Explore the Bible.

DEAF PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah

Tony Evans, General Editor

THE ABC'S OF SALVATION

Some people think a personal relationship with God is something only theologians can comprehend. Actually, God's plan of salvation is simple enough for everyone to understand. Here are the ABC's of salvation.

Admit

Admit to God that you are a sinner. All persons need salvation. Each of us has a problem the Bible calls sin. Sin is a refusal to acknowledge God's authority over our lives. Everyone who does not live a life of perfect obedience to the Lord is guilty of sin. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Since none of us is perfect, all of us are sinners (Romans 3:10-18).

The result of sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Spiritual death means eternal separation from God. By God's perfect standard we are guilty of sin and therefore subject to the punishment for sin, which is separation from God. Admitting that you are a sinner and separated from God is the first step of repentance, which is turning from sin and self and turning toward God.

Believe

Believe in Jesus Christ as God's Son and receive Jesus' gift of forgiveness from sin. God loves each of us. God offers us salvation. Although we have done nothing to deserve His love and salvation, God wants to save us. In the death of Jesus on the cross, God provided salvation for all who would repent of their sins and believe in Jesus. "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Confess

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord to others. After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, share your decision with another person. Tell your pastor or a Christian friend about your decision. Following Christ's example, ask for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith. "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth. resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

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SENERAL EDITOR



In the New Testament, Paul writes that Old Testament things were written for our instruction (1 Cor. 10:11). If a royal butler together with a theologian can rebuild a nation amid staunch opposition, if an attractive peasant girl can

become queen just in time to prevent ethnic genocide, we can be encouraged that there is nothing God cannot do. We hope this study of Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah will strengthen your faith in the God who orders all things for His renown and for the joy of His people.

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MEET THE WRITER



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BIBLE READING PLAN

DECEMBER

- Hebrews 1:1-4
 Hebrews 1:5-7
- □ Hebrews 1:8-9
- □ Hebrews 1:10-12
- □ Hebrews 1:13-14
- Hebrews 2:1-4
- Hebrews 2:5-9
- □ Hebrews 2:10-13
- □ Hebrews 2:14-15
- □ Hebrews 2:16-18
- Hebrews 3:1-3
- Hebrews 3:4-6
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- Hebrews 4:8-11
- □ Hebrews 4:12-13
- Hebrews 4:14-16
- Hebrews 5:1-3
- Hebrews 5:4-6
- □ Hebrews 5:7-10
- □ Hebrews 5:11-14
- Hebrews 6:1-3
- □ Hebrews 6:4-6
- Hebrews 6:7-8
- Hebrews 6:9-12
- □ Hebrews 6:13-15

JANUARY

Hebrews 6:16-18 Hebrews 6:19-20 □ Hebrews 7:1-3 Hebrews 7:4-7 Hebrews 7:8-10 □ Hebrews 7:11-13 Hebrews 7:14-16 □ Hebrews 7:17-19 □ Hebrews 7:20-22 Hebrews 7:23-25 □ Hebrews 7.26-28 Hebrews 8:1-3 Hebrews 8:4-6 Hebrews 8:7-9 □ Hebrews 8:10-13 Hebrews 9:1-5 □ Hebrews 9:6-7 Hebrews 9:8-10 Hebrews 9.11-12 Hebrews 9:13-14 □ Hebrews 9:15 □ Hebrews 9:16-18 Hebrews 9.19-22 Hebrews 9:23-24 □ Hebrews 9:25-28 □ Hebrews 10:1-4 □ Hebrews 10:5-7 □ Hebrews 10:8-10 □ Hebrews 10:11-14 □ Hebrews 10:15-18 □ Hebrews 10:19-22

FEBRUARY

□ Hebrews 10:23-25 □ Hebrews 10:26-27 Hebrews 10:28-31 Hebrews 10:32-35 Hebrews 10:36-39 □ Hebrews 11:1-3 □ Hebrews 11:4-7 Hebrews 11:8-12 Hebrews 11:13-16 Hebrews 11:17-22 Hebrews 11.23-29 Hebrews 11:30-38 □ Hebrews 11:39-40 □ Hebrews 12:1-2 Hebrews 12:3-6 Hebrews 12:7-10 □ Hebrews 12:11-13 Hebrews 12:14-17 Hebrews 12:18-24 □ Hebrews 12:25-27 Hebrews 12:28-29 □ Hebrews 13:1-3 □ Hebrews 13.4-6 Hebrews 13:7-9 Hebrews 13:10-12 Hebrews 13:13-15 Hebrews 13:16-17 □ Hebrews 13:18-19 Hebrews 13:20-21 Hebrews 13:22-25

INTRODUCTION TO BOOK

Who wrote the Book of Esther? There is nothing in the Bible about who wrote this book. Many Bible scholars believe it was written by Mordecai. He was Esther's cousin.

When was written? Bible scholars believe it was written during the time of King **Ahasuerus**. He ruled **Persia** from 486–465 B.C.

Why was Esther written? The Book of Esther tells the story of God's care about His chosen people. It shows how God can use unbelievers to do what He wants done. The king was not a believer, but he chose Esther to be his queen. She was in the right place to save the Jewish people.

Who was Esther written to? Many historical books are not written to any special people. They are written for all people to read. The books tell the actual events that happened during a certain time period.

Who wrote the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah? The Bible does not tell who wrote these two books. In the Jewish Scriptures, they made up one book called Ezra-Nehemiah. The content is much the same. Ezra and Nehemiah give information about the Jewish people who returned to Jerusalem. Many scholars think Ezra and Nehemiah were written by the person who wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles. Ezra gives personal information about his family line. Ezra would know his family tree best.

When were Ezra and Nehemiah written? Ezra and Nehemiah were written soon after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, no later than 400 B.C.

Who were Ezra and Nehemiah written to? Both books are history. They were written for the generations of people in the future so they would know what happened.

Why were Ezra and Nehemiah written? Both books were written to record the events leading to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and restarting worship in the temple.



Session

Deliverance Is Needed

Enemies of God will always seek to destroy His chosen people.

ESTHER 3:1-9

¹After these things happened, King **Xerxes** honored **Haman** son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He gave him a new rank that was higher than all the important men.² All the royal officers at the **king's gate** would bow down and kneel before **Haman**, as the King had ordered.

But Mordecai would not bow down or show him honor.³ Then the royal officers at the **king's gate** asked Mordecai, "Why don't you obey the king's command?" ⁴And they said this to him every day. When he did not listen to them, they told **Haman** about it. They wanted to see if Haman would accept Mordecai's behavior because Mordecai had told them he was Jewish. ⁵ When **Haman** saw that Mordecai would not bow down to him or honor him, he became very angry. ⁶He thought of himself as too important to try to kill only Mordecai. He had been told who the people of Mordecai were, so he looked for a way to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jewish people, in all of **Xerxes**' kingdom. ⁷ It was the first month of the twelfth year of King *Xerxes* rule – the month of Nisan. *Pur* (that is, the lot) was thrown before **Haman** to choose a day and a month. So the twelfth month, the month of Adar, was chosen.⁸ Then **Haman** said to King **Xerxes**, "There is a certain group of people scattered among the other people in the states of your kingdom. Their customs are different from those of all the other people, and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not right for them to live in your kingdom.⁹ If it pleases the king, let an order be given to destroy those people. Then I will pay seven hundred fifty thousand pounds of silver to those people who do the king's business, and they will put it into the royal treasury."

FIRST THOUGHTS

Believers today often must obey laws we know are against the will of God. Believers all around the world face punishment because they serve the Lord God. In America, believers are often misunderstood because of our faith.



Believers must refuse to do things that do not please God. We must honor Him in public places. We can learn to be strong and faithful when we read the story of Esther and her cousin, Mordecai. They worshiped God. They refused to worship other gods or men.

Do you think it is all right for believers to disobey the laws of their government? YES ____ NO ____

Name a law you think you should not obey.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Esther was a Jewish girl. She and her cousin, Mordecai, were captives (slaves) in a foreign land. They were Jews, living in Susa, a city in **Babylon**.

Why were the Jewish people in **Babylon**? In the year 586 B.C., the **Babylonians** defeated the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. Many Jewish people were taken to **Babylon** as captives. Israel had a habit of disobeying God. God let them be punished by their enemies. The **Persians** defeated **Babylon**. The **Persian** kings ruled over Israel and Judah, and also over the Jewish captives in **Persia**.

Fifty years later, King **Cyrus** of **Persia** allowed some Jewish people to return to Jerusalem.

Not all the Jewish people returned to Jerusalem. Mordecai and Esther stayed in Susa. They remained faithful to God even in a difficult situation.

Read Esther 1-2.

Name two things you learned about Esther.

1. ______2. _____

Name two things you learned about Mordecai.

1. ______ 2. _____

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Mordecai Honors God Only (Esther 3:1-5)

VERSE 1

Xerxes (also called **Ahasuerus**) was king of **Persia**. One of his servants, **Haman**, served the king well. King **Xerxes** decided to honor **Haman** for his loyalty. **Haman** was appointed to a high position in the kingdom.

VERSE 2

All people were required to kneel in front of the king. He also ordered people to kneel in front of **Haman**.

Many kings ordered their people to honor and worship them. **Haman** expected people to honor and worship him. He thought of himself as more important than anyone except the king.

DID YOU KNOW: Worship God Only

One of the Ten Commandments is that the Jewish people could not have any other god except God. Read that Commandment in Exodus 20:4-5 and Deuteronomy 5:1-21.

The Jewish law said it was all right to bow and show honor to kings, but not worship the king. Mordecai probably showed honor to the king by bowing to him, but he was not required to bow to **Haman**. One reason Mordecai would not kneel to **Haman** was because **Haman's ancestors** were Amalekites. Amalekites were enemies of the Jewish people.

VERSES 3-4

Mordecai adopted his niece, Esther, when she was a young girl. She honored Mordecai as her father. She learned the Jewish religion and traditions from him. She learned to worship God.

Esther grew up and became queen of $\ensuremath{\textbf{Persia}}$. (You can read that story in Esther 1–2.)



Every day, Mordecai sat at the gate of the king's palace with other important men in the kingdom. The **king's gate** was an area inside the palace walls. The king's officers asked Mordecai why he did not kneel to **Haman**. He ignored them and so they reported him to **Haman**. They reminded **Haman** that Mordecai was a Jew. The men knew **Haman** hated the Jewish people.

VERSE 5

When **Haman** heard Mordecai would not bow and honor him, he became very angry. His anger caused him to act in evil ways.

Mordecai's actions show us God's people can bring honor to God when we face persecution. We can bring honor to God when we face misunderstandings.

Do you remember any times in your life when you took a stand against things you knew were not the will of God? YES ____ NO ____

Write a few words to tell what happened.

Are you strong enough to take a stand for God when other people ask you questions about your decision? YES ____ NO ____

2. Genocide Planned (Esther 3:6-9)

Genocide means to destroy a whole race of people. One of history's worst times of **genocide** was during World War II when Adolph Hitler killed millions of Jewish people in Germany.

VERSE 6

Haman thought he was too important to use his power to punish only one man. He must find a way to punish all of the Jewish people.

VERSE 7

This happened during the first month of **Xerxes**' twelfth year as king (March-April, 474 B.C.). Esther had been queen for four years.

Haman was a superstitious man. He threw some stones that are like

dice. They are called **Pur**. People threw them into the lap of their robes. Haman believed his gods would show him what to do. The **Pur** showed him the month to act was the month of Adar. Adar was eleven months in the future.

VERSE 8

Haman needed the king's permission to do anything about Mordecai and the Jewish people. He told the king about a group of people who were not like the **Persians**. These people refused to follow the king's orders. (Most Jewish people did obey the king's orders, but **Haman** lied and told the king all the Jewish people refused to obey his orders.) He said the Jewish people should not be allowed to live in the kingdom if they did not follow the king's laws. He told the king those people should be killed.

VERSE 9

Haman influenced the king by suggesting this would bring several hundred pounds of silver into the king's treasury. The plan had two good results for the king. First, people who disobeyed the king's order would be gone, and second, the king would become richer.

God's people can honor Him in times of persecution and misunderstanding. Mordecai was respected by the people in his city. He was faithful to God. He honored God by obeying His laws.

Haman's pride was hurt because Mordecai did not worship him. Pride leads to hatred of other races and other religions. Pride causes people to sin against God and against other people.

Do you think pride can be controlled? YES ____ NO ____

How?

Believers must not have hatred for other races of people. Believers must not have hatred for people who have false religions.

What happens when pride leads to hatred of other racial and religious groups?

IN MY CONTEXT

Mordecai obeyed the laws of God. He knew he could be punished because he obeyed God. He was strong and refused to worship anyone but the one true God.

It is easy for believers to be faithful to God during happy times. It is not as easy to be faithful during hard times.

Can you name a time when it was difficult for you to serve God faithfully? Write a few words about your experience.

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life. Are you living in a way that pleases God? Name at least one thing you need to change so you will please God more.

Look deep into your own heart. Are you guilty of treating another person or group of people badly? (Answer in your heart.) Pray and ask God to forgive you.

Answer these questions.

1. This week, how can I stay true to God? ______

2. Who can I share this lesson with?

3. How can I prepare better to worship God?_____

MEMORY VERSE

"Mordecai would not bow down or show him (Haman) honor."

—Esther 3:2

God Saves His People

God acted powerfully to deliver His people. He had a plan to redeem them.

Session

ESTHER 4:6-17

⁶ So Hathach went to Mordecai, who was in the city square in front of the **king's gate**. ⁷ Mordecai told Hathach everything that had happened to him, and he told Hathach about the amount of money **Haman** had promised to pay into the king's treasury for the killing

of the Jewish people. ⁸ Mordecai also gave him a copy of the order to kill the Jewish people, which had been given in Susa. He wanted Hathach to show it to Esther and to tell her about it. And Mordecai told him to order Esther to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and to plead with him for her people.⁹ Hathach went back and reported to Esther everything Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then Esther told Hathach to tell Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the royal officers and people of the royal states know that no man or woman may go to the king in the inner courtyard without being called. There is only one law about this: Anyone who enters must be put to death unless the king holds out his gold **scepter**. Then that person may live. And I have not been called to go to the king for thirty days." ¹² Esther's message was given to Mordecai. ¹³ Then Mordecai sent back word to Esther: "Just because you live in the king's palace, don't think that out of all the Jewish people you alone will escape. ¹⁴ If you keep quiet at this time, someone else will help and save the Jewish people, but you and your father's family will all die. And who knows, you may have been chosen queen for just such a time as this."¹⁵ Then Esther sent this answer to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go and get all the Jewish people in Susa together. For my sake, fast; do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my servant girls will also fast. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law, and if I die, I die." ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and did everything Esther had told him to do.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Bullying is a frequent topic in today's television news.

We sadly remember the story of a young girl who killed herself because other girls were teasing and bullying her. Everyone at school knew about her, but no one tried to stop the girls who were bullying her. Some students said they were afraid to say anything because the bad girls would bully them.

When we know the truth, we must be willing to take risks to obey God, no matter what happens to us. Maybe people will mock or hurt us. If we do not obey, we take a greater risk. We will fail to please God. We must do God's will. He will take care of the final result.

Think about times in your life when you took risks because of your faith in God. What did you do during those times? Write a few words about your actions and God's help:

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In last week's lesson we learned how **Haman** lied to the king about the Jewish people and made a plan to kill all of the Jewish people living in all of the King's cities. The king approved **Haman**'s plan.

BIBLE SKILL: Sackcloth and Ashes

Read the following verses to understand more about why people wore **sackcloth** (rough cloth) and ashes. After reading each Scripture, write the feelings of the person who wore **sackcloth** and ashes.

Esther 4:1-5 -	
Daniel 9:1-8	
Genesis 37:32-35	
2 Kings 19:1-4	

Mordecai received a copy of **Haman's** letter. He was sad because he felt there was nothing he could do to stop **Haman**.

Esther did not know about the letter. She sent her servant to find out why Mordecai was sad.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Mordecai Tells About Haman's Plot (Esther 4:6-9)

VERSE 6

Esther heard that her cousin Mordecai was sitting at the **king's gate** wearing rough cloth used for making sacks. Many Bible translations call it **sackcloth**. It was too rough to wear as clothing. People wore **sackcloth** to show they had great sorrow.

