



Lesson Overview

Week of May 9

1 Life Need:

Contrast true hope in Christ with false expectations.

2 Bible Learning:

Study the Lord's warning and promise to Israel.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Poster and reproducible hand-out—God's Faithful Prophets

3 Bible Application

Discuss God's surprising interventions in our lives.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Reproducible handout—God Surprised Them
■ A large sheet of paper, felt drawing pens

4 Life Response:

Promise to seek the Lord in every situation.

Church/Home Theme:
Revive Us Again,
O Lord!

Lesson Focus:
Seek the God
who upends our
expectations.

Lesson Scripture:
Isaiah 29:13-24

Isaiah: Offering Hope for the Future

Lip Service, But No Heart—God's people in Jerusalem talked religious, but their rituals had become a mere formality. The Lord used the prophet Isaiah to warn the people that their lips were saying one thing but their hearts were in a totally different place. Their leaders had allowed themselves to be lured into spiritual complacency, pride, immorality, and other worldly activities. They became blind to God's instructions and desires. Still, from this darkened place, God spoke hope and made promises for a bright future!

Isaiah said it was like the potter and the clay. God's people had decided the clay and the potter were equal. But God, the potter and creator, told the clay, His people, that they were misinformed. The clay cannot tell the potter what to do.

Hope in Darkness—But in the middle of this doom and gloom message, God sowed the seeds of hope. God promised restoration to Jerusalem for a remnant of His people who followed Him. The damaged land, incorrect thinking, and injustices would be turned into fruitful harvests, healed hearts, and opened eyes and ears. There would be laughter, dancing, and smiles again, though the wicked would bow low and endure endless suffering.

God's Promises—The real source of our blessing and help is the Lord—He always supplies. We bow down in humility as we acknowledge this truth, call Him holy, and abandon all other gods.

Isaiah prophesied during a critical time in Judah's history, when there was very little to look forward to. Yet, through His prophet Isaiah, God proclaimed hope. His hope and His promises are for His children today as well.

As Your Students Arrive

Ask your students to share about expectations they had growing up that have been fulfilled or not fulfilled. You might even write on a board or sheet of newsprint, "When I became an adult, I expected to do or be X." For instance, they expected they would grow up to be a fireman, and they didn't—or maybe they did. Introduce the lesson by letting the class know that this week's lesson focuses on how God's plan for us can upset our own plans and take us in an unexpected and surprising direction.

Link to Last Week: Allow some of your students to share the lies they heard and wrote down on their index cards this past week.

1 Life Need

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Lesson 10 • May 9 • Page 68

Isaiah: Offering Hope for the Future

Akira sat stonefaced. She tried to get out of coming to church this morning, but her parents insisted. Chloe, one of Akira's newfound friends, had died in a car accident seven months ago. Akira's mother said she needed to go through the grieving process. Akira did not think she would ever move from the second stage—anger! Still, Akira felt as though she could not escape the eye and the love of the Lord.

Today, a visiting youth minister was speaking to the young adults. He gave his testimony about a time of rebellion after he had come to Christ. The Lord had not provided opportunities that he wanted. The youth minister found that the path he eventually followed had been the best all along.

His words began to chip away at Akira's heart. She had wanted to be part of Chloe's pretty, popular, and plush world. Akira started running after materialism and began to despise the things of God. She had been wrong.

"Can we visit and pray together?" a girl said, intruding on Akira's thoughts. "The minister asked us to pair off, share some struggles, and pray together."

After the service, Akira met her parents in the church lobby. "How was youth fellowship?" asked her mother.

"All right," she said, to which her parents exchanged hopeful looks.

1. How do you react when things don't go your way? Explain why.

2. What things do we often pursue that offer only false hope? Why do we do that?

3. As Christians, why do we need to live with expectancy and not expectations?

LESSON FOCUS: Seek the God who upends our expectations.

Contrast true hope in Christ with false expectations.

Form small groups to discuss **Questions 1, 2, and 3** in the student book. Question 1 urges students to examine their behavior during the weakest moments of their lives. Some will react with spiritual maturity; others will respond with regrettable anger and bitterness; and still others will subdue their negative feelings while harboring a discontentment. What is important in any reaction is that we continue in faith—either praising the Lord or asking Him for forgiveness.

