

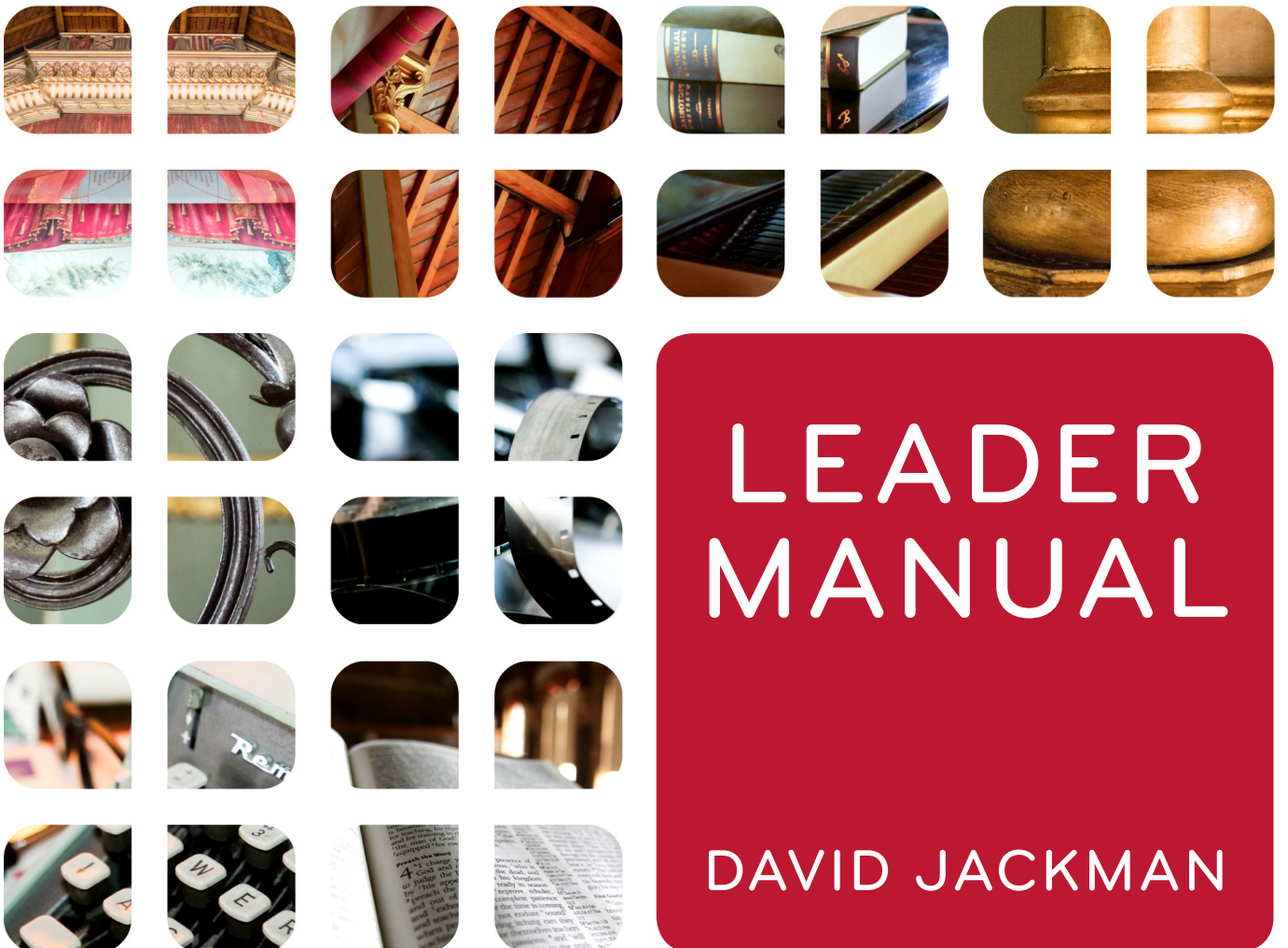


Equipped

TO PREACH THE WORD

MODULE 3

EQUIPPED WITH THE SCRIPTURES



































LEADER MANUAL

DAVID JACKMAN

MODULE 3

EQUIPPED WITH THE SCRIPTURES

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Manual Design: Diane Warnes. Publisher: The Proclamation Trust.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

As with Modules 1 and 2, this manual comprises eight training Units. Please complete Modules 1 and 2, Units 1 to 16 before attempting Module 3. Module 3 starts at Unit 17.

The timings for Module 3 Units are approximately as follows:

3–5 minutes	INTRODUCTION
15 minutes	VIDEO TEACHING BY REV. DAVID JACKMAN
40–80 minutes	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES
15–25 minutes	HOME STUDY AND PRAYER

This manual contains notes and instructions to help you lead your trainees. You will need to read through the notes and instructions for each Unit in advance to be prepared for the training.

The Home Studies for Module 3 consist of exercises and videos to help develop the skill introduced in each Unit. Briefly describe the purpose of the Home Study to your trainees at the end of each Unit. Emphasise the importance of this home preparation.

Note that the Home Studies for Units 19 to 23 consist of preaching practice. The Appendix provides further details and instructions on how to do this.

If you decide to run this Module over an intensive two-day workshop you will need to leave out the Home Studies for Units 17 to 18, but you should ask each of the trainees to prepare one of the five passages from the Home Studies for Units 19 to 23 before coming to the workshop, as this preaching practice is an essential element of the Module.

Throughout this manual, instructions are in *italics*.

Please note that the page numbers in this *Leader Manual* do not correspond to those in the *Trainee Manual*. Please therefore ask trainees to turn to the Unit number, rather than the page number.

This manual uses the English Standard Version (ESV) translation of the Bible.

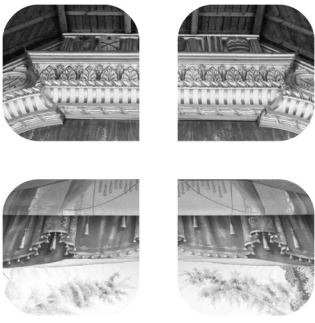
All videos can be found at www.proctrust.org.uk/equipped

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to: John Lumgair and Sim Lumgair of Quirky Motion for the production of the videos; Diane Warnes for the manual design; Pete Nicholas, Roo Standing and Robin Weekes for the discussion panels; everyone at The Proclamation Trust, especially Mike Clarkson. Special thanks are also due to Nancy Olsen, Malcolm Riley and David Seckington, each of whose contributions were invaluable.



UNIT 17

TWO TESTAMENTS: ONE STORY

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees, and pray as you begin this final Module that God will confirm and strengthen you and your trainees in your ability to handle his Word accurately, faithfully and with growing ability.

Hand each trainee a copy of the Module 3 Trainee Manual or alternatively they can download it from: www.proctrust.org.uk/equipped.

Introduce the Module by saying:

Welcome again to Equipped to Preach the Word. This third Module, as you can see from your manual, is entitled *Equipped with the Scriptures*. So, this Module is all about the different sorts of Biblical writing, how these genres of Scripture function and how they come together to form the whole Bible story. We are going to explore principles and practice to help us preach the whole counsel of God.

Introduce the video by saying:

For each unit we will watch a teaching video presented by Rev. David Jackman and then discuss and practise the skills together. We completed Units 1 through to 16 in the first two modules, so please open your manual to Unit 17, which is entitled *Two Testaments: One Story*.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 17

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the principles taught in the video.

- 1. We heard in the video that: “We have to read the Bible forwards in terms of its chronology, but we can only understand it backwards in terms of its theology.” Apply this principle to the following pairs of texts. Look first for the plain meaning of the Old Testament and then see how the New Testament explains and applies it.**

Look for the following points

Genesis 17:7-8 and Galatians 3:7-8

- ❖ God is promising Abraham that he will establish his covenant with him and his offspring and that he will give them the land of Canaan.
- ❖ The emphasis is on the “everlasting” nature of the promise and gift.
- ❖ Some interpreters might therefore see its fulfilment in the restoration of the state of Israel and their possession of the land today.

- ❑ But Galatians shows that the “sons of Abraham” are believers, Jews and Gentiles, who have faith in God’s promise. This is now fulfilled in Christ (“the offspring” v.16) and the promise of the land is fulfilled in the heavenly, eternal kingdom. Both are entered into by all who are united to him, by faith (see also verses 28-29).

Isaiah 11:10 and Romans 15:12 (context)

- ❑ Isaiah is predicting that the root of Jesse, signifying the Davidic royal line, will become a rallying banner for all nations to gather under. There they will find wisdom and rest.
- ❑ This could be thought to refer to a future earthly Jewish king who would exercise a world-wide rule.
- ❑ But its fulfilment lies not in a merely human ruler but in Christ the King. He is the source of God’s mercy to the Gentiles (Rom 15:8-9).
- ❑ The quotation is the climax of the series of four from the Old Testament in which the Gentiles rejoice in the peace and hope of the gospel.

Isaiah 28:16 and Romans 9:30-33

- ❑ Isaiah is rebuking the rulers of Jerusalem who are trusting in human allies to deliver them from the Assyrians (see vv14-15).
- ❑ By contrast, God is planting a foundation stone in Zion, which will be sure and which will never disappoint those built on it.
- ❑ Romans 9 shows that this is not a reference to an earthly city or temple, but to Christ.
- ❑ Picking up and combining the quote with another verse (Isa 8:14) in which the stone becomes a stumbling block, Paul applies this to Israel’s refusal of God’s gift of righteousness by faith in the Messiah.
- ❑ Seeking to establish their righteousness on the basis of their works, they have stumbled over and rejected God’s foundation stone of his new covenant community, the crucified Lord Jesus.

2. We heard in the video that “ours is not a replacement theology but a fulfilment theology”. The New Testament expands and develops the revelation of the Old Testament. Ask someone to read aloud Matthew 5:17-20. What principles does Jesus give us for handling the Old Testament?

Points to consider:

- ❑ “The Law and the Prophets” is a shorthand way of referring to the whole Old Testament. Jesus states that he is the climax and fulfilment of all the preceding revelation (v17b).
- ❑ Until the new creation is “accomplished”, not the smallest letter or punctuation mark of the OT Scriptures will be redundant or disappear.
- ❑ Fulfilment does not involve removal of any command, but the deepening of their significance to a practical godliness which exceeds the externalism of the Jewish leaders.
- ❑ The examples that follow all have this point to make. They take the principle of the law, which expresses the character of God, the law-giver, and apply it more deeply to the internal attitudes of mind and heart.
- ❑ The deeper progressive righteousness is the mark of living under Christ’s kingly rule. It is not the way into the Kingdom, but evidence of citizenship.

3. The video provided a diagram to help us see both the continuity and the differences between the testaments. Examine the three references below, in their context, and discuss which aspects of the Old Testament teaching continue and what are the changes through their expansion and development, in Christ.

Some points to seek to underline:

Matthew 5:38-39 (consider also verses 40-42)

- ❖ Verse 38 is a direct quotation from the Law in Exodus 21:24. It was designed to establish an equivalence of punishment to the crime committed.
- ❖ There is a natural justice in this, recognised by the law, but its purpose is also to restrict revenge (not two eyes for one).
- ❖ Although the Pharisees appeared to keep the law externally, Jesus turns the spotlight on to the victim's heart (see Matt 5:20). Far from seeking revenge, or even justice, his followers are to be willing to suffer further at the hands of evil people. See Rom 12:19.
- ❖ The following verses (vv40-42) give practical examples of what that would look like in the cultural setting of Jesus' day and are not difficult to translate to the details of our own cultures today.

Mark 7:18-20

- ❖ In the context of this chapter the controversy is over the ritual washing of hands, which Jesus uses as an example of how the Pharisees have substituted an external cleansing for inner purity.
- ❖ His accusation is that their traditions are more important to them than God's law, as, for example, in honouring parents (see verses 8-13).
- ❖ In verse 18 Jesus turns to the food laws. Proscribed foods did not make a person unclean. It is the inner corruption of sin which does that and that is what Christ has come to deal with.
- ❖ The problem with legalism is that it is satisfied with outward observation of man-made rules. Christ's purpose is heart surgery. Again, the OT call to obedience is developed to a more radical solution.

John 2:18-22

- ❖ There is much in the OT about the Jerusalem temple as the dwelling place of God among his people (eg. the tabernacle in Exod 25:8).
- ❖ In Jesus' day the temple was a very impressive structure which had consumed much time and money in building (v20) but which was no longer fit for purpose (v16).
- ❖ Jesus shows that the ultimate fulfilment of the temple is in himself (v21)—his body. He will become the meeting place between God and man, referring to his death and resurrection as "the three days" (v19).
- ❖ As this truth is developed further in the NT we see why earthly temples are irrelevant (Jn 4:21-24) and why there is no temple in the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:22).

4. The law of God is an expression of his character. Old Testament instruction continues to be relevant to us because of what it reveals of God's unchanging nature.

Split into small groups of two or three and work through the examples which follow. Work out the unchanging principle and its application to life today in each case.

Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Deut 22:1

- ❖ The principle here is love for one's neighbour, which is a reflection of the compassionate love of God. An ox or sheep was a very valuable asset and to fail to return it to its owner would be expressive not just of carelessness but of a total lack of concern.
- ❖ The principle is upheld by every act of God's compassion and mercy towards us. Membership of God's Kingdom involves submission to his will, which is defined in the golden rule of Matt 7:12. "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."
- ❖ This principle is seen supremely in the self-sacrificing love of Christ who in his atoning death met us at the point of our greatest need.

Deut 22:8

- ❖ The principle here is the avoidance of blood guilt by making proper provision for others' safety and not being careless or dilatory.
- ❖ The parapet (a barrier-rail) around the roof is to prevent life-threatening injury, since the space would be used for hospitality—eating and sleeping.
- ❖ This principle is an extension of God's concern for his creation. He has compassion on all he has made and a special concern for the protection of the vulnerable.
- ❖ This has continuing relevance today in compassion and care for all under our roof. It might mean fitting a stair rail, providing a special diet, ensuring safety, etc.
- ❖ The gospel of God's infinite compassion and concern for us, in Christ, is the ultimate fulfilment of this generous love.