Mordecai could not go in to see Esther and tell her about **Haman** because he was wearing **sackcloth**. He felt helpless.

Esther could not leave the palace without the king's permission, so she sent her servant, Hathach, to find out why Mordecai was so sad.

VERSE 7

Mordecai told Hathach about **Haman's** plot to kill all the Jewish people who lived in all the king's lands. Mordecai had a copy of **Haman's** letter.

VERSES 8-9

Mordecai gave **Haman's** letter to Hathach. He said Esther must go to the king and beg the king not to allow the Jewish people to be killed.

Hathach told Esther everything Mordecai said. Esther loved Mordecai. When Esther knew the truth, she knew she had a responsibility to help the Jewish people.

2. Esther Was Afraid (Esther 4:10-12)

VERSES 10-12

People could not go in to see the king unless they were invited. If they

went to the king without an invitation, they must be killed. However, if the king held out his golden **scepter**, they would not die.

When Esther first became queen, she was one of the king's favorite wives. He probably called for her to come to him often. She knew she would be taking a great risk. The king might have her put to death or put her in prison. (See chapter 1 for the story about the girl who was queen before Esther.)

Ask yourself, "Am I willing to obey God, no matter what happens to me?"

Have you faced a time when you took a risk to obey God?

DID YOU KNOW: ... about Obeying God

A sinful heart does not obey God. A heart that obeys God will trust Him. Read 1 John 5:3; John 14:23; and Acts 5:29.

3. Mordecai's Appeal (Esther 4:13-14)

VERSE 13

Hathach continued to carry messages between Mordecai and Esther. Mordecai reminded Esther she was a Jew. She was queen but that did not mean she would escape. **Haman's** order said all Jewish people must die.

Esther could take a chance to be killed by going to see the king without an invitation. Or, she would surely be killed because she was a Jew. Either way she would die.

VERSE 14

Mordecai said if Esther did not act to save the Jewish people, someone



else would come to help them. And then Esther and all her relatives would be killed because of **Haman's** order.

Mordecai said maybe Esther became queen just so God could use her to talk to the king and save His people. Wow! What a thought!

Have you ever wondered why God put you in an unusual situation? YES ____ NO ____

Can you look back and see God's reason for putting you there?

4. Esther's Decision (Esther 4:15-17)

VERSE 15

Esther probably thought a long time about the things Mordecai said to her. It was not an easy decision for her.

VERSE 16

Esther told Mordecai to tell all the Jewish people in the town of Susa to meet in one place and **fast** for three days and nights. Esther and her servant girls would **fast** also. To **fast** meant not to eat or drink anything and spend much time in prayer. They put their full attention on God.

Esther told them to **fast** for her sake so she would not be killed when she went in to see the king. Esther said it did not matter what happened to her. She explained her thoughts in a few words, "If I die, I die." She trusted God to use her for His purpose.

VERSE 17

Mordecai did everything Esther told him to do. Believers need to do God's will and leave the results to God. We know He is in control. Esther needed a lot of thought and prayer to make the right decision. It is not easy to let God take care of the results of our decisions.

What do you think Esther meant when she said, "If I die, I die?"

When you make a decision, do you worry about what will happen? What can you do to stop worrying?

IN MY CONTEXT

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life.

Sometimes we do not know about bad things happening to other people. What should you do when you hear about a plan to hurt someone?

Think of times in your life when you faced problems. Did you feel helpless and alone? YES ____ NO ____Explain one of those times.

Have you ever made a difficult decision? YES ____ NO ____

List two things you did to find the right decision.

1._____2.____

Answer these questions.

- 1. Am I strong enough to make decisions that please God?
- 2. Am I willing to obey God in everything I do?
- 3. This week, how can I use the things I learned in this lesson?

4. Who can I share this lesson with? _____

MEMORY VERSE

"And who knows, you may have been chosen queen for just such a time as this." —Esther 4:14



God Provides a Savior

God sent His Son to be a Savior for all people.

LUKE 2:8-20

⁸ That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news that will be a great joy to all the people. ¹¹ "Today, your Savior was born in the town of David. He is Christ, the Lord. ¹² "This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a feeding box."¹³ Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel, praising God and saying: ¹⁴ "Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace among the people who please God."¹⁵ When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about."¹⁶ So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in a feeding trough. ¹⁷ When they had seen Him, they told what the angels had said about this child. ¹⁸ Everyone was amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured these things and continued to think about them. ²⁰ Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking Him for everything they had seen and heard. It had been just as the angel had told them.

FIRST THOUGHTS

The gospel message still amazes people today. People who have accepted the truth of the gospel message confess they do not know why God is so good to them. We do not understand why God would send His only Son to save us. We are very thankful God loves us so much.

We believe the shepherds' story. Why? We have proof that Jesus was the Messiah. Old Testament prophesies told where He would be born and about His family line. They told about His life and the kind of man He would be.

In today's lesson we learn Jesus came to bring salvation to all people.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Mary's ancestor was King David. Old Testament prophets said Jesus would be born into the family of David.

Jewish young women prayed for the honor of being the mother of the Messiah. They tried to live pure lives. God looked on the life of Mary. He was pleased with her. Luke describes how the angel told Mary she would be the mother of the Messiah.

Jesus did not have an earthly father. He was God's son. God told Mary to name Him Jesus. Jesus means "the Lord is salvation."

The Roman Emperor gave an order for everyone to register (like a census). The head of each family must go to the city of his **ancestors** to register. Joseph's **ancestors** were from Bethlehem. Bethlehem was called the city of David. Jesus was born while Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem.

The first seven verses of chapter 2 describe the birth of Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (LUKE 2:8-20)

1. Angels Announced the Birth of the Savior (Luke 2:8-14)

VERSE 8

Shepherds had important jobs, but no one thought of them as "important" people. They usually were not rich men or able to read and write. The people in towns did not show them great respect. They stayed in the fields to protect their sheep. Night was the time when thieves or animals came to kill or steal the sheep.

VERSE 9

It was very dark out in the fields. Shepherds often built fires. The fire was the only light for them. This night, they were probably sitting or standing near their fire, as usual. Suddenly, a very bright light replaced the darkness. They were surprised and afraid.

VERSE 10

In the middle of the bright light, an angel appeared and told them not to be afraid. He told them he was giving them some great news. The things he told them would bring joy to all people.

It is wonderful how God gave the good news to poor, humble men first. The angel did not appear to the king or to rich or famous people. He did not appear to the religious leaders. He appeared to people the world thought were not important.

VERSE 11

What was the good news? The Savior was born in Bethlehem. That is where the Old Testament prophets said He would be born.

BIBLE SKILL: Prophecy about Jesus

Read these prophecies about Jesus' birth and when it happened: Isaiah 7:14 / Matthew 1:18-23; Micah 5:2 / Luke 2:1-7.

In this verse, can you find three important things about the baby who was born in Bethlehem? First, He is a Savior. Before Jesus was born, the angel told Mary to name her child Jesus, meaning "The Lord is Salvation" (Luke 1:30-33). These verses tell why she must name Him Jesus: because He is the Savior, the Son of God.

Second, the angel called Him Christ. The words *Christ* (a Greek word) and *Messiah* (a Hebrew word) mean the same as our English word, *Savior*. The Jewish people waited hundreds of years for the Messiah to free them from their enemies. Christ came to free people from their sins.

Third, the angel called Him the Lord. The Lord is ruler over everything. Jesus is the Lord. He is God.

VERSE 12

The angel told the shepherds where to find Jesus. They said to look for a baby wrapped in strips of *cloth*. New-born babies were often wrapped in wide strips of cloth when they were born.

The angel told the shepherds they would find the baby in a box used to put food for animals (a manger). The shepherds were truly shocked to learn the Savior of the world would be in a feeding box!

VERSES 13-14

Suddenly, a very large group of angels joined the first angel and sang praises about God's glory. The life of Jesus gave glory to God. The angel's song said the people who please God will have peace. Who are the people who please God? They are the people who love Jesus and follow Him. What is the peace they will have? It is the peace that is in the heart of the believer who knows and loves Jesus.

Do these verses suggest to you that Jesus was born like a rich king or a poor common person? _____

Do you think the shepherds were surprised to know God chose them to be among the first people to know the Messiah was born?

2. Shepherds Found the Savior (Luke 2:15-16)

VERSE 15

After the angels finished singing, they went away. The light from the angels was gone and it was dark again. The shepherds believed what the angels said. They hurried to Bethlehem to find the new born baby. They wanted to see the things the angel told them about.

VERSE 16

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem. They found Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus. Everything the angels told them was true. The baby was wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger. The manger was in a stable (barn). It was probably in one of the many caves near Bethlehem. The stable was the only place in town Mary and Joseph could find to stay for the night.

The shepherds traveled to Bethlehem because the angel told them about Jesus. They believed the things the angel told them. People today can find Jesus if they look for Him. We can read God's Word and know it is true.

God's Word tells us how to find Jesus and invite Him into our lives. Have you invited Jesus into your heart? YES ____ NO ___ Not yet ____

If you cannot say yes, ask your pastor or teacher to help you find Jesus.

3. Shepherds Told About the Birth of the Savior (Luke 2:17-20)

VERSES 17-18

Many people were probably staying near the place Jesus was born. People were amazed when they heard the shepherds tell about the bright lights and the angel's words. They told the people about the song all the angels sang. They told about how they knew where to find the baby Jesus.

VERSE 19

Mary kept all these things in her heart. The Greek word means she thought for a long time about these things. The American Sign Language sign means to continue to think. It means to think about something all the time. Mary continued to think about the things the shepherds told her.

Mary treasured the things she heard. To treasure something means to feel it is very important. People guard and protect their treasures.

VERSE 20

Finally, the shepherds went back to their sheep. They praised God as they traveled back to their fields because the angels told them the truth.

Do you praise God for letting you know the truth about Jesus?

Do you know how to explain about the Messiah?

Ask your pastor or teacher to help you.

IN MY CONTEXT

The verses in today's lesson explain the story of the shepherds. Read the Bible verses again and then write the story in your own words.

Have you ever told someone the true gospel story?

Describe your experience:

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life and answer these questions:

- 1. Do I truly know how to explain about my faith in Jesus?
- 2. This week, how can I use the things I learned in this lesson?
- 3. Who can I share this lesson with?

4. How can I prepare better for worship next week?

The next two lessons will be from the small Book of Ezra. Plan to read all of the Book of Ezra before next Sunday.

MEMORY VERSE

"Today your Savior was born in the town of David." —Luke 2:11

God Wants Believers to Come Back to Him

Session

God's plan is for believers to repent and return to worship Him.



EZRA 3:1-7,10-11

¹ In the seventh month, after the Israelites were settled in their hometowns, they met together in Jerusalem.² Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests joined Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and began to build the altar of the God of Israel where they could offer burnt offerings, just as it is written in the Teachings of Moses, the man of God. ³ Even though they were afraid of the people living around them, they built the altar where it had been before. And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, morning and evening.⁴ Then, to obey what was written, they celebrated the Feast of **Shelters**. They offered the right number of sacrifices for each day of the festival. ⁵ After the Feast of **Shelters**, they had regular sacrifices every day, as well as sacrifices for the New Moon and all the festivals commanded by the Lord. Also there were special offerings brought as gifts to the Lord. ⁶ On the first day of the seventh month they began to bring burnt offerings to the Lord, but the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.⁷ Then they gave money to the bricklayers and carpenters. They also gave food, wine, and oil to the cities of Sidon and Tyre so they would float cedar logs from Lebanon to the seacoast town of Joppa. *Cyrus, king of* **Persia**, had given permission for this. ¹⁰ The builders finished laying the foundation of the temple of the Lord. Then the priests, dressed in their robes, stood with their trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, stood with their cymbals. They all took their places and praised the Lord just as David king of Israel had said to do. ¹¹With praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the Lord: "He is good; His love for Israel continues forever." And then all the people shouted loudly, "Praise the Lord! The foundation of his temple has been laid."

EZRA 6:19-22

¹⁹ The Jewish people who returned from captivity celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. ²⁰ The priests and Levites had made themselves clean. Then the Levites killed the Passover lambs for all the people who had returned from captivity, for their relatives the priests, and for themselves. ²¹ So all the people of Israel who returned from captivity ate the Passover lamb. So did the people who had given up the unclean ways of their non-Jewish neighbors in order to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. ²² For seven days they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread in a very joyful way. The Lord had made them happy by changing the mind of the king of Assyria so that he helped them in the work on the temple of the God of Israel.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Most believers try to worship God in the right way. The people in this lesson worshiped God with joy and praise.

Worship of God may involve sacrifice. In some countries, believers may be forced to sacrifice their lives. For us, worship may involve sacrifice of time or money. It may involve taking a risk to go to a place of worship.

Believers show God's grace and goodness when we join in worship together. Worship involves praising God for His goodness to us. We honor Him when we meet together and worship Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Use the **timeline** on page 100 to understand when these things happened. In 586 B.C., the **Babylonians** defeated Jerusalem. Many Jewish people were taken to **Babylon** as captives. Fifty years later (539

B.C.), King **Cyrus** of **Persia** defeated **Babylon** and later let the Israelites return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. Many Jewish people returned to Jerusalem at that time. Look at the map at the back of this book to see the distance between **Persia** and Jerusalem.

Ezra was a priest in **Babylon**. He returned to help rebuild Jerusalem. Two other priests, Jeshua and Zerubbabel, also returned to Jerusalem to build the temple of God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (EZRA 3:1-7,10-11; 6:19-22)

1. Ezra Rebuilt the Altar (Ezra 3:1-7)

The name of the nation of **Babylon** was changed to Assyria, then later, **Persia**. The Lord told Cyrus, king of Assyria, to let the Jewish people return to their hometowns. Some Jewish people decided to go back to Israel. Others decided to stay in towns in Assyria.

VERSES 1-2

The distance between **Babylon** and Jerusalem was about nine hundred miles. It took several months to travel that far. Look at the map on the back of this book to see where the Jewish people traveled.

The most important festivals were held during the seventh month on the Jewish calendar.

Jeshua and Zerubbabel, two of the leading priests, began to build the altar. They built the altar the way God told Moses it should be built. (See Deuteronomy 27:1-7.)

VERSE 3

When the Jewish people were taken away to **Babylon**, people from other nations moved into Judah. They did not worship the one true God. They destroyed the city of Jerusalem, the temple, and the altar.

The Jewish people needed the altar as a place to worship. They offered burnt offerings to God on the altar day and night.

VERSE 4

Moses said they should have a feast during the seventh month to remember the time when their **ancestors** left Egypt and wandered in the desert for forty years. The Festival of **shelters** helped them remember God's care for them. The festival started on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and lasted for seven days and nights. The people gave special burnt offerings every day and lived in **shelters** for the entire festival (Numbers 29:12-40).

VERSES 5-6

On the first day of the Festival of **shelters**, people began to bring burnt offerings to the Lord. It was important for Jewish people to be able to worship God before any other work was started.

DID YOU KNOW: ... about Worship?

God wants believers to worship Him. Read the following verses: John 4:23-24; Exodus 3:12; Jeremiah 32:30; Acts 10:35; and Hebrews 12:28.

VERSE 7

Bricklayers and carpenters worked on the temple. The Jewish people brought money to pay for the builders' work. They got cedar wood from Lebanon. Tyre and Sidon had ships to carry the wood for the temple. The Jewish people paid the cities of Tyre and Sidon with food, wine, and oil to carry logs on their boats.

Look at the map in the back of this book. Lebanon is a long way from Jerusalem. How did the Jewish people get the wood from Lebanon to Judah? ______ (See Ezra 3:7.)

2. The Temple Foundation Was Rebuilt (Ezra 3:10-11)

VERSE 10

After the altar was built, they started building the foundation of the



temple. When the foundation was complete, they had a celebration. Everyone started shouting and praising the Lord. It was the first time the Jewish people were able to worship at their holy altar since they were carried away to **Babylon**.

