

GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS, OUR REDEMPTION

BY JACKIE OESCH

**STORIES AND PASSAGES FROM THE BOOKS OF EZRA,
NEHEMIAH, AND THE PROPHETS**

- LESSON 1: *WHEN GOD SAW...GOD RELENTED* – JONAH**
LESSON 2: *SERVANTS OF THE MOST HIGH GOD* – DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS
LESSON 3: *SERVANT OF THE LIVING GOD* – DANIEL AND KING DARIUS
LESSON 4: *FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS* – ESTHER
LESSON 5: *THE GOOD HAND OF GOD* - EZRA
LESSON 6: *YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS* - NEHEMIAH

**“...I have stored up Your Word in my heart...”
Psalm 119:11**

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GETTING STARTED

You are embarking on an adventure that will shape the rest of your life. Your journey will be unique to you and will be determined in part by your eager and enthusiastic desire to grow in your understanding of the book called The Holy Bible. Your commitment to the study promises to enrich your life as God speaks to you through His Word.

As you study you are encouraged to have some recommended supplies on hand:

1. This Bible Study unit: *God's Righteousness, Our Redemption*
2. English Standard Version of the Holy Bible (ESV). Note: If you are making a new purchase, look for a Bible, if possible, that has:
 - a. a cross-reference column preferably down the center of each page,
 - b. a Concordance usually found in the back of the Bible, and
 - c. a few basic maps also usually found in the back.
3. Pen or pencil
4. 3x5 or 4x6 index cards

With the three features listed in #2 you will be adequately supplied for your study and be ready to successfully navigate through these lessons. If, however, this is your first exposure to the Bible, you may want to consider beginning with the study entitled *Navigating the Bible*. This study provides navigational tools designed to help you develop skills and make you a more confident Bible student. *Navigating the Bible* may be downloaded at no cost or obligation from the CrossConnect Ministries website (www.crosscm.org). Although this study is recommended, it is not essential for success in studying *God's Righteousness, Our Redemption*.

Do not hesitate to mark up your Bible. It's your Bible to study. Make it your own with your notes, your underlining, highlighting, circling and arrows! You may choose to use a notebook or tablet for recording thoughts, questions, and tracking your journey through the study.

The study material is written so that you are able to learn on your own. With a degree of self-discipline you will cover the material with little or no difficulty. At the same time, you will acquire new information, share new insights, and ask some challenging questions that will beg for answers. Anticipating this response you are encouraged to seriously consider inviting a couple of friends to study with you.

May you find joy in your study. May your heart be receptive as God speaks to you through His Word. May these Bible stories reassure you of His great love given to you through His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Editor's note: For clarification, capitalized pronouns reference God. i.e. "...what He said."

UNIT INTRODUCTION

This unit of study *God's Righteousness, Our Redemption* brings us to the end of Israel's history as recorded in the Old Testament portion of the Bible. We will consider three stories recorded in the books of the prophets Jonah and Daniel. These stories will introduce us to several new characters, namely Jonah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In addition, we will undertake the study of the three books of Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Again, we will observe God's faithfulness to His people as He worked through the lives of many different individuals to accomplish His purposes.

The material in Lesson 1 begins with some review material about the prophets, who they were and what their purpose was as prophets. Then we will look at the historical context in which these characters lived and in which their stories took place. We will learn what took place during a) the pre-exile years before the Kingdoms of Israel (north) and Judah (south) were conquered by the Assyrian and Babylonians armies respectively, b) the 70 years of the exile during the reign of the Babylonian and Persian kings, and c) the post-exile years when King Cyrus and Darius permitted the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem.

Take a moment and turn to the Table of Contents where the Books of the Bible are listed. As the study progresses we will be reminded that the Books of the Bible are not in chronological order but rather listed in groupings. For example, the Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch, are the first five Books. The next twelve Books from Joshua to Esther are the account of Israel's history. The writings of the prophets begin with the Book of Isaiah and continue through the last Old Testament Book of Malachi. The prophets spoke to particular people and situations during these years of Israel's history, especially during the years recorded in the Books of First and Second Kings and Chronicles, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

You will benefit from some map work as you observe the movement of the people who were deported out of the Promised Land and brought into the land of their captivity. This journey will become more significant as we consider the great distance and arid landmass they needed to cross. And we dare not forget that this time in history was void of all 21st Century travel means and physical comforts.

So, let's get started! Enjoy the study. Work hard to glean new thoughts and insights as you look for the application of these Biblical teachings, stories, and characters to your own life. Look for the places where the Lord is speaking to your heart. Jonah prayed within the belly of the big fish and Daniel prayed within the den of the lions. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked unbound in the fiery furnace and Esther stood courageously before the king. Maybe you will find yourself among the crowd of those trekking back to the Promised Land after a time spent in bondage and captivity and now you are ready to begin a

new life by returning to the familiar. Maybe you are experiencing anxiety and challenged by the uncertainty of what lies ahead. If you have never walked this road before don't forget to look around you. You are traveling with many others. We are walking together with our holy God who goes with us, redeeming our past and giving hope for the future, the crown of His righteousness!

A brief note before we begin... *Redemption* is the act of buying back something or someone. It is the act of releasing or being released because a payment has been made. One who is redeemed has been delivered or set free. This study continues the story of God redeeming His people. God redeemed Israel from their slavery in Egypt hundreds of years earlier (Exodus 1-14). Now we will see His work of redemption continue to unfold as Israel returned from exile and God established them once again in the Promised Land. The Bible speaks of God redeeming us and releasing us to live righteously before Him— forgiven, loved, and heirs of eternal life! Watch God's redemptive work for His people, the Israelites, unfold in this study.

LESSON ONE

WHEN GOD SAW...GOD RELENTED

JONAH 1-4 – THE STORY OF JONAH

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INTRODUCTION

Our responses to God's directives are not always responses of obedience. Jonah avoided saying "yes" to God. In this lesson learn what God asked Jonah to do and discover Jonah's response. How did God manage Jonah's audacious disobedience? How did Jonah's disobedience affect those around him? Did God give up on Jonah? Does God give up on us?

As you read the Book of Jonah watch for the little word "but." Circle or highlight this one word that can easily be passed over. When you've finished reading note the frequent usage of this word. Take time to reflect on the difference "but" made in Jonah's life. You may also choose to consider those times in your own life when "but" seemed to make all the difference.

Jonah 2:9 says, "*But* I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" God's love is greater than Jonah's disobedience and rebellion. God gives Jonah a repentant heart, a heart that responds with praise and thanks to the Lord for granting him hope, hope which rests in His steadfast love.

Part 1

INTRODUCTION: The Old Testament books from Isaiah to Malachi were written by prophets. These men filled with the Spirit of God, spoke the Word of God to the people, to the kings who ruled over them, and to the priests who spoke to God on their behalf. The previous study, *God's Mercy, Our Salvation* introduced the kings and some of the prophets in First and Second Kings and First and Second Chronicles. The study included two of the more prominent prophets Elijah and Elisha who were not literary prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example.

TEACHING: This is a good time to review who the prophets were and what their purpose was as prophets. Keep in mind that in spite of the fact that the people prostituted themselves before other gods and abandoned His rule and reign in their lives by choosing to do evil, nevertheless, God relentlessly pursued them with His tenacious love. His ultimate desire was to have an intimate, loving relationship with His chosen people. The prophets were the voice of God calling His people back to Him.

These messengers were chosen by God and given the work of *declaring a word of judgment* to the Israelites for the evil ways they chose to live their lives. They abandoned the Lord as their God and bowed down, worshipping the god of Baal and the fertility goddess Ashtaroth. Their lewd worship included practicing divination and witchcraft, consulting mediums and spiritists, and even sacrificing humans in fire.

Through the voice of the prophets God *called the people to turn from their wicked ways and offered the promise of His mercy* by restoring His relationship with all who turned back to Him. Ultimately, the prophets redirected God's people, pointing them to the One who would come as their Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

In this study watch for these three aspects of the prophets' work: 1) the declaration of God's judgment, 2) the call to repentance—the turning away from their evil ways and turning back to God, and 3) the promise of His mercy that restored His relationship with His people.

HISTORICAL SETTING: Our next challenge is to acquire an understanding of what is happening chronologically during the reign of the kings and the prophets who declared God's Word of judgment to these kings. In 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 we learned that the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, captured Jerusalem and took to Babylon the remnant of the Israelites who escaped death during Jerusalem's

destruction. This remnant lived in Babylon as slaves and servants for seventy years. During this time the King of Persia came into power and conquered Babylon.

PRE-EXILE – During these years the Israelites lived in Israel and Judah. Isaiah and Jeremiah were two of the many prophets who prophesied to those living in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah before they were exiled.

1. Read Isaiah's words of warning in Isaiah 5:4-6. As you read verses 8-23, underline the word "woe" found throughout this chapter. Isaiah 5 is an example of the prophet's warning to the Israelites. This is a chapter of woes and judgment. In verse 7 who is Isaiah referencing as the vineyard? _____
 - a. What is the judgment on those who have no regard for the deeds of the Lord (verses 11-15)? _____
 - b. What is the warning to those who tie themselves to sin, deceit, and wickedness, to those who call evil good and good evil, to those who are wise in their own eyes, and to those who are heroes at drinking wine, acquit the guilty and deny justice to the innocent (verses 18-25)? _____

2. Read Jeremiah 3:6-14 and as you read underline the words "faithless" (Kingdom of Israel) and "treacherous" (Kingdom of Judah). Jeremiah is speaking about the unfaithfulness of God's people to Him. Rather than remain faithful to Him they chose to commit adultery by giving themselves to other gods, committing wickedness and evil.
 - a. What is the picture Jeremiah describes in verses 6-10? _____

 - b. What does God say about Himself in verse 12? _____

 - c. What is God's message through the prophet to faithless Israel in verses 12-14?
Repeatedly God called them to _____ (verses 12, 14)
 - d. In verse 13 God called them to _____ their guilt.
 - e. And, what had they done (verse 13)?
 - i. _____ against the Lord your God.
 - ii. _____ your favors among foreign gods, and
 - iii. Have not _____ Me.

Isaiah and Jeremiah are examples of two prophets who delivered the warnings of God to His people during the reign of the kings in both the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The Northern

Kingdom of Israel was the first kingdom to be destroyed. It was taken by the Assyrians under the leadership of King Shalmaneser. The Book of Jonah was written *before* the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel.

IN EXILE – These are the years when the Israelites lived in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. The Book of Daniel records some of Israel’s exilic history when the people lived in Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar was king. In this study the stories while Israel was in exile will include the Books of Daniel and Esther. The exile ended in the year 539 B.B. when the Persian king Cyrus defeated Babylon. The return to Jerusalem, however, happened over a considerable period of time with waves of returnees.

POST-EXILE – These are the years when Israel began returning to Jerusalem under the Persian kings Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, also known as Artaxerxes. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah take place seventy years after the captivity during the years when the Israelites were given the opportunity to return and establish themselves once again in the Promised Land.

The Books, for whatever reason, are not in chronological order. The study, *God’s Righteousness, Our Redemption*, will tell some of Israel’s history through the following stories:

1. Jonah and the call to Nineveh
2. Daniel and the lions’ den
3. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and the fiery furnace
4. Esther, the Queen of Persia
5. Zerubbabel, the leader, and Ezra, the law giver
6. Nehemiah, the builder

A word of encouragement... Don’t become overwhelmed with the names of all the different characters, the number of Books, or the timeline. In Part 1 you have been introduced to the prophets and their work through Isaiah and Jeremiah. You have been given a brief historical outline of the years that preceded the exile, the years of exile under Babylonian and Persian rule, and the Books that cover the post-exilic period. In addition, you have a listing of the stories that are included in this study. So, let’s press on and begin by turning to the Book of Jonah.

Part 2

ASSIGNMENT: The Book of Jonah is brief, four short chapters to be exact. You are encouraged to read these chapters in one sitting. Enjoy reading for yourself the story of Jonah and the big fish! As you read, underline words and phrases that get your attention.

EXERCISE:

1. In Jonah 1:1 we are told the Word of the Lord came to _____ son of _____.

If you have a Bible with a cross-reference, look up 2 Kings 14:23-25.

- a. In verse 23 we learn that Jeroboam II was the king of Israel. What are we told about this king in verse 24? _____
- b. Who was the prophet who spoke the Word of the Lord to him (verse 25)? _____
- c. The prophet came from Gath Hopher, a town in Zebulun to the north.
2. What was the Word of the Lord that came to Jonah in Jonah 1:2? _____

Locate this great city of Nineveh on one of the first maps in the back of your Bible. Where is the city located? _____

3. How did Jonah respond in verse 3a? _____

TEACHING: Jonah was instructed by God to go to Nineveh. Instead, he ran away from the Lord. In order to understand Jonah’s response to God’s instruction we need to know about Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and Shalmaneser was the king. Hoshea was Israel’s king now. King Shalmaneser was about to capture Israel and have the Israelites deported to Assyria (2 Kings 17). King Shalmaneser would make the Kingdom of Israel his vassal which meant that Israel would be paying tribute to him.

The Assyrian invasion was evident and the Lord says to Jonah, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and call out against it...” God was sending Jonah into the heart of the country, to this great capital city that was about to seize the Kingdom of Israel! And what was the prophet to do? “...call out against it.” What was God thinking? What was God asking Jonah to do—die! To be taken captive? To be made into a slave? Into a fool?

Why should Nineveh have a chance to repent? Could it be that Jonah ran in the opposite direction because he hated the Assyrians (the Ninevites) as a different ethnic group? As a cruel enemy?

This background on Nineveh sets the stage for the remainder of the Book of Jonah. And it all begins with the Word of the Lord coming to the prophet Jonah...

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: One can’t help but ask the question:

1. If God asked me to go somewhere, would I go? If God asked me to risk my life, would I go? What would influence my decision to go or not to go? _____
- _____

2. I might identify with Jonah. What are those things that cause me to run away? _____

Part 3

EXERCISE:

1. But Jonah ran away and headed for _____ (verse 3). No one knows exactly where Tarshish was, quite possibly in Western Europe, but his route was west and Nineveh was to the east. Obviously, he was headed in an entirely different direction.
2. Find Zebulun on the map and then locate the town of Joppa to the south along the coast. There he found a ship bound for Tarshish. According to verse 3b what was his reason for sailing? _____

3. Describe in your own words the desperate situation on the ship: _____

4. But where had Jonah gone and what was he doing? _____
5. The captain was appalled. What did he want Jonah to do (verse 6)? _____

6. What was the sailors' solution (verse 7)? _____
7. What was the result? _____
8. The sailors quickly became acquainted with their passenger. Consider all the questions they asked Jonah. What was his answer to their questions (verses 8-9)? _____

9. The sailors apparently knew that he was running away from the Lord but now they wanted to know why! After professing that he worshipped the Creator of heaven, the sea, and the land, they were _____. What did they want to know (verse 10)? _____

10. Now the sailors wanted to know what it would take to appease this angry God. So they asked Jonah (verse 11), " _____ "
11. What was Jonah's reply (verse 12)? _____
12. He knew that he was at fault. He was the one to blame for the storm but rather than throw him into the sea, what did the sailors do? _____
13. But the great storm intensified. The sailors could not row back to land. In verse 14 they cried out to the Lord. What was the essence of their prayer? _____

14. What all happened in verse 15 and 16?

- a. To Jonah? _____
 - b. To the sea? _____
 - c. To the sailors? _____
15. But what did the Lord provide in verse 17? _____
 “and Jonah was _____.”

