

SERVING GOD'S PURPOSE IN YOUR GENERATION

Table Of Contents:

Introduction

Lesson One: *God's Great Plan—Purposed from Eternity*

Lesson Two: *Abraham—Father of the Faithful*

Lesson Three: *Judah—A Flawed Man Used by God*

Lesson Four: *Moses—A Reluctant and Troubled Leader*

Lesson Five: *Joshua—Conqueror of Canaan*

Lesson Six: *Deborah—A Woman of Courage*

Lesson Seven: *Ruth—A Blessing in a Troubled Time*

Lesson Eight: *David—A Man after God's Own Heart*

Lesson Nine: *Josiah—A Young King over an Aging Nation*

Lesson Ten: *Esther—A Woman of the Kingdom*

Lesson Eleven: *Judah the Maccabee—A Courageous Patriot*

Lesson Twelve: *John the Baptist—Forerunner of the Messiah*

Lesson Thirteen: *Mary—Mother of the Messiah*

Lesson Fourteen: *Jesus—Both Lord And Messiah*

Lesson Fifteen: *Saul of Tarsus—From Persecutor to Apostle*

Lesson Sixteen: *God's People—A Kingdom of Servants*

Lesson Seventeen: *God's People—Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*

Lesson Eighteen: *Eternity—The Future of God's People*

Supplement: *1 Maccabees 1-4*



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Introduction

How would you describe your relationship to God? Many Christians, while believing and trusting in God, live disconnected lives relative to God's purposes. Does God have a purpose for your life? If so, what is it? What are you supposed to be doing?

God has been working out His plans and purposes since before the foundation of the world. Paul speaks of God's "good pleasure" that predated the "foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:3-11). God's plan, according to this text, is summed up in Christ and results in the praise of His glory.

A lack of understanding of God's plan is one great reason why so many live disconnected lives. Because the truth of God is not known or understood, connection with God's plan is not possible. Even some people, who get connected by obedience to the truth, do not fully understand the meaning of their relationship with God. They not only fail to understand the nature and meaning of their relationship with God, they also fail to see God's purpose for their lives. We need to see ourselves as a people with purpose, as disciples with a destiny. We need to have a vision of who we are and what we can be.

One reason for the lack of vision is that the Bible is regarded as a great collection of stories about superheroes of faith—that the men and women in the Bible accounts reach near-legend status. Instead, we ought to view these as historical accounts of ordinary people who served in God's plan. These "*great ones*" in the Bible are not different from us. Some of these that we will see were ordinary people who were willing to be used for God's purposes. As a result, they accomplished extraordinary things.

What the Lord desires from 21st century believers is really no different than what He expected of David or those in any other era of believers. David "served the purpose of God in his own generation" (Acts 13:36, NASB). David was not a superhero who could "leap tall buildings in a single bound." He was just a man—an ordinary man—who was devoted to God; his devotion led him to be God's faithful servant in his generation. David did great things, but not merely by his own personal abilities or talents. He was a tool in the hand of God. God used him for His purposes. What about us? Can we serve the purpose of God in our generation?

We often underestimate what we are capable of with God's help. We focus on our perceived limitations rather than our limitless possibilities in serving the Lord. What is it that forces us to conclude that we cannot be successful servants of God in our generation? What Bible text causes us to believe that we must settle for mediocrity instead of excellence? The issues are not with anything in the Bible, but with things in our hearts. The truth is, God's faithful people can accomplish much with His help. Remember Paul's affirmation, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

What, exactly, are God's expectations for us? How do we fit into the plan of God? How can we better understand God's plan? What is our purpose in serving God in the present generation? If we can get a good grasp of how God has used ordinary people in the past, maybe we will function more productively in the present and be more firmly entrenched in our pursuit of a glorious future. Christ still reigns. He is yet King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Hebrews 13:8). No better purpose in life exists than *serving God's purpose in your generation*. The study before us will not only give us an overview of God's purposes, but will also focus on some of those individuals used by God—men and women that we can imitate.



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

God's Great Plan: Purposed from Eternity

1

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

WHO

Before the universe knew a single day of existence, God had calculated and arranged His plan. No scheme of the devil could prevent what God intended (Revelation 12:7-9). No scheme of any man could prevent what God intended (Daniel 4:35). By their own abilities, men couldn't even discover God's plan, nor fathom its depths (Romans 11:33-36; 1 Corinthians 2:8-9). God's power, wisdom, knowledge and understanding are beyond our comprehension (Psalm 147:4-5).

The failure—the sin of man—was anticipated by God; His plan for redemption was formulated before man ever lived a day (Revelation 13:8). When sin entered the world, the first revelation of God's intention, a prophecy for the distant future, was immediately given (Genesis 3:15). The rest of the Bible story reveals the working out of God's plan to bring a Savior to mankind. On every page, the Bible declares, "God is at work!" God has been at work from the beginning, and He has been at work according to His own timetable. Jesus appeared in history "when the fullness of the time came" (Galatians 4:4; Mark 1:15). God had made all the necessary arrangements and plans. When the right time came, Jesus came into the world.

God is still at work today. There are things that are to be done in our time. We are the people through whom God is working. We must see our purpose in our time.

WHAT

Reading: 1 Peter 1:10-25

1. What purpose of God did the prophets serve in their generations?

WHEN

2. According to verse 12, to whom did the prophets' words minister?

WHERE

3. What do verses 15-17 say about our purpose in God's plan?

HOW

4. What two specific references are made to time in verse 20?

WHY

5. According to verse 25, how can we be confident God's message applies to us today?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Abraham: Father of the Faithful

2

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

Sin is like a cancer to the soul; it spreads, corrupts and destroys. Cain murdered his brother, righteous Abel (Genesis 4:1-10). Seth was appointed heir in Abel's place (4:25). The hearts of men became corrupt. Enoch was an exception (Genesis 5:24). Noah was another exception; Noah was a just man and perfect in his generation (Genesis 6:9). A great flood destroyed that wicked generation; only Noah and his family were saved (Genesis 6-11). After the flood, a descendent of Noah became the focal point of God's purposes and plans.