VERSE 11

The people were joyful. They sang a song King David wrote many years earlier (1 Chronicles 16:34). They took turns singing the words back and forth many times.

After the song was finished, all the people shouted loudly, "Praise the Lord! The foundation of his temple is completed."

Think about times in your life when you were so thankful to God you wanted to shout. What did you want to praise Him for?

3. People Started Worshiping in the Temple Again (Ezra 6:19-22)

VERSES 19-20

The most important feast for the Jewish people was the Passover Feast. It reminded the Jewish people of the night the Death Angel passed over the houses of God's people. The first-born sons of the Egyptians were killed.

BIBLE SKILL: The Passover. Exodus 12:1-20.

Read Exodus 12:1-20. The Death Angel did not kill the Jewish people.

How were the Jewish people saved from the Death Angel?

VERSES 21-22

Some Jewish people were not carried away as captives. They stayed in Judah. The Jewish people who returned and the Jewish people who stayed celebrated the Passover together.

IN MY CONTEXT

What was the main reason the Jewish people wanted to return to Jerusalem?

Believers today should be joyful. In most countries we can be obedient and worship Him regularly. We can worship Him according to His Word. Write a little song of worship here. You may want to use some words from a Psalm or from another Bible verse.

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life. Answer these questions:

1. How can I prepare better for worship next week?

2. Do I worship God, or do I only ask Him for things?

3. This week, how can I use the things I learned in this lesson?

4. Who can I share this lesson with?

Sing the song in 1 Chronicles 16:34 the way the priests sang it. Take turns. Sing to the Lord. Use large and strong signs to show your praise.

MEMORY VERSE

"With prayer and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; His love for Israel continues forever." —Ezra 3:11



Session

God Commands People to Obey Him

Faithful obedience to God's Word brings liberty.
EZRA 7:1-10

¹After these things during the rule of Artaxerxes king of **Persia**, Ezra came up from **Babylon**. Ezra was the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, ² the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, ³ the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, ⁴ the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, ⁵ the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the high priest. ⁶ This Ezra came to Jerusalem from **Babylon**. He was a teacher and knew well the Teachings of Moses that had been given by the Lord, the God of Israel. Ezra received everything he asked for from the king, because the Lord his God was helping him. ⁷ In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, more Israelites came to Jerusalem. Among them were priests, Levites, singers, **gatekeepers**, and temple servants. ⁸ Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of Artaxerxes' seventh year as king.⁹ Ezra had left **Babylon** on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, because God was helping him. ¹⁰ Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the teachings of the Lord and to teach His rules and commands to the Israelites.

FIRST THOUGHTS

God gives different abilities to people so they can serve His people. We know He puts people in places where they can use their talents in the best ways. The lesson today explains how different people used their talents to serve God. Some were builders, and some were priests.

Teaching others the truths of God requires us to be students of His

Word. We have heard the saying, "Do as I say, not as I do." That saying is not true. We must do the things we say. Teaching others the truths of God requires us to be good examples.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

BIBLE SKILLS: Use Other Materials

Other materials are provided in your book to help you understand your lessons.

1. Timeline (p. 100). The timeline tells you when things happened.

2. Maps (inside back cover). Look at maps to see the locations in your lessons.

3. Word List (page 97). The word list will help you understand words you may not know yet. It will help you learn new words.

In 586 B.C., many Jewish people were carried to **Babylon** to be slaves. About one hundred fifty years later King **Xerxes** let some Jewish people return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city. When **Xerxes** died, Artaxerxes became king. He let more groups return about seven years after the first group.

The enemies living in the area did not want Jerusalem to be rebuilt. They tried to make the Jewish people afraid to build anything. They wrote a letter to Artaxerxes to complain about the Jewish people. They said the Jewish people refused to pay taxes, were trouble makers, and did not follow the King's orders.

Artaxerxes' advisors searched the government records. They reported the letter was true. The Jewish people did not pay taxes to the King of **Babylon**. They followed their own laws. Then Artaxerxes became angry. He did not want another nation to become a strong enemy. He commanded the Jewish people to stop all building. Later God caused Artaxerxes to change his mind and he told everyone that any Jew who wanted to leave could leave. He respected Ezra. Ezra asked Artaxerxes for money and supplies to build the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Artaxerxes gave Ezra everything he asked for.

Again, the surrounding governors did not want Jerusalem rebuilt. Again, the king ordered the building to stop. Later he let them start building again.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (EZRA 7:1-10)

1. Ezra's Ancestors (Ezra 7:1-6)

VERSE 1a

Ezra was one of the Jewish captives who came back to Jerusalem to finish building the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

VERSES 1b – 5

These verses list Ezra's **ancestors**. In Jewish life the priests must prove they came from the family line of Aaron. Ezra was qualified to be a priest because his ancestor was Aaron.

BIBLE SKILL: Requirements to Be a Priest

Read Exodus 28:1-41 to see how God told Moses to choose Aaron and his sons to be priests. Read about the clothes they were required to wear in the temple. Pay close attention to verses 1 and 41.

VERSE 6

Ezra was a priest and he was a teacher. He knew all the teachings of Moses. Ezra knew it was his responsibility to teach the commands of God to the people. When the Jewish people became captives in **Babylon** they



did not have a place to worship and to learn God's laws.

The priests and leaders of the Jewish nation were taken to **Babylon**. The Jewish people who were left in Israel did not have any one to teach them God's laws. Ezra knew he must teach both groups the teachings of Moses.

Who is responsible for teaching God's Word in your church?

Why? _

2. Ezra's Journey (Ezra 7:7-9)

VERSE 7

When Artaxerxes had been king for seven years another large group of Jewish people returned to Jerusalem. In the group were priests, Levites, singers, **gatekeepers** and temple servants. All these people had an important part in temple worship. They were joyful because they were returning to worship in the temple of the Lord.

Most of the work on the temple was finished. Ezra and his group were planning to finish the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem.

DID YOU KNOW: ... Praise Is Worship?

Read Psalm 100:1-5. List six way	s the writer of Psalms said to praise
God. 1	2
3	4
5	. 6

VERSES 8-9

Jerusalem was about nine hundred miles from **Babylon**. It took a long time to travel that far. They had to travel by walking or riding animals. This long trip showed the dedication of the people who were going back to Jerusalem. God gave Ezra strength for traveling. He gave the group safety while they traveled.

God planned for the redemption of Israel. His plan was to rebuild the nation of Israel. In these lessons the Jewish people who returned to Jerusalem are called by several names. They are called Jews, Hebrews, and Israelites. The two separate nations of Israel and Judah did not exist now. They were all one group again.

There are times in our lives when we are tired and discouraged while we are doing God's work. We feel like giving up. God asks His followers to work hard. He asks us to keep on going even if we are tired.

Have you ever felt like giving up? YES ____ NO ____

Write some things you did to continue when you were tired and discouraged.

3. Ezra's Goal (Ezra 7:10)

VERSE 10

Verse 10 is our memory verse for today. It explains Ezra's goal. His goal was made up of three parts.

Part one: Ezra wanted to *know* all of the teachings of the Lord. He studied and prayed to God for understanding of the teachings.

Part two: Ezra wanted to *obey* the teachings. He understood it was not enough just to know the Word of God. God expects believers to obey His Word.

Part three: Ezra wanted to *teach* the Jewish people about God. He knew he could not teach others something he did not know himself. His main goal was to lead the Israelites back to worship the one true God of Israel.

IN MY CONTEXT

Do you have spiritual goals? YES ____ NO ____

List two goals you have for doing God's work.

1. _____ 2. _____

Can you name a time you kept working for God even when you were tired? YES ____ NO ____

Write a few words about the things that were happening at that time. _____

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life.

1. This week will I be joyful because I can go to church and worship God? YES ____ NO ____

2. What is my responsibility in the worship service?

3. Who can I share this lesson with?

4. How can I prepare better for worship next week?

MEMORY VERSE

"Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the Teachings of the Lord and to teach His rules and commands to the Israelites." —Ezra 7:10



God Inspires the Work

When God's people repent, He brings them back to a right relationship with Himself. He helps them do work that honors Him.

NEHEMIAH 2:1-8,17-18

¹ It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year Artaxerxes was king. He wanted some wine, so I took some and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before. ² So the king said, "Why does your face look sad even though you are not sick? Your heart must be sad." Then I was very afraid. ³ I said to the king, "May the king live forever! My face is sad because the city where my **ancestors** are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire."⁴ Then the king said to me, "What do you want?" First I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I answered the king, "If you are willing and if I have pleased you, send me to the city in Judah where my **ancestors** are buried so I can rebuild it." ⁶ The queen was sitting next to the king. He asked me, "How long will your trip take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me, so I set a time. ⁷ I also said to him, "If you are willing, give me letters for the governors of Trans-Euphrates. Tell them to let me pass safely through their lands on my way to Judah. ⁸And may I have a letter for Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, telling him to give me timber? I will need it to make boards for the gates of the palace, which is by the temple, and for the city wall, and for the house in which I will live." So the king gave me the letters, because God was showing kindness to me. ¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You can see the trouble we have here. Jerusalem is a pile of ruins and its gates have been burned. Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so we won't be full of shame any longer."¹⁸I also told them how God had been kind to me and what the king had said to me. Then they answered, "Let's start rebuilding." So they began to work hard.

FIRST THOUGHTS

We see things every day that do not honor God. We should be brokenhearted when God is not honored. When we ask God for direction, He will help us know what to do. It is very important for believers to know He will answer our prayers. When believers act in a way that honors God, we may face people who oppose us. When our prayers are answered, we must prepare to follow God's plan. He will show us His plan. Often we will see His plan only a little at a time.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In the last few lessons we learned about some Jewish people who left **Babylon** and returned to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was destroyed by its enemies. The returning Israelites were going to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city. Nehemiah was a Jew in **Persia**. He was a cupbearer for King Artaxerxes. The cupbearer tasted every drink to be sure it did not have poison in it. The king trusted the cupbearer with his life.

Some people from Jerusalem returned to Susa to report about the work on the temple. Nehemiah's brother was in that group. He told Nehemiah the Jewish people in Jerusalem had a hard time rebuilding the city. Nehemiah cried for many days. His face looked very sad. He prayed and reminded God about how He promised to return His people to Jerusalem if they repented. Nehemiah admitted his sins. He begged God to forgive him and the Jewish people. He prayed for help to rebuild the city.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 2:1-8,17-18)

1. Nehemiah Shows His Sadness (Nehemiah 2:1-3)

VERSES 1-2

Four months after he heard about the trouble in Jerusalem, Nehemiah was sad. His unhappiness showed on his face. King Artaxerxes noticed Nehemiah was unhappy. He knew Nehemiah was not sick. The king wanted to know what was wrong.

VERSE 3

Nehemiah thought carefully before he answered the king. King Artaxerxes thought Jerusalem was his enemy. Nehemiah decided a different way to explain his sadness.

In **Persia**, people built fine tombs for their **ancestors**. Nehemiah told the king the city where his **ancestors** were buried was destroyed. He was sad because no one respected the burial place of his **ancestors**.

Have you ever had something happen to make you very sad, and you did not want people to see your sadness? YES ____ NO ____

Write a few words about what happened. ______ How did you hide your sadness? _____

2. Nehemiah Makes Requests (Nehemiah 2:4-5)

VERSE 4

The king asked Nehemiah what he wanted to do. Nehemiah first prayed to the God of heaven. This verse does not mean he prayed out loud. He did not kneel to pray. He prayed silently in his heart. Nehemiah believed God would answer his prayer.

DID YOU KNOW: ... about Prayer?

Jesus taught believers how to pray. Read Matthew 6:5-14 and Luke 11:1-13.

VERSE 5

Nehemiah told the king he would only do something if it pleased the king. Nehemiah asked the king to send him back to the city where his **ancestors**' graves were located. He did not yet say the name Jerusalem.

Fill in the blanks. Sometimes we must pray _____ We must believe God will ______ our prayers.

3. Nehemiah Prepares to Go (Nehemiah 2:6-8)

VERSE 6

It is important to understand the choices the king could make. He could have Nehemiah killed for wanting to leave the king. He could make fun of Nehemiah for asking for such a silly thing. The king did not make those choices. He wanted to know more.

The king asked how long the trip would take. Then he wanted to know when Nehemiah would return. We do not know how much time Nehemiah asked for. We do know he stayed in Jerusalem for twelve years.

BIBLE SKILL: Nehemiah Becomes Governor

Read Nehemiah 5:14-16. Those verses shows Artaxerxes trusted Nehemiah. Nehemiah could lead his people because the King appointed him to be governor. Can you find verses that tell about David being anointed to become king of Israel? Many times in 1 and 2 Kings, God used someone to announce a new king. **Do you think God used the king of Persia to name Nehemiah as**

governor? YES ____ NO ____

VERSES 7-8

Trans-Euphrates was the area across the Euphrates River from **Babylon**. These areas were not friendly to the Israelites. Nehemiah asked the king for letters to command the governors to let Nehemiah and his group safely pass through their territories.

Nehemiah knew Jerusalem and the area around the city were destroyed. Judah is a land with many rocks and stones. The rocks were big enough to build city walls. There were enough rocks and stones to build houses and the temple. He told King Artaxerxes he needed lumber for the city wall and also for his own personal house. He still did not name the city he wanted to rebuild.

Asaph was the manager of the king's forests. Nehemiah asked the

king to give him a letter to tell Asaph to give Nehemiah all the wood he needed to rebuild Jerusalem.

Nehemiah said the king gave him the letters because God showed kindness to him. Nehemiah knew only God could cause the king to give him the letters he needed.

Name three things Nehemiah asked the king for: 1. ______ 2. ______ 3. _____ 3. _____

4. Nehemiah Begins Rebuilding (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

BIBLE SKILL: Nehemiah Begins Building (Nehemiah 2:9-16)

Read verses 9-16. These verses describe how Nehemiah went through areas with governors who did not want Jerusalem to be rebuilt.

Why do you think Nehemiah chose to visit with these governors?

VERSE 17

After Nehemiah checked the wall and temple he explained what he wanted to do. Nehemiah said it was time to rebuild the walls and temple so they could be proud to call Jerusalem their home.

VERSE 18

Nehemiah gave them strong encouragement. He told them it was not only his idea to rebuild; it was God who caused the king to be kind.

The people gave their answer. They did not put it off. They started to work.

Is there something you need to do to serve God?

Will you say, "Let's get started?"

IN MY CONTEXT

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life. Was there a time when you needed to do some project for the Lord?

Think of some things you may be doing that bring shame to God. You do not need to write them. Think of them in your heart and mind, and ask God for forgiveness.

Answer the questions.

- 1. Was there a time when you were afraid to ask someone for something? YES ____ NO ____
- 2. Did you pray about it first? YES ___ NO ___
- 3. Did God help you be strong during that time? YES ____ NO ____
- 4. Were you able to finish the job you needed to do? YES ___ NO ___
- 5. This week, how can you use the things you learned in this lesson? _____
- 6. Who can you share this lesson with? _____
- 7. How can you prepare better for worship next week?

MEMORY VERSE

"First I prayed to the God of Heaven." —Nehemiah 2:4



Protect Human Life

God values every life He creates. We must value and protect human life.

GENESIS 9:1-7

¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Have many children; grow in number and fill the earth. ² "Every animal on earth, every bird in the sky, every animal that crawls on the ground, and every fish in the sea will respect and **fear** you. I have given them to

you. ³ "Everything that moves, everything that is alive, is yours for food. Earlier I gave you the green plants, but now I give you everything for food. ⁴ "But you must not eat meat that still has blood in it, because blood gives life. ⁵ "I will demand blood for life. I will demand the life of any animal that kills a person, and I will demand the life of anyone who takes another person's life. ⁶ "Whoever kills a human being will be killed by a human being, because God made humans in His own image. ⁷ "As for you, Noah, I want you and your family to have many children, to grow in number on the earth, and to become many."

PSALM 8:4-8

⁴ But why are people even important to you? Why do you take care of human beings? ⁵ You made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. ⁶ You put them in charge of everything you made. You put all things under their control: ⁷ All the sheep, the cattle, and the wild animals, ⁸ The birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that lives under water.

