



**is your growth group getting a little DULL?** Maybe it's because you're not attending regularly and building relationships. Maybe you and others aren't preparing, so not working hard enough to see a reward. Maybe your leader could try some new ideas to avoid too much dull "Q&A". Talk about it this week! And see how you go in this week's study, where YOU get to do more of the work...

## Springtime In Israel

**Matthew 8:18-9:35**



Don't you love springtime? Buds shoot blossoms of hope from dead looking trees, browns turn to green and the birds start to sing. There's spring in the air for Israel as well, as curse turns to blessing, and their grey looking world takes on splashes of colour.

To understand what's going on, though, we need to understand the season Israel's going through as Jesus arrives. Take a look back at some warnings from Moses, way back in the beginning...



### Deuteronomy 28

V15 If you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you... v18 **the fruit of your womb will be cursed**... the Lord will plague you with **diseases** until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. V22 The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with **fever** and inflammation... v28 The Lord will afflict you with madness, **blindness**, and confusion of mind... day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you... Your sons and daughters will be given to another land and you will wear out your eyes watching for them... you will have **sons and daughters but you will not keep them**... **the alien who lives among you will rise above you** higher and higher... He will be the head, but you will be the tail. V45 All these curses will come upon you... because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you... v48 He will put an iron **yoke on your neck** until he has destroyed you. V58 If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name the Lord your God the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and **severe and lingering illnesses**... v64 The Lord your God will scatter you among the nations... you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot.

### Deuteronomy 30

...but... when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and **have compassion on you**...

If you're wandering through Israel and keep bumping into people suffering from fevers and diseases and blindness and confusion and oppression by foreign forces, if they're struggling under a heavy yoke, then what can you say about the way things are between Israel and God?

**Read Matthew 8 and 9 (re-reading the section from the last study).**

*Write down verse references for any examples of*

Disease

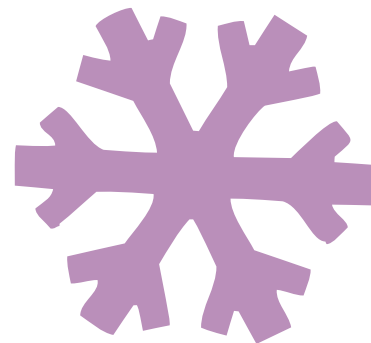
Blindness

Aliens (foreigners) who have risen above Israel

Fruit of the womb (children) cursed or lost

Severe or lingering illness

*Does Israel (as Jesus encounters it) appear to be under God's blessing, or his curse?*



## **A Change of Season**

With the arrival of Jesus, new life has come. For those who accept him, it's the springtime of God's restored blessing! In each of the cases above, what difference does Jesus make?

What (usually) is Jesus looking for from those he encounters?

*As he brings blessing back to Israel, Jesus tangles with unclean things in some interesting ways.*

### **Verse references for the unclean things Jesus mixes with are...**

Gentiles  
Demons  
Pigs  
Lepers  
Sinners and tax collectors

*How could you summarise the effect Jesus has on all this "uncleanness"?*

*Jesus has these things to say about the state of Israel*

8:22  
9:12-13  
9:16  
more...

*Crowds react to Jesus this way*

8:34  
9:8  
more...

The Scribes, Pharisees and Teachers of the Law respond to Jesus this way...  
*You find them!*

Following Jesus is mentioned in these verses...

Try to summarise the "big picture" of what's happening in Matthew 8 and 9.

What personal challenges come from your understanding of the passage?

### **mpc prayer and discussion point**

Please talk and pray together in your group about the ongoing financial situation of our church. Though giving has risen encouragingly this year, we are still \$10,000 behind budget. It is likely we will be unable to meet repayments on our renovation loan. Talk about issues like a) awareness... how should we keep our church family aware of finances without "always talking about money" in our church meetings? b) budget... are our goals for 2003 unrealistic? c) future plans... what goals and ministries should we curtail if we can't meet our current budget?