A three-fold promise was made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18). The fulfilling of this promise dominates the landscape of Scripture from this point forward.

WHO

The promise involved:

1. The land of _____.
2. The nation of _____.
3. The seed, who is _____.

WHAT

Matches regarding Abraham:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ___ 1. Friend of God | a. Hebrews 11:8-10 |
| ___ 2. Looked for a city | b. Galatians 3:7, 9, 29 |
| ___ 3. Hoped against hope | c. John 8:56 |
| ___ 4. Saw Jesus' day | d. Luke 16:19-31 |
| ___ 5. Speaks to rich man | e. Romans 4:16-18 |
| ___ 6. Justified by faith | f. Hebrews 7:1-10 |
| ___ 7. Tithes to Melchizedek | g. James 2:23 |
| ___ 8. Sons of Abraham | h. Romans 4:1-12 |

WHEN

WHERE

HOW

Two important questions:

1. Find at least two characteristics in Abraham in Genesis 13 that Christians can imitate that will help us to serve God's purposes in our generation.

WHY

2. Discussion question: Is there any way we can imitate what Abraham did in Genesis 22 that will help us serve God's purposes in our time?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Judah: A Flawed Man Used by God

3

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

The promises made to Abraham were reiterated to his son, Isaac (Genesis 26:24), and to his grandson, Jacob (Genesis 35:10-12). The rest of Genesis chronicles the sojourn of Abraham's descendants in the land of promise and their subsequent move to Egypt. Though Joseph is a prominent figure in the latter stages of the book, his brother Judah would receive the prophetic blessing from Jacob. The seed promise was to be fulfilled through him (Genesis 49:8-10).

Typically, when we choose to study one of Jacob's sons, we pick Joseph. Indeed, he is important to the Bible story. However, since the promise was extended to Judah, it would do us well to study about him.

Some questions about Judah:

WHO

1. What do you think Judah's motives were in the account in Genesis 37:23-28?

WHAT

2. What would you have said or done if you were in Judah's shoes in Genesis 37:26-27?

WHEN

3. After reading the account found in Genesis 38:1-30, what can you conclude about Judah's character? Is there anything good at all about this man?

WHERE

4. Look at what Judah said in Genesis 43:1-10. Do you see any good thing in Judah's character?

HOW

5. Who is Judah concerned about in Genesis 44:14-34? What important changes do you see in this man? What leadership qualities do you see in Judah?

WHY

6. Does it surprise you that a man who had been immoral was in the lineage of Christ? What does this say about us in our generation?

7. Thought question: Is there anything in your life that makes you sure God could never use you for anything important?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Moses: A Reluctant and Troubled Leader

4

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

After the descendants of Abraham spent a long time in slavery in Egypt, God was about to act to deliver them from their oppression (Exodus 2:23-25). At the right time, according to God's purposes, Moses was chosen by God to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The nation was miraculously preserved through the plagues God sent on Egypt. The Israelites were also miraculously led through the Red Sea and the wilderness. Moses was the great and magnificent leader of God's people for 40 years.

As great as Moses was, he was also a man who was very reluctant to lead the people at all. Even after God convinced him to go, he was still a troubled man. There seemed to be so many problems for Moses.

Some questions about Moses:

WHO

1. List all the objections Moses gave to God that are found in Exodus 3:7-4:17. Do you ever use any of these excuses about your service to God?

WHAT

2. When Pharaoh rejected Moses' words and made the work even harder for the Israelites, how did the Israelites react (Exodus 5:15-21)?

WHEN

3. What complaint did Moses take to God over this matter in Exodus 5:22-23?

WHERE

4. Immediately after the Israelites were freed, what complaint did Moses have to deal with in Exodus 14:10-12?

HOW

5. What problem did Moses have in Exodus 18:13-27? How was it resolved? Is there anything we can learn from this as we serve God in our generation?

WHY

6. What was Moses accused of in Numbers 16:1-3? How would you feel if you were in his shoes?
7. Why do you think Moses acted as he did in Numbers 20:1-12? What advice would you have given to Moses to prevent his wrong actions?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Joshua: Conqueror of Canaan

5

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

Several centuries removed from the promise to Abraham, a young nation finally reached the brink of the Promised Land. With Joshua in command, Israel crossed the Jordan River. The Lord masterminded and delivered a great victory at Jericho (Joshua 6). Sadness, however, followed quickly on the heels of rejoicing. Israel met defeat at Ai because sin was in the camp of the Israelites (Joshua 7). Once that situation was resolved, the conquest of Canaan continued. The land was ultimately conquered under Joshua's leadership and the land was allotted to each tribe. See Joshua 21:43-45.

Joshua did not seem to be the reluctant leader that Moses was. He seemed to have excellent leadership qualities. He was a great military man and a faithful servant of Jehovah. There are few men in the Bible who compare to Joshua.

WHO

Some questions about Joshua:

1. What was Joshua called in Exodus 24:13? (Check various translations.) What is implied in this word?

WHAT

2. Do you think Joshua was a "natural born leader," or do you think his leadership may have come from something else? If something else, what?

WHEN

3. What does Exodus 33:11 tell you about Joshua?

WHERE

4. What kind of disposition did Joshua (and Caleb) have toward God's promise to give Israel the land of Canaan? What qualities do you find in these two men in Numbers 13:30-14:10 that good leaders need?

