

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

by
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Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

**A study of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther for
Small Group or Personal Bible Study**

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Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

Small Group or Personal Study Course

Introduction

This is a small group Bible study course to help you grow in your understanding of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther. This study will be most effective as you get together with a small group to share the answers that each of you has written in your personal study. This can also be used as a personal study course to help you grow in your understanding of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther. This course is designed to help you grow in three ways. Throughout the course you will read a paragraph to help you grow in your knowledge of the verses that you will be reading. After each paragraph you will usually have three questions. These three questions will focus on three things: Knowledge, Understanding and Application.

The first question will ask you to find the answer to some question in the verses that you are reading. This question is to help you pick out a key fact in those verses to help you grow in your knowledge of those verses. The answer to this question will usually be found in the verses as you read them.

The second question will ask you a question that will help you to think through the verses to understand the meaning of the group of verses being discussed. As you read this question, pray that the Lord will give you understanding of the passage as well as knowledge of the facts.

The third question will ask you a question that will help you to apply what you have learned from those verses both to your own life and to your service for Christ. It is as we understand and apply the Scripture to our lives that the Lord really begins to change and transform our lives.

At the end of each lesson there will be an opportunity to write down something that you have learned for your own life through the study of those verses. Our prayer is that as you work through these lessons that three things will happen in your life:

1. First, you will grow in your knowledge of the Bible.
2. Second, you will grow in your understanding of the verses that you have studied.
3. Third, you will learn how to apply the Word of God to your life.

The basic material in each of these lessons was originally written in one of six Bible Survey texts written between 1969 and 1974 that covered the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We are making this material available in this new form to help you grow in your knowledge, understanding and application of the Bible to your life. The Lord willing, we will continue to make other books available as we have time to prepare them in this new form.

May the Lord bless you as you learn His Word.

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Lesson 1

Ezra 1:1-3:13

The book of II Chronicles finishes with the nation of Judah being captured and taken into exile by the Babylonians. This happened to the people of Judah because of their sins. However, the Lord gave Judah a promise for the future even though they were taken as captives to Babylon. God promised that Cyrus would allow the people of Judah that chose to do so to return to Jerusalem after a period of seventy years. As we come to the book of Ezra, we see that Cyrus becomes the king of Persia. During the seventy year period, Persia had conquered Babylon and so the families of those who had been taken captive by Babylon were now under the government of Persia. Just as God had promised, God caused Cyrus to issue a law allowing any of the people of Judah that desired to return to the land of Judah to have permission to return to Judah.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

Explain what the law of Cyrus said.

Explain what people chose to return to Jerusalem.

Explain how the people began to offer sacrifices to the Lord again.

Explain how the people felt when they laid the foundation of the temple.

As we begin our study of the book of Ezra, we see that the things that happened in this book happened so that the word of the Lord would be fulfilled. Here we see that the Lord will always keep His promises. Today many Christians seem to forget that the things that happening among the nations are happening to fulfill the plan of the Lord. Here we see that God used a ruler that had no interest in serving the Lord to fulfill a prophecy that God had given many years earlier. God had used Jeremiah to give a prophecy that Cyrus would allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple since it had been destroyed by Babylon seventy years earlier.

1. Read Ezra 1:1-11 and write who stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to cause him to allow the people of Judah to return to Jerusalem.
2. Explain why it is important for Christians to understand that the things that are happening among the nations are happening to fulfill the plan of God.
3. Explain why you think that God can even work through very evil rulers to complete His plan and purpose.

Cyrus wrote a letter that was read in all of the nations that were controlled by Persia. In this letter Cyrus said that the Lord had given him the responsibility to build a house for the Lord in the city of Jerusalem. Then Cyrus asked who would be willing to go to Jerusalem to build this house for the Lord. It had been seventy years since the people had first been taken out of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. During this time many of the people had gotten comfortable in the areas where they had been resettled. Their children that had grown up in these lands had never lived in Jerusalem. Many of these people had become very happy with the lands where they were now living and wanted to remain.

4. Read Ezra 1:1-11 and write what those who remained were to do to help those who chose to return to Jerusalem.
5. Explain why it is often very easy for people to get comfortable where they are and not want to move to another place to carry out the work the Lord has for them.
6. Explain why you think that the Lord led Cyrus to write a letter to all of the nations controlled by Persia saying that God had given him the responsibility to build a house for the Lord in the city of Jerusalem.

Cyrus knew that many of the people had become so satisfied with their own success in the lands where they had been scattered that they would rather not return to the city of Jerusalem. Today many Christians also try to avoid their personal responsibility by only giving money so that someone else can go and serve the Lord rather than being willing to serve the Lord themselves. Here we see that it was a king that did not even serve God that gave the people that choice rather than God. The desire of the Lord is that all of His people will serve Him. In addition to the gifts requested by the king, the people were also encouraged to give a freewill offering to help in the work of the Lord.

7. Read Ezra 1:1-11 and write the names of the tribes whose leaders responded.

8. Explain why Cyrus encouraged the Jews from throughout the lands controlled by Persia to give a freewill offering to help in the work of the Lord.

9. Explain why you think that many Christians try to avoid their personal responsibility to serve the Lord.

The leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin plus the priests and the Levites were the ones that responded to the letter that had been written by Cyrus. That means that these were people that were taken captive or were the children of those taken captive at the time that Jerusalem was destroyed. We also see why these people were willing to return to Jerusalem. The Lord raised up a group of people that had chosen to follow the Lord and let the Lord lead and guide their lives. These people wanted to do the will of the Lord. They were willing to leave the easy life and return to a land where everything had been destroyed. The other people also gave to help those who were returning to the land.

10. Read Ezra 1:1-11 and write what Cyrus gave for the temple so that the people could take those things back with them to Jerusalem.

11. Explain what the Lord always has a group of people that have chosen to follow the Lord and let Him guide their lives.

12. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from the people that returned to Jerusalem.

When the original temple had been destroyed, all of the vessels that had been in the temple were taken to Babylon. Now Cyrus gave these vessels to the people that were returning to Jerusalem. These vessels were to be used in the temple that would be built. Here we see that the Lord was continuing to work through Cyrus even though Cyrus did not have his faith and trust in the Lord. We limit God when we fail to realize that God can work through our rulers even though they are evil men. That is one reason why it is important to pray for our leaders.

13. Read Ezra 1:1-11 and write the name of the man that was given the responsibility for taking these gold and silver vessels back to Jerusalem.

14. Explain why the fact that God can even work through evil rulers is an important reason why we should pray for our leaders.

15. Explain why you think that Cyrus had developed such a concern for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

We go on to read about the group of men that returned to Judah and Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel. First we are given the list of men that returned from each of the cities of Judah. This list is followed by the list of the priests that returned. This is followed by the list of the Levites and the list of those whose families had been the servants of Solomon. Among the servants mentioned are the Nethinim. There were probably the people that had lived in the city of Gibeon. As you remember the people of that city chose to become slaves of the nation of Israel rather than be destroyed during the time of Joshua. Now we see that some of their descendants had developed such a love for the Lord that they wanted to return to Jerusalem.

16. Read Ezra 2:1-70 and write how many of the Nethinim returned with the group to Judah and Jerusalem.

17. Explain why some of the Nethinim also chose to return to Jerusalem even though they were

not Jews.

18. Explain how this shows you that the Lord was working in the lives of servants that had masters that trusted the Lord.

Some of the priests that returned could not show their genealogy to show that they were actually priests. As a result, they were not allowed to serve as priests. Today we have some that claim to be Christians whose lives do not show that they are Christians. As a result, such individuals should not be allowed to become leaders of local churches. Spiritual leadership carries with it a real responsibility. Spiritual leaders are to provide an example for others to follow. This means that those who are given positions of spiritual leadership should meet the qualifications given by the Lord for spiritual leadership in the Word of God.

19. Read Ezra 2:1-70 and write the total number of people that returned to Judah and the city of Jerusalem.

20. Explain why some of the priests were excluded from serving as priests.

21. Explain why you think that it is important for spiritual leaders to both take responsibility and also provide an example for others to follow.

The total of those that returned to the land of Judah including the servants was a total of about 50,000 people. However, this was only a tiny part of the people that had come from the nations of Israel and Judah. This is a reminder of the fact that those that truly serve the Lord are often only a tiny minority of the total population in most countries. This should not cause us to become discouraged because we are promised ultimate victory when our trust is in Christ. After the people had returned to the land, all of the people gathered together in the seventh month.

22. Read Ezra 3:1-7 and write what the leaders did when all of the people gathered together at Jerusalem.

23. Explain why most of the Jews chose not to return to the land of Judah or to help build the temple.

24. Explain why you think that God is able to do great things through the lives of committed followers even though they are only a small minority of the people.

The first thing that the people wanted to do when they had returned to their land was to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Many times it is easy to be so busy with our own plans that we put these plans ahead of our worship of the Lord. In fact we may become so busy doing the work of the Lord that we forget to come to the Lord to confess our sins and worship Him. Confession must come first or it is useless to try and do the work of the Lord. We will be trying to do the work of the Lord through our own efforts instead of doing the work of the Lord through His strength. Only as we confess our sins first will we be effective as we do the work of the Lord.

25. Read Ezra 3:1-7 and write what feast the people observed during this time that they were gathered together.

26. Explain why the first thing that the people wanted to do when they returned to the land was to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

27. Explain why it is useless to try to do the work of the Lord in our own strength instead of depending on the Lord.

Here we see that the people began offering their sacrifices and keeping their feasts before they even began to lay the foundation for the temple. This is a reminder to us that the people had things in the proper order. The first desire of these people was to be obedient to the Lord. Sometimes people can place their buildings or some other thing ahead of their worship and service of the Lord. As a result, they bring confusion to their own lives as well as to the lives of those around them that they are trying to reach for the Lord. Our worship and obedience to the Lord must always come before any other thing so that whatever we do will be done in obedience to the Lord.

28. Read Ezra 3:1-7 and write what kinds of offerings the people began to give to the Lord once they started offering sacrifices.
29. Explain why our worship and obedience to the Lord are much more important to the Lord than our buildings.
30. Explain why it is important to you in your own life to make certain that your worship and obedience come first in your relationship with the Lord.

When the people came together to worship the Lord, the people also gave their gifts to the Lord. This provided money so that the building of the temple could begin. This money was used to hire masons and carpenters to begin to do the construction on the temple. The money was also used to buy cedar trees from the land of Lebanon for use in the building of the temple. In the second year after the people returned to Jerusalem, the people were ready to begin the work of building the temple. It was decided that the Levites would do the actual work of building the temple. Then those men began the work of building the temple.

31. Read Ezra 3:8-13 and write how old the Levites had to be in order to be allowed to work on the temple.
32. Explain why the offerings of the people provided the gifts that were needed to buy the materials needed for the temple.
33. Explain why you think that Levites were the group chosen to do the actual building of the temple.

Here we see that all of the Levites that were men were allowed to participate in the work of building the temple. It was a great day for the people when the day came to lay the foundation of the temple. It had been many years since the temple that Solomon had built had been destroyed. As a result, there was great rejoicing as the people began to lay the foundation for the temple. The priests and the Levites played their musical instruments to express their praises to the Lord. The people also sang together and gave thanks to the Lord.

34. Read Ezra 3:8-13 and write what the old men did when the foundation of the temple was laid.
35. Explain why the people expressed their joy and praise to the Lord on the day that the foundation of the temple was laid.
36. Explain why it is also important for us in our own lives to express our joy and praise to the Lord for what He is doing for us.

It was a day of great rejoicing for most of the people. However, that day was a day of sadness for the old men. Those men remembered the size of the first temple. They remembered its greatness. In comparison this new temple was very small. As a result, these older men that remembered the first temple felt both joy and sadness. They were very glad that the temple was being rebuilt. However, they were very sad as they remembered the first temple. They realized again that sin carries with it a very high cost. The first temple had been destroyed because of the sins of the people and this second temple could not compare with the first.

37. Read Ezra 3:8-13 and write how far the celebration of the Jews was heard that day.
38. Explain why the old men cried when the foundation of the new temple was laid.
39. Explain why the old men were reminded of the high cost of sin as they looked at the foundation for the new temple.

Most of the people that were there that day had not seen the temple that Solomon had built. They did not remember the size or beauty of the first temple. As a result, they did not compare the two temples as the old men did. Instead it was a day of rejoicing for them. They shouted for joy as they saw the foundation of the new temple being laid. They were able to look forward to the future instead of look back at the past. As a result, it was impossible to tell the cries of joy from the sound of crying. Instead it was just one great noise that sounded like shouting.

40. Read Ezra 3:8-13 and write how far the noise of the shouting could be heard.
41. Explain why it is important for us to look forward to what the Lord is going to do instead of spending our time talking about the past.
42. Explain why you think that it was hard for the old men to have joy as they looked at the foundation for the new temple.

Now reread Ezra 1:1-3:13 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.

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Lesson 2

Ezra 4:1-5:17

In our last lesson we learned how the people that had returned to Jerusalem began to build the new temple. However, the people in the surrounding areas were not happy to see the people of Jerusalem building a new temple. As a result, the people of the surrounding areas tried to stop the work of the Lord. When the people that had returned to Judah refused to stop the building of the temple, these enemies wrote to the new king of Persia and told him that the people of Judah were planning to rebel against the king and the Persians. This caused the work of the temple to stop until the prophets encouraged the people to start building the temple again.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study.

By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain why the enemies wanted to stop the building of the temple.
- Explain why Artaxerxes ordered the building of the temple stopped.
- Tell how the prophets encouraged the people.
- Explain how the enemies tried to stop the people again.

Any time that people are involved in doing the work that the Lord wants to be done, the devil will always try to stop that work. That was what happened when the people of Judah and Benjamin began to build the temple. The devil caused the people that lived in the surrounding areas to try and stop the building of the temple. The first way that these enemies tried to stop the work of the Lord was to come and offer to help in the building of the temple. This is a favorite trick of the devil. He nearly always tries to get followers of the Lord to work together with those who do not follow the Lord. Eventually the devil knows that he will gain control this way.

1. Read Ezra 4:1-10 and write what the leaders of Judah answered these people that said that they wanted to help build the temple.
2. Explain why the first thing that the people of the surrounding nations did was offer to help in the building of the temple.
3. Explain why you think that the people of the surrounding areas were so unhappy when they saw that the people were beginning to rebuild the temple.

Here we see the kind of attitude that we should have toward trying to work together in the work of the Lord with those who reject the Word of God. We should not enter into any partnership to do the work of the Lord with such people. They will only lead us away from doing the work that the Lord has called us to do. Today there are many churches in the world that reject the Word of God. Such churches are always trying to get the churches that believe and teach the Word of God to cooperate with them. Such partnership and cooperation with churches that reject the Word of God has eventually caused many other churches to also turn away from the Word of God.

4. Read Ezra 4:1-10 and write what the people of the land did next to try to stop the people from building the temple.
5. Explain why it is important for followers of the Lord to avoid partnerships with those who reject the Lord.
6. Explain why you think that many people that have rejected the Word of God want to work with those who follow the Word of God.

Here we see that the enemies showed that their real goal was to try to destroy the work of the Lord. When the enemies of the Lord could not destroy the work of the Lord by becoming a part of it, they set out to destroy the work of the Lord in other ways. The enemies opposed the people of Judah in every way possible to hinder them in the building of the temple. They did

their best to cause trouble. Finally they wrote a letter to the king of Persia and told him that the people of Judah were building a temple and that they planned to rebel against him. Since there was a new king in Persia, he did not know that Cyrus had given the people of Judah permission to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem so that they could have it as a place to worship the Lord.