PROVERBS 24:10-12

¹⁰ If you give up when trouble comes, it shows that you are weak.
¹¹ Save those who are being led to their death; rescue those who are about to be killed.
¹² If you say, "We don't know anything about this," God, who knows what's in your mind, will notice. He is watching you, and he will know. He will reward each person for what he has done.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16A

¹² My dear friends, you have always obeyed God when I was with you. It is even more important that you obey now while I am away from you. Keep on working to complete your salvation with **fear** and trembling, ¹³ Because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him. ¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing. ¹⁵ Then you will be innocent and without any wrong. You will be God's children without fault. But you are living with crooked and mean people all around you, among whom you shine like stars in the dark world. ¹⁶ You offer the teaching that gives life. So when Christ comes again, I can be happy because my work was not wasted. I ran the race and won.

FIRST THOUGHTS

In the world today, many people do not value the lives of other people. We have laws that allow people to end the lives of unborn babies. Some states have discussed passing laws to allow doctors to help people kill themselves if they are elderly or sick.

As believers there are some spiritual truths we accept. We believe God created humans in His own image. He enjoys fellowship with us. He put humans in charge of everything on earth.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Bible tells us in the beginning God created humans in His own image. He was pleased with His creation. He said it was good.

Then humans began to disobey God. Their sin became so bad God sent a flood to cover the whole earth. After the flood, God again said people were made in His image.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Part of Our Purpose (Genesis 9:1-7)

VERSE 1

God blessed Noah and his sons. God said they must have many children and descendants. God places great value on human life.

VERSES 2-3

In the first chapter of Genesis, God gave man control over every living animal. He gave Adam and Eve instructions about eating the grain and plants of the earth. He did not mention eating animals. In these verses, God allows humans to eat animals for food.

VERSE 4

Humans must not eat meat that still has blood in it. Remember this verse, "Blood gives life." It is a very important verse.

VERSES 5-6

God said animals and people must be killed if they kill a human being. God allows people in authority to punish a person who kills another person. If a person kills another person, he is telling God His image is not important and he does not care about God's creation.

VERSE 7

God said to Noah, "Have many children, grow in numbers and fill the whole earth." God loves His creation. He loves the people He made. He wants the earth to be full of His people.

Write in the missing words:

People are created in	's image.

God told Noah to grow in _____.

"Blood gives _____."

2. God Values Us (Psalm 8:4-8)

David wrote Psalm 8. He was amazed at the order in which God created things. He said creating people was like a crown on the work of God in creation.

DID YOU KNOW: ...about Human Life?

God values all human life. Read Exodus 20:13 and 1 Peter 1:18-19.

VERSE 4

David asked God how He could care about something as small as a person. We are like a grain of sand when compared to the universe. God loves us and takes care of us because we are made in His image.

VERSE 5

Angels are the heavenly beings who surround God's throne. They live to worship God and obey His commands. People are made just a little lower than the angels. People must also worship God and obey His commands.

Glory and honor are like crowns for people. When God made everything except people, He said it was good. When He added people to the things He made, He said it was very good.

BIBLE SKILL: God was pleased with His creation.

Compare Genesis 1:31 with Psalm 8:4-5. How did God show He was pleased when He made people?

VERSES 6-7

God wants us to act like His representatives here on earth. We must care for each other and for all creatures the same way God cares for them.

Write in the missing words. God made people a little lower than the _____

God gave people ____

and

God gave ______ control over every creature on earth.

3. We Are Called to Action (Proverbs 24:10-12; Philippians 2:12-16a)

VERSE 10

We believe abortion is a sin because God said it is a sin. Many people disagree with us. Sometimes it is difficult for believers to be strong against them. If we give up, it shows we are weak.

VERSE 11

God loves all people no matter if they are disabled, sick or old. Some countries kill disabled children. Other countries have laws that permit doctors to help people kill themselves because they are sick or old. We must stand strong for the things we believe.

VERSE 12

God knows our minds and hearts. We cannot hide anything from Him. God will reward each of us for the things we do.

VERSES 12-13

Paul encouraged the Philippians believers to continue to do the will of God. He told them to work and act with respect: God is working in us to help us want to do His will. God will help us want to do the things that please Him.

VERSES 14-15

We need to do things that please God without complaining or arguing. Believers need to shine like God's stars. Why? When people around us are crooked and mean, we must be light in a dark world.

VERSE 16a

We have life through the blood of Jesus. Elderly people, disabled people, and unborn babies have life because they have blood.

Name three things you	can do to l	be sure your actions are pleasing
to God: 1	2	3



IN MY CONTEXT

Do you care about human life? YES NO		
Do you ignore the problems around you? YES NO		
God loves human life.		
Does that mean you should love human life also? YES NO		
Do you love all human life? YES NO		
Is an unborn baby important to God? YES NO		
Why do you think that?		
Why are human beings important to God?		
Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life. Think about		

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life. Think about times in your life when you had to explain your beliefs about human life.

Were you able to give Bible verses to support your beliefs?

List some verses you want to remember from today's lesson. 1. ______ 2. _____

3._____4.____

MEMORY VERSE

"You offer the teaching that gives life." — Philippians 2:16

Be Faithful in Times of Trouble

Session

We know we can complete the work God gives us. He has conquered everything that would stop us.

NEHEMIAH 6:1-19

¹Then **Sanballat**, **Tobiah**, **Geshem** the Arab, and our other enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that there was not one gap in it. But I had not yet set the doors in the gates. ²So **Sanballat** and **Geshem** sent me this message: "Come, Nehemiah, let's meet together

in Kephirim on the plain of Ono." But they were planning to harm me. ³ So I sent messengers to them with this answer: "I am doing a great work, and I can't come down. I don't want the work to stop while I leave to meet you." ⁴ Sanballat and Geshem sent the same message to me four times, and each time I sent back the same answer. ⁵ The fifth time **Sanballat** sent his helper to me with the message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter. ⁶ This is what was written: A report is going around to all the nations, and **Geshem** says it is true, that you and the Jewish people are planning to turn against the king and that you are rebuilding the wall. They say you are going to be their king ⁷And that you have appointed prophets to announce in Jerusalem: "There is a king of Judah!" The king will hear about this. So come, let's discuss this together. ⁸ So I sent him back this answer: "Nothing you are saying is really happening. You are just making it up in your own mind." ⁹ Our enemies were trying to scare us, thinking, "They will get too weak to work. Then the wall will not be finished." But I prayed, "God, make me strong."¹⁰ One day I went to the house of **Shemaiah** son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel. **Shemaiah** had to stay at home. He said, "Nehemiah, let's meet in the temple of God. Let's go inside the temple and close the doors, because men are coming at night to kill you." ¹¹ But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Should I run for my life into the temple? I will not go." ¹²I knew that God had not sent him but that **Tobiah** and **Sanballat** had paid him to prophesy against me. ¹³ They paid him to frighten me so I would do this and sin. Then they could give me a bad name to shame me. ¹⁴ I prayed, "My God, remember **Tobiah** and **Sanballat** and what they have done. Also remember the prophetess Noadiah and the other prophets who have been trying to frighten me."¹⁵ The wall of Jerusalem was

completed on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul. It took fiftytwo days to rebuild. ¹⁶ When all our enemies heard about it and all the nations around us saw it, they were shamed. They then understood that the work had been done with the help of our God. ¹⁷ Also in those days the important people of Judah sent many letters to **Tobiah**, and he answered them. ¹⁸ Many Jewish people had promised to be faithful to **Tobiah**, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah. And **Tobiah**'s son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. ¹⁹ These important people kept telling me about the good things **Tobiah** was doing, and then they would tell **Tobiah** what I said about him. So **Tobiah** sent letters to frighten me.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Obedient leaders know some people will work against them, but God will help them understand the plans of people who work against them.

Leaders may be tempted not to do their best. God will help them stay away from short-cuts that may dishonor God.

People working against us may try to get us to stop paying attention to the work of God. We must stay focused and complete God's work. Completing the work God gives us will honor Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Read Nehemiah 1-5 and look at the **timeline** on page 100. When Nehemiah went back to Jerusalem, others were already there and working to rebuild the city and temple. **Zerubabbel** and Ezra went back to Jerusalem before Nehemiah.

Chapters 3-5 explain about Nehemiah's journey back to Jerusalem.

The chapters describe the parts of the wall each family group built. **Sanballat**, **Tobiah** and **Geshem** were probably governors in nearby areas like Nehemiah was in the area around Jerusalem. They all served under the king of **Persia**.

Nehemiah put guards around the parts of the wall people were building. His enemies tried to stop the building. Each family protected its own section of the wall.

BIBLE SKILL: Building the Wall

Read Nehemiah 3-5. Look at a picture of the Jerusalem wall. Write the Bible verses where each place is mentioned in these chapters.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 6:1-19)

1. People Make False Statements About Us (Nehemiah 6:1-9)

VERSE 1

Sanballat, **Tobiah** and Gershem tried to stop the building. They mocked Nehemiah and his workers. They were not able to stop the building. All of the walls except the doors at the gates were finished.

VERSES 2-3

These men knew they could not stop the building as long as Nehemiah was the leader. Nehemiah was strong spiritually and mentally. He knew how to plan. His people trusted him and God blessed him. **Sanballat** and Gershem decided to get rid of Nehemiah. They told Nehemiah they wanted to meet with him in a town about twenty miles from Jerusalem. Nehemiah knew he would not be safe there. Nehemiah said he was too busy doing a great work. The rebuilding of Jerusalem was God's work.

VERSES 4-5

His enemies sent the same message to Nehemiah four times and got the same answer back four times.

VERSES 6-8

Next, **Sanballat** told Nehemiah there was gossip that Nehemiah and the Jewish people were planning to turn against King Artaxerxes in **Persia** and Nehemiah was going to make himself king. They thought this letter would force Nehemiah to meet with them. They told Nehemiah they would tell the king if he did not meet with them. Nehemiah told them he knew they were lying.

VERSE 9

Nehemiah knew his enemies were trying to scare the Jewish people. They thought the Jewish builders would become weak and the wall would not be finished. Nehemiah prayed for God to give him strength.

Why do you think Sanballat wanted everyone to know what was in his letter? ______. List a major reason they were not able to stop Nehemiah ______.

DID YOU KNOW?: Be Faithful to God's Work

Read 1 Peter 2:12. Peter wrote to believers to continue to do good works. Non-believers will see your good works and give glory to God.

2. People Make False Promises to Us (Nehemiah 6:10-14)

VERSES 10-11

Nehemiah went to visit a priest named **Shemaiah** in his home. **Shemaiah** said he had a prophecy from God. Some men planned to kill Nehemiah. He told Nehemiah the two of them should hide in the inner room of the temple. **Shemaiah** knew Nehemiah was not a priest. Only a priest could go into that part of the temple. The punishment for anyone else going into the inner room was death.

God gave Nehemiah the wisdom to understand **Shemaiah** was a false prophet. He told **Shemaiah** he would not hide in the temple. He depended on God to protect him.

VERSES 12-13

God helped Nehemiah to understand **Sanballat** and **Tobiah** had paid **Shemaiah** to prophesy against Nehemiah. **Sanballat** and **Tobiah** knew if Nehemiah sinned against God, people would lose respect for him and not follow him. God's work would not be completed.

VERSE 14

Again Nehemiah prayed. He did not pray for strength. He prayed against his enemies because of what they did to him and against God.

Fill in the blanks: Shemaiah wa	s trying to trap
Shemaiah prophesied against _	's law.

How do you think God gave Nehemiah wisdom about Shemaiah?

 What would happen if Nehemiah sinned against God?

 1. ______3. _____3.

3. Our Co-workers Work Against Us (Nehemiah 6:15-19)

VERSES 15-16

It only took fifty-two days to complete the work on the city wall. Some worked at night, others worked in the daytime. Nehemiah's enemies heard the wall was finished. They were ashamed of the things they did. They finally understood it was God who helped the people rebuild the wall.

VERSES 17-18

But some important men still did not agree with Nehemiah. They wrote letters to **Tobiah** and promised to be faithful to him. Many were related to **Tobiah** through marriage of family members.

Nehemiah said these things happened "during those days." He means they were happening while they were building the wall.

VERSE 19

Tobiah knew everything that was happening. The Jewish leaders informed him. They told **Tobiah** everything Nehemiah said about him. Finally **Tobiah** sent letters to Nehemiah to make him afraid.

IN MY CONTEXT

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life.

This week's lesson talks about completing the work God gives us. Think about the work you are doing for Him now.

Are you succeeding in the work? YES ____ NO ____

Do you depend on God to help you stay true to His work? YES ____ NO ____

Write a few words about the work God has called you to do.

Sanballat said the Jewish people were planning to turn against _______and Nehemiah was planning to become ______. Do you remember a time in the past when people made false statements about the work you were doing for God? YES ____ NO ___. Were you able to finish your work? YES ____ NO ___. Did you pray and ask God to give you strength? YES ____ NO ___. Did you thank God for His help? YES ____ NO ____

Write a few words about your experience.

MEMORY VERSE

"So I sent messengers to them with this answer: 'I am doing a great work, and I can't come down. I don't want the work to stop while I leave to meet you.'" —Nehemiah 6:3





Do the Work God Gives You

God uses each of His people to succeed in completing His purposes.

NEHEMIAH 7:1-8

¹After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the **gatekeepers**, singers, and Levites were chosen. ²I put my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah, the commander of the palace, in charge of Jerusalem. Hananiah was honest and feared God more

than most people. ³ I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem should not be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut and bolt the doors. Appoint people who live in Jerusalem as guards, and put some at guard posts and some near their own houses."⁴ The city was large and roomy, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. ⁵ Then my God caused me to gather the important people, the leaders, and the common people so I could register them by families. I found the family history of those who had returned first. This is what I found written there: ⁶ These are the people of the area who returned from captivity, whom **Nebuchadnezzar** king of **Babylon** had taken away. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each going back to his own town.⁷ These people returned with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah. These are the people from Israel: ⁸ The descendants of Parosh – 2,172;

FIRST THOUGHTS

The people who returned to Judah had a lot of work to do. Each person had his own special responsibility. God used the abilities of each person to rebuild the city.

Every believer has a responsibility. Each one has a place to work in God's Kingdom. God will give believers help when they ask for it.

We do not need to keep family records to prove we are a part of God's family. We join God's family when we ask Jesus to come into our lives.

God continues to call people to do work for His kingdom. Each believer is important to help God's kingdom grow.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Some Jewish people returned from **Babylon** to Jerusalem. Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. There were many different kinds of jobs to be done.

Each person had a special responsibility. Each person worked hard to complete his or her job. They rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem. They were able to protect the city because of the wall.

Nehemiah's enemies did not want him to succeed in building the wall. His enemies tried to harm him. They tried to frighten him.

Nehemiah prayed for strength. He knew God called him to the work he was doing.

God protected Nehemiah.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Each Person Has a Job in God's Kingdom (Nehemiah 7:1-3)

DID YOU KNOW: ... about Spiritual Gifts or Responsibilities?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,27-31. Every believer has a job to do in God's Kingdom.

List four gifts you find listed in these verses.

VERSE 1

Nehemiah finished building the wall. He put up the gates and doors. Nehemiah knew he needed to organize the people so the city could be protected. He needed to organize them so they could begin to worship in the temple again.

Nehemiah needed a way to organize the work. He chose three groups. First, he chose the **gatekeepers**. These men guarded the gates. They

opened them in the morning and locked them at night. The **gatekeepers** needed to be strong.

Next, he chose singers. Singers were an important part of temple worship. We see this in the psalms King David wrote. Nehemiah told the singers to sing many songs as part of worship. Often they sang the words of the law God gave to Moses as part of the worship service.

The third group Nehemiah appointed were the priests from the family of Levi. There were three levels of priests. Levites were the lowest level. They made the sacrifice offerings for the people. Above them were the priests who served in temple worship. The highest level was the High Priest. Only the High Priest could go into the most holy place in the temple.

BIBLE SKILL: Who Are the Levites?

Read Numbers 3:11-13 to see how and when God chose the tribe of Levi to make sacrifice offerings in the temple.