HOW

5. What leadership qualities do you find in Joshua's words in Joshua 24:14-15?

WHY

6. What does Joshua 24:31 say about God's people during Joshua's generation?

7. What are some things you can do to bring the same results in your generation?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

6

Deborah: A Woman of Courage

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

Even while Joshua was yet alive, ominous signs appeared on the horizon. All of the Canaanites were not driven out (Judges 1). A new generation in Israel arose that did not know the Lord (Joshua 2:10). Idolatry disturbed the peace and prosperity that God intended for Israel. Coupled with tribal independence and border wars, Israel grew weak and divided. The Canaanites fought against them. Israel did not have a leader to unite them. Finally, when Israel cried out to the Lord, He sent a deliverer—a judge—to overthrow the enemy. The first judge was Caleb's nephew, Othniel (Judges 3:9-11).

Read Judges 2:11-19:

The cycle discussed in this text continued for over 300 years. Choose four or five key words to describe this cycle.

WHO

Match the Judges:

WHAT

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| ___ 1. Left-handed, lost sword | A. Barak |
| ___ 2. Helped woman judge | B. Abimelech |
| ___ 3. Caleb's son-in-law | C. Jair |
| ___ 4. Made king at Shechem | D. Samson |
| ___ 5. Weapon was an ox goad | E. Gideon |
| ___ 6. Made a rash vow | F. Jephthah |
| ___ 7. Hair, strength & women | G. Ehud |
| ___ 8. 30 sons, donkeys & cities | H. Othniel |
| ___ 9. Sat under the palm tree | I. Deborah |
| ___ 10. Victory with only 300 men | J. Shamgar |

WHEN

WHERE

One of the judges mentioned above is Deborah. She was a prophetess and was fourth in the order of the judges. Answer these questions about Deborah:

HOW

1. According to Judges 4:1-5, what job or function did Deborah have?

2. What national problem existed in the time of Deborah?

WHY

3. On the opposite page, write a brief summary on the role Deborah played in delivering Israel. How did she serve God in her generation?

4. Is Deborah the woman into whose hand the Lord would sell Sisera (Judges 4:9)? Explain.



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Ruth: A Blessing in a Troubled Time

7

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

The era of the Judges was a time of terrible turmoil. The people of God were never faithful to the Lord for very long. Though there were periods when they trusted in the Lord, they were more often disobedient. One passage that well characterizes this time is Judges 21:25, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Whenever men set themselves up as their own standard of authority, they are sure to get in trouble with God. Man needs God to guide him (Jeremiah 10:23).

During the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1) there is found a beautiful story about a Moabite woman who was adopted into the family of Israel. Though there was a famine in the land, the time of Ruth seems to be set in a period of peace. Answer the following questions about Ruth:

1. How did Ruth come to be married to an Israelite? (Ruth 1:1-6)

WHO

2. When the men of the family died, what did Ruth promise to do? (Ruth 1:6-18)

WHAT

3. What is said about Ruth's character in Ruth 2:11-12; 3:11?

WHEN

4. How did the people of Israel typically regard foreigners?

WHERE

5. Why do you think Ruth was treated so well by the people of Bethlehem?

HOW

6. Write a short summary of how Ruth came to be married to Boaz.

WHY

7. How did Ruth serve God's purposes in her generation?

8. What lessons can we learn from Ruth that will help us serve God's purposes in our generation?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

David: A Man after God's Own Heart

8

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

Samuel served as Israel's last judge. His sons did not walk in his ways. Israel said to Samuel, "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5-9). This request signaled a rejection of the Lord, not a rejection of Samuel. In a sense, Saul was the people's choice for king (1 Samuel 9:1-2). He was the kind of king they wanted, but he became corrupt and faithless. His successor, David, was God's choice (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Saul seemed to be a natural leader; he was a tall, handsome warrior. David was but a shepherd boy when God called him, and seemed less a leader. Though David was a great leader in many respects, he still had his share of troubles.

Give your opinion on how you think these events in David's life should be ranked:

Rank in order of significance from 1 (more) to 6 (less).

WHO

- _____ His killing of the giant, Goliath
- _____ His mercy toward King Saul
- _____ His bringing the Ark to Jerusalem
- _____ His preparation for building the Temple

WHAT

- _____ His writing of the Psalms
- _____ His unification of Israel

WHEN

Match the sons of David:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| _____ 1. Guilty of sin over Tamar | A. Solomon |
| _____ 2. Little known about him | B. Absalom |
| _____ 3. Loved by the Lord | C. Adonijah |
| _____ 4. Put to death by Benaiah | D. Amnon |
| _____ 5. Conspiracy against David | E. Chileab |

WHERE

Some questions about David:

HOW

1. Do you think a sense of destiny played a part in David's life? Note particularly the promises of 2 Samuel 7:12-13. Should we have a sense of destiny?

2. What qualities can you identify that made David a man after God's own heart? (Acts 13:22)

WHY

3. In what sense did David serve God's purposes in his generation? (Acts 13:36) What did he accomplish for God?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Josiah: A Young King over an Aging Nation

9

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

David's son, Solomon, failed to be faithful to God. This led to a loss of power and the anointing of Jeroboam in the North (1 Kings 11). Judah followed Rehoboam (David's grandson). The Northern Kingdom lasted only 200 years. After about 20 kings, and not a single righteous one among them, Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Judah, only slightly better spiritually, survived about a century longer. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC after two deportations in 605 and 597.

There were still people of faith in this terrible time of sin and divided loyalties. One such person was a very young king in Judah. His name was Josiah. Though the Southern Kingdom of Judah was in decline, he led a revival that extended its life.