Deut 22:12 (Numbers 15:38)

- ❖ The tassels were a distinctive mark of Israelite clothing. They were an external sign of their distinctiveness as the people of God, separated to him through their covenant relationship.
- ❖ They were also to be a perpetual reminder to them of the moral and spiritual obligations of this special relationship with God (Num 15:39).
- ❖ As with so many of these distinctions, by the time of the Pharisees they seem to have been corrupted into marks of pride and self-promotion (see Matt 23:5).
- ❖ But for Christ's followers, our likeness to Jesus, our personal holiness, is to be a distinguishing feature of our lives. We are not to be half-hearted or compromised in our exclusive commitment to our Lord.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

The first Home Studies consist of exercises and videos to help develop the ability rightly to relate Old and New Testaments together.

Ask the trainees to turn to the Home Study in their Trainee Manual (as in your Leader Manual the Home Study is identified by being in its own separate window). Briefly describe the purpose of the Home Study to your trainees. Emphasise the importance of this home preparation.

Pray at the end of your time together.

Complete the Home Study yourself and be prepared to discuss it with your trainees.

- 1. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34, one of the clearest and most famous predictions of the new covenant in the Old Testament. What are the details of God's promise? How are they fulfilled in the new covenant? You may find it helpful to read Hebrews 8 and 9 to check your ideas.**
- 2. Watch Discussion Panel 17. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.**



UNIT 18

THE SKELETON STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees, and pray as you begin this Unit that you will understand more clearly the basic pattern of God's revelation in all the Scriptures.

Introduce the video by saying:

This Unit helps us to see the major building blocks of the whole Biblical revelation.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 18

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop their understanding and incorporate it into their preaching. Try to teach them how to do this in an interactive way.

1. The Video taught us that the patterns of the opening chapters of Genesis serve as a template for the big-picture story of the whole Bible. This can be represented in four categories: sin – retribution – divine intervention – deliverance or salvation.

Explore how that pattern emerges in the following passages. Split into small groups of two or three. Appoint a spokesperson in each group ready to contribute comments and ideas to the larger group when we come back together.

Genesis 50:15-21 a summary of the Joseph narrative

Sin: The evil which the brothers did to Joseph, selling him into captivity (v15).

Retribution: They fear Joseph's revenge, which drives them to confess their transgression and seek forgiveness (v17).

Divine intervention: God rescued Joseph and brought him to Egypt where he exalted him to the position of Pharaoh's right-hand man (v19).

Deliverance/Salvation: God rescues multitudes of Egyptians from famine through Joseph's wise provision (v20) and also brings reconciliation and future provision for the brothers since Joseph is the agent of God's sovereignty (v21).

Numbers 21:4-9

Sin: The Israelites are impatient, speak against God, are ungrateful and despise God's gracious provision (v4-5).

Retribution: The plague of poisonous snakes, sent by God (v6).

Divine intervention: In response to the people's confession and Moses' prayer, God commands the making of the bronze serpent, so that whoever looks to it will live—a divinely-given miracle of grace (v7-8).

Deliverance/Salvation: Moses is obedient to God's instruction and as the people exercise faith by doing what God commands, they live (v9).

Judges 2:11-19 a recurring pattern

This text is the theme tune of the whole book of Judges.

Sin: The idolatry of the people in abandoning God, their rescuer, and serving the gods of the pagan nations (v11-13).

Retribution: God's anger is revealed as he gives them over to their plundering enemies, against whom they are powerless (v14-15).

Divine intervention: God raised up judges by whom he rescued them from their enemies (v16). Verse 18 reveals how this happened ("the LORD was with the judges and he saved them") and why it happened ("the LORD was moved to pity" by their distress).

Deliverance/Salvation: Their oppression was lifted, but only during the lifetime of the judge. Sadly, the pattern was so often repeated (see verses 19-23) that eventually God's delivering power was withdrawn.

2. We heard in the video how God restores peace and relationship with fallen humanity. "He does this through his own saving grace, meeting the claims of his justice and opening the way to a divinely-created fellowship, which is the covenant." This pattern is consistent throughout the whole Bible, so we now look at one New Testament example.

Ask someone to read aloud **Romans 5:1-11**. How does the pattern we have been observing work out in this gospel exposition?

Sin: Notice how the passage describes the human condition – weak (unable to help ourselves), ungodly (v6), sinners (v8).

Retribution: The consequences of sin are implicit. Hostility towards God (v1), under God's wrath (v9), alienated and cut off from God (v10-11).

Divine intervention: Christ died for us, the ungodly (v6-8). Through his blood we are saved from wrath (v9). We are reconciled to God by Christ's death and saved by his resurrection life (v10).

Deliverance/Salvation: We have peace (v1), access, joy and hope (v2) even in sufferings (v3-4). God's love has been poured into our hearts (v5). We are justified (vv1, 9) and reconciled (vv10-11).

3. As we learned in the video, Christ is the centre of this gospel pattern. Perhaps the greatest foreshadowing of the gospel in the Old Testament is to be found in the "servant songs" of Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13 - 53:12). To understand how Christ is at the centre of this pattern in Isaiah and what it entailed for Jesus to be the serpent-crusher (Gen 3:15), study the following verses.

Isaiah 49:1-2, 4, 6

v1 From his conception God called him to be his servant (v3a).

v2 He had a teaching ministry of speaking God's Word.

v3 He would be the true Israel, the obedient servant.

v4 It involved toil and labour, seemingly to no purpose.

v6 But far from being a failure, the LORD honours the servant and promises to use him to bring about salvation "to the end of the earth".

Isaiah 50:4-9

v4 Every day the servant is instructed by God to his task.

v5 He embraces God's will and does not resist.

v6 Even though that involves physical suffering and degradation.

v7 With God's strength he determines to fulfil God's will and purposes.

v8-9 Whatever his enemies may throw at him, God will vindicate him and they will perish.

Isaiah 53:1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12

You may not have time for all four sections, but verses 4-6 are the heart of the matter.

Verses 1-3 are similar to the earlier songs in pointing out that the servant's life from birth had no special protection or attraction. The words of verse 3 show us what it cost Christ—despised, rejected, sorrows, grief.

Verses 4-6 show us why this was necessary. The suffering vocabulary piles up—stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, crushed, chastisement, stripes. But it is the divine remedy for our griefs, sorrows, transgressions, iniquities. He is the sacrificial substitute for our sins and guilt (see v6).

Verses 7-9 again underline the suffering—oppressed, afflicted, cut off. Yet his death was entirely undeserved.

Verses 10-12 complete the picture by seeing that the servant's death is as the sin offering, which having been accepted by God opens the way to new life beyond death, victory over sin and evil and forgiveness for his people.

The cross of Christ and his subsequent resurrection is the crushing of the serpent's head, but involves the bruising of the redeemer's heel (Gen 3:15).

4. At the end of the video we were given 4 key questions to ask of any passage, so that we interpret it within the over-arching story of the whole Biblical revelation. They were:-

Q1 How does this relate to God, our Creator and Redeemer?

Q2 What do we learn here about his sovereign grace?

Q3 How does it point us forward to the ultimate fulfilment in Christ's person and work?

Q4 What response does this require from us today in terms of covenant faith and obedience?

Split into three smaller groups and study one of the passages below. Ask each of the four questions of your text and be prepared to present your findings to the larger group when we come back together. You will probably need to allocate the largest segment of your group time to this exercise.

2 Samuel 9:1-13

Q1 The kindness David wants to show (v1) is described as the kindness of God in verse 3. This is what God promised to David and his dynasty (2 Sam 7:15). It is "steadfast love". David's action reveals God's nature.

Q2 There is not the slightest need for David to be gracious. In fact we might have expected him to destroy Saul's descendants. This would explain the obeisance of Mephibosheth (v6) and his view of himself as a "dead dog" (v8). This grace is offered in sovereignty, but is entirely unexpected.

Q3 Great David's greater Son shows his undeserved favour to those who are dead in sin. Mephibosheth was crippled and entirely dependent on the kindness of others, as are all sinners before God. The kindness of the Lord Jesus, seen supremely on the cross, brings us a place at the table of the heavenly banquet.

Q4 Awe and wonder at the grace of God in the gospel. Joy in the experience of all the blessings that are ours in Christ. Faith to receive them and obedience to our King as response to his kindness (see Titus 3:4-5).

1 Kings 17:8-16

Q1 Elijah has just pronounced God's judgment on Israel, in the form of a prolonged drought (v1). God the Creator is the one who provides rain, harvests, etc. He is able to sustain his servant by the most unlikely means – ravens (v6) and a foreign widow (v8).

Q2 God shows his sovereign grace in the most hostile circumstances. He reaches out to the woman and her son, although they are outside the covenant. Because they are prepared to obey what God says, through the prophet, God miraculously provides (vv13-15).

Q3 Elijah is the agent through whom God saves the woman's life. She has "nothing" (v12), but she obeys God's Word and so is fed every day. The parallel with Christ's work is seen in his supernatural provision of spiritual life to those who trust and obey.

Q4 The woman experienced God's offered blessing through faith issuing in obedience to his word through Elijah (v15). The promise of God was 100% reliable and fulfilled. But she only proved that when faith overcame her fear (v13). The pagan widow does what the nation of Israel refused to do. She responded to the Word of the Lord in faith and obedience.

Luke 7:11-17

Q1 The Lord Jesus takes the initiative because "he had compassion" on the widow (v13). The emotion is strong. She is a widow, engulfed in grief. It is her only son. Our Redeemer knows what it is to be human.

Q2 He is the author and giver of life. No one else can do what he did in raising the young man. His grace is directed to the widow and her son (v15) but it also brings the crowd to glorify God (v16).

Q3 It is a reminder that although the young man would inevitably die again, the death of Jesus himself will bring eternal life to all who believe in him. See Jn 11:25-26.

Q4 The historical truth of the story compels us to ask who Jesus is (v16). It underlines the life-giving power of his Word. For those who believe it is a great encouragement to keep trusting through our tears and to focus on the eternal life which is ours through his work.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the following to introduce the exercise:

In the previous Home Study you were asked to study Jeremiah 31:31-34 to establish the details of what God promised concerning the new covenant. What New Testament verses would you use to prove its fulfilment?

Invite a few of the trainees to share their answers with the group.

You may also like to share the following with them:

- The new covenant promises focus on a re-united Israel and Judah, although the northern kingdom has already disappeared and Judah is about to fall. Other passages (eg. Isa 66:18-23) show that this is universal in its scope, but here perhaps the emphasis is on its unifying power.
- The great new development of this covenant is that it will be internal – the law written on the heart, not merely on tablets of stone.
- There will be a personal, relational knowledge of the Lord which will be available to all who receive this covenant.
- The forgiveness of sin will be its great blessing.

New Testament confirmation can be taught from: Hebrew 8:6-7, 8:13, 9:11-12, 9:15, 10:12-17, 12:24; Luke 22:20-21.

Remind your trainees to complete the Home Study and pray at the end of your time together.

Complete the Home Study and be prepared to discuss it with your trainees.

1. Read 2 Chron 20:1-30. Using the 4 analytical questions from this unit identify the main points of significance to preach from this narrative.
2. Watch Discussion Panel 18. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.



UNIT 19

OLD TESTAMENT POETRY

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees, and pray as you begin this Unit that your understanding of how Biblical poetry works will be deepened so that you can preach it more effectively from heart to heart.

Introduce the video by saying:

This Unit is designed to help us discover how to understand and use the poetry of the Old Testament more fruitfully.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 19

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop the insights and practise the skills taught in the video.

You may want to encourage the trainees that although the form of poetry may appear a little alien at first, it is worth persevering with this genre, since so much of the Old Testament is in poetic form and since it communicates so powerfully with mind, heart and will. Practice will develop competence.

1. We learned from the video that there are three advantages of God's message being conveyed through poetry over prose. They were (1) freedom of expression; (2) identification with the author's viewpoint; (3) memorability. Work at the two examples below in each of these categories, read them aloud and discuss in groups how the poetry achieves the effect.

Freedom of Expression

Exodus 15:6-12 If this was written in prose it would state that the Egyptian army and its chariots have been drowned in the Red Sea, so Israel is free from her slavery. But the poem attributes all this to God's mighty power. Verses 6-7 show the LORD at work. The "right hand" is the symbol of power and authority. Note the repetition and the devastating present-tense verbs – shatter, overthrow, consumes. See also the divine qualities revealed – glorious power, greatness of majesty, fury. The pictures are vivid and violent. Human imagery ("the blast of your nostrils") is used to describe divine power (see verses 8 & 10). In between, the enemy's foolish pride is caricatured. Look at the enemy's empty threats, expressed in the "I will" verbs in v9, which are blown away in verse 10, the last part of which enacts its meaning—"they sank (pause) like lead (pause) in the mighty waters". The reflection of verse 11 is the crown of the poem with its repeated question and its three-fold celebration of Yahweh—"majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders". None of this could be achieved with the same force and dramatic urgency in prose.

Amos 4:6-13 The repeated form, “I did this...yet you did not return to me, declares the LORD”, builds a growing dramatic tension, verse by verse, which exposes Israel’s rebellious resistance. Each of the five denunciations begins with an “I” verb on God’s behalf. Famine, drought, blight, war and direct judgments have all been ignored, so the drama increases until the climax in verse 12. There will be an inevitable confrontation with God and verse 13 is a chilling warning of what that will involve. Far more emotional trauma is conveyed by the poetry than could be communicated in prose statements.

Identification with the author’s viewpoint

Psalms 86:1-7 We identify with the writer immediately because of the verbs used in his appeal to God—incline your ear, preserve, save, be gracious, gladden, give ear, listen. There is no mistaking the urgency, with which we are encouraged to identify by the description, “poor and needy” (v1). Unless God answers there is no hope. But this is not a psalm of despair—see verse 7. The confidence is based on the God to whom he prays, who can meet his overwhelming need—see verse 5. The plea for grace will not go unanswered for the psalmist, or for us (v6).

Psalms 123:1-4 This brief request for mercy (v3) has great resonance with us, the readers. The heavens are far above us, but God is enthroned there. He can act, where we are powerless. So there is the moving imagery of verse 2, where the servants depend entirely on their master or mistress for their favour and mercy. Their position is contrasted with the ease of their proud oppressors (v4), but it is the heart-felt expression of need that draws us in, with the repeated phrase (v3-4) “more than enough” of contempt. There is a sense of being at the end of one’s tether in a godless, hostile world, with which it is not hard to identify. The challenge is for our eyes to “look to the LORD, our God” (v2).