REFLECTION: Let’s take some time to look back over this chapter and consider a few things...

1. Do you find it interesting that the one Jonah is running from is the One whom he worships (verse 9)? What thoughts come to your mind? When do you find yourself running from the One who made you? _____
2. Jonah who worshipped the Lord is disobedient to Him while the sailors who had their own gods would do whatever it took to obey Him. Review what the sailors said and did in their attempt to appease the wrath of God caused by Jonah’s disobedience: _____

3. As hard as Jonah ran from God, how far was God from him?
 - a. In verse 4 who sent a great wind that caused a violent storm? _____
 - b. In verse 17 who provided a great fish? _____
4. And Jonah found himself inside another belly.
 - a. Verse 5b tells us that he was in the belly of the _____
 - b. Verse 15 tells us that he was in the belly of the _____
 - c. Verse 17 tells us that he was in the belly of the _____
5. What are these “belly” places for Jonah? These places all seemed big enough to accommodate him, big enough to hide him. What do you think he was looking for? A place to hide? Did he think he could hide? _____
6. Where did God find some of the others He loved?
 - a. In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve sinned and God went looking for them. Recall where He found them (Genesis 3:8-9): _____
 - b. In Genesis 4, where did God find Cain? _____
 - c. In Genesis 19, where did God find Lot? _____
 - d. In Exodus 3, where did God find Moses? _____
 - e. In Ruth 1, where did God find Ruth? _____
 - f. In 1 Samuel 3, where did God find Samuel? _____
 - g. In 1 Samuel 16, where did God find David? _____

7. Jonah knew that the Lord was his deliverer. What does he proclaim in Jonah 2:6b? _____

APPLICATION:

1. When are those times you hide and don't want to be found? _____

2. Where do you go to hide? Where are your "belly" places? _____

3. Read Jeremiah 23:23-24.
 - a. What is the first question God asks? _____
 - b. What is His next question? _____
 - c. Finally, what does He ask? _____
4. How do these questions challenge my understanding about God, the God who is present everywhere? _____

CHALLENGE: As I consider my family and friends and those in my workplace...

1. How might I act with intention to bring an awareness of God's presence into their places of hiding that they might discover His peaceful, caring presence? _____

2. What might I say? _____

PRAYER: My prayer asking God to work through me to connect someone to Him: _____

MEMORIZATION: There is great comfort in knowing that I can never be separated from God by hiding. God does not hide Himself and we cannot hide from Him. He has made the heavens and the earth. And, He has made me. Because I am His and He is mine, Psalm 139:7-10 can be in my memory always reminding me that I cannot flee from His presence. There is no place I can go and not find Him. He is there with me. Write these verses on an index card and add it to your library of verses. Find comfort as you rest in His presence. Find peace knowing that nothing in all creation can separate you from Him and His love (Romans 8:38-39)! Your thoughts: _____

Part 4

APPLICATION:

1. Jonah 2:8 speaks about those who cling to worthless idols. This verse begs the question: What are some of the worthless things I cling to? _____

2. This verse also declares what we forfeit when we put our faith and trust in other people and things. What do we forfeit that could be ours? _____
We have a choice to make, but we can't have both. We can choose to cling to worthless things (idols) and forfeit grace or we can forfeit the worthless things and cling to grace, God's great love.
3. What are we encouraged to do that gives evidence that we are clinging to grace (verse 9)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____Singing songs of thanksgiving, offering to the Lord our sacrifices of worship and praise, and living with integrity all give testimony to our faith: "Salvation comes from the Lord."
4. Jonah has had time to reflect and repent and now his life in the belly of the great fish is over. What are we told in verse 10? _____

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Jonah 3.

EXERCISE: Of course, we don't know but we can imagine ourselves finding Jonah sprawled out on the beach. It's really not a pretty sight; after all, he's been inside the fish for three days. Can you see him still all matted down and tangled up in a bog of seaweed?

1. What happens in verse 1? _____
2. What was the essence of God's second word to Jonah (verse 2)? _____

3. Had the essence changed from what God said in Jonah 1:2? _____
4. According to verse 3 what was Jonah's response? How had it changed from his response in Jonah 1:3? _____
5. How did God use Jonah in verses 3-5? _____

6. God's message reached the hearts of the Ninevites. The message also reached the heart of the king (verse 6). What did he do that demonstrated his repentance?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

7. Then he issued a proclamation. He led the Ninevites into a time of repentance and prayer. Repentance included the act of covering themselves with sackcloth which gave witness to their sorrow and humility for the violence and evil they had committed. Repentance also included responding to the call to give up and turn away from what they had been doing. It was the call to change their ways. What was God’s response to what they did (verse 10)? _____

God’s grace received their repentant hearts and released His compassion which kept Him from bringing the destruction He had threatened.

REFLECTION: What a short chapter packed full of God’s grace!

1. He was gracious to Jonah by starting over. In spite of Jonah’s disobedience, his rebellion, his hiding, and running from God, God saved Jonah for His purposes and came to him again with the words, “_____.”
2. Jonah obediently went and proclaimed God’s Word: “_____ days and Nineveh will be _____!” By God’s grace, by His undeserved love, the Ninevites _____ God, called for a _____, and put on _____.
3. The king heard the message and saw what the people were doing. He issued a proclamation that everyone—man and beast—fast, wear sackcloth, and call out mightily on God. Everyone was to _____ from his _____ way and from the _____ that is in his _____.
4. And God in His grace was compassionate. He did not bring the _____ that He had said He would do to them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Reflecting on all of God’s grace, what am I learning about God and His love for those whom He created whether I identify with Jonah or the Ninevites? _____
2. What is God’s good news to us as He addresses our disobedience, our rebellion, our hardened hearts, and even our choice all too often to cling to worthless idols? _____
3. Have I ever considered God to be a God of second chances? Am I one who is asking for a second chance? _____

APPLICATION: We care not move on until we have asked the “so what” question. So, what difference does this story make on my life? How do I apply grace to myself? How do I extend grace to others? Grace simply loves.

1. When are those times when I need to apply grace to my own life, treating myself graciously, loving, and forgiving myself and refraining from self-incriminating thoughts and actions that accuse and condemn? _____
2. Is there something today for which I need to forgive myself, something I’ve said or done, something that I’m not proud of, something I’ve said or done that has hurt someone else? _____

May God empower you to forgive *yourself* as He has forgiven you.

3. Who are those people I find hard to love? _____
I would rather declare these individuals guilty and make them pay for what they did than act graciously and compassionately toward them. I would rather punish them and bring them to ruin. How might I love someone today with grace even when it’s hard to do? _____

May God empower you to forgive *others* as He has forgiven you.

Part 5

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Jonah 4. Look for more insights into who this Jonah character is.

INTRODUCTION: After reading this chapter we may find it more difficult to love Jonah. We know he was stubborn and rebellious, a man with a mind of his own. Not only was he disobedient to God’s call to go to Nineveh but was willing to be drowned in the sea rather than do the right thing and obey. This chapter gives us more insight into why he didn’t want to go to Nineveh in the first place. Let’s continue...

EXERCISE:

1. In Jonah 3:10 we read about the Lord’s compassion toward Nineveh and how does Jonah respond in Jonah 4:1? _____
2. What did Jonah know to be true about God in verse 2?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

- e. _____
3. He knew these things to be true about the God he worshipped (Jonah 1:9). That’s why he ran away. What does the fact that he ran away tell us about his regard for the Ninevites? _____

 4. How did Jonah want God to treat the Ninevites? _____

 5. How did the Lord respond (verse 4)? _____
 6. Jonah went off to “wait and see” what was going to happen to Nineveh. One almost gets the feeling that he went off to pout. His life was all about him. Once again, God came with grace to Jonah and caused a plant to grow that provided shade for him. What was Jonah’s reaction to the vine (verse 6)? _____
 7. What happened the next day according to verses 7 and 8? _____

 8. And again, Jonah expressed his wish to die. His anger over God’s grace to the Ninevites was consuming him. He was angry about the shade plant that died and again wanted to die. How did the Lord respond to him in verses 10-11? _____

TEACHING: Jonah, in essence, was more concerned about the vine that died than about the more than 120,000 inhabitants of Nineveh who did not know who made them, loved them, and wanted to bless them. They did not know God as gracious, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and a God who relents from sending disaster. From Jonah’s perspective God was to be only the God of the Israelites. Yet God chose to extend His grace to the Ninevites, to those who did not belong, who were not God’s people. Thus, God was showing Himself as the God of *all* people.

REFLECTION: This story ends abruptly. It’s as though all the questions haven’t been answered. How did Jonah respond to God’s ultimate question? What happened to Jonah after this encounter with God? Did God lose patience with Jonah and take his life? But, are these important questions? What might be some more significant questions as we consider the application of this story to contemporary life?

1. How do I respond to others with different customs and ethnic backgrounds?
2. How do I regard those who believe in a different god(s)?
3. How do I respond when I’m asked to share the Word of the Lord with those in my neighborhood?
4. Does my response express God’s love and mercy toward those who do not know Him?

APPLICATION: God calls us to reflect His image to the world (Genesis 1:27). In this story we learn that grace, compassion and mercy, love, and slowness to anger are all words that describe who He is. God shows no partiality. He treats the Ninevites as He treats Jonah with love and forgiveness. Read Matthew 5:43-48. Jesus is speaking to a crowd that had gathered to hear His teachings. These verses challenge us to how we are to treat others in a way that reflects Him. He first talks about love and hate. Then He speaks of the sin and rain blessing both the evil and good, both the righteous and the unrighteous. Jesus is calling the people to rise up. He's calling them to act as He acts. He's calling them to reflect Him. God is not selective when He blesses creation with sun and rain. He challenges us to the same. Don't love selectively but rather love those who don't love you back. We are called to reflect the holiness of God, our Father who has made us holy in His Son Jesus Christ. Because we can't be perfect, we *need* a Savior who is!

MEMORIZATION: Enjoy memorizing Matthew 5:44-45 and 48 these next days. Write them on another index card and include on the back your prayer asking the Lord to enable you to love as He has first loved you.

CLOSING COMMENTS: As we bring to conclusion our study of the Book of Jonah you are encouraged to scan through the chapters one more time. This time, take a pen or highlighter and underline the word "but" every time it is used.

1. After you have completed underlining throughout the Book, you may notice that at least 9 times the word "but" is used. The New International Version (NIV) uses the word 13 times.
 - a. In the first chapter the Lord says something and immediately Jonah follows it with *but...* (Jonah 1:3)
 - b. The boat is in route to Tarshish *but* the Lord... (Jonah 1:4 ESV only)
 - c. Everyone else is on deck battling the storm *but* Jonah... (Jonah 1:5)
 - d. The men on ship did their best to row to land *but...* (Jonah 1:13)
 - e. The men gave Jonah up as drowned and dead *but* the Lord... (Jonah 1:17 NIV)
 - f. In his prayer Jonah thought he was dying *but...* (Jonah 2:6b NIV)
 - g. Jonah speaks of those who forfeit grace and of himself he says, *but...* (Jonah 2:9)
 - h. The king gives the decree to those fasting and adds *but...* (Jonah 3:8)
 - i. God relents and does not punish the Ninevites *but* Jonah... (Jonah 4:1)
 - j. Jonah wants to die *but* the Lord... (Jonah 4:4 NIV)
 - k. The vine grows and provides shade *but* God... (Jonah 4:7)
 - l. Again, Jonah wants to die *but* God... (Jonah 4:9)
 - m. Jonah is angry enough to die, *but* the Lord... (Jonah 4:10 NIV)

n. Jonah is so concerned about the vine *but* Nineveh... (Jonah 4:11 NIV)

2. For the most part, the “buts” are the battle between Jonah and the Lord. Jonah wants life his way *but* God has different thoughts. In Jonah 3 Jonah obeys God. God blesses his ministry to the people of Nineveh. The people respond. And then comes verse 10: “When God saw what they did...” There is no “but”! There’s no struggle between God and Jonah, between man and nature, between vine and worm. Yes, when Jonah reached Nineveh he had quite a story to tell about how he got there. The story could have been very short. Simply told, Jonah could have said that he obeyed the call of God, the Ninevites believed God and repented, and God had compassion on them (Jonah 3). No buts!

PRAYER: Lord God Almighty, all too often I find myself identifying with Jonah. You call and I run the other way. I want to hide from You. I don’t want to be obedient. I confess my sin of disobedience and rebellion. So many times I want my own way. I’m stubborn and obstinate. I don’t deserve Your grace and compassion. But, in spite of my sin, You keep coming back to me with love. Open my eyes to see what You see. Silence all of my arguments and grant me the grace to run quickly to obey Your holy will. Thank You for blessing me with opportunities to serve You as I love others. _____

LESSON TWO

SERVANTS OF THE MOST HIGH GOD

**DANIEL 1-6 – A STORY OF DANIEL,
SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO**

OVERVIEW OF LESSON 2

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INTRODUCTION

Who were these young men who denied themselves food from the king's table, interpreted dreams, and believed that the God they served was able to deliver them from the burning fiery furnace? What possessed them to disobey the king's edict and die rather than to disobey the God whom they served? These men stood firm against the king's fury.

What was the situation that placed these men in such difficult circumstances? What gave them the character to stand up to the God in whom they believed? What was the result of their witness to the power of God at work in them? As you learn about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego consider your own response to life's difficult situations. Whom do you serve? God promises to be with us in our most difficult times. Romans 8:28 gives to us God's promise which reassures us with these words, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." And He reassures us of His presence with the words, "I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20)."

LESSON 2

Part 1

INTRODUCTION: The prophet Jonah prophesied during the reign of the kings of Israel, the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 14:25). In 2 Kings 17:6 we are told that the Assyrians invaded the land and captured the capital city of Samaria, the place where the kings of the Northern Kingdom reigned. God's people living in the north were deported to Assyria.

