

Grade 5—Unit 10

A New Hope

This unit studies the book of Revelation, which provides a glimpse into the conclusion of the salvation history story. Revelation brings us full circle in this story. Christ, who suffered, died, and rose again has made possible the reconciliation of humanity with God. All creation will be restored. A new heaven and a new earth await the redeemed.

LESSONS

1. Heavenly Vision in Difficult Times
2. God Is Present in Persecution and Struggle
3. A New Heaven and a New Earth

Unit 10: A New Hope

Unit Information

SUMMARY

The book of Revelation has been the subject of much discussion throughout the centuries. People have used it to set dates for the second coming of Christ. Some church leaders have used the book to frighten people into conformity. Revelation, when wisely interpreted, possesses a tremendous message of encouragement and hope. Either John the apostle or John the presbyter wrote the book to bring hope and encouragement to persecuted Christians when Roman authorities were enforcing the cult of emperor worship. In this unit, students will use the book to identify its origin, the terms *alpha* and *omega*, and its message for followers of Christ. Many early Mennonites and other Christians faced persecution for their faith, and some do today. Students will identify and understand these struggles.

Finally, students will use Revelation 21:1-5 to reflect on their studies this year. They will review their travel logs, noting God’s acts of reaching out to God’s people throughout biblical history. The final travel log entry asks them to use the knowledge they have gained in the year’s studies to answer these questions: How has God sought you out this year? What do you hear God telling you? Which person from our studies do you most identify with? What does “salvation” mean to you? Finally, students are invited to write a prayer to God, expressing their personal thoughts and feelings about their relationship with God.

KEY BIBLE TEXTS

Acts 9:1-22
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
Revelation

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Revelation

The book of Revelation arose out of a time of great crisis, as the early church experienced persecution for worshipping only Christ, when empire worship was being enforced. We know that John was the writer, although we are not sure whether John the apostle or John the presbyter wrote it. Regardless, John received the vision while exiled on the island of Patmos, probably during the reign of Domitian.

Revelation uses extensive symbolism to address the cosmic conflict between good and evil. It reveals Jesus Christ as a slaughtered lamb, who is worthy to open the seal of the scrolls that unlock the meaning and purpose of history (Revelation 5:12). It tells us that, contrary experiences notwithstanding, God is still in control. Evil seems triumphant, but victory has already been realized in Jesus’ resurrection.

Ultimately, Revelation reveals the core message of salvation history—that God seeks out and restores God’s people to God. We don’t have to be concerned with

techniques and rituals by which to gain salvation, but rather God saves humanity from destruction.

In this unit, we approach Revelation as if it were a painting or piece of literature, instead of a giant decoding project. We use this piece of literature to remind us of God's promise of salvation and close our study of salvation history.

Mennonite History and Persecution

Mennonites began in 1525, at the time of the Protestant reformation. They were a significant part of a much bigger Anabaptist movement. Yet they differed from the other Protestant reformers on three main issues: (1) Instead of baptizing infants, Mennonites believed in baptism of adults, who could choose whether or not they wanted to be a part of the church; (2) Mennonites believed in the separation of church and state; and (3) Mennonites were pacifists and rejected military service. For these reasons, both Protestants and Catholics persecuted Mennonites.

Although Mennonites in the United States now worship freely, some in other countries still experience persecution or struggle. We study the history of the Mennonite church, as well as those who currently struggle, to better understand both the book of Revelation and our personal heritage.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Revelation was written to bring hope and encouragement to persecuted Christians when Roman authorities were enforcing the cult of emperor worship.
- The “Lamb” is clearly the central character of Revelation, and the way of the Lamb is held up as the measure of faithfulness for persecuted Christians.
- Historically, since the time of Christ, some Christians have experienced persecution for their faith.
- Biblical faith does not concern itself with rituals and techniques by which to gain salvation. Instead, biblical faith offers hope in the face of human evil, because God seeks out humankind. God has saved God's people from destruction.
- Through studying the stories of God's people and God's faithfulness and providence to them, we come to understand God's work in our world and lives today.

WORSHIP

Theme hymns:

SJ 42—Listen, God is calling
HWB 611—Soon and very soon
SJ 71—Alleluia, the Great Storm is over

Other hymn ideas:

HWB 293—God sends us the Spirit
HWB 615—Shall we gather at the river
HWB323—Beyond a dying sun

Called to Be Faithful Witnesses (*Focus: Revelation's call that we follow Christ, even if that means hardship, and the promise of heaven if we follow*)

Clear the room so that there is a large open space. In the center of it, place a stand with the pot on top of it. Gather around the pot, and recite the memory verse, Revelation 1:8. Now sing together “Soon and very soon,” encouraging the students to move or clap to the song.

Subdue the mood a little bit. Ask students to be seated, and pass out paper and

writing materials. Explain that one word that is used a lot in the book of Revelation we translate as “witness.” But the Greek word it comes from is *martyria*. What does that word sound like? *Martyria* is the root word of our word “martyr.” What is a martyr?

In Revelation, we are told again and again to be “faithful witnesses”—literally “martyrs.” Does this mean we have to be killed? No. It means that when we decide to follow Christ, we follow no matter what happens. Sometimes, when we follow Christ, we face persecution. In our country, we usually don’t face persecution like the people did whom Revelation was addressing. But sometimes we do face hardships because we follow Christ. And in other parts of the world, people are still being killed because they believe in Christ.