Ask students to be specific with their answers to Question 2. Examples might include the pursuit of wealth, career advancement, and even the love of a particular person. On the one hand, what is hoped for may never occur, and on the other hand, fulfillment of that hope may not be satisfying. Moreover, what we often hope for is based on fantasy and not on reality.

For Question 3, students, in their own ways, will indicate that "expectancy" is being alert to how Christ is involved in our lives, while "expectation" is wanting something to happen for our benefit. Whereas walking with the Lord in expectancy stirs excitement in us, turning to Him in expectation for what we want Him to do for us arouses anxiety in us. The contrast in Christian living is clear.

2 Bible Learning

Study the Lord's warning and promise to Israel.



During the long history of ancient Israel, there were times when God's people were devoted to

the Lord and obedient to His statutes. During those times, they flourished because of God's blessings. At other times, God's people were rebellious and immoral. Therefore, they incurred the Lord's wrath. Nevertheless, even during those times, God did not abandon them. For example, when the people of Judah suffered exile in Babylon, words of hope written by the prophet Isaiah over a century earlier encouraged them that the Lord would comfort them and bring them back to the promised land despite their hardships and sins.

On the poster handout, read paragraph

six and note the photo of the Dead Sea scroll of the Book of Isaiah on display at the Israel Museum.

FALSE PROFESSION OF FAITH

Read Isaiah 29:13-16, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture:

- The Lord God spoke to the people of Israel through His prophet Isaiah on many occasions; on this occasion, He was very critical of their hypocritical worship.

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Week of May 9 • Page 69

False Profession of Faith

Isaiah 29:13-16, KJV

13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

15 Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?

16 Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

Isaiah 29:13-16, NIV

¹³The Lord says:

"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

¹⁴Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish."

¹⁵Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD,

who do their work in darkness and think,

"Who sees us? Who will know?"

¹⁶You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!

Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it,

"You did not make me"? Can the pot say to the potter, "You know nothing"?

Unlike people, the Lord is not impressed with outward appearances or actions that are meant to please others instead of Him. Isaiah saw that God looked into the heart of the Israelites' worship and found their hearts were far from Him.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Role of a Prophet

The Old Testament prophets typically had a twofold mission. The first was reminding the wayward people of God's commands with the goal of calling them back to Him. The second was foretelling future events, often to let the people know what would happen based upon their response to God's call for repentance. Our God is gracious, and all through history He has warned His people by letting them know where they have strayed and then warning them of the consequences of their choices. Our lesson's Scripture passage is no exception to this twofold process. It begins with Isaiah telling the people what God thought of their hypocritical worship and then continues with the prophet revealing what they could expect based upon how they responded to the Lord.



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 1174-1175 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*.

- On the one hand, their words of worship seemed to pay homage to Him, and yet, their hearts were empty of praise for their God.
- In fact, the Hebrews were merely following their religious traditions, pretending to be devout in their devotion to God.
- In consequence to their spiritual hypocrisy, the Lord promised to vanquish those who regarded themselves as knowledgeable through astounding demonstrations of His power.
- Moreover, woe to those who plot in secret, trying to hide what they do from God.

- Isaiah then related to his listeners the image of a potter and his clay pot, in which the pot denounces the potter as his maker, implying that the Israelites have the same attitude toward the Lord God.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

God pointed out that the people gave a good show of worship with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. Their hypocritical worship was simply going through the motions in accordance with what the religious leaders taught them.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

When the people weren't engaged in hypocritical worship, they lived and behaved as if God could not see them. As the clay object rejects the very existence of the potter who made it, so too did the people live as if God did not exist and that there would be no accounting to their Creator for their actions.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

God promised that the day would come when the so-called wisdom of their wise men would perish, and the intelligence of their scholars would vanish. All that they had foolishly trusted in would be gone.