Memorability

Isaiah 55:6-11 Here the structure of the poem is the means by which its message is reinforced. Verse 6 has similar halves – two imperatives (seek, call) followed by “while...”, which stresses urgency. Verse 7 indicates what that involves, again in two halves. “Let the wicked forsake...let him return.” Then verses 8-11 give three reasons, each beginning with “for”. God’s thoughts and ways are so much higher than ours, but the God who sustains physical life on earth also sustains spiritual life with the gift of his Word which always produces its harvest. The passage is easy to memorise due to its rhythm, patterns and repetitions and its message is encouragement to us to be memorising Scripture.

Psalms 19:7-11 Here again the poetic repetitive structure greatly aids the memory. In verses 7-9 there are six descriptions of God’s Word, each of which has a slightly different emphasis built into its meaning. And each time a description of its powerful, desirable effect is given—reviving, making wise, rejoicing, enlightening, enduring. But it is the qualities of God’s life-giving revelation (perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous) that produce these effects. So, the climax in verses 10-11 focuses on the desirability of God’s Word in the two images of gold and honey, which acts both as a caution and a motivation to obedience.

2. “Parallelism is the basic structural ingredient of Biblical poetry.” We learned that three of its major uses are (1) repetition for reinforcement, (2) contrast, (3) explanation and development.

Consider the following references and discuss in each case which purpose the parallelism serves and why it is effective. Please note that the examples become increasingly complex and that some will show more than one of the purposes.

Psalms 19:1 is a straightforward example of repetition for reinforcement. The repetition is never identical. The second half always adds to the first. So here, the glory of God is proclaimed/communicated by the sky, night and day, which are the evidence of his handiwork.

Isaiah 1:4 This verse works by explanation and development. The first half has four descriptions of God’s people—sinful, iniquitous, evildoers, corrupt. But in each case their identity (nation, people, offspring, children) is also stressed. So what they have rebelled against is God’s work in their lives. The second half has three verbs describing their consequent state regarding their God—forsaken, despised, estranged. The sheer weight of evidence, in one verse, serves to condemn Israel, but also to challenge our own hearts.

Isaiah 25:4 The strength of this verse lies in its repetition for reinforcement. The central idea of God as a stronghold is elaborated further at each stage. To the poor as the object of God's defence are added the needy and distressed. To the idea of stronghold is added the shelter from both storm and heat, both life-threatening. But it is human opposition that is in view, not weather conditions. "The ruthless" are those who attack God's people, but the defences he provides are utterly sure.

Psalms 44:6-7 The two verses work together as a powerful contrast between self-confidence and humble dependence on God in the conflicts of national life for Israel. Human weapons and personal strength are inadequate to overcome the enemy. But God has not only rescued his people, he has also put their enemies to shame—total defeat. It is the stark contrast between the two outcomes, which motivates continuing faith and dependence on the Lord.

Psalms 18:16-19 This sequence of verses works together in a growing crescendo of explanation and development. It also has its own contrast parallelism in verse 18. The verbs of God's deliverance are cumulative—he took, drew out, rescued. The strength of the opposition is also stressed—metaphorically "many waters" and physically "they were too mighty for me". It was a day of calamitous confrontation (v18) but the LORD supported, brought liberty and rescued "because he delighted in me". These are covenant blessings always experienced by those who put their trust in him and therefore very motivational for us, the readers, to emulate.

Psalms 37:10-11 Each verse has its own parallelism but the two together are a strong contrast. Verse 10 presents the short time of the wicked man and his total removal, so that not even the most careful search will find him. He is no more. This is a particular example of contrast, since the meek (those submissive to the Lord and his kingly rule) have permanence and the enjoyment of their heritage in great peace. This is utterly preferable in every way to the short-lived "gains" of wickedness.

3. If the poetry of the Old Testament is where we see God's heart most clearly revealed, we should always be able to trace those characteristics in Jesus Christ himself, the Word made flesh. Which divine "emotions" do we find in the following verses? How do they help us to preach to the affections by understanding God's heart better? Think how the character of God revealed in the Old Testament poetry is perfectly revealed in Christ.

Mark 6:34 The great crowd stirs the compassion of Jesus' heart. They have no wise leadership, no direction for life, so "he began to teach them many things". Here is the shepherd-king of Israel at work, meeting the deepest needs of his people and fulfilling Old Testament themes such as Ps 23; Isa 40:10-11; Ezek 34:11-16 and 22-24.

Mark 9:19 There is compassion here too, but also a degree of disappointment and exasperation that all Christ's ministry among them is not generating faith. This leads to the righteous anger theme of the Old Testament where God's judgment must fall on persistent faithlessness and rebellion. See Isaiah 1:18-20.

Luke 13:34 Here is the grief that mingles with God's righteous judgment. There is pathos in the repeated address to Jerusalem and deep tragedy in its constant rejection of God's message and messengers. There is also a longing desire to gather God's people under the shelter of his protecting grace, but "you would not". This echoes Old Testament teaching in which God often pleads with his people to repent and come back to his protection. Indeed, the whole prophetic ministry is designed to achieve that. See Hosea 11:8-9.

Luke 22:44 The full humanity of Jesus is expressed here as physically, psychologically and spiritually he faces the devastation of the cross. There are many ways in which God is spoken of in the Old Testament in human terms, so that we can understand what would otherwise be impenetrable to us mortals. But they are not just metaphors. The incarnation shows that he really has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isa 53:4). See the outworking of that in Heb 2:14-18 and 4:14-16.

John 21:15 The appeal to Peter is in terms of love as the basis of service. Jesus is looking for a deep personal relationship of love, leading to a life of faith and obedience, as compared to Peter's recent denials. It reminds us that loving the Lord our God with all our being and our neighbour as ourselves is the fulfilling of the law and the greatest requirement of covenant membership, as in Deut 6:4-8. The root of obedience is not fear or duty, but love.

4. In the previous modules we have seen that God's Word addresses the mind in order to soften the heart, so as to energise the will. First we have to understand God's Word mentally, then receive it into the soul and so then put it into practice in our lives. So we are now going to apply this process to poetry. Remember that the "heart" in the Bible is not the locus of the emotions, but the control-centre for the whole of life.

Split into groups of two or three to analyse the following example passages. How do they address mind, heart and will? Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together. You may like to choose one passage from each group.

Isaiah 1:16-20 The prophet has just been exposing the religious sins of Judah, in their double-minded hypocrisy. Now he turns to the remedy. He addresses their minds by contrasting what God requires with their current behaviour (verses 16-17). The urgency is conveyed by the imperatives—watch, remove, cease, learn, seek, correct, bring justice, plead. Then the opening of verse 18 is an appeal to the heart. "Come now...." As their minds are engaged with God's reasoning, their decisions need to be made on the basis of God's offer of mercy and forgiveness. Why would they ever turn down so loving an approach? But the will has to be active in verse 19, turning back to God in repentance and obedience. In order to underline the urgency of action the given alternative is faithfully spelt out in verse 20.

Jeremiah 2:14-19 The questions in verse 14 are designed to engage the mind in thinking through the reasons for the present calamities Israel is experiencing. Verses 15-16 explain in some detail what has happened (invasion and conquest), but this is not clinical. There is a strong appeal to the heart woven into the vivid violence of the descriptions, encapsulated in the phrase "become a prey" (v14). The reasoning continues in verses 17-18. The series of questions exposes why they are facing such disaster ("forsaking the LORD") and the futility of their attempts to rescue themselves by turning to pagan nations—Egypt and Assyria. But again this is more than factual. The heart element is there too in the regret they should feel ("he led you in the way") and the disappointment of unquenched thirst (v18). Finally, the will is challenged in verse 19. "Know and see" is obviously with a view to a change of direction, where the fear of God will replace their forsaking of him.

Psalms 42:1-5 Heart feeling is uppermost in verses 1-2, where the psalmist invites us to share his longing for the presence of God. The imagery of the panting deer and the thirsty traveller is designed to stir the heart. Verse 3 reflects on why the emotion is felt so strongly and so addresses the mind. It seems as though God has deserted him and so he is constantly mocked by his enemies. Verse 4 deepens the emotional impact with its treasured memories of great festival days when God's presence was unmistakably real. But mind and heart draw in the will in verse 5. Has God changed? Why such turmoil? There is a determination not just to reflect but to act in faith. "Hope in God for...."

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the notes below to discuss the previous Home Study.

In the previous *Home Study* you were asked to read 2 Chron 20:1-30 and using the four analytical questions from the unit to identify the main points of significance to preach from this narrative.

Ask a few of your trainees, who are willing, to contribute their answers. You might like to share the following with them.

1. How does this relate to God, our Creator and Redeemer?

Jehoshaphat's action in gathering Judah to seek God's help and his subsequent prayer (verses 6-12) are eloquent testimony to God as all powerful, the one who gave his people the land, who promised to protect his faithful people and on whom they totally depend (see v12b).

2. What do we learn here about his sovereign grace?

In response to the prayer, God graciously inspires Jahaziel with a direct, authoritative word. The essence of the passage is "the battle is not yours but God's" (v15). God has a victory strategy which they must simply follow

to experience his salvation (v17 – echoes of Exod 14:13). But the people will have to believe the Lord (v20) and demonstrate trust in his sovereign grace by obedience.

3. How does this point us forward to the ultimate fulfilment in Christ's person and work?

There is a resounding victory (v22-25) which is entirely due to God's intervention (v22) in the face of what looked like certain defeat. Salvation is the gift of God (Eph 2:8), purchased through Christ's total victory over all the hostile powers, at what looked like the moment of his total defeat. Judah experienced the physical spoils of God's victory (v25), as we experience the spiritual blessings of Christ's triumph (Eph1:3ff). Greatest of these is the rest God gives his people (v30) in the assurance of gospel grace.

4. What response does this require from us today in terms of covenant faith and obedience?

We do not have to import any application because the passage is rich in it. The primacy of prayer in the face of great need, faith in God's authoritative Word, obedience to his instructions, dependence on his power and ability, praise and thanksgiving for God's faithfulness before it is fully experienced (an act of faith)—all of these are practical implications for the New Testament believer.

Remind your trainees to complete the Home Study. This will be the first Home Study in this Unit in which they prepare a talk. Explain that for Home Study during the rest of the Module they will be preparing 10 minute talks which they may be asked to present to the group. Explain that the purpose is to get some preaching practice and some constructive feedback to help them improve and progress.

Pray at the end of your time together.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on pages 19-20 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on this Home Study.

Using the skills you have developed so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on Psalm 122.

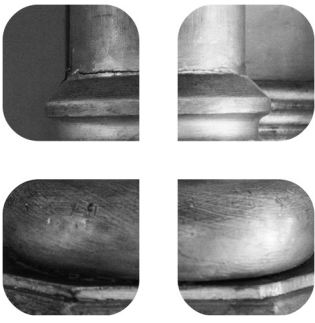
As you prepare, set the text in its context (a song of ascents used by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem), identify the main teaching content and its pastoral intention. Bring the psalm into its New Testament fulfilment context and apply it to us today.

Remember to write a theme sentence and an aim sentence, as we learned in Module 1.

You may also like to review the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1. A simplified version can be found on page 44 of this manual.

You may be asked to present this talk when we next meet together.

Note: In order to develop your skills and build confidence, it would be preferable if you did not use commentaries or listen to sermon downloads for the purpose of this exercise.



UNIT 20

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees, and pray as you begin this Unit that you will understand more clearly how Biblical prophecy works and its benefit to the contemporary church.

Introduce the video by saying:

This Unit explores the genre of Biblical prophecy so that we can better understand its meaning and preach it today with faithfulness and relevance.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 20

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop the insights and practise the skills taught in the video.

Principles for Interpreting Prophecy

1. The video stated that in prophecy “future prediction should stimulate us to present action”. How does that pattern work out in the three passages below?

Jeremiah 26:12-19

The context is that Jeremiah’s own life is under threat because he has prophesied the imminent destruction of the temple and the city. This is a warning from the Lord (v12) designed to bring about repentance and obedience (v13). The prophecy is conditional. If the people will return to God, he will relent (v13b). The immediate response is that the people hear this as God’s Word to them and compare it with the words of Micah (see 3:9-12). He was not killed; rather his words produced their desired effect (v19). But although there is a recognition of truth by “the officials and all the people” (v16), there is no action, no repentance.

Jonah 3:4-10

Here is the ideal example of effective prophecy. Jonah’s message of Nineveh’s imminent destruction is heard and heeded because “the people believed God” (v5). Fasting and sackcloth are signs of their repentance, which affects the whole city (v5b). The king’s proclamation is part of their active response (v6-8), but this is not merely outward. The people’s action is two-fold: to “call out mightily to God” and to turn from evil and violence (v8). This in turn causes God to relent and the disaster is averted (v9-10). Jonah, of course, has his own problems with this (4:2) as he would rather have seen the pagans destroyed, but it is a great example of prophecy achieving its divinely-appointed goal.

Isaiah 46:1-4

The eventual destruction of Babylon is being predicted in terms of a vivid pictorial image. The inhabitants are fleeing the city carrying their idols (Bel and Nebo) with them on beasts and carts (v1-2). The whole section deals frequently with the stupidity of idolatry. In total contrast, Israel's God carries his people (v3) at every stage of their lives, whether nationally or individually (v4). "I will carry", "I will bear". "I have made you" unlike the gods of Babylon made by men and "I will save", which they cannot. Their worshippers have to "save" their idols. The action required here is implicit, but spelt out later in the chapter (see verses 8-11). Turn from the futility of idolatry and commit yourselves to the faithful mercy of the only living God.

2. Survey the prophecies listed below and decide whether they are absolute or conditional. Discuss together how you came to your conclusions from the text and its contexts.

Amos 5:3-5

This is a conditional prophecy. Although verse 3 speaks of such a devastating judgment that there could be no recovery, the link word "for" at the start of verse 4 opens the door for mercy. The condition is that if Israel ceases to worship at the man-made shrines of Bethel and Gilgal, which were not authorized by the Lord, and instead returns to seek him, they will find life. They are to be obedient to God's instruction and not rely on their own alternatives. Even though it was the last hour, judgment could have been averted. But they refused and verse 3 was terribly fulfilled in the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom.

Isaiah 9:6-7

Clearly the prophecy is predicting future events, but it begins with a statement in the past tense. This is to indicate the certainty of what is being predicted. God's promise will be fulfilled and nothing will be able to stop it. It is as though Isaiah moves himself forward to the future Messianic reign (v6b-7) where he looks back and describes what initiated it all—the birth at Bethlehem. But whether in past or future time, this is an absolute word from the Lord.