When might it be hard for us to be faithful witnesses? Have students write or illustrate ideas of this. What might we be called to do that isn’t much fun?

Being a follower of Christ isn’t always easy, and it may sometimes mean doing things that are hard. But God is with us through all of it. And here comes the really fun part of Revelation!

Through all of this hard stuff, God is reconciling the world, bringing about salvation. And when we do our part in that, there’s a lot to hope for and look forward to. Read Revelation 21:1-7. God, the *Alpha* and *Omega*, has great things in store for us—eternity with God in heaven. Ask students to write or draw on the backs of their papers what they think eternity in heaven might be like. Talk about how both the hard stuff in being a faithful witness and the promise of heaven are part of God’s work for salvation, for reconciling the world.

Now celebrate. While singing and/or playing “Alleluia, the Great Storm is over,” dance and move in a procession around the room, leading students past the pot. As they pass by the pot, they can drop into it their papers with hardship and heaven on them. End the worship time with prayer.

ASSESSING TEACHING / LEARNING

Assessment is important throughout the unit, and teachers should use tools both to formally and informally assess student learning. Use the results of these assessments to modify lessons to further increase student understanding and mastery. Teachers should formally assess students using their own point system and grading scale on the various worksheets and activities in the lessons.

No formal end-of-the-unit assessment is given. The final travel log entry is meant to be a reflection of students’ understanding of the unit.

HOME EXTENSION IDEA

(To be shared with parents)

The book of Revelation at times seems daunting or even scary. But your child is learning to interpret Revelation as a book of hope and guidance. What are your experiences with the book of Revelation? Discuss these ideas with your child

This is the end of our overview of salvation history. Throughout the year we have learned about God’s work in the world, in the past, present, and future. We have learned that God’s work continues through us. As you complete your timeline, be sure to include yourselves at the end of it.

MEMORY PASSAGE

The main memory verse for this unit is Revelation 1:8. It is provided in large format on page 392, to be used as a poster or overhead.



*"I am the Alpha
and the Omega,"
says the Lord God,
"who is, and who was,
and who is to come,
the Almighty."*

Revelation 1:8

A New Hope

LESSON 1: HEAVENLY VISIONS IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Objective

Students will be introduced to the book of Revelation as a message for persecuted Christians. They will learn the meaning of the terms *alpha* and *omega*.

Key Concepts

- *Alpha* and *omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.
- Revelation was written to bring hope and encouragement to persecuted Christians when Roman authorities were enforcing the cult of emperor worship.
- Either John the apostle or John the presbyter wrote the book of Revelation. He refers to himself as John, “a brother” (Revelation 1:9).
- The “Lamb” is clearly the central character of Revelation, and the way of the Lamb is held up as the measure of faithfulness for persecuted Christians.

Text: Book of Revelation, Revelation 1:8 and 5:12

Estimated Lesson Time: 40 minutes

Materials

- Student Bibles
- “Revelation Description” (p. 395)
- “Greek Alphabet” (p. 396)
- “Worthy Is the Lamb” (p. 397)
- For Extend the Lesson: “Writing the Greek Alphabet” (p. 398)

Teacher Preparation

- Make an overhead transparency, *OR* one copy per student, of “Revelation Description.”
- Make one copy per student of “Greek Alphabet” and “Worthy is the Lamb.”
- If using Extend the Lesson, make copies of “Writing the Greek Alphabet,” one per student.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Distribute “Revelation Description” sheet or place it on the overhead. Use it to help students understand the historical context in which the book of Revelation was written. In addition, students could read the introduction to the Book of Revelation in their Bibles, to gain insight into its context and writer.

Explain that as you read portions of the book, you will not try to analyze specific symbols, but focus on what it tells us about who Jesus is, and about our relationship with God. Revelation is ultimately a worship book.

LESSON STEPS

1. Skim through Revelation and note its use of symbols such as the lamb, scroll, stars, seas, thrones, living creatures, etc. Explain that there are many different

interpretations of these symbols across Christian traditions. Ultimately, they remind us of who God is.

2. Ask students to read Revelation 1:8. Explain that *alpha* is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and *omega* is the last. This is similar to saying that God is the A and the Z. How is this significant as we consider who God is? This is the memory verse for this unit. Students might spend time working with a partner to memorize it, or you might use the “popcorn” format (*used in previous lessons*) with the entire class.

3. Distribute the “Greek Alphabet” sheet and read through the letters together. These are the original letters used to write the book of Revelation.

4. Read Revelation 5:12. The “Lamb” is clearly the central character of Revelation, and the way of the Lamb is held up as the measure of faithfulness for persecuted Christians. Ask students to recall your recent study of Easter and the Passover—Jesus was the sacrificial lamb at the crucifixion.

5. “Worthy Is the Lamb.” Distribute this sheet and have students find passages that mention the “Lamb.” If you wish, remove the references portion of the sheet and ask students to use the concordances in their Bibles to search. At the bottom of the page it asks, “We know that the ‘Lamb’ is Christ. Based on what you found in Revelation, what can you learn about who he is?” A possible response might be: *He is a shepherd who leads his sheep to springs of living water. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the light.*

EXTEND THE LESSON

(This activity will extend the lesson to longer than 40 minutes.)