Some questions about Josiah:

1. How old was Josiah when he became king? (2 Chronicles 34:1-2)
2. What did Josiah do at age 16? What did he do at age 20? (2 Chronicles 34:3-7)
3. What great event took place in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign? (2 Chronicles 34:8-18)
4. What did Josiah do when this great find took place? (2 Chronicles 34:19-21)
5. Read the remainder of the chapter (verses 22-33), then list all the qualities that you think made Josiah a great leader.

Some thought questions:

1. Have you ever made the excuse that you were too young or too old to be of value in God's service? Was the excuse really valid?
2. While Josiah did not excuse himself because of age, there were other things that he might have used as excuses. Can you name some of them?
3. Most people have made excuses. If you have made some, what are they?

WHO

WHAT

WHEN

WHERE

HOW

WHY



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Esther: A Woman of the Kingdom

10

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

Josiah's reforms did not last. After Josiah died, the nation of Judah declined and eventually the Babylonian Captivity came. However, there was a faithful remnant of Judah that survived, even thrived, while in Babylon. Such men as Ezekiel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were faithful to God in this time. At the end of the 70 years, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem—just as God had promised in Jeremiah 29:10-11. After the return from captivity, the Jews eventually rebuilt the city and the temple under the leadership of such men as Ezra and Nehemiah.

There is also a Jewish woman of some note during this period. Esther was a Jew who lived in Persia. In her time, the order allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem had already been given. But, there was a scheme afloat that would have destroyed all the Jews throughout the empire. The book of Esther deals with this crisis. Esther served the purpose of God in her generation.

WHO

Some questions about Esther:

1. Before the crisis arose, a woman named Vashti played a major role in the book of Esther (Esther 1:1-22). What do you think of her conduct?

WHAT

2. What special favor was given to Esther as the king was about to choose a new queen? (Esther 2:1-18)

WHEN

3. What wicked man planned to destroy all the Jews living in Babylon? (Esther 3:1-15) Why did this man have such contempt for the Jews?

WHERE

4. What did Mordecai say to encourage Esther after he learned of the plot to kill the Jews? (Esther 4:1-17)

HOW

5. What dangers did Esther face if she did as Mordecai said?

6. List as many qualities as you can that made Esther a woman who served God's purposes in her generation.

WHY

7. How did the situation with Haman and the Jews finally work out?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Judah the Maccabee: A Courageous Patriot

11

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

The Old Testament closes with the book of Malachi. After Malachi, no new revelation was given for 400 years. We call this “the inter-testament period” or “the time between the testaments.” This period of silence was not a period of inactivity. God was still at work. The plan of God *did not cease* just because no new revelation was given! Several apocryphal books provide historical data for this period and mention Jewish patriots like Judah the Maccabee (Judas Maccabeus). Such men were instrumental in gaining Jewish freedom from the Syrians and in reclaiming Jewish land.

The book of Daniel speaks of four world empires (Daniel 2:31-45). In the days of the fourth empire, God said He would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed.

The four empires are:	Babylon	605-536 BC	(head of gold)
	Medo-Persia	536-331 BC	(chest of silver)
	Greece	331-142 BC	(belly, thighs of brass)
	Rome	63 BC-70 AD	(legs, feet of iron)

The third empire, Greece, under Alexander the Great, was divided upon Alexander’s death. Alexander’s four generals ruled over these four divisions. They were truly divided as they fought against one another. Eventually, Palestine came under the control of Syria (the kingdom of the North; see Daniel 11:13-35). Through the work of the Maccabees, Jerusalem gained a period of independence from Syria. An uninspired book gives us the history of this time. (See 1 Maccabees 1-4 in the back of your workbook.) After reading the text, please answer the following questions.

WHO

WHAT

WHEN

WHERE

HOW

WHY

1. Can you identify the following relationships relative to Judas Maccabeus?
 - a. Who was his father? _____.
 - b. He was the leader of what group? _____.
 - c. His avowed enemy was what man? _____.
2. What wicked things had the enemy done in Jerusalem?
3. List what you believe are the three most critical qualities in Judas Maccabeus that made him the great man that he was.
4. How did Judas Maccabeus come to be so great? Was it his family heritage? Was it the time in which he lived? Was it an innate ability to lead? What was it?
5. God is not giving any new revelation today. Is it possible for us to be great leaders in our time? Does a person have to be a great leader in order to serve God’s purposes in his generation? Explain your answer.



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

John the Baptist: Forerunner of the Messiah

12

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

The time was drawing near for the coming of the Messiah to fulfill the promise to Abraham. Before the Messiah came, God sent a forerunner to prepare the way for Him. Isaiah spoke of the work of the forerunner in Isaiah 40:3-5.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Part of this text is quoted in Matthew 3:1-3. Many other New Testament references speak of John the Baptist and how he served the Lord.

WHO

Read the third and fourth chapters of Malachi. Find the prophecies about a messenger who would come. You should find at least two or three statements that are fulfilled in the New Testament. List the scriptures about the prophecies and their fulfillment.

WHAT

Prophecy

Fulfillment

WHEN

What did Jesus say about the greatness of John the Baptist? (Matthew 11:11)

WHERE

Read the following passages from Matthew’s gospel, then list the qualities that you think did and did not contribute to John’s greatness:

Matthew 3:4-12

Matthew 11:1-15

Matthew 14:1-12

Matthew 17:11-13

Did Not Contribute

Did Contribute

HOW

WHY



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Mary: Mother of the Messiah

13

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

John the Baptist was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-25). During the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy the angel Gabriel was sent to a virgin named Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Mary was to be the mother of the Christ child!

Truly, if there was any person who served God's purposes it was Mary! There were a number of factors that made her a fitting candidate to bear the Messiah. Note the passages below and list each of the factors found in the text that made her the right person to give birth to Jesus.

Luke 1:27a Mary was a _____

Luke 1:27b Mary was of what family? _____

WHO

Luke 1:45 Mary _____ the message from the Lord.

Luke 1:54-55 Mary believed in what promise? _____

Luke 2:16-20 Mary kept _____

WHAT

1. Read Luke 2:41-50. What do you think of Mary's reaction when she did not find Jesus among the company that had left Jerusalem?

WHEN

2. What do you think about what she said to Jesus (verse 48) when she found him? Were her words out of order or improper? Explain your answer.

WHERE

3. A question for mothers: Read Luke 2:51. Put yourself in Mary's situation. You are raising Jesus into adulthood. What thoughts would have been in your heart as the years go by? What fears, worries or concerns would you have?

HOW

4. Read the account in John 2:1-12. If you had been Mary, would you have been a little upset by the seemingly sharp answer that Jesus gave in verse 4?

WHY

5. Obviously there is some difference in raising the Son of God and raising an ordinary child. But, list some things mothers today can do to raise children who will serve the purpose of God in their generation.



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Jesus: Both Lord and Messiah

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

No single person has affected history like Jesus of Nazareth. Near the age of 30, Jesus was baptized, then went into the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil. In the course of His ministry He did amazing things. He worked spectacular miracles—the blind saw; the lame walked; lepers were cleansed; the dead were raised!

God the Father was with Jesus in all He did. Indeed, Jesus Himself was God in the flesh (John 1:1-3, 14). No one ever spoke like Jesus (John 7:46). No one ever died like Jesus. His enemies crucified Him, and thus fulfilled God's plan (Acts 2:23). As a result of His death and resurrection, God made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

In the book of Isaiah God calls the Messiah "My Servant." See if you can find at least three references to that language in the book of Isaiah.

WHO

Some Things People Said About Jesus

Who Said It:

What They Said:

WHAT

Matthew 2:2

Matthew 3:14

Matthew 4:3

Matthew 9:3

WHEN

Matthew 9:21

Matthew 12:24

Matthew 16:16

WHERE

Matthew 26:61

Matthew 27:4

Matthew 27:42

Matthew 27:54

HOW

Matthew 28:6

1. According to Galatians 4:4, God sent forth His Son in "the fullness of time." What is meant by that phrase?

WHY

2. List as many factors as you can that made the time of Jesus "the fullness of time."

3. How would the world be different if Jesus had never come?



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Saul of Tarsus: From Persecutor to Apostle

15

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

The story of Saul of Tarsus is surely one of the most remarkable in all the Bible. He was a man who truly thought he was serving God's purposes before he became a Christian. Yet he was a violent persecutor of the church. He was a man who fulfilled the Lord's words in John 16:2.

Saul had a part in the death of Stephen in Acts 7:54-8:3. Not content with persecuting the saints in Jerusalem, he was instrumental in expanding his heinous actions to other cities (Acts 9:1-2).

By his own admission, his zeal was focused on destroying the cause of Christ (Galatians 1:13-14). What if this zeal could be redirected? What if this man's energy could be turned toward promoting the gospel rather than destroying it?

Indeed, the Lord had such a plan for Saul when He called him as he traveled to the city of Damascus (Acts 9:1-30). Saul immediately preached Jesus after his conversion. (For more information on his conversion, see Acts 22:1-21 and Acts 26:1-18.)

From Acts 13:9, and onward, Saul is known by the name Paul.

Some questions about Saul of Tarsus—the Apostle Paul:

WHO

WHAT

1. What can we say about Paul's conscience before he became a Christian? (See Acts 23:1)

2. How can you reconcile your answer to question 1 with Paul's statement in Acts 26:9?

WHEN

3. The Lord made a special appearance unto Saul. What was the purpose of that appearance? See Paul's address to King Agrippa for help.

WHERE

4. While Paul preached to the Jews in almost every place he went, he was known as the apostle to the Gentiles. Can you find a text that supports that truth?

HOW

5. According to Philippians 3:1-8, what was Paul willing to give up in order that he might serve God's purposes?

6. Is there anything that God might want us to give up in order that we can serve His purposes? Can you find Scripture that supports your answer?

WHY

7. In your mind, what is the most important factor that made Paul a success is serving God? Can that factor also be present in your life? Explain



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

God's People: A Kingdom of Servants

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

Though the prophets foretold the coming of the gospel age, it was not until after the coming of Christ that the great mystery was revealed—that God's intent was to reconcile both Jew and Gentile in one body by the cross (Ephesians 3:6-16). God's plan can be summarized by the statement of Colossians 1:13-14.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

When referring to the people of God, "church" and "kingdom" can both refer to the same group of people. I understand that Jesus used the terms interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19. Also note Revelation 1:6, "...He has made us to be a kingdom..."

WHO

Now that we are in the kingdom, what does our King expect us to do? Read the following passages and *identify what all of the passages have in common*. Circle what you believe are the key words in each verse.

Daniel 7:14—Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him...

WHAT

Matthew 18:23—Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

Matthew 25:14—For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

WHEN

Luke 19:15—And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

WHERE

John 18:36—My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews...

Hebrews 12:28—Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

HOW

What do the above passages say about you? What is your role in the kingdom? Please write a short paragraph that describes how you are fulfilling your role in this time and in this place.

WHY

Do you have any room for improvement? If so, please list three very specific things that you can (and will) do to improve.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

God's People: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

While the church of Christ has existed since Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Matthew 16:18), a majority of religious people have turned away from the plan of God. This great apostasy made necessary a return to the ancient order—a restoration of men to the New Testament pattern.

As early as the 1400's, men in Europe began to advocate a return to the Bible. In the 1700's, large numbers began to make the plea of restoration. In the early 1800's, such men as Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell were prominent voices in this movement. They did not advocate a new church (there were already too many of those), but a return to the church that is found in the Bible. These men did not form any new religious organizations. Instead, they argued that the existing denominations were corrupt and ought to be dissolved. They further insisted that men should just be a part of a church that already existed—the church that Christ built. This appeal was attractive to many people, but most of the Protestant and Catholic religious leaders of the day strongly opposed it. Nevertheless, thousands of men and women turned away from denominationalism and became New Testament Christians.

The Lord's church today certainly owes a debt of gratitude to the men and women of the past three hundred years who have sought to restore men back to the New Testament order. But it is not enough to look to the past. Each new generation of Christians must strive for the New Testament pattern—pursuing a complete, consistent and faithful application of God's word. We must be diligent and militant, lest apostasy come again! There was nothing restored in the 1800's that cannot be lost in the twenty-first century.

What can I do?

What can disciples in our century do to assure that our local congregation does not go into apostasy? In light of the following passages, what part can you play to maintain God's order? Please identify an action on each passage—an action you can take!

WHO

WHAT

WHEN

WHERE

HOW

WHY

1 Timothy 4:1-5 _____

2 Peter 2:1-3 _____

Acts 20:28-32 _____

2 John 9 _____

Jude 3 _____

Hebrews 12:28 _____

2 Timothy 3:16-17 _____

Jeremiah 6:16 _____

Romans 16:17-18 _____



Serving God's Purpose In Your Generation

Eternity: The Future of God's People

18

Think about the things below for our in-class talking points.

This world will not continue indefinitely (2 Peter 3:3-8). God has already determined that the present order will end (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). The Lord's return draws ever closer (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Believers must always be ready. There is coming a great Day of Judgment (Acts 17:31). Either heaven (eternal life) or hell (eternal punishment) will be the destiny of every person who has lived (Matthew 25:46).

The pursuit of righteousness, being a servant of God, deserves the utmost in priority in our lives (Matthew 6:33-34; Romans 13:11-14). We must allow nothing to interfere with our eternal destiny!

Consider the following questions about eternity:

1. According to 1 Corinthians 15:42-54, what will be the state of our bodies in eternity?
2. According to Philippians 3:20-21, our bodies in eternity will be like whose?
3. According to Matthew 25:23, what will we be in eternity?
4. According to Psalm 16:11, what two things will we experience in God's presence?
5. In view of the end of the world and coming judgment, what sort of persons ought we to be (2 Peter 3:9-18)?
6. How can you serve God on this day that will assure your salvation at the last day?
7. What causes people who have heard and obeyed the truth to give up on eternity?

Which would you choose—and why?

- a. Many more years on earth ("I'd like to stay here longer than man's allotted days...").
- b. The Lord to return immediately so I can go to heaven sooner.

WHO

WHAT

WHEN

WHERE

HOW

WHY

1 Maccabees 1

Alexander the Great

¹After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) ²He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. ³He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. ⁴He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him.

⁵After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. ⁶So he summoned his most honored officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. ⁷And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died.

⁸Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. ⁹They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their descendants after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth.

Antiochus Epiphanes and Renegade Jews

¹⁰From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

¹¹In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." ¹²This proposal pleased them, ¹³and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. ¹⁴So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, ¹⁵and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

Antiochus in Egypt

¹⁶When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. ¹⁷So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. ¹⁸He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. ¹⁹They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt.

Persecution of the Jews

²⁰After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. ²¹He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. ²²He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. ²³He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. ²⁴Taking them all, he went into his own land.

He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance. ²⁵Israel mourned deeply in every community, ²⁶rulers and elders groaned, young women and young men became faint, the beauty of the women faded. ²⁷Every bridegroom took up the lament; she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning. ²⁸Even the land trembled for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame.

The Occupation of Jerusalem

²⁹Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force. ³⁰Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel. ³¹He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. ³²They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock. ³³Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. ³⁴They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; ³⁵they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace,

³⁶for the citadel became an ambush against the sanctuary, an evil adversary of Israel at all times. ³⁷On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood; they even defiled the sanctuary. ³⁸Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled; she became a dwelling of strangers; she became strange to her offspring, and her children forsook her. ³⁹Her sanctuary became desolate like a desert; her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into a reproach, her honor into contempt. ⁴⁰Her dishonor now grew as great as her glory; her exaltation was turned into mourning.

Installation of Gentile Cults

⁴¹Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, ⁴²and that all should give up their particular customs. ⁴³All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. ⁴⁴And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, ⁴⁵to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, ⁴⁶to defile the sanctuary and the priests, ⁴⁷to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, ⁴⁸and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, ⁴⁹so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. ⁵⁰He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."

⁵¹In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. ⁵²Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; ⁵³they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

⁵⁴Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, ⁵⁵and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. ⁵⁶The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. ⁵⁷Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. ⁵⁸They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. ⁵⁹On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. ⁶⁰According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, ⁶¹and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

⁶²But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. ⁶³They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. ⁶⁴Very great wrath came upon Israel.

1 Maccabees 2

Mattathias and His Sons

¹In those days Mattathias son of John son of Simeon, a priest of the family of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein. ²He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, ³Simon called Thassi, ⁴Judas called Maccabeus, ⁵Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus. ⁶He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem, ⁷and said,

“Alas! Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city, and to live there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens? ⁸Her temple has become like a person without honor; ⁹her glorious vessels have been carried into exile. Her infants have been killed in her streets, her youths by the sword of the foe. ¹⁰What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils? ¹¹All her adornment has been taken away; no longer free, she has become a slave. ¹²And see, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned them. ¹³Why should we live any longer?”

¹⁴Then Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.