VERSE 2

Nehemiah needed to put someone in charge of Jerusalem. The first person he chose was his brother, Hanani. Hanani is the one who returned to **Babylon** and told Nehemiah about the terrible conditions of the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah knew Hanani was faithful to God and to Nehemiah.

The second person he chose was Hananiah. He was the commander of the palace guard. Nehemiah said Hananiah was honest and feared God.

Each man was the leader of one part of the city. Nehemiah felt good about having Hanani and Hananiah to be leaders.

VERSE 3

Nehemiah gave instructions about the gates. He told them to keep the gates closed until the day became hot. Why? Often enemy soldiers would attack when the sun first came up. They attacked in the direction of the

sun. When the city soldiers tried to defend themselves, the sun was in their eyes. They could not see well enough to fight. Nehemiah wanted the gates closed so they would not be surprised by their enemies' attack.

Nehemiah told Hanani and Hananiah to choose people to be guards night and day. Nehemiah told them to order men to stand guard by their own houses. At that time, many houses were built beside the city wall. Most of these houses were destroyed. The houses could not protect the families from attack. Nehemiah knew a man would be more alert if he was guarding his own home.

Does the leader or pastor in	your church trust you? YES NO	
List three things you can do to show your leaders they can trust		
you. 1	2	
3.		

2. Each Person Has a Place in God's Kingdom (Nehemiah 7:4-8)

VERSE 4

Many people returned to the city of Jerusalem and the country of Judah. The Bible tells us about three men who led groups of Jewish people back to their homeland (see the **timeline** on page 100).

Many Jewish people were not taken as slaves to **Babylon**. They stayed in Jerusalem. The houses in the cities were not rebuilt yet. People moved out into the areas surrounding Jerusalem. When the people returned from **Babylon**, many others moved back into Jerusalem.

VERSE 5

The Jewish people kept records of family members who lived hundreds of years earlier. The records were kept in the storerooms of the temple or in their homes.

God led Nehemiah to gather the important men of the city together and register the families living in Jerusalem and Judah.

Nehemiah found some family records of the people who returned with Zerubbabel, the first leader to return to Jerusalem, eighty years before Nehemiah. (See the **timeline** on page 100.)

BIBLE SKILL: Family Records

Matthew 1 has the history of Jesus' family. This proved He fulfilled prophesy to be the Messiah. Read this chapter. **Do you recognize any of the names listed? YES ____ NO ____ Who?**

Why was Jesus' family line important?

VERSE 6

The records Nehemiah found were lists of people who returned from **Babylon** to Jerusalem and Judah. This verse stresses the fact they returned to their own hometown. Many of the Jewish people were born in **Babylon**. They never visited the home of their fathers and grandfathers.

VERSE 7

Nehemiah listed some of the leaders who returned to Judah and Jerusalem. A man named Nehemiah is listed. This is not the same Nehemiah who was leading the people to rebuild the city.

VERSE 8

This verse is the beginning of a very long list. The verse only mentions one family. That is the family that came from Parosh. The next fifty-six verses list all the families. The lists proved they were citizens of Judah. The people needed the records to prove they should be allowed to come back to homes in Judah and worship in the temple.

Have you ever visited a home or town that was destroyed by a tornado or hurricane? YES ____ NO ____

Did you want to help rebuild it? YES ____ NO ____

What was the first thing you might do to begin to rebuild?

IN MY CONTEXT

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life.

What about your life? Has there been a time when you needed to start over and rebuild your life? You do not need to write it for other people to see. Think carefully about the things you did to start over. Did God show you what to do? How did He show you?

Christians today do not need to trace our family history to prove we are in God's family. Believers are born into His kingdom when they invite Jesus to come into their lives.

Think about these sentences. Mark them T for true or F for false.

1. I know I have a place in God's kingdom. T___ F___

2. I know I can depend on God to give me strength. T___ F___

3. My place in God's kingdom is to serve Him. T___ F___

Fill in the blanks to the following sentences.

1. Every believer has a	in God's kingdom.
2. God will give believers	when they pray and ask for it.
3. We should be	to our spiritual leaders.

4. We are part of God's family when we ask ______ to come into our lives.

MEMORY VERSE

"Those who work hard make a profit, but those who only talk will be poor." —Proverbs 14:23)



Get an Understanding

We look for understanding through regular and reverent hearing of God's Word.

NEHEMIAH 8:1-8

¹All the people of Israel gathered together in the square by the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the teacher to bring out the Book of the Teachings of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. ²So on

the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought out the Teachings for the crowd. Men, women, and all who could listen and understand had gathered. ³ At the square by the Water Gate Ezra read the Teachings out loud from early morning until noon to the men, women, and everyone who could listen and understand. All the people listened carefully to the Book of the Teachings. ⁴ Ezra the teacher stood on a high wooden platform that had been built just for this time. On his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. And on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. ⁵ Ezra opened the book in full view of everyone, because he was above them. As he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Ezra praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people held up their hands and said, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ These Levites explained the Teachings to the people as they stood there: Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah.⁸ They read from the Book of the Teachings of God and explained what it meant so the people understood what was being read.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Here are two things to think about as you study this lesson.

1. Am I humble when I see God's Word signed?

2. Do I find joy when I read God's Word?

Believers should desire to hear or see God's Word. We must never be
bored by reading the Bible. Believers should see or hear God's Word on a regular basis. God's people grow in faith when they meet together to share God's Word.

Believers must do the things we learn in God's Word. It is not enough to just hear or read God's Word. We must be faithful to do the things we learn in His Word.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

After the temple was completed, the people could begin worshiping in it again. The Jewish nations became slaves about 600 B.C. There was no Jewish nation from 600 B.C. until about 445 B.C. Jewish leaders returned to Judah. Israel was becoming a nation again.

The people gave great amounts of gold, silver, clothes, and other things to help pay for the work of rebuilding.

After the records were found, the people were all counted. Then they all went to their own towns.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 8:1-8)

1. Desire to Hear God's Word (Nehemiah 8:1-3)

VERSE 1

Finally all the Israelites were settled in their own towns. Then all the people gathered in the town square by the Water Gate in Jerusalem. The temple was not large enough to hold all the people.

DID YOU KNOW: ... The Word of God Is Perfect?

Read Psalm 19:7-11; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

The people asked Ezra to bring out the Book of the Teachings of Moses. Ezra took care of the Book while he was in **Babylon**. He brought it with him when he returned to Jerusalem. Also copies of the Book may have been hidden in the temple. This was the Book of Teachings the Lord gave to Moses. It included the first five books in our Bibles.

VERSE 2

This meeting happened in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. The seventh month was a very important month in the lives of Jewish people. It was the start of the Jewish New Year.

Moses commanded the Book of Teachings must be read to the people every seven years. The Book must be read so everyone could hear it. All people who could listen and understand should be at the meeting. The phrase all who could understand includes children who were old enough to understand.

BIBLE SKILL: Find some verses about hearing, listening, and understanding.

Use a Bible dictionary or concordance to find verses that talk about hearing God or listening to His Word. Read the verses to understand what they mean. List the verses here. 1. _____

2. _____ 3. _____ 4. ____

VERSE 3

Ezra read from the Book of Teachings so everyone could hear him. Most people in that day could not read or write. Priests, teachers, and some rich men were taught to read. Usually women and girls did not read. Ezra read the Book aloud so people who could not read could understand.

Today we have many different copies of the Bible. In Ezra's day, there were only a few copies of the Book of Teachings. The teachings were written on scrolls. It took many scrolls for all the teachings.

Write a few words about why the Bible is important to you.

Write a few words about how you can help Deaf people "hear" God's Word.

2. Prepare to Listen to God's Word (Nehemiah 8:4-8)

Nehemiah wanted all the people to hear the Book of Teachings. They prepared a place for Ezra to stand and read. He needed a place large enough to hold a big crowd of people.

VERSE 4

Ezra was on a high platform. That made it possible for all the people to see the Book he was reading. Most Bible students think the men standing beside Ezra were the important men from different families. They stood with Ezra to show they agreed with him.

Christian leaders need people to stand with them. In church, we cannot really stand on the stage with our leaders, but we can pray for them and show we support their work.

VERSE 5

When Ezra unrolled the scroll so everyone could see it, all the people stood up! They stood for six hours while Ezra read the Book. Imagine standing for six hours while someone reads the Bible!

VERSE 6

This is a wonderful example of people worshiping God. First, Ezra praised God. All the people lifted up their hands and said loudly "Amen, Amen." Deaf people pray in front of other people. Often they sign looking up. They lift their hands toward heaven.

Then the people bowed down before God. The verse says they worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Why? They showed humility. They did not feel they were good enough to look up toward the face of God.

VERSES 7-8

Thirteen Levites had a special job to do during the reading of God's Word. They helped the people understand what the words meant. Many of the Jewish people who returned from **Babylon** did not understand the Hebrew language. They were born in **Babylon** and spoke the language of that country. The Levites were there to make clear the meaning of the words they heard. Ezra and the Levites wanted all the people to understand the Teachings.

List two things you can do to show you support your spiritual leaders. 1. ______ 2. _____

Write one or two words to describe yourself in these sentences.

- 1. I ______ when I pray.
- 2. I ______ to God's Word.
- 3. I ______ to teach other people about the Bible.
- 4. I ______ to hear His Word.

3. Obey God's Word (Nehemiah 8:9-12)

VERSE 9

When the people heard God's Word, they were sorry for their sins. They cried loudly for a long time. Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites all told the people to stop crying. They reminded the people the day was a holy day unto the Lord. It was a day of celebration.

VERSES 10-12

Nehemiah told the people to go and celebrate. He told them to eat good food and drink sweet drinks. Some of the people were very poor. Nehemiah told all the people to give food and drink to other people that did not have any and to send food and drink to people who were not able to come to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah told the people the joy of the Lord would make them strong. They were sorry for their sins. Now the time of sorrow was finished. The Lord is the only one who can give the true joy of forgiveness.

All the people rejoiced because they understood the words of the Book of Teachings.

IN MY CONTEXT

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life.

Fill in the blanks.

1. I must be sorry for my ______.

2. I can celebrate because I have the ______ of the Lord in my heart.

3. The joy of the Lord will give me ______.

Answer these questions:

1. What can I do this week to honor the reading of God's Word?

2. How can I listen to God? _____

3. Who can I share this lesson with? _____

4. How can I prepare better for worship next week?

MEMORY VERSE

"As he opened (The Book), all the people stood up." —Nehemiah 8:5





Return to the Restoring God

When we see God, we want to confess our sin and repent. He will bring us back to a right relationship with Him.

NEHEMIAH 9:32-37

³² "And so, our God, you are the great and mighty and wonderful God. You keep your agreement of love. Do not let all our trouble seem unimportant to you. This trouble has come to us, to our kings and our leaders, to our priests and prophets, to our **ancestors** and all your people from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. ³³ "You have been fair in everything that has happened to us; you have been loyal, but we have been wicked. ³⁴ "Our kings, leaders, priests, and **ancestors** did not obey your teachings; they did not pay attention to the commands and warnings you gave them. ³⁵ "Even when our **ancestors** were living in their kingdom, enjoying all the good things you had given them, enjoying the land that was fertile and full of room, they did not stop their evil ways. ³⁶ "Look, we are slaves today in the land you gave our ancestors. They were to enjoy its fruit and its good things, look, we are slaves here." ³⁷ "The land's great harvest belongs to the kings you have put over us because of our sins. Those kings rule over us and our cattle as they please, so we are in much trouble.

FIRST THOUGHTS

People use God's name without thinking how serious it is to misuse the name of God. They forget He is the great God.

Some of the people who use God's name in the wrong way say they are believers. These people must come back to God. The first step in coming back to God is to confess our sins. "If we confess our sins, God will forgive us" (1 John 1:9). All humans are sinful. No matter how hard we try, we fail. We are not perfect. The grace of God is our only hope.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The city wall was finished. The people were joyful. They praised God and celebrated.

The people met together in the city square to hear the Word of the



Lord. Ezra read from the Book of Teachings. The people stood to honor God's Word. They listened and learned. Levites explained the meaning of the words. The people were sorry for their sins. They cried loudly because of the way they were living.

Nehemiah told the people to stop crying. He told them to see the joy of the Lord. They should celebrate. The people had a feast to celebrate. They shared their food with other people who needed it.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 9:32-37)

1. The Great God (Nehemiah 9:32)

VERSE 32

This verse starts with the word *so*. It means, "After we list everything You have done for us," we know You are great, mighty, and wonderful. Nehemiah's prayer pulls everything together that happened in the past. The people talked about the things God did for them. They began to describe God with three words.

The first word they used was *great*. In this verse, *great* means bigger than any other thing. Nothing on earth or in heaven is greater than God.

DID YOU KNOW: ... about the Greatness of God?

Read Psalm 8. How did King David describe God?

God is mighty. God is stronger than anything on earth or in heaven. No one has more power than God.

God is wonderful. People cannot describe the greatness and power of God. Wonderful means we cannot compare God to any other being.

God is faithful. God keeps His promise of love.

The people asked God to see their great trouble. From the time they

were carried off to **Babylon** they had trouble. Their kings, princes, priests, and prophets had trouble.

Believers must understand God knows everything. He has power over everything. He is always with us. Believers must go to God with respect.

Think of a few words you can use to describe God.

1. ______ 2. _____ 3. _____

2. The Confession (Nehemiah 9:33-35)

VERSE 33

The people praised God. They admitted God is always fair. He keeps His promises. Then, they admitted they were sinful. The Israelites had a habit of going away from God. He would let them to get into trouble. When they were in trouble, they prayed for help and returned to worshiping God. God warned them not to disobey Him again. Then, they would go away from God again. They repeated this circle often for hundreds of years. Through all of their disobedience, God stayed faithful and loyal to them.

VERSE 34

The prayer lists the people who were responsible for their sins. They admitted their **ancestors** were responsible for their own sins.

The list tells of people who were leaders. Kings had the power to command the people to obey the laws of God. It was the responsibility of the leaders to show the right way to live and act.

Priests had the responsibility to teach the people about God. Most of the people could not read.

The kings, priests, leaders, and people did not pay attention to the commands of God. He warned them about what would happen if they disobeyed Him. He punished all of the Jewish people because they did not obey His commands.

VERSE 35

Think about the history of the Jewish people. In the past, God helped



them. They became rich. They lived in their own land. They were able to grow a lot of food. When they prayed, God blessed them.

Then, they forgot about God. They began doing the things they wanted to do. They worshiped false gods. God let their enemies defeat them.

BIBLE SKILL: God's Judgment

Read Joshua 2 for another look at God's people and their pattern of sin and judgment.

Sometimes God punishes us today. When believers disobey Him, He lets trouble come because of their decisions to do wrong things. We must not disobey God's rules.

We think we can disobey God. We think God will not punish us. Sometimes He waits until a later time. We may not see the punishment until we meet God in heaven. Then we will see He is sad. He is not pleased when we do not obey Him.

Confession of our sin is the first step to return to God.

Does God punish believers today when we disobey Him? YES ____ NO ____

Write a few words about why you do or do not think God punishes believers today? _____

Why do you think God stayed faithful to His people?

3. The Request (Nehemiah 9:36-37)

VERSE 36

The people were back in the land God gave their **ancestors**. It was

God's great gift to them. God wanted them to enjoy the land. They were supposed to plant crops for food. They should enjoy all the things God gave them in their own land. God provided a rich land for them. They should obey God. They should live under His rules. They should be thankful for the things He gave them.

They should be enjoying the land, but they were not. Why? They were still slaves to the king of Assyria. The king let them come back to their own land, but all the people in Judah were still slaves to King Artaxerxes. Nothing truly belonged to them.

VERSE 37

The soil of Judah was rich. They could grow great amounts of food, but the food was not theirs. Everything on the land belonged to the king. God put the king over them.

They had large herds of cattle, but the king could do whatever he wanted to do with the cattle.

The last sentence in this verse is very sad. In our language today we might say, "WOW! We are in a whole lot of trouble." The sentence is sad because it explains how the people were living. They could not see any way out of their trouble. They hoped God would help them out of trouble. The only hope people have is the grace of God.