- **Write the Greek alphabet.** Have students practice writing out the letters of the Greek alphabet, both upper and lower case, using the “Writing the Greek Alphabet” sheet.

REVELATION DESCRIPTION

After Jesus died and rose again, the good news spread across the Roman empire. Followers of “the way” believed in one message of salvation (in Christ) and worshipped the LORD God only. At first, government officials viewed Christian house fellowships as a Jewish sect. After all, they were followers of Christ, and he was a Jew. Like the Jewish people, Christians were given permission to abstain from emperor worship.

Many emperors thought of themselves as divine, and wanted the people they ruled to treat them as gods. This posed problems for Jews and Christians. They recognized the LORD God, Yahweh, as the one true god. To worship the emperor would violate all that they believed. For about 30 years after Christ’s crucifixion, the Roman government treated his followers as loyal citizens, even though they refused to worship the emperor.

Some people, though, didn’t feel that Christians should receive the same privileges as Jews. The church was growing. Christians didn’t meet in synagogues, and held beliefs that were different from the Jews. Many non-Jews had joined the growing churches. Why should a Gentile receive special privileges that had always been reserved for Jews?



Messages of hope written on an early Christian martyr’s tomb. Notice the *alpha and omega*.

Suspicious surfaced and tensions grew. The Romans began to view the Christians as unpatriotic and stubborn people. Christ’s followers were often unfairly accused of illegal acts and accidents in the empire. In Asia, Christians suffered much persecution under the rule of the emperor Domitian. Domitian required people to address him as “master and god.” By this time (A.D. 91-96), the Roman government treated Christians as a separate religion from the Jewish religion. You can imagine what happened! If you refused to state that the emperor was lord and god, and you did not claim to follow the Jewish religion, then you were not a loyal citizen.

The consequences for disloyalty to Rome were severe. Sometimes Christians were tortured or given “special” punishment. Most often, however, they were condemned to death. There were only two choices for Christians: renounce Christ and be set free, or refuse to worship the emperor and face suffering or death.

Christians had to decide whether they would die for their faith. Some of them did die. Others suffered in other ways. John, the writer of Revelation, was exiled to the island prison on Patmos because of his work as a missionary. In Revelation, we learn that God has wonderful things planned for those who remain faithful.

Although it might look as if evil is taking over, God is in charge. The victory that Jesus won by his death and resurrection will be completed. The Christians under Emperor Domitian’s rule needed to hear those words of encouragement. We need to hear them today as well.

Many Christians have suffered for their faith throughout the centuries. Today there are brothers and sisters in Christ who are being persecuted and subjected to abuse because of their faith in God. They put their trust in the LORD, whose love and grace help them endure the pain. As Christians, we know that one day the final victory described in Revelation will take place. Hallelujah!

GREEK ALPHABET



WORTHY IS THE LAMB

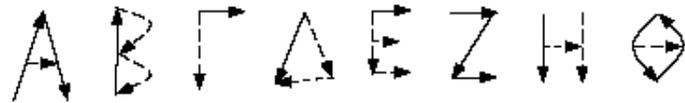
Use the table to note the passages in Revelation that refer to the “Lamb.”

REFERENCE	PASSAGE
Revelation 5:12	Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!
Revelation 5:6	
Revelation 7:14	
Revelation 14:4	
Revelation 15:3	
Revelation 17:14	
Revelation 19:9	
Revelation 21:23	
Revelation 21:27	

We know that the “Lamb” is Christ. Based on what you found in Revelation, what can you learn about who he is? *(Write your ideas on the back of this sheet.)*

WRITING THE GREEK ALPHABET

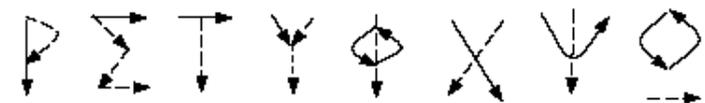
Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ



Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π



Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ Χ Ψ Ω



α β γ δ ε ζ η θ



ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π



ρ σ τ υ φ χ ψ ω



A New Hope

LESSON 2: GOD IS PRESENT IN PERSECUTION AND STRUGGLE

Objective

Students will learn about Mennonites and other Christians who have experienced God as they were persecuted or struggled for survival.

Key Concepts

- Revelation was written to bring hope and encouragement to persecuted Christians when Roman authorities were enforcing the cult of emperor worship.
- Historically, since the time of Christ, some Christians have experienced persecution for their faith.

Text: Book of Revelation

Estimated Lesson Time: 40 minutes

Materials

- “Till We Meet Again” story (pp. 401-405)
- “Story Organizer” (pp. 406-407)
- For Extend the Lesson, option one: student travel logs
- For Extend the Lesson, option three: websites list (p. 409)

Teacher Preparation

- Make one copy for every two students of “Till We Meet Again.”
- Make one copy for each student of “Story Organizer.”
- Look ahead to the option given for lower-level readers in lesson step #1.
- If using Extend the Lesson, option three, check the websites on the list ahead of time.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Introduce the concept of Christians being persecuted for their faith. This is an especially important and valuable part of the history of Mennonite Anabaptists. Others have faced great struggle as they moved from place to place in times of war. Explain that today you will read a story of one group that was forced to leave their homes and become refugees because of war.