In 2 Kings 25 we read about the fall of the capital city of Jerusalem in Judah, the Southern Kingdom. King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, marched with his army against Jerusalem, set fire to the temple and the royal palace and deported the people to Babylon. Now in Lesson 2 we read a story about the prophet Daniel who was among those carried off into captivity and lived in Babylon.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Daniel 1:1-21.

EXERCISE:

1. What history is recorded in Daniel 1:1-2?
 - a. Who was the king of Judah? _____
 - b. Who was the king of Babylon? _____
 - c. What did the Lord do? _____
 - d. The people were carried off. What was also taken? _____
 - e. Where were these articles placed? _____
2. What did King Nebuchadnezzar order Ashpenaz to do (Daniel 1:3-5)?
 - a. Who specifically was Ashpenaz to look for? _____
 - b. Describe the traits and characteristics of these young men?
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____
 - iv. _____
 - v. _____
 - vi. _____
 - c. What was Ashpenaz to teach them? _____

 - d. What did the king provide? _____

- e. What was to happen after the three years of training? _____
3. Who were four of the men from Judah (verses 6-7)?

NAMES	NEW NAMES
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

4. But Daniel had a problem with the king's orders (verse 8).
- a. Problem: _____
- b. Request: _____
5. What was God's intervention on Daniel's behalf (verse 9)? _____
6. What was the official's problem (verse 10)? _____
7. What was the bargain that Daniel made with the official (verses 11-14)? _____
8. What was the result of the test (verses 15-16)? _____
9. What did God give these four young men according to verse 17? _____
- What did God give specifically to Daniel? _____
10. The time came for the men to be presented to King Nebuchadnezzar.
- a. What did the king determine (verse 19)? _____
- b. What did he discover about these men after questioning them (verse 20)? _____
11. How long did Daniel remain in the King's service? _____

Part 2

REFLECTION:

1. If you were a young man, a teenager or in your early twenties, reading about Daniel and his three friends, what might be some of your thoughts? _____

2. How does the description of their character challenge you? _____

3. In verse 9 we learned that God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel. Where in your relationships do you see God showing you favor through others? _____

4. In verse 17 we read that God gave these young men _____ and _____ in all _____ and _____. Daniel had _____ in all _____ and _____. What are the gifts God has given to you that you also need to acknowledge? _____

MEMORIZATION: In Daniel 2 King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and asked that his astrologers not only interpret the dream but also tell him what his dream was. They claimed this was impossible. Daniel asked the king for time that he might be able to interpret his dream (verse 16). Daniel and his three friends pleaded to God for mercy in order that the dream might be known and interpreted and all of these men might not be executed. During the night God revealed the mystery to Daniel in a vision. What was his immediate response (verses 20-23)? _____

Take time to write these four verses on your index card and memorize them!

1. Identify who holds wisdom and power. _____
2. To whom does He give wisdom and knowledge? _____
3. Who brings things in the deep and darkness to light? _____
4. In verse 23 what does Daniel acknowledge?
 - a. You have given me _____ and _____.
 - b. You have made know to me _____
 - c. You have made known to us _____

INTRODUCTION: The next story from the Book of the prophet Daniel that we will study is written in Daniel 3. Keep in mind that these men are in the service of the king. They are living in a strange and foreign land and held captive by the Babylonians. Now Daniel's three friends are put to the ultimate test.

At the end of chapter two (verses 48-49) we learn that Daniel is placed in a high position and is lavished with many gifts from King Nebuchadnezzar. He is made ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed in charge of all the king's wise men. At Daniel's request his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are appointed as administrators over the province. Daniel remained at the royal court.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Daniel 3:1-18.

EXERCISE:

1. What do we learn about the image King Nebuchadnezzar had made (verse 1)? _____

2. Then the king has a dedication of the image. Who is summoned to come (verse 2)? _____

This includes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as province officials.

3. What was the command in verses 4-5? _____

4. What were the consequences for any disobedience to this command (verse 6)? _____

5. So, the music played and what did everyone do? _____

6. What did Nebuchadnezzar's astrologers report (verses 8-12)? _____

One wonders if these were some of the same individuals who were stumped by the king's request to be told his dream and the interpretation of it. Were these possibly the same men whom Daniel's interpretation kept from execution?

7. What was Nebuchadnezzar's response to this report (verses 13-15)? _____

- _____
- a. The men were summoned.
 - b. The men were questioned.
 - c. The men were offered a second chance.

8. What was Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's reply (verses 16-18)? _____

These men laid things on the line. They declared their God to be the only God they would worship and serve. They would bow down to no other gods.

Part 3

REFLECTION: One can't help but wonder about the courage of these men to go contrary to the command of the king at the risk of being burned to death in a blazing furnace. Nevertheless, they believed that their God would save them but even went so far as to say that "if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up (verse 18)."

Some of us reading this lesson have never had to face a life or death situation when declaring our faith in the one true God. Some of us have. Some of us know the courage it takes to stand up against the crowd or against those in authority knowing that our declaration may mean a loss of a job promotion, loss of relationships with friends and family, loss of status, recognition, approval, and countless other things. The call for courage prevails. Can we say, "but if not...we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image...?"

The same characteristics of these men that gave them a position within the king's service were now the character traits that put their lives at risk. They were well informed and quick to understand what the consequences of their actions would be. Yet, they refused to serve the gods of those who now held the people of their God in captivity. What was the source of such courage and convictions? _____

Share some of your own reflections: _____

ASSIGNMENT: Read Daniel 3:19-30.

EXERCISE:

1. What was Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to the statement of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that they would suffer death rather than serve his gods or worship the image? _____

2. What did Nebuchadnezzar order (verse 19b)? _____
3. What was the king's command (verse 20)? _____

4. We are told what the men were wearing when they were bound and thrown into the furnace. What do you notice (verse 21)? _____
- What happened to the soldiers? _____
 - What happened to the men of God? _____
5. What was Nebuchadnezzar's question in verse 24? _____
- And what was the reply? _____
 - What did Nebuchadnezzar see? What was unusual (verse 25)?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
6. These men had been servants of the king. What does the king call them in verse 26? _____
7. The king called them out of the furnace. Everyone gathered around them. What did they all notice about the men?
- _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
8. Nebuchadnezzar saw these three young men no longer as servants of the king. He regarded them as servants of their God. This meant that (verse 28b) they _____ in Him and _____ the king's command and were willing to _____ their lives rather than _____ or _____ any other god except their own _____.
9. What was the king's decree in verse 29? _____
10. What did the king do for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? _____

Part 4

REFLECTION: Again, if these three were young men, even teenagers, what is their powerful testimony of God's faithfulness for you and me? _____

APPLICATION:

1. The furnace in my life may never be a fire that burns. They may be challenges to my faith, my beliefs, or my life experiences. How do I live? Do I live my life safe so that I am never confronted with a test that gives such a witness? To what then does my life give witness? _____

2. What changes might I need to consider making in order that I give witness to the one I serve?

PRAYER: O Lord God Almighty, You are my God, the God that I serve. Enable me to trust You when times come calling for a powerful witness of Your faithfulness to me. Even if I face death, never let me bow down and serve other gods or worship the image made with human hands. Rather give me the courage to say that even if You do not rescue me I am Your servant. Thank you for these young men and the testimony their lives have been to people down through the ages. May my life give witness of You to others for You are the God whom I serve. _____

OVERVIEW: We are told in Daniel 1:17 that Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. In chapter two the king has a dream and asks that his astrologers tell him the dream and interpret it. By the end of the chapter Daniel has interpreted the dream. The king falls prostrate before Daniel and pays him honor and presents him with an offering and incense. As mentioned earlier in this lesson King Nebuchadnezzar places Daniel in a high position and lavishes many gifts on him. He is made ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed in charge of all its wise men.

In chapter 4 the king has another dream that none of the wise men in his kingdom can interpret. Again, he comes to Daniel and asks Daniel to tell him what the dream means. Daniel interprets the dream but this time he asks the king to accept his advice and “break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity (Daniel 4:27).”

Then in chapter 5 King Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s son, while drinking his wine from the goblets that his father had taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, sees the fingers of a human hand writing on the wall. Belshazzar’s wife tells the king about Daniel who is then brought before him. Daniel reads the

writing to the king that indicates the end of the Babylonian Empire. Belshazzar commands that Daniel be clothed in purple, a gold chain be placed around his neck, and proclaimed him to be the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That night Belshazzar is slain and Darius the Mede takes over the kingdom.

LESSON THREE

SERVANT OF THE LIVING GOD

DANIEL 6 – DANIEL AND KING DARIUS

OVERVIEW OF LESSON 3

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INTRODUCTION

Not only was the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego tested and proven worthy but also the faith of their friend Daniel. Once again, malicious men choose to put the life of one who is a servant of the Living God to the test. What caused these men to act so wickedly? What is the background for their treatment of Daniel?

Once a decree or law is signed it cannot be revoked, so these men who were out to find charges against Daniel appealed to the king's weakness, his desire to be god over all, and enticed the king with a decree. What is this law that the king put in writing that Daniel could not and would not keep? What was the problem?

But Daniel would not deny his Lord. He disobeyed the king and the sentence was death. As you study Daniel's behavior and character through this ordeal, consider his relationship with the God of Israel. What did he know to be true about God? What was his discipline as he nurtured his relationship with God? What was one of the blessings of living a disciplined life?

Daniel gave witness to the king of God's faithfulness to him. Daniel exposed those who provided poor and corrupt advice and counsel to the king. Listen carefully as Daniel reveals God's grace even when living among the lions.

INTRODUCTION

Part 1

INTRODUCTION: Dreams and visions are told throughout the Book of Daniel. The prophetic interpretation of those dreams and visions are also told and finally their fulfillment becomes a reality. Tucked away in Daniel 6, however, we have one of the well-known Bible stories. It's the story of Daniel in the lions' den. The Babylonian Empire had ended and now the Medes and the Persians ruled the land. King Darius, the Mede, did not know Daniel.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Daniel 6.

EXERCISE:

1. Consider for a minute the organizational structure established by Darius (verses 1-2).
 - a. The _____ were set throughout the kingdom.
 - b. Three _____ ruled over them so that _____

 - c. What was to become Daniel's role (verse 3)? _____
 - d. What distinguished Daniel above all the others? _____
2. This arrangement caused jealousy. What did the satraps and administrators attempt to do (verse 4)? _____
3. They were, however, unable to find grounds for charges against Daniel because _____

4. The men gave up trying to find fault with Daniel's conduct of government affairs. What did they realize they needed to do (verse 5b)? _____
5. What was their proposal to the king (verses 6-7)? _____

6. To keep the king from changing his mind and resending the order, what did the group tell the king to do (verse 8)? _____

REFLECTION: The king put the decree in writing. It was the law of the Medes and Persians that no document could be repealed.

1. If you were king, what might cause you to make and sign such a decree? What is the appeal to human nature? _____

2. Apparently, what is the way the people regarded their king? _____
3. What would cause the king to make such a decision? What would cause him to fail to see the implications of this manipulative act? _____
4. Obviously, the administrators and satraps came to the king with malice intent. What do you think it was about Daniel's exceptional qualities (verse 3) that stirred up jealousy and threatened them to act so unjustly toward Daniel? _____
5. With which character(s) do you identify? The king? The administrators and satraps? Daniel? Share your thoughts and reflections: _____

APPLICATION: Daniel's life reflected a righteous life. Verse 4 says that "they could find no _____ for _____ or any _____, because he was _____, and no _____ or _____ was found in him."

1. Wouldn't any employer want Daniel working for him? Consider your own work ethic whether working as a paid employee or serving in a volunteer position. Could it be said of you that no one can find any fault or corruption in you, because you are faithful and trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent? _____
2. As you consider your work, in what areas do you reflect Daniel's work ethic? _____

3. In what areas might you choose to reevaluate and introduce personal change to your work environment? _____

PRAYER: O Lord, I can't help but reflect on my own life as I reflect on Daniel's. Through Your Word You set before me the model of a godly man whose life is observed and challenged by others, even by kings and those in authority over him. Enable me to conscientiously serve You and to confidently know that, regardless of my position, my life is a witness You are using to help bring others into a relationship with You. May I be faithful to You as You have been to me. Fill me with Your presence so that I cannot help but do those things pleasing to You and Your Will all the days of my life. _____

Part 2

INTRODUCTION: The stage has been set. The administrators and satraps have convinced King Darius to sign the decree. Anyone who worships anything or anybody other than the king in the next thirty days

is to be thrown into the den of lions. To make sure that the king does not change his mind and that charges are made against Daniel they insist that the decree be signed. Thus the law of the Medes and Persians is in effect and the decree cannot be repealed.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Daniel 6.

EXERCISE:

1. What was Daniel's pattern of behavior according to verse 10? _____

2. What difference did the edict make in Daniel's prayer life? _____

REFLECTION:

1. The king's orders made no difference in the way that Daniel maintained his disciplined prayer life. We are told that he went to his upstairs room where the windows were opened toward Jerusalem. Do you find this unusual behavior? Why? Why not? _____

2. What modifications would you be inclined to make knowing that if you were found out that you would be thrown to the lions? _____

3. Not just once but three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed. He gave thanks to his God just as he had always done. There was no question. He was not going to let an edict get in the way of his time with the Lord his God. I need to ask myself, what are some of the things that get in the way of my quiet time with the Lord my God? _____

APPLICATION:

1. What is a change and choice I want to make? _____

2. Beginning to establish a discipline of prayer makes us extremely vulnerable to temptations that would distract us. Prayer, after all, is hard work! Some of us are not threatened with life and death situations when it comes to prayer but all too often our prayers become trite and lack energy and passion. What do you notice about Daniel's prayer discipline?
 - a. Where did he go to pray? _____
 - b. What time did he pray? _____
 - c. What was the posture of prayer? _____

- d. What did he pray? _____
3. Establishing a place to pray, a posture of prayer, a time to pray, and praying the prayer of thanksgiving are helpful in keeping the discipline of prayer. What might I do in these areas that would encourage and bless my prayer life?
- a. Where is my place of prayer? _____
- b. When is my time of prayer? _____
- c. What is my posture of prayer? _____
- d. What is the content of my prayers? _____

Part 3

EXERCISE:

1. The administrators and satraps go as a group and what do they find (verse 11)? _____
2. What is Daniel praying (verse 11)? _____

MEMORIZATION: In verse 11 we learn that Daniel is aware of the seriousness of his situation. He knows that by maintaining his active life of prayer that his life is in danger. These men hear Daniel asking God for help which completely violates the decree of the king. If you are using a Bible with a cross-reference notation following the word “help,” take time to look for the suggested related passages. One of the references in verse 11 might suggest Psalm 55:17. Turn to Psalm 55. Write out on an index card and memorize verses 16-19. What similarities do you see between David’s psalm and Daniel’s situation?