The sentence is powerful because it is the beginning of a desire to return to God. They agree their troubles are their own fault. In our next lesson we will see what the Jewish people did to change the way they lived.

Answer these three questions.

1. Are you having troubles in your life? YES ____ NO ____

- 2. Who is responsible for your troubles? _____
- 3. What are you going to do about your troubles?

IN MY CONTEXT

1. Does our nation need to return to God? YES ___ NO ___

2. What is the first thing we should do to return to God?

3. Who is responsible for causing our nation to return to God?

4. How can just one person help the nation to return to God?

Think seriously about these questions. Answer them with YES or NO. **1. Do you always obey God? YES ____ NO ___**

2. Are there times you do what you want to do? YES ____ NO ____

3. Are you willing to confess your sin to God? YES ___ NO ___

4. Are there ways God punishes you today? YES ____ NO ____

5. Is God always faithful to you? YES ___ NO ___

You have answered the questions. How do you feel about your answers? Are you satisfied with the way you are treating God? YES ____ NO ___Why? _____

MEMORY VERSE

"You have been fair in everything that has happened to us; you have been loyal, but we have been wicked." —Nehemiah 9:33



Commit Your Way to the Lord

God expects His people to change and obey Him.

NEHEMIAH 10:28-39

²⁸ The rest of the people took an oath. They were the priests, Levites,

gatekeepers, singers, temple servants, all those who separated themselves from foreigners to keep the Teachings of God, and also their wives and their sons and daughters who could understand. ²⁹ They joined their fellow Israelites and their leading men in taking an oath, which was tied to a **curse** in case they broke the oath. They promised to follow the Teachings of God, which they had been given through Moses the servant of God, and to obey all the commands, rules, and laws of the LORD our God. ³⁰ They said: We promise not to let our daughters marry foreigners nor to let our sons marry their daughters. ³¹ Foreigners may bring goods or grain to sell on the Sabbath, but we will not buy on the Sabbath or any holy day. Every seventh year we will not plant, and that year we will forget all that people owe us. ³² We will be responsible for the commands to pay for the service of the temple of our God. We will give an eighth of an ounce of silver each year. ³³ It is for the bread that is set out on the table; the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals, and special feasts; the holy offerings; the offerings to remove the sins of the Israelites so they will belong to God; and for the work of the temple of our God. ³⁴ We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have thrown lots to decide at what time of year each family must bring wood to the temple. The wood is for burning on the altar of the LORD our God, and we will do this as it is written in the Teachings. ³⁵We also will bring the **first fruits** from our crops and the **first fruits** of every tree to the temple each year. ³⁶ We will bring to the temple our firstborn sons and cattle and the firstborn of our herds and flocks, as it is written in the Teachings. We will bring them to the priests who are serving in the temple. ³⁷ We will bring to the priests at the storerooms of the temple the first of our

ground meal, our offerings, the fruit from all our trees, and our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tenth of our crops to the Levites, who will collect these things in all the towns where we work. ³⁸ A priest of Aaron's family must be with the Levites when they receive the tenth of the people's crops. The Levites must bring a tenth of all they receive to the temple of our God to put in the storerooms of the treasury. ³⁹ The people of Israel and the Levites are to bring to the storerooms the gifts of grain, new wine, and oil. That is where the utensils for the temple are kept and where the priests who are serving, the **gatekeepers**, and singers stay. We will not ignore the temple of our God.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Believers know the Bible is God's perfect Word. His Word gives directions for living a full and blessed life.

God expects His people to show holiness in their lives. Holiness in the life of the believer is the thing that sets us apart from non-believers.

Today's lesson shows how the Jewish people responded to the Word of God when it was read to them. They promised to change things in their lives that did not please God.

The way we act shows the things we love. Our lives must show our love for God. One way to show our love is to worship Him only.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Nehemiah finished building the wall around Jerusalem. He placed guards around the city on the wall. The first thing the people did was to have a time of worship. Ezra returned to Jerusalem with the book of the Law.

The people gathered in the city square. Ezra read the Teachings of Moses to them. Their hearts were touched and they confessed their sins

and praised God for His love and care. Nehemiah 9:38–10:27 tells us the people made an agreement. The priests and Levites signed the agreement. The leading men signed the agreement. Then all the people promised to follow the agreement.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 10:28-39)

1. The People Made a Promise (Nehemiah 10:28-29)

VERSE 28

An oath is a promise made to God. It is very serious.

The people who separated themselves from foreigners were descendants of the Israelites who were not taken to **Babylon**. They joined with the people who returned from **Babylon** to sign the agreement.

VERSE 29

Everyone took the oath. They all made a promise to obey all of the Laws of Moses; the first five books of the Old Testament.

The promise was tied to a curse. If someone broke the law they would be punished.

The people promised to obey all the laws of God. In our next lesson we will learn more about those laws and if the Israelites obeyed all of them.

Do you think God punishes people today when they do not obey His commands? YES ____ NO ____

Name some ways you think God punishes believers today.

1	2
3	4

2. The People Try to Live Holy Lives (Nehemiah 10:30)

VERSE 30

In Old Testament times, the Jewish parents chose a husband or wife for

their child. They disobeyed God and let their children marry people who were **Gentiles** (not Jews). The Gentile husband or wife influenced Jewish to worship idols.

BIBLE SKILL: Marrying Non-believers.

Read Exodus 34:12-16. God told the Jewish people they must not marry **Gentiles**.

3. The People Promise to Worship (Nehemiah 10:31-39)

VERSE 31

The people made several promises. The first was about the **Sabbath day**. The verse does not explain about worship on the Sabbath. **Gentiles** brought things into the city to sell on the Sabbath. The Jewish people promised they would not buy anything on the Sabbath.

The second thing was about planting crops. God's law said they must not plant crops in any field on the seventh year. They could plant and gather crops in that field for six years. On the seventh year, they must let the land rest.

The third promise was to forgive all debts. Some of the Jewish people were very rich. Others were very poor. The rich people often charged high interest rates to loan money. It was hard for the very poor people to pay back the debts.

VERSES 32-33

Another important promise was to support the work of the temple. The priests could not own fields to plant for food. Their support came from the offerings of the people. The people promised to give an eighth of an ounce of silver each year for sacrifices and offerings to God, for Sabbath offerings, and for new moon offerings.

VERSE 34

The Law said the altar fire must never go out. The priests must keep the wood burning. The priests and Levites threw "lots" (something like dice) to



decide which time of the year each family must bring wood to the temple.

BIBLE SKILL: Wood burning continuously.

Read Leviticus 6:8-13 to learn why the wood must always be burning.

VERSE 35

The people promised to bring the **first fruits** from every crop to the temple. The people must honor God by giving Him the first of everything they grew. If they ate the first food themselves, it showed they thought they were more important than God.

VERSE 36

They promised to give the firstborn sons and the firstborn of their cattle to the priests. They dedicated them to the Lord God. The fathers could buy back their first born sons and animals.

VERSE 37

The Jewish people promised to bring many other things to the temple. These offerings supported the Levites and the work in the temple.

They promised to pay the **tithe** (one-tenth of everything they earned). The priests and Levites must gather the offerings from everyone.

DID YOU KNOW: ... about the tithe?

Read Malachi 3:6-12. What is the tithe? _____ Where should we give the tithe? _____

VERSES 38-39

God commanded the people to bring their offerings to the storehouse in the temple. Today we bring our money to our church. The church is our storehouse.

Verse 39 is a strong promise to God. The people promised not to ignore the temple of God. This is our memory verse for today.

IN MY CONTEXT

Have you ever taken an oath? YES	NO	
When? For what	reason?	
Read verse 31. Fill in the blank spaces.		
1. They would not	on the Sabbath.	
2. On the seventh year they promised to forgive all _ people owed them.		
3. They would not of around in the		
of ground in the year. Why do you think the people did not belong to God anymore?		
 What did they do to come back to Him	ı?	
Think about how today's lesson is connect questions:	ed to your life. Answer these	
1. Do you feel you are obeying the law YES NO	vs we learned about today?	
2. Do you honor the Sabbath? YES	NO	
3. Do you set aside a day to worship?	YES NO	
4. Do you give God the first tenth of e NO	verything you earn? YES	

MEMORY VERSE

"We will not ignore the temple of our God." —Nehemiah 10:39



Establish Justice in Gods Community

God expects His people to treat every person with love and dignity.

NEHEMIAH 5:1-13

¹ The men and their wives complained loudly against their fellow Jewish people. ² Some of them were saying, "We have many sons and daughters in our families. To eat and stay alive, we need grain." ³ Others were saying, "We are borrowing money against our fields, vineyards, and homes to get grain because there is not much food." ⁴And still others were saying, "We are borrowing money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. ⁵We are just like our fellow Jewish people, and our sons are like their sons. But we have to sell our sons and daughters as slaves. Some of our daughters have already been sold. But there is nothing we can do, because our fields and vineyards already belong to other people." ⁶When I heard their complaints about these things, I was very angry. ⁷After I thought about it, I accused the important people and the leaders, "You are charging your own brothers too much interest." So I called a large meeting to deal with them. ⁸I said to them, "As much as possible, we have bought freedom for our fellow Jewish people who had been sold to foreigners. Now you are selling your fellow Jewish people to us!" The leaders were quiet and had nothing to say.⁹ Then I said, "What you are doing is not right. Don't you **fear** God? Don't let our foreign enemies shame us.¹⁰ I, my brothers, and my men are also lending money and grain to the people. But stop charging them so much for this. ¹¹ Give back their fields, vineyards, olive trees, and houses right now. Also give back the extra amount you charged—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine, and oil."¹² They said, "We will give it back and not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." Then I called for the priests, and I made the important people and leaders take an oath to do what they had said. ¹³ Also I shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out everyone who does not keep his promise. May God shake him out of his house and out of the things that are his. Let that person be shaken out and emptied!" Then the whole group said, "Amen," and they praised the LORD. So the people did what they had promised.

FIRST THOUGHTS

There are people in the world who are not treated fairly. When injustice happens, it shows society does not value human life.

There are people who are too weak to stand up for themselves or protect themselves. Believers must boldly help weak people. When believers boldly help weaker people we show we value all people.

Are there ways your group can help people in your area who are too poor or weak to care for themselves? Name three ways:

1. ______ 2. _____ 3. _____

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The people had to work on the wall and did not have time to work their farms and grow crops. It was difficult for many people to get food. People who owned land borrowed money to buy food and pay taxes to the

Persian king.

Rich Jewish people loaned money to the poor Jewish people so they could buy food. They charged a high interest rate, up to fifty per cent! The poor people often sold their children to be slaves so they could get money to buy food and to pay back their loans. They complained to Nehemiah. We begin our study with their complaints.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 5:1-13)

1. A Request for Justice (Nehemiah 5:1-5)

VERSES 1-2

Three groups complained to Nehemiah. The first group was men who did not own land. They worked as laborers out in the fields. They were not able to work in the fields and work on the wall at the same time. They had no way to buy grain for their families. Poverty is a problem all over the world. Many churches work in other countries to provide food for people. After the earthquake in Haiti, Southern Baptists provided millions of pounds of food to help feed people who lost everything they owned. Deaf churches and Deaf ministries have helped people who lost their homes in tornadoes and floods.

VERSE 3

The second group was people who owned their own land, but they had to mortgage their farms to get money to live on. The rich men who loaned them money charged up to fifty per cent interest rates. These farmers could not pay back their loans because they were working on the wall and did not have time to grow crops. The rich men took their farms if they did not pay.

Today many people do not earn enough money to buy food and other things they need. They must use credit cards. They have jobs but they just get deeper into debt. Many of these people are not careless with their money. They just don't earn enough.

Careless overuse of credit is another large problem in society today. People must learn how to handle their money properly.

VERSES 4-5

The third group was men who owned their own land, but had to mortgage their farms to pay taxes. They lost their farms because they could not continue to borrow and pay high interest rates.

It was not unusual for fathers to sell their children into slavery to pay their debts. The result was they were left with no children and no land. They could not earn enough money to pay off their debts or pay taxes.

DID YOU KNOW: ...about Helping Poor People

Find God's command about poor people in Deuteronomy 15:1-18. Write a few words about His command. _____

Write a few words about the teaching of Jesus about poor. (See Matthew 6:1-4.) ______

The people told Nehemiah their sons and daughters were just like the sons and daughters of the rich Jewish people. The difference was they had to sell their children or borrow money from the rich Jewish people to pay their taxes.

What can you do to help people who are hungry in your area? List three ways you can help people not to be hungry. 1. ______2. ____1.

2. Taking a Stand (Nehemiah 5:6-11)

VERSE 6

To take a stand means to announce a decision publicly. Nehemiah became angry with the rich Jewish people who mistreated the poor people.

VERSE 7

Nehemiah called a meeting of the leaders and important men. He reminded them the Old Testament Law did not allow a Jew to charge another Jew any interest on a loan.

BIBLE SKILL: Usury. What is it?

Usury means charging more than a fair rate of interest on a debt. Jewish people were told not to charge interest on loans made to other Jewish people.

Read Deuteronomy 23:18-20. Does the Law of Moses permit usury?

VERSES 8-9

Nehemiah bought many Jewish people back from foreigners. He did not want any Jewish people to belong to foreigners.

Nehemiah criticized the rich Jewish people. He asked them if they feared God. The way Nehemiah used the word fear, it means to honor God. If they honored God, they would obey Him.

Second he said they were causing the Jewish people to be ashamed in

the eyes of foreigners. When he was through, they were quiet. They knew they broke God's Law.

VERSE 10

Nehemiah and his brothers loaned money and grain to the people. They did not charge interest. It was not against God's Law to loan money. It was against the Law to charge interest to other Jews.

BIBLE SKILL: Mistreating others to make a profit.

Read Ezekiel 22:12 and 33:31 Fill in the blanks.

You make profits by ______ your neighbor. You have ______ me says the Lord. Their hearts desire their selfish ______.

VERSE 11

Nehemiah told the leaders they must give back the fields and everything they took from the poor farmers, and return the money they charged for interest. The hundredth part equals twelve percent per year.

3. A Promise to Take Action (Nehemiah 5:12-13)

VERSE 12

Nehemiah called the priests to help the rich people to make an oath (promise to God) to return everything they took from the poor people.

VERSE 13

Nehemiah stood in front of them and shook out the folds of his robe. Men kept money and other things in the folds, like pockets. He showed them what God would do to them if they did not keep their promise. He said God would shake them out of His house. They would not be able to worship in the temple.

The whole group said, "Amen!" Then they praised the Lord. The verse ends with the statement that the people kept their promises.

Why do you think the people praised the Lord at that time?



IN MY CONTEXT

What about you? Are you careful to use credit wisely?

Do you become angry when you see someone mistreating another person?

Do you do anything about the mistreatment of someone?

Write a few words about something you would do or say to a person who is mistreating another person?

Think about how today's lesson is connected to your life. Answer these questions.

1. Is there something you need to take a stand on?

What is it? _____

2. Are you willing to take action against some injustice you know about? What is that injustice?

3. This week, how can I use the things I learned in this lesson?

4. Who can I share this lesson with?

5. How can I prepare better for worship next week? _____

MEMORY VERSE

"Know that the Lord is God. He made us, and we belong to Him: we are his people, the sheep he tends."—Psalm 100:3

WORD LIST

Ahasuerus—Another name for Xerxes.

Ancestors—Family members who lived many years ago.

Appeal—A strong request

Babylon, Babylonians—A nation that conquered Judah and Israel.

Captive—To be held as a slave by another person.

Curse—Punishment for sin.

Cyrus (King Cyrus the Great)—The Persian king who defeated the Babylonians in 538 B.C.

Fast—Not eat or drink anything and spend their time in prayer.

Fear—In the Bible this often means to honor rather than to be afraid.

First Fruits—The first part of the harvest of grain or animals.

Gatekeepers—People chosen to guard the city gate.

Genocide—To kill a whole race of people.

Gentiles—People who are not Jews.

Geshem—An Arab and possibly governor of an area near Judah.

Haman—A high official in Xerxes' government.

King Cyrus the Great—The Persian kng who defeated the Babylonians in 538 B.C.

King's Gate—A place inside or near the palace gate where officials met.

Law of the Medes and Persians—When a law was made in the nation of Persia, it could not be changed.

Nebuchadnezzar—King of Babylon. He conquered Judah and Israel in 586 B.C.

Persia, Persians—The nation that defeated Babylon.

Pur—Stones used to make decisions, like throwing dice.

Sabbath Day—The day God set aside for rest and worship.

Sackcloth—Rough clothing worn to show the person was very sad.

Sanballat—Governor of an area near Judah.

Scepter—The official staff kings used to show their authority.

Shelters—Temporary places to stay, made with branches from trees.

Shemaiah—A false prophet in the time of Nehemiah.

Timeline—A list of dates and events to show the order they happened.

Tithe—One tenth of our increase (income) belongs to God.

Tobiah—An official, possibly governor in the area of Ammon.

Usury—Charging more than a fair rate of interest on a debt.

Xerxes—The king of Persia, also called **Ahasuerus**.

Zerubabbel—One of the earliest leaders to go back to rebuild Jerusalem.

Explore the Bible.

LEADER GUIDE

Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah



600 B.C.

575 B.C.

550 B.C.

615-595

Neco II of Egypt commissions Phoenician sailors to be the first to sail around the continent of Africa

605, 597, 586 Nebuchadnezzar's three invasions of Judah

605-586? Events in Obadiah

605-530 Events in Daniel

586 Temple of Solomon destroyed

593-571 Events in Ezekiel

589

Athens has two years with no archon (ruler), hence the term anarchy.

581

Cyrus the Elder, founder of the Persian Empire, is born.

570

Aesop, slave of Xanthus of Samos, is credited with collecting and creating fables. They were probably committed to writing at a later time.

560

Nebuchadnezzar II's successor, Evil-Merodach, releases Judah's King Jehoiachin, who has been a prisoner for 36 years.

546

Battle of Thymbra between Cyrus the Great and Croesus, commander of the Lydian army

538

Cyrus's decree allows return of Jews from exile.

538-457 Events in Ezra

536-515

Second temple construction under Zerubbabel's and Joshua's leadership

525 B.C.

500 B.C.

475 B.C.

530-522

Cambyses, son of Cyrus Greeks develop

525-456

Aeschylus, Greek tragedian, many of whose plays dealt with Persian invasion of Greece, participated in the Greek victories at Marathon and Salamis.

521-486

Darius I or Darius the Great

520 Events in Haggai

520-518 Events in Zechariah

515 Second temple dedicated

500

Greeks develop instruments for surveying

500 Sugar cane cultivated in India

490

Greeks, outnumbered almost five to one, defeat Persians in Battle of Marathon through superior military intelligence and strategy, forestalling Persian expansion into Europe.

486-465

Events in Esther

475

Xerxes I, Ahasuerus, husband of Esther

479-465~ Esther's reign

474~

Esther saves the Jews within the Persian Empire.

458 Ezra goes to Jerusalem.

445-430 Events in Nehemiah

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Session 1

Deliverance Is Needed

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Enemies of God will always seek to destroy His chosen people.

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Lecture, with opportunities for discussion.

Suggested hymn: "Where He Leads Me."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (ESTHER 3:1-9)

1. Mordecai Honors God Only (Esther 3:1-5)

Verses 1-5. Ask the assigned person to sign these verses. Ask the assigned person to summarize the introduction to the Book of Esther.

For background about why Mordecai had no respect for **Haman** because he was an Agagite, review 1 Samuel 15:1-7. These verses describe God's instruction to Saul regarding the destruction of the Amalekites.

Encourage class members to read all the Book of Esther so they can get the complete story and better understand the significance of the two lessons selected for this study.

Call attention to the **timeline** (page 100) to show where Esther fits into the history of Israel. Point out Ezra and Nehemiah's place in this history and note these will also be studied this quarter.

Briefly review chapters 1-2, showing how Esther became queen. Today's lesson follows that story. Our Scripture text begins with after these things. This refers to the events leading up to Esther becoming

06:00

queen. The first two chapters show how God placed Mordecai and Esther in just the right place at the right time for God to use them.

What if Mordecai just nodded his head instead of bowing? Why wouldn't that have been all right?

DIG DEEPER: Honoring People in Authority

Read today's memory verse and then read 1 Timothy 2:1-3 and Romans 13:1-6. Discuss Paul's instruction about how we should respond to people in authority.

How can we honor the government leaders and still refuse to obey laws that go against God's authority?

2. Genocide Planned (Esther 3:6-9)

Verses 6-9. Search the Internet for information about **genocides** in history. Ask the class what they remember from history classes in school about past **genocides** such as in Germany in World War II. Briefly share the information you've found about other infamous examples of

genocides.

How did Haman lie and change the truth when he tried to turn the king against the Jewish people?

Encourage discussion of what this lesson teaches us about opposing prejudice and mistreatment of people in our nation today. Is there a related issue in your community? If so, what can the Deaf class do about it?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: When Tempted to Participate in Evil

The Bible offers encouragement when we are tempted. Ask if anyone in the class can find a verse that helps them. Ask class members to sign these verses: Proverbs 7:25-26; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Session 2

God Saves His People

God acted powerfully to deliver His people. He had a plan to redeem them.

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PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Small groups (4). Suggested hymn: "I Surrender All."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (ESTHER 4:6-9)

1. Mordecai Tells About Haman's Plot (Esther 4:6-9)

Verses 6-9. Mordecai ordered (commanded) Esther to act (verse 8). A Jewish slave could not command the **Persian** queen, but a Jewish uncle could!

DIG DEEPER: Eunuchs (Esther 4:5-6)

Hathach was one of the king's eunuchs. A eunuch was a man who had been castrated so he could no longer have sex with a woman. Pagan rulers often used eunuchs to serve females with the idea their physical limitations made them no threat to the women. Although the Hebrews did not practice castration, eunuchs were common in other cultures featured in the Bible, such as Egypt, the **Persian** Empire, and Rome. When foreigners accepted the Jewish religion, if they were eunuchs they were still required to obey the law (Isaiah 5:3-5).

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Esther and Mordecai were not the only ones who faced danger. When Hathach made his second trip to talk with Mordecai, he placed himself in danger. Someone might notice and report him to **Haman** or the king.

How should a believer respond when faced with the possibility of serious consequences for standing up for truth?

2. Esther Was Afraid (Esther 4:10-12)

Verses 10-12. Maybe Esther thought she had lost favor with King **Ahasuerus**. Her only hope was for the king to extend the gold **scepter**, indicating his permission for her to come to him.

Like Esther, we may face serious danger when we follow God's commands. However, not being in God's will has much greater danger.

Was Mordecai too hard on his young niece, or did his tough language encourage her to do what was right?

3. Mordecai's Appeal (Esther 4:13-14)

Verses 13-14. Mordecai knew God could deliver His people without Esther. If Esther kept silent, God would still save His people.

At such a time as this, God had placed an unknown Jewish girl beside the most powerful man in the world. God accomplishes His purposes in many strange ways.

Just as Mordecai encouraged Esther to place her faith in God, can you let God's Word encourage you to faithful obedience?

4. Esther's Decision (Esther 4:15-17)

Verses 15-17. Esther said, "If I die, I die." She left the results in the hands of God, knowing she had little control over the reaction of the king.

What could lead you to spend three days in total fasting and prayer?

Do you think God may have placed you where you are now to be used by Him to do His will?

Session 3

God Provides a Savior

God sent His Son to be a Savior for all people.

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Skit. Ask three or four pupils to prepare a skit. They are the shepherds. They talk with the angel, then talk together, then with Mary and Joseph, and finally with people from the village.

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Suggested hymn: "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (LUKE 2:8-20)

1. Angels Announced the Birth of the Savior (Luke 2:8-14)

Verses 8-14. Ask someone to sign Philippians 2:6-11. This is Paul's summary of the gospel.

It is not enough to believe the good news of Jesus' birth; we must also believe the greater news of His death and resurrection.

DIG DEEPER: Bethlehem (Luke 2:11-15)

The name Bethlehem means house of bread. It is about six miles from Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary traveled for three days from Nazareth to Bethlehem. God planned for the Messiah (Christ, Savior) to be born in Bethlehem. About seven hundred years earlier, the prophet Micah said, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are too small to be among the army groups from Judah, from you will come one who will rule Israel for me" (Micah 5:2).

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When you get great news, whom do you tell first?"

Ask two or three to tell about the time they first heard the gospel, or when they responded to it and accepted Jesus as Savior.

2. Shepherds Found the Savior (Luke 2:15-16)

Verses 15-16. Note the prompt response of the shepherds, "they went quickly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby."

Do people today really search for Christ?

Do you try to help unreached people find Jesus?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: *Titles for Jesus (Luke 2:11)*

The angel identified Jesus as Christ, the Savior, and the Lord. The Bible has many "titles" for Jesus. In John 1:1, He is the Living Word. Later, John calls Him the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8, 22:13). He is God's Son (Matthew 3:16-17), the Bread of life (John 6:32), the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), and the Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). Some of the more colorful picture words for Jesus are the Morning Star (Revelation 22:16), the Lamb (Revelation 13:8), and the Light of the world (John 8:12). The Roman soldier at the cross called Him the Son of God (Matthew 27:54).

3. Shepherds Told About the Birth of the Savior (Luke 2:17-20) Verses 17-20. Ask if anyone has seen photos of a car or a house "before" and "after" it was rebuilt? Usually these photos show a dramatic change. Compare how the shepherds felt in verse 9 with verse 20. What a difference Jesus made!



God Wants Believers to Come Back to Him

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God's plan is for believers to repent and return to worship Him.

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Student teachers, one for each section.

Suggested hymn: "Holy, Holy, Holy."

Take copies of today's worship service bulletin, or get copies of the "Order of Service" from the pastor. Use these with the discussion of worship in section 3.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (EZRA 3:1-7,10-11; 6:19-22)

This is the first of two lessons from the Book of Ezra. Use the **timeline** (page 100) to show how the Book of Ezra relates to the Books of Esther and Nehemiah.

These lessons from Ezra and Nehemiah are about restoring the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

1. Ezra Rebuilt the Altar (Ezra 3:1-7)

Verses 1-7. Rebuilding the altar made it possible for the exiles to obey the Law, including the observance of festivals. The people had a common goal in wanting to see the altar rebuilt and a common bond of faith in God. With that, they were prepared to do great things for God.

Do we have a common goal in our church, or are we divided by misunderstandings or bad experiences?

2. The Temple Foundation Was Rebuilt (Ezra 3:10-11)

Verses 10-11. Give each one a copy of the order of worship used at your church for this Sunday or a recent Sunday. Ask class members to share about which parts of worship are most meaningful for them.

The exiles focused on the rebuilding of the temple. The leaders followed the practices established by David as they celebrated the rebuilding work on the temple.

How can we prepare our hearts and minds for worship each week?

3. People Started Worshiping in the Temple Again (Ezra 6:19-22)

DIG DEEPER: The Passover Feast (Ezra 6:19)

The annual Passover Feast celebrated the time when the Jewish people left Egypt (Exodus 12). They followed the instructions for the first Passover. The story of the first Passover was told each year. Psalms 113–118 were read as part of the celebration. Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples in what we now call the last supper (Luke 22:14-20).

The Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread emphasized renewal of religious life for the Jewish people. They were now able to live and worship in obedience to God's Word.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: Jesus, Our Passover Lamb

Isaiah identified the Messiah as the Lamb of God (Isaiah 53:7) and John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29-34). Peter identified Jesus as the perfect sacrificial lamb (1 Peter 1:18-20). Paul wrote about Jesus as our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) and our salvation (Romans 8:1-4).

Are our worship experiences joy-filled? If not, then why not?

How can we increase the joy expressed in our worship?

God Commands People to Obey Him

HEREITER KOUTER

TROATTERYS - 14

Faithful obedience to God's Word brings liberty.

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Small groups. Divide the class into three groups. Have each one study a section and then report to the whole class.

Suggested hymn: "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (EZRA 7:1-10)

Today's lesson is a character study of Ezra. He was a priest, and a student of God's law. His life makes him a worthy role model.

Between chapters 6 and 7, sixty years have gone by. The events in chapter 7 happened in 458 B.C. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, leading a group of Jews from **Babylon**.

1. Ezra's Ancestors (Ezra 7:1-6)

Verses 1-6. These verses are important because Ezra's family tree shows he has the proper credentials. Verse 6 tells the qualities of leadership God gave to Ezra. Ezra was fortunate to have both a strong family heritage and God's hand guiding his life. The most important words are in verse 6: "because the Lord his God was helping him."

We can see how God's hand was on Ezra through his **ancestors** and through his own life.

Can you see God's hand preparing you for use in His kingdom?

DIG DEEPER: Obedience (Ezra 7:6)

Obedience to God is more than behaving like His people. Obedience is not only following the law. True obedience, in the eyes of God, means to surrender my will to the authority of God. Obedience to God is when my heart accepts His lordship. It is when I accept His right to command, and my duty to obey.

2. Ezra's Journey (Ezra 7:7-9)

Verses 7-9. List the words priests, singers, Levites, and **gatekeepers** on the board. We know more about the priests than the other two groups. The Levites were from the tribe of Levi, from which priests were chosen. They helped in the temple worship. Singers led in the worship services, singing psalms and other spiritual songs. **Gatekeepers** and temple servants also helped maintain the temple and its activities.

For more than one-hundred years, Jerusalem was in ruins; but now it was rebuilt. And Ezra arrived to bring religious renewal.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: Spiritual Gifts (Ezra 7:6)

Ezra was successful in his work because of his skill and wisdom, but more than anything else, "because the Lord his God was helping him." God gives gifts of leadership to those who are called to be leaders. Spiritual gifts are mentioned often in the Bible.

What spiritual gift God has given you? If you do not know, ask Him to show you. Ask your friends to help you recognize your gifts.

3. Ezra's Goal (Ezra 7:10)

Verse 10. Ezra worked hard to prepare and do the work God called him to. Not everyone has a formal teaching position, but all of us have opportunities to teach God's Word to our families and friends.

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God Inspires the Work

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TROATTERYS - H

When God's people repent, He brings them back to a right relationship with Himself. He helps them do work that honors Him.

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Lecture, with encouraging discussions. Use an Old Testament map to locate **Persia**, Susa, and Jerusalem.

Suggested hymn: "Serve the Lord with Gladness."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 2:1-8,17-18)

1. Nehemiah Shows His Sadness (Nehemiah 2:1-3)

Verses 1-3. Ask: "How do you think four months of prayer and fasting may have changed Nehemiah's appearance?"

Ask: "How does Nehemiah's request demonstrate his trust in the faithfulness of God?"

DIG DEEPER: City Walls (Nehemiah 2:8)

In ancient times, most cities had walls around them for defense. Some of the walls made the city look like a large castle. The top of the wall was flat. The city guards walked on top of the wall. From there, they could watch for problems inside the walls and outside. Most walls had towers that let the guards get even higher up for better observation. Large gates were open during the day for traders and visitors. At night the gates were closed. Some people built their house up against the wall for security.

2. Nehemiah Makes Requests (Nehemiah 2:4-5)

Verses 4-5. Nehemiah chose his words carefully. Perhaps he remembered a proverb he learned as a child. (See Proverbs 25:11.)

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: Timeline

586 B.C. The Jewish people turned away from God. He let a pagan nation take them as slaves to **Babylon** because of their sin. Read 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52.

537 B.C. Zerubbabel led the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Read Ezra 1–2.

457 B.C. Ezra led the second group of exiles and restored the law. Read Ezra 8–9.

444 B.C. Nehemiah led the third group and rebuilt the city wall. Read Nehemiah 2.

3. Nehemiah Prepares to Go (Nehemiah 2:6-8)

Verses 6-8. Nehemiah knew God planned for him to go to Jerusalem. He was bold when he asked the king for help. God blessed Nehemiah and caused the king to give Nehemiah everything he asked for.

When you plan an activity for your church, do you pray first and ask God to give you wisdom?

4. Nehemiah Begins Rebuilding (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

Verses 17-18. Call attention to the words of encouragement Nehemiah used to enlist the people to help with the work of rebuilding. Using the ideas in this verse, ask the class what they might say, if:

A friend has stopped attending worship services and Bible study.