LESSON STEPS

1. Read the story. Divide students into pairs and give each pair a copy of “Till We Meet Again.” Also distribute the “Story Organizer” sheets—one per student. Ask students to read the story aloud together, alternating paragraphs. As each new event in the story occurs, both students should note it in the next box on their organizer sheets. *Option: For lower-level readers, you may want to create a small group and lead the group. You could also pre-record the story on tape for this group.*

This is an interesting story. Its sequence and details will easily be lost if students fail to use the story organizer. You may want to model how to do this if students have not done it before.

2. Discuss the story. When all have finished reading, invite questions and comments about the story. Be sure students understand the connections between this story and that of the Israelites in Exile and the Christians in Revelation. Students could also reflect on times that they have felt alienated or in exile.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 40 minutes.)

- **Write in travel logs.** Have students do a special entry in the voice of Jakob Giesbrecht on the prompt: How did your faith in God carry you through this difficult struggle?
- **Sing “God be with you,”** #430 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.
- **Learn more about persecution.** You may wish for students to learn a bit more about the persecution of early Mennonites in Europe, as well as difficulties Mennonites in some countries abroad still face today. The book of Revelation was written particularly for persecuted Christians. Fifth graders can best identify with its message when they can relate to its audience. Evaluate what resources you have access to, as well as the specific areas you wish to study, in choosing from one of these lesson options:
 - a. Have students do a web search. Use the website list on page 409 to locate stories of persecution and personal struggle as Mennonites strive to worship and serve God as they feel is best.
 - b. Invite a pastor or church member who is well studied in Mennonite history to come and share an overview of the topic, as well as specific stories.
 - c. Invite a guest who has witnessed this sort of struggle first-hand. Ask the visitor to share his/her account of people’s faith in God, and God’s presence and providence.
 - d. Choose a novel to read together that deals with the topic of unacceptance or bullying. Relate it to the struggle of some Christians today.
 - e. “Interview” an early church member. Students can research that member and then write what an interview with the person might sound like.

Till We Meet Again

On October 3, 1943, 614 persons were forced to flee from their homes because of World War II. Twenty-two months later, 33 of these people arrived at a refugee camp in Holland, where Mennonite Central Committee workers arranged for them to live until they could be resettled. Three months later at a special worship service, the group listened as Jakob Giesbrecht's account of the group's struggles was read. This is Jakob's handwritten story as translated by Peter and Elfrieda Dyck.



The place is our village of Nieder-Chortitza in the Ukraine. The year is 1943, and the time is the beginning of September. On all the fields of the Mennonites there is a beehive of activity. Everybody is harvesting or sowing winter wheat. Since the German army came and dissolved the collective farms, the people work with renewed enthusiasm from early till late. The land is again theirs. The war and the front had passed through our community only two years ago. But now there is talk about the front coming back again. People are restless and apprehensive. Everyone asks the same question: What will happen to us?

We did not have to wait long for an answer. At the end of September, the German commander of our area ordered all inhabitants to get ready to evacuate. Preparations to leave began at once. We butchered all our small animals—sheep, pigs, poultry, and such. We sorted and packed clothing. On October 3, 61 persons left the community taking with them some of the larger animals. On the fifth, another 163 persons—mostly old people, children, and those who were not farmers, like teachers, for example—were loaded onto railroad cars and shipped west.

The next day we could hear the guns; artillery hit the village. The front was rolling back into Nieder-Chortitza again. The rest of us left on October 7 in haste, with horses and wagons, also fleeing westward. In all, 614 persons fled from our community. We left knowing that we would not return. There were many tears as we glanced back

once more at our homes . . . our schools . . . our church . . . the cemetery where our loved ones lay buried . . . the place where we had been happy, especially in the years of our youth. But then communism came. It was so indescribably horrible. All that injustice, the inhuman treatment, the suffering . . . We must flee!

We stopped in a place called Apostolowo. After a week we had to push on. We traveled 200 kilometers to Proskurowo. The German commander ordered all men with wagons to return to rescue those who had been left behind. Driving the horses furiously, we went back, arrived there two days later, but discovered that these people had already left by train. We turned around again. In 30 days we covered a distance of 1200 kilometers. The roads were ribbons of mud stretched over a bleak and deserted landscape. Bridges were out. It got terribly cold and, on top of that, partisan bands terrorized the countryside, stealing our horses and supplies. Two of our boys, 16 and 17 years old, were almost killed when they tried to save our horses.

At Proskurowo, the German army took our horses and wagons, loaded us onto trains, and on December 21, 1943, they shipped us off to Litzmannstadt (Lodz) in Poland, not far from Warsaw. There we thought we would meet the rest of our people from whom we had been separated. But they were not there. The Russians had overtaken them at the railroad station of Apostolowo. There was a lot of confusion. About half of them, 273 persons in all, managed to escape. The

old people, women with children, and the sick could not escape and were shipped back into the interior of Russia. Those who had escaped hid in the fields, ditches, and haystacks for 15 horrible days. They were wet and cold. The meager food supply ran out. Some died.

Then temporarily, just for a few days, the Germans drove the Russians back again, and that gave them the chance to return to the railroad station. Once more they were safe, they were going west. But during the night the train collided with an express train going at full speed. Three cars were totally demolished. Four children were killed immediately and seven could not be found. Several women were critically injured. One died soon afterward. Pastor P. Thieszen conducted a hurried funeral service, and all the dead were buried on the spot. Then the rest continued on to Litzmannstadt. On November 21, 1943, we were reunited with them. Two days later they shipped us all off to Dresden, Germany.