Psalm Reference	David’s Psalm	Daniel’s Prayer
Verse 16		
Verse 17		
Verse 18		
Verse 19		

EXERCISE:

1. Having heard Daniel's prayer, the administrators and satraps head off to speak to the king about his royal decree. Notice in verse 12 that these men want to make sure that the king takes ownership for the decree. What is the king's reply? _____

2. The king not only says that the decree stands but that it cannot be repealed. Having said that, now what do these men report to the king (verse 13) concerning Daniel, this exile from Judah?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. The king is distressed, _____ distressed (verse 14). He is determined to _____ Daniel and made every effort until sundown to _____ him.
4. Now the men return to the King as a group. What do they remind the king? _____

5. The law has been set. Daniel is to be thrown to the lions. The king is trapped (verse 15):
 - a. By the _____
 - b. By the _____
 - c. By the _____

Part 4

REFLECTION: So, you are King Darius. What would be going through your mind? You are trapped by the men, the decree, and the laws of the Medes and Persians. Daniel, your one man with exceptional qualities, is now condemned to death by lions. Daniel, the man you planned to set over your whole kingdom is about to die. Because of your weak character you were deceived by your egotistical thinking and now Daniel is as good as a dead man. And, you are unable to rescue him from the laws of the land. He is guilty. You made yourself a god to be worshipped and you cannot save him. You may be king but you are also just a man. So, you give the order. What would be your last words to Daniel? _____

EXERCISE:

1. What did King Darius say to Daniel (verse 16)? _____

2. The king acknowledged that Daniel's God was his only hope for rescue (deliverance). Turn to Psalm 37:39-40.
 - a. Where does the salvation of the righteous come from? _____

- b. He is their _____ in time of _____
 - c. The Lord _____ them and _____ them.
 - d. What does the Lord deliver them from (verse 40)? _____
 - e. He saves them because _____
3. What procedure was carried out in Daniel 6:17? _____

 4. The king returned to the palace and spent the night (verse 18). Describe his night. _____

 5. What was the first thing he did in the morning? _____
 6. What word tells you that the king had hope? _____
 7. The moment of truth had arrived. He called out to Daniel in _____
(verse 20). What did he ask? _____
 8. What did King Darius acknowledge in his question to Daniel?
 - a. Whom did Daniel serve? _____
 - b. Who was Daniel's only hope for rescue? _____

REFLECTION: Does it seem interesting to you that all of this time we have kept in touch with the king and his men but we have not been brought into the den of death with Daniel and the lions? We can dread the thought of what might be happening to Daniel but maybe it's because we know the end of the story that we have lost the sense of fear and dread that was there for Daniel. The king certainly had some sense of dread and horror. He had spent the longest night of his life in fear of what would happen to Daniel if his God did not intervene and rescue him.

1. In the light of what we have learned about Daniel, what do you think was going on inside of Daniel when he was captured and condemned to death by hungry lions? _____

2. How might the courage of his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have empowered him to face the lions? _____
3. Do you think he may have recalled some of the Psalms of David who himself was pursued relentlessly by his enemies? Review Psalm 55:16-19 and Psalm 37:39-40. What words do you think he would cling to for hope and reassurance? _____

Part 5

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Daniel 6:21-28.

EXERCISE:

1. What is Daniel's response to King Darius as he calls up from the grace of the lions' den (verse 21-22)? _____
 - a. My God _____
 - b. And He _____
 - c. They have not _____
 - d. Because I was _____
 - e. I have done _____
2. What was the response of the king upon hearing Daniel's voice (verse 23)? _____

3. What was his order? _____
4. What did they discover when they lifted Daniel out? _____
5. What was said about Daniel at the end of verse 23? _____
6. What was the king's command in verse 24? _____

7. The miracle of God's protection on Daniel is magnified by the ferocious hunger of the lions when they devoured the men who had falsely accused Daniel. What are we told about the lions in verse 24? _____
8. King Darius wrote to all the people of the land. He issued a new decree. What is the statement he makes in verse 26a? _____
Then he goes on to say why...
 - a. For He is the _____
 - b. His kingdom _____
 - c. His dominion _____
 - d. He _____ and _____
 - e. He works _____ and _____ in _____
and on _____
 - f. He who has _____ Daniel from _____
9. Verse 28 gives a summary statement regarding Daniel's life during the reign of Darius (Mede) and Cyrus (Persian). What are we told? _____

REFLECTION: One gets a sense of coming through something very dramatic. The Law demanded death but in the grave of the den God comes as the mighty conqueror with grace and mercy and gives life! The more we learn about God the more we see Him act with love and compassion toward those who trust

in Him and call upon His Name. Did God give Daniel the promise that the mouths of the lions would be kept shut? Certainly not! Did God intervene in some miraculous way so that the king would be released from a law that could not be repealed in order to rescue Daniel? Certainly not! Daniel could only come before the One to whom He prayed asking for help. Psalm 50:15 reminds us to “call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” Would these same words hold true if Daniel had been eaten by the lions or if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had burned in the furnace?

Do we trust God as these men did believing that even in death we will be delivered into the hands of our Heavenly Father because of Jesus? Jesus, too, faced death because He was falsely accused before an authority that held the power of life or death. He, too, prayed to His Heavenly Father for deliverance (Matthew 26:39), but He was not delivered. He died. There is a big difference between Daniel and Jesus. Daniel’s deliverance was a witness to the king and others but Jesus’ death was an act of deliverance for all humankind! His perfect obedience, even in death, was a victory over all the wrongdoings of all people. By dying and by the Father’s act of raising Him up from the grave, the Father declared that from that time on all who trust in Jesus, His Son will be delivered from eternal death in hell and will live with Him in heaven forever.

PRAYER: O Lord God Almighty, You acted with power and might in Daniel’s life. We are reminded of Your love poured out on him during his night in the grave of the lions’ den. Open my eyes to see Your goodness poured out on my life. Grant me the grace to trust You and to give witness to You through my life as I demonstrate Your exceptional qualities. May no corruption or negligence be found in me. May I be trustworthy enabling others to lean on me as a shelter from the wicked who would deceive and falsely accuse. My heart wants to declare Your goodness to all. _____

LESSON FOUR

**FOR SUCH A TIME
AS THIS**

ESTHER 1-10 – THE STORY OF ESTHER

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• The Days of Purim	57

INTRODUCTION

The people of Israel were in exile. Ahasuerus (Xerxes - Greek) was king of the Persian Empire. The story of Esther begins when King Ahasuerus gave a feast that lasted for several days. Learn what happened at the feast that brought Esther, a young exiled Jewish girl, into the house of the king? And who influenced Esther to be the woman she became when her people were threatened? What was the heinous plot designed to destroy God's chosen people?

These few short chapters are filled with an intriguing plot and interesting characters. Watch the hand of God at work in and through the lives of these individuals. How were characters like Mordecai, Esther, King Ahasuerus, and even the villainous Haman connected? Discover God's unfailing love for those who are His. His character is righteousness. His power destroys the ways of the unrighteous and His unfailing love protects the righteous from evil.

The victory is the Lord's. Purim is a Jewish holiday established to celebrate victory, days to be observed remembering this time in Jewish history. Every family in every province in every city in every generation was to remember what the Lord had done!

LESSON 4

Part 1

TRANSITION: We are ready to begin studying the story of a girl named Esther. Her story is told in the Old Testament Book of Esther. Like the characters in the Book of Daniel, Esther lived in the Persian Empire during the time of Israel's captivity. The story is filled with drama, romance, intrigue just like a story one might read in a best-selling novel. So, let's get started!

INTRODUCTION: The story begins with several words that may be unfamiliar to you. King Xerxes is the ruler of the Persian Empire which included 127 provinces from India to Cush, the land today referred to as northern Ethiopia or the upper Nile region. Much of the story takes place at the royal palace in Susa, the capital of the empire. Now that we're up and running, let's get started with the story.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Esther 1:1-22. *Note:* Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, is the son of Darius I and the grandson of Cyrus the Great. His son was Artaxerxes III.

EXERCISE:

1. King Ahasuerus gave a banquet. Who were his invited guests (verse 2-3)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. What did he have on display for six months (180 days)? _____

3. When these days were concluded he hosted a banquet.
 - a. How long did this banquet last? _____
 - b. Who was invited to the banquet? _____
 - c. Where did the banquet take place? _____
4. Verses 6-7 describe the beauty of the garden decorations. What described the king's liberality (verses 7-8)? _____
5. Describe in your own words how you imagined the party to be: _____

6. Queen Vashti, the wife of King Ahasuerus, also gave a banquet (verse 9). Who was invited to her banquet? _____

7. It's the seventh day (verse 10). What condition is the king in? _____
8. What is his command to the eunuchs? _____
 - a. What was Queen Vashti to wear? _____
 - b. Why was she to come? _____
9. Vashti refused to acknowledge his invitation. What was the king's reaction? _____
10. Verses 13-14: Who were the men King Ahasuerus consulted on this matter of Vashti's refusal to obey his command? _____
11. What is the question under discussion (verse 15)? _____
12. Memucan, one of the seven nobles, summed up the problem (verses 16-18). What was the problem that Vashti had created according to him? _____
13. What did Memucan propose (verses 19-20)? _____
14. What was the response (verse 21)? _____
15. What was the royal decree? _____
16. How did the king make sure everyone understood? _____

REFLECTION: The fear was that women would despise their husbands and that disrespect and discord would run rampant in the empire. The edict of the king was that all women would respect their husbands and that every man should be ruler over his own household. Undoubtedly, Memucan's advice will cause an emotional reaction to many within today's cultures. In some cultures respect is something that is earned. In other cultures respect is demanded and put upon by others.

1. Was Queen Vashti justified in rejecting the king's command? Why or why not? _____
2. Were the fears and concerns of the nobles valid? Why or why not? _____

APPLICATION: Consider the word *respect*.

1. Who are some of those I respect? _____
2. Who are some individuals who respect me? _____
3. How do I know that they respect me? What do they say or do to communicate respect? _____
4. What creates respect between two people? _____

5. What are some things which prevent respect from happening? What are some things that destroy respect between people? _____
- _____

Part 2

INTRODUCTION: The story of Esther has begun. Chapter 1 discloses the problem. King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) displayed the empire's wealth and held an elaborate garden banquet. Queen Vashti's created a disturbance among the king and his noblemen. Vashti refused to come at the king's command and be displayed before her husband and his intoxicated guests. Her disobedience to the king was considered an act of disrespect and had the potential of causing discord by permeating the attitudes of women throughout the land.

The king issued a royal decree that Vashti was never again to come into his presence. The royal decree was written in the law of the Medes and Persians and would never be repealed. The king also was to give Vashti's position to another woman, someone who was better than she. Now our story picks up with Chapter 2.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Esther 2:1-18.

EXERCISE:

1. What was the plan of the king's personal attendants (verses 1-4) _____

2. In verses 5-7 who are the two new characters that are introduced in the story. Who are they and what is their relationship? _____

3. What are we told about Esther's appearance in verse 7? _____
4. Esther was one of the girls brought to the citadel and into the king's palace. She won the favor of the eunuch Hegai who was responsible for the harem. What was Esther's special treatment (verse 9)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
5. One thing Esther had not disclosed. What was it (verse 10)? _____

6. Understandably, Mordecai was concerned about what was happening to Esther, after all, he raised her as if she were his daughter. How did Mordecai express his concern (verse 11)? _____

There's reason to believe she was able to communicate with him from the courtyard of the harem.

7. What were the treatments of the young virgins before their turn came to go in to King Xerxes (verse 12)? _____
8. After preparation she remained with the other concubines until she was called by name (verse 14). What do we learn about Esther during this time of treatments and waiting (verse 15b)? _____
9. Esther is brought to King Xerxes (verse 16). What was the king's response to Esther (verses 17-18)? _____

REFLECTION:

1. Three times in chapter two it is said that Esther won the favor.
- a. Verse 9 tells us that Esther pleased _____ and he _____
 - b. Verse 15 says that Esther _____
 - c. In verse 17 we are told that the king was _____ to Esther...and she _____ and _____ more than any of the other virgins
2. As you reflect on these words, what do you sense is the essence of this young girl? What do we learn about her inner character? _____
3. Xerxes and his personal attendants wanted beautiful girls. In verse 7 Esther is described as lovely in form and features. Many young virgins were gathered. Undoubtedly, they were all beautiful and lovely in form and features. Yet, the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women. What made her stand out above the crowd, so to speak? What made her more attractive? _____
4. Do you know people like Esther? Maybe they don't have all the outward beauty but they are more attractive to you than all the others. _____

TEACHING: St. Peter describes beautiful women.

1. Read 1 Peter 3:1-6. These verses are addressed to wives. For some the word "submissive" or "subject" may raise up all kinds of feelings and reactions. You are asked to focus on four words that Peter uses to describe a beautiful woman:

- a. Verse 2: _____ and _____
- b. Verse 4: _____ and _____
2. If you are a man reading these verses, how are these qualities affirmed in the lives of the women to whom you relate? _____
3. If you are a father or a guardian such as Mordecai, what might you do to identify and nurture these qualities in your daughter/young girl/teenager? _____
4. If you are a woman reading these verses, how are you affirmed and challenged by these words? _____
5. Who are those young girls/daughters/teenagers are you able to influence giving attention to the inner beauty reflected in both their actions and attitudes? _____

PRAYER: It is often difficult for all of us whether men or women to reflect You living in us, the essence of who we are, the inner being of purity and reverence, or gentleness and a quiet spirit. Quiet our resistance. Empower us to be Your light in the world that has its focus on the outward signs of beauty, wealth, power, and possessions. Forgive us when we lose sight of the fact that others are influenced by our actions and our attitudes. Grant to all of us Your attitude of humility and obedience in order that You alone be glorified through us. _____

Part 3

ASSIGNMENT: Read Esther 2:19 through Esther 4.

EXERCISE: This story may seem inconsequential right now but don't forget it.

