



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Session 7: Present

Suggested Week of Use: July 16, 2023

Core Passage: Jeremiah 29:4-14

News Story Summary

Mass graves containing hundreds of bodies have been found in an 800-acre forest in Kenya. The bodies are of individuals who followed the teachings of former taxi driver, Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, a cult leader who founded the Good News International Church in 2003. The church closed in 2019, but Mackenzie still persuaded people to follow him to a remote forest where they set up villages named after biblical cities. He allegedly told his followers that they should not eat or engage in “worldly” activities, such as attending school or going to the doctor. Officials believe Mackenzie commanded people to starve themselves and their families so they could go to heaven and meet Jesus. Bodies continue to be exhumed in phases from shallow graves in the forest area. Many of the victims appear to have died of starvation, but others show signs of being strangled or beaten. Mackenzie is in police custody and has been denied bail.

For more about this story, search “Kenyan starvation cult leader”

Engage

To supplement the Engage suggestions, hang a large sheet of paper on a focal wall. As adults arrive, direct them to list one or two characteristics of a good pastor on the paper. To introduce the session, review the list and encourage volunteers to explain why each quality is important. Ask: *What happens if people follow a leader who doesn't care about these qualities?* Share the information about Paul Mackenzie's cult in Kenya. Ask: *Why do you think people might follow Mackenzie's teachings?* Point out that false prophets and dangerous leaders have always been around—even in churches. Share that in today's session, Jeremiah urged the people to trust God and to follow godly leaders—even when their message isn't comfortable to hear and obey.

Challenge

To supplement the Challenge activities, encourage the group to reflect on how what they learned from Jeremiah can be applied to their lives each day. Remind adults about the victims of the Kenyan cult who put their faith in a false prophet. Say: *Like them, we may be tempted to follow false teachings when we face difficult circumstances.* Emphasize the importance of getting into God's Word and knowing what He says so we can identify leaders who will guide us in the right direction spiritually.