Joel 2:1-3

Another conditional prophecy, though we have to read on in the context to be sure of that. These dramatic words are intended to produce great urgency. The density of the darkness and the numbers and might of the invaders produce alarm and trembling, but the coming devastating catastrophe (v3) is "the day of the Lord" (v1). They are his agents of judgment. But when we read on to verses 12-14, we see there is the possibility "even now" of repentance, leading to forgiveness.

Micah 4:1-5

This prophecy is located in "the latter days" (v1) which usually indicates the distant future. Its description of Yahweh's government of the whole earth, in righteousness and peace, is in Old Testament pictures and language (v3-4). The final verse exhorts God's people to walk now in God's ways, in anticipation of this glorious future, which is absolute—to be finally accomplished in the new creation.

Jeremiah 4:23-27

This is the most difficult to determine. In context, Jeremiah is predicting the fall of Jerusalem and Judah and the exile to Babylon. In the early days of his ministry there was still opportunity for repentance, but nearer the event itself the decree became absolute. Here the four times repetition of "I looked..." builds the dramatic tension, as what he sees is the equivalent of the undoing of creation itself (v23 using Gen 1 language). The whole created order (v24), all the life found (v25) and all human endeavour (v26) are devastated by God's anger, but there is a hint of conditionality in verse 27. This is not yet the final judgment of the last day, but it is a powerful foreshadowing of that absolute retribution.

3. In the video we heard that Old Testament prophecy “has at least three ‘hill-tops’ of significant fulfilment”. Each of these requires a different question in order to understand its significance. (1) What did it mean to the first hearers in their historical context? (2) What difference does it now make that Jesus has come? (3) What remains yet to be fulfilled in the new creation?

Split into groups of two or three to apply these questions to the passages listed below. How do the answers help us to preach the texts? Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute answers and comments from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Isaiah 61:1-3

(1) What did it mean to the first hearers?

Isaiah speaks in the first person as God’s anointed one (Messiah). He will come, in the power of the Spirit, to preach good news (gospel) of restoration and liberty (v1) and to comfort or strengthen God’s people (v3) with beauty, gladness and praise. But his coming will also be “the day of vengeance”.

(2) What difference does it make that Jesus has come?

Jesus applied this passage to himself and the ministry he was about to commence, in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:10-21). The gospel narratives all show its fulfilment in word and action. But Luke 4:20 indicates that he stopped reading before “and the day of vengeance”. This means that his work is divided into two comings—verses 1-2a are the first and verse 2b the second coming. This will also issue in the blessings of verse 3.

(3) What is the eternal fulfilment?

Although verse 3 is experienced in a measure by God’s redeemed people, here and now, its ultimate fulfilment awaits the new creation (see Rev 21:4).

Amos 9:11-12

(1) What did it mean to the first hearers?

The book of Amos has been devoted to the coming judgment of God upon the northern kingdom of Israel, at the hands of the Assyrians. But right at the end of the book there is a glimmer of hope. “In that day” refers to a distant future of rebuilding and renewal. God’s plans are not at an end even though the kingdom of the ten tribes is to be destroyed.

(2) What difference does it make that Jesus has come?

The reference to David’s fallen booth (v11) alerts us to expecting the blessings of restoration to be dependent on the Davidic monarchy. In spite of the division of the kingdoms and the destruction of the north, God’s promise to David will be fulfilled (see 2 Sam 7:11-16). In Acts 15:13-17, James relates the prophecy to the inclusion of believing Gentiles as the people of God, through the Messianic gospel. Even Edom (v12), always hostile towards God’s people, has a share in the Davidic kingdom, inaugurated by “great David’s greater Son”.

(3) What is the eternal fulfilment?

What we now see in part, as all over the world the gospel spreads and bears fruit, will be brought to its perfection in the heavenly kingdom—see Rev 7:9-10. We live now in the light of that eternity.

Isaiah 35:5-7

(1) What did it mean to the first hearers?

This chapter is the climax of Isaiah’s predictions of the blessings that will attend the rule of the King who “will reign in righteousness” (32:1). He will bring changes to the people and the land. Healing will come to the sick and disabled whom no one else could help (blind, deaf, lame, dumb). Vitality and fruitfulness will come instead of poverty and drought. There would be encouragements to live now in expectation of these certain future realities.

(2) What difference does it make that Jesus has come?

Jesus used the literal, physical fulfilment of verses 5-6 as proof to John the Baptist’s disciples that he truly was the Messiah. See Matt 11:2-6. This and even more that he did is proof of his deity. Think, for example of Lk 9:43, Matt 9:33, Jn 7:46.

(3) What is the eternal fulfilment?

Perfect wholeness awaits the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting – see Phil 3:20-21.

4. The principle of cumulative revelation means that the later passages interpret the earlier ones more fully. However, careful study of the Old Testament predictions can also help us to understand their fulfilment more completely. Using the passages listed below, discuss how the old and the new reflect on each other and what each contributes to our understanding.

Isaiah 40:3-5 – Mark 1:1-5

The Old Testament passage is announcing the arrival of God as he makes a highway through the desert, to bring his exiled people back to their homeland, to Jerusalem (v9). Its climax is the acclamation, "Behold your God!" And the following verses (10-11) depict him as the sovereign-shepherd. The New Testament shows John the Baptist in the role of preparer and proclaimer and the revelation climaxes in the coming of Jesus (Mk 1:9), his baptism and the divine declaration of his identity (Mk 1:11). In him the glory of the Lord is fully revealed (cf. Jn 1:14) and all the barriers and impediments to God's kingly rule are overcome.

Micah 5:2-5a – Matt 2:3-6

The emphasis in Micah's prophecy is on the insignificance of Bethlehem. Yet this was David's birthplace and it will also be the birthplace of his expected greater Son, who will rule Israel. His birth will bring about a united people of God, whom he will shepherd in strength and majesty, giving them security and peace (vv4-5a). The New Testament quotes the prophecy, when Herod responding to the wise men, enquires where "the Christ was to be born". In Matthew, Bethlehem is the sign of the Davidic kingship, associated with the Messiah, and it is for the one "who has been born king" (v2) that the wise men search. No-one is born king. Kingship is inherited, but this King, Matthew indicates, is like no earthly monarch.

Ezekiel 43:1-7a – Rev 21:3, 22-25

This prophecy stands alongside Isaiah 65:17-25, for example, as a direct prediction of the everlasting Kingdom of God, but presented in Old Testament terms. It is part of the vision of the new temple which God gave to Ezekiel, beginning in chapter 40. Here the emphasis is on the glory of God (the manifestation of his presence) entering and filling the temple, his dwelling place (verses 4-5). This is a reversal of the imagery earlier in the book, when his glory departed from Jerusalem. The promise is given that this time God's presence will be permanent (verses 6-7a). His throne will be among his people. The fact that this promise was not fulfilled by an earthly temple, since none has existed since AD70, points us forward to the spiritual fulfilment of the temple in the person of Christ and his dwelling within his people by his Spirit (see Eph 2:19-22). But it further points us to the complete perfection of fulfilment in the new creation as indicated in Rev 21. The new Jerusalem is God's dwelling place among his people (v3) and because there is unbroken fellowship between the Lord and his people there is no need of a temple (v22). Everything is transfused with the glory of God (v23) and its inhabitants are from all nations (v24). The earthly picture from Ezekiel is seen in full heavenly and eternal dimensions in Revelation 21.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on Psalm 122. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will then all be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the insights we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own and anything that strikes you as important.

This is an important moment in the Module as you hear the first 10 minute talk presented. The feedback received may have a profound effect on the presenter and the hearers, so you will want the whole experience to be as well managed and profitable as possible. Please see Appendix for notes and instructions on how to lead the feedback positively and beneficially.

Ask a trainee, who is willing, to stand up and deliver their talk to the group. Before the talk ask a different trainee to read the text aloud and another trainee to pray for the speaker and the hearers, for wisdom, sensitivity, and that the Lord will speak to all through his Word.

At the end of the talk, thank the trainee and then ask everyone to turn to the Sample Assessment sheet on page 27 of their Trainee Manual. Give them 2 minutes to structure their comments and responses to the talk along the lines of the questions on this sheet.

After 2 minutes ask for comments and feedback from the group. Please see Appendix for notes and instructions on how to lead this feedback time. Spend no more than 10 minutes on this feedback.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback:-

- The Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) are the pilgrim songs celebrating the journey to Jerusalem for the festivals, with its challenges and dangers, culminating in the joy of arrival, as here in verse 1.
- The psalm begins with a great sense of joy in anticipation of entering the Lord's presence in the Jerusalem temple (v1-2). Note the corporate dimension of mutual encouragement among the pilgrims (I, they, us). The joy of arrival is even greater (v2).
- Jerusalem is David's city and focuses God's covenant promises about his everlasting dynasty. The solid unity of the city (v3) and the people who visit it, from many different tribes (v4) is created by what God decreed for Israel (his law) and its exercise in just rule (v5).
- The prayer for peace (v6-7) indicates that the earthly Jerusalem was vulnerable to attack from without and division within.
- But that peace needs to be sought and prayed for, both because of the needed unity of God's people (v8), and the continuation on earth of the temple as the place of sacrifice and therefore of access to the Lord (v9).
- In New Testament terms, the temple has been fulfilled in Christ and his self-sacrifice. He is now the meeting-place between God and man and through him we too become a dwelling place for God's Spirit. All of this points us forward ultimately to the heavenly city and the new creation.
- The earthly Jerusalem has now become the world-wide church of Christ, through the new covenant. We should pray that we demonstrate increasingly his kingly rule, in obedience to his commandments and seek to cultivate unity and security in a hostile world.
- Thank God that David's throne is not unoccupied, that there is no doubt about the certainty of Christ's eternal reign. Although its full realization is still future we can rejoice even now that Jesus Christ is Lord.

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives. Pray that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of this time together.

Close in prayer and remind your trainees to complete the Home Study.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on page 25 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on this next Home Study.

Using the insights into prophecy we have acquired so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on Isaiah 44:1-8.

Remember to write a theme sentence and an aim sentence as we learned in Module 1.

You may also like to review the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1. A simplified version can be found on page 44 of this manual.

You may be asked to present this talk when we next meet together.

Note: In order to develop your skills and build confidence, it would be preferable if you did not use commentaries or listen to sermon downloads for the purpose of this exercise.



UNIT 21

OLD TESTAMENT WISDOM

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees, and pray as you begin this Unit that God will give you wisdom and understanding, by his Spirit, through his Word.

Introduce the video by saying:

In this unit we study the wisdom writings as a genre of the Old Testament so that we can preach its unchanging message with clarity and conviction.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 21

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop the insights and practise the skills taught in the video. With this genre it is important to examine the detail of the text, but always to keep the fulfilment in Christ and the gospel firmly in view.

- 1. We heard in the video that “when preaching Proverbs we must keep in mind that they are designed to make us stop, reflect and chew over what they are saying”. To practise this skill, examine the verses below and discuss together what is their pastoral intention and how you would bring this into your contemporary environment.**

Proverbs 12:11

Neither of the characters in the verse is inactive. But the wise man uses his time and energy to provide for the future. He recognises the order of creation as God has ordained it and knows that without hard work on his land there will be no food supply. The foolish man spends his time on things that have no ultimate value. The challenge to us is to use our resources, especially time and energy, in such a way as to yield value for life today and tomorrow.

Proverbs 21:25-26

Again the contrast is between “the sluggard” (the lazy man) and the righteous (living by God’s instruction). The lazy man is consumed by his unsatisfied desires, because he will not work to achieve anything. The contrast is vivid. The righteous man has more than enough (because he is not lazy) and so can give generously from his abundance. What is true physically also has spiritual implications. Living according to God’s wisdom produces satisfaction and blessing (see Ps 37:4).

Proverbs 22:29

Here the emphasis is on growing ability, not just expending energy. Standing before kings indicates influence and respect. What makes the difference is skill in his work. The question makes us stop and consider the long-term effects of developing the ability to do our work well. There is a powerful challenge for us as preachers here. If we want our work to be influential, for God’s glory, we have to develop our skills.

Proverbs 25:19

We can all identify with the excruciating agony of toothache, or the injury caused by a sudden fall. Both are experiences we would want to avoid and so is putting our trust in “a treacherous man”, someone who will desert us in trouble. Because he won’t fulfil his promises, he cannot be relied on. The proverb encourages us to make wise decisions about the character of those in whom we place our trust. This is certainly true in church life.

Proverbs 28:11

The contrast between rich and poor would normally lead us to think that all the advantages are with the rich. The rich man certainly thinks that way. He is proud of himself and oblivious to his vulnerability. But because the disadvantaged poor man is shrewd in his wisdom (he has “understanding”), he sees through the pretensions of the rich and lives his life by the alternative standards of God’s wisdom and truth (see Matt 6:33). Faithfulness to God is of far greater value than any of the transient rewards of this world.

2. The video said that probably the best way to preach Proverbs is to group together different themes across the chapters and summarise their teaching. But in some sections of the book successive verses follow and develop a particular theme. What teaching would you seek to bring out from each of the sections below?

Split into groups of two or three to discuss this. Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute answers and comments from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Proverbs 23:29-35

There are six questions in verse 29 which demand our attention. What is the cause of the negative experiences listed in the verse? The rest of the verses show the dangers and consequences of over consumption of strong drink. The key (v30) seems to be “tarrying long” and “trying mixed drinks”. Wine’s attractions (sparkling, smooth) are deceptive (v31-32). It can be debilitating (v33), lead to injury through conflict, even to death (v34-35a) for it is addictive (v35b). Wisdom encourages us to stop and think through the consequences of our actions. It does not forbid wine, but it provides a profound and drastic warning against drunkenness (see Eph 5:18).

Proverbs 24:3-7

This short section presents the value and blessing of living a life of wisdom. It is therefore a strong incentive to accept and follow the instruction of all the wisdom literature. It would be good to explain the benefits of wisdom when teaching these verses. It is constructive and productive (v3-4). The house and its treasures can be literal, but also may refer to any major endeavour in life (building a career, family, etc). Wisdom produces strength and the ability make good decisions, which includes seeking the counsel of other wise people to achieve your purposes (v5-6). Verse 7 implies that the wise man is known by what he says. “In the gate” is the place where city leaders shaped policies and legislated decisions. The fool has nothing to contribute because the wisdom needed is beyond his grasp (“too high”). If we are successfully to fulfil any responsibilities in life we need to be gaining a heart of wisdom.

Proverbs 26:18-23

The focus in these verses is on relationship with our neighbours. It begins with the terrifying image of a mad marksman (v18) and compares this with a deceiver who tries to excuse his treachery as a joke. But the deceit is as deadly as a fiery arrow (v19). The proverb is designed to stop us before we embark on such a course and verses 20-21 have the same purpose in avoiding quarrelling. It begins with whispering (things said in secret attacking others) and ends in open strife. So don’t add fuel to the flames. Verses 22-23 take the temptation deeper. Knowing what others don’t know (gossip) is an attractive delicacy to consume, but we are already aware of its outcome (v18-21). It is as deceptive as attractive glaze over a cheap, earthen pot (v23). The words spoken are appealing, but the heart that speaks them is evil. The use of the tongue is a recurring theme in Scripture since it reveals the true heart (Matt 12:33-37, James 3:5-10). Christ alone is the fulfiller and enabler of this wise behaviour.

3. Scholars suggest that chapter 28 of Job is the pivot point at the centre of the book.¹ It comes as an interlude between the false arguments of Job's comforters and the speeches of Elihu and God. What are the key ingredients of wisdom which the chapter teaches?

Ask two or three trainees to read the chapter aloud.

- The first eleven verses are a detailed dramatic description of man's ability to mine valuable metals and precious stones from the bowels of the earth, which have never even been seen by the birds or animals. But "the thing that is hidden he (man) brings to light" (v11b).
- All this leads up to the question of v12, "where shall wisdom be found?" It cannot be unearthed by human technology (v13). It cannot be brought up from the ocean (v14) or purchased in the market (v15). These verses are designed to point up the uniqueness of wisdom and its incalculable value.
- Verses 16-19 emphasise over and over again the value of wisdom, since it cannot be measured by the greatest treasures and riches of this world.
- Having established wisdom's value, the question of v12 is repeated in v20 with even greater urgency. Nothing in this world or beyond it can provide the answer (v21-22).
- That can be provided by God alone (v23). He alone knows and sees the whole creation (v24) because he is the one who made it all, and who governs and sustains it (v25-26). In contrast to human inability God saw, declared, established and searched out wisdom (v27).
- Verse 28 is his declaration of its essence to man. Fearing the Lord—acknowledging that God is God and living under his sovereignty—is the key. Wisdom leads us to turn away from the evil of our rebellion and to develop our understanding of God's ways and how to live in his world as his people.

4. The closing chapters of Job feature God asking Job questions—more than 70 of them! Take just one representative section, Job 38:1-11. Discuss these two questions:

(1) How do these verses point us towards a resolution of the conflict of ideas which the book poses, as discussed in the video?

(2) How does its message relate to the message of the New Testament gospel?

- Verses 1-3 set up the conversation that follows, but it is not a discussion between equals. Job is "without knowledge" (v2) and far from God being questioned, it is Job who is in the dock.
- The verses are divided up by the series of questions God poses.
 - v4** Where was Job when God created the earth?
 - v5** How were its measurements decided?
 - v6-7** Where was Job when the earth was established and the angels shouted for joy?
 - v8-11** Who created the oceans and the rain cycle?
- The questions are clearly designed to humble Job (and us) before the all-knowing, all-powerful, utterly wise and inscrutable God. We can only know anything about him because he chooses to reveal himself. That gives us no right to argue with God about anything in our lives.
- As the cumulative effect of God's speeches builds up in the next chapters, we are pointed to the resolution, which is the heart of wisdom. See 42:1-6. Compare Prov 1:7.
- Links to the New Testament gospel are implicit throughout Job's story. "It is a book that directs our faith and focus toward the suffering Saviour, as His work is depicted on the stage of ancient history in the life of Job."²
- This is explained further, as follows, "The grievous suffering that Christ endured in his flesh was a necessary part of his bearing the consequences of sins of his people....Job, as a type of Christ, suffered a taste of what every sinner deserves and what Christ ultimately endured on our behalf."³

¹ See "The Literary Structure of the Old Testament" by David A Dorsey. (Baker Academic. Grand Rapids 1999) p172.

² See "The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Job" by C.J. Williams (Wipf and Stock, Eugene Or, 2017)

³ Williams op.cit., p.91.

- The patience of Job which James 5:11 recalls (“steadfastness” ESV), determined not to curse God but to trust him even in the face of death (Job 13:15), is a further foreshadowing of the patient, steadfast endurance of the Lord Jesus in his passion and death, as he took upon himself our suffering, becoming sin for us “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).
- Job’s restoration (42:10, 12-17) is surely a pale Old Testament foreshadowing of resurrection morning and Christ’s glorious ascension.

5. Ecclesiastes exposes the futility (“vanity”) of “life under the sun” and the failure of our attempts to compensate for that in all sorts of ways. But the book also directs us to the hidden eternal realities which give the key to solving the questions raised. Examine the passages listed below and ask what their wisdom is teaching us.

Split into groups of two or three to discuss this. Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute answers and comments from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Ecclesiastes 3:16-17

One of the sources of “vanity” is the lack of justice which we see in the world (v16). Wickedness seems to be in control and righteousness is a rare commodity. Wisdom takes the long view. There will be a day when perfect justice will prevail, as every human being is judged by God (v17). To restrict one’s understanding to what can be observed in the here and now is to ignore the fact that God knows everything and is eternal.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

The start and end of the section have the same message—take care in approaching God (v1) for he is the one you must fear (v7). This is the heart of wisdom. There are two examples of spiritual foolishness given. Ignorant offering of sacrifice with meaningless religious talk (v1-3) and not paying a vow made to God (v4-6). In contrast, the wise man draws near to listen (v1), to learn from God’s wisdom and is careful not to speak rash words (v2). Such a man promptly pays what he vows (v5) and is careful not to promise and fail to perform. This is sin which may provoke God to anger (v6). The wise man keeps the divine perspective in all he does.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-14

These verses address a common reason why men do not fear God, which is the heart of wisdom. In verse 12, the sinner seems to get away with his evil over and over again. Verse 14 elaborates this. So often the righteous suffer and the wicked appear to get away with things. But wisdom takes the longer view. The fear of God brings its own reward in this life (v12b) and ultimate acceptance by God. However, the end of the wicked will “not be well”, in spite of the many escapes he may seem to have made.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-16

The writer says this example had a profound effect on him (v13b). Against all the odds, a poor man delivers his city from a great king (v14-15). This is a picture of his wisdom undermining and reversing the expected order. “Yet no one remembered.” Although he is ignored, his actions are far better for many people than the military might he overcame (v16). Wisdom has its own reward, not measured in terms of this world’s wealth, power or approval. Acting wisely for the common good is at the heart of fearing God.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

In this last example encourage the trainees to think about how it is fulfilled in Christ. “The end of the matter” is the distillation of the wisdom that shines in the book, in spite of the disappointment and futility of so much life “under the sun”. Obedience to God is the sure mark of godly fear and this is a universal obligation (v13). The eternal perspective of God’s all-seeing eye, his infallible judgment and his perfect righteousness is a great motivation to wisdom. But it requires the coming of Christ and his salvation to enable any of us to face God’s judgment without fear. We can thank God for our life in Christ Jesus, “whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on Isaiah 44:1-8. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will all then be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the insights we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own and anything that strikes you as important.

Please follow the Leaders' instructions again, as outlined in Unit 20 on pages 19-20 of this manual.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback.

- These great promises and affirmations by God are set within the context of idolatry in Isaiah. God's people have not only to be rescued from their slavery in exile, in Babylon (ch 40) but also from their slavery to sin, especially following empty idols (see 41:29, 43:22-24 and chiefly 44:9-20).
- Against this background of sin and failure, God addresses his people with tenderness and commitment (v1-2). They are sons of Jacob or Israel, chosen by God to serve him and live in covenant relationship with him. Their creation as a nation was entirely God's work (v2a) and he expresses his affection for them in the poetic name Jeshurun, which means the one set right by God.
- The promise is very iconic—water in the desert land (v3a). This may have some physical application to agriculture but v3b quickly moves it into the spiritual perspective. The multiplication of the nation is a sign of God's favour, but the great promise is of God's blessing, which is seen as they thrive in an otherwise hostile environment (v4).
- The blessing of God's renewing, life-giving grace is detailed in verse 5 as his people unashamedly call themselves by his name and so commit themselves to his service.
- In verses 6-8 God confirms the dependability of his promises by revealing his incomparable nature (v7a). He is the faithful covenant God (Yahweh), King, Redeemer, Lord of hosts, eternal, unique (all in v6) and this is demonstrated by his perfect knowledge of the future (v7). So his prophetic word is utterly trustworthy because of his omniscience and power.
- Verse 8 is the application. They are witnesses to how his word has already been fulfilled, so they can trust him for the future, without fear. Not only is he unique in his deity, but also in his dependability as their Rock.
- As New Testament believers we can rejoice in the fulfilment of these promises in and through the Lord Jesus. We are God's people by his choice, given life by his Spirit, called by his name to worship and serve him as the only living and true God. The characteristics of verse 6 are supremely revealed for us in the person of Jesus (cf. Rev 1:17-18), so we can face the future without fear, grounded securely on Christ our Rock.
- The implications for "them then" and for "us now" are the same—"flee from idolatry" (1 Cor 10:14). "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1Jn 5:21).

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives. Pray that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of this time together.

Close in prayer and remind your trainees to complete the Home Study.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on page 29 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on the next Home Study.

Using the insights into wisdom we have acquired so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on Proverbs 8:12-21.

Note: Direct the trainees' attention to the guide lines already printed in their manual on page 27 about how to carry out this exercise.



UNIT 22

PREACHING NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees, and pray as you begin Unit 22 for God's help in discerning the purposes of Bible narratives and applying them accurately.

Introduce the video by saying:

In this unit we study the composition of Biblical stories so as to grow in competence to understand their emphases and purpose.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 22

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop the insights and practise the skills taught in the video.

1. The video taught us that, in a Biblical narrative, “the turning point is the key focus... and so, for the preacher, the turning point provides the teaching point, because that is why the story has been recorded”. To practise this skill, study the passages below and then discuss together the turning point and its teaching implications.

Numbers 16:41-49

Even after Korah's rebellion, earlier in the chapter, the Israelites are still grumbling against their leaders and against God (v41). God announces that his judgment is about to fall in a devastating plague (v45), but the turning point is when Moses instructs Aaron to take fire from the altar and incense to make atonement for the people. In doing this Aaron becomes Moses' agent and God's anger is turned away. “He stood between the dead and the living and the plague was stopped.” (v48) The teaching implication is that God's wrath is only propitiated when atonement is made from the altar of sacrifice. Only Aaron as the priest can make this atonement. However, the New Testament teaches us that Christ is both the priest and the sacrifice and that through his perfect offering we are saved from God's righteous wrath. (See Heb 9:11-14, 1 Jn 1:8-2:2.)

1 Samuel 30:1-20

In the midst of Saul's pursuit and persecution of him, David returns to his home base in Ziklag only to find it raided by the Amalekites, the women and children taken captive and his followers threatening his life (v1-6). It is a catalogue of disasters, but the last sentence of verse 6 is the turning point. He finds his strength in Yahweh and from this decision all the other blessings follow—guidance from God about the pursuit (v7-10), a meeting with an Egyptian slave who takes them to the Amalekite camp (v11-16), a great victory over their enemies (v17) and the recovery of their families and goods (v18-19). “David brought back all.” The lessons here are of a faithful covenant keeping God who brings his anointed king through to victory because of his dependence on him. How much more is this true of the Messiah! And because we are “in Christ” it is true of us as well.

2 Chron 12:1-12

Shishak king of Egypt is attacking Jerusalem because of King Rehoboam's unfaithfulness to the Lord (v1-2). The army is immense and it carries all before it up to the walls of Jerusalem (v3-4). Shemaiah the prophet brings God's word, "You have abandoned me, so I have abandoned you...." (v5). The turning point is in verse 6 where the king and nobles humble themselves and confess that what God is doing is just. It is a confession of joint repentance. A further word from God promises some deliverance (v7) although the treasures of temple and palace are plundered (v9-10). This teaches Rehoboam the difference between serving Yahweh and other pagan kings (v8). It is a lesson we all have to learn. Every act of sinful rebellion deprives us of the blessing we might have received. We too have to learn to humble ourselves, but in so doing we find God's mercy and salvation.

2. Since God is the "hero" of all the Old Testament narratives, it is important to establish what he is teaching about himself in each story and then to think through how we should teach them, through the lens of the New Testament.

Take the three passages below and explore in each case (1) what they teach us about God; and (2) how this is fulfilled in the person of Christ. These are long passages, so ask someone to read them aloud, but note that even so they are not always the complete story.

Exodus 14:10-25

The Israelites are at a perilous moment in their exodus, with the Red Sea in front of them and the pursuing Egyptian charioteers behind. But God has brought them here (v2). He is in control of the whole episode (v6). Quite naturally the people are terrified (v10-12), but they learn that the Lord works salvation (v13) and will fight for them (v14). Their part is to trust. God parts the sea by his powerful wind for the Israelites to cross and then returns it to normality for the pursuing troops to drown (v21-28). In this way God demonstrates his glory over his enemies (v17-18) and the Israelites learn the awesome sovereignty and power of God who is leading them to the land he has promised. Our victory has been secured by our Saviour through his cross and glorious resurrection and he will lead his children home to the rest he has promised. See 1 Cor 10:2-4 and John 17:24.

1 Samuel 15:7-26

Saul has been commanded to fight and utterly destroy the Amalekites (v3). But though successful he disobeys God's instruction by sparing the king, their animals and "all that was good" (v9). The passage teaches Saul that God's word is absolute and has to be obeyed in full detail. When confronted by Samuel, Saul first affirms that he has kept God's Word (v13), then that the animals are intended for sacrifice (v14) and that this was the choice of the people (v21). But Samuel defines this as disobedience (v19), which Saul eventually confesses (v24) but assumes that then everything can return to "normal" (v25). Verse 26 chillingly proclaims God's rejection of him as king because "you have rejected the word of the Lord". God's word is not up for negotiation or partial obedience, which is why Jesus calls his disciples to express their love by obedience to his commands (Jn 14:15, 15:10).