1. What is the story that takes place in Esther 2:19-23?
 - a. Where was Mordecai? _____
 - b. What conversation did he hear? _____
 - c. Who did he tell? _____
 - d. What happened when Esther reported to the king? _____
2. Chapter 3 begins by introducing Haman whom the king elevated to a high seat of honor. People were to bow down and pay honor to Haman; however, what was Mordecai's response to the king's command (verse 2)? _____

3. Mordecai's behavior caused quite a stir. The royal officials couldn't understand why he wouldn't obey the king's command. They approached Haman asking if this Jew's conduct would be tolerated (verse 4). Haman was furious with Mordecai's conduct. What was Haman's plan (verse 6)? _____

4. In verse 7 they cast Pur (lots) to determine the day when the Jews would be exterminated. The lot was cast in the first month and the pur or lot fell on the twelfth month. This meant that in just less than a year Haman's plan would be carried out. What does Haman tell King Xerxes in order to persuade him of the plan (verses 8-10)? _____

5. Haman was willing to pay the treasury in order to have this decree issued by the king (verse 9). What does the king tell Haman (verse 11)? _____
6. In verses 12-15 the orders were written in the language of the people.
 - a. What were the orders? _____
 - b. What was the date? _____
 - c. What was the seal? _____
 - d. What was the mood of the king and Haman? _____
 - e. What was the mood of the people of Susa? _____
7. What was Mordecai's reaction to the edict (verse 1)? _____

8. The Jews throughout the country were mourning (verse 3) with _____ and _____, and _____. Many lay in _____ and _____.
9. What was Esther's reaction (verse 4)? _____
10. What was her order for Hathach (verse 5)? _____
11. What did Hathach find out from Mordecai (verse 6-8)? _____
12. What did Mordecai tell Hathach to urge Esther to do (verse 8)? _____

13. Hathach reported to Esther all that he found out. What is the problem that Esther shares in verse 11? _____

14. What is the last thing she says? _____
15. What is the word that Mordecai sends back to Esther (verses 12-14)? _____

16. Mordecai made it very clear that no one would escape this edict, not even Esther, the queen. The turning point of the story is in Mordecai's words to Esther at the end of verse 14: _____

17. What is the reply Esther sends to Mordecai (verses 15-17)? _____

REFLECTION: The suspense of the story is building. Haman is hungry for power and prestige. He demands to be treated as a deity, knelt down, and honored. Mordecai, on the other hand, will bow down to no man. Knowing that Mordecai is a Jew, Haman's anger exposes his prejudice and seeks a way to annihilate the entire Jewish race. The king carelessly gives to Haman his signet ring thus yielding his power to Haman to do with the people as he pleased.

Esther is unaware of the transaction going on between her husband, the king, and Haman. Mordecai is mortified and tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth and ashes and goes out into the city wailing loudly and bitterly. Esther wants to know what's going on. Now we see Haman obsessed with the destruction of the Jewish people and Esther is weighed down knowing that unless she acts on behalf of the people they will all be killed. At the same time she knows that her life is on the line for unless the king extends the gold scepter she will be put to death. To make this story even more intense we are told that King Xerxes has not called for Esther for thirty days.

MEMORIZATION: God had brought both Joseph, the son of Jacob, and now Esther into positions of power and influence in order that the lives of many people would be saved.

1. Write out Genesis 50:20 – “_____.”

2. Write out Esther 4:14 – “_____?”

Both Joseph and Esther were brought to places they didn't intend to go, Egypt and captivity respectively. Yet both rose to significant positions of influence and power. Both found favor with others. Joseph found it with Potiphar, the jailer, and ultimately with Pharaoh himself. Esther, on the other hand, found favor with the eunuch Hegai, the maids, and everyone who saw her, especially the king. As the Lord was with Joseph and granted him success so He was with Esther and granted her the favor of the king.

APPLICATION QUESTION: As you reflect on the lives of Esther and Mordecai, what is one application that you can make to your own life? _____

Part 4

ASSIGNMENT: Read Esther 5 and 6.

EXERCISE:

1. What happened on the third day of fasting (Esther 5:1-2)? _____

2. The golden scepter was held out to Esther. What was Esther's request? _____

Doesn't a dinner invitation seem a little strange? Did she risk her life in order to invite the king and his friend Haman to dinner?

3. The king was eager to comply. And at dinner he again asked Esther for her petition. What was her reply this time (verses 7-8) _____

So she requested dinner together again and this time she promised to answer the king's question.

4. Haman was excited until what happened in verse 9? _____

Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home to his family and friends.

5. Verses 10-14 reveal Haman's heart. What did he boast about in verse 11? _____

6. What else did Haman boast about in verse 12? _____

7. In spite of all that he had to boast what was the obsession that was destroying him (verse 13)? _____

8. What was the arrogant counsel of his wife and friends (verse 14)? _____

9. So Haman is delighted with the suggestion and had the gallows built. However, according to Esther 6:1, what was going on at the palace that night? _____

10. What did the king discover? _____
What did he ask? _____

11. Haman had just entered the court and the king called for him. What did he ask Haman (verse 6)?

12. Who did Haman assume the king wanted to honor? _____

13. What did Haman answer (verse 7-9) _____

14. What was the king's order to Haman (verse 10)? _____

15. What is the picture in verse 11? _____

16. Afterwards Mordecai returned to the king's gate and Haman went home. What is his posture now? What did he tell his wife and friends? _____

17. Those who had counseled him the day before now prophesied Haman's doom (verse 13)? _____

18. Where did the eunuchs take Haman once again (verse 14)? _____

REFLECTION: Haman has been totally humiliated by the king's request to honor Mordecai, a man of Jewish origin, and the man that Haman hated. Mordecai was led through the city streets wearing the royal robe and riding the king's majestic horse with the royal crest on its head and all the while Haman was proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!"

1. Was this a good situation for either man?

a. Was this what Mordecai wanted, to be led through the streets receiving honor and recognition? What did Mordecai really want? _____

b. Was this what Haman wanted? What did he really envision for himself? _____

2. In Esther 5:9 Mordecai demonstrated strength that stirred up rage in Haman. What do you make of that kind of strength within a man? Compare Mordecai's strength with the strength that Haman exhibited as he boasted of his wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials (Esther 5:11).

APPLICATION: What becomes the application for us as we study this story?

1. Goliath boasted in his strength. Haman boasted in his wealth. What do we boast in? _____

2. Enjoy the words of encouragement from these passages:

Reference	Words of Encouragement
Psalm 34:2	
Psalm 44:8	
1 Corinthians 1:31	
Galatians 6:14	
Ephesians 2:8-9	

MEMORIZATION: Powerful words are found in Jeremiah 9:23-24: “Thus says the Lord...” Write these two verses on an index card and again challenge yourself to memorize them. These verses remind us that we are not to boast about ourselves but we are free to boast in the Lord, I whom He is and delight in what He exercises, namely steadfast love, justice, and righteousness!

Part 5

ASSIGNMENT: Read Esther 7.

EXERCISE:

1. We can almost guess how the story is going to end. In Chapter 7 we find Haman, King Xerxes, and Esther dining together. Again, the king asks Esther to share her petition. Summarize Queen Esther’s answer (verses 3-4)? _____

2. The king wants to know who the man is that would do such a thing! Esther discloses his identity (verse 6). _____
3. Haman is terrified. The king leaves his wine and heads out into the garden. What is Haman’s fatal move (verses 7-9)? _____

4. How did the king interpret what he saw (verse 8)? _____
5. What is the fate of Haman (verses 9-10)? _____
The villain is dead. Justice has been carried out. His death caused the fury of the king to subside (verse 10). Righteousness prevails!

TEACHING: This is a good time to look at what the Bible teaches concerning righteousness. We cannot probe into all that is taught but we can learn how righteousness applies to us and to our relationship with our holy and righteous God.

Reference	Question	Learning
Psalm 119:137	Who is the Righteous One?	
Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4:6-8	Who are made righteous?	
2 Corinthians 5:21	Who makes us righteous?	
Romans 3:21-24; Philippians 3:9	Are we made righteous by the law (what we do) or by faith (in whom we believe)?	
Romans 1:17	How do we know that God has made us righteous?	
Psalm 9:4,8; 23:3; 34:15; 37:25; Habakkuk 2:4	What are the promises God has made to the righteous?	

PRAYER: One can almost imagine that Psalm 143 was the prayer of Mordecai and Esther as they wrestled with the situation they faced. The decree for the annihilation of the Jews had been signed by the king and dispersed throughout the land. The only hope of the people rested in the hands of Esther who would risk her life and approach the king. As a prayer consider the words of this Psalm and follow along identifying the verses:

1. Lord, I cry to You for mercy. You alone are faithful and righteous. Do not judge me. Have mercy for no one is righteous before You. (Verses: _____)
2. The enemy pursues me relentlessly. I am crushed. I live in the darkness of the dead. My hope is growing weak. My heart is captured by fear. (Verses: _____)
3. I remember the past and think about all that Your hands have done. Now my hands reach out to You to satisfy my soul once again. (Verses: _____)
4. Answer me quickly. I am desperate. May I awake with a word of hope. Your love never fails. I trust in You alone. (Verses: _____)
5. Show me the way I should go. Rescue me from my enemies. Teach me to do Your will. Lead me on level ground. (Verses: _____)

6. Your reputation is at stake. Preserve my life. O Righteous One, save me. Silence my enemies. Destroy my foes. I am Your servant. (Verses: _____)

Part 6

ASSIGNMENT: Read Esther 8-10.

EXERCISE:

1. What does the king bestow on Esther and Mordecai (Esther 8:1-2)? _____

2. Esther comes before the king again. What does she ask for (verses 3-6)? _____

3. What did the king order Mordecai to do (verses 7-8)? _____

4. Mordecai acted at once! What was his directive to all who were summoned (verses 9-19)? _____

5. In verses 11-14 we are told exactly what was granted in the edict to the Jews of the empire. What has been decreed that provides for their protection? _____

6. Can you envision Mordecai in his blue and white garments, wearing a large gold crown and dressed in a purple robe of fine linen? What a site that must have been! In verses 15-17 underline all the words that describe the atmosphere of the celebration.
7. Chapter 9 fast-forwards us to the day that was to be a day of annihilation. Instead the day is described quite differently. What are we told in verses 1-10? _____

Notice what we are told about Mordecai. His power increased and fear of him seized the nobles, satraps, governors, and all. His influence was great in the palace of the king. His reputation had spread to the provinces.
8. Even the king appeared to be taking orders. Note what he asks Esther in verse 12. "Now what is your wish?" What did she answer him? _____

And, the edict was carried out (verses 14-15).
9. At last, after _____ were killed (verse 16) they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy! One begins to get an understanding of the aggressive oppression that the Jewish people were

living under in this empire of King Xerxes. They rested on the fourteenth day of the month. In Susa, however, they rested on the _____ day.

10. A Jewish holiday was established; the days were call Purim (Esther 9:26).

- a. When were the days celebrated (verse 21)? _____
- b. What were the people to remember (verse 22)? _____

- c. How were the days to be observed (verse 22)?
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____

11. In verses 23-28 the history of events were reiterated and the days were established and always to be remembered by every family in every province and every city by every generation. The letter was confirmed by Esther and Mordecai and sent throughout the provinces of the kingdom. It's interesting to note who had the authority and who made the decree (verses 29-32). We learn in Esther 10 that King Xerxes had made Mordecai second in rank to the king! Mordecai was held in high esteem by the Jewish people because...

- a. _____
- b. _____

REFLECTION: One can't help but reflect on the influence of Mordecai. He first influenced Esther as a child growing up. Esther in turn found favor with those around her. Mordecai's influence was brought into the royal palace because he protected the life of the king (Esther 2:19-23) and yet refused to bow the knee to evil Haman (Esther 3:1-2).

- 1. As the story unfolds, consider ways Mordecai's influence penetrated the entire country. _____

- 2. We are all individuals who influence others. Who are those influenced by your presence in their lives? _____
- 3. What are ways in which your life is influencing theirs? It's not a question of whether or not your life in influencing others but rather it's a question of what is your influence on their lives.
 - a. Morals _____
 - b. Values _____
 - c. Character _____
 - d. Other _____
 - e. Other _____

4. Another question to reflect on might be: What message do I want my life to give to others? Is my life, as words formed into a letter that others are reading, consistent with what I want to communicate? _____
5. Is my life authentic? What messages do I give that are not consistent with the essence of who I am? _____
6. Accepting the fact that I am a person of influence, what are ways in which I might live my life with more intention and purpose, proactively seeking ways to use that influence in a godly way?

PRAYER: Take time to review the happenings within the Book of Esther. Note especially God's righteousness reflected in the lives of Mordecai and Esther. Give thanks for those who have had a godly influence on your life. Raise up those who are influenced by your life. Seek His character as you continue to consciously influence others. _____

LESSON FIVE

THE GOOD HAND OF GOD

EZRA 1-10 – THE STORY OF EZRA

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INTRODUCTION

It was time. Israel's captivity was over. It was time for the exiles to return to their homeland. Seventy years had passed. The trek across the arid desert was hard and long. So, what did they find when they returned? What was the condition of the buildings, their homes, and the land? Was anything spared? Seventy years was a long time to be gone. Everything had be destroyed and desecrated. Everything was in ruins. Where would they begin to rebuild the city of Jerusalem? Where would they find the financial resources, the manpower, and the materials?

Rebuilding the physical structures was only part of the project. Other aspects of life needed work as well. Family life had changed. Some of the exiled chose not to return to the land of Israel. Families were scattered. Brokenness was seen in relationships and the destruction of the Temple reminded them of the broken relationship they had with their God. They had forgotten Him and lived life in bondage.

What do you think you would do? Would you return, even if you had been born when your parents were in captivity? What would bring you back to Israel? Consider your relationship with the God who had delivered your ancestors from Egyptian bondage and now had delivered you from Persian captivity. As you continue your study, attempt to enter into the lives of the different individuals—the leaders, those who were now elders, the craftsmen, and the travelers. What would compel you to come home?

LESSON 5

Part 1

INTRODUCTION: The Book of Ezra is a continuation of Israel’s history. About 537 B.C. during the reign of Cyrus, the king of Persia, God began to bring His people out of exile and back to the Promised Land, the land He had promised to Abraham and his offspring centuries earlier. Several individuals will be mentioned in the opening chapters of the Book of Ezra but once again, don’t become discouraged with all the unfamiliar names. You will recall that Nebuchadnezzar was the Babylonian king who took captive the Israelites. Sometime later the Babylonians were conquered by the Medo-Persians. Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes are three of the kings ruling during this time in Israel’s history. Zerubbabel and Ezra are two prominent Jewish leaders.

Some of the materials covered in these ten chapters of Ezra are listings with numbers, descendants, and other names. Another challenge is the chronology of kings and events. Names, numbers and chronology, however, are not pertinent information for our study. Rather, in the Book of Ezra watch God at work in the hearts and lives of the kings and His people as He fulfills His promise to Abraham and his descendants.

ASSIGNMENT: Begin this study by reading 2 Chronicles 36:22-23. Ezra 1 sets the scene for the story to continue. Read Ezra 1 and these selected verses from Ezra 2—verses 1-2, 68-70.

EXERCISE:

1. Immediately we are told that Jeremiah’s prophesy is about to be fulfilled. If your Bible has a cross-reference, notice the reference given after the word Jeremiah. Jeremiah 25:11-12 is likely to be listed as one of the references. Turn to these verses.
 - a. The _____ years of captivity are over. The word of the Lord is about to be fulfilled.
 - b. The king of Persia, _____, is about to make a proclamation (Ezra 1:1).
 - c. If it’s not King Cyrus and his proclamation and it’s not Jeremiah and his prophesy, who is the major character and what does He do (verse 1)? _____

2. God is about to act using the celebration of a king (Cyrus) who has triumphed over the Babylonians and amassed his kingdom. Look at the king’s proclamation (verses 2-4):
 - a. What is the king about to do (verse 2)? _____

- b. Why is he going to do this? _____
- c. Where was this undertaking to happen? _____
- d. Who was to do the work (verse 3)? _____
- e. Who was to fund the project (verse 4)? _____

TEACHING: It is important to keep in mind that to the Persian king this God of Israel was just another god. His desire to build a temple was not to build a temple to the one true God, the God of Israel. To build a temple was simply acknowledging his belief that a god had given him “all the kingdoms of the earth.” He had conquered the Babylonian Empire. Now it was his duty, or his appointment, to build a temple as a type of payment to the god of the heaven.

EXERCISE:

1. Any of the Jewish people were allowed to go to Jerusalem and build the temple. What words are used to describe those who prepared to go (verse 5)? _____

2. Neighbors helped to finance the building project with all kinds of goods, livestock, and freewill offerings. What did King Cyrus contribute (verse 7)? _____

To review read 2 Kings 24:13 and 25:13-17.

3. _____, the prince of Judah, was made governor by King Cyrus and given by the treasurer all that had been supplied for the endeavor. He was responsible for returning the articles removed from the temple by King Nebuchadnezzar. *Note:* Sheshbazzar was a Babylonian name and it is thought that since he was the grandson of the Judean king, Jehoiachin, he was referred to as the prince. It is believed Zerubbabel was his Hebrew name. (See Ezra 2:2.)

REFLECTION: Not everyone went. Does that surprise you? Wouldn't you think that after 70 years in captivity everyone would be eager to leave? A generation had died. Not everyone knew or remembered the Promised Land. Not everyone was eager to leave Babylon, the only country that they had known. God gave the same opportunity to Abraham when he moved out of this same land, out of the land of Ur of the Chaldeans. He settled in Haran where he lived with Sarah when God called him out and led him to the land of Canaan.

1. It may be a little more surprising that the king would allow the people to return. Write out Proverbs 21:1— _____

2. How do these words speak to the situation in Ezra 1:1? _____

3. The Lord moved the heart of the king in verse 1. In verse 5 we are told that He moved the hearts of the people. God is moving them to fulfill what He wants accomplished. Recall a time when you knew God was moving your heart to do or say something that you were convinced was right and godly. _____

Part 2

TEACHING: Ezra 2:2 gives the names of those who led the people out of captivity. Zerubbabel is the man who was given the responsibility of returning the treasures belonging to the temple of the Lord. The name in verse 2 that may already sound familiar to you is Mordecai. You will recall that he was Queen Esther’s cousin and with Esther received the king’s favor, saving the lives of the Jewish people living in the Persian Empire.

Upon their return the people arrived at the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. One can’t help but wonder what they thought when they saw the temple that King Solomon had built now in ruins. Some may have never seen it because they had been born in exile. Others, undoubtedly, recalled what life was like before they became captives in a foreign land. How things had changed during the years of captivity! My, how things had changed!

Even before building their own homes and establishing themselves in their own towns we are told that the heads of the families gave freewill offerings. They gave as they were able to the treasury for this work. They provided for the rebuilding of the house of God then they began to settle in their towns.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Ezra 3.

EXERCISE:

1. What was the first rebuilding project? _____
2. Who headed up the project (verse 2)? _____ with his fellow _____
and _____ and his _____.
3. When the altar was completed what did they do (verses 3-5)? _____

4. According to verse 6 what was left to be done? _____
5. What was the second rebuilding project? _____

6. How did they provide for the carpenters and masons? How did they acquire the cedar logs from Lebanon (verse 7)? _____
7. A little over a year after their arrival in Jerusalem the work began on the house of God. Once again Zerubbabel, Jeshua, the priests, Levites and all who returned from captivity began. Who supervised the work (verses 8-9)? _____
8. The foundation was laid. Now was the time for celebration! What did the people do (verses 10-11)?
 - a. The priests: _____
 - b. The Levites: _____
9. With everyone in place to praise the Lord, what did they sing? _____

10. And, all the people (verse 11) _____
11. But the sound of the people was mixed with _____ and _____.
12. According to verse 12 why did some weep when they saw the foundation? _____

13. Yet the people made so much noise that _____

REFLECTION: “For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.” The word “forever” in your Bible may have a cross-reference noted. In the reference column one of the passages for verse 11 may be 2 Chronicles 7:3. Read verses 1-3.

1. What was the occasion? _____
2. Solomon had finished praying. Fire from heaven came down and consumed the burnt offering and sacrifices (verse 1). Then what happened? _____

3. The glory of the Lord filled the Lord’s house. What was the response of the people? What did they say (verse 3)? _____

Once again, with praise and thanksgiving the people sang: “For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.”

APPLICATION: Even when things aren’t as perfect as we would like them to be, are we eager and ready to sing: “For He is good, His love to me endures forever?” Even when things turn out different than we planned, are we eager and ready to sing: “He is good; His love to me endures forever?” Even when our hearts are crying out in disappointment and disillusionment, are we eager and ready to sing: “He is good; His love to me endures forever?”

Think of your own heart responses. Consider your responses to life situations. How do you respond? Give yourself the challenge to respond as the people did even when the glory and grandeur of Jerusalem's temple that some of them knew no longer existed.

Let us all sing in our hearts together: _____
_____ even when... _____

Part 3

ASSIGNMENT: Read Ezra 4:1-4.

EXERCISE (verses 1-5): Three words describe what is happening between the opposition and the Israelite leaders.

1. Deceit: What do the enemies ask Zerubbabel (verse 2)? _____

2. Declare: What is the response of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the family heads (verse 3)? _____

3. Discourage: What was the opposition's tactic (verse 4)? _____
What did they do to discourage their work on the temple?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
4. How long did the opposition last? _____

TEACHING: The opposition did not give up. Throughout the rest of the chapter the letters of communication with King Artaxerxes regarded accusations they made against the Israelites. In verse 12 they spoke about Jerusalem as a rebellious and wicked city. Furthermore, in verse 13 they warn the king that once the walls were built no more taxes and tribute would be paid. Therefore, the royal revenues would suffer. As tattle-tales they felt the king deserved to know.

Of course, the king responded. He made a search and found the opposition to be correct and ordered that the work of the Israelites be stopped. He asks in verse 22, "Why let this threat grow, to the detriment of the royal interests?" So, the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Ezra 5.

EXERCISE:

1. The two prophets referenced in verse 1 are the same names as two Old Testament Books:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
2. Turn to the Book of Haggai. What is the prophet Haggai telling Zerubbabel (governor) and Jeshua (high priest)? What do we learn from these verses in Haggai 1?
 - a. Verses 2-4: _____

 - b. Verses 7-11: _____

 - c. Verse 12: _____
 - d. Verse 13: _____
 - e. Verse 14: _____
3. What is the message of the Lord to Zerubbabel, Jeshua (Joshua), and the people in Haggai 2:4?

 - a. Three times God says, Be _____!
 - b. What is the command? And _____!
 - c. The people could be strong and work because _____
4. The covenant is renewed. The same covenant promise made to the Israelites when they first left Egypt and entered the Promised Land is now theirs as they return to this land once again and begin to rebuild. What is the promise in verses 4b-5? _____

TEACHING: In the next verses of Haggai 2 the Lord speaks once again of filling this house with glory (verse 7)! He even goes on to say that the glory of this present house will be greater than the former house (verse 9)! He reassures them that He will grant peace in this place (verse 9) and tells them that from this day on He will bless them (verse 19).

Part 4

EXERCISE:

1. The other prophet who prophesied to the Jews during this time is Zechariah. Turn to the first chapter of the Book of Zechariah. What does the prophet call the people to do (verse 4)?

2. Verse 6b tells us that the people _____. We learn about repentance in these first verses. Repentance does not mean that we apologize for wrong that we've done. It does mean that we *turn from* (verse 4) our evil ways and practices. It's the act of turning 180 degrees. It's the act of turning our back on those things that are evil in God's sight.
3. We know that God wanted prosperity and peace for Jerusalem. He claimed Israel to be His own. We learn the heart of our Heavenly Father when we read the words in Zechariah 2:8-13.
 - a. How does He refer to His people in verse 8? _____
 - b. Is He a God who rules and loves His people from a distance? What do we learn in verses 10-11? _____
 Once again we are reminded of the intimate relationship God would have with those who are His. He chooses to live among His people as they returned to rebuild Jerusalem.
4. The people returning to Jerusalem were weak, tired, and poor. Their journey had been long and arduous. What reassurance did the prophet give to Zerubbabel? What was it going to take to complete the assignment (4:6)? "Not by _____..."
5. How did God Almighty want His people to treat one another (8:16-17)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

The Lord loves truth and peace and wants these gifts for His people also.
6. Zechariah 13:9 offers encouragement and a sense of belonging. God promises to refine them like silver and test them like gold. Then what is the promise of God (verse 9b)? _____

REFLECTION: So why did we read about Haggai and Zechariah? These prophets lived during the time when the exiles were returning to Jerusalem. These prophets offered reassurance and encouragement from God who knew their weak and vulnerable condition. Basically, the exiles had nothing, yet God promised to be with them, to dwell among them, and success would come by His Spirit. Their time of exile was over. God's anger had turned to compassion. Once again He was jealous for Jerusalem and avidly protected His people from anything that would threaten them.

1. Now turn back to Ezra 5. At the same time that the prophets offered reassurance and encouragement, Zerubbabel and Jeshua proceeded with the physical building of the temple. In spite of the opposition challenging Zerubbabel and Jeshua's authority to rebuild the temple, what

are we told in Ezra 5:5? _____

2. What would it be like to proceed with the work only believing God's promise to be with them and believing that God's eye was watching over them? Your thoughts: _____

EXERCISE:

1. After challenging Zerubbabel, Tattenai sent a letter to Darius reporting all that had been said and all that was being accomplished in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:6-17). In chapter 6 Tattenai receives King Darius' response. What had been found in the archives at the treasury in Babylon (verses 3-5)?

2. What was King Darius' order and decree (verses 6-10)?

- a. Verses 6-7: _____

- b. Verses 8-10: _____

3. In addition, according to verses 11-12, what would be the consequences if the king's decree was changed or failed to be carried out? _____

REFLECTION: Once again we can see God's Spirit at work. Even King Darius searched in the archives to know the orders of King Cyrus who preceded him. When everything was discovered to be in order Darius added his own decree demanding that the provisions needed were to be supplied out of the royal treasury. God made it evident to Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the leaders of the people that He was again prospering them and blessing them beyond measure.

1. Once again we see that "the king's _____ is a _____ in the hand of the _____; he _____ it wherever he _____ (Proverbs 21:1)."

2. Jump ahead a few verses to the celebration of the Passover (Ezra 6:22). God turned the king's _____ and the king _____ them with the work on the house of God!

3. Things seem to be settled. Ezra 6:14 says that the elders of the Jews _____ and _____ through the prophesying of Haggai. And what are we told about the building in verse 14b? _____ by decree of _____ and the three Persian kings: _____, _____, and _____.

Part 5

INTRODUCTION: Artaxerxes followed Darius as king of the Persian Empire. During Artaxerxes's reign we are told that Ezra came up from Babylon. In Ezra 7:1-5 we have an extensive genealogy of Ezra that verifies his lineage. He was from the priestly tribe of _____ and identifies himself the _____, the brother of _____ and the first chief priest.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Ezra 7.

- Who came with Ezra out from Babylon?
- What do we learn about Ezra?
- What is the essence of the letter Artaxerxes gave to Ezra?

EXERCISE:

1. We learn some specific things about Ezra.
 - a. What are we told about him in verse 6? _____
and _____
 - b. What words are repeated in verse 9? _____
 - c. To what is Ezra devoted to in verse 10? _____ and
_____ and _____
2. Who are some of those who accompanied him to Jerusalem (verse 7)? _____

3. What did King Artaxerxes also know and acknowledge about Ezra (verses 11-12)? _____

4. Artaxerxes wrote a letter to Ezra (verses 12-26). All who desired to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem were permitted to go. What was Ezra to do?
 - a. Verses 13-14: _____
 - b. Verses 15-16: _____
 - c. Verse 17: _____ and _____
 - d. Verses 18-20: _____
5. What was the king's order for the treasurers of the provinces Beyond the River (Trans-Euphrates) (verses 21-23)? _____
6. What is the specific order of the king in verse 24? _____

7. The final point of the king's letter pertained to the administration of justice. In verse 25 Ezra is first told to _____ magistrates and judges.

- a. What was their responsibility? _____
 - b. What was Ezra's assignment? _____
8. In verse 26 what were the consequences of disobedience? _____
- _____

REFLECTION: Obviously, Ezra was recognized by the king to be a man of high moral character. He delegated the spiritual matters to Ezra expecting that appointments would be made and that the laws of God would be administered justly by those placed in positions of authority. We cannot overlook the concluding verses (27-28). Ezra acknowledges that it is the Lord, the God of our fathers, who has moved the heart of the king.

- 1. Again, we are reminded of Proverbs 21:1. "The king's _____ is a stream of _____ in the _____ of the Lord; He _____ it wherever he will."
- 2. What does Ezra acknowledge in verses 27-28?
 - a. Regarding the king (verse 27): _____
 - b. Regarding himself (verse 28a): _____
 - c. Regarding God (verse 28b): _____
 - d. Regarding himself (verse 28c)? _____

ASSIGNMENT: Ezra 8:1-14 lists the names of the family heads and those who were registered with them. These are the people who came up out from Babylon with Ezra and returned to Jerusalem. Read Ezra 8:15-23.