7. Read Ezra 4:1-10 and write the name of the new king of Persia.

8. Explain why those who reject the Lord will often try to destroy the work of the Lord rather than just ignore it.

9. Explain what you learn from these verses about some of the ways that the devil tries to hinder or stop the work of the Lord.

We go on to read the letter that the enemies of the people of Judah sent to Artaxerxes. The people wrote in the letter that they were the servants of the king. At the very beginning of the letter they were trying to suggest that they were the servants of the king of Persia while the people of Judah were rebellious and not his servants. In this letter the enemies of Judah accused the people of Judah of being wicked and rebellious. They said that the people had already laid the foundation at Jerusalem. The enemies said that if the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt that the people would refuse to pay taxes to the king.

10. Read Ezra 4:11-24 and write where the king was told to search to find out if Jerusalem was a rebellious city.

11. Explain why the enemies of the Jews tried to make it sound like the Jews were very rebellious people.

12. Explain why you think that those who oppose the work of the Lord will completely twist the truth in their efforts to destroy the work of the Lord.

The enemies of Judah were supported by the king. That was the reason why they pretended to be faithful servants of the king. The reason that the enemies of Judah wanted to keep the walls of Jerusalem from being rebuilt was to make it possible for them to continue to steal all that they desired from the people of Jerusalem. Their concern was not the best interests of the king but their desire to please themselves. However, the only way that they could stop the work of rebuilding the temple was to accuse the people of Judah of trying to rebel against the king. That was the reason why they told the king that they were writing to him. They did not say that the people were rebuilding the temple and not the wall.

13. Read Ezra 4:11-24 and write what the enemies told the king would happen if the walls were set up again.

14. Explain why the enemies of the building of the temple at Jerusalem were in fact only trying to please themselves.

15. Explain why you think that the enemies of Judah were talking about the rebuilding of the wall when the people were actually starting to rebuild the temple.

When the king received the letter from the enemies of Judah, he ordered a search of the old records to find out if Jerusalem had been a rebellious city at one time. As you remember from the last few chapters of II Chronicles, the people of Jerusalem had rebelled against the nation of Babylon several times after Babylon gained control of the nation of Judah. As a result, the king found in the records of Babylon that Judah had rebelled against Babylon in the past before Babylon had been conquered by the Medes and Persians. The king immediately sent a letter to the enemies of Judah.

16. Read Ezra 4:11-24 and write what kind of a commandment the king gave the enemies of Judah in this letter.

17. Explain why the enemies asked the king to search the records of Babylon to see if Jerusalem had been a rebellious city at one time.

18. Explain why you think that enemies did not even suggest that the new king look at the records of Persia.

This letter from the king with its commandment gave the exact answer that the enemies of Judah had hoped the king would give. The king gave the enemies of Judah a new commandment to cause the people of Judah to stop building. The enemies of Judah immediately hurried to Jerusalem and forced the people to stop their work of rebuilding the temple. Here we see that the devil works in every possible way to stop the work of the Lord. If one plan fails, he will try another plan. However, the devil cannot stop the work of the Lord even though he may try very hard. The only thing that he can do is delay the work of the Lord if the people do not completely trust the Lord. That was what happened in this situation.

19. Read Ezra 4:11-24 and write how long the work on the temple stopped.

20. Explain what these verses teach about the fact that the devil will use many different methods to try and stop the work of the Lord.

21. Explain why people will act out of fear and let the world control them if they do not trust the Lord to guide them.

When the devil tries to hinder or stop the work of the Lord, the Lord will always raise up someone to encourage the work of the Lord to go forward. This was what happened at Jerusalem. Soon after Darius became the king of Persia, the Lord sent some prophets to encourage the people at Jerusalem. Then the people began again to work to rebuild the temple. These prophets said that God was the One that had said that the temple should be rebuilt. The people were encouraged by the message from the prophets. Here we see the importance of helping people to know the will of the Lord so that those people can choose to obey what the Lord has said.

22. Read Ezra 5:1-5 and write what the leaders of Jerusalem began to do.

23. Explain why the Lord chose to speak to the people of Judah and Jerusalem through the prophets to encourage them.

24. Explain why you think that it is important to share the Word of God with people to encourage them as they do the work of the Lord.

Here we see that results when men of God are willing to speak the message that the Lord has given them to speak. As the people of God hear the Word of God, they will be encouraged to do the work of God. This was what happened at Jerusalem. Because the prophets were willing to speak the Word of God, the people began again to rebuild the temple. Of course the enemies were not happy when they saw that the people of Jerusalem were beginning to build the temple again. In fact the enemies were very angry and wanted to stop the work.

25. Read Ezra 5:1-5 and write the first question that the enemies asked the leaders of Jerusalem.

26. Explain why the enemies of the people of Judah were very angry when they saw that the people had started working to build the temple again.

27. Explain why it is important for you to understand that when you are doing the work of the Lord that there will always be opposition from those who oppose the Lord.

The enemies of Judah thought that they could stop the rebuilding of the temple by scaring the people. The enemies asked the leaders of Jerusalem who had given them permission to rebuild the temple. They also asked the names of the leaders of the workers. Here we see that they were trying to use fear to exercise control over the leaders. They wanted the names of the leaders so that they could include the names of the workers in a letter to the king. However, the people were not discouraged by their enemies because they were trusting in the Lord. If we are led by the love of the Lord, we will be obedient to the Lord. If we are driven by the fear of people, that fear will control us. Instead of becoming fearful, the people told their enemies to write a letter to the king.

28. Read Ezra 5:1-5 and write what was with the elders of Israel when the enemies tried to stop them this time.

29. Explain how the Lord encouraged the people of Judah to begin building the temple again.

30. Explain why we will be obedient to the Lord if we are led by the love of the Lord even

when we are facing opposition.

We go on to read the letter that the enemies of Judah sent to the king. In this letter the enemies told the king that the people of Judah were rebuilding the temple. They said that the people were using great stones and timbers to build this temple. The work of this temple was going forward very rapidly. Of course we know that this was happening because the Lord was blessing the work of the people of Judah. The enemies also told the king about the questions that they had asked the people of Jerusalem that were rebuilding the temple.

31. Read Ezra 5:6-17 and write whose servants the people of Jerusalem told the enemies that they were.

32. Explain why the Lord made it possible for the work of rebuilding the temple to go forward very rapidly during this time.

33. Explain why you think that the Lord led the enemies to tell the questions that they had asked the people of Judah.

The people of Judah had given their enemies a little information about the history of the nation of Israel to show why they were rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. That said that they were the servants of God. They also said that one of their early kings had built a great temple. However, the people had turned away from the Lord. As a result, the Lord had allowed judgment to come on the people of Judah. God had used the kingdom of Babylon to bring this judgment on Judah. God had brought this judgment by allowing the king of Babylon to take the people of Judah to the land of Babylon. Of course we know that Babylon was later conquered by Persia.

34. Read Ezra 5:6-18 and write who the people of Judah said had given them permission to rebuild the temple.

35. Explain why the people of Judah chose to tell their enemies about the history of the earlier temple.

36. Explain why you think that the people told the enemies why the Lord had brought judgment on the first temple.

The people of Jerusalem said that King Cyrus of Persia was the one that had given them the permission to rebuild the temple. The enemies of Judah thought that the people of Judah were telling lies when they said that Cyrus had instructed them to rebuild the temple. The enemies thought that the king would give an order forbidding the people to do any more building on the temple once the records of Cyrus had been checked. The people of Judah also told their enemies that Cyrus had given them the vessels of the temple when he gave them instructions to return and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem.

37. Read Ezra 5:6-17 and write what the enemies asked the king to do to find out whether the people of Judah were telling the truth.

38. Explain how the enemies of Judah thought that they would stop the work of the Lord this time.

39. Explain why you think that the Lord chose to work through the request that the enemies made to the king of Persia.

The enemies of Judah told the king of Persia all that the people of Judah said that Cyrus had told them. Then the enemies of Judah asked the king to search the records of Cyrus. They wanted those records searched to see whether these things were true. Of course the enemies thought that a search of the records would show that the people of Judah were not telling the truth. The enemies thought that a search of the official records would certainly reveal the fact that Cyrus had never given the people of Judah permission to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem.

40. Read Ezra 5:6-17 and write what the enemies of Judah asked the king of Persia to send to them.

41. Explain what the enemies of Judah expected that the king would find if he searched the

records of Cyrus.

42. Explain why you think that you can trust the Lord to work in your life and through your life as you trust the Lord to lead you.

Now reread Ezra 4:1-5:17 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.

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Lesson 3

Ezra 6:1-7:28

In our last lesson we learned that the enemies had worked to stop the rebuilding of the temple. The enemies had succeeded until the prophets of God had encouraged the people to begin building again. Then the enemies thought that they could stop the rebuilding of the temple by having the king of Persia search the records of Cyrus to show that Cyrus had not given the people of Judah permission to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. When Darius read the letter of the enemies of Judah, he ordered a search of the records of Cyrus. The Lord had a wonderful purpose for this search of the records. We will learn about the results of that search in our lesson today.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain what Darius said about the rebuilding of the temple.
- Explain how the temple was then completed.
- Explain why Ezra came to the land of Judah.
- Tell about the letter of Artaxerxes regarding Ezra.

The enemies of Judah thought that they had discovered a way to stop the rebuilding of the temple when the people of Jerusalem said that Cyrus was the one that had given the permission to rebuild the temple. However, the Lord works in many unusual ways to complete His purposes. In this case the God used the opposition of the enemies to encourage the work. Darius ordered a search of the records of Cyrus. Darius instructed some men to go and search in the building where all of the records of each king were kept. As they searched the records, these men discovered a scroll that had been written during the first year that Cyrus was the king of Persia. In this scroll there were even instructions regarding the way that the temple was to be rebuilt.

1. Read Ezra 6:1-12 and write what Cyrus has said about the way that the foundations of the temple should be laid.
2. Explain how God turned the opposition of the enemies into a way to help the work of rebuilding the temple.
3. Explain why you think that God led the enemies to try and get Darius to stop the rebuilding of the temple.

The instructions of Cyrus emphasized the fact that the temple was to be built with a strong foundation. Great stones and new timbers were to be used in the building of the temple. In addition, the expenses for the rebuilding of the temple were to be paid out of the treasury of the king of Persia. The instructions of Cyrus also said that the golden vessels that had been taken from the original temple when it was destroyed were to be returned. Cyrus said that those golden vessels were to be placed in the temple at Jerusalem when it was rebuilt. Here we see that Cyrus had made the original instructions very clear.

4. Read Ezra 6:1-12 and write what the enemies of Judah were told about the work on the house of the Lord.
5. Explain why Cyrus said in the original instructions that the temple was to be built on a strong foundation.
6. Explain why you think that Cyrus had made it very clear that Persia wanted to help in the rebuilding of the temple.

The plan of the enemies of the Lord to stop the work of rebuilding the temple was completely reversed. They were told to let the work of this house of God alone. The enemies were also

given several other instructions about the work that the Jews were doing to rebuild the temple. The enemies were told that they were to stay far away from the city of Jerusalem. They were to stop trying to hinder the workers that were rebuilding the temple. In addition, since Cyrus had said that the money from the treasury of the king was to be used to rebuild the temple, these enemies were to give the Jews all of the money that they needed to rebuild the temple. Here we see that the Lord used the opposition of the enemies to supply the money that was needed to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem.

7. Read Ezra 6:1-12 and write who the king asked the Jews to remember as they prayed to God.
8. Explain how the request of the enemies now provided a new source of finances for the rebuilding of the temple.
9. Explain why this chapter is an example of the fact that the Lord can make all things work out together for good to them that love Him.

Here we see that the king even asked the Jews to pray to God for him and his family. The Lord also used the enemies to supply more than just the money needed for the rebuilding of the temple. The enemies were ordered to supply as much money as the Jews requested so that the Jews could purchase animals and the other things that they needed to offer sacrifices. The king also said that any people that tried to change the orders of the king were to have their houses destroyed. Then the lumber from their houses was to be used to build a gallows where the owners of the houses could be hung. Here we see that opposition would bring an immediate death sentence. Darius encouraged the Jews to quickly finish the work of rebuilding the temple.

10. Read Ezra 6:1-12 and write what the king had said should happen to any people that tried to alter or destroy the house of God at Jerusalem.
11. Explain how God used the opposition of the enemies to complete His purpose instead of stop His purpose.
12. Explain why you think that the king warned about the future consequences for anyone that tried to hinder or stop the rebuilding of the temple.

When the enemies of Judah received the letter from Darius, they quickly stopped trying to hinder the Jews. Their fear caused them to be concerned for their own lives. They were now willing to do anything that the Jews requested because they realized that the king would have them put to death if they tried to hinder the Jews any longer. Meanwhile the work continued to go forward on the temple because the prophets were encouraging the workers with messages from the Lord. The Word of God shared with those who are doing the work of the God will always bring encouragement to those who are doing that work. As a result, the rebuilding of the temple went forward and the temple was completed.

13. Read Ezra 6:13-22 and write in what year of the reign of Darius the temple at Jerusalem was completed.
14. Explain why it was so important for the prophets to continue to encourage the people while they were building the temple.
15. Explain why you think that the teaching of the Word of God will also be an encouragement to all those who want to do the work of the Lord.

The completion of the temple was a time of great rejoicing for the Jews that had returned to Jerusalem from the nations where they had been taken captives as a result of their sins. When the temple was completed, the people all gathered together for the dedication of the temple. This was a time of great joy for the people. At the dedication service they offered seven hundred animals as an offering of dedication. Then they offered twelve goats as a sin offering for the twelve tribes of Israel. The priests and the Levites also began to carry out their responsibilities according to the instructions that had been given by Moses.

16. Read Ezra 6:13-22 and write when the people observed the Passover.
17. Explain why the completion of the rebuilding of the temple brought great joy to all of the people of Judah.
18. Explain why you think that the priests and Levites realized the importance of carrying out

their responsibilities according to the instructions given by Moses.

The people that had come back to the land of Judah had returned to Judah because of their desire to serve the Lord. They had left a life of ease in the lands where they were scattered before they chose to come back to Jerusalem. Now they wanted to serve the Lord according to the instructions given in the Word of God. The people prepared themselves to serve the Lord by purifying themselves. Only those who had separated themselves from the filthiness of the nations around them were to eat the Passover. The people were filled with joy as they observed the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The joy in their hearts came from the Lord.

19. Read Ezra 6:13-22 and write what the Lord had done for the people in addition to making them joyful.

20. Explain why the people that returned to Jerusalem chose to leave a life of ease in order to come back to Jerusalem.

21. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from these verses.

As we move from the events record in chapter six in Ezra to chapter seven, there is a time period of more than fifty years between these two chapters. It was during this fifty year period that the events recorded in the book of Esther happened. Ezra had not even been born yet at the time the first group of people had returned to Jerusalem. As we begin chapter seven, we read about the family from which Ezra came. Ezra came from the family of Aaron. As a result, the men from his family had been the high priests of the nations of Israel and Judah. This also meant that as one from the family of the priests that Ezra was also a priest. We also see that he was a scribe.

22. Read Ezra 7:1-10 and write what kind of a scribe this passage says that Ezra was.

23. Explain why it is important for us to know that Ezra came from the family of Aaron.

24. Explain why you think that Ezra wanted to go back to Jerusalem even though his family had chosen not to return with the original group more than fifty years earlier.

Ezra was one person that had a very good knowledge of the first five books of the Old Testament. He had spent much time studying and copying those books. Now Ezra asked the king for permission to return to the city of Jerusalem. The king agreed to the request of Ezra because the Lord had prepared him for the request of Ezra. When Ezra decided to return to the city of Jerusalem, some of the other people decided to go along with Ezra as he returned. Here we are reminded again of the fact that when one person becomes a spiritual leader for the Lord that others will follow him.

