulation, but a response to God's proclamation of the covenant. Do you agree with this statement? What does it mean for our interpretation of the covenant?

¹Jeremiah Unterman, "Covenant," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985),190.

The Structure of Job

Opening Narrative (Job loses everything): chapters 1-2

Beginning of poetry section (Job curses his life): chapter 3

Eliphaz's speeches

- *1. chapters 4-5
- 2. chapter 15
- 3. chapter 22

Job's responses

- *1. chapters 6-7
- 2. chapters 16-17
- 3. chapter 23; 24:1-17

Bildad's speeches

- 1. chapter 8
- *2. chapter 18
- 3. chapter 25

- 1. chapters 9-10
- *2. chapter 19
- 3. 26:1-4; 27

Zophar's speeches

- *1. chapter 11
- 2. chapter 20
- 3. third speech is missing; it may be in 24:18-25 or 27:7-23, but evidence for either is limited.

- *1. chapters 12-13
- 2. chapter 21
- 3. chapters 29-31

Elihu's speeches

- 1. chapters 32-37

No Response

God's speeches

- 1. chapters 38, 39; 40:1-2
- 2. 40:6-24 and chapter 41

- 1. 40:3-5
- 2. 42:1-6

Closing Narrative (friends rebuked, Job rewarded): 42:7-17

Assignment: Read the starred passage about one of Job's friends and Job's responses to the friend's words. Each person will read the passage of one of the four "friends" of Job.

Make a brief list of the points that the speaker makes for his case.

Note: A few passages are left out of this survey of the structure of Job because there is little scholarly consensus about whether they actually belong to the speaker to whom they are attributed.