The trip from Apostolowo to Dresden had taken exactly one month. The weather had been bad: rain, snow, and zero-degree temperatures. Most of the time we were totally exposed to the elements, even when we were on the train; the railroad cars were open coal cars. Attempts to provide a makeshift room over the heads of the women and children usually failed because the wind tore it away. We had no way of providing heat for our wet and shivering bodies; no possibilities to cook any meals. Many of us got sick.

During this first month of our flight, we had buried 22 of our people, mostly children. Often the burial had to be done in such haste that it was impossible to dig a proper grave in the frozen ground. Some of the dead had to be left behind without burial. For some we managed to make a simple coffin from boards that we ripped from the sides of our wagons. Frequently we buried three or four persons in one shallow grave. Nobody can understand the anguish and heartache of parents who had to leave their children behind in a cornfield or a potato patch. May the Lord comfort them and grant a happy reunion on the day of resurrection.

When we looked for our Nieder-Chortitz people in Dresden, we found 240 persons of

the original 614. They had come there in three separate groups. The Germans put us up in a large school, 20 and 30 men, women, and children all together in one classroom. Sleeping on the hard floors was almost impossible. The food was poor, and we never had enough. Every man, woman, and child over 14 years of age had to work in factories. It was all new for us and very hard, but we did our best. When the order came on April 2, 1944, to move on again, because the Russian front was coming closer, the directors of these factories begged our leaders to let “these hardworking and trustworthy people” stay. But we moved on.

On April 5, 1944, half of our group was sent to work for farmers in Yugoslavia. We were glad to be out of these stifling factories and back on the land again, where we could breathe fresh air, but the pay was very poor—just enough to buy the food allowed us on our ration cards.

All this territory was, of course, occupied by the Germans. Now a new danger faced us: the partisans. They were armed farmers and intellectuals who fought against the German occupation. Since the Germans had brought us here, and because we all spoke German, they naturally associated us with them, rather than thinking of us as refugees. This made it especially dangerous for our young people and for those who worked on large state-owned farms. Consequently, more and more of our people left and moved to the city. From there they tried to get to Austria. They settled in the area of Murau, between Salzburg and Graz. Those that stayed behind, over 150 persons, were never seen or heard from again. We assume they were ultimately shipped back to Russia.

When Germany collapsed and the war was over at last, a new chapter began in our lives. We were still in the Murau area in Austria. Where should we go? What should we do? We had lost our homes and possessions. We had no country that was our own. We did not want to return to the Soviet Union. We knew nobody who could help us. Often as many as 40 persons lived crowded together in a small house. Food was extremely scarce.

On top of that, rumor had it that the Russians were going to occupy the area of

Murau. All three powers—the Russians, Americans, and British-occupied Austria. We didn't like what we heard. On May 10, 1945, we packed our few possessions onto pushcarts and baby buggies and moved on, westward, hoping to reach Bavaria in south Germany. We were now 53 persons. We had no definite goal and no plan, only to flee and to trust God for the future.

In Tamsweg, a small town still in Austria, we were brought to the British military. They interrogated us and sent us to a refugee camp. They asked us where we were going. We answered: "We want to go back to Holland, the country of our origin." But since we had no papers or documents of any kind, it was difficult to convince them. After some days we realized that we were making no progress at all. We stayed in that camp a full two months.

At first the food was reasonably good, but then it got progressively worse. We were actually hungry all the time. It was a very difficult time for all of us. We feared we might starve to death. In this desperate situation, we managed to buy an old horse, which we killed and ate. After that we bought another one and ate that, too.

On July 11, 1945, we were loaded onto trucks and taken to the railway station in Radstadt. It seemed there was a breakthrough in our situation at last. We were told that the train would take us to Salzburg. There we would be able to see the Dutch consul. However, to our surprise and shock, we discovered that the train was not going to Salzburg, but to Liezen, the border town between the British and the Russian [Soviet] zones of occupation. We had been deceived.

We arrived in Liezen at 3:00 on the 11th of July, and were told to stay on the train because it would soon go on to the Russians. We could think of nothing more terrible than to be shipped back to the Soviet Union. We all agreed to flee, even if it would cost us our lives. But that was easier said than done, because the station was heavily guarded by military police. However, when fear grips one's soul, one will do almost anything. So we jumped off the train and ran, crying to God for help, because human help had abandoned us.

Many had left the train and the station

and were already out in the fields, running, when the police got wind of their escape. Immediately they chased after us. Then they started shooting. Thinking that we were hiding in the bushes, they just fired their automatic rifles into them. Those of us who had managed to run several hundred meters didn't want to go back, but they turned us around. They brought most of us back to the station. But then the people refused to get onto the train.

One woman took her children into her arms, stepped right up to the police, and said: "Shoot me and my children! Do it now. Do it right here! Then all this agony will be over. We are not going back to Russia!" The police shot their pistols over their heads. There was screaming and crying, but to no avail. They were all forced back onto the train. Then the police announced: "From now on, anyone leaving the train even for a moment will be shot on the spot." But our fear of the Soviet oppression was so great. As soon as the police had turned their backs and moved away a few yards, some of us jumped off again and ran for the open fields.