Judges 3:12-30

The story of Ehud is not a behavioural model for anyone to follow and is certainly not encouraging the assassination of tyrants. Verse 12 reveals that the dominance of King Eglon was itself an act of God's judgment against the evil of Israel. There is no clear leadership in Israel, but in response to their cry to him, after 18 years, God raises up a deliverer (v15). The story is told with some dark humour and a note of triumph over a greedy, self-indulgent enemy. But Ehud's action not only removes the tyrant. It also initiates a campaign against Moab resulting in a victory which lasted for eighty years (v28-30). God acts in the darkness of human history in both judging and delivering his people. When all hope seems lost he is able to raise up a rescuer, liberate from tyranny and bring rest. That pattern has been brought to its fulfilment in our perfect rescuer, who did not practise deceit, but won a total victory over all the hostile powers through his cross and empty tomb. See Col 2:13-15 and 1 Peter 2:21-25.

3. We heard in the video that we need to ask why God revealed himself to these people, in this way, at this time, so that by attention to the context we can better understand the story's pastoral intention. Take the three narratives below and by reference to their contexts (immediate and whole book) try to work out their purpose and the focus for us today.

Split into groups of two or three to discuss this. Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute answers and comments from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Exodus 2:23 – 3:6

If we were to apply this straight to us, we would need a similar special revelation to equip us to serve God, but we are not Moses. Ignoring the chapter division, we see that the call of Moses is God's answer to the desperate cries of his people. When his people prayed, God heard, remembered, saw and knew (v24-25). His answer was not known to them, but hundreds of miles away he called Moses to be the agent of his great rescue mission (3:10). But before Moses can serve God he has to come to know God—that he is holy (3:5) and faithful (3:6). The narrative's purpose is to teach that God is totally dependable. He will keep his promises and fulfil his purposes, but in his own time and way.

Joshua 5:13 – 6:2

We need to remember that we are not Joshua and we cannot expect to have a similar vision to his. Joshua is facing the first big challenge of the conquest – Jericho. The Jordan has been crossed miraculously (chs 3-4), the Passover celebrated, but how is Jericho to be attacked? The answer is in the earthly commander's encounter with his heavenly Lord (v14). Joshua's act of worship and submission to the Lord's instructions lead to a disclosure of the divine plan (6:1-2) which no human mind could have devised or executed. But obedience brings victory (6:20). Joshua now learns for the nation the lesson which Moses learned for himself in Exodus 3:1-6. Submission to the instructions of the Lord (obedience) is what brings victory and blessing to his otherwise weak people.

Judges 6:36-40

This is not a passage about how to get guidance from God by 'putting out a fleece', though it is often used to encourage believers to ask for such signs. But this double sign was supernatural, not circumstantial. In context, Gideon has been introduced as a nervous leader, aware of his own inadequacies (6:11-16). He receives a first supernatural sign from the angel of God (6:17-24) and after destroying his father's altar to Baal (6:25-32) he now requests another. Note v34 "the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon", but even with this divine enabling he requests—and is granted—further signs. The ultimate result is a great victory over Midian (7:19-25). Everything points to the Lord as the deliverer, but when his servants act in faith and obedience he is pleased to prove his faithfulness to his promise by his actions.

4. Following these narrative principles also opens up the stories of the New Testament Gospels. Study the three passages below and (1) consider the turning point in the story and (2) how the narrative presents the person of Christ to us. Discuss your findings in the larger group.

Matthew 14:22-33

Note that the whole event is Jesus' initiative (v22). The disciples are battling both against the storm on the lake and also the terror they feel when they see him walking on the water (v23-26). The coming of Jesus is the turning point of the narrative, though it is expressed in two brief sayings, "It is I" (v27) and to Peter, "Come" (v29). The Peter incident is a story within the story. He wants to share in the supernatural power of Christ and does, but momentarily. Verse 30 is the turning point. "When he saw the wind" he was afraid and began to sink. With his eyes off Jesus, doubt eclipsed his faith (v31). But in that situation his cry, "Lord, save me" (v30) was the wisest action and itself an expression of faith. The concluding verse 33 expresses what the event taught the disciples and the response it is clearly intended to generate in us, the readers. Christ is the Lord of creation, who is in total control of all our circumstances and through them is growing our faith.

Matthew 17:14-20

The need of the epileptic boy cannot be met by his father (v14-15) or Jesus' disciples (v16). The turning point is the divine power of Jesus, which heals the boy instantly by evicting a demon (v18). This is not teaching that any or every case of epilepsy is due to demonic activity. Primarily, this story focuses on Christ teaching his disciples about his power. But the event is preceded by Christ's rebuke of their lack of faith (v17). The power of Christ highlights a crucial lesson of faith for the disciples (v20-21). So there is a turning point in their experience, as Jesus now begins his journey to the cross (17:22-23) which will require faith in his person and his word. Verse 20 teaches that it is not the quantity of the faith exercised that determines the outcome, but where that faith is placed. It is a key lesson of discipleship from the master.

Luke 19:1-10

The turning point here has two ingredients. Firstly there is the intervention of Jesus, travelling through Jericho, as he stops at the tree to summon Zacchaeus (v5). But this is completed by Zacchaeus responding instantly and joyfully (v6). This encounter changes the whole of his life (v8-9). Verse 10 sums up what the narrative is designed to teach about Jesus, in his own words. Whether it is a blind beggar (18:35-43) or a rich tax collector, the Son of Man is the one who seeks the lost to save them. It is a salvation experienced by obedience to his word, repentance and faith issuing in a radical change of life.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on Proverbs 8:12-21. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will all then be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the insights we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own and anything that strikes you as important.

Please follow the Leaders' instructions again, as outlined in Unit 20 on pages 19-20 of this manual.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback.

- This is the second half of a chapter in which wisdom is presented as a person, in the feminine gender (v2). In verses 1-11, she calls to the "simple" children of men to discover noble things, truth, righteousness, knowledge and instruction from her teaching.
- In our verses the focus is on wisdom herself and the rewards that she brings to those who receive her. Note the many personal pronouns in the first person ("I") which draw attention to wisdom's character.
- Verse 12 unites the nature of wisdom to her benefits. To attain wisdom and knowledge means to gain prudence (the root idea is subtlety) and discretion. These are practical qualities of shrewdness in thought, word and action.
- However, wisdom is not merely intellectual. Verse 13 speaks of hatred and verses 17 and 21 of love. Here is the moral aspect of wisdom—a hatred of evil is the essence of wisdom ("the fear of the Lord" v13). Pride and lying speech are particularly identified. Wisdom makes us humble and truthful. Verse 17 speaks of a reciprocal love, which means diligent seeking rewarded by a rich inheritance (v21).
- Verses 14-16 teach the indispensability of wisdom for good government. Counsel, insight and strength are needed by those who govern and wisdom will provide these qualities. It is the ability to make the best choices at the appropriate time, based on the knowledge of the wisdom revealed by the Lord (see Prov 2:6).
- There is an emphasis here on acquiring what is available to all by diligent seeking because its "yield" (v19) is better than the greatest earthly wealth. Living a godly life (v20) in harmony with the Lord and his will is the greatest benefit of wisdom.
- Since Christ is our wisdom (1 Cor 1:30) this passage exhorts us to diligence in seeking to know him better (Phil 3:8-10) so that we live a godly, Christ-like life, in humble dependence on him. What this looks like is spelt out for us in the parallel passage in James 3:17-18.
- Truly wise people will distinguish themselves by their growing in maturity and experience as they seek to become more like Christ.

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives. Pray that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of our time together.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on page 34 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on the next Home Study.

Using the insights into Biblical narrative we have acquired so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

Note: Direct the trainees' attention to the guide lines already printed in their manual on page 27 about how to carry out this exercise.



UNIT 23

PREACHING THE LETTERS

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin Unit 23 for God to deepen your understanding of how to preach the teaching content and pastoral applications of the New Testament letters.

Introduce the video by saying:

This unit introduces us to ways of opening up the New Testament letters to understand how they teach, reprove, correct and train their readers in righteousness.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 23

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop the insights and practise the skills taught in the video.

1. We learned in the video that “establishing the theme tune of the book is especially important for expounding the letters”. Using the references provided below, try to work out the theme which unites them. How does this help us to understand the letter’s purpose?

Split into small groups of two or three and work through the examples which follow. Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Colossians 1:9, 10, 19, 24, 25; 2:2, 9-10

The common theme to these verses is that of fulness, being filled or complete. The issue in Colossae seems to have been where such fulness of spiritual life and experience was to be found. The church was being tempted to look to human philosophy, worldly ambitions, asceticism or religious rules as necessary extras for their Christian experience. The letter’s purpose is to proclaim that sufficiency is in Christ alone, because he is supreme over creation and the church (1:15-20), since he is God’s fulness incarnate (2:9). The verses quoted refer to the centrality of Christ and his Word in whom all God’s treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found. The climax is the assertion of 2:9-10, from which all the implications covered in the rest of the letter flow.

Ephesians 1:3, 1:20-21, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12

Here the unifying theme is “the heavenly places”. While we might assume that this refers to the invisible eternal kingdom of heaven, the existence of spiritual forces of evil there (6:12) and the fact that believers are already seated there (2:6) makes us think again. 1:20-21 teaches that Jesus is far above all the hostile spiritual powers and 3:10 that the church is the present proof of that reality. The church is defined in 3:6 as the new man of 2:15, which is Jews and Gentiles as fellow citizens and fellow members of God’s family (2:19). It is this supernatural creation of the one body (4:4-6) which is a prototype in time of the eternal reality envisaged in 1:10. The Ephesian believers living in their city of occult magic and idolatrous worship (Acts 19:11-20) needed to know these greater realities in order to persevere.

1 John 2:10, 15; 3:1, 10-11, 14, 18, 23; 4:7-12, 16-21; 5:1-3

The concern of the letter is to establish the hallmarks of genuine Christianity. The two affirmations—God is light (1:5) and God is love (4:8) are the foundation of true belief in Jesus the Son of God. True love for God and fellow believers is then expounded in detail as the evidences of gospel reality. In these verses the Father’s love for his children (3:1) must lead to their love for all the brothers and sisters in the family (3:10-11, 3:14, 3:23). In every verse quoted from chapter 4 love is referred to, culminating in the assertion of 4:19 that “we love because he first loved us”. Our reciprocal love for the Father is expressed by obedience to his commands (5:1-3) and by a refusal to love the things of the world (2:15-17). The purpose of the letter is to move its readers from loving “in word and talk”, to loving “in deed and truth” (3:18).

2. The video gave a pattern of sentence analysis from Titus 3. This means first identifying the main verb and then how the other parts of the sentence are connected to it. Following that example, work out a similar analysis for the references below.

1 Peter 1:3-5

After the opening doxology, there is one sentence to the end of verse 5. The main verb is in v3—“he has caused us to be born again”. All the sentence hangs on that statement. The verse begins with the motivation (“his great mercy”). It continues with its results—hope of resurrection (v3) and of a heavenly inheritance (v4) which nothing can destroy. But not only is the inheritance eternally sure, so are the inheritors (v5)—guarded by God’s power until the salvation is fully revealed. All this is what it means to be born again.

Galatians 2:19-21

There are several short sentences here, but identifying the main verbs provides us with a guide to the big ideas of the paragraph. “I died to the law” (v19). “I have been crucified”....” “It is no longer I who live” (v20). “I live by faith” (v20). “I do not nullify” (v21). There are elaborations of all these verbs elsewhere in the sentences, but the spiritual argument becomes very clear as we isolate them. They all focus on Paul’s personal experience, but the dependent clauses stress the work of God, in Christ, which has made all this possible.

Ephesians 3:8-10

This is one long sentence which depends on the main verb “(to me) this grace was given” (v8). Paul is explaining the content of his ministry and the passive verb (‘was given’) stresses that it is entirely the gift of God’s grace. The grace appointed Paul to preach Christ to the Gentiles and to bring to light God’s hidden mystery, which has been defined in 3:6. The two infinitives (‘to preach’ and ‘to bring to light’) express the purpose of the grace given (v8-9), while verse 10 adds the result. The unifying gospel declares to all the hostile powers the many-coloured wisdom of God, through the union of Jews and Gentiles who are one in Christ.

3. The apostolic teaching method is to undermine error by declaring the truth. In each of the passages listed below identify the error and how the truth exposes and overcomes it. Discuss what implications this has for our preaching.

2 Corinthians 11:1-11

The error identified in v3 is practical—being “led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ”. This comes about by the proclaiming of “another Jesus” or receiving a “different spirit” (v4). This is a description of the false gospel being peddled by the false teachers whom Paul ironically calls “super apostles” (v5). We can pick up their criticisms and rejection of Paul from verses 6-11. He is not an impressive orator (v6); he is too humble to charge for his services (v7), and he had to rely on support from others (v8-9). Paul’s motivation was love for the Corinthians (v11)—totally self-denying, whereas the super apostles are totally self-obsessed. The same marks of error still attack and infiltrate churches today and need to be exposed in detail by the comparison with true apostolic ministry.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-8

The Thessalonian church is enduring persecutions and afflictions (v3). It seems that the danger would be to see this as evidence of God's desertion of them, but Paul wants to undermine that erroneous short-term view. In the present, they have been considered worthy to suffer for God's kingdom (v5) which is the proof of their membership. For the future, there is the promise of relief for God's people, but of vengeance and punishment on all the enemies of God, who reject the gospel and persecute his people (v6-8). While we long that the enemies of the gospel will come to trust Christ (as Paul himself did), it is important to remind believers of the long-term certainties of heaven and hell, to give focus as we face hostility and discouragement in the present.

Hebrews 12:3-11

Here the error is to think that it is not worth continuing to run the race because of discouragement and weariness caused by opposition and suffering. That is the danger being addressed throughout this letter—falling away or turning back. The remedy is to focus on Christ who walked this pathway before us (v3). The trials and difficulties are God's instruction class ("discipline" v7) which every good father uses with his children, as a sign of his love and concern for their progress and well-being (v5-9). The truth is that the present pain will yield the fruits of holiness and righteousness, if we respond positively to God's dealings with us and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (v10-11). These things come from his love, for our good.

Jude 3-4

These verses set out the agenda for Jude's short letter. The error is clear in v4. The church is being infected by false teachers who are using grace as an excuse for sensuality and leading people away from living for Jesus as Master and Lord. The remedy is to contend for the faith which is the "common salvation" of verse 3. The rest of the letter expounds from past examples in Scripture where this error will lead (v5-19), but from verse 20 onwards what it looks like to contend for the gospel. As they keep themselves in the love of God (v21) they can be confident that God, our Saviour, will keep them from stumbling (v24). Our preaching needs to expose the nature of error in belief and behaviour and to teach uncompromisingly about its destructive long-term effects.