25. Read Ezra 7:1-10 and write what month Ezra came to the city of Jerusalem.

26. Explain how the choice of Ezra to return to Jerusalem also caused others to join him and return to Jerusalem also.

27. Explain why you think that the fact that Ezra was a scribe that continually made copies of the law helped him to become familiar with the law.

Ezra was able to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem in four months because the good hand of the Lord was upon him. The Lord was the One that led and protected Ezra as he traveled. We see that the reason that Ezra had come to Jerusalem was the fact that he had prepared his heart to seek the Lord. In addition, he also wanted to obey the Law of God and teach the Law to the people. In order to be an effective teacher of the Word of God, Ezra realized that he must be obedient to the Word of God himself. This is also the only way that we will be effective as teachers of the Word of God.

28. Read Ezra 7:1-10 and write the three things that Ezra had prepared his heart to do as he returned to Jerusalem.

29. Explain why Ezra felt it was important to study the law of God and obey it himself before he tried to teach the law of God to others.

30. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from the example of Ezra in this chapter.

While Ezra was preparing to return to Jerusalem, the king wrote a letter for Ezra to take with him. In this letter the king said that Ezra was a scribe of the commandments of the Lord. From the way that the king began his letter, it shows that he realized that there was a great difference between the true and living God and the false gods. Artaxerxes encouraged any of the people of Israel or Judah that desired to do so to go along with Ezra. The king was sending Ezra to Jerusalem for several reasons. He was to instruct the people in the law and see if the people were being obedient to the law of God.

31. Read Ezra 7:11-28 and write what Ezra was to carry with him when he went to the city of Jerusalem.

32. Explain why the Lord led the king to send Ezra to Jerusalem to instruct the people in the law of God.

33. Explain why you think that God chose to work through all of these foreign kings to complete His work.

The king and his counselors had collected a freewill offering of silver and gold to send to the Lord with Ezra. In addition, many of the people of Israel who lived in Babylon had also brought freewill offerings to be taken to Jerusalem. These offerings were to be used to purchase sacrifices for the Lord. Then the money that remained after the sacrifices were purchased was to be used in any way that God showed Ezra and the people of Judah to use it. In addition to these freewill offerings, Ezra was also to carry certain vessels for the house of the Lord.

34. Read Ezra 7:11-28 and write from where additional money was to be supplied if it was needed.

35. Explain why it is important for people to choose to give freewill offerings to the Lord instead of feeling that they have to give.

36. Explain why you think that the king and his counselors also wanted to have a part by giving a freewill offering to the Lord.

The king of Persia wanted to see the work of the Lord go forward at Jerusalem. He realized the greatness of the power of God. He realized that God could bring judgment upon him if he was not concerned about the needs of the people of God. For this reason the king also gave instructions that those men that were doing the work and ministry of the Lord were not to be charged any taxes. Instead the king said that it was against the law to tax these men in any way. As we have seen the way that the Persian kings respected the God of Israel, we realize the influence that people like Daniel, Esther, Mordecai and others were having with the Persian rulers.

37. Read Ezra 7:11-28 and write for what things Ezra gave thanksgiving to the Lord.

38. Explain what these verses teach about the king of Persia from this letter.

39. Explain why you think that the Lord chose to put people like Daniel, Esther and Mordecai in positions where they could influence the entire Persian empire.

The king of Persia also gave Ezra some other instructions. He was to appoint judges and rulers that knew the Word of God. If these men did not know the Word of God, Ezra was to teach the Word to them. Those who refused to obey the Word of God were to be judged in one of several ways. Ezra was filled with joy when he read the letter that the king had written. He realized that it was the Lord that had caused the king to write such things. When Ezra saw what the Lord had done in the heart of the king of Persia, Ezra was strengthened.

40. Read Ezra 7:11-28 and write who Ezra gathered to go with him to the city of Jerusalem.

41. Explain why it is important for judges and rulers to know the Word of God if they want to be effective leaders.

42. Explain why you think that Ezra was strengthened because of the way that he realized that the Lord had worked in the life of the king of Persia.

Now reread Ezra 6:1-7:28 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned

from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

Lesson 4

Ezra 8:1-10:44

In our last lesson we learned about the desire of Ezra to go to Jerusalem so that he could teach the Word of God to his people. We also saw how the Lord provided for Ezra through the kindness of the king of Persia. When Ezra decided to return to the land of Judah, a group of other men decided to go with him to the city of Jerusalem. Ezra was also taking some treasures to be placed in the house of the Lord. However, this meant that he needed some protection from robbers that might be along the way. As we study our lesson today, we will learn who provided the needed protection for Ezra and those with him as they returned to Jerusalem.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study.

By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain how Ezra and those with him were protected as they traveled.
- Tell about the treasures that they brought to Jerusalem.
- Explain why the people had failed to separate themselves.
- Explain why God said that separation was necessary.

As Ezra prepared to return to Jerusalem, he was not returning alone. The Lord had given several hundred other men a desire to return to Jerusalem also. As a result, these men were prepared to return to Jerusalem along with Ezra. All of these men that were planning to return with Ezra gathered together to prepare for their journey. When they were all together, Ezra realized that there was no one from the tribe of Levi. Then Ezra sent a messenger to the leaders of the Levites to encourage some of the Levites to return to serve as spiritual leaders. Then some of the Levites also prepared to return to Jerusalem including a man of understanding.

1. Read Ezra 8:1-23 and write what Ezra proclaimed before the people left for Jerusalem.
2. Explain why Ezra felt that it was important to encourage some of the Levites to return to Jerusalem with the other people that were returning.
3. Explain why you think that it is important to have godly spiritual leadership in any group of followers of the Lord.

We see that Ezra proclaimed a fast for a very important reason before the people left to travel to Jerusalem. In addition to returning to Jerusalem, the people had to prepare their hearts so that they would know the will of God as they returned. They needed to know the leading of the Lord because they would be traveling through some very dangerous country as they traveled. They needed the protection of the Lord as they traveled toward the land of Judah. Ezra could have asked the king to send some soldiers with them to protect them as they traveled. However, Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers because of what he had said to the king.

4. Read Ezra 8:1-23 and write what Ezra had told the king.
5. Explain why it is important for all followers of the Lord to prepare their hearts to know the will of God.
6. Explain why you think that it is important for Christians to pray for safety as they travel.

Ezra had told the king that he served a God that is all powerful and controls all things. After making such a statement to the king, he knew that to ask for soldiers to guard them would be a way of admitting that he did not really believe that God controls all things. Sometimes we say that we believe that God controls all things and then we act as if we do not believe what we have said. Here we see that Ezra acted exactly as he had told the king that he believed.

Because of the fact that Ezra had his faith and trust in the Lord, he believed that God would provide the safety and the protection that the group needed as they traveled toward Jerusalem.

7. Read Ezra 8:1-23 and write what happened when the people fasted and prayed to the Lord

for safety.

8. Explain why it is important to recognize that God is all powerful and is the One that controls all things.
9. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life about faith from the example of Ezra in this chapter.

We go on to read about the treasures that Ezra and those with him carried as they returned to the city of Jerusalem. The Lord had provided them with a large amount of both silver and gold. Twelve of the priests were appointed to be in charge of this gold and silver. These twelve priests also had ten other men to help them transport these treasures back to Jerusalem. These vessels of silver and gold were holy because they had been given as a freewill offering to the Lord. As we have been reading about these offerings, the fact that they were freewill offerings has been emphasized several times. He we see that many people freely chose to give to the Lord so that His work could move forward in Jerusalem.

10. Read Ezra 8:24-36 and write when the people started their trip toward the city of Jerusalem.
11. Explain why the Lord laid it on the hearts of many people to give a freewill offering to the Lord.
12. Explain why you think that freewill offerings are emphasized several times in this passage.

The people had prayed and fasted as they had asked the Lord to provide protection for them as they traveled. Now they started on their way. This is an example of faith in action. The people had prayed but the only way that they could demonstrate their faith was to begin traveling toward Jerusalem. This is also true of our own faith. We do not begin to demonstrate our faith until we put feet to our prayers and begin to allow the Lord to use our lives to show that He will answer our prayers. Ezra and the people with him had faith that the Lord would answer their prayers and give them safety as they traveled toward Jerusalem. As a result, they were not afraid to start on their journey toward Jerusalem.

13. Read Ezra 8:24-36 and write what God did for the people as they traveled because His hand was upon them.
14. Explain why true faith in the promises of the Lord will be demonstrated by actions to serve the Lord.
15. Explain why you think that the Lord wants to work through your life to answer your prayers for others.

We could call the answer of God the reward of faith as He delivered them from the hand of the enemy. Because the people were willing to pray and then go, the Lord rewarded their faith by protecting them from all of their enemies that might have been along the way as they traveled. They reached Jerusalem in perfect safety. No one had tried to harm them at all. Then they delivered the treasures that they had brought to the people that were in charge of the temple treasures. This was followed by offering burnt offerings to the Lord.

16. Read Ezra 8:24-36 and write what the governors on this side of the river did when they received the letters from the king.
17. Explain why it is important for all followers of the Lord to learn to walk by faith in their lives.
18. Explain what these verses teach you about the way that we can show that our faith in the Lord and not ourselves.

After Ezra reached the city of Jerusalem, the princes came to him and told him how some of the people living at Jerusalem had rejected the commandments of the Lord. God had told the people of Israel that they were not to marry any of the people that lived in the land. Instead the people of Israel were to be a separate people whose lives were dedicated to the Lord. God knew that the people of Israel would follow the evil practices of the people around them if they began to marry the people of these other nations. By intermarrying in this way, the people were bringing sin into their own lives because of their disobedience to the Lord.

19. Read Ezra 9:1-15 and write who was leading the people in doing this evil thing of sinning against the commandments of the Lord.
20. Explain why God told the people of Israel that they were not to make marriages with the people of the other nations.
21. Explain why you think that it is easy for people to be led away from the Lord if they marry people that do not have their trust in the Lord.

Ezra was filled with great sorrow when he heard what the people in Judah and the city of Jerusalem were doing. To show his sorrow for the sins of the people, Ezra tore his clothes and pulled the hair out of his head and his beard. Ezra was filled with great sorrow to think that the people would turn away from the Lord so quickly after they had returned back to the land. Ezra just sat for the rest of the day. That evening at the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra began to pray to the Lord. He fell on his knees and spread out his hands as he prayed to the Lord.

22. Now read Ezra 9:1-15 and write how Ezra began his prayer to the Lord as he prayed for his people.
23. Explain why Ezra tore his clothes and pulled out his hair when he heard what the people were doing.
24. Explain why you think that the people had turned away from the Lord so quickly and began to marry people of the other nations.

As Ezra prayed, he spoke about the greatness of the sin of the people. The people had been very sinful in the past. As a result, it had been necessary for God to take the people out of their own land and take them as captives to another land. Then God had shown His mercy to His people by allowing a small group to return to the land from which they had earlier been taken. God had even caused the kings of Persia to show mercy to the people of Israel. As the people had prepared to return to the land of Judah, God had given them a commandment.

25. Read Ezra 9:1-15 and write what God had said about the land to which they were going as they had prepared to return.
26. Explain why it is important for all people to understand the greatness of their sin when they choose to disobey the commandments of the Lord.
27. Explain why you think that the Lord had caused the kings of Persia to show mercy to the people of Israel.

Because of the sinfulness of the people living in the land, the people of God had been told to marry their own people and not the people of the land. Now the people had turned from God and done exactly what the Lord had told them not to do. Ezra realized that if the people rebelled again now that they were back in the land that it would be necessary for the Lord to bring even greater judgment on the people. As a result of what the people had done, they could not stand before the Lord. Ezra realized that the entire nation was guilty in the sight of God because of the sins of the people.

28. Read Ezra 9:1-15 and write what Ezra said about the character of God as he concluded his prayer.
29. Explain why Ezra realized that the Lord would bring even greater judgment on the people if they rebelled against the Lord again.
30. Explain what lessons you learn about the importance of separation from sin for your own life.

The people in Jerusalem had been gathered in front of Ezra as he had prayed to the Lord. As the people listened to Ezra pray, they had begun to realize the greatness of their sin. By the time Ezra had completed his prayer to the Lord, the people were crying bitterly because of the greatness of their sin. The people realized that they had done wrong to marry foreign women. The leaders of Judah realized that their only hope was to repent of their sin and get things right before God. As a result, the people decided to make a covenant with God.

31. Read Ezra 10:1-17 and write the covenant that the people of Judah decided to make with

God.

32. Explain why it is important for any person who realizes that he or she has sinned to repent of their sin and get things right before the Lord.

33. Explain why you think that the people decided to make a covenant with God when they realized the greatness of their sin.

Ezra and all of the leaders of Judah agreed to make this covenant with God. Then these leaders sent letters to all of the people of God that lived in Jerusalem and Judah. The letters told them to come together in three days to the city of Jerusalem. These letters warned that any people that did not come to Jerusalem would be cut off from the people of God. This meant that they would no longer be considered Jews. On the third day all of the people gathered together. They gathered in the street in front of the temple. There they stood trembling.

34. Read Ezra 10:1-17 and write the reasons that the people were trembling as they stood in the street of the temple.

35. Explain why the leaders warned the people that they would be cut off from Israel if they did not gather in Jerusalem.

36. Explain why you think that the people were filled with trembling as they gathered in the city of Jerusalem.

Ezra told the people of Jerusalem and the rest of Judah that they had sinned against God by marrying foreign women. The people realized that God said they had sinned. Then they agreed to do all that Ezra suggested. However, the people said that they could not judge each case that day because many had sinned. They suggested that each case be judged individually. As a result, each of those that had done wrong was appointed a time when his case could be heard. Here we are reminded of the fact that sin must always be judged.

37. Read Ezra 10:1-17 and write what Ezra told the people to do that had married foreign wives.

38. Explain why it was important for each person to have their case judged individually.

39. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from these verses.

The people kept their promises. They were obedient and came at their appointed times to have their cases judged. Then all of the men that had married foreign wives agreed to separate themselves from their foreign wives. They realized that they were guilty of sin. As a result, they also offered a sacrifice to the Lord because of their sin. Then the Scripture gives us a list of the men that had married foreign wives. Some of these men had also had children by these foreign wives and so they separated from the children also. Here we see that the men that were guilty of sin made the choice to become obedient to God and His Word.

40. Read Ezra 10:18-44 and write down the sacrifice that these men offered for their sin.

41. Explain why it was important for each person that was guilty of sin to make the choice to become obedient to the Lord.

42. Explain why you think that it is important for people to keep every single promise that they make to the Lord.

Now reread Ezra 8:1-10:44 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther
Lesson 5
Nehemiah 1:1-3:32

A period of time occurred between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. As we come to the book of Nehemiah, some of the people of Judah had been back in Jerusalem for almost one hundred years. However, the wall of the city of Jerusalem had never been rebuilt around the city of Jerusalem even though Cyrus had given them permission to rebuild the wall nearly one hundred years earlier. In our lesson today, we will see that Nehemiah became concerned about the need to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem. Then we will see how the Lord worked because one man became concerned about doing the work of the Lord.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Tell about the terrible conditions that existed in the city of Jerusalem.
- Tell about the prayer life of Nehemiah.
- Explain how the Lord answered the prayer of Nehemiah.
- Explain why the people were encouraged to rebuild the wall.