EXERCISE:

- 1. While they gathered at the canal Ezra checked over those who had assembled. What did he discover (verse 15)? _____
 - 2. No Levites volunteered to return to Jerusalem. What problem did this create (verse 17b)? _____
 - 3. Ezra pulled together some leaders and men of learning and sent them to the temple servants in Casiphia. What was their mission (verse 17)? _____
 - 4. The mission was accomplished! _____, a man of discretion and Levite, came along with his sons and kinsmen. They brought temple servants to assist the Levites (verses 18-20). What is given as the cause for the response of these men (verse 18)? _____
- _____

5. One can't help but smile when reading verses 21-23. First, Ezra proclaimed a _____ that the people might _____ themselves before _____ and ask Him for a _____ for ourselves. Then in verse 22 Ezra makes himself vulnerable. What does he admit? _____
- _____
- So we _____ and _____ our God for this, and He _____.
6. What is the rest of the story (verse 31b)? _____
- _____

REFLECTION: Did these verses make you smile? Have you ever made a claim that demanded faith and then been called upon to act on that faith? Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect them. He knew he could if he had wanted. But, the greater witness to the king and to the exiles who were ready to return to Jerusalem was acknowledging that God's gracious hand was on His people (verses 18, 22).

Have you wondered what you would do in a situation like this? Ultimately, you are a leader of losers. As we recognized earlier in this lesson, these people were weak, poor, desolate, and facing a four month trek through dangerous territory. Trusting the protection of soldiers and horsemen versus trusting the protection of an invisible God who promised to be with them? Hmm... Doesn't seem to be a difficult decision, or does it? Your thoughts: _____

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. In my own life who or what do I trust in difficult circumstances? My insurance policy? Or my investments? My college degree(s)? My bank account? Honestly, in what or whom do I put my trust? _____
 2. To ask God for help means humbling ourselves before Him, recognizing that apart from Him we are unprotected and vulnerable. Now I can't help but ask myself the question, in what or in whom do I put my trust for life everlasting? _____
- _____

PRAYER: O Lord, God Almighty, I can only come before You with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. Your hand has been on me. Your hand is a hand of grace, a hand of love that I have neither earned nor deserved. I live cradled in Your gracious hands because of You who has promised to be with me. Your

presence makes me strong and enables me to serve You all the days of my life. You have made me strong by Your Spirit and, therefore, I have nothing to fear. Thank You for blessing my life with Your gracious hand. Enable my hands to be gracious hands for others. _____

CLOSURE TO THE BOOK OF EZRA: The exiles returned with Ezra to Jerusalem. Chosen priests were set aside to bring the silver, gold, and other donated offerings to the priests and Levites who were already working on the house of God. Sacrifices were made to the Lord and the king's orders were delivered to the governors of provinces Beyond the River (Trans-Euphrates) (Ezra 8:36).

Things had no more than settled down and the leaders confessed to Ezra that the people of Israel had been *unfaithful* to the Lord. The exiles had not kept themselves separated from their neighbors and their detestable practices, the very practices that had brought them into captivity. The exiles chose to intermarry. This practice appalled Ezra because it was against God's law. Before God, Ezra was ashamed of the sins of the people. God had been gracious and shown kindness to them granting to them a new life so they could begin to rebuild and repair the wall of Jerusalem. Yet the people had disregarded His commands. Already the land was polluted by the corruption of God's people.

Ezra prays to the Lord, the God of Israel, the Righteous One. "We are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this (Ezra 9:15)." The Israelites confessed their *unfaithfulness* by marrying foreign women. In Ezra 9 and 10 the word *unfaithful* is used repeatedly. In Ezra 10:11 Ezra, the priest, declared them *unfaithful* and had them make confession to the Lord and commanded them to do His will. He ordered them to separate themselves from the peoples around them and from their foreign wives. And they did (verse 16).

LESSON SIX

YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS

NEHEMIAH 1-13 – THE STORY OF NEHEMIAH

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INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah 1 begins with a report from some men who came to Nehemiah. They reported on the people and conditions of those who had escaped from captivity and returned to Judah. Their words troubled Nehemiah so he went to the Lord in prayer. Because he was the cupbearer to the king, he had the ear of the king who wanted to know what troubled him.

As you begin this lesson, learn what Nehemiah found out when he returned to Jerusalem. What was the problem? What needed to be done immediately? You will quickly find out that strong opposition arose and was relentless in its attempt to discourage the work that was being accomplished. In spite of all the attempts to bring to an end the work, nevertheless, the wall was completed.

The Book of the Law of Moses was read and everyone heard as Ezra read. What was the result of the reading of the Law? What was the response of the people? The people could only declare, "You are the Lord, You alone." They knew that their redemption rested in their Righteous God who is slow to anger and abounds in love. They were reminded of all that their Righteous God had done for their forefathers and how they had acted presumptuously and with a stubborn heart. Yet, God's faithfulness brought them to the land that had been promised and now as part of a remnant Ezra and Nehemiah returned to rebuild the same land that God had given to their forefathers.

LESSON 6

Part 1

INTRODUCTION: The Old Testament Book that follows the Book of Ezra is Nehemiah. The story in Nehemiah takes place several years later. The primary focus of the first seven chapters is the reconstruction of the wall and the gates around the city of Jerusalem. The wall would provide protection from the ever-present opposition. The aggression of their enemies continued to make the work difficult for the builders.

In Nehemiah 8 the Law of God is read. In chapter 9 the people make confession and write a binding agreement to follow the law of God. The people settled in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah occupying and taking possession of the land. In chapter 12 the wall is dedicated. In chapter 13 reforms are made. Undoubtedly, you've observed the abundance of material to cover in this lesson, therefore, some material will only be highlighted. So, let's begin!

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 1.

EXERCISE:

1. What was the report Nehemiah received from the men who had returned from Judah (verses 1-3)?

2. What is Nehemiah's reaction to the news (verse 4)? _____

3. What is the essence of Nehemiah's prayer?
 - a. Verses 5-6a: _____
 - b. Verses 6b-7: _____
 - c. Verses 8-9: _____
 - d. Verses 10-11: _____

In his prayer we note how Nehemiah first addresses God and then prays for the people of Israel. The next aspect of his prayer is confession admitting the failure of the community, including himself, to obey God's commands and laws. In the next section Nehemiah calls upon the Lord to remember the promise He made to His people. The promise included the consequences for disobedience (Leviticus 26:33) and the blessings for obedience (Deuteronomy 30:4). The last part of his prayer was for Nehemiah himself that God would grant him favor in the presence of the king.

4. What was Nehemiah's responsibility (end of verse 11)? _____

REFLECTION: Nehemiah's prayer is a model for our own. He acknowledges to whom he is praying and His greatness. He prays for others and then calls upon God to remember what He has promised. And then, Nehemiah prays for himself as he seeks to respond to the condition of the Jewish remnant who survived the exile.

1. Take some time to consider your own prayers. What have you learned from Nehemiah that would enrich your own prayer life? _____
2. What might you share with a new believer or a young child who is beginning to articulate their prayers in private or public assembly? _____

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 2.

TEACHING: Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king (Nehemiah 1:11). The cupbearer was trusted by the king and served wine at his table. The cupbearer would be willing to drink whatever he brought to the king thus risking his own life should a drink he served be tainted with a poison. Nehemiah served as a respected official to King Artaxerxes.

EXERCISE:

1. What does the king observe in verses 1 and 2? _____
2. What was Nehemiah's response (verse 3)? _____

3. What is his response to the king's question in verse 4 (verse 5)? _____

4. He found favor with the king who sent him to Jerusalem to rebuild it. Nehemiah asked for more. What did he ask for in verses 7 and 8? _____

5. What was the bonus the king threw in (verse 9)? _____

REFLECTION: We dare not overlook Nehemiah’s comment in verse 8. “...for the good hand of my God was upon me.” Does this phrase sound familiar? *Note:* The Book of Ezra speaks of the hand of God or the gracious hand of God six times! You may choose to review the verses and underline the words. See Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; Ezra 8:18, 22, 31.

Now Nehemiah uses the same words. What might the “good hand of my God” mean to you? How have you experienced the good hand of God on you? _____

EXERCISE:

1. We learned about opposition in the Book of Ezra when the foundation of the temple was laid. Who led the opposition this time (Nehemiah 2:10)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____What were they disturbed about? _____
2. What is happening in verses 11-16? _____
3. Nehemiah revealed his plan in verses 17-18. With God’s good and gracious hand and the support of the king, what did Nehemiah set out to do? _____
What would be removed by rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall? _____
4. What was the response of the people? _____
5. Verse 19 starts out with the word “but.” Now what’s the problem? What are the accusations of the opposition? _____
6. Nehemiah answers them setting things straight. What did he say in no uncertain terms? _____

ASSIGNMENT: Chapter 3 tells who the builders were and what sections they worked on.

1. Scan through the chapter and underline words like adjoining section, next to, and next section. The work is done with everyone working side-by-side. The work is done on the wall and the gates that had been burned.
2. Read Nehemiah 4.

EXERCISE:

1. Sanballat and Tobiah are back at it again with their opposition to the Jews. Sanballat is angry and greatly incensed. What is the essence of his ridiculing (verses 1-2)? _____

- What is Tobiah's comment (verse 3)? _____
2. The response of God's people is interesting. They don't argue with the opposition. Instead they turn to the Lord their God. Summarize their prayer (verses 4-5)? _____

3. Having turned their concerns to the Lord, what are we told (verse 6)?
 - a. Regarding the work: _____
 - b. Regarding the people: _____
4. What did the opposition determine to do when they realized that their ridiculing did nothing to hinder the work? _____
5. What did the Israelites do to meet their threat (verse 9)? _____

6. What was happening physically to the laborers (verse 10)? _____
7. What was happening to the morale of the people (verses 11-12)? _____

8. Nehemiah armed the people with swords, spears, and bows and then gave them this strong word of encouragement (verse 14): _____

- God frustrates the work of the enemy and blesses the work of His people (verse 15).
9. The rest of the chapter tells the defense strategy of the workers. All men carried arms as they did their work. Because the work was extensive and spread out (verse 19) they were told that when the trumpet sounded they were to gather together, for God would fight for them (verse 20). What was Nehemiah's instruction for the men and their helpers (verse 22)? _____

TEACHING: Nehemiah 5 shares the financial struggles that existed among the people. They were mortgaging their fields to buy grain and borrowing money to pay taxes to the king. Even their sons and daughters were subjected to slavery. Nehemiah accused the nobles and officials of exacting usury from their own people and ordered them to give back their land, groves, and homes, and to cease the demand for such exorbitant interest. The nobles and officials took an oath promising to do as Nehemiah ordered. Nehemiah also served as an example to the people by not eating all that was allotted to him as governor

like his predecessors had done. Rather he and his men were devoted to the work on the wall (verse 16). He fed at his table every day 150 Jews, officials, and those who came from surrounding nations.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 6:1-14.

- What are the two attempts to harm Nehemiah?
- Where is the opposition coming from in each attempt?

EXERCISE:

1. Nehemiah's enemies would not give up. He realized that they were scheming to harm him. What was their invitation (verse 2)? _____
2. What was Nehemiah's response (verses 3-4)? _____

3. What were the primary accusations in the unsealed letter (verses 5-7)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
4. Nehemiah's response was that the accusations were a bunch of foolishness. "You are inventing them out of your own mind." What had he determined was their intent (verse 9a)? _____

5. What action did Nehemiah take (verse 9b)? _____
6. Opposition did not only come from outside the Jewish community. What do we learn about the threat on Nehemiah's life and character from verses 10-13? _____

REFLECTION: In verse 2 Nehemiah knew they were scheming to harm him. Now in verse 12 he realized that God had not sent him (Shemaiah). How did he know that? Who told him or did he just have an intuitive sense that they were out to get him? Maybe one would be suspect of Sanballat and Tobiah but what clue did Nehemiah have that one among God's own people would be hired by the enemy to harm him? Obviously, the enemy was infiltrating, seeking to deceive and intimidate him and have his good name discredited.

1. It's interesting to note that Nehemiah did not retaliate. What do you think would be your recourse for such an attack on your integrity and honor? _____

2. What character! Nehemiah asks God to remember these individuals who have been attempting to intimidate him. He asks God to remember what they have done. Their intent was to destroy all

that God's people were constructing in order that they would no longer _____
(Nehemiah 2:17b).

3. This seems to be the time to ask the question: Am I more prone to side with the opposition or am I one who is working with great commitment for a cause? _____
4. Am I one who would seeks ways of undermining an effort or one who would offer support and encouragement that would help to keep others energized and focused on the work at hand?

5. Take time to consider your words, your ways, your mode of operation when something new or different is proposed. Are you one to look at the big picture and adjust to the change or are you one who wants things to remain the same even if change is a better way? Your thoughts: _____

PRAYER: O Lord, remember me. Remember me with favor. Remember me for You alone are the Righteous One. You do not remember my sin. You do not remember all that I have done or failed to do against You or my neighbor. You remember my sin no more because You love me with an everlasting love. You have redeemed me in the righteous blood of Your Son Jesus Christ who is my Savior and redeemer. Because of Jesus I know that Your gracious hand is on me and that You are always with me. I have nothing to fear for I remember You, the Lord, who is great and awesome. Thank You for remembering me. _____

Part 3

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 6:15-16, 19b, and Nehemiah 7:1-3.

EXERCISE:

1. What was accomplished in 52 days was totally an act of God! These few verses from chapter 6 reveal the outcome when God remembers what the opposition has done (verses 15-16). The surrounding nations were _____ and _____ because they perceived _____
We learn that at least one of the instigators of the opposition persisted (verse 19b). What did Tobiah continue to do? _____

2. At last, the wall was completed and the gates were set in place. Appointments were made. Individuals were put in charge. What does Nehemiah say about Hananiah, the commander of the citadel (verse 2)? _____

3. Is there a Hananiah in your life, someone with integrity who fears God more than most people? Take a moment and give thanks for this person. Ask the Lord to strengthen and empower him/her for the work he/she is called to do. _____

TEACHING: Something strange happens in verse 3. Why would Nehemiah ask that the gates of Jerusalem not be opened until the sun is hot? Keep in mind the last sentence of chapter six. The threat of the opposition remained. It was common for the city gates to be opened very early in order that merchants might set up their booths for the day. Nehemiah was cautious. He ordered the gates not to be opened because the opposition could take by surprise the new vulnerable inhabitants who lived in Jerusalem and seize the city.

The next several verses (4-69) list the genealogy of those who had come out of exile. The first people who arrived came with Zerubbabel and Jeshua (verse 7). We read about them in the Book of Ezra. The genealogy may not seem important but it was critical for the Jews to be able to show that their families were descended from Israel (verse 61). Verse 64 tells us that some searched for their family records but were not able to find them. These were excluded from the priesthood.

We learn in verses 70-72 of the generosity of the heads of the families. Not only did they contribute to the work but they gave to the treasury. They gave silver and gold, bowls and even garments for the priests. The temple treasury held the wealth of the nation.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 8.

INTRODUCTION: After the completion of the wall the people were sent to their homes and towns to establish themselves. Now the day came for the people to assemble together for the reading of the Law. Although Ezra was a contemporary of Nehemiah, he had arrived in Jerusalem approximately 13 years earlier and was the priest responsible for reading and instructing the people in the Law of Moses.

EXERCISE:

1. What did Ezra do in verse 2? _____
2. He read it aloud from _____ to _____

And all the people _____

3. Nehemiah gives more insight to the setting. Ezra faced the square before the Water Gate. Men and women were present. Where did Ezra stand (verse 4)? _____
Men and women were present. Where did Ezra stand (verse 4)? _____

4. What did Ezra do in verse 5? _____
What did the people do? _____
5. What did Ezra do in verse 6? _____
What did the people do? _____
6. What was the work of the Levites (verses 7-8)? _____

7. The people were brought to tears as they heard the Law and realized how far they had strayed from it. But Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites wanted this to be a day of celebration (verse 9).
What were the people instructed to do (verses 10-11)? _____

8. What gave the people great joy and celebration (verse 12)? _____

TEACHING: One day when the heads of families, priests, and the Levites were gathered around Ezra (verses 13-18) they discovered in the reading that each family was to construct a booth on their roofs, in their courtyards, or the square or the temple courtyard. The booth was made of tree branches. All the people who returned from exile built them and lived in them for several days. These booths were a reminder to God's people and their descendants that the Lord had the Israelites live in booths when He brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 23:33-43). The booths became a physical demonstration that they were reestablishing their relationship with God. This week was known as the Feast of Tabernacles. During these days Ezra read daily from the Book of the Law of God and the people celebrated with great joy. On the eighth day there was an assembly.

Part 4

INTRODUCTION: For those who have engaged in the previous units of the CrossConnect Series, Nehemiah 9 is going to be a review. You will be affirmed in your learning and your memory will be refreshed. Many cross-references are listed if you do not recall a particular situation or event. Do not hesitate to go back and review and allow the stories to come alive once again.

EXERCISE:

1. Those of Israelite descent gathered to hear the Law of the Lord their God and to confess their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. What were they wearing in verse 1? _____

 2. The people stood up and praised the Lord who is from everlasting to everlasting. What are the people recalling in the following verses:
 - a. Verses 5b-6: _____
 - b. Verses 7-8: _____
 - c. Verses 9-12: _____
 - d. Verses 13-15: _____
 3. In the next verses they are reminded of the ways of their forefathers (verses 16-17a): _____

 4. And, in verses 17b and 18 they are reminded of who God is:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 5. What are the people continuing to recall in the following verses:
 - a. Verse 18: _____
 - b. Verses 19-21: _____
 - c. Verses 22-25: _____
 6. Again, in verses 26-27a they are reminded of the ways of their forefathers: _____

- God in His great compassion gave them deliverers who rescued them (verse 27b).
7. Then the cycles began all over again (verse 28):
 - a. The people did what? _____
 - b. God did what? _____
 8. Verses 29-30: God warned them but they _____

 9. Verse 31: But God _____

10. In spite of all that the people did, God remained just and acted faithfully (verse 33). Yet, because of all their forefathers had done that led to their captivity, what was the condition of God's people now (verses 36-37)? _____

REFLECTION: What a difficult revelation. What a sad condition. God meant only good for His people by keeping the promise He made to Abraham. Now, only a remnant remained. Now they were slaves in the land that once was theirs. Now, they have no wealth and possessions. Now, what were they going to do? What had happened to the promise made by God in Genesis 15 that the offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens? They were only a remnant now. The land that God wanted them to possess was now the land belonging to the Persian king. And now they were slaves in great distress. The promise of great possessions was now reduced to the taxes and tributes due the king. Even the nobles and officials among their own people charged with exacting usury. This was hardly the picture of promise.

But confession was the right place to begin. Sin always comes between God and man, however, it is an obstacle that is removed by confession, the admission of both one's wrong and inability to be holy as God intended. Confession is the act of acknowledging before God exactly what we are—sinners! In Nehemiah 9:16 and 17, for example, the Israelites confessed that their forefathers were arrogant, stiff-necked, and disobeyed God's commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember... Verse 26 is another example. They were disobedient and rebelled against God. They ignored God's law and committed awful blasphemies.

God, however, remained constant. In spite of what the people did God forgave them. He was gracious and compassionate to them, slow to anger and abounding in love. He did not abandon them but rescued them, delivering them time after time from their enemies. God is gracious and merciful, a God who is just and acts faithfully. To this God we are bold to confess and eager to receive the forgiveness of all of our sins. To this God we can come because He remembers our sins no more (Jeremiah 31:34). He remembers them no more because He has removed our wrongdoing from us. He sent Jesus who came in our stead, took our punishment, endured God's wrath and hell for us. God the Father gave Jesus His Son to save us, not to condemn us! John 3:17-18a offers this Good News for us: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned..." Let us give thanks unto the Lord, for His unspeakable Gift, Jesus!

INTRODUCTION: The people of Israel confessed their sin and the sin of their forefathers. Through the use of the Law God revealed to them their sin and showed them their wrongdoing. The Law became for them a mirror that God’s Spirit used to open their eyes and their hearts to see how far they had strayed from reflecting God to His creation. Through the use of the Law God graciously and mercifully acted drawing them to repent and turn back to Him. They wanted to obey. They wanted to act faithfully to what God wanted for their lives.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 10:28-39.

EXERCISE: In the following references identify the essence of the promise the people made:

1. Verse 30: _____
2. Verse 31: _____
3. Verses 32-33: _____
4. Verse 34: _____
5. Verse 35: _____
6. Verse 36: _____
7. Verses 37-39: _____

APPLICATION:

1. Take a few moments and consider the last sentence in chapter 10: “We will... _____.”
2. The Jewish community committed itself to the provisions for the house of God and for those who worked there. What would the condition of the house of God say about the spiritual condition of the community? _____
3. There are a couple of things for us as students of the Word to consider. What significance does this hold for you as you consider the buildings of worship, the house of God, in your neighborhoods and community, where you may or may not worship? _____
4. Second, in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 we are told that we are the temple of God. Read these verses and celebrate the intimate relationship God wants with you. He says, “I will make My dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” He also says, “I will be a Father to you and you shall be sons and daughters to me.” What does this mean for you? _____

5. Keeping with the thought of Nehemiah when the people said, “We will not neglect the house of our God,” what significance do these words hold for you as you consider the care or neglect of the temple that He has made you, the place where He chooses to live and dwell?

6. If you belong to a church, how does this speak to our care for one another as the people of God and the body of Christ? _____

PRAYER: Thank the Lord for giving His Holy Spirit that through the use of the Law He draws our hearts to confession and repentance. Talk to Him about the condition of the house of God, both the building and your body. Ask Him to cause your heart to burn with desire to not neglect giving to those responsible for the maintenance and ministry of the house of God. Discuss with Him the maintenance and ministry of the house of God, the temple that He has made you to be. _____

Part 5

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 11 we learn that the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The other people cast lots. It was determined that one out of ten families would live in the holy city of Jerusalem to help guard and protect the city and its inhabitants. The remaining people would settle on their ancestral property in the towns of Judah (verse 20).

Nehemiah 12:1-26 is a genealogy of the priests and Levites who returned from exile with Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Remember, it was important that lineage could be traced to the tribe of Levi, the tribe chosen by God to serve as priests to His people.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 12:27-47.

EXERCISE:

1. The time for the dedication of the wall has come! Who was summoned to lead the celebration (verse 27)? _____

Who were the others who gathered together (verse 28)? _____

2. What would be included in the celebration (verse 27)? _____

3. What was the first thing the priests and Levites did (verse 30)? _____

4. In verses 31-39 Nehemiah orchestrated a major production. Using two choirs and the leaders of Judah he had them ascend the wall. Half were to go to the south and half to the north. The choir going to the south was led by _____, the _____ (verse 36).
5. Who followed the choir to the north (verse 38)? _____
6. Verse 40: Nehemiah and the two choirs took their place in _____.
7. Verse 43: What was the atmosphere of the day? _____
8. Verses 44-47 remind us again of the contributions that the people made for those who performed their service to God. The storerooms held the _____
(verse 44).
9. For whom were their contributions set apart (verse 47)? _____

REFLECTION: Have you ever attended the dedication of a building, or a park, or some other community project? Have you ever wondered why all the hoopla? Some people always seem ready to celebrate. However, when you consider what has been completed, most likely it was a community effort and now the community gathered to celebrate. Undoubtedly, some individuals were involved in the design, some in the construction, some in the fundraising, and even some in the preparation for the celebration when everything is completed.

This same atmosphere happens when a church or house of God has been constructed. The architectural firm is represented, the community dignitaries are invited to participate, and local politicians may be included. The celebration is led by the clergy, choirs, and leaders of the congregation. Musicians using organs, pianos, handbells, other musical instruments all raise up the spirit of the people and encourage singing and rejoicing with great joy! Oftentimes the celebration continues with an elaborate feast for the people to enjoy.

What may have been your experience? When have you engaged with the community, even the community of believers, in a celebration? What was it like? _____

It was said that “the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.”

TEACHING: In chapter 13 we are not told when or why but sometime after the dedication of the wall and after all the festivities were over that Nehemiah returned to King Artaxerxes (verse 6). He had been in Jerusalem for 12 years. Quite possibly Nehemiah returned because of the agreed upon time that he

established with the king before leaving for Jerusalem. We are also told that sometime later he returned again to Jerusalem.

Chapter 13 is not exactly what one would hope to read. In our fairytale world we'd like to think that "they lived happily ever after." We'd like to think that after remembering all the wrong their parents did causing them to end up losing all that they had that those who returned from exile would be different. This chapter reveals what Nehemiah found when he returned from the king.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 13. As you read, keep your finger on Nehemiah 10:28-39.

EXERCISE:

1. What was discovered in the Law of Moses (verse 1)? _____

Note: If you check cross-references you will discover that the law is written in Deuteronomy 23:3-5. You will also find that the situation referred to is found in Numbers 22:3-11; 23:7.

2. What was the reason (verse 2)? _____

3. What was the response of the people to this law (verse 3)? _____

4. The situation in verses 4-5 happened while Nehemiah was not in Jerusalem. Who is the primary character? _____ He was the high priest responsible for _____

5. Who was Eliashib related to (verse 4)? _____

What do you recall about him? _____

For review see Nehemiah 4:3, 7; 6:17-19.

6. What had Eliashib provided for him within the house of God (verse 5)? _____

7. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. What was his reaction to the situation (verses 7-9)? _____

8. Why was Nehemiah greatly displeased with the accommodations that Elisahib had provided for Tobiah (Nehemiah 4:3)? _____

9. What was the next thing that Nehemiah learned (verse 10)? _____

a. What was Nehemiah's rebuke (verse 11)? _____

- b. How did he resolve the situation (verses 12-13)? _____

10. What did Nehemiah discover next (verse 15-16)? _____

- a. What was Nehemiah’s rebuke (verse 17-18)? _____

- b. How was the situation resolved (verses 19-22a)? _____

11. Nehemiah became aware of something else. What is it this time (verses 23-24)? _____

- a. What was Nehemiah’s rebuke (verses 25-27)? _____

- b. How was the situation resolved (verses 28, 30)? _____

12. Nehemiah’s prayers for God’s grace and mercy are said throughout this last chapter:
- a. Verse 14: “Remember me _____.”
 _____.”
- b. Verse 22b: “Remember me _____.”
 _____.”
- c. Verse 31b: “Remember me _____.”
 _____.”
13. Nehemiah also calls on God’s justice when he says in verse 29: “Remember them _____.”
 _____.”

SUMMARY: The Law has been read (Nehemiah 8). The people have confessed their sins (Nehemiah 9). They have made a binding agreement with one another (Nehemiah 10). The wall has been dedicated (Nehemiah 12). Nehemiah left for a period of time and what did he find when he returned (Nehemiah 13)? Recalling once again the words from chapter 10, “We will not neglect the house of our God,” we can begin to get a handle on Nehemiah’s demand for reform. All too quickly the people, specifically the priests and Levites, primary caretakers for the house of God, had weakened and yielded to some of the same sins committed by their forefathers.

History has a way of repeating itself. The sins of the forefathers were abhorred and yet it wasn’t long before the same sins were repeated by the generations that followed. Would God’s people ever learn? That’s an easy question to ask until we ask ourselves the same question: Will we ever learn? Sin has permeated the world. All of creation, including humankind, is contaminated by sin and doomed to follow

the way of wickedness and destruction. But, God in His faithfulness calls His people back to Him as a loving father calls back his runaway child.

How great is the Father's love for those who are His. Regardless of how rebellious and disobedient Israel's forefathers were, God acted with compassion and mercy. Then the cycle would begin all over again. Their stiff-necked behavior and refusal to listen to God's Law eventually destroyed them, yet even after 70 years God remembered His covenant to Abraham and once again delivered them.

God is righteous. He keeps His promises and establishes His role as the God of history. It is in Jesus' righteousness that we have redemption. It's in His righteousness, His holiness, that we have been rescued and bought back from the power of death and the devil. He made the payment and He did it with His own holy and innocent blood. He did it all in order that we might live with Him forever as His children and heirs of His kingdom.

His redemptive work continues to this day. He continues to call people everywhere back to Himself. His holy desire is that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth! Once again we can only say, "How great is the Father's love!"

UNIT REVIEW

**GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS,
OUR REDEMPTION**

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS, OUR REDEMPTION

REVIEW

Congratulations! You have completed the study *God's Righteousness, Our Redemption*. You have become acquainted with several new Bible stories and characters. Now it's time to review. Remember, this is not a test, only an opportunity to affirm you and your progress as you continue this exciting journey that is shaping your life. As you study you are learning the *facts* of the stories and the *truths* about God and humankind. You are also discovering how to *apply* the facts and truths to your life lived in this 21st Century.

PRE-EXILE

EXILE

POST-EXILE

Story:	Story:	Story:
Character(s):	Character(s):	Character(s):
Truths/Insights:	Truths/Insights:	Truths/Insights:
	Story:	Story:
	Character(s):	Character(s):

	Truths/Insights:	Truths/Insights:
		Story:
		Character(s):
		Truths/Insights:

PRAYER: Lord, You have demonstrated Your righteousness. You have only done that which is right for Your people the Israelites. In spite of the wrong they did, You forgave them and acted compassionately by enabling them to return to the land that once was theirs but had now become inhabited with those who aggressively acted in opposition to them. Yet, Lord, You gave them the leaders, courage, and steadfastness to act righteously as they rebuilt the temple and the city wall. You provided for their every need as in humility they returned from bondage to also rebuild their lives. As You have delivered them, You have also delivered me from the bondage of all that entangles me and keeps me bound up. In Your righteousness You have redeemed me. You have released me and now launch me into the world to live free and forgiven. I offer to You my thanks and praise. _____

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