It was our good fortune that just at that moment a military transport pulled into the station. There was a lot of noise, the platform was filled with soldiers, there was pushing and shoving, and in the general confusion the rest of us jumped off the train and fled. Naturally, we left our belongings, our last meager possessions, on the train, and scattered in many different directions.

An old grandmother of 82 years of age stayed on the train. She was blind and also unable to walk. Hugging her children and grandchildren, she said, "Run! Save yourselves. In God's name, go. Remember us. And if we don't see you again on earth, we'll meet in heaven." These were the last words of the mother to her children and grandchildren. One unmarried daughter remained with her. For her other children, this farewell was more difficult than if she had died. May the Almighty protect her and be with her in her old age. Oh Lord, give that dear grandmother rest at last and a home in glory where she will not be afraid any-

more. She went to the altar to be sacrificed for all of us, and we will never forget her.

Early dawn found our people scattered in fields and forests, hiding in empty sheds and barns, under bushes and in haystacks. No group was more than three or four people. During the day we stayed under cover, but the next night was a terror. None of us dared sleep, for fear we might be found. Everyone was hungry. The little children cried. Older children joined the adults in prayer. Everybody was afraid. Fear gripped our hearts.

We finally came to the point where we cried with the psalmist, “In God I trust and shall not be afraid; what can man do to me?” From the depths of our hearts we prayed: “Oh Lord, our God. Father of us all. Have mercy on us. Help us in this hour of distress and deliver us. You, Lord, brought us this far. You were with us and protected us. And shall we now come to a miserable end in the fields? Forgive us all our sins. We beg you, Lord, in the name of Jesus, Our Savior and the Savior of the world. Amen.” This was our prayer. With every little sound we heard, we drew back, startled and frozen in our thoughts. When the little ones cried, the mothers tried to quiet them or muffle the sound. So at last the long night ended.

Next morning we moved on, weary and exhausted as we were, in the direction of Salzburg. We were about 95 kilometers away, didn’t know the road, were hungry and wet, and lived in constant fear that any step could be our last. We trudged on all that day and the next. We had nothing but the clothes on our backs. Many didn’t even have shoes. But we needed food. The farmers had little and could not spare any for us. We pushed on another day. At night we collapsed weary and hungry in some empty shed or haystack. Our strength was spent. We almost despaired. The future was dark. We saw no hope. In the morning we went on again, praying as we went. We were all scattered and knew nothing about each other. For four days we pushed on like this.

On Sunday noon, July 15, 1945, we heard the church bells ring as we trudged wearily into Bischofshoven, south of Salzburg. We made our way to the railroad station. Great

was our joy when we found some of our people there who had also fled from Liezen. Together we went to nearby Salzburg. We were now 33 persons in all. The others we had lost.

Our joy was short-lived, however, when we discovered that we could not go on. The border was closed. We could not stay in Salzburg, because we had no food and no way to get any. Staying meant starving to death. For a few days we found refuge in a school, but our situation worsened rapidly. We discovered that we were getting so weak that we could hardly walk anymore. Many were already beginning to swell, the last phase of hunger before death overtakes you.

Just when all hope of survival was disappearing, the Lord rescued us again. In the office of the International Red Cross (IRC) we met a Dutchman, one of the IRC representatives. We told him our pilgrimage of sorrow, told him who we were, and begged him to help us. He was very kind to us. Immediately he sent us to a Dutch refugee camp, where they accepted us. He gave us papers and saved us.

We felt more safe in the Dutch camp. We had food and beds for the first time in many weeks. That night we thanked God on our knees and sang praises to him. The sun had almost set over our lives, and now it was shining again. We could hardly believe it. At 1:00 at night, we were awakened. “Come, follow me” said the kind Dutchman. He took us to the storeroom and gave us packages: tinned food, sugar, chocolate, cheese, milk—eight pounds in all. Our cup of joy ran over. None of us, including the children, slept any more that night. We accepted all of this as a gift from God’s hand.

The next morning they loaded us, along with a number of Dutch citizens, onto trucks and brought us to a refugee camp in Ulm, Germany. We stayed there all that day and the next. On the third day, Sunday, they moved us into a camp of Dutch citizens at Mannheim in the Palatinate. We spent a whole week there. On July 30, we were loaded onto a train and sent to Holland. We arrived in Maastricht, south Holland, at 7:00 in the evening of July 31, 1945.

In Maastricht, Peter Dyck and Pastor

Hylkema found us. A few days later, early in August, they brought us here to Fredeshiem. We left our homes in Nieder-Chortitza on October 3, 1943 and arrived in Maastricht, Holland on July 31, 1945; exactly 22 months later. We started out with 614 persons, and now we are only 33. In that turbulent time of almost two years, we lost 581 of our friends, neighbors and loved ones. We are safe, but where are they? We pray with thanksgiving for our safe refuge and pray also for those whom we lost along the way.

During the worship service, Pastor Hylkema spoke to the refugees. He read Psalm 126, which expresses the joy that the

Israelites felt when they were permitted to return to Jerusalem after years in captivity. To close the service, the refugees sang "God Be with You Till We Meet Again." As they sang, they thought of the 581 who had been lost along the way. They sang to one another and to their new friends in Holland.