Nehemiah lived in the land of Persia. In fact he lived in the capital city of Persia. There he had a very important job. He was the man that was the cupbearer to the king. The cupbearer was the man that tasted the food and drink of the king before the king ate it in order to make certain that no one had added poison to the food. If someone had added poison to the food, the cupbearer would have died instead of the king. For this reason a king often had great respect for his cupbearer because the king knew that the cupbearer was risking his life each day to protect the king. As we study this book, we will see that the king of Persia had a great respect for Nehemiah because he was a very faithful cupbearer for the king.

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 and write who came to visit Nehemiah in Shushan, the capital city of Persia.
2. Explain why the king would often develop great respect for the person that served him as his cupbearer.
3. Explain why you think that the Lord had worked to place Nehemiah in this position as the cupbearer of the king.

Hanani was one of the Jews that had returned to the land of Judah. Now he and a small group of men had returned to Persia for a short period of time. While they were in Persia, they came to the palace in Shushan to visit Nehemiah. The first question that Nehemiah asked Hanani and the other men was to ask them about the condition of the city of Jerusalem. He was concerned for his people that had returned to Judah and wanted to know what was happening to the people and to the city of Jerusalem. Here we have an important lesson for our own lives. We also need to be concerned about the spiritual condition of our people. Only when we have a real concern for our people will we be able to help them.

4. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 and write what Hanani said about the wall of the city of Jerusalem.
5. Explain why Nehemiah had a great concern for the spiritual condition of the people that had returned to Jerusalem.
6. Explain why you think that the first thing that Nehemiah did when he saw these men was ask them about the conditions in the city of Jerusalem.

These men that came to visit Nehemiah told him about the terrible conditions that were present in the city of Jerusalem. The people that lived in the city of Jerusalem were enduring great suffering. This was due to the fact that there was no wall around the city to protect them. This meant that their enemies could come at any time and take anything that they desired from the

people of Jerusalem. In addition, their enemies were also mocking and making fun of them. It had been almost one hundred years since Cyrus had allowed the people to return to Judah and Jerusalem. As a result, this suffering had lasted for a long time.

7. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 and write the first thing that Nehemiah did when he heard about the terrible conditions in Jerusalem.

8. Explain what these verses teach about the conditions that were present in the city of Jerusalem at this time.

9. Explain why you think that the people had done nothing to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem even though they had been back in the city for almost one hundred years.

When Nehemiah heard these words about the conditions in the city of Jerusalem, he did several things. He cried and mourned for his people for several days. During this time he did not eat any food. Instead he spent all of his time praying for his people that were in the city of Jerusalem. We go on to read the prayer of Nehemiah. Nehemiah began his prayer by recognizing the greatness of God. God is a very great God. He is also faithful and keeps His Word. God shows love and mercy to those who love Him and obey His commandments. Nehemiah was eager to pray to the Lord because he knew that the Lord would show love and mercy to his people.

10. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 and write what Nehemiah said about the ear of the Lord.

11. Explain why Nehemiah chose to fast and pray when he heard about the terrible conditions in Jerusalem.

12. Explain why you think that Nehemiah began his prayer by recognizing the greatness of God.

Nehemiah asked the Lord to hear as he confessed his sins and the sins of his people. Nehemiah realized that the terrible conditions in the city of Jerusalem were a result of sin. Before anything else could be done, there must be confession of sins. Nehemiah realized that he and the rest of the people were very sinful. Here we see that Nehemiah identified himself with the sins of his people and did not try to separate himself from them. They had failed to keep the commandments of the Lord. They had failed to walk in the ways that were taught in the Word of God. As a result, their lives were full of sin and God was allowing judgment to come on His people.

13. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 and write what Nehemiah asked the Lord to remember.

14. Explain why it is important that Nehemiah chose to identify himself with the sins of the people and not separate himself from them.

15. Explain why you think that the people had failed to walk in the ways that are taught in the Word of God.

God had said many years earlier that if the people rebelled against Him that He would scatter them among the nations. That was exactly what had happened. However, God also promised the people that if they would return to Him that He would gather them from all of the places where they had been scattered. God promised to bring them back to the city where He had chosen to set His name. Of course that city was the city of Jerusalem. Then Nehemiah spoke of the fact that those who had returned to the city of Jerusalem had a desire to serve the Lord. Now the prayer of Nehemiah included asking the Lord to make it possible for him to return to Jerusalem and help the people in Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.

16. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 and write why Nehemiah asked the Lord to grant him mercy in the sight of the king.

17. Explain why the Lord chose to bring some of the people back to Jerusalem from the lands where they had been scattered.

18. Explain why you think that Nehemiah included himself as he confessed the sins of the people.

Nehemiah prayed that the Lord would prepare the heart of the king so that the king would allow Nehemiah to make his request to the king. One day the king ordered a glass of wine. Because he was the cupbearer, Nehemiah took the wine to the king. Then the king asked Nehemiah why he was so sad since he was not sick. Here we see that Nehemiah could not hide his sorrow from the king. The king wanted to know what kind of sorrow Nehemiah had in his heart. In that day it was a very dangerous thing to be sad in the presence of the king. The king could order a person to be put to death for being sad in his presence.

19. Read Nehemiah 2:1-11 and write how Nehemiah felt when he heard the words of the king.

20. Explain why the king wanted to know what kind of sorrow Nehemiah had in his heart that caused him to be so sad.

21. Explain why you think that the king could tell that Nehemiah was sad when Nehemiah brought him his wine.

Although Nehemiah was filled with fear, he quickly began to tell the king why he was sad. He told the king that he could not be happy as long as the city where his parents were buried was unprotected from the enemy. The king immediately realized that Nehemiah had a request to make and so the king asked him for his request. Nehemiah paused for a moment before he answered the king. During this pause he prayed to the Lord and asked the Lord to give him the words to speak to the king. There are also many times in our lives when we should pray silently and ask the Lord to give us the words to speak as we speak.

22. Read Nehemiah 2:1-11 and write why Nehemiah asked the king for permission to return to the city of Jerusalem.

23. Explain why it is important to pray and ask the Lord for guidance before we answer the questions of others.

24. Explain why you realize that the Lord will hear your prayers just as well even when it is necessary for you to pray silently.

The king listened to the request of Nehemiah. Then the king asked Nehemiah how long he would be gone. The king then agreed to allow Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem. Nehemiah also asked the king to do certain other things for him. He asked for letters that would give him permission to pass through the various countries between Persia and Jerusalem. Such a request was necessary for safety. Nehemiah also asked for permission to cut any timbers that he needed from the forest of the king. The king granted all of the requests of Nehemiah.

25. Read Nehemiah 2:1-11 and write why the king granted all of the requests that Nehemiah requested.

26. Explain why Nehemiah knew exactly what to ask the king when the king agreed to let him return to Jerusalem.

27. Explain why you think that it is important to plan as well as to pray so that we are prepared to act when the opportunity comes.

The Lord had prepared the heart of the king for the requests of Nehemiah. The king also sent a group of soldiers with Nehemiah. Here we see that the king did even more than Nehemiah requested. When Nehemiah reached the city of Jerusalem, there were certain men by the names of Sanballat and Tobiah that were very unhappy because Nehemiah had come to help the people of Jerusalem. These men were unhappy because they were the enemies of the Jews. They did not want anyone to help the Jews. We will read about these enemies many times in the book of Nehemiah.

28. Read Nehemiah 2:1-11 and write how unhappy these men were when they heard that Nehemiah had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

29. Explain what these verses teach about the way that the Lord answered the prayer of Nehemiah.

30. Explain why you realize that they will always be enemies of the Lord when we are called to do the work of the Lord.

After Nehemiah had been at Jerusalem for three days, he and a few of the other men went out at night and rode around the city to inspect the walls of the city that had been destroyed more than one hundred and fifty years earlier. Nehemiah wanted to know what needed to be done before he told the people why he had returned to Jerusalem. Here we see an important lesson about leadership. A leader must first find out what needs to be done. Then he needs to encourage the people to join him in doing that work. This was what Nehemiah did.

31. Read Nehemiah 2:12-20 and write what Nehemiah told the people the next day about the condition of Jerusalem.

32. Explain why an effective leader will determine what needs to be done before he begins to share his plans with the people.

33. Explain why you think that the Lord will give us guidance as we both pray to the Lord and survey the work that needs to be done.

Nehemiah began by reminding the people of the terrible condition that they and the city of Jerusalem were experiencing. Then he encouraged the people to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. After Nehemiah had spoken these things to the people, he then went on to tell them what God had already done for them in order to make it possible for the people to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah told the people about the words of the king. Here we learn another important lesson about leadership. Nehemiah encouraged the people by telling the people what the Lord had already done. Nehemiah did not need to boast about his own leadership.

34. Read Nehemiah 2:12-20 and write what the people answered when they heard the words of Nehemiah.

35. Explain why Nehemiah reminded the people of the terrible condition that they were in before he told what the Lord had already done to make it possible to rebuild the wall.

36. Explain why you think that people need both to be reminded of the condition that they are in and also be reminded what the Lord has already done for them.

For one hundred years the people of Jerusalem had talked about the need to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. However, no one had done anything to make it possible to begin rebuilding the wall. Now because one man was willing to take the leadership and encourage the people to trust in the Lord instead of themselves, the people were motivated by the Lord and encouraged to work together to rebuild the wall. Today most Christians are willing to do the work of the Lord if the leaders will encourage the people and show them how to do the work of the Lord. They will realize the way that the Lord is working. Nehemiah also told the enemies that God was the One that was helping Judah.

37. Read Nehemiah 2:12-20 and write of what the enemies of Judah accused Nehemiah to prevent the rebuilding of the wall.

38. Explain what these verses teach about the importance of godly leadership in the work of the Lord.

39. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life about leadership from these verses.

In chapter three we have the places where each group of men worked on the wall. As we study this chapter we see that there were no gaps between the workers. Everyone worked in the place where the Lord had placed him. Some had more difficult places while others had easier places. Today we also need to be working in the place where the Lord has placed us whether the work the Lord has given us is easy or difficult. We should not complain because we think that someone else has an easier job than the work that the Lord has given us to do. Instead we should all work together so that the work of Lord will be accomplished in all places.

40. Read Nehemiah 3:1-32 and write who repaired the sheep gate.

41. Explain why it was important that there were no gaps between the workers.

42. Explain why you think that the Lord gives some people more difficult responsibilities than others.

Now reread Nehemiah 1:1-3:32 and write down the three most important lessons that you

learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

Lesson 6

Nehemiah 4:1-5:19

In our last lesson we learned how Nehemiah returned to the city of Jerusalem to help the people rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The devil did not want the wall of Jerusalem to be rebuilt. As a result, he provided several forms of opposition to stop the building of the wall of Jerusalem. The devil has not changed or learned new ways to stop the work of the Lord. The devil still uses these same kinds of opposition to try and keep us from doing the work of the Lord. By studying the way that Nehemiah met these various forms of opposition, we are given several instructions about the right way to meet the opposition of the devil when he tries to hinder us from doing the work of the Lord.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain how to deal with opposition from mocking.
- Explain how to deal with discouragement.
- Explain how to deal with greed.
- Explain why it is important to lead by example.

As we concluded our last lesson, we saw that everyone was working in his assigned place to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. However, the enemies of the Lord were very angry when they heard that the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was going forward. As a result, they came to try and stop the work. Sanballat began by mocking the Jews. He said that the people were feeble Jews who would never be able to rebuild the walls of the city. Then Tobiah added his mocking to that of Sanballat. Tobiah said that a fox could easily knock over the walls that the Jews were building around the city of Jerusalem.

1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-9 and write what Nehemiah did when he heard the mocking of these men.
2. Explain why the first way that Satan often tries to hinder the work of the Lord is by trying to convince people that they cannot do what God is asking them to do.
3. Explain why you think that Satan will always raise up people to try to hinder the work of the Lord when the work of the Lord is being accomplished.

Nehemiah prayed and asked the Lord to hear the words of the enemies of Jerusalem. Then Nehemiah asked the Lord to bring their mocking back on their own heads. The Lord is the One that is the judge. He will judge the sins of those who oppose the work of the Lord. For that reason it is not our responsibility to try and judge them. We are told to leave all judgment to the Lord. After Nehemiah had prayed and asked the Lord to handle the mocking of the enemies, he continued the rebuilding of the wall. He was not going to let the mocking of the enemies stop the work of the Lord. Soon the wall had been built to half of its height.

4. Read Nehemiah 4:1-9 and write why the people of Jerusalem were able to rebuild the wall so quickly.
5. Explain why we can leave all judgment to the Lord and do not need to try and judge the enemies of the work of the Lord ourselves.
6. Explain why you think that it is important to pray and ask the Lord to handle the opposition to the work of the Lord.

The people had a mind to work because they were doing the work of the Lord. They were also depending on Him for help. As a result, the enemies of the Lord became very angry. They were not happy at all to see the work of the Lord going forward. They hated to see the holes in the wall being closed. Then the enemies joined together to come and fight against Jerusalem.

This time Nehemiah met the opposition by praying to the Lord and then setting a guard so that the enemy could not make a surprise attack against the city. Here we see that when the devil fails to stop us in one way that he will quickly try to stop us in other ways. His main concern is to try to hinder and stop the work of the Lord so that it will not go forward.

7. Read Nehemiah 4:1-9 and write how the enemies of the work felt when they saw that the building of the wall was going forward.

8. Explain why it is important for Christians to also have a mind to work and do the will of the Lord in the world.

9. Explain why lessons you learn for your own life from these early forms of opposition to the work of the Lord.

When the devil failed to stop the work of the Lord by the first two forms of opposition, he tried a third form of opposition that is often more effective. He caused some of the men that were working on the wall to become discouraged. These men said that the workers were becoming so tired that they could not haul away the rubbish that was left as they did the work. In addition, these men had also been listening to the threats of the enemy instead of listening to the Word of the Lord. The enemies had told them ten times that they would make a surprise attack at a time when the people were not prepared for that attack.

10. Read Nehemiah 4:10-23 and write what Nehemiah gave to the families that were working on the wall.

11. Explain why discouragement stops many people from continuing to do the work of the Lord.

12. Explain why you think that people often begin to look at the problems instead of the progress when they are discouraged.

To be equipped to be able to fight against the enemy if they did attack, the people were equipped with weapons to be able to fight. In the same way, our weapons for spiritual warfare are mentioned in Ephesians 6. Then Nehemiah encouraged the people by reminding them of the greatness of the Lord. The people had become discouraged because they were looking at the enemy and at their own problems instead of looking to the Lord. The Lord is the One that is the problem solver. Once the people began to look to the Lord again instead of looking at the problems, they were ready to return to the work that the Lord had given to them.

13. Read Nehemiah 4:10-23 and write what the people did after they heard the words of Nehemiah.

14. Explain why true followers of the Lord will be encouraged when they are reminded of the greatness of the Lord.

15. Explain why you think that it is important to help people take their focus off of the problems and help them remember that the Lord is the problem solver.

From that time, half of the people worked on the wall and the other half stood guard to protect the workers from the enemy. Those who were working on the wall also had their swords at their sides so that they were prepared to fight at a moments notice. Regardless of the opposition of the enemy, the work of the Lord continued to go forward. This was due to the fact that the people had their trust in the Lord as they worked on the wall. The wall of Jerusalem was a very long wall. This meant that the people were widely scattered along the wall. As a result, the people were instructed to come and fight at the place where they heard the sound of the trumpet.

16. Read Nehemiah 4:10-23 and write who Nehemiah told the people would fight for them.

17. Explain why nothing could stop the progress of the work as long as the people had their trust in the Lord.

18. Explain why you think that we also need to be prepared at all times to deal with the opposition of Satan to the work of the Lord.

We also see the way that the people worked as they rebuilt the wall. We read that they worked from early in the morning until the stars appeared at night. In addition, the people that lived in other areas of Judah remained within the walls of Jerusalem so that they could work during the day and also serve as guards at night. The people were so concerned about doing the work of the Lord that they did not even take off their clothes except to wash them. Here we see that the people were making an all out effort to complete the work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

19. Read Nehemiah 4:10-23 and write what the people had in one hand as they did the work with the other hand.
20. Explain what these verses teach about the desire of the people to do the work of the Lord.
21. Explain why you think that the people were willing to make an all out effort to complete the work on the wall.

When the devil cannot stop the work of the Lord by outside opposition, he will try to get some of those who are followers of the Lord to hinder the work of the Lord. This was what happened in the city of Jerusalem. Some of the Jews saw an opportunity to get rich. The devil will always try to encourage people to think about their own desires instead of thinking about what is best for the work of the Lord. Many of the people at Jerusalem were very poor. As a result, some of the rich people were forcing the poor people to mortgage their lands and houses in order to buy food for themselves because they were having a time of famine.

22. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 and write the other reason that these poor people were forced to mortgage their lands.
23. Explain why there are people that will put their own desires first ahead of the work of the Lord.
24. Explain why you think that there are also some people that will take advantage of any situation to try and make money for themselves.

Some of the poor had even been forced to sell their sons and daughters to be servants in order to pay their taxes. This was happening because the rich were charging such high interest rates. Now these people were not able to redeem their children because the rich people had also taken their lands. Here we see that the only concern of the rich was to get what they wanted for themselves. The rich were not concerned about the needs of the poor. They did not even care that the poor were working night and day in order to make the city safe. Their only concern was to make as much money as possible even though it meant taking advantage of the poor people.

25. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 and write how Nehemiah said he felt when he heard these words.
26. Explain why the rich will often take advantage of other people to try and gain more riches for themselves.
27. Explain why you think that the Lord tells us that it is important to have a great concern for the poor.

Nehemiah was filled with anger when he heard that some of the people were using the conditions in the city of Jerusalem to get rich rather than choosing to serve the Lord. Nehemiah called these men together and spoke to them. He told them that they were doing wrong to charge interest of their brothers. God had told the people of Israel that they were not to charge each other interest. When these men heard the words of Nehemiah, they kept silent because they knew that they were guilty. People will often keep silent when they had been caught committing sin.

28. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 and write what Nehemiah called to talk to the people that were taking advantage of the poor.
29. Explain why Satan will try to divide Christians when he cannot stop them with outside opposition.
30. Explain why you think that the Lord had told the Jews that they were not to charge interest of other Jews.

We go on to read how Nehemiah handled this form of opposition. He talked first to these men about their responsibility to fear the Lord. This is always the first step when people are hindering the work of the Lord. They must be encouraged to get back into a right relationship with the Lord before they will begin to obey the Lord. After encouraging the people to get right with the Lord, Nehemiah asked them to stop charging interest to those to whom they had loaned money. Here we see that once people are back in a right relationship with the Lord, then they will listen when we talk to them about being obedient to the commandments of the Lord.

31. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 and write what Nehemiah asked these men to restore to the poor people.

32. Explain why it is important to remind people of the importance of fearing the Lord and having a right relationship with Him.

33. Explain why you think that people will obey the commandments of the Lord if we first help them get back into a right relationship with the Lord.

When the people heard the words of Nehemiah, they agreed to restore the things that Nehemiah had mentioned. Nehemiah also called the priests to be witnesses of the statements of these men. Then Nehemiah stood up and shook out his lap. He said that this is what would happen to any of the people that failed to keep their promise. God would shake them out by taking everything that they had and then giving it to others. God would cause them to become people that had nothing. Here we see that God causes people to reap what they sow.

34. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 and write what all of the people said when Nehemiah had finished speaking to them.

35. Explain why Nehemiah gave a warning to the people that the Lord would judge them if they failed to keep their promise.

36. Explain why you know that the Lord will cause people to reap what they sow whether what they sow is good or bad.

Nehemiah also taught the people some lessons about sharing with others by the example of his own life. During the twelve years that he was the governor of Judah, he did not charge the people any taxes for himself even though he had the right to do so. Instead he used his own money to provide for his needs and the needs of his servants. In addition, he and his servants all worked on the wall rather than taking it easy as most governors would do. Here we see that the life of Nehemiah was a real example of sharing. He did not say one thing and do the opposite. Instead Nehemiah chose to make it possible for others to have enough.

37. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 and write how many of the workers on the wall Nehemiah fed at his own expense.

38. Explain why it is very important for a spiritual leader to make his own life an example for the Lord.

39. Explain why you think that it is important for you in your own life to show by your own example the things that you are teaching others.

Nehemiah also did several other things that provided a real example for the people to follow. People from the surrounding areas had come to help build the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked one hundred and fifty of these men to eat at his table. He provided the food that they ate so that they could spend all of their time working on the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah also provided this food with money from his own funds instead of expecting others to supply this money. He did not charge any taxes from the rest of the people to provide this food.

40. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 and write how Nehemiah asked the Lord to think about him because of the choices that he made.

41. Explain why Nehemiah did not charge the other people taxes to pay for his own needs even though that was his right as the governor.

42. Explain why it is more important to you in your own life to serve others rather than try to be served by others.

Now reread Nehemiah 4:1-5:19 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther
Lesson 7
Nehemiah 6:1-7:73

In our last lesson we learned that there was much opposition to the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Satan did every possible thing that he could do to hinder or stop the work of rebuilding the wall. Today we will learn that Satan used some additional forms of opposition as the walls were getting closer to being completed. The kinds of opposition that we will study today are some of the most subtle ways that the devil works. We need to be well prepared for these forms of opposition because we will certainly face them if we are doing the work of the Lord. That is why we must depend on the Lord for strength instead of our own strength. Nehemiah showed the people how to depend on the Lord to stop the opposition. As a result, the people were able to finish the rebuilding of the wall in a very short time.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain the final forms of opposition that were faced in building the wall.
- Explain why the wall was built so quickly.
- Explain why certain men were placed in charge of Jerusalem.
- Tell about the people that returned to Judah.

The devil had tried to stop the work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem by ridicule, by discouragement and by the greed of some of those who lived inside the wall. However, all of these forms of opposition had failed. The devil did not give up. Instead he saved his most dangerous forms of opposition for the time when the wall was almost complete. The reason that these forms of opposition are so dangerous is due to the fact that they do not look like opposition at all. The wall had been completed except for installing the gates. Then the enemies of the people of God sent a message to Nehemiah. Their plan was to stop the work before the wall was completed even though the wall was now very close to completion.

1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-14 and write the message that the enemies sent to Nehemiah now that the wall was almost complete.
2. Explain why the devil will never give up in his opposition to the work of the Lord.
3. Explain why you think that Satan will sometimes try to disguise his opposition by trying to make it look like it is not opposition.

The enemies of the work of the Lord wanted Nehemiah to come and have a planning conference with them. Today many churches that reject the word of God are trying to get churches that believe the Word of God to plan together with them. Those churches that reject the Word of God say that all churches should work together to do the work of God. However, such cooperation will only destroy those churches that still teach the Word of God. This is one of the most dangerous tricks of the devil. This was also how the enemies of the rebuilding of the wall tried to deceive Nehemiah. They encouraged him to come and meet with them.

4. Read Nehemiah 6:1-14 and write the answer that Nehemiah sent to these men when they asked him to meet with them.
5. Explain why the enemies of the Lord invited Nehemiah to come and plan together with them.
6. Explain why you think that Satan wants to hinder the work of the Lord by keeping Christians busy so that they do not have time to do the work of the Lord.

Nehemiah gave the answer that we need to give to those who reject the Word of God. We are doing a great work and we do not have the time to attend their planning conferences or work with them. The enemies then sent letters in which they accused Nehemiah of trying to rebel against the king. Here they showed that they were really just trying to stop the work of the Lord.

Nehemiah told these men that they had just invented their lies in their own hearts in an effort to weaken the hands of the workers that were rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah asked the Lord to strengthen the hands of the workers instead of letting them be weakened by the false accusations of the enemies.

7. Read Nehemiah 6:1-14 and write where Shemaiah told Nehemiah to meet him as Satan tried one more time to stop the work of the rebuilding of the wall.

8. Explain why Nehemiah told the enemies that he was doing a great work and did not have time to meet with them.

9. Explain why you think that the enemies started telling lies in order to weaken the hands of the workers.

Here we see that the devil made one last attempt to stop the work of the Lord. Shemaiah told Nehemiah to go inside the temple so that the enemies would not be able to kill him. Today the devil has convinced many Christians that they should carry out all of their activities within the safety of the church walls so that the devil will not destroy the faith of the Christians. God has commanded us to go out into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. If the devil can keep Christians inside the church, he will keep them from preaching the Gospel to most of the people in the world because most of the people will never go into a church.

10. Read Nehemiah 6:1-14 and write who had hired Shemaiah to try and get Nehemiah to meet with him in the temple.

11. Explain what these verses teach about some of the ways that the devil tries to stop the work of the Lord.

12. Explain why you think that Satan will try to get Christians to do their ministry inside the church building instead of sharing the Gospel with people where they live, work and spend their free time.

Nehemiah realized that Shemaiah was hired by the enemies to stop the work of the Lord. As a result, Nehemiah refused to go and hide in the temple. Instead Nehemiah prayed that the Lord would judge the enemies that were trying to stop the work of the Lord. Because Nehemiah and the people placed their trust in the Lord and allowed Him to handle the opposition of the enemies, the work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem was completed in a very short time. For almost one hundred years the people had been back in the land and had probably talked many times about the need to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.

13. Read Nehemiah 6:15-19 and write how long it took to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem when all of the people worked together.

14. Explain why the people were able to complete in a very short time what they had not completed in the previous one hundred years.

15. Explain why you think that it is important to trust the Lord and let Him handle the opposition of the enemies.

A task that the people had talked about for one hundred years was completed in only fifty two days. Many times we talk about all of the work that needs to be done for the Lord. However, instead of focusing on the power of the Lord to do the work, we focus on the problems and never get started doing the work that the Lord has called us to do. Here we see that the work of the Lord can be completed when we stop talking and start working. In less than two months the people completed the work that they had probably talked about for one hundred years. When we depend on the Lord for strength instead of ourselves, we will be able to complete the work that He has called us to do.

16. Read Nehemiah 6:15-19 and write how the enemies felt when they saw that the wall of Jerusalem had been completed.

17. Explain why it was important for the people of Judah to stop talking and start working in order to complete the work of the Lord.

18. Explain why you think that many people choose to focus on the problems instead of

focusing on the power of the Lord to do the work.

The enemies realized that it was the Lord that had caused the work on the wall of Jerusalem to be completed. They were very unhappy when they saw what the Lord had done. When we allow the Lord to work through our lives, many things will be accomplished for the Lord because He will be the One that is doing the work. The building of the wall had been impossible as long as the people had depended on their own strength. However, it was completed very quickly when the people depended on the strength of the Lord.

19. Read Nehemiah 6:15-19 and write the name of the enemy that had two children married to leaders in the city of Jerusalem.

20. Explain why the Lord is able to accomplish many things when we allow Him to work through our lives.

21. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem.

Although the wall of Jerusalem was completed, that did not mean that the enemies stopped trying to hinder the work of the Lord. Tobiah had become a friend of many of the leaders of Judah because he was married to one of the women of Judah. Because the people had made marriages with those that did not trust and serve the Lord, those marriages were a constant source of problems for the people of Judah. The leaders of Judah kept giving good reports about Tobiah even though he was one of the enemies of Judah. In the same way, marriages of Christians to those who are not Christians will cause the Christians to be deceived about the will of the Lord.

22. Read Nehemiah 6:15-19 and write who sent letters to Nehemiah telling about the good deeds of Tobiah.

23. Explain how Tobiah had become a friend of many of the leaders of Judah even though he was one of the key leaders trying to hinder the work of the Lord.

24. Explain why you think that these verses show one of the very important reasons why followers of the Lord should not marry those who reject the Lord.

Nehemiah had promised the king that he would return to Persia at a certain time. One day the time came for Nehemiah to return to Persia. This meant that Nehemiah had to appoint others to be in charge of the city of Jerusalem. One of the men that had originally told Nehemiah about the conditions in the city of Jerusalem was Hanani. Now Hanani and Hananiah were appointed to be in charge at Jerusalem. These men were appointed because they were faithful men that had a greater fear of God than most of the people.

25. Read Nehemiah 7:1-4 and write when these men were told to open the gates of Jerusalem each morning.

26. Explain why Nehemiah felt that it was important to appoint faithful men to be in charge of Jerusalem.

27. Explain why you think that people that fear the Lord and serve Him will usually be faithful people.

Although Nehemiah was returning to Persia, he still had a great concern for the city of Jerusalem and the people in the city. He realized that the enemies would continue to try and stop the work of the Lord at Jerusalem even though the walls had been rebuilt. For this reason Nehemiah did not want the gates of the city to be open when there was no one to guard them. As a result, he told the people to close the gates of the city each night and not open them till the sun was hot in the morning. The city was a large city but there were very few people living in the city. This meant that everything must be organized so that the city would be protected from the enemies.

28. Read Nehemiah 7:1-4 and write what part of the wall each person was to guard when he was assigned to guard the wall.

29. Explain why Nehemiah knew that the enemies would not give up their efforts even though the wall of Jerusalem had been completed.
30. Explain why you think that it is important to understand that Satan will continue to work as long as he is allowed to do so.

God had one more thing that He wanted Nehemiah to do before he returned to the country of Persia. God encouraged Nehemiah to make a record of the people that had returned to the city of Jerusalem. Then Nehemiah found the registration that had been made when the people had first returned to Jerusalem about one hundred years earlier. This gave Nehemiah the information that he needed. This list contained the people that had chosen to serve the Lord even if it meant hardship and suffering. They had left the easy life in Babylon to return to a city that had been destroyed. They had chosen to return to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

31. Read Nehemiah 7:1-62 and write how many of the Nethanim and servants of Solomon had returned at that time.
32. Explain why the Lord encouraged Nehemiah to make a record of the people that had returned to Jerusalem.
33. Explain why you think that the people had chosen to return to Jerusalem one hundred years earlier even though they knew it meant hardship and suffering.

Some of the people that had returned at that time claimed to be priests but could not show their genealogy to prove that they were priests. These men had taken the family name of Barzillai because their father had taken one of the daughters of Barzillai as his wife. The family had chosen to take the name of Barzillai instead of the name of the father. As a result, the descendents of this family could not find their registration among the genealogy of the priests. Many times we think that the lists of names in the Bible are not important. Here we see one of the reasons why those lists of names are very important.

34. Read Nehemiah 7:63-73 and write what these people were not allowed to eat because their genealogy could not be found.
35. Explain why it was important for the priests in Judah to have the genealogy lists so that they could show that they were priests of God.
36. Explain why you think that the father of some of the men had chosen to take the family name of his wife instead of his own family name.

These men were excluded from the priesthood because their genealogy could not be found. This was the reason that they could not eat the most holy things. If they would have eaten of the holy things, then those things would have been polluted in the sight of God. In the New Testament we have an example of a similar thing. As Christians, we are not to take communion if there is unconfessed sin in our lives. We are told that we may bring judgment on ourselves if we do not confess our sins first. That is why we are to each examine our own lives and confess any sin that has remained unconfessed. Then we will be in fellowship with the Lord as we take communion.

37. Read Nehemiah 7:63-73 and write how long these men were excluded from the priesthood.
38. Explain why certain men at the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem were excluded from serving as priests.
39. Explain why you think that it is important for all Christians to examine their own lives before they take communion.

We are also given the total number of people that had returned to Judah and the city of Jerusalem when the first group was allowed to return. There were 42,360 people that had returned at that time. In addition, there were 7,337 servants and 245 singers that had returned. This meant that the total size of the group of people that had returned to Judah was about fifty thousand people. These people had also taken certain things with them. These things included animals and certain riches. These riches had been given by some of the people that did not return.

40. Read Nehemiah 7:63-73 and write when the people entered the cities of Judah when they returned.
41. Explain why it is important to know that a large number of those that chose to return to Judah were servants.
42. Explain why you think that God wanted the total number of people recorded that returned to Jerusalem.

Now reread Nehemiah 6:1-7:73 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

Lesson 8

Nehemiah 8:1-10:39

In our last several lessons we have learned how Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to come and help the people rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The king had allowed Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem when he promised to return at a certain time. Just before Nehemiah returned to the land of Persia, he gathered all of the people in Jerusalem together. Then Nehemiah had Ezra read the books of the Bible that Moses had written. Nehemiah wanted to make certain that all of the people had heard the Law read to them. We will learn that the reading of the Word of God brought conviction to the hearts and lives of the people. Today we will learn what happened as a result of that conviction.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain what happened when the people heard the Word of God.
- Tell how the people praised God for deliverance.
- Tell how the people rebelled against God.
- Tell about the covenant that the people made.

Even though Nehemiah had to return to the country of Persia, he had a real concern to see the people continue to serve the Lord. As a result, he asked Ezra to read the book of the Law to the people before he returned to Persia. Then all of the people gathered together and asked Ezra to read the books of the Law to them. All of the men and women and all of the children that could understand listened as Ezra read the books of the Law to the people. The people all listened very closely as Ezra read even though he read from morning until noon. These people had seen what the Lord had done in the rebuilding of the wall and so they now had a concern to serve the Lord. They also have a great respect for the Lord.

1. Read Nehemiah 8:1-18 and write what the people did when Ezra opened the book so that he could begin to read.
2. Explain why the way that the people saw the Lord work in the rebuilding of the wall caused them to want to obey the Word of God and serve the Lord.
3. Explain why you think that the people were listening attentively to the reading of the Word of God even though the reading lasting from morning until noon.

The respect of the people for God caused the people to stand while the Word of God was being read to them. Ezra and the people also prayed and worshiped the Lord before Ezra began reading the Word of God to them. As Ezra read the law several other men were standing beside him. These men took turns explaining the various parts of the law that Ezra was reading. This was to help the people understand exactly what the Word of God was saying. Many people can hear the Word of God without understanding it. This is why it is important to teach and explain what the Word of God says.

4. Read Nehemiah 8:1-18 and write how they read as they read the law of God.
5. Explain why it was important for some of the leaders to take time to explain the Word of God to the people after each section was read.
6. Explain why you realize that is also very important for us today to explain the Word of God to people as we read it to them.

As Ezra and the other men read the Word of God, they pronounced each word clearly so that the people could understand each word. This is also an important lesson for our own lives when we read the Word of God publicly. When the people heard the Word of God, they began to cry and mourn. Here we see that the Word of God brings conviction to those who listen to it.

Ezra and the Levites that were helping him told the people not to mourn because it was a day that was holy to the Lord. Instead the people were encouraged to go and eat and share their food with those who were needy. Then the people did as they were told.

7. Read Nehemiah 8:1-18 and write why the people were filled with joy as they went to their homes.

8. Explain why the reading of the Word of God will often bring conviction to the people who are hearing the Word read.

9. Explain why you think that Nehemiah told the people not to mourn but to go and eat and share their food with the needy.

Just as the Word of God brings conviction of sin, the Word also brings joy when we understand the meaning of the Word of God. The people gathered a second day to learn more about the Word of God. That day they read that they were to build booths and observe the Feast of Tabernacles during the seventh month. All of the people were instructed to build booths because it was the seventh month. Then the people lived in these booths for seven days. The people were filled with gladness as they celebrated this feast because they had not celebrated this feast by living in booths since the days of Joshua.

10. Read Nehemiah 8:1-18 and write what the people did when Ezra prayed before reading the Word of God.

11. Explain why the Word of God had such an effect on the people when they heard the Word of God read.

12. Explain why people can be filled with joy when they understand the meaning of the Word of God.

After the Feast of Tabernacles, the people gathered together again to hear some more of the Word of God read. This time they were fasting and wearing sackcloth because of the conviction that the Word of God brought to their lives. Then the people separated themselves from the foreigners that rejected the Word of God. Here we see that true repentance brings separation from sin so that the people no longer participate in the sinful practices of those who reject the Word of God. The people also confessed their own sins. Then they stood listening to the Word of God for one fourth of the day. This was followed by spending the next fourth of the day confessing their sins.

13. Read Nehemiah 9:1-15 and write what the people did in addition to confessing their sins.

14. Explain why the people separated themselves from the foreigners that rejected the Word of God.

15. Explain why you think that the people realized the need to confess their sins after they heard the Word of God read.

Here we see that the confession of sins and the worship of the Lord go together. When we confess our sins to the Lord, our desire will be to worship the Lord because our hearts are right with Him. Then the Levites led the people in praising the Lord. They also gave a review of the way that the Lord had worked in the nation of Israel. God is the One that deserves all praise because His name is greater than any other name. God is the One that made the heavens and the earth. He is the One that preserves all people. The Lord is the One that chose Abraham and brought him out of the land of his fathers. The Lord also gave him the name of Abraham. Then the Lord led Abraham and caused him to have a faithful heart.

16. Read Nehemiah 9:1-15 and write what the Lord made with Abraham.

17. Explain why confession of sin will give us a desire to worship the Lord from our hearts.

18. Explain why you think that the Levites helped the people to focus on giving praise to the Lord for what He had done for Abraham.

In the covenant that the Lord made with Abraham, He promised to give the land of Canaan to the family of Abraham. When the people went down into the land of Egypt, God heard their

cry when Pharaoh made them suffer. God showed great signs and brought great judgment on Egypt before Pharaoh allowed the people to leave the land of Egypt. God divided the Red Sea so that Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. Then God used the Red Sea to destroy the army of Egypt. God also led the people by a cloud and gave them commandments so that they would know what was right. God also provided food and water for the people as they traveled.

19. Read Nehemiah 9:1-15 and write one way that the Lord provided water for the people as they traveled through the wilderness.

20. Explain how God had cared for His people in the past.

21. Explain why you think that the Lord gave commandments to the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness.

Although God had done all of these things for the people of Israel, the people hardened their hearts and refused to obey the Lord. They did not remember all of the things that God had done for them. Instead they made a golden calf that they claimed was the god that had brought them out of the land of Egypt. Even when the people rebelled against God, He did not forget them. Instead He continued to lead them and provide for their needs. He sent the Holy Spirit to teach them. For forty years the people lacked nothing as they traveled through the wilderness.

22. Read Nehemiah 9:16-37 and write what happened to the clothes of the people as they traveled through the wilderness.

23. Explain why God did not forget the people of Israel in the wilderness even though they rebelled against Him.

24. Explain why you think that the people hardened their hearts and forgot the things that God had done for them.

God also gave the people victory over strong enemies. They captured strong cities and received a rich land. The land was a very rich land and they got all of the food that they could eat. However, they rebelled against the Word of God. They killed the prophets who warned them of coming judgment. Then God allowed their enemies to come and make them suffer. When the people suffered, they would call for help and God would deliver them. However, they would turn away from God again as soon as He delivered them. This happened many times. The people continued in their rebellion against the Lord.

25. Read Nehemiah 9:16-37 and write why God did not completely destroy the nation of Israel.

26. Explain why God would deliver the people when they cried to Him for help even though they had turned away from Him.

27. Explain why you think that the Lord chose to be so patient with the people of Israel even though they turned away from Him many times.

God had shown mercy to His people even when they had rebelled against Him many times. The people realized that God had been just to allow the people to be punished. The people had not served the Lord even though He had given them a rich land. Now the people realized that they needed to serve the Lord instead of following the evil ways of their fathers. Because of the blessing of the Lord, the people wanted to make a covenant with God. They wanted to serve Him and put Him first in their lives.

28. Read Nehemiah 9:16-37 and write what the people said about the character of God even though they realized that they had done wickedness.

29. Explain why God showed mercy to the people of Israel even though they rebelled against Him many times.

30. Explain why you think that the reading of the Word of God caused the people to want to make a covenant with the Lord and put Him first in their lives.

We go on to read the list of the men that signed the covenant that the people made with the Lord. These men were the leaders of the people. They were signing as the representatives of their families. They were also signing as the representatives of the people. The rest of the

people also set themselves apart from to people of the land so that they could serve the Lord. The people did this because they had heard the Word of God and had received understanding of the Word. True understanding of the Word of God will have the same effect today. That understanding will lead Christians to separate themselves from sinful living.

31. Read Nehemiah 10:1-39 and write what kind of an oath the people made in response to their desire to obey the Word of God.

32. Explain why the understanding of the Word of God will lead people to separate themselves from sinful living.

33. Explain why you think that the people wanted to serve the Lord and obey Him instead of continuing in their disobedience.

The people had decided to walking according to the law of God instead of continuing to follow their own sinful ways. This meant that there would be many changes in the lives of the people. They agreed not to allow their children to marry the people of the land because the people of the land refused to serve the Lord. They also said that they would not buy or sell on the Sabbath day. In the seventh year they would also allow the land to rest. They also said that they would give an offering each year for the service of the house of God. Here we see that obedience to the Word of God will produce great changes in the lives of all those who choose to obey the Lord.

34. Read Nehemiah 10:28-39 and write how much the people agreed to give to the Lord.

35. Explain why obedience to the Word of God also caused the people to want to give a regular offering to the Lord.

36. Explain why you think that choosing to obey the Word of God will bring transformation to the lives of people.

This money that the people gave to the Lord was to be used to provide the showbread and the offerings that were to be offered at the temple. The people also cast lots so that the people could bring wood at different times of the year to burn the sacrifices. Then the people also said that they wanted to bring the first of their crops as an offering to the Lord. They also decided to dedicate the first of their children and the first of their flock to the Lord. As we see these different things that they decided, we see that they were actually choosing to become obedient to the instructions that Moses had given them in the law of God.

37. Read Nehemiah 10:28-39 and write what the people decided that they should give to the Lord.

38. Explain why the people also realized that they needed to divide the responsibility for bringing wood to burn the sacrifices among all of the people.

39. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from the covenant that the people made with the Lord.

The people chose to bring the first fruits to the Lord. They decided that the offerings that the people brought when they dedicated their oldest son were to be used to supply the needs of the priests. Because the priests spent much of their time doing the work that needed to be done at the temple, they did not have time to gather food for their families. This was the reason why the people wanted to provide for the needs of the priests. The people also brought tithes of all of their crops. Here we see that the people wanted to show their love for the Lord by giving their offerings to Him.

40. Read Nehemiah 10:28-39 and write what the people said that they would not forsake any more.

41. Explain why the people chose to provide food for the priests and their families.

42. Explain why you think that the people chose to show their love for the Lord by giving offerings to Him.

Now reread Nehemiah 8:1-10:39 and write down the three most important lessons that you

learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther
Lesson 9
Nehemiah 11:1-13:31

By the time we come to the end of the book of Nehemiah, the people had been back in the land of Judah for more than one hundred years. We saw in our last lesson that the people made a covenant with the Lord and promised to obey the Word of God. However, we will see that they did not continue to obey the Lord. As we study these last chapters we will see what life was like more than one hundred years after the people had returned from captivity. We saw that Tobiah was one of the enemies that tried to stop the work of rebuilding the wall. Because some of the leaders of Judah did not choose to continue to obey the Lord, we will find that Tobiah was living in a very unusual place.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Tell about the people that lived in the various cities of Judah.
- Tell about the dedication of the wall.
- Explain why Tobiah was forced to move.
- Explain how Nehemiah stopped trading on the Sabbath.

There were not a large number of people living in the city of Jerusalem. As a result, the leaders decided to cast lots among the rest of the people of Judah to see which people should move into the city of Jerusalem. It was decided that one family in ten from the land of Judah should live in the city of Jerusalem. Then the leaders cast lots to see who should move to live in Jerusalem. After the lots were cast, the people that had been chosen by lot all willingly agreed to move to Jerusalem. Here we see an important lesson. We need to be willing to do the work of the Lord even if it does not fit our plans. These people were willing to move to Jerusalem even though they had their own houses in other parts of the land of Judah.

1. Read Nehemiah 11:1-36 and write what chiefs are mentioned first.
2. Explain why it was important that all those that were chosen by the casting of lots to move into the city of Jerusalem willingly chose to make that move.
3. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from the men that were chosen to live in Jerusalem.

The men that are mentioned in this section were the leading men in the city of Jerusalem. Particular things are mentioned about certain ones of these men. The sons of Perez were valiant men. This meant that they were full of courage because their trust was in the Lord. This is the kind of Christians that Christ wants us to be today. Our lives are able to make an impact for the Lord if we are depending on Him so that our lives are filled with courage. However, we will not have that courage if we are depending on our own strength. True courage is always based on our trust in the Lord instead of our own strength. We also read about one the men that led the people in Jerusalem in the giving of thanksgiving.

4. Read Nehemiah 11:1-36 and write how this man began the thanksgiving.
5. Explain what make it possible for the sons of Perez to be full of courage.
6. Explain why you think that we will always make an impact for the Lord if we are depending on the Lord so that our lives are filled with courage.

Here we see that true thanksgiving is giving thanks to the Lord in prayer. Thankfulness to the Lord is prayer is thankfulness that comes from the heart. After we read about the men that were the leaders in Jerusalem, we come to the men that were the leaders in the other cities. Among these men were the sons of Asaph. The sons of Asaph were the singers for the temple. Like the priests, the singers could only live in the area of their possession for part of the year. As a result, the singers were to receive a certain amount of food along with the priests so that they

could provide for the needs of their families. If God gives us a ministry that does not supply our needs, God will supply our needs in other ways.

7. Read Nehemiah 11:1-36 and write what the valley was called where the city of Ono was located.

8. Explain why true thanksgiving is giving thanks to the Lord in prayer that comes from the heart.

9. Explain why you are thankful that the Lord will supply your needs in various ways as you are faithful in your service for Him.

We are also given a list of the priests and Levites that returned to Jerusalem with Zerrubbabel. These were the men that were responsible for leading the people of Judah in the worship of the Lord. The priests were responsible for offering the sacrifices of the people. The Levites were responsible for much of the worship of the people. We read about the Levites that were responsible for leading the people in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. Then we have the list of men that were responsible for the gates of the temple and the storehouses. Here we see that the various responsibilities were divided among different groups of men.

10. Read Nehemiah 12:1-47 and write why the Levites from throughout the land were called to come to Jerusalem.

11. Explain why it is important to divide the responsibilities among various groups of people.

12. Explain why you think that the Levites were given the responsibility for leading much of the worship of the people of Judah.

The dedication of the wall of Jerusalem was a time of great rejoicing for the people of Jerusalem. The completion of the wall meant that the people could now protect themselves from their enemies. As a result, the Levites from throughout the land were called to Jerusalem to lead the people in the singing at the dedication of the wall. These Levites played a variety of musical instruments. The gladness of the people was expressed both with singing and the playing of these musical instruments. The priests, the Levites and the people all purified themselves for this dedication service.

13. Read Nehemiah 12:27-47 and write why two companies were appointed.

14. Explain why the people were filled with great joy as they gathered to dedicate the wall of Jerusalem.

15. Explain why you think that the fact that they used a variety of musical instruments as they dedicated the wall is important for today.

One large group of people was on the wall at the dung gate. The other large group was on the wall at the fountain gate. When the signal was given, these two groups marched until they met each other. When the two companies met, they expressed their thanks to the Lord and offered great sacrifices. The women and children added their voices of joy to the joy and rejoicing that was being made by these two groups of men. As a result, the noise of the people could be heard a great distance from Jerusalem. The people also restored the worship at the temple so that it was like the worship during the time of David.

16. Read Nehemiah 12:27-47 and write what kind of sacrifices the people offered as they dedicated the wall.

17. Explain what these verses teach about the dedication of the wall of the city of Jerusalem.

18. Explain why you think it is still important for the whole family including fathers, mothers and children to join in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

Some other things also happened on that day when the leaders read the book of Moses in the hearing of the people. As the leaders read the Word of God, they read that the people of Moab and Ammon were not to become a part of the nation of Israel forever. This was due to the fact that they had hired Balaam to curse the nation of Israel instead of offering to help the people of the nation of Israel when Israel came from the land of Egypt. However, God had turned the

curse of Balaam into a blessing even though Moab and Ammon had tried to place a curse on the people of Israel.

19. Read Nehemiah 13:1-14 and write what the people did when they heard what the law said.
20. Explain why the fact that Moab and Ammon had hired Balaam is the reason that these nations were not to become a part of Israel forever.
21. Explain why you think that the Lord will turn any curse of the world into a blessing for those who have their faith in the Lord.

The law of God pointed out the fact that the people could not serve the Lord as long as those who rejected the Lord were serving together with them. Instead they were actually serving the devil as long as they worked together with this mixed multitude. As you remember, Tobiah was one of the enemies that had tried to stop the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Although he had failed to stop the building of the wall, he had succeeded in another way. He became a friend of the priest. Then the priest prepared a room so that Tobiah could live right in the temple. As a result, an enemy of the people of Israel was living in the very place where they came to worship God.

22. Read Nehemiah 13:1-14 and write where Nehemiah was at the time that the priest allowed Tobiah to move into the temple.
23. Explain why God told the people that they should not join with those who rejected the Lord to work together with them in the work of the Lord.
24. Explain why you think that the priest allowed a person that was the enemy of the work of the Lord to live right in the temple.

Here we see what happens when Christians think that they can work together with those who are not Christians to do the work of the Lord. Soon these people that do not follow the Word of God are in control. This was what Tobiah had done. By working together with the priest, he was soon living in the temple. One day Nehemiah received permission from the king to return to Jerusalem. When Nehemiah reached Jerusalem, he learned that Eliashib had prepared a place right in the temple as a place for Tobiah to live. Nehemiah was very sad when he heard where Tobiah was living.

25. Read Nehemiah 13:1-14 and write what Nehemiah did with the possessions of Tobiah that were in the temple.
26. Explain why those who reject the Word of God will often end up in leadership if they are given opportunities to share in the work of God.
27. Explain how you think that Nehemiah felt when he learned that the priest had prepared a place for Tobiah to live right in the temple.

Nehemiah realized that the only way to deal with sin was to get rid of it. Nehemiah knew that the Lord could not bless the people of God as long as they were allowing Tobiah to live in the temple. In the same way, the Lord cannot bless us as long as we allow sin to remain in our lives. We must confess and forsake our sins if we want to enjoy the blessing of the Lord. Once Tobiah and his possessions had been removed from the temple, Nehemiah was able to bring the vessels that belonged in the temple back into the temple. The place where Tobiah had lived was also cleansed.

28. Read Nehemiah 13:1-14 and write what Nehemiah asked the Lord to remember as Nehemiah prayed to the Lord.
29. Explain why it is important to confess and forsake sin if we want to enjoy the blessing of the Lord.
30. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from these verses.

We also see that other things had changed while Nehemiah had been gone. The people had stopped bringing food for the Levites that worked in the temple. As a result, the Levites had been forced to leave their work in the temple and go and work in the fields. When Nehemiah

returned to Jerusalem, he told the people that they had done wrong by failing to bring their tithes so that the Levites could carry out the work that needed to be done in the temple. Then Nehemiah encouraged the Levites to begin carrying out their responsibilities again. The people of Judah responded by beginning to bring their tithes again.

31. Read Nehemiah 13:15-31 and write when Nehemiah saw some of the men treading the grapes in their winepresses.

32. Explain why the Levites had neglected their work in the temple to raise food for their families.

33. Explain why you think that many people will begin to neglect their work for the Lord unless they are receiving encouragement.

The Lord had told the people of Israel that they were not to do any work on the Sabbath day. The people of Judah had earlier made a covenant saying that they would do exactly what the Lord had told them to do. However, the people had forgotten the commandment of the Lord and the covenant that they had made. Instead they were doing many forms of work on the Sabbath. In addition, there were also men from the city of Tyre that came to sell fish on the Sabbath day. Nehemiah called the leaders of Judah together to talk to them about this evil that they were doing on the Sabbath day. God had said that the Sabbath was to be a day of rest and not a day of work.

34. Read Nehemiah 13:15-31 and write the first question that Nehemiah asked the leaders of Judah.

35. Explain why people often forget very quickly the promises that they make to the Lord in their lives.

36. Explain why you think that the Sabbath day had become unimportant to the people living in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah told the leaders of Judah that this evil would certainly bring judgment from the Lord. Then Nehemiah ordered the gates of the city to be closed at sundown before the Sabbath began and not opened until after the Sabbath. The traders came to sell their wares the following two Sabbaths. Then Nehemiah told those men that if they came to sell their wares on the Sabbath day again that he would lay hands on them and punish them. With that warning, the traders did not come to the city of Jerusalem any more on the Sabbath day. In this way Nehemiah caused the people to respect the Sabbath day.

37. Read Nehemiah 13:15-31 and write what else Nehemiah saw that some of the Jews had done.

38. Explain why Nehemiah stopped the people of Judah from working on the Sabbath day.

39. Explain why you think that Nehemiah had to give the traders from Tyre a warning of judgment if they continued to come on the Sabbath day.

Some of the Jews had also married women of the surrounding nations. As a result, their children could not speak the language of the Jews. Nehemiah was angry with the men that had done this evil. He reminded the people that this was the sin that had caused Solomon to turn away from the Lord. One of the sons of the priest had married the daughter of Sanballat. As you remember, Sanballat was one of the enemies that had tried to stop the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah made this son of the priest leave Jerusalem because of his sin of marrying a foreign woman that was the enemy of the Lord.

40. Read Nehemiah 13:15-31 and write what he had done to the priesthood by this evil action.

41. Explain how the priest had failed to exercise his spiritual leadership because he had become friends with Tobiah and Sanballat.

42. Explain why you think that the children of the men that had married the women of the surrounding nations had not learned to speak the language of the Jews.

Now reread Nehemiah 11:1-13:31 and write down the three most important lessons that you

learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther
Lesson 10
Esther 1:1-3:15

The book of Esther is a very unusual book. It is the only book in the entire Bible in which the name of God is not mentioned. Although God is not mentioned by name in the book of Esther, His power and His work are seen throughout the book. The book of Esther gives us a beautiful picture of the way that God has guided the circumstances in the world throughout the history of the Jews to protect the Jews from complete destruction. Today we will learn how God led Esther so that she would be in the right place at the right time to protect her people from destruction. We will also learn why Haman wanted to kill all of the Jews.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain why Vashti was removed as the queen.
- Tell how the king decided to choose a new queen.
- Explain why Esther was chosen as the new queen.
- Explain why Haman wanted to destroy all of the Jews.

The nation of Media and Persia had become a very great nation that ruled a large section of the world. It had conquered Babylon and added the nations that Babylon controlled to its empire. A man by the name of Ahasuerus became the ruler of this great nation. During the third year that he was the king, he made a great feast for all of his princes. He invited all of the princes and rulers from the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces that he ruled to come to this great feast. The king wanted to show all of these princes the greatness of his kingdom by showing them all of the riches and honor that he had as their king.

1. Read Esther 1:1-22 and write how long this great celebration of the king lasted before the final feast.
2. Explain why the Lord had allowed the nation of Media and Persia to become a great and powerful nation that controlled many other nations.
3. Explain why you think that the king of Persia wanted all of his princes to see the riches and honor that he had as the king.

After celebrating for one hundred and eighty days, the king prepared for one final feast. This feast was to be a great feast for all of the people that were in Shushan. This final feast lasted for seven days. It was held in the garden of the palace of the king. There was plenty of food and drink at this great feast. However, no one was forced to drink unless he desired to do so. At the same time, Vashti, the queen, was also making a feast for the women. On the seventh day of the feast the king gave instructions to his servants to bring the queen so that the men at the feast could see her beauty. Here we see that the king wanted to show these men his greatness in every way.

4. Read Esther 1:1-22 and write what the queen did when she received the commandment of the king.
5. Explain why the king wanted the men attending the feast to see the beauty of the queen.
6. Explain why you think that this feast for the princes was actually a series of feasts that lasted for one hundred and eighty days.

The king went into a rage when the queen refused to come to his feast at his commandment. He was filled with anger. Then the king called for his seven wisest men. The king asked these men what should be done to the queen because she had refused to come at the commandment of the king. These wise men said that the problem was not just the fact that the queen had refused to come when the king had given his commandment. These wise men were even more concerned about what the rest of the women would do when they heard that the queen had

refused to obey the king. Here we see that these wise men wanted to maintain the power and control in their own homes instead of showing love to their wives.

7. Read Esther 1:1-22 and write what these men said that Vashti should not do any more because of her refusal to obey the commandment of the king.

8. Explain why the wise men said that the real problem was the fact that the rest of the women would follow the example of the queen and refuse to obey their husbands.

9. Explain why you think that many couples have problems in their marriages because they are trying to control each other instead of serve each other.

The wise men then suggested that the king choose a new queen to replace Vashti so that the women would realize the importance of obeying and honoring their husbands. Then the king wrote a letter that was sent to all of the provinces of the Persian Empire. This letter was translated into each of the languages of these other provinces. In this letter the king told the men that they were to bear the rule in their own houses. They were not to let their wives become the rulers in the home. The letter also told how the king had removed the queen because she had failed to obey him.

10. Read Esther 1:1-22 and write how the king felt about the suggestion of his wise men.

11. Explain why many husbands focus on the obedience of their wives instead of their responsibility to love their wives.

12. Explain why you think that the king wanted this law to be taught to all of the people throughout the Persian Empire.

After the king had satisfied his anger by removing Vashti as the queen of the empire, the king asked his servants what he should do to find a new queen to replace Vashti. Then the servants suggested that the king send a letter throughout all of the area that he ruled telling his officers to find the most beautiful young virgins in the kingdom. These women were to be brought to Shushan and placed in the house of the women. While these young women were in the house of the women, these young virgins were to be given any ointments that they desired in order to make them make them look even more beautiful.

13. Read Esther 2:1-11 and write who the servants said should be the new queen.

14. Explain why the king asked his servants for ideas about what he should do to find a new queen to replace Vashti.

15. Explain why you think that the servants of the king suggested he pick a new queen based on outward beauty instead of inner character.

The king was very happy with the idea of his servants. Then the most beautiful virgins in the entire kingdom were brought to the city of Shushan and placed in the house of the women. Although the king and his servants showed a lack of respect by their treatment of the women, we will see that the Lord was still working through the actions of the king to complete His plan. There was a certain Jew living in Shushan by the name of Mordecai. He had been brought to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar had carried the Jews away from the city of Jerusalem. Then he had eventually been brought to Shushan. When the uncle and the wife of the uncle of Mordecai both died, Mordecai took their daughter and raised her as his own daughter. This daughter of the uncle of Mordecai was a very beautiful young woman.

16. Read Esther 2:1-11 and write the name of this beautiful young woman that Mordecai was raising.

17. Explain why the Lord is even able to work through ungodly kings that have wrong motives to complete the plan and purpose of God.

18. Explain why you think that many men show the same lack of respect for women that was shown by the king and his servants.

When the king gave his commandment that the most beautiful women in the kingdom should be brought to the palace, Esther was one of the young virgins that was included with the most

beautiful women. Esther gained the respect of the person that was the keeper of the women. As a result, Hegai gave Esther all that she requested. He also appointed seven other women to be with her. We also see the concern that Mordecai had for Esther. Each day he would walk near the court of the house of the women so that he could learn how Esther was getting along and what was happening to her. Here we see that he showed the great concern of a godly parent.

19. Read Esther 2:1-11 and write what Mordecai had suggested that Esther not reveal as she was taken into the house of the women.

20. Explain what these verses teach you about the concern of Mordecai for Esther.

21. Explain why you think that Esther quickly gained the respect of the person that was the keeper of the women.

Each of the women had to wait a year before they went to the palace of the king. When it came time for a woman to go to the house of the king, she could ask the keeper of the house for whatever she wanted. Each woman would go in the evening. When she returned the next day, she would be taken to the house of the concubines where she would remain unless the king desired her again. Here we see that the king had many concubines and many of them only went to the king once. We also see that the Persians had little respect for women. Finally the day came when Esther was supposed to go to the house of the king. She could ask for anything that she wanted as she went.

22. Read Esther 2:12-23 and write what Esther asked the keeper of the house of the women to give her.

23. Explain why the way that the king chose the new queen shows a lack of respect for women.

24. Explain why you think that Esther trusted the Lord to guide her even though she was forced to live in the house of the women where most of the women did not know God.

Here Esther gives us a real example of her dependence on the Lord. Her trust was in the Lord as she went to the house of the king. She knew it was not in the things that she could take with her as she went to the house of the king that would make a difference. When Esther came into the king, he loved her. The king realized that here was the woman that he had been seeking to become the queen of the Persian Empire. The Lord had blessed Esther because she had depended on the Lord rather than the things that she might have taken from the house of the women. Then the king placed the crown on the head of Esther and gave a great feast. He also sent gifts to the people instead of charging taxes.

25. Read Esther 2:12-23 and write what Esther had not yet revealed to the king.

26. Explain how the godly character of Esther caused the king to love her even though he did not show respect to most of the women.

27. Explain why you think that the Lord had blessed Esther even though she had been in a very difficult situation.

Mordecai had told Esther not to tell the king from what nation she came. Mordecai also began to sit at the gate of the king so that he could learn what was happening in the life of Esther. One day two of the servants of the king became angry with the king and decided to kill him.

Mordecai heard their plan to kill the king and told Esther. Then Esther told the king the words of Mordecai and the king ordered an investigation. When he found that the words of Mordecai were true, the two servants were killed and the kindness of Mordecai was written in the official records of the king.

28. Read Esther 2:12-23 and write how the two servants were killed for their plan to kill the king.

29. Explain how the Lord blessed Esther because of the fact that she had her trust in the Lord.

30. Explain why you think that the Lord gave Mordecai an opportunity to save the life of the king because of his concern for Esther.

One day the king promoted a man by the name of Haman to be his assistant. Haman was an Agagite. Back in I Samuel we learned that one of the reasons that God had removed Saul from being the king of Israel was due to the fact that Saul had failed to kill Agag, the king of Amalek, as God had commanded Saul to do. Now we see here that Haman was a descendent of Agag. When Haman was promoted to be the assistant of the king, all of the servants of the king started bowing to him. This made Haman happy because he was filled with pride. However, Mordecai refused to bow to Haman. The servants asked Mordecai why he refused to bow to Haman.

31. Read Esther 3:1-15 and write who these servants told about Mordecai when he refused to bow to Haman.

32. Explain why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman when he entered the gate into the palace of the king.

33. Explain why you think that the choice that Saul made to disobey the Lord many hundreds of years earlier was still affecting the Jews at this time.

When these servants told Haman about Mordecai, they also told him that Mordecai was a Jew. The next time that Haman came by the gate he watched to see whether Mordecai would bow to him. When Mordecai did not bow to him, Haman was filled with anger. He decided to destroy Mordecai to get even. However, he also decided that he did not want to kill just Mordecai. Instead he decided to kill all of the Jews along with Mordecai. He decided to destroy every Jew in the entire kingdom of Ahasuerus. Haman still had the same hatred for the Jews that Agag and the people of Amalek had shown toward the Jews hundreds of years earlier.

34. Read Esther 3:1-15 and write what Haman told the king that a certain group of people in the kingdom were not keeping.

35. Explain why Haman was filled with anger when he saw that Mordecai did not bow.

36. Explain why you think that Haman decided to kill Mordecai and all of the Jews.

Haman said that this certain group of people had their own laws. He said those laws caused them to disobey the laws of the king. As a result, Haman offered the king a great reward if he could write a law ordering the destruction of this group of people. Then the king agreed to the request of Haman and gave his ring to Haman. This ring was used to sign all of the letters of the king by placing the ring in the soft wax used to seal the letter or law. This seal meant that everything in the letter was the commandment of the king and could not be changed.

37. Read Esther 3:1-15 and write to whom Haman quickly wrote a letter about the Jews.

38. Explain why Haman decided to try and destroy all of the Jews in the entire kingdom of Persia.

39. Explain why you think that the ring of the king gave Haman great authority.

Haman quickly wrote a letter to all of the provinces controlled by the king. In this letter he ordered the people of the provinces to put all of the Jews to death. The Jews were all to be killed on the same day. This included the women and children as well as the men. None were to be allowed to live. Those who killed the Jews were to be allowed to take the possessions of those that they killed as their reward. Here we see that Haman was actually offering a reward to every person that would help kill the Jews that lived in their area. He knew that the opportunity to receive the possessions of the Jews would cause many people to get involved in their destruction. Then Haman sat down to drink with the king.

40. Read Esther 3:1-15 and write how the people in Shushan felt when they heard about the letter of Haman.

41. Explain why Haman said that those who killed the Jews could take their possessions as a reward.

42. Explain why you think that the people of Shushan were perplexed when they heard about the letter that Haman had sent out in the name of the king.

Now reread Esther 1:1-3:15 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

Lesson 11

Esther 4:1-7:10

In our last lesson we learned that Haman had developed a plan to destroy all of the Jews because Mordecai had refused to bow to him. We saw that Haman developed this plan because of his hatred for the Jews. However, the Lord had brought Esther into the palace of the king for just such a time as this. Here we see that the Lord has His purpose in the places where He places us. We also see that Esther was willing to risk her life in order to save her people. The Lord also caused the king to spend a sleepless night in order to protect the life of Mordecai. Finally Haman was destroyed in the very same way that he had planned to destroy Mordecai.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study.

By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain why Esther was willing to risk her life to save her people.
- Tell about the requests of Esther to the king.
- Explain why Haman was forced to honor Mordecai.
- Explain how Haman was destroyed by his own plans.

Mordecai was filled with sorrow when he heard about the order that Haman had sent out to all of the provinces of Persia ordering the death of all of the Jews. Then he put on sackcloth and ashes to show his sorrow. Jews throughout the nations controlled by Persia were doing the same thing. There was great sorrow and fasting among the Jews as they realized that judgment would soon come on all of them. Esther heard that Mordecai was dressed in sackcloth and sent him some new clothes. However, Mordecai refused to take the clothes. Then Esther sent one of her servants to talk to Mordecai and find out why he was wearing the sackcloth.

1. Read Esther 4:1-17 and write what Mordecai told this servant that Esther had sent to talk to him.
2. Explain how the Jews throughout the Persian Empire reacted when they heard about the order of Haman to destroy all of the Jews.
3. Explain how you think that the Jews felt as they realized that the ring of the king had been used to sign a law that would lead to their total destruction.

Mordecai told the servant of Esther exactly how much Haman had promised to pay the king in exchange for permission to kill all of the Jews throughout the entire empire of Persia. Then Mordecai gave a copy of the letter of Haman to the servant of Esther. Mordecai encouraged Esther to go to the king and plead for the Jews. Esther sent back an answer stating that Esther had not been invited to come before the king for a month. To go before the king without an invitation from the king meant death unless the king held out the golden scepter to the person that came before him uninvited. Mordecai then told Esther that she would not escape just because she was the queen.

4. Read Esther 4:1-17 and write the question that Mordecai asked Esther.
5. Explain why Mordecai encouraged Esther to go and talk to the king and plead for the lives of the Jews.
6. Explain why the request of Mordecai caused Esther to realize that she faced a choice that could lead to her death.

The faith of Mordecai in the Lord was so strong that he was certain that God would protect the Jews from the evil plot of Haman. He said that if Esther refused to be used by the Lord, God would raise up someone else to deliver the Jews from Haman. However, God had brought Esther into a place where she could be used by the Lord to save the lives of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire. Mordecai asked Esther if this was possibly the reason why God had placed her in the position of queen of the Persian Empire. Then Esther agreed to go before the king

after she and the other women with her had fasted and prayed for three days. Esther asked Mordecai and the other Jews in Shushan to fast with her.

7. Read Esther 4:1-17 and write what Esther said about the possibility that she would be killed when she came before the king without an invitation.

8. Explain why Mordecai had faith that the Lord would raise up someone to protect the Jews from the evil plot of Haman.

9. Explain how you think Esther felt when she realized that God had placed her in a position where she could be used to save the Jews throughout the Persian Empire.

Esther had made her choice. She was willing to die if necessary in order to try and save the lives of her people. She made this choice knowing that she would be facing almost certain death if she went to the king when he had not invited her to come to him. However, Esther also realized that the Lord had placed her in a position where she could attempt to save the Jewish people. Esther was willing to give her life so that her people might have the opportunity to live. Today as Christians we should also be willing to give our lives so that others may also have the opportunity to hear about Christ and have the opportunity to receive eternal life and live.

10. Read Esther 4:1-17 and write how long Esther asked all the Jews in Shushan to pray before she went to the king.

11. Explain why Esther was willing to make the choice to plead for her people even though she knew that action could cost her life.

12. Explain why you think that we as Christians should be will to give our lives so that others will have the opportunity to hear about forgiveness through Christ.

After Esther and the women with her had fasted and prayed for three days, Esther put on the clothes that she wore when she appeared as the queen. Then Esther went to the court of the king. She did not know what the response of the king would be when she came into the court. However, the Lord had prepared the heart of the king and he held out the golden scepter to Esther. Because Esther had placed her life in the control of the Lord, He had caused the king to respond favorably when Esther came into his presence. In fact the king said that he would give Esther whatever she desired including one half of the kingdom. Instead of making her request to the king immediately, Esther made a different request to the king.

13. Read Esther 5:1-14 and write the request that Esther made to the king.

14. Explain why the king responded favorably when Esther came into his presence with her request.

15. Explain why you think that Esther and the women with her prayed for three days before Esther went to see the king.

Esther invited the king to a banquet that she had prepared for the king and Haman. The king gladly said that he would honor the request of Esther and quickly sent messengers to go and get Haman. Although the king had only been invited to the banquet, the king realized that Esther must have another request. At the banquet, the king asked Esther for her request. Instead of telling the king her request immediately, Esther replied that she would tell her request to the king the next day if the king and Haman would come to another banquet the next day. The king agreed that he and Haman would come to another banquet the next day as Esther had requested. Haman left the palace of the queen with a happy heart.

16. Read Esther 5:1-14 and write who suddenly caused Haman to become angry as he left the palace of Esther.

17. Explain why Esther told the king that she would tell him her request at the banquet on the second day.

18. Explain why you think that Esther waited until the second banquet to bring her request to the king.

Haman became very angry because Mordecai refused to show honor and bow to him. Haman

went home and told his family and friends about his greatness. He told how the queen had invited him to two banquets along with the king. After Haman had finished telling his family and friends about his greatness, he told them that there was still one thing that destroyed his happiness. Haman said that he would not be happy as long as Mordecai was alive. Then his wife and friends suggested that Haman build a gallows seventy-five feet high on which he could hang Mordecai. Haman quickly built the gallows.

19. Read Esther 5:1-14 and write what Haman told his wife and friends about himself when he returned from the first banquet with Esther.
20. Explain why Haman had such a great hatred for Mordecai.
21. Explain why you think that Haman said that he could not be happy as long as Mordecai was alive.

Haman was happy that the gallows was built and he planned to hang Mordecai on the gallows before the banquet with Esther the next day. That way he would be able to enjoy the banquet. However, the Lord had other plans. That night the king could not sleep. As a result, the king had one of his servants read the records of the king to him. In those records the king was reminded of the fact that Mordecai had saved his life when two of his servants had planned to kill him. The king asked if Mordecai had been rewarded for protecting his life. The servants replied that he had received no reward. The king asked who was in the court so that someone could suggest a reward to him.

22. Read Esther 6:1-14 and write who had just come into the court to talk to the king.
23. Explain why the king decided to have his servants read his records to him when he could not sleep.
24. Explain why you think that the Lord would not allow the king to be able to sleep that night.

Haman had come to the palace early in the morning so that he could ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai. The king quickly called for Haman to come into his room. The king asked Haman what Haman thought the king should do in order to show the people the one that the king desired to honor. Of course Haman thought that the king desired to honor him. As a result, Haman suggested that the clothes of the king should be placed on the man that the king wanted to honor. Then one of the most important servants of the king should lead that man through the city on a horse and say that this was what the king did for the one that he wanted to honor.

25. Read Esther 6:1-14 and write what the king immediately told Haman to do.
26. Explain why Haman thought that the king was trying to find out how to honor him when the king asked Haman how to show honor.
27. Explain why you think that Haman was so filled with pride that he thought that the king would want to honor him.

Although Haman hated Mordecai and wanted to kill him, Haman did exactly as the king had requested. Here is a little picture of the way that the devil works. He will even do the things that he hates if he thinks that doing those things will help him to accomplish his purpose at a later time. After taking Mordecai through the streets of the city, Haman hurried home. There his wife and friends were gathered for the hanging of Mordecai. When Haman told his wife and friend what had happened, the wife of Haman told Haman that he would fall before Mordecai. Just then a messenger arrived to take Haman to the banquet with the king and Esther.

28. Read Esther 6:1-14 and write where Mordecai went after he had been taken through the city by Haman.
29. Explain what this chapter teaches about the way that the Lord had protected Mordecai from Haman.
30. Explain why you think that Haman was willing to lead Mordecai through the streets even though he hated Mordecai.

Haman had boasted the previous day about the fact that he had been invited to two banquets with Esther. He said that he and the king were the only guests that were invited. Now he was going to that second banquet. At the banquet the king asked Esther for her request. The king promised that he would give Esther whatever she desired including one half of the kingdom. Then Esther said that she and her people had been sold to be killed. She said that she would not have complained if they had just been sold to be slaves. However, that was not the case. Instead the one that had done this evil thing planned for them to be destroyed.

31. Read Esther 7:1-10 and write the question that the king then asked Esther.

32. Explain why Esther said that she would not have complained if her people had just been sold to be slaves.

33. Explain what you think was going through the mind of Haman as Esther began to talk about the person that wanted to destroy her people.

The time had come for Esther to reveal the evil plot of Haman. Then Esther told the king that Haman was the man that planned to kill her and her people. Immediately Haman was filled with fear. He knew that his life was in great danger. He probably realized immediately that Esther was a Jew. The king was filled with anger and went out into the palace garden.

Immediately Haman realized that his life was in immediate danger because of the anger of the king. As a result, he began to beg Esther to spare his life. In his begging, he fell down on the couch where Esther was sitting. Then the king returned from the garden where he had gone.

34. Read Esther 7:1-10 and write what the king said when he returned to the place where Haman had fallen on the couch of Esther.

35. Explain why the king was so angry when he heard that Haman planned to kill Esther and all of her people.

36. Explain why you think that Haman began to beg Esther to spare his life when he thought nothing of trying to destroy all of the Jews.

The way that Haman had fallen on the couch of Esther it looked like he was trying to rape her. As soon as the king spoke, his guards covered the face of Haman. This meant that Haman would be put to death. Once the king ordered the face of a man covered, there was no way that the person could escape death. Because Esther had been willing to face death for her people, the man that wanted to destroy her people was now going to be put to death. Here we see that the Lord was allowing the king to judge Haman in exactly the same way that he wanted to judge the Jews.

37. Read Esther 7:1-10 and write what Harbonah told the king that Haman had made for Mordecai.

38. Explain why Esther was willing to face the possibility of losing her own life in order to keep the Jews from being destroyed.

39. Explain why you think that the king chose to kill Haman in exactly the same way that Haman had planned to kill Mordecai.

One of the servants of the king came and told the king about the gallows that Haman had built. The servant said that Haman had built a gallows seventy-five feet high so that he could hang Mordecai on it. Now the servant suggested that Haman be hung on his own gallows. Then the king ordered his servants to go and hang Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the servants took Haman and hanged him immediately. Here we see that Haman had made a choice to try and destroy Mordecai. Instead we see that Haman reaped exactly as he had sown. He was hanged on his own gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

40. Read Esther 7:1-10 and write how the king felt after Haman had been hanged on the gallows.

41. Explain why the king followed the suggestion of his servant and ordered the death of Haman on his own gallows.

42. Explain why you think that this chapter gives us a clear illustration of the fact that people will reap exactly what they sow.

Now reread Esther 4:1-7:10 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.

Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

Lesson 12

Esther 8:1-10:3

In our last lesson we learned that Haman had tried to destroy all of the Jews because of his anger toward Mordecai. Haman had succeeded in getting permission from the king to issue the order that would have destroyed all of the Jews in all of the countries that were controlled by Persia. Because of the faith and courage of Esther, Haman was put to death on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. However, the law was still on the books that ordered the death of all of the Jews. That law was the law of the Medes and the Persians and could not be changed. In our lesson today we will learn how God saved the Jews from the judgment of that law.

As you study this lesson, you should use the following objectives to guide you in your study. By the time you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain how the plot of Haman was defeated.
- Tell about the way that the Lord blessed Mordecai.
- Tell how the enemies of the Jews were destroyed.
- Explain the meaning of the Feast of Purim.

Haman was dead. He had been killed on the gallows that he had prepared to destroy Mordecai. However, the law that he had prepared that had been sent out to all of the provinces of Persia would completely destroy the Jews because the laws of the Medes and the Persians could not be changed. The same day that Haman was killed, the king gave the possessions of Haman to Esther. Then Esther told the king how Mordecai was related to her. The king immediately called for Mordecai to come to the palace. The king realized that Mordecai was the person that was really concerned for him. As a result, when Mordecai reached the palace of the king, the king had something to give to Mordecai.

1. Read Esther 8:1-6 and write what the king gave to Mordecai when he reached the palace.
2. Explain why Esther realized that the time had now come for her to reveal the fact that Mordecai was related to her.
3. Explain why you think that the Medes and the Persians had said that their laws could not be changed even by the king.

The ring that the king gave to Mordecai was the ring that was used to sign all of the laws of the Medes and the Persians. It was the ring that Haman had used to sign the law ordering the death of all of the Jews. However, the king had taken the ring from Haman before he was hanged on the gallows. Now the king gave that ring to Mordecai. This meant a complete change in the control of all of the nations that had become a part of the Persian Empire. Mordecai would now write the king's commandments instead of Haman. Then Esther fell down before the king and asked the king to reverse the evil plot that Haman had made to destroy all of the Jews.

4. Read Esther 8:1-6 and write what the king held out to Esther after she had made her request to him.
5. Explain why it is so important that the king took his ring from Haman and placed that ring on the finger of Mordecai.
6. Explain why you think that the king chose Mordecai to replace Haman as the person that would sