

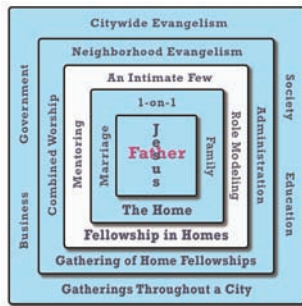
Preparing Home Fellowship Families for the Dark Days of Chastisement

Lesson 1

Topic 1. Introduction

Topic 2. Do You Understand The Present Times And What God Wants You To Do?

Topic 3. The Entire Bible Is God's Word For All Ages



“Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” (Isaiah 58:12)

Topic 1.

Introduction

Not long after Peter's message at Pentecost, the new converts *“broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved”* (Acts 2:46,47). Throughout the Newer Testament this pattern of followers of Jesus fellowshiping in homes is repeated (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philemon 2; Colossians 4:15).

Realize that this practice of meeting in one another's homes didn't start in the first century. Our Father had been fostering the accountability and intimacy of gathering in homes *centuries before* the first coming of Jesus. In later lessons we'll discuss why.

Tragically, when Christianity became institutionalized and organized according to prevailing Roman and Greek customs, the biblical purposes for meeting in homes was lost as pagan religious forms and rituals became the norm. But now our Father is restoring fellowship in homes as *extended spiritual family* to prepare His children before He chastises this

nation for the sin of rejecting His Son Jesus and for living in blatant disobedience and rebellion against His Word.

Like the most caring of all fathers, our heavenly Father has been warning this nation for decades about its sinful disregard for Him and His standards. At the same time, He is preparing His children to be His ambassadors during the formidable times of trial that are coming.

The downward spiral of this land didn't happen in just one generation. Way back in 1965 Ruth Graham lamented, **“If God doesn't soon bring judgment upon America, He'll have to go back and apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah!”** Our holy God doesn't apologize! To the contrary, in the biblical pattern of His response when widespread depravity rules a nation, He's going to chastise us so that we might repent.

Our Father is also preparing His children to fellowship in homes as extended family in order to be His **Repairers** and **Restorers**. As you discuss these lessons on home fellowship families, may you be among those He can count on to raise up the age-old foundations of loving Him by *obeying His commands and bringing Him glory.* *Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz*

Topic 2.

Do You Understand The Present Times And What God Wants You To Do?

We hope you'll seriously consider this reality: you're alive at this point in time because *our Sovereign God has willed it!* If by His Spirit you can understand what He is doing NOW, you'll be better equipped to cooperate with the purposes He wants to fulfill through you (Ephesians 2:10). If you claim to be our Father's child, make sure your life purpose isn't contrary to the purpose and plans He has for you. As Gamaliel of old so wisely warned, *"But if it is from God... you will only find yourselves fighting against God"* (Acts 5:39). That's not a good place to be!

Each person who is called by our Father to become His child must overcome their innate inclination to see life from their own vantage point. That is, people generally make decisions in light of what's good for their own interests and well-being. It's so easy to deceive ourselves that we have control over our own destiny because we can make our own decisions. But nothing could be further from the truth of God's Word.

All too often we fail to consider how truly **SOVEREIGN** our Father is over everything. This sure fact was lodged deep within the writer: *"In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps"* (Proverbs 16:9). Every choice you opt for has already been foreseen by our Father. Your decisions fit into a larger plan that is unfolding according to His own predetermined will (Ephesians 1:11).

Don't think that means you can blindly do whatever you want, as fatalists erroneously believe! God reveals what He is doing among humanity, and/or what He demands of them. For example, when the tribes of Israel came with warriors to

Throughout these lessons on home fellowship families we'll be recommending other materials on our website for those who want a more extensive understanding of a particular topic.

anoint David as king, we're told there were *"men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do"* (1Chronicles 12:32). Only God could have given these men such wisdom. Throughout the Bible we see how He uses prophets to reveal His plans so that His people can cooperate with Him: *"Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets"* (Amos 3:7).

Think about the importance of this promise, remembering that prophets aren't confined to Older Testament service. In Acts 11:28 and 21:10 God sends forth the prophet Agabus, first to warn of an impending famine, and then to Paul to warn him of what awaited him in Jerusalem. Within His sovereign purpose our loving and compassionate Lord lets us know what He's about to do—though not all the details of when and how.

As His children we need to be careful that we're not presumptuous in the choices we make which don't reckon how truly almighty God is. The absolute rule of God is made clear as the writer warns against being over confident, deceived into believing we're in control of all circumstances around us:

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil" (James 4:13-16).

It's important to your own faith walk to recognize that our Father chose you to be alive at this specific time in this specific nation. And, it's essential that you respond humbly as His child in trusting Him with your plans.

Our Father has revealed to some of His own His intent to chastise this nation, and these servants understand what we who follow His Son must do!

- 1. What do you perceive our Father is doing in this nation at this time in accordance with His own will and purpose?**
- 2. Do you believe that this nation is currently in, or approaching, a time of His blessing? Or, are we facing His chastisement?**
- 3. Do you know what He expects of you to be prepared to serve His purposes?**

Preparing for seasons of suffering as a collective people is a theme found throughout Scripture. Ezra (9:6,7), Nehemiah (1:6), Jeremiah (14:20), and Daniel (9:16) all found themselves living in a time of God's chastisement because of the sins of their forefathers. Realizing why their painful situation had come about, these righteous men made known to those around them how they had violated their faithful God.

These grieving prophets had to endure the forewarned consequences of the sins of others before them even though they had walked uprightly themselves before their holy God. Even so, they found themselves repenting for the sins of their ancestors; they knew in their hearts that God's ways are fully just.

As this nation suffers chastisement that may lead to repentance, it just may be that our Father's children will be called upon to both sound the alarm as well as endure the painful consequences of our forefathers' tolerated sin.

Proverbial Wisdom

The book of Proverbs is a collection of broadly-accepted truths to help us *“attain wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair”* (1:2,3). These truths are meant to be acted on!

Throughout these lessons you'll see Proverbial Wisdom boxes like this which will offer you “gouge.” In the military, *gouge* is an essential piece of information which focuses on the heart of a matter, enabling people to maximize their opportunity for success in a particular endeavor. It's our hope to provide you with the “spiritual gouge” you need as a soldier in the Kingdom of God warring against a demonic empire that wants every soul in hell. Jesus came to destroy the devil's work (1John 3:8), and He has entrusted that legacy to all who follow Him so that freedom in Him will prevail (John 8:31-36).

Topic 3.

The Entire Bible Is God's Word For All Ages

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for every good work”* (2Timothy 3:16,17).

When Paul penned this admonition to his younger protégé, *“Scripture”* consisted only of the Older Testament, the Hebrew Bible. If the Hebrew text was *“useful”* for the first followers of Jesus, do you think it's any less necessary for you? Think of the entire Bible as a two-act play. If you have just the first act, the Older Testament, you're left incomplete because you haven't yet seen the prophe-

For further understanding of how to use the Bible as God intends, see an explanation of “apperception” in our online book, *Pastoring By Elders* (pages 25-28).

cies fulfilled in the coming Messiah. But if you rely only on the Newer Testament, you have no foundation on which to discern your own sinful depravity, nor can you fully appreciate the real meaning of the atonement of Jesus on your behalf.

Without the Older Testament, you'll lack the vital spiritual and historical foundations which guided the faith practices of His earliest followers. The two testaments are inseparably linked; both are essential if you hope to be a **rebuilder** and **restorer** our Father is seeking.

Like many church people today maybe you've discounted how indispensably important the Older Testament is to followers of Jesus. In your ignorance you may be committing the same sins as the Israelites. Paul points us back to the Hebrew text for a very important reason:

*“Nevertheless, **God was not pleased with most of [the Israelites]; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”** (1Corinthians 10:5,6,11,12).*

At the least, the Older Testament causes you to know what sins—violations against God—He may be warning you about. The entire Bible describes one and the same God Who doesn't change (James 1:17). How He deals with those who belong to Him hasn't changed either. For example, He warns the Israelites, “**Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you**” (Deuteronomy 8:5). And, He affirms the same promise to us who are His children through Jesus:

*“**God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”** (Hebrews 12:10,11).*

For both the children of Israel and followers of Jesus alike, our heavenly Father *chastens those He loves*. To the rebellious and the lawless, God's love being manifested through discipline seems harsh. But as a Father He is enacting that which will cause us to change course from self-willed disobedience to responsive and trusting obedience. We're being trained!

On a broader scale, biblical Israel serves as an example to us today that God disciplines *entire nations*. And that chastening is what He is in the process of doing to the United States right now! If our Father is disciplining the United States, then it's important that you who follow Jesus as your Lord understand why He's doing this and what He is calling you to do to cooperate with Him. As He says through the writer to the Hebrews, His goal is to produce **righteousness** and **peace** in those who receive His discipline and are trained by it.

Even the pagan commander of the Babylonian army who captured Jerusalem understood that God allowed its destruction because of the sin and disobedience of the Jewish people:

*“**The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place. And now the LORD has brought it about; He has done just as He said He would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey Him**”* (Jeremiah 40:2,3).

Think about the ongoing sin and disobedience in this nation and maybe in your own life as well.

1. Where in your daily life do you see God uplifted and glorified by your attitude, words and actions?
2. How often do you and others close to you in the faith discuss how you can walk righteously together so that you are representing your Lord authentically?
3. Would you agree that God and His Word have been removed from every vestige of this society? How is He being mocked and blasphemed?
4. Do you think the God of the whole universe is not going to do something about this?

We'll discuss in our next lesson how God has disciplined this country several times in the past whenever we forsook serving Him and keeping His commands. Historically our Presidents and Congress called for public fasting, prayer, and repentance. Those voices are now silent, and we as a nation will face the consequences.

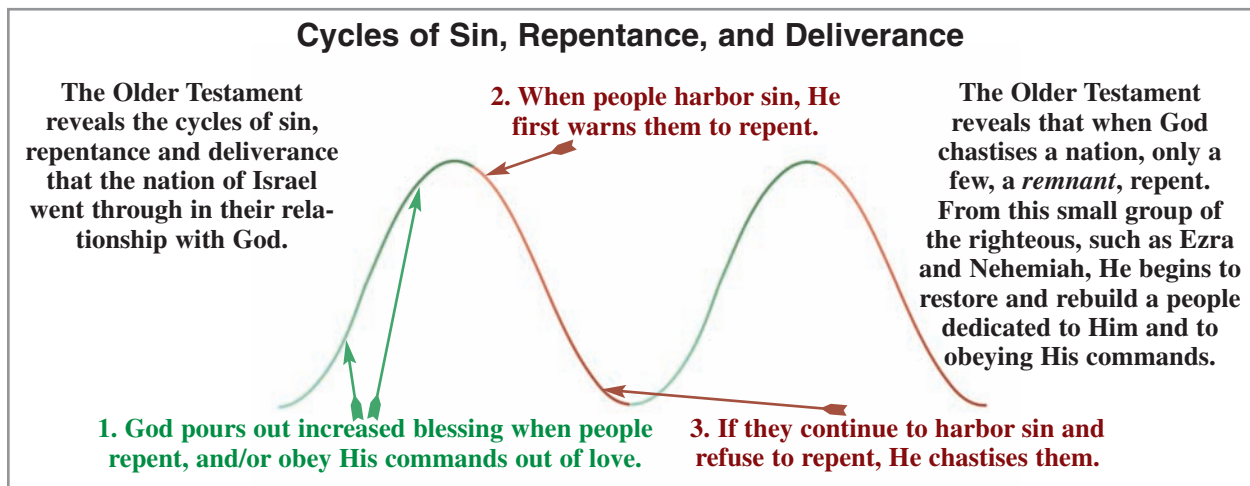
The earliest settlers of this nation, the Pilgrims and Puritans, as well as the men who founded the United States of America looked for guidance in the pattern found in the Older Testament between God and His people. Through the principles and standards set forth in that chronicle they clearly understood the holy regard for God and His ways which brought His blessing on a nation, and the

rebellious disobedience and disregard which resulted in its discipline. They learned this from the Hebrew Scriptures!

We today need to understand the bold, self-sacrificial choices this land's forefathers made for the collective well-being of the colonists, and the basis upon which they made those choices. Why? Because we desperately need the same devotion to God and *His entire Word* so that we too may make the same right choices. At the same time we collectively need to heed the repeated warning from God's Word: "*Do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion*" (Hebrews 3:15).

A specific thread runs from the Older and Newer Testaments, through the unwavering beliefs of the Founding Fathers, down to us today who hunger for the righteousness and peace that God's discipline is intended to produce. But if you're among those who discount the importance of the Older Testament in your life journey in Jesus, the very Word which He Himself made full the meaning, then please reconsider seriously your misguided stance.

God has made sure both the Older Testament and the Newer Testament comprise the Bible as a continuum of truth, and you need to know why He's done this!



The Same God of BOTH Testaments

“Observe [My commands] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

(Deuteronomy 4:6).

Our God chose the Israelites as His own precious people because of His undeserved love and His promise to the Patriarchs (Deuteronomy 9:56). He wasn't surprised they were stiff-necked and rebellious (Deuteronomy 9:24; Ezekiel 2:3). He still loved them, giving them righteous commands to live by so they might show themselves wise to the nations around them. As a Father Who knows and responds best, He disciplined them when they defiantly rebelled and disobeyed His good and righteous ways.

While the Israelites were still wandering in the desert He explained His conditions for blessing them when they reached the Promised Land:

*“Therefore you shall **keep every commandment** which I command you today, that you **may be strong**, and go in and **possess the land** which you cross over to possess, and that you **may prolong your days** in the land which the LORD swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’”*

God then revealed a key difference between how they'd be *dependent on Him* for their harvest, and how *self-dependent* they'd been in Egypt for their crops:

*“The land you are entering to take over is **not like the land of Egypt**, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and **irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden**. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and*

Proverbial Wisdom

There's no doubt that the United States has been a prosperous nation in the past. But have you considered that this prosperity continued because God was blessing the righteousness of *past generations*? The Older Testament reveals that He blessed Israel because of the righteousness of Abraham (2Kings 13:23). The Newer Testament testifies that God loves the Jews and has confirmed His promises to them because of the patriarchs (Romans 11:28; 15:8). You'll see in the next lesson: the blessings we've enjoyed came through the righteousness of our forefathers. But something is changing.

Has it crossed your mind that God is removing His blessing from this nation as He prepares to chastise us? Consider what He promised Israel *if they obeyed Him*: *“For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will **borrow from none**. You will rule over many nations but **none will rule over you**”* (Deuteronomy 15:6).

The USA is now the largest borrowing nation in the world, owing trillions of dollars in debt we can't pay back. We're constantly engaged in conflicts around the world, believing we're the “good guys.” But since World War II we haven't won a war; instead we've left other nations in shambles and chaos. If we truly were a righteous nation, God would have kept this promise: *“When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, **He makes even his enemies live at peace with him**”* (Proverbs 16:7).

We're living in a time when not only are His blessings on this nation being withheld, but His means of punishment for sin are intensifying: sword (through war), famine (through drought and floods), and plague (through viruses). Ask our Father: **Are we in a season of Your judgment, or of Your blessing?** When you know, then act accordingly. It's either a time of repentance for sin, or a time of thanksgiving for well-being. It's critical you know which one.

valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.”

Now comes the condition for receiving His bountiful blessings:

*“So **IF** you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied” (Deuteronomy 11:8-15).*

Lest Israel forget their responsibility in this glorious privilege to love and serve the One True God, He reminds them again:

“Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do” (Deuteronomy 29:9).

Earlier in Deuteronomy 28 God confirmed that He would bless the Israelites for their obedience and chastise them when they violated His commands. The books of Judges and 2 Kings reveal the ups and downs of Israel’s relationship with their God. When the people kept His commands, or repented and returned to God, He blessed them—even by delivering them from their enemies. And when they sinned by failing to love Him by keeping His commands, He first warned them, then allowed them to be oppressed by their enemies, or sent famine and drought upon them. All of Psalm 107 aptly captures the repeated cycles of chastisement and repentance: *“Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress.”*

Whatever you claim in your relationship with our Lord must be lived out in both your heart’s desire and your response to keep His commands. This obedience evidences your love for both our Lord and for one another, and is empowered by the Spirit within you. What is the connection between love and obedience?

“Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to him” (John 14:21).

“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands. This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome” (1John 5:2,3).

We show our love for each other by obeying our Lord’s commands. Because of our love for Him, they aren’t a burden. We aren’t trying to gain anything from God through our obedience, nor can we. Rather, out of love for our heavenly Father, we want to obey the righteous standards He has established for His children.

If God is about to chastise this nation, *“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).*

- 1. Describe what you believe about the Older Testament. In what ways do you see it as important for followers of Jesus?**
- 2. Describe your understanding of how your heavenly Father views this nation.**
- 3. In your own faith walk, how conscious are you of God’s divine plans being carried out all around you?**
- 4. If you believe the Older Testament is just “law” and the Newer Testament is “grace”, do you think the Ten Commandments apply any longer? Does God?**