Pagan Worship Refused

¹⁵The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modein to make them offer sacrifice. ¹⁶Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. ¹⁷Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: “You are a leader, honored and great in this town, and supported by sons and brothers. ¹⁸Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the people of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the Friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts.”

¹⁹But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: “Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, everyone of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, ²⁰I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. ²¹Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. ²²We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left.”

²³When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. ²⁴When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. ²⁵At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. ²⁶Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu.

²⁷Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: “Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!” ²⁸Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town.

²⁹At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to live there, ³⁰they, their sons, their wives, and their livestock, because troubles pressed heavily upon them. ³¹And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that those who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. ³²Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. ³³They said to them, “Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live.” ³⁴But they said, “We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day.” ³⁵Then the enemy quickly attacked them. ³⁶But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, ³⁷for they said, “Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly.” ³⁸So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons.

³⁹When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, ³⁹they mourned for them deeply. ⁴⁰And all said to their neighbors: “If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth.” ⁴¹So they made this decision that day: “Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places.”

Counter-Attack

⁴²Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law. ⁴³And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. ⁴⁴They organized an army, and struck down

sinner in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. ⁴⁵And Mattathias and his friends went around and tore down the altars; ⁴⁶they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. ⁴⁷They hunted down the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands. ⁴⁸They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

The Last Words of Mattathias

⁴⁹Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: "Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. ⁵⁰Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors.

⁵¹"Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. ⁵²Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? ⁵³Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. ⁵⁴Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. ⁵⁵Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. ⁵⁶Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. ⁵⁷David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. ⁵⁸Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. ⁵⁹Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. ⁶⁰Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions.

⁶¹"And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength. ⁶²Do not fear the words of sinners, for their splendor will turn into dung and worms. ⁶³Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. ⁶⁴My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor.

⁶⁵"Here is your brother Simeon who, I know, is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. ⁶⁶Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. ⁶⁷You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. ⁶⁸Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law."

⁶⁹Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his ancestors. ⁷⁰He died in the one hundred forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.

1 Maccabees 3

The Early Victories of Judas

¹Then his son Judas, who was called Maccabeus, took command in his place. ²All his brothers and all who had joined his father helped him; they gladly fought for Israel.

³He extended the glory of his people. Like a giant he put on his breastplate; he bound on his armor of war and waged battles, protecting the camp by his sword. ⁴He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion's cub roaring for prey. ⁵He searched out and pursued those who broke the law; he burned those who troubled his people. ⁶Lawbreakers shrank back for fear of him; all the evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand. ⁷He embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds, and his memory is blessed forever. ⁸He went through the cities of Judah; he destroyed the ungodly out of the land; thus he turned away wrath from Israel. ⁹He was renowned to the ends of the earth; he gathered in those who were perishing.

¹⁰Apollonius now gathered together Gentiles and a large force from Samaria to fight against Israel. ¹¹When Judas learned of it, he went out to meet him, and he defeated and killed him. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled. ¹²Then they seized their spoils; and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and used it in battle the rest of his life.

¹³When Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large company, including a body of faithful soldiers who stayed with him and went out to battle, ¹⁴he said, "I will make a name for myself and win honor in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king's command." ¹⁵Once again a strong army of godless men went up with him to help him, to take vengeance on the Israelites.

¹⁶When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company. ¹⁷But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, "How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and so strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today." ¹⁸Judas replied, "It is easy for many to be hemmed in by few, for in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between saving by many or by few. ¹⁹It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven. ²⁰They come against us in great insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; ²¹but we fight for our lives and our laws. ²²He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them."

²³When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him. ²⁴They pursued them down the descent of Beth-horon to the plain; eight hundred of them fell, and the rest fled into the land of the Philistines. ²⁵Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell on the Gentiles all around them. ²⁶His fame reached the king, and the Gentiles talked of the battles of Judas.

The Policy of Antiochus

²⁷When King Antiochus heard these reports, he was greatly angered; and he sent and gathered all the forces of his kingdom, a very strong army. ²⁸He opened his coffers and gave a year's pay to his forces, and ordered them to be ready for any need. ²⁹Then he saw that the money in the treasury was exhausted, and that the revenues from the country were small because of the dissension and disaster that he had caused in the land by abolishing the laws that had existed from the earliest days. ³⁰He feared that he might not have such funds as he had

before for his expenses and for the gifts that he used to give more lavishly than preceding kings. ³¹He was greatly perplexed in mind; then he determined to go to Persia and collect the revenues from those regions and raise a large fund.

³²He left Lysias, a distinguished man of royal lineage, in charge of the king's affairs from the river Euphrates to the borders of Egypt. ³³Lysias was also to take care of his son Antiochus until he returned. ³⁴And he turned over to Lysias half of his forces and the elephants, and gave him orders about all that he wanted done. As for the residents of Judea and Jerusalem, ³⁵Lysias was to send a force against them to wipe out and destroy the strength of Israel and the remnant of Jerusalem; he was to banish the memory of them from the place, ³⁶settle aliens in all their territory, and distribute their land by lot. ³⁷Then the king took the remaining half of his forces and left Antioch his capital in the one hundred and forty-seventh year. He crossed the Euphrates river and went through the upper provinces.

Preparations for Battle

³⁸Lysias chose Ptolemy son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor and Gorgias, able men among the Friends of the king, ³⁹and sent with them forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to go into the land of Judah and destroy it, as the king had commanded. ⁴⁰So they set out with their entire force, and when they arrived they encamped near Emmaus in the plain. ⁴¹When the traders of the region heard what was said to them, they took silver and gold in immense amounts, and fetters, and went to the camp to get the Israelites for slaves. And forces from Syria and the land of the Philistines joined with them.