4. In the video we heard a series of questions, which are listed below. They help us to identify the pastoral application of the apostolic teaching in the letters for us today.

- (1) Do you see what your present difficulties are?
- (2) Do you realise what are their root causes?
- (3) Do you understand who Jesus is and what he has done for you?
- (4) Do you see how that addresses your problems?
- (5) Are you willing to act on the implications of this, in life-changing ways?

Take each of these questions and apply them to one of the passages listed below. Split into groups of two or three and select one passage per group. Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together. Make sure that each passage is read aloud in the larger group before it is discussed.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

(1) Present difficulties: Immaturity shown by "jealousy and strife" over different human leaders (v1-4).

(2) Root causes: Thinking too highly of human leaders, who are "only servants", each one given a specific task by the Lord (v5).

(3) What Christ has done: All the spiritual growth at Corinth is God's work, not man's (v6-7). They are God's field (v9) so everything they have is due to God's gift, not human ability.

(4) Addressing the problem: Recognise different leaders have different gifts and roles (v6) but they are one team. They are all God's fellow workers (v9).

(5) Action: Leave God to reward his workers (v8) and stop elevating or denigrating one against another. Develop spiritual maturity by putting off the flesh which behaves "only in a human way" (v3). Recognise the different priorities in God's kingdom and grow up spiritually.

(1) Present difficulties: The Philippians are in danger of taking their eyes off the gospel life-style and being seduced by the enemies of the cross whose minds are “set on earthly things” (v17-19).

(2) Root causes: They resist the cross because they want to live a life of self-indulgence (see v19).

(3) What Christ has done: The crucified Christ is now the Lord in heaven, who will return as Saviour to bring his people into their full salvation (v20).

(4) Addressing the problem: That glorious future reality changes our priorities in this world. Our minds are no longer set on it because “our citizenship is in heaven” (v20). Rather than satisfying the flesh now we look to the transformation of our lowly bodies to be like Christ’s glorious resurrection body (v21).

(5) Action: We live now in the light of eternity, which means not being diverted, but standing firm in the Lord, looking forward to that great day (4:1). He is the source of the power to persevere.

1 John 2:18-25

(1) Present difficulties: Individuals have gone out from the churches and deserted their Christian faith and fellowship (v19) and this is very unsettling to those who remain.

(2) Root causes: They were not “of us”, not truly believers (v19). So they responded to the many antichrists whom the devil has deployed in the world to deceive God’s people (v18). They are defined as those who deny the Father and the Son (v22).

(3) What Christ has done: He has revealed the Father because he is the true Son, the Christ (v22). The Holy One has anointed his people with this saving knowledge, which is God’s truth (v20-21).

(4) Addressing the problem: Recognise that if you deny that Jesus is the Son you deny the Father (v23). You cannot have the Father without the Son. The heart of the original gospel was that we are accepted by the Father through the work of the Son and this brings eternal life (v24-15).

(5) Action: Stay with that truth abiding in you (v24). Don’t be unnerved by the departures or seduced by the antichrists. Hold on to the truth of God’s promise of eternal life (v25).

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on 1 Samuel 16:1-13. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will all then be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the insights we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own and anything that strikes you as important.

Please follow the leaders’ instructions again, as outlined in Unit 20 on pages 19-20 of this manual.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback:

- In chapter 15 God has rejected Saul as king over Israel due to his disobedience, which has caused grief to Samuel (15:35). Saul was the sort of king the people wanted (“taller than any of the people” 10:23) but now, in verse 1, God summons Samuel to anoint a new king “I have provided for myself”. God’s wisdom will raise up a different king to do his will.
- Samuel is told to go to Bethlehem to select a son of Jesse. Notice the stress on God’s initiative in verse 3 – “invite Jesse...I will show you...him whom I declare to you”.
- The sacrifice is at the centre of the story, reminding us that this is the only way for sinners to be in relationship with a holy God. This is the basis of all God’s gracious dealings with Israel.
- The parade of Jesse’s seven sons builds a dramatic tension into the story, as one after another is rejected. The climax of this is the leading question in v11. “Are all your sons here?”

- ❏ What God is teaching us about God here is summarised in v7. Saul was impressive to the people because of his height, but God does not make his judgment on outward appearance. “The LORD looks on the heart.” In fact, when David arrives he has an attractive appearance (v12) but that is not what qualifies him. The turning point comes when the Lord commands Samuel to anoint David as his divine choice. From now on the story of Israel will be markedly different.
- ❏ Verse 13 reveals the supernatural confirmation that God’s will has been done, as the Spirit “rushed upon David from that day forward”. The image is of energy, power and ability. It is in the power of the Lord’s anointing that he will win his first great victory over Goliath and the Philistines in the next chapter.
- ❏ For New Testament believers this is a powerful foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus, who is the Christ (the anointed one). He too was chosen by the Father and sent to be the Saviour of the world and the shepherd-king of his flock. He too was anointed with the Spirit at his baptism, where his identity as the beloved Son was proclaimed by the Father from heaven (see Mark 1:9-11).
- ❏ We can be thankful that great though David would prove to be, our Saviour is the perfect shepherd-king (see Psalm 23) and in submitting our lives to his divine instruction, like Samuel, we enter into the fulness of God’s blessing.

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your lives. Pray that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of our time together.

Close in prayer and remind your trainees to complete the Home Study.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on page 39 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on the next Home Study.

Using the insights into interpreting the New Testament letters we have acquired so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on Romans 6:1-11.

Note: Direct the trainees’ attention to the guidelines already printed in their manual on page 27 about how to carry out this exercise.



UNIT 24

KEEP ON KEEPING ON

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees to this final Unit in the series and pray as you begin Unit 24 that God will use it to deepen your convictions about the necessity of Biblical preaching at the heart of gospel ministry.

Introduce the video by saying:

This final focuses for us the priorities we need to establish if we are to persevere and develop as effective and fruitful Biblical preachers.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 24

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

The video was built around the four factors which preachers need to cultivate if we are to keep faithfully persevering and growing in competence in our work.

In this final session of the series we shall look at Biblical passages which will help us to do this, considering their content and practical implications to enable us to keep on keeping on. Some of these passages have already featured in previous units of the course, but we are returning to them in order to strengthen our convictions and motivate our practice.

1. Confidence in the Uniqueness of Scripture was the first factor noted in the video. Take each of the group of passages listed below and discuss which aspects of their teaching will encourage your confidence in Scripture.

Deut 29:29; Matt 4:4; Prov 30:5-6

These verses affirm the essential need of revelation through the Scripture if ever we are to know anything about God. There are many things we cannot know, but what God has revealed is designed to enable us to live in right relationship with him (Deut 29:29). That relationship can only be nourished and deepened by God's Word (Matt 4:4 quoting Deut 8:3). All that God has spoken is the sufficient word for godly living in this world. Nothing can be added and nothing should be omitted (Prov 30:5-6). The Scriptures are God's totally sufficient revelation.

2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:21; Rom 15:4

Our confidence in the inspiration and authority of Scripture is strengthened by these verses. "Breathed out by God" the Scriptures bring us to salvation and then equip us to live a life that is pleasing to God (2 Tim 3:15-17). Peter explains their origin as a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21) which is why they are always relevant to instruct and encourage the people of God (Rom 15:4).

1 Cor 2:9-10, 14; James 1:22-25

Not only is the Spirit active in inspiring Bible writers, but also in illuminating Bible readers. This explains why God's word appears folly to unbelievers, however intelligent they may be. It is spiritual discernment which is needed (v14) and this is the Spirit's gift (v12). It is a great incentive to pray for the Spirit's ministry both in the

study and in our proclamation. But James reminds us that understanding Scripture must lead to action. Its purpose is never merely to be informed, but conformed to be obedient to God's word, which leads to blessing. This is true for both preacher and hearers.

2. Competence in the hard work of preparation. This factor can be broken down into several constituents, listed below. In each case discuss how the verses referred to can help to stimulate diligence and increase competence.

Personal discipline

2 Tim 2:15 is a verse we have often returned to in this whole series. It reminds us that we have to work hard and rightly handle God's Word if we are to be approved by him. That requires constant practice, but it develops competence and yields great reward, "not ashamed".

Col 1:28-2:1 stresses the energy and effort involved in proclaiming Christ to present his people mature. That is the preacher's great goal, which is why he toils and struggles (1:29-2:1). But the huge stimulus is that this is not merely human effort. The ministry of v28 is carried out through "all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (v29). All faithful ministry is Christ's ministry through his servants.

1 Cor 9:24-27 encourages us to emulate Paul by putting in every effort to achieve our ministry goals, like a disciplined athlete in training and performance. Our preaching is not something separate from our living (v27). So we need to be disciplined to live what we preach and to keep a clear focus of purpose (v26).

Enduring suffering

2 Tim 1:8-12 opens a window into understanding what Paul's ministry cost him personally. He attributes his suffering (imprisonment) directly to his appointment as a preacher (v11-12a). Every gospel preacher will to some extent share in suffering as he serves a rejected Saviour (v8) but the stimulus to continue is the divine dynamic, rooted in the gospel itself (see v9-10). As we meditate on the content of the gospel we shall not give up.

2 Tim 2:3-4 applies the principle of chapter 1 directly to Timothy. The ministry is like a soldier fighting in an army. A good soldier has one supreme aim—"to please the one who enlisted him" (v4) and this means that everything that would divert him ("civilian pursuits") is laid aside, with conscious determination. He expects to suffer, but achieving the goals set by his commander energises and sustains him.

2 Cor 4:11-15 is a further stimulus to perseverance from Paul's own experience. He describes this as "being given over to death" (v11) but it is "for Jesus' sake", since, as with Jesus, the cross is followed by resurrection life (v11, 14). His main motivations, however, are in verse 15. His suffering in ministry is for the sake of the growth of the church, which will increase the thanksgiving offered to God for the grace of the gospel and bring glory to God. More believers and more glory to the Lord drive him on.

Persevering Prayer

Acts 6:4 reminds us that prayer and ministry of the Word were the earliest apostolic priorities and the order is probably significant—prayer before preaching.

2 Thess 3:1-2 indicates the sort of requests Paul asked for. His concern is to see the Word forging ahead and being honoured (v1) by more and more hearers who respond in faith. He is aware that those who do not have faith are likely to oppose him in violent ways and so asks for his own protection and deliverance in order to be able to continue his work.

Eph 6:18-19 Notice the comprehensiveness of verse 18—"all times...all prayer...all perseverance...for all the saints". There is never a situation in which prayer is not needed or in which prayer cannot make the difference. But the gospel messenger especially needs prayer for the content of the message ("words may be given"), for boldness (twice in these verses) and for faithfulness ("as I ought to speak"). We need to encourage those who pray for us to ask for these things, as we should for ourselves.

3. Commitment to the Bible's eternal perspective is the third factor. The verses below give a number of reasons why the future realities should govern our present ministries. Identify what each one teaches and discuss how this will affect your own attitudes and practice.

Split into small groups of two or three to work through the verses below. Each group should choose a spokesperson ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Psalm 73:23-26 and Phil 3:12-16

The psalm has a real expectation of future glory (v24b) which is generated by the writer's present experience of God's presence (v23a), protection (v23b), guidance (v24a) and strength (v26). These realities prompt the assertion of verse 25 that God is his greatest desire in heaven or on earth. The light from the future encourages him to keep trusting in the present. On this side of the resurrection of Jesus, with the future so much clearer, Paul adds his testimony in Phil 3 to the motivation of the eternal perspective (v14). "I press on" (v12), "straining forward" (v13), "I press on" (v14). As we see the value of what we seek to do from the perspective of eternity it is a tremendous motivation to keep pressing on in the work God has given us.

2 Cor 4:16-18

Paul's faith for the future is based on what God has already done in the past (v14)—"he raised the Lord Jesus" (v14). This factual reality explains why he does not lose heart. Here the potential discouragement is physical decline and "affliction" (v16-17), but the resurrection of Jesus is proof of the unseen eternal realities (v18). "The weight of glory beyond all comparison" (v17) is what keeps him pressing on and not giving up or neglecting his calling.

1 Cor 3:11-15

Having expounded the different tasks of different servants of God, Paul reverts to the one foundation already laid, "which is Jesus Christ" (v11). That determines the shape of the building and on "the Day" the quality of the workmanship will be revealed. This is not a judgment for salvation but for reward (v14-15). So Paul wants to build with the finest, enduring materials a construction (the church) patterned on Christ. Again, the future motivates commitment to earthly service in the present for the apostle, as it should do for us.

Matt 6:19-21, 33

Jesus teaches us that it is possible to lay up treasures in heaven (v20) and in view of that eternal reality we should invest our earthly resources in what will last and be secure. The priorities we live by will demonstrate where our true affections lie (v21). The famous verse 33 summarises God's faithfulness to those who put the kingdom first as their greatest good. We do not need to fear for our lives being sustained in this world because we have a heavenly Father who will provide. This sets us free to invest our lives in time, for eternity.

4. Concern for God's greater glory, that he will be worshipped and praised as a result of our work, is the final factor. The verses below indicate a number of ways in which Biblical ministry can glorify God. Unpack their detail and discuss together how each might work out in your own context.

Matthew 5:16; 2 Cor 3:18, 4:5-6

These verses all indicate that believers can reflect the glory of God as they live godly lives in this fallen world. **Matt 5:16** is a reminder that the distinctively different lives of Christian believers ("your good works") are the means of God's light shining (see v14a). When this happens God is glorified. We therefore want to encourage this response in our pastoral preaching. We shall also want to encourage our hearers to prove **2 Cor 3:18** in their experience. The gospel brings us to see God's glory in Jesus, which has transforming power, making us increasingly like him as the image of God is restored in his people. That is why we preach Christ as Lord, since he is the source of the light of God's glory which is to shine out from our "jars of clay" (2 Cor 4:5-7). The more we and our hearers grow in holiness the more God will be glorified in our ministries.