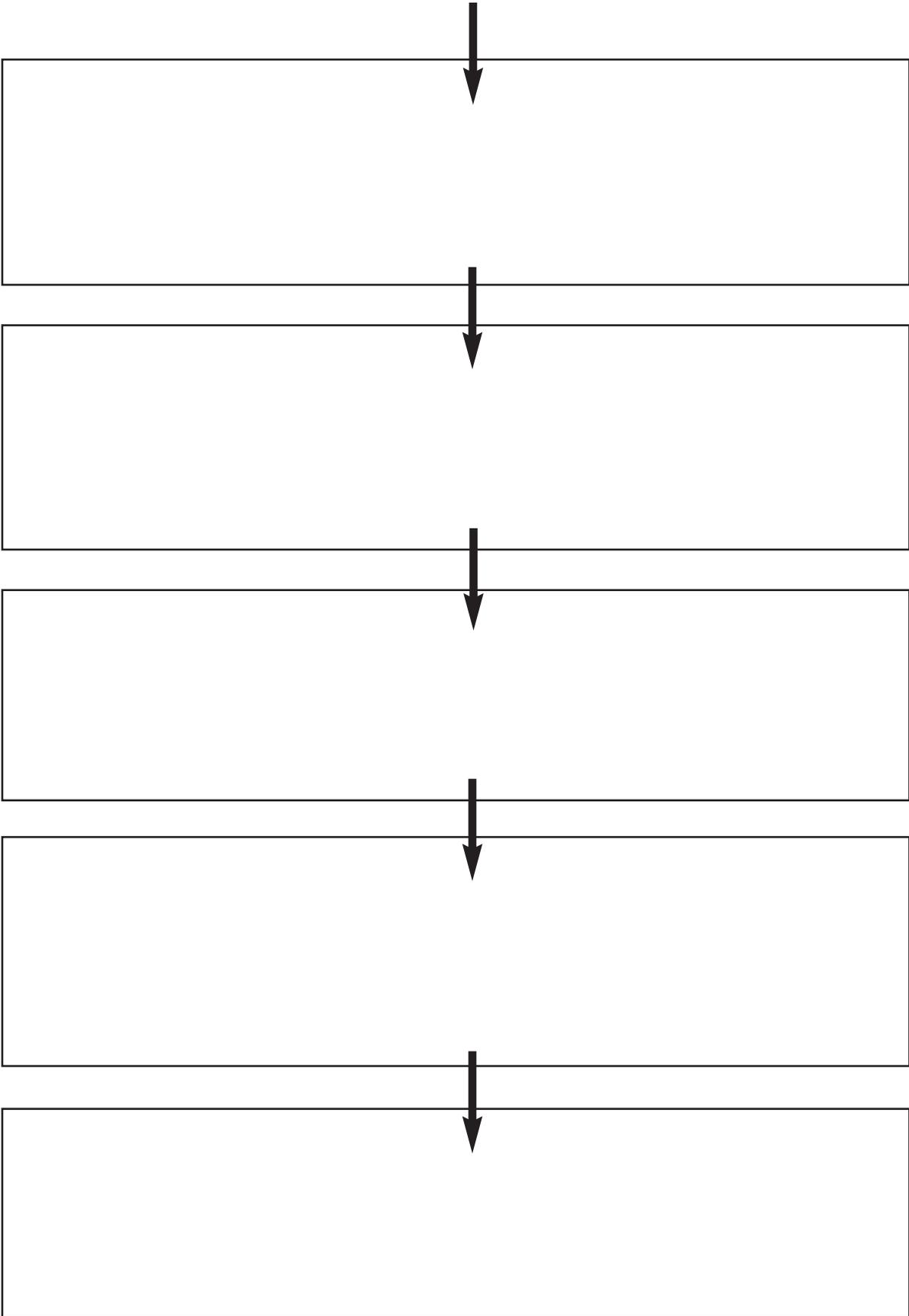
One thing was certain. No matter what happened, God would be faithful. They would see their loved ones again. Perhaps they would not meet again in this life, but they could look forward to a grand reunion at the throne where a loud voice will proclaim, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 20:5)

Story Organizer

for “Till We Meet Again”

This is an interesting and exciting story about a group’s faith and struggle, and God’s provision for them. Use the story organizer below to note each new event as it happens in the story.

The form consists of five empty rectangular boxes arranged vertically. Each box is connected to the one below it by a thick, black, downward-pointing arrow. This structure is designed for students to record key events from the story in chronological order.



Story Organizer Answer Key

There are a variety of ways to mark the events. This is one way.

614 Mennonites were forced to flee their homes because of World War II in 1943. They were forced to flee the Ukraine.

When this group arrived at a place called Apostolowo, the group was somehow separated.

One group tried to push on, but the Germans took their horses and wagons. The Germans shipped this group of Mennonites off to Poland on a train. They eventually went back to Apostolowo.

The other part of the group was overtaken by Russians. Half of them were shipped back to Russia. The other half escaped and hid in the fields for 15 days. Eventually, the ones that escaped and the ones that had been sent to Poland reunited. All of them were then shipped to Dresden, Germany.

The total group was now down to 240 from the original 614. The Germans in Dresden put them in a large school, where they slept on the hard floor.

Half of the group was then sent to live in Yugoslavia, where life was difficult. The other half was never heard from again and may have been shipped back to Russia.

