

Central Study Hour – Sabbath School Lesson Notes

“The Least of These”: Lesson 2, “Blueprint for a Better World”

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read the title. *Wouldn't a better world be a place where people treat each other better?*

Read the Memory verse. *Did you know that this verse came from the Old Testament?*

Through people, such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and many others, we see God yearning to rebuild broken relationships with human beings. It wasn't just for their own personal benefit, but to include all other people in sharing the blessings of a benevolent God.

Read Gen. 12:2-3 (from the narrative). “The blessing was to come through the nation of Israel and, ultimately the Messiah.”

However, long before the Messiah came, God gave Israel laws, statutes, and regulations to guide them to principled living that is inherent with His blessings. This was to be shared with the world.

SUNDAY: “The God Who Hears”

Read Ex. 3:7 (from the narrative). 400 years was “a long time to wait, especially when waiting in conditions of increasingly harsh slavery...God seemed silent.” Most Hebrews had given up. Then God appeared to Moses in a burning bush giving him the job “to go back to the Israelites in Egypt with the message that God had heard and seen their oppression—and, yes, He did care.”

Read Ex. 3:16-17. At first the people responded well (**Read also Ex. 4:31**). They exclaimed, “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; our God will deliver us from this bondage!” Then, “**they bowed their heads and worshipped.**”

Share highlights from the bottom two paragraphs.

Was Israel the only suffering people that God ever took notice of?

Discuss briefly the questions in the box at the bottom of the page.

MONDAY: “The Ten Commandments”

Read Matt. 22:37-40. *How does Jesus' summary of the commandments help your understanding as you read each of the Ten Commandments?* His summary shows that each of the 10 Commandments is about love. These ten are the “core principles on which the nation of Israel is founded.” They are “specific commands about how human beings could best live out their love for God [1-4] and love for each other [5-10].”

Share highlights from the 2nd paragraph (applications of the 6th and 8th commandments from *Patriarchs and Prophets* pages 308-309. See also Teachers' Comments, p. 28 middle paragraph, also dealing with the 6th commandment).

Read/Share last two paragraphs.

Briefly discuss the 2 questions in the box at the bottom of the page. It's like the pharisees. *Is it easier to convince yourself of how good you are when your thinking is narrow and superficial?*

TUESDAY: "Slaves, Widows, Fatherless, Foreigners"

Read Ex. 23:9 and Ex. 22:22-23. *What three types of people does God specifically warn should not be taken advantage of? Foreigners, widows, and the fatherless. Why do these three groups get special mention? Likely because they are most easily taken advantage of.*

Reads/share the first paragraph. Sometimes it's very important to remember! It helps people to be more understanding, to be more grateful.

"After the giving of the Ten Commandments" in **Exodus 20**, God gave Moses "detailed instructions as to how these grand commands should be lived out in Israelite society. Even before the instructions for building the tabernacle, God gives three chapters of laws [**Exodus 21-23**] about such things as the appropriate treatment of slaves...laws related to property, laws for everyday living, and principles for establishing courts" and more.

Share highlights of the last paragraph. Teacher: Mention where it fits in, that God gave the gleaner opportunity rather than government surplus handouts. *Where did we see that lived out in the Bible?* The story of Ruth.

Ask the question from the box at the bottom of the page.

WEDNESDAY: "Second Tithing"

Read the title. *We know what tithing is, but what is second tithing?*

Malachi 3:10 is just one place in the Bible where we see believers are to return 10% of their income—or "increase" to support God's work. This is the first tithe.

Read Numbers 18:21. *Who was to be supported by the first tithe? Only the Levites.*

Was this 10% the sum of all their giving? No. It was just a beginning point.

Studies in the Old Testament on Israelite giving under Levitical law reveals that they gave one fourth of their yearly income to support the Levites (which include the priests), the sanctuary, and to help the poor.

This is also mentioned in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 527. "The contributions required of the Hebrews for religious and charitable purposes amounted to fully one fourth of their income."

Read or share highlights from the last 3 paragraphs.

Of course, this second tithe is what we call offerings. *Why is it sometimes referred to as a second tithe?* It is potentially another 10%. *Did you realize before studying this lesson, how much it should be....for those who blessed and able?*

Share the Illustrations from the Teachers' Comments (Three kinds of givers, bottom of p. 28; and Anthony Rossi, top of p. 29). Anthony Rossi paid a 5th tithe and was better off for it!

THURSDAY: "The Year of Jubilee"

What is the year of jubilee? First, we must understand that in the natural course of economic activity (personal finances) always there are some people who prove to have more natural ability, and sometimes better opportunities in handling money and business while others end up less fortunate. Ownership of land, especially in an agrarian society, is a central factor in economics. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, each Israelite family was eager to get land and have a new beginning, to start with a clean slate, so to speak.

Read or highlight the first two paragraphs. The point is that over time a great divide develops between the rich and the poor. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

“God’s solution was to decree that land could never be sold absolutely [final]. Instead, land would be sold only until the next ‘year of jubilee,’ at which time the land would revert to its allotted family.”

How was this to actually work? God gave them a 50 year cycle for each jubilee year. The key is that land prices would get lower as the jubilee approached. Meanwhile, any land that had been sold so that a family could get through hard times could be redeemed (bought back) at any time “by the seller or another member of the seller’s family.” This is what Boaz did for Noemi and Ruth. The closer it was to the jubilee the more possible it was to buy back one’s land because on the jubilee it would be returned free.

Read Leviticus 25:8-10, 12a, 16-17, 23-24. (Comment as needed).

Some families in the USA have had the same land over a few generations. I met several persons in Iowa who were the 4th and even 5th generation farming their land. However, land doesn’t run through generations of one family like it did in Israel in Old Testament times in which every family was given land to start with when they conquered Canaan. Therefore, as a nation, we can’t follow the jubilee literally even if everybody wanted to. Welfare programs and bankruptcy laws are an attempt to solve these economic problems today.

For those that are interested. Many have wondered if the principles of the jubilee can be better applied today. *Are there better ways for handling debt problems, relieving oppression, and regulating land ownership in our present society?* All of this requires more thought and study. It is highly recommended to read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 51, “God’s Care for the Poor,” especially the section on the jubilee starting on p. 533, and the principles that follow to the end of the chapter. *In this reading, what evidence can be found that Communism or pure socialism are not in God’s plan? In OT Israel, was the economy based on free enterprise? What was not free enterprise?*

Close the lesson: Read the last two paragraphs of Thursday’s narrative. *If God cares about the poor, shouldn’t we?* We need to love our neighbor as ourselves whether they are poor or rich! Read the 1st quotations from Friday’s page (and the 2nd one if desired).