A friend is facing some long-term health problems and is discouraged.

Your adult child doesn't see a need for church in his life now that he is grown

Nehemiah did not brag on his status with the king or his diplomacy before the king. He gave the credit to God for his success in returning to Jerusalem to rebuild.

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God values every life He creates. We must value and protect human life.

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PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Scripture search.

Suggested hymn: "Speak to My Heart."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (GENESIS 9:1-7; PSALM 8:4-8; PROVERBS 24:10-12; PHILIPPIANS 2:12-17A)

1. Part of Our Purpose (Genesis 9:1-7)

Verses 12-17. Life is sacred to God and should be sacred to us, also. Ask: "What responsibility do we, as His people, have to protect the life of others?" "Is placing value on human life part of our purpose in life?" How does God's demand for the death of a murderer balance with His love for life?

2. God Values Us (Psalm 8:4-8)

Verses 4-8. God values all of His creation, especially His people.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: The Image of God

The Bible is not specific as to exactly what is the image of God. It's not just one characteristic or a combination of things. Everything about us is an image God. Read Genesis 1:26. The idea in Genesis is that we are a likeness of God.

When you think of the greatness of God's creation, how do you feel about His care for you?

How does human dominion require responsible action as stewards over God's creation?

3. We Are Called to Action (Proverbs 24:10-12; Philippians 2:12-16a) Verses 24:10-12, 2:12-16a. These Scripture verses show how God's value for human life is a thread woven through the Bible from Old Testament through New Testament.

DIG DEEPER: Work to Complete Your Salvation

It is easy to misunderstand Paul's words in Philippians 2:12. Someone may think it means Christians must work to earn their salvation. But Paul is writing to Christians who already know Christ's salvation. They know they received salvation as a free gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-10). Paul's word in Greek refers to working in a silver mine. It means to get all they could from that mine. So Christians must work hard to get all the wonderful riches that their salvation in Christ has for them.

Paul also wrote to do that with **fear** and trembling. This does not mean the **fear** of a slave in front of a cruel master. It means the honor that we should give to our holy and powerful God.

How does our view of accountability to God cause us to act as we do?

How should our salvation influence our work in defending the life of other people?

Be Faithful in Times of Trouble

We know we can complete the work God gives us. He has conquered everything that would stop us.

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TROATTERYS - 14

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Guest Speaker. Ask someone in your class who has been part of a mission team to talk about how the group worked together. Include such things as who decided each person's role. How did they see God working through them?

Suggested hymn: "God Will Take Care of You."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 6:1-19)

People Make False Statements About Us (Nehemiah 6:1-9)
Verses 1-9. Nehemiah was not shaken by the threats of these enemies:
Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Identify these men from material in the pupil section. Call attention to the end of verse 9 and stress that Nehemiah depended on God, not himself, for his strength.

DIG DEEPER: Tobiah

His name means, pleasing to Jehovah, or the servant. He was an Ammonite. He joined with those who opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Exile (Nehemiah 2:10). It seems he had great influence over other area governors. At one point, the High Priest, Eliashib, prepared a room for **Tobiah** to do business in the temple. When Nehemiah returned and learned of this, he put **Tobiah** and all his family out of the temple (Nehemiah 13:7-8).

What can we learn about standing against threats and challenges we may experience while doing God's work?

2. People Make False Promises to Us (Nehemiah 6:10-14)

Verses 10-14. God gave wisdom to Nehemiah to know how to handle it. He was faced with another effort to cause him to stumble in his work to rebuild the wall. Nehemiah stood firm, and turned away from the opportunity to sin.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: Suffering

Compare Nehemiah 6:1-9 with 1 Peter 4:12-13. "My friends, do not be surprised at the terrible trouble which now comes to test you. Do not think that something strange is happening to you. But be happy that you are sharing in Christ's sufferings so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory." Find other verses about suffering with Christ.

How did this second attack compare to the first?

It was from a priest who should have listened to God, but he listened to God's enemies.

3. Our Coworkers Work Against Us (Nehemiah 6:15-19)

Verses 15-19. For Nehemiah and the Jewish workers, the completed wall was a reminder of God's help and presence in the building project. For Nehemiah's enemies, the completed wall was a frightening reminder of God's involvement. Ask the class to think of all the things they need to do next week.

How will you give honor to God for each task you complete?

Encourage learners to get a small notepad or journal and keep an ongoing list of their activities and think of how they can honor God in each thing they do.

How was the completion of reconstruction a powerful testimony to God's greatness?

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Do the Work God Gives You

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God uses each of His people to succeed in completing His purposes.

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Scripture search. A week early, ask each one to bring a cap or shirt that supports a sports team.

Suggested hymn: "To the Work."

Display a sports team cap or jersey, or call attention to the sports items class members brought. Note that a baseball team is made up of people with different skills. Say: "In last week's study, Nehemiah stood strong against opposition as he led the work to rebuild the city wall. But there was still work to be done, and Nehemiah couldn't do it alone. Everyone had a job to do."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 7:1-8)

1. Each Person Has a Job to Do in God's Kingdom (Nehemiah 7:1-3) Verses 1-3. Say: "Jerusalem had a strong wall, but not many people lived inside the wall. In strong churches, many people share the responsibilities and everyone is valued for the job they do."

How does the appointment of singers, Levites, and gatekeepers demonstrate the equal importance of everyone's job?

Why are character and faithfulness important in assigning jobs in the church?

2. Each Person Has a Place in God's Kingdom (Nehemiah 7:4-8) Verses 4-8. Ask class members to name the various jobs that are needed for your church to be a bright witness for Christ in your community. Write their responses on the board. Mark the ones that urgently need someone. Talk about how all of these are important as they help to advance the gospel.

What do you believe God wants you to do to serve Him in His church?

What steps do you need to take to do that work better?

Call for volunteers to share their responses.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: God Calls Leaders

God has always raised up leaders when they are needed. There are several examples of God's call in the Bible. Ezekiel described his call in Ezekiel 1:1-3. Genesis 12:1-3 describes God's call to Abraham. The call to Moses is in Exodus 3:1-12. Gideon's call is in Judges 6:11-16. Elijah put his cloak on Elisha to show God's call (1 Kings 19:19). Isaiah was in the temple when God called him (Isaiah 6:8). Paul was on the road to Damascus when God called him (Acts 26:12-18).

Are you available for God to call you?

Do you think Nehemiah was asking them to do something they were not sure about?

Are you willing to do something you are not truly comfortable with?

If God calls you, He will give you what you need.



Get an Understanding

We look for understanding through regular and reverent hearing of God's Word.

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PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Student teachers. Suggested hymn: "Wonderful Words of Life."

From what you have studied in this lesson, what are we supposed to understand? (God's Word.)

Rebuilding the walls of the city was only part of what God wanted them to do. Spiritual restoration was needed, too, and it would come only through understanding and obeying God's Word.

What would change in our community if everyone took the time to read and understand the Bible?

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 8:1-8)

1. Desire to Hear God's Word (Nehemiah 8:1-3)

Verses 1-3. The people had a thirst for the Word of God. Their spiritual thirst led them to the square in front of the water gate. Outside this gate, on the southeastern wall of the city, was Gihon Spring with a large open space for the people to meet together.

DIG DEEPER: Gihon Spring

Gihon Spring was the main source of water for Jerusalem. It was used for drinking water and for irrigating gardens in the Kidron Valley. These gardens provided food for the city. The water was diverted into a tunnel Hezekiah dug under the city into the Pool of Siloam. That pool stored water for times when the spring was not flowing. Hezekiah blocked the outlet of the spring so the Assyrians could not get water when they attacked (2 Chronicles 32:30).

Discuss how our "busyness" gets in the way of our Bible study time. Discuss how to make Bible study a priority in our lives.

What circumstances of life make you more eager to hear a word from the Lord?

2. Prepare to Listen to God's Word (Nehemiah 8:4-8)

Verses 4-8. Ask if any class member remembers one Bible teacher in the past who invested in their understanding of God and His Word? Suggest that if it is possible, they should send that person a note of thanks for helping them understand God's Word.

Are you growing in your understanding of God's Word?

3. Obey God's Word (Nehemiah 8:9-12)

Verses 9-12. Call attention to the ways the people showed their celebration of God's Word. Discuss how much we enjoy eating our favorite foods, and how we become hungry for those favorite foods if we have not had them for a while. Use this discussion to help the class make the connection between physical hunger and spiritual hunger for God's Word.

When Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites saw the people weeping, what did they say? (See verse 10.)

Return to the Restoring God

When we see God, we want to confess our sin and repent. He will bring us back to a right relationship with Him.

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PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Lecture with class members finding and signing related verses in each section.

Suggested hymn: "Amazing Grace."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 9:32-37)

1. The Great God (Nehemiah 9:32)

Verse 32. Ask the class to find words or phrases in this verse that describe God's power, His covenant relationship with His people, the challenges the people faced, and how people were influenced by sin. Discuss how to sign these concepts.

Note the order of events: They confessed their sin and were forgiven and then they could see God in a fresh, new way as great, mighty, and wonderful. They remembered His covenant of love.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: Covenants (Nehemiah 9:32)

Read about God's covenants with His people: Noah (Gen. 9:8-17). Abraham (Gen. 12:2; 15:6-20; 17:1-14). When God led the Jews out of Egypt (Ex. 24:1-8). David (2 Sam. 7:1-16; 23:5-7; Ps. 89:1-37). Man broke his part of the covenant many times. God never broke His part of His covenant. God's greatest covenant was made through Christ. (Heb. 12:24).

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How was God addressed in this passage? How should we address God today? Why do we pray in Jesus' name?

2. The Confession (Nehemiah 9:33-35)

Verses 33-35. Discuss the meaning and sign(s) for the word confession. Confessing sin is calling sin the same thing that God calls it, with no "sugar-coating" and no excuses.

DIG DEEPER: Confession

In the Old Testament, confession began with acknowledging God's Law, then admitting sin. In today's lesson, the people confessed their own sin and their ancestor's sin. By this, they were admitting they followed their **ancestors** in sinning against God.

Why is it easy to identify and point out sin in other people an is hard to identify our sins?

Ask someone to sign 1 John 1:9. How often must we confess our sins?

How does unconfessed sin affect our fellowship with God?

3. The Request (Nehemiah 9:36-37)

Verses 36-37. Ask someone to sign parts of Psalm 51, David's response to his sin. Note that God still said David was a man after His own heart! **How can that be true with his sin?** Because he always confessed immediately afterward.

Describe your typical attitude when you pray. How does that compare to the attitude we see in our lesson today?

What adjustment do you need to make in your attitude when you pray?

Do you ask more often than you say thank you?

Commit Your Way to the Lord

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God expects His people to change and obey Him.

PLAN AHEAD

Suggested teaching method: Skits. Ask someone to do brief skits showing the action in each of the sections.

Suggested hymn: "I Need Thee Every Hour."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 10:28-39)

1. The People Made a Promise (Nehemiah 10:28-29)

Verses 28-29. Discuss appropriate sign(s) for the word commitment. Discuss the meaning and sign(s) for the term, accountability (responsibility to each other and to God).

What things do you have that show your commitment to someone? (Wedding ring, mortgage, other legal document.)

Ask the class to look at Nehemiah 10:1-27. What is the importance of all the names listed?

How can believers show separation from unbelievers today?

Why is this so important?

How can we be separate and still be a witness in a group of unbelievers where we work or with our neighbors?

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2. The People Try to Live Holy Lives (Nehemiah 10:30)

Verse 30. Ask the class to think of a good sermon, Sunday School lesson, or Bible verse in the past that impressed them. Then ask them to think of a person who lived a bold Christian faith.

Which of these made a bigger impression on you? Why?

3. The People Promise to Worship (Nehemiah 10:31-39)

Verses 31-39. God wants us to be obedient to Him in all areas of life and that includes our money.

DIG DEEPER: The Tithe (Nehemiah 10:37)

The Bible's first example of a **tithe** is in Genesis 14. Abraham gave Melchizedek, king of Salem, a tenth of his military spoils. After the exodus from Egypt, God designated the **tithe** to support the Levites and the priests (Numbers 18:20-32).

The **tithe** is holy to the Lord. God criticized the Jews who robbed Him by failing to give their **tithes** (Malachi 3:8-12). The **tithe** represents both obedience and faith toward God. Like the **first fruits**, it signified God's ownership of all we have.

In the New Testament, Jesus confronted Pharisees who **tithed** on the smallest amounts, but omitted the more important teachings about justice, mercy, and faith. He did not say they should not **tithe**, but taught they should do both (Matthew 23:23).

Encourage class members to prepare for the start of next quarter by reading the Book of Nahum.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: Honor God through Giving

Study these verses for more Bible truths about giving: Malachi 3:8-10; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7; and 1 Peter 4:10. What lessons can we learn from these verses? What kind of givers does God want us to be?

Bonus Session

Establish Justice in God's Community

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God expects His people to treat every person with love and dignity.

PLAN AHEAD

Ask all class members to bring their Bible and sign the verses. Suggested hymn: "Tell It to Jesus."

EXPLORE THE TEXT (NEHEMIAH 5:1-13)

1. A Request for Justice (Nehemiah 5:1-5)

Verses 1-5. Discuss the meaning and appropriate sign(s) for justice, fair, and unfair. Discuss several ways the people were treated unfairly—by outsiders (**Gentiles**) and by their own people (Jews).

Does this teach that taxes and interest are wrong? (No, unless they are excessive and inappropriate.)

How can we know true justice (fairness)? God is the source of true justice (Proverbs 29:26-27). God's justice is based on mercy and grace.

What injustice do you see in your community, nation or world today?

Do you believe Deaf people are often treated unjustly? Ask for examples.

In what ways can our church be a voice for the powerless?

DIG DEEPER: Justice

True justice finds its best example in God and His righteousness. Right action toward other people begins with a right relationship with the Lord. The prophet Micah gave us a good definition of the kind of life God wants us to have (Micah 6:8).

God's prophets condemned people who treated others unjustly, especially the poor and defenseless (Deuteronomy 27:19; Isaiah 56:1; Jeremiah 21:12).

2. Taking a Stand (Nehemiah 5:6-11)

Verses 6-11. Nehemiah was very angry. But Nehemiah responded with control and a thoughtful answer.

What can controlled anger? Nehemiah confronted the individuals who were doing wrong. Then he called all the people together for a public rebuke.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH: God's Justice

Read more about God's justice in Genesis 18:19; Exodus 23:2,6; 2 Samuel 8:15; Psalm 10:17-18; 33:5; 37:28; Proverbs 29:4; Isaiah 1:17; and Luke 18:2-8).

3. A Promise to Take Action (Nehemiah 5:12-13)

Verses 12-13. Injustice today is a symptom showing that our culture does not value human life as we should. As believers, we should be the first to take a bold stand, affirming the value of all people.

Lessons we can learn from Nehemiah's response to injustice:

1. Nehemiah treated the wrongdoers with dignity—appealing to them as gentlemen.

2. Nehemiah appealed to them to do the right thing.

3. Nehemiah appealed to their relationship with God, and to their witness to their foreign neighbors.

4. Nehemiah treated his neighbors right and appealed to them to do the same.

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PRAYER JOURNAL

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YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

How do you like this new format? We would like to hear from you and your class members. Send an email to Stephanie Johnson or George Joslin to tell us what you think of it. Our email address is ETBDeaf@lifeway.com. For additional teaching helps visit: www.lifeway.com/ETBDeaf



Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah

We love our heroes. We never tire of hearing and telling stories about them—in movies, graphic novels, TV shows, plays, and even in family lore passed from generation to generation. The Bible is full of heroes too. Heroes of the faith. Men and women who made a difference for God and for God's people through acts of valor, sacrifice, and benevolence. These are not fantasy characters with superhuman powers. Rather, they are ordinary believers who did extraordinary things in the power of the Living God. The Books of Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah chronicle the faith and actions of three biblical heroes. They teach us, inspire us, and show us a better way to live—the way of audacious faith in the Sovereign Lord who will not fail to bring salvation to His people.



Let the Word dwell in you.

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