

March 21
Lesson 3 (NIV)

PROPHET OF WISDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 25:1–10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 22

2 Kings 22:14–20

¹⁴ Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shalum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

¹⁵ She said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶ ‘This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷ Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.’ ¹⁸ Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: ¹⁹ Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people — that they would become a curse and be laid waste — and because you tore your robes

and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the LORD. ²⁰ Therefore I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.’”

So they took her answer back to the king.



KEY VERSE

“‘Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people—that they would become a curse and be laid waste—and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.’” —2 Kings 22:19

PROPHETS FAITHFUL TO GOD'S COVENANT

Unit 1: Faithful Prophets

LESSONS 1–4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the two major parts of Huldah's prophetic message.
2. Explain the key verse (2 Kings 22:19) in light of the text's spiritual principles.
3. Pray for seven national leaders by name in the week ahead, one each day.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. The Source Matters

B. Lesson Context

I. A Word Sought (2 Kings 22:14)

A. The Delegation (v. 14a)

B. The Prophetess (v. 14b)

Where Do You Go for Wisdom?

II. A Word for Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:15–17)

A. Judgment Is Coming (vv. 15–16)

B. Judgment Is Deserved (v. 17)

III. A Word for the King (2 Kings 22:18–20)

A. God Heard (vv. 18–19)

A Humble Leader

B. God Will Act (v. 20)

Conclusion

A. Responding in Faith

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Akbor	<i>Ak-bor.</i>
Ahikam	<i>Uh-high-kum.</i>
Asaiah	<i>As-eye-uh.</i>
Elnathan	<i>El-nay-thun.</i>
Harhas	<i>Har-haz.</i>
Hezekiah	<i>Hez-ih-kye-uh.</i>
Hilkiah	<i>Hill-kye-uh.</i>
Huldah	<i>Hul-duh.</i>
Jehoiada	<i>Jee-hoy-uh-duh.</i>
Jehoiakim	<i>Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.</i>
Jeroboam	<i>Jair-uh-boe-um.</i>
Josiah	<i>Jo-sigh-uh.</i>
Shallum	<i>Shall-um.</i>
Shaphan	<i>Shay-fan.</i>
Tikvah	<i>Tick-vuh.</i>

Introduction

A. The Source Matters

The Information Age in which we live is a double-edge sword: the massive amount of useful information is accompanied by massive amounts of factual errors and bias. Which customer review is the reliable guide to booking a hotel room or trying a new restaurant? Which news network should you count on as being the most trustworthy? To what commentators and analysts do you turn to make unbiased sense of current events? What source of information can be trusted above all others?

In the lesson text for this week, we encounter a young king who was faced with similar questions. His decision is still instruc-

tive after many centuries.

B. Lesson Context

The events recorded in this week's text took place in the days of Josiah, king of Judah (reigned 640–609 BC). He was a godly king known for his tireless attempts to purify Judah's worship and the temple (2 Kings 22:1–23:25; 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19).

In the years preceding Josiah's rise to the throne, the kings of Judah had vacillated between devotion to the Lord and to idols. Josiah's great-grandfather Hezekiah (reigned 724–695 BC) had instituted a set of religious reforms in Judah that were intended to restore proper worship of the Lord (2 Chronicles 29–31). But gross unfaithfulness to the God of Israel characterized the reign of Hezekiah's son Manasseh (694–642 BC). He rebuilt pagan worship shrines his father had destroyed. Manasseh encouraged worship of the Baals as well as that of the sun, moon, and stars (example: 2 Kings 23:11). Manasseh went so far as to offer his son in child sacrifice and built pagan altars within the Lord's temple itself (2 Kings 21:1–18). Late in his reign, Manasseh repented of his sin (2 Chronicles 33:10–17). But his former evil contributed directly in Judah's ultimate destruction and exile (2 Kings 21:10–16; 23:26; 24:3–4).

Josiah's father, Amon (reigned 642–640 BC), returned to the idolatry that characterized the earlier years of Manasseh. King Amon was assassinated in a palace coup after a two-year reign, and the "people of the land" made his 8-year-old son Josiah king in

his place (2 Kings 21:19–26; 2 Chronicles 33:20–25).

Godly advisers among Judah's aristocracy apparently influenced Josiah. Some are named in today's text. Other godly contemporaries included well-known prophets. Zephaniah, a descendant of King Hezekiah, prophesied during the reign of Josiah (Zephaniah 1:1). Jeremiah's prophetic ministry began in the thirteenth year of Josiah (Jeremiah 1:1–2), five years before this event. No doubt their ministries were an impetus in Josiah's reforms leading up to these events. The result was that when Josiah was 16 years old, "he began to seek the God of his father David" (2 Chronicles 34:3). In the twelfth year of Josiah's reign, he began to purge the land of pagan idols and shrines (34:3–7).

About six years later, King Josiah ordered a renovation of the temple (2 Kings 22:3). The Book of the Law was found within the temple in the process (22:8). Scholars disagree regarding the exact identity of the book that was found. Some believe it was a copy of the entire Law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament, otherwise known as the Pentateuch). Others believe it was only the book of Deuteronomy or some portion of it. Sometime in the previous decades during the reigns of wicked Manasseh and Amon, the Book of the Law had been lost and forgotten. Or perhaps idolatrous priests intentionally "misplaced" it in order to hide the guilt of their own apostasy.

When Shaphan reported to Josiah on the process of the repair project, Shaphan also

alerted the king to the discovery of the book. Given Josiah's reaction of distress to what he heard read from that book (see [2 Kings 22:11](#)), Deuteronomy may well have been the book's identity; it detailed the punishments Israel would suffer if the people failed to keep the covenant.

These curses would culminate in exile from the land ([Deuteronomy 29:25–28](#)). Realizing the guilt of Judah, Josiah commissioned a delegation to inquire of the Lord concerning the wrath that the king feared would soon be visited on him and his kingdom ([2 Kings 22:12–13](#)). A description of the nature of that delegation is how today's lesson text opens.

I. A Word Sought

([2 KINGS 22:14](#))

A. The Delegation (v. [14a](#))

14a. Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah

Here we see the forming of a delegation. This is the first action taken as a result of King Josiah's order in [2 Kings 22:12–13](#). Seven men bear the name *Hilkiyah* in the Old Testament. The one here was not only a *priest*, but was “the high priest” ([22:4, 8](#)).

Ahikam was a son of the secretary *Shaphan* ([2 Kings 22:12](#)). Members of this family seem to have been devout followers of the Lord, as borne out later (see [Jeremiah 26:24; 29:1–3; 36:10–12; 39:14](#)). *Akbor*, another official in Josiah's court, was the father of Elnathan, who became an official

in the court of King Jehoiakim, Josiah's son ([Jeremiah 26:22; 36:11–12, 24–25](#)). *Asaiah* was earlier designated as “the king's attendant” ([2 Kings 22:12](#)).

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances in the church should you act as a messenger between two parties? When should you not?

Digging Deeper

What circumstances call for face to face conversation rather than text messages?

B. The Prophetess (v. [14b](#))

14b. went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

The prophet Huldah appears elsewhere only in the parallel account to this event in [2 Chronicles 34:22–28](#) (although name spellings differ there). Nothing more is known about her except what is given in these two accounts. Jewish tradition holds that she and Jehoiada the priest were both buried in Jerusalem ([2 Chronicles 24:15–16](#)), an honor reserved for those of King David's family. This bolsters the impression that the delegation felt no hesitation in consulting Huldah.

Although female prophets in Israel were rarer than male ones, Huldah's role is not without precedent in the Old Testament.

Miriam ([Exodus 15:20](#)), Deborah ([Judges 4:4](#)), and the unnamed wife of Isaiah ([Isaiah 8:3](#)) precede her in being designated *prophet*. (The 1984 edition of the NIV has “prophet-ess”; contrast the false prophet(ess) in [Nehemiah 6:14](#).)

Huldah’s husband, *Shallum*, may have been Jeremiah’s uncle ([Jeremiah 32:7](#)). The dwelling of this husband and wife *in the New Quarter* is uncertain in location, but it likely indicates a particular area of Jerusalem. We can contrast the 2011 NIV’s “New Quarter” with the 1984 NIV’s “Second District.”

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR WISDOM?

In my early 20s, I enjoyed going to my small town’s only grocery store and listening to the older men’s conversation. I expected wisdom, but often I heard only complaints about the changing world. I would laugh to myself about this ongoing theme. Now I’m the age that some of those fellows were, and I sometimes find myself thinking as they did. As we age, we are tempted to idealize “the good old days” and become negative about the present.

The delegation in today’s text could have gone to the ancient equivalent of the small-town grocery store to bemoan their times. Instead, they sought counsel with Huldah, who could give them a word from the Lord. When you face change, do you reinforce your negative thinking by consulting with cynics of like mind, or do you find wisdom by seeking guidance from the Lord?

—C. R. B.

II. A Word for Jerusalem

([2 KINGS 22:15–17](#))

A. Judgment Is Coming (vv. 15–16)

15. She said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me,

Huldah begins her response with the prophetic formula *this is what the Lord ... says*. Her use of this phrase, which occurs more than 500 times in the Old Testament, marks her as a true prophet (see [2 Kings 22:16, 18–19](#), below). Adding *the God of Israel* emphasized the Lord’s sovereignty over the nation and his relationship to it. God chose to associate himself with Israel specifically. Though this fact should have had implications for how the people behaved, this did not often play out in reality.

Huldah’s referring to King Josiah as *the man who sent you to me* created space between the king and herself. Though he was powerful, she was the one who had heard a true word from God to share. Her words reminded the delegation that Josiah was merely a man who, like all people, was subject to God’s reign.

16. “This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read.

By using the prophetic formula *this is what the Lord says* a second time, Huldah reemphasized that her words came from the Lord. What she is about to say is also her own conviction, but it does not originate

with her.

The first part of Huldah's oracle (continued in [2 Kings 22:17](#), next) concerned *Judah* in general plus Jerusalem and/or its temple (*this place*) in particular (compare [1 Kings 8:29–30](#), [35](#); [2 Kings 22:17–20](#); [Jeremiah 7:20](#)). In the context at hand, it most likely indicates Jerusalem in general since the destruction of the temple without concurrent destruction of the city wouldn't make sense.

As great as King Josiah's desire was to spare his nation, he could not save Judah from coming judgment. Thus, Huldah indicated that Josiah's worst fears were justified (see [2 Kings 22:13](#)). Moses had warned that destruction would come if the Israelites were disobedient to the Lord (example: [Deuteronomy 28:15–68](#)). Later prophets based their judgment oracles on warnings found in the Law of Moses (examples: [Jeremiah 6:16–19](#); [Amos 2:4–5](#)). Josiah may have heard these calamities read straight out of [Deuteronomy 28:15–68](#) (see [2 Kings 22:10–11](#)). Even if he heard some other text, the curses would be very similar to those of [Deuteronomy 28](#).

Older versions of the Bible translate the Lord's intent to *bring disaster* as bringing "evil." But the underlying Hebrew does not refer to moral evil. Instead, it should be understood as physical harm or affliction ([Genesis 31:52](#); [Psalm 34:19](#)) or similar. This announcement of coming judgment through calamity echoes earlier announcements against the dynasties of the wicked kings Jeroboam ([1 Kings 14:10–11](#)) and Ahab ([21:20–22](#)). It also parallels the indictment in

[2 Kings 21:10–15](#) that was delivered by prophets in the days of Josiah's grandfather Manasseh.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who proposes that a certain modern disaster was due to the sin of those affected by it?

Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances should you work [Luke 13:1–5](#) into the discussion?

B. Judgment Is Deserved (v. 17)

17. “‘Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.’

Judah's having *forsaken* God for idols would result in punishment. What Moses had warned about ([Deuteronomy 28:20](#); [29:25](#); [31:16–17](#)), Huldah recognized as forthcoming reality in Judah. Jeremiah also cited Judah's having *burned incense to other gods* as evidence of their idolatry; that was the means by which the nation provoked the Lord's *anger* ([Jeremiah 1:16](#); [19:4](#); [44:3](#), 8). Both *the idols* and the sacrifices offered to the idols were works *their hands have made*. Tragically humorous is [Isaiah 44:19](#):

No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, “Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat

and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?

God's anger was abundantly justified since it had been provoked by intentional human rebellion; this had happened so often that the limits of the Lord's patience were exceeded. Zephaniah indicated that Judah was rotten to the core ([Zephaniah 3:6–8](#)). The fire of God's judgment would *burn*, and it would *not be quenched*.

What Do You Think?

What can you do to ensure that a hobby or favorite activity doesn't become an idol?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture texts help you most in doing so? Why?

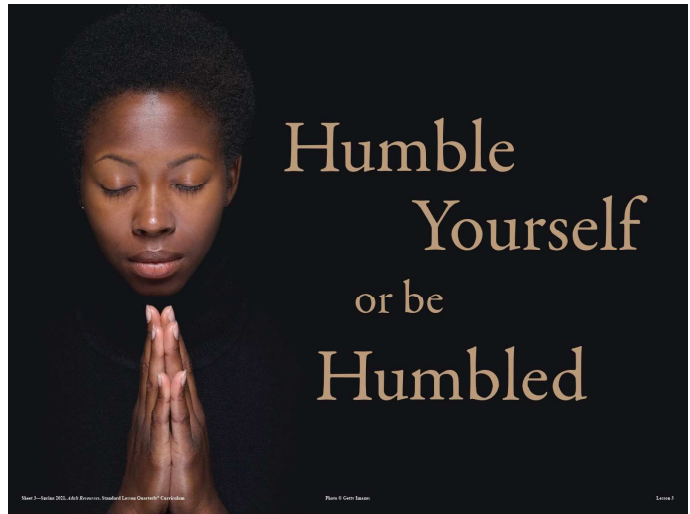
III. A Word for the King ([2 KINGS 22:18–20](#))

A. God Heard (vv. 18–19)

18a. “Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD,

Huldah's message of judgment against Judah was not the final word. Whereas she had previously identified Josiah simply as “the man who sent you to me” ([2 Kings 22:15](#), above), she here identified him specifically as *the king of Judah*. This description highlighted Josiah's leadership role. The Hebrew behind the phrase *inquire of the Lord* occurs only six times in the Old Testament, always in context of great seriousness (here

and [Genesis 25:22](#); [1 Kings 22:8](#); [Ezekiel 20:1](#); [2 Chronicles 16:12](#); [22:9](#)).



Visual for Lesson 3. Point to this visual as you ask learners to name modern actions that are equivalent to Josiah's tearing of his clothing (verse 19).

18b. “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard:

The prophetess once again used the prophetic formula *this is what the Lord ... says* (see [2 Kings 22:16](#), above) to reinforce that her words came from God. This repetition emphasized the Lord's special relationship with all of *Israel*.

19. “‘Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people—that they would become a curse and be laid waste—and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.

When Shaphan read the law to Josiah, the king was shaken to his core. He had torn

his robes to signify his grief (2 Kings 22:11). That was an appropriate response to the words of the scroll that announced that Jerusalem would *become a curse and be laid waste*. God had heard Josiah and had seen his weeping and the state of his *heart*. So God had decided to honor the king's humble and contrite response (compare Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12).

Moses had described such repentance as a prerequisite for the Lord's restoring Israel after it fell under his judgment (Leviticus 26:40–42). Such humble repentance had led God to delay the demise of Ahab's dynasty (1 Kings 21:29), to postpone judgment in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:26), and to restore Josiah's grandfather Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:10–13). The New Testament highlights the centrality of humility and repentance before God (examples: Matthew 18:4; James 4:6, 10; 1 Peter 5:5).

What Do You Think?

What characteristics of humility should be most evident in your daily walk with Christ?

Digging Deeper

Is humility best understood in light of opposites such as pride or arrogance as described in Romans 1:28–32; James 4:16; 2 Peter 2:10, 18? Why, or why not?

The prophetic formula *declares the Lord* underscores that God has honored the king's contrition. Its repetition throughout Huldah's prophecy does more than just legit-

imize her as a spokesperson for God. It also gave the king's delegation confidence to repeat to the king what they had learned, knowing that the prophecy was reliable.

A HUMBLE LEADER

A colleague and I once moderated a church's congregational meeting concerning whether the minister should resign or be fired. We arrived to see a congregation self-destructing.

Tempers were flaring; voices were raised in anger. In the heat of the meeting, the minister declared that if he received 50.1 percent of the vote, he would stay.

My colleague and I concluded that the minister's pride had become a key factor in the church's troubles. We asked for a recess and talked privately with him. He acknowledged that his staying would split the church and mar its witness in the community. Reluctantly, he decided to resign.

Many kings of Israel and Judah paid little heed to God's Word because they were so impressed with themselves. By contrast, Josiah was a model of humble leadership. He placed God and the welfare of his nation before himself, and God blessed him as a result. What steps can you take to humble yourself for the good of God's people?

—C. R. B.

B. God Will Act (v. 20)

20a. “Therefore I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in

peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.’”

The Lord would honor the king by protecting him from the punishment coming against Judah. The phrase *I will gather you to your ancestors* is a variation on the formula “[name] rested with his ancestors” as used throughout 1 and 2 Kings (examples: 1 Kings 2:10; 11:43; 15:24; 2 Kings 16:20; 20:21). The king would not experience *the disaster* (see on 2 Kings 22:16, above) that God would bring on the temple, Jerusalem, and Judah.

The phrase *you will be buried in peace* may seem to contradict what we know about Josiah’s death in battle (2 Kings 23:29–30). But the idea is that Josiah would die at peace with God. He would not personally witness what the words of the book anticipated and what Huldah confirmed: the devastating destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC (2 Kings 25).

The message of God through Huldah confirmed anew his righteousness, faithfulness, and mercy. God would be faithful to the word he had uttered centuries before when he warned Israel of the penalties that would result from unfaithfulness to the covenant.

What Do You Think?

What would you say to a fellow Christian who fully expects to escape all consequences God may visit on the idolatrous culture around us?

Digging Deeper

Which biblical precedents back you up?

2ob. So they took her answer back to the king.

The message of the prophetess and the words of the book resulted in Josiah’s convening the nation for a covenant renewal ceremony. He also enacted further measures to cleanse the temple and the land from elements of idolatry (2 Kings 23:1–25; 2 Chronicles 34:29–33).

Judah was spared while Josiah was alive. But after his death, Judah returned to evil ways and experienced the promised curses: the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar as well as the exile in Babylon (2 Kings 23:31–25:21).

Conclusion

A. Responding in Faith

The events recorded in 2 Kings 22 highlight both the importance of engaging with God’s words and responding to them. It seems absurd that the Book of the Law was neglected and lost to the people of Judah! Yet is that any more ridiculous than the Bible’s loss to myriads of Christians who rarely read it? We must guard against losing Scripture in our churches, our homes, and our lives.

We honor God when we do his will as recorded in Scripture (John 14:15; etc.). Josiah sought to do just that through his reforms after the Book of the Law was found. He *acted* on the words he had heard from that book. He showed remorse over the sin of his people, and he sought godly insight into what he had heard read to him.

Scripture study must always lead us to repentance and action based on what we encounter in its pages. This is the faithful response to learning God’s will. That process involves consulting competent interpreters of Scripture ([Romans 12:4–8](#); [2 Timothy 2:2](#)) and studying it alongside other believers who are willing to hold us accountable to its words ([Acts 2:42](#); [Hebrews 10:24–25](#)). May we, like Josiah, surround ourselves with faithful companions as we seek God’s guidance.

B. Prayer

Father, we praise you as the God of mercy and grace whose love for us has been demonstrated in mercy to Josiah and ultimately through your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask that you forgive us when we fail to heed your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God hears those who humbly seek him.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](#) or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Option. Before learners arrive, place at

chairs copies of the “Five Milestones of 1 and 2 Kings” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, for individuals to complete as indicated. This brief exercise will sketch the broader context in which today’s lesson occurs.

Begin class by writing the following “quote” on the board:

The problem with quotes on the internet is that it is hard to verify their authenticity.

—Abraham Lincoln

Ask learners what is suspicious about this attribution. After the obvious answer and some chuckles, ask what news sources and information outlets your learners trust. Jot responses on the board as they are voiced. (The follow-up question “Why?” is best not asked, lest the discussion become political.) Make a transition by noting that everyone realizes that some sources are more reliable than others in accuracy, which today’s lesson brings home to the twenty-first century Christian.

Into the Word

Give each participant a handout (you prepare) featuring the following title and questions:

2 Kings 22:14–20 ... and a Bit More

1. Who were the direct participants?
2. What action occurred?
3. Where did it take place?
4. When did the action of the text occur?‡
5. Why did the action of the text occur?‡

As you distribute handouts to pairs or triads of learners, announce a prize to the team that scores the most points. Say that 15 points are possible, but do not be more specific than that. Inform teams that the last 2 questions (marked with ‡) will take them outside today's lesson text for answers.

Expected responses and scoring: 1—Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan, Asaiah, Huldah the prophet, and the Lord (1 point each, total of 7 points possible; penalize 1 point for answering King Josiah—he wasn't there personally); 2—those whom the king sent to the prophetess received a message from God (1 point); 3—in a specific area of Jerusalem (2 points possible; award only 1 point for the bare answer “Jerusalem”); 4—622 BC (award 3 points for this answer, which must be deduced by consulting [2 Kings 22:3](#) and using a conversion timeline; award only 2 points for the answer “eighteenth year of Josiah's reign”; award only 1 point for the answer “during Josiah's reign”); 5—Book of the Law was found, per [2 Kings 22:8](#) (award 2 points for this reference; award only 1 point for less specific responses).

Award a humorous Due Diligence certificate (or other appropriate prize), which you have prepared in advance, to the team scoring the most points.

Into Life

Give everyone an index card. Ask them to write the name of a disaster that could befall them in the week ahead, but not to write their own names. Collect the (anonymous)

cards, shuffle them, then read them. After each card is read, pause to ask where the person with the designated fear should go for reliable help and information.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Many Sources” exercise from the activity page for learners in study pairs to complete as indicated. Compare and contrast entries in ensuing whole-class discussion.

As learners depart (not sooner), distribute handouts that feature the names of seven church leaders (mixture of your church's leaders and national luminaries) and seven political leaders (mixture of national, state, and local). Challenge learners to post it in a place where they will pray for one named person in each category in the seven days until class meets again. Include on the handouts the text of [1 Timothy 2:1–2](#).