John 3:30; 1 Cor 4:1-5; Acts 13:47-48

God's glory is further enhanced by the exaltation of the Lord Jesus and the eclipse of the messenger, as John the Baptist stated in **Jn 3:30**. For Paul this meant that what people thought of him was of no great significance. In **1 Cor 4:1-5** he points out that he is only a servant (v1) and a steward (v2) of whom faithfulness is the prime requirement. Human judgment is irrelevant, because heart motives are hidden from human eyes and the end is the only valid time for assessment (v5). His aim is to bring glory to God by his faithfulness. An example of this is recorded in **Acts 13:47-48** when the gospel message of light to the Gentiles brings many to faith and great glory to God.

Jn 15:8; Rom 15:5-7; 2 Cor 9:12-13; 2 Thess 1:11-12

This final group of texts illustrates ways by which God's Word at work in the lives of God's people brings glory to God. So it provides us with worthy, Biblical aims to pursue in our preaching ministry. **Jn 15:8** speaks of much fruit glorifying God. The fruit is the production of the vine's life through the branches, so godly character is primarily in view. **Romans 15:5-7** shows that "harmony" with one another in the church and unity in our declaration of God's truth glorifies God (v6) as does the warmth of loving welcome and fellowship among believers (v7). Verse 5 indicates that "endurance and encouragement" are needed to promote this. Generous giving to others in need as the fruit of gospel faith is another means of glorifying God in **2 Cor 9:12-13**. Finally in **2 Thess 1:11-12** the name of Jesus is glorified as the grace of God enables his people to "fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power" (v11). All of these are worthy aims and outcomes of a ministry whose supreme concern is God's greater glory.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on **Romans 6:1-11**. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will all then be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the skills we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own, and anything that strikes you as important.

Please follow the leaders' instructions again, as outlined in Unit 20 on pages 19-20 of this manual.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback:

- This passage is a profound and important exposition of what it means to be united with Christ and its implications for life. It is a doctrine (usually called "union with Christ") which tends to be under preached in many contemporary churches.
- Verses 1-2 teach the spiritual logic which defeats the erroneous idea that the free gospel of grace will lead to a life of sin. The more sin, the more forgiveness, the more grace. Paul's horror is expressed by the fact that we have not just been forgiven but "died to sin" (v2).
- The sign of baptism which marks the start of Christian experience is a symbol of death to the old as well as newness of life (v3).
- It is probable that immersion baptism is in view here, depicting the death and burial of the old sinful life (under the water) and the emergence of the new resurrection life ("walk in newness of life"). See verse 4.
- Paul pursues the logic in verse 5. The cross was not the end, nor is our death to the old way of life. It was followed by the resurrection to life of a new and distinctive quality.
- Verses 6-7 explore the implications. Death spells the end of sinful activity and deliverance from sin's tyranny. That is true physically, but the point here is that the same is true spiritually.
- So what does that signify? Baptism is the sign of union with Christ, so it speaks of sharing not only in the benefits of his death but also the power of his resurrection. Death no longer has any dominion over Christ, nor over those who are united to him (v8-9).

- ❑ His present experience is unending, everlasting life, which believers share with him, so we are to live in the light of the reality of what has been achieved through Christ's death and resurrection (v10-11).
- ❑ The application "consider yourselves" (v11) means "act on the basis that it is so". That is a response of faith, which appropriates the benefits of the resurrection life of Jesus, lived in us (as we learn elsewhere) by the Holy Spirit.
- ❑ Victory over slavery to sin is produced by our union with Christ, crucified and risen. He has broken sin's dominion, so we cannot continue lightly to sin. Every day we need to embrace the new life that is ours and present every part of ourselves to God to live in godliness.
- ❑ Holiness matters and here are the logical and practical foundations by which it can be increasingly experienced.

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives, and praying that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of this time together.

MODULE SUMMARY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

The equipping with the Scriptures we have explored in this Module has dealt with the following areas:

- ❑ Two Testaments: One Story
- ❑ The Skeleton Structure
- ❑ Old Testament Poetry
- ❑ Old Testament Prophecy
- ❑ Old Testament Wisdom
- ❑ Preaching Narrative
- ❑ Preaching the Letters
- ❑ Keeping on keeping on

As this is the end of the Module, mention to your trainees that, as with all skills, practice increases competence. We should develop a pattern of consciously recognising and reviewing some of the skills we have worked through when we prepare a sermon. But we must not forget that they are tools to be used, not an end in themselves. We should remember also that different tools are used for different jobs. Some of these skills will be of greater use than others in dealing with any particular text. So we should try them all, but not be surprised if we find they are not all of equal value every time.

Remind the trainees that the goal is to be making progress; that we all have a long way to go, but that the Bible is God's sufficient Word, equipping us for our ministries and that his Spirit is our ever-present enabler. We cannot expect to develop any (much less all) of these skills overnight. It may take hours to produce a faithful sermon, but it takes a lifetime to produce a faithful preacher.

Give your trainees a few minutes to answer the following question (also found in the Trainee Manual).

As this is the final Unit, write down 3 significant things that you have learned from this entire Module, which you want to work into your preaching from now on.

Ask a few trainees (who are willing) to share their answers (and write them on a board), so that the group can pray specifically for them at the end. (If the group is small enough, encourage each trainee to share at least one of their answers.)

Remind them that preaching is hard work, calling for the utilisation of all our mental abilities and spiritual maturity, and that our part is to do our best, as it says in 2 Timothy 2:15 "to present (ourselves)

to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth". As we set ourselves to work for God's glory, he will work with us and in us, to equip us to fulfil this ministry.

Remind them that as we think about our progress as preachers, we should realise that it is only a subsection of our total development as Christians, growing increasingly into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Beyond any preaching skills we may develop, by God's grace, it is greater likeness to Christ that matters most and most glorifies God.

Encourage the group to pray together, for one another before they leave, using the answers on the board as a basis for the prayers.

Close in prayer using the following, or similar, prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have caused all the Scriptures to be written. Increase in us the skills to handle them wisely and faithfully, so that we may ourselves grow daily in our knowledge and love of you, and be channels of your grace as we seek to preach them to others. Help us to listen to your Word and inwardly digest its truth, and empower us by your Holy Spirit to respond in faith and obedience to all that you teach us, and then to preach it faithfully and boldly to those whom you have put in our charge. Equip us with the skills we need and constantly increase them in us, we pray. These things we ask for the good of your church and for the glory of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

APPENDIX

This appendix contains guidance and instructions on how to lead the feedback time after the trainees have delivered their talk.

AIM

Your aim above all is to give considered and honest feedback from yourself and the group, but to do so in such a way that the presenter is encouraged and stimulated to want to improve. There is no virtue in saying something is good when it is not, and no value in allowing poor exegesis, exposition, or application to go unchallenged. The group must not become a mutual admiration society. Most of all you will want to encourage the presenter, but not at the expense of truth and realism. You may need to urge your trainees to prioritise gentle and respectful honesty with each other, speaking the truth in love.

TIMING

The talk should take 10 minutes, so have a timer on hand to indicate when the time is up. You may have to intervene and end the presentation if the speaker does not respond within a minute or two.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT

Use the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1 to help you and the trainees to formulate your feedback. A simplified version is printed on page 44 of this manual and page 27 of the *Trainee Manual*. The complete version is also printed on page 45 of this manual for your reference. At the end of the presentation give the trainees 2 minutes to structure their comments and responses to the talk along the lines of the questions on this sheet. During those 2 minutes you should also be reviewing the sheet yourself and discerning which of the questions will be most helpful for you to utilise as you lead the feedback.

FEEDBACK TIME

Try to start the feedback with something positive. You may want to prompt the trainees by asking: “What was the most helpful point from the talk we just heard?” Ask two or three trainees to respond.

You can then ask for feedback along the lines of the questions in the Sample Assessment. Read out an appropriate question and then ask two or three trainees to respond. The questions should identify areas of weakness or errors, and they should be addressed and remedied by referring to the text with the group.

You may want to ask the speaker to share the theme sentence and the aim sentence which were used to shape the sermon. The group can then evaluate and comment. You will remember from Module 1 that:

The *theme sentence* summarises the core content of the text, in faithfulness to its original meaning. It identifies what the essentials are, in other words—what must be preached from this text.

The *aim sentence* summarises the significance of the text in one sentence. It should reflect the original purpose of the text as it focuses on its on-going significance.

AT THE END

End on a forward-looking note by asking “In what way could the sermon be improved?”. This will give the speaker something positive to work on for the next time.

After 10 minutes of feedback you should draw the whole exercise to a close by gathering together the positive reactions from the feedback and briefly repeating or underlining them.

LEADING THE FEEDBACK TIME

Try to develop a businesslike attitude, as it is a serious task, but a little humour can often help the exercise along.

Don't allow one trainee to dominate and try not to have silent partners either. The aim is for each trainee to contribute. You may need to encourage your trainees to keep their comments short and focused. Don't let people waffle generally. Encourage them to be precise, with specific reference to the talk. This is much better than general impressions.

Discourage trainees from merely airing their opinions or trying to demonstrate their knowledge. The aim is to help the speaker, not to boost their own egos. Make sure all the comments relate to the Bible text or the talk and don't be afraid to move on to other questions or other trainees if someone is distracting or unhelpful.

Be critical of the feedback and responses as well as of the talk. If the feedback and comments are untrue or unhelpful, ask questions like: "Where do you find that in the text?", "Why do you say that?", "What do other people think?", "How can we help our speaker from that comment?", etc.

Be active in your chairmanship and instruction, but don't force your own view on the group. Give them time to participate. And, don't forget how important the tone of your voice and your body language can be, and how trainees will pick up on these as they give feedback.

Gradually a cooperative, supportive, but honest and insightful culture will develop in the group if you persist with these standards. Pray that this will happen and that the Lord would help you to guide the feedback with honesty, sensitivity, and gentleness.

EXTENDING THE EXERCISE

As the trainees become familiar with the preaching and feedback process, you will probably find that everyone will want their talk(s) to be heard. If you can extend the time, try to hear two talks each Unit. More than that becomes too much for everyone to cope with. If you have two presenters, hear both of them before you invite the group feedback. Otherwise, the second speaker will feel they have to relate to the first and may even try to change their material. Hear them both first and then lead the feedback for each talk separately.

If there is a trainee with maturity and experience in the group, they could be co-opted to help lead, enabling the group to split and more sermons to be heard. You would need to go through the *Leader Manual* notes and the Appendix with the sub-leader before the Unit. However, the feedback session is very important and poor leadership at any point could devalue the exercise.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT

SECTION 1: AIM AND STRUCTURE

Q1 Was there a clear message?

Q2 Was there a clear structure to the sermon?

Q3 Was the introduction engaging and appropriate? Did the sermon deliver what the introduction promised?

Q4 Was there a clear and effective conclusion?

SECTION 2: INTERPRETATION

Q1 Was the text properly understood and expounded? Did the main points of the text come across clearly?

Q2 Was the text set in its immediate, book, and whole Bible context? How did that help to clarify the contents?

Q3 Did the application arise from the text and reflect its main points? Was there a smooth transition from the original hearers then to us now?

SECTION 3: PRESENTATION

Q1 Were illustrations used effectively to deepen understanding or focus application, or did they distract?

Q2 How appropriate were the manner of the preacher, the verbal style, and use of language, as well as the pitch and pace and the body language of the preacher?

SECTION 4: GENERAL

Q1 What was the strongest positive quality of the sermon?

Q2 What immediate steps could be taken to improve?

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT FROM MODULE 1

Much more detail is given than could be used in any one assessment—but it is designed to provide a range of features and issues, any of which could be profitably employed in a critique. Please pay special attention to the explanations beneath the questions, which will help to develop the use of this assessment in a positive and creative way.

SECTION 1: AIM AND STRUCTURE

Q1 Was there a clear structure to the sermon and if so what were the main points?

This is not designed to impose a particular homiletical pattern or method on the text, but to ask whether the Bible text was in the driving seat and whether the structure of the talk reflected the structure of the original passage with accuracy and clarity.

Q2 Was there a clear message? What was it?

The message should represent the contents of the passage, but presented in a more than merely informational way. A “message” is something deeper and more urgent. It is a communication through the mind, to the heart, to activate the will. So if preaching is designed to change lives, to make us more like the Lord Jesus, in what way did the sermon accomplish that?

Q3 Was the introduction engaging and appropriate? Did the sermon deliver what the introduction promised?

Q4 Was there a clear conclusion? How effective was it?

A strong conclusion will probably drive home the aim of the whole sermon and provide a strong motivation not only to receive and understand what the Bible text is saying, but to put its significance into practice in our lives.

SECTION 2: INTERPRETATION

Q1 Was the text properly understood and expounded? Did the main points of the text come across clearly?

Was the meaning of the text explained adequately, especially the more difficult parts? And as it was expounded, did the hearers have a sense of how it fitted together, its integrity and purpose?

Q2 Was the text set in its immediate and whole Bible context? How did that help to clarify the contents?

The clarification this brings is in understanding the significance of the passage; why it is an important Word of God to our minds and hearts so many centuries later.

Q3 Did the application arise from the text and reflect its main points?

This is an extension of Q2 to ensure that the method was not “impositional”, bringing in the application from the outside. Was there a smooth transition from the original hearers then to us now?

SECTION 3: PRESENTATION

Q1 Was the sermon clear and easy to follow?

Good preaching is intellectually stimulating but it is not complex or abstract. Were the main points stated clearly, explained lucidly and applied cogently? Were the connections between the sections of the sermon explained well, so that there was no loss of purpose or direction as the sermon unfolded?

Q2 Were illustrations used effectively to deepen understanding or focus application, or did they distract?

Q3 Was the talk compelling? What response was being asked for?

This is less about content and more about the preacher’s style. The preacher will be in the foreground and our attitude to him will determine our attitude to the whole talk.

Q4 How appropriate were the manner of the preacher, the verbal style, and use of language, as well as the pitch and pace and the body language of the preacher?

Each of these should be considered and commented upon, since any of these aspects can greatly heighten or diminish a sermon’s usefulness.

SECTION 4: GENERAL

Q1 What was the strongest positive quality of the sermon?

We all need that sort of encouragement so that we take away something from the critique which can act as a stimulus to work at developing our strengths as well as resolving our weaknesses.

Q2 What immediate steps could be taken to improve?

The ‘immediate steps’ stresses that we all need to start somewhere in developing what is a lifelong improvement programme. But it is a long haul—and if the criticisms are too many or too negative it can be confusing and discouraging. Identify an aspect or two that you can work on immediately, and go away hopeful and prayerful, with a desire to be faithful and above all dependent on God himself, who makes us grow.