FUTURE PROSPECT FOR JUSTICE

Now read Isaiah 29:17-21, and note these summary statements:

- Despite God's description of doom and gloom to Isaiah's audience, He promised the Jews that He would restore them to prosperity.
- Isaiah noted that the moral change in the Jewish nation would be great and that the deaf would hear and the blind would see.
- God's promise was not only a physical promise, but more importantly a spiritual promise so that once again the humble and needy among His people would be filled

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Week of May 9 • Page 70

Instead of worshipping the Lord out of love for Him, they just went through the ritual motions of worship.

The Israelites also sinned and thought no one could see them, not even God. Therefore, the Lord promised that what was coming upon them would be a (terrible) wonder to behold. Those whom they considered wise would perish, and the understanding of the prudent would cease to exist. By thinking they were hiding their evil ways from God, these sinners had turned everything upside down in their folly.

Just as a clay object can't deny that the potter made it, so too would it be foolish for people to deny their Creator. Yet, when people act as if what they do is hidden from God and will not be held accountable to Him, they truly are denying the existence of the Lord to whom we all will one day answer.

4. How did the people approach God in worship?

5. What attitude did the people have as they lived and behaved as they saw fit?

6. What did God promise would happen as a result of their hypocrisy?

Future Prospect for Justice

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| <p><i>Isaiah 29:17-21, KJV</i></p> <p>17 Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?</p> <p>18 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.</p> <p>19 The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.</p> | <p><i>Isaiah 29:17-21, NIV</i></p> <p>¹⁷In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?</p> <p>¹⁸In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.</p> <p>¹⁹Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.</p> |
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with overflowing joy in their Lord God.

• Meanwhile, those who had been merciless and humiliating toward God's faithful will vanish from their presence, for God will obliterate those who practice evil.

• Indeed, those evil people are the ones who falsely accuse the innocent both publicly and in court, depriving them of justice.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

In the day that the Lord would set things right, moral fruitfulness would abound, and His Word would resound in the land and shine forth as a beacon of hope. Even the deaf would hear and the blind would see His goodness. Therefore, on that day the humble and poor would rejoice in the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

Isaiah described these people as

BIBLE EXTRA

God Expects True Justice from His People

A favorite verse of many of God's people states succinctly what He wants of us: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8). This beloved verse captures perfectly the heart of God that Isaiah revealed to his readers. God requires that His people act justly and mercifully. Such people will also be more likely to walk humbly with Him. Unlike the ruthless, scorners, and those who search out evil, God's people should defend the poor widows and orphans and be sure that the afflicted and needy receive real justice (Ps. 82:3). True justice is more important to God than any sacrifice His people could bring to Him (Prov. 21:3). How we treat people is an accurate indicator of our relationship with the Lord. With that in mind, we would do well to take heed of what He says to the sheep on His right and the goats on His left (Matt. 25:31-46).

ruthless, scornful, and having an eye for evil. They treated the poor without mercy, mocked God and His people, and falsely accused the innocent to deny them true justice.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 9

One day, the Lord would set the scales of justice right. The ruthless would come to nothing, the mockers would be consumed, and those evil-eyed perjurers would be cut down as God dealt with them in His perfect justice.

FAITHFUL PROMISE OF HOPE

While reading Isaiah 29:22-24, note these important points in your class discussion:

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Week of May 9 • Page 71

KJV

20 For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off:

21 That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.

NIV

²⁰The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down—
²¹those who with a word make someone out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice.

In the future, when God intervenes to bless Jerusalem, the moral change in the Jewish nation will be as great as if the usually forested Lebanon were turned into a field and vice versa. Ears will be unstopped, and eyes opened—both physically and spiritually—to discern the Lord's truth.

When this happens, two kinds of people will rejoice: the humble and the poor. Jesus said the "poor in spirit" would be blessed (Matt. 5:3)—those who recognize their spiritual neediness apart from God and therefore turn to Him in faith.

The Lord also pronounced a blessing on the humble, who would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). Isaiah proclaimed that the humble and poor would rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

The poor and the humble will also rejoice because God will, in due time, judge the perpetrators of injustice. These wrongdoers are in three categories: the ruthless, the scorner, and the one with an eye for evil. The ruthless have no mercy for the less fortunate. The scorners mock God. Isaiah said that they would be consumed and disappear from the face of the earth. Finally, those with an eye for evil—such as false accusers in court—will one day face their day of reckoning.

7. *Who would one day rejoice in the Lord?*

8. *How does Isaiah describe the people who practiced injustice?*

9. *What would happen to those who dealt with the poor unjustly?*

• Isaiah began this section by noting that the Lord “redeemed Abraham.” God delivered Abraham from his pagan background when He brought him into the land of Canaan.

• The Lord promised Jacob’s descendants that they would no longer live in shame and sadness.

• It is then that God will work among their children, for they will truly honor God’s name and be in amazement of His holiness.

• Isaiah noted that those among them who had strayed from the Lord would comprehend the reality of God and those who were complainers would be obedient to His commands.

Faithful Promise of Hope

Isaiah 29:22-24, KJV

22 Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale.

23 But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

24 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

Isaiah 29:22-24, NIV

²²Therefore this is what the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the descendants of Jacob:

“No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale.

²³When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

²⁴Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.”

Because true justice will prevail, Jacob’s descendants would no longer be ashamed. Furthermore, their faces would not turn ashen in fear or dread anymore. When people practice justice and walk in integrity, they will see their children sanctify the Holy One of Jacob by giving due reverence and honor to the God of Israel.

Our passage closes with two amazing truths. First, those who were wayward in spirit will come to understand the error of their ways. Second, those who murmured and complained against the Lord will be willing to receive instruction.

10. Why will Jacob no longer be ashamed?

11. Who will gain understanding and accept the teachings of the Lord?

12. How does this give God’s people hope for the future?

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 10

There will come a time when Jacob (the people of Israel) will no longer be ashamed because the people will see their children keep God’s name holy and stand in awe of Him. They will once again be faithful to Him.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 11

When that time comes, the Lord will turn the hearts of His people back to Him. This means that even those who have erred and been wayward in spirit will gain true understanding. And those who have murmured complaints against Him will come to accept God’s truth and instruction.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 12

These truths give us hope because God can upend our expectations and turn even bad to good by His power and grace. So, no matter how bad things are, or how far we or a loved one may have strayed, our loving God is more than able to turn things around and bring us back to Him.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

Lebanon

When the Hebrew Bible speaks of “Lebanon,” as in Isaiah 29:17, it is usually referring to a mountain range, parallel to the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Mt. Lebanon itself was known to its inhabitants as “the White Mountain.” Interestingly, the Hebrew word *laban* means “white.” The mountain is famous for its abundant cedar forests, whose towering trees were used by kings, such as Solomon, to construct their palaces.

Modern Lebanon is a small country bordered by Syria to the north and east, Israel to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. For much of its history, Lebanon has been a resort destination for wealthy Middle Easterners and Europeans. Today, violence has curbed its appeal.

3 Bible Application

Discuss God's surprising interventions in our lives.

What Jesus did on the Cross and how God raised Him from the dead were certainly unexpected. And yet, the Lord continuing to intercede in our lives can be surprising as well. Allow students to select the activity they would like to do. If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Give a large sheet of paper and felt pens to the group making the mural. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.



Handout:

'God Surprised Them'

Answer the questions, then share your answers. The Bible is full of stories of God touching the lives of people in truly unexpected ways. The memorable stories of Sarah, Elijah, Mary Magdalene, and Paul can teach us about how the Lord astonishes us in the way He keeps His promises to us, in the way He communicates with us, in the way He has redeemed us, and in the way He heals our broken relationships with others.

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Week of May 9 • Page 73

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "Surprised by God!" and answer **Questions 13, 14, and 15** in the student book. We can take our eyes off of Christ and place them on the things that please us and so subtly steer us from the pursuit of God. It is human nature to consider far more those things that are tangible, and because God is seemingly not tangible, it is difficult to believe He is directly involved in our lives. Moreover, as the years pass from the time of our initial awakening to God, the more and more it seems He is simply "out there" beyond our lives.

'Surprised by Christ' Mural

On a large sheet of paper, work as a team to draw a picture of Jesus in the center with one hand reaching out. Then, draw images of yourselves in various situations in which God did something that was totally unexpected. You may have been at home, at work, on vacation, or in some other situation. After you finish, display your drawing on the class wall and explain to the class how the drawing expresses surprise at what God did in those situations.

Surprised by God!

In *Surprised by Joy* by C. S. Lewis, the author recounts his conversion to Christianity. His parents regularly took him to church in his hometown of Belfast, Northern Ireland, while he was growing up. But Lewis became bitter toward God when his mother became ill with cancer and died when he was only 10. "With my mother's death," he said, "all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life." Lewis became an atheist.

However, atheism did not bring him the "joy" he so much wanted. He called joy "an unsatisfied desire which in itself is more desirable than any other satisfaction." He looked for it in the many books he read, especially medieval literature and tales of myths and fantasies. But he would later write in *Surprised by Joy* that "a young man who wants to be a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere."

Instead of Lewis's readings leading him further from the "myth" of God, they began to lead him to the Lord. He discovered that what he originally called "the Christian mythology" was not a mythology like the others, but a true description of how the world has worked since the beginning. "All pleasures," he found, are "substitutes" for the true joy he eventually found in Christ. Lewis realized he had not been searching for God. God had searched for him—and found him through the unexpected means of literature.

Each one of us lives a unique life and has a unique relationship with our heavenly Father. Therefore, the Lord upends our expectations for lives unique to us in order to bring us to where and what He wants us to be.

13. *When have you looked for joy in places you did not find it?*

14. *Why do we expect God to work in the ways we want Him to work?*

15. *How has God upended your personal expectations in a way that has caused you to seek Him?*

4 Life Response

Promise to seek the Lord in every situation.

When God derails people's expectations, even Christians can become upset or disenchanted with His plans for their lives. It is then, more than ever, that we must place our trust and our hopes in Him and believe that the Lord truly desires the very best for us. Therefore, let us seek God in the same way the psalmist expressed his desire for the Lord: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God" (Ps. 42:1).

For this step, have your students read "The

Pursuit of God." They may write the letter on page 96 of their student book. If they finish writing their letters in class, they may want to share some of what they wrote as an encouragement to their classmates. They may instead want to finish their letters later and share them next week.

Give the class the opportunity to pray either silently or verbally. In their prayers, they can express their gratitude to God for the life they have in Christ, while asking Him to help them pursue Him with all their heart and mind.

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Note that there might be some students who are struggling with God about how their lives are in turmoil. Therefore, ask God to deepen their trust in Him with His wisdom and His strength. For the entire class, ask the Lord to renew our hopes in Him and not in worldly things. Finally, express the gratitude of all your students to the Lord for actively and lovingly guiding our lives in what is best for each one of us.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Jeremiah 38:14-23. Ask your students to think about what "listening devices" they use regularly—for example, a cell phone to hear and answer telephone calls.

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Week of May 9 • Page 74

The Pursuit of God

Much like the Israelites, we often stray from the Lord, placing our trust and expectations on false hopes rather than placing our hopes for today and the future on Christ. Nevertheless, the Lord is faithful and will not abandon those who truly seek Him.

► *Take a few minutes to write a letter to God. Begin by thanking Him for giving you the wisdom to comprehend how fleeting are the hopes of the world and how everlasting and priceless are the hopes you have in Christ. Also, thank Him for being actively involved in your life—even, at times, upsetting your personal expectations. Promise the Lord that you will continue to seek Him, and relate how you will pursue His presence, His guidance, and His love.*

KEY VERSE

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. —Isaiah 29:24, KJV

Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction. —Isaiah 29:24, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 10 through May 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Acts 4:13-22—Apostles Speak Truth to Council.
- Tues.** Jeremiah 37:11-16—Prophet Jeremiah Is Arrested and Imprisoned.
- Wed.** Jeremiah 38:7-13; 39:15-18—Ebed-Melech's Trust in Jeremiah Honored.
- Thurs.** Jeremiah 37:17-21—Jeremiah Reaffirms Prophecy of Zedekiah.
- Fri.** Jeremiah 38:24-28—Jeremiah's Last Days in Jerusalem.
- Sat.** 2 Kings 25:1-12—Jerusalem Destroyed; People Exiled.
- Sun.** Jeremiah 38:14-23—Zedekiah Must Submit to Babylonian Conquest.