⁴²Now Judas and his brothers saw that misfortunes had increased and that the forces were encamped in their territory. They also learned what the king had commanded to do to the people to cause their final destruction. ⁴³But they said to one another, "Let us restore the ruins of our people, and fight for our people and the sanctuary." ⁴⁴So the congregation assembled to be ready for battle, and to pray and ask for mercy and compassion.

⁴⁵Jerusalem was uninhabited like a wilderness; not one of her children went in or out. The sanctuary was trampled down, and aliens held the citadel; it was a lodging place for the Gentiles. Joy was taken from Jacob; the flute and the harp ceased to play.

⁴⁶Then they gathered together and went to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem, because Israel formerly had a place of prayer in Mizpah. ⁴⁷They fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and tore their clothes. ⁴⁸And they opened the book of the law to inquire into those matters about which the Gentiles consulted the likenesses of their gods. ⁴⁹They also brought the vestments of the priesthood and the first fruits and the tithes, and they stirred up the nazirites who had completed their days; ⁵⁰and they cried aloud to Heaven, saying,

"What shall we do with these? Where shall we take them? ⁵¹Your sanctuary is trampled down and profaned, and your priests mourn in humiliation. ⁵²Here the Gentiles are assembled against us to destroy us; you know what they plot against us. ⁵³How will we be able to withstand them, if you do not help us?"

⁵⁴Then they sounded the trumpets and gave a loud shout. ⁵⁵After this Judas appointed leaders of the people, in charge of thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens. ⁵⁶Those who were building houses, or were about to be married, or were planting a vineyard, or were faint-hearted, he told to go home again, according to the law. ⁵⁷Then the army marched out and encamped to the south of Emmaus.

⁵⁸And Judas said, "Arm yourselves and be courageous. Be ready early in the morning to fight with these Gentiles who have assembled against us to destroy us and our sanctuary. ⁵⁹It is better for us to die in battle than to see the misfortunes of our nation and of the sanctuary. ⁶⁰But as his will in heaven may be, so shall he do."

1 Maccabees 4

The Battle at Emmaus

¹Now Gorgias took five thousand infantry and one thousand picked cavalry, and this division moved out by night ²to fall upon the camp of the Jews and attack them suddenly. Men from the citadel were his guides. ³But Judas heard of it, and he and his warriors moved out to attack the king's force in Emmaus ⁴while the division was still absent from the camp. ⁵When Gorgias entered the camp of Judas by night, he found no one there, so he looked for them in the hills, because he said, "These men are running away from us."

⁶At daybreak Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men, but they did not have armor and swords such as they desired. ⁷And they saw the camp of the Gentiles, strong and fortified, with cavalry all around it; and these men were trained in war. ⁸But Judas said to those who were with him, "Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. ⁹Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. ¹⁰And now, let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us and remember his covenant with our ancestors and crush this army before us today. ¹¹Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel."

¹²When the foreigners looked up and saw them coming against them, ¹³they went out from their camp to battle. Then the men with Judas blew their trumpets ¹⁴and engaged in battle. The Gentiles were crushed, and fled into the plain, ¹⁵and all those in the rear fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, and to the plains of Idumea, and to Azotus and Jamnia; and three thousand of them fell. ¹⁶Then Judas and his force turned back from pursuing them, ¹⁷and he said to the people, "Do not be greedy for plunder, for there is a battle before us; ¹⁸Gorgias and his force are near us in the hills. But stand now against our enemies and fight them, and afterward seize the plunder boldly."

¹⁹Just as Judas was finishing this speech, a detachment appeared, coming out of the hills. ²⁰They saw that their army had been put to flight, and that the Jews were burning the camp, for the smoke that was seen showed what had happened. ²¹When they perceived this, they were greatly frightened, and when they also saw the army of Judas drawn up in the plain for battle, ²²they all fled into the land of the Philistines. ²³Then Judas returned to plunder the camp, and they seized a great amount of gold and silver, and cloth dyed blue and sea purple, and great riches. ²⁴On their return they sang hymns and praises to Heaven—"For he is good, for his mercy endures forever." ²⁵Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day.

First Campaign of Lysias

²⁶Those of the foreigners who escaped went and reported to Lysias all that had happened. ²⁷When he heard it, he was perplexed and discouraged, for things had not happened to Israel as he had intended, nor had they turned out as the king had ordered. ²⁸But the next year he mustered sixty thousand picked infantry and five thousand cavalry to subdue them. ²⁹They came into Idumea and encamped at Beth-zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men.

³⁰When he saw that their army was strong, he prayed, saying, “Blessed are you, O Savior of Israel, who crushed the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of your servant David, and gave the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor. ³¹Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. ³²Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. ³³Strike them down with the sword of those who love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns.”

³⁴Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action. ³⁵When Lysias saw the rout of his troops and observed the boldness that inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he withdrew to Antioch and enlisted mercenaries in order to invade Judea again with an even larger army.

Cleansing and Dedication of the Temple

³⁶Then Judas and his brothers said, “See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.” ³⁷So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. ³⁸There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. ³⁹Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes ⁴⁰and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

⁴¹Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. ⁴²He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, ⁴³and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. ⁴⁴They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. ⁴⁵And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, ⁴⁶and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. ⁴⁷Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. ⁴⁸They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. ⁴⁹They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. ⁵⁰Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. ⁵¹They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

⁵²Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, ⁵³they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. ⁵⁴At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. ⁵⁵All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. ⁵⁶So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. ⁵⁷They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. ⁵⁸There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

⁵⁹Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

⁶⁰At that time they fortified Mount Zion with high walls and strong towers all around, to keep the Gentiles from coming and trampling them down as they had done before. ⁶¹Judas stationed a garrison there to guard it; he also fortified Beth-zur to guard it, so that the people might have a stronghold that faced Idumea.