The small group left in Yugoslavia moved on to try to reach Southern Germany. There were only 53 people left. However, they were caught and forced to go on a train back to Russia.

They ran from the train and were forced back on. They ran from the train again, during some confusion at the station. They were scattered in their hiding places, but managed to push on to Salzburg. When they arrived in Salzburg, there were only 33 in all.

In Salzburg they were starving. They met a Dutchman at the Red Cross. He helped them get official papers, and they went to a Dutch refugee camp.

The Dutch took good care of them and sent them to Holland. In Holland, Peter Dyck found them. There were now only the same 33 people left. They were safe, but they had lost 581 loved ones.

Websites List

Below is a list of websites that provide resources for teaching about Mennonite history and about those that have faced persecution.

Martyrs Mirror—the text can be viewed in its entirety
www.homecomers.org/mirror/contents.htm

Illustrations of Christians being persecuted from *Martyrs Mirror*
www.bethelks.edu/services/mla/images/martyrsmirror

Mennonite History by Daniel Kauffman
www.anabaptists.org/history/mennohist.html

Article about the demolition of a Mennonite chapel in Vietnam in 2004
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/10/22/vietna9552.htm>

Article by Professor John D. Roth describes Mennonite History
<http://history.mennonite.net>

Web page details the history of Mennonite persecution and conscientious objection to war
<http://mennonite0.tripod.com/KingofGlory/id5.html>

Article on the Mennonites in Europe
<http://anabaptists.org/writings/excerpts/meneu-1.html>

Page from the New Religious Movements website detailing Mennonite beliefs, history, and membership
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/relmove/nrms/mennonites.html>

Page from the Third Way Café site gives links to the history of the Mennonites
<http://www.thirdway.com/menno/>

A New Hope

LESSON 3: A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

Objective

Students will use Revelation 21:1-5 to reflect on their studies this year. They will review their travel logs, noting God’s acts of reaching out to God’s people throughout biblical history. Their final travel log entries will reflect their understanding of the concepts and their growing relationship with God.

Key Concepts

- Biblical faith does not concern itself with rituals and techniques by which we gain salvation. Instead, biblical faith offers hope in the face of human evil, because God seeks out humankind. God has saved God’s people from destruction.
- Through studying stories of God’s people and God’s faithfulness and providence to them, we come to understand God’s work in our world and lives today.

Text: Revelation 21:1-5

Estimated Lesson Time: 40 minutes

Materials

- Student Bibles
- Travel logs/timelines

Teacher Preparation

- Gather materials needed.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Relationship with God. Explain that today you will talk again about the first concepts you studied in fifth grade Bible class. Say, “We have studied the stories of God’s people, and of God’s faithfulness and providence to them. Now we can better understand that it is by God’s grace we have a relationship with God. We don’t need to use certain rituals as people did in the Old Testament stories. Instead, Jesus came as our sacrificial lamb, and we now have a model to follow as we seek God. God seeks out God’s people, and God has sought out each of you through your Bible studies this year.”

LESSON STEPS

- 1. Read together Revelation 21:1-4.** Ask students to reflect a bit on the reading. It is God’s ultimate promise of salvation and oneness with God.
- 2. Review timelines.** Have students look back at their timelines, noting God’s work in the lives of the people and groups you have studied. Take time together as a class to review the stories. Be especially mindful of God’s efforts to seek out God’s people.

3. Write in travel logs. Allow plenty of time for students to make a final entry (*for fifth grade studies*) in their travel logs. They should write in their own voices on each of the following prompts:

- How has God sought you out this year?
- What do you hear God telling you?
- Which person from our studies do you most identify with?
- What does “salvation” mean to you?
- Write a prayer to God, expressing your personal thoughts and feelings about your relationship with God.

You may want to recommend that students use a separate paragraph or section for the five different parts of this prompt.

Note: *Rather than a review for this unit, you may assess students’ understanding using the Travel Log Evaluation sheet. This prompt has been broken down into the five individual questions, and is valued at 150 points. These are personal questions, and may be difficult to evaluate. As noted on the evaluation form, you should look for evidence of students’ understanding of the concepts, as well as thoughtful writing.*

EXTEND THE LESSON

(This activity will extend the lesson to longer than 40 minutes.)

- **Share travel log entries.** If appropriate, you could give students time to share this journal entry or another one from the year’s studies.

Travel Log Evaluation

Name: _____

This time, all writing is done in the student's own voice, and the prompt is broken down by question.

PROMPT	EVALUATION COMPONENT	POINTS
How has God sought you out this year?	Writing is thoughtful and best effort is given.	___/10
	Writing reflects understanding of the concepts.	___/20
What do you hear God telling you?	Writing is thoughtful and best effort is given.	___/10
	Writing reflects understanding of the concepts.	___/20
Which person from our studies do you most identify with?	Writing is thoughtful and best effort is given.	___/10
	Writing reflects understanding of the concepts.	___/20
What does "salvation" mean to you?	Writing is thoughtful and best effort is given.	___/10
	Writing reflects understanding of the concepts.	___/20
Write a prayer to God, expressing your personal thoughts and feelings about your relationship with God.	Writing is thoughtful and best effort is given.	___/10
	Writing reflects understanding of the concepts.	___/20
	TOTAL	___/150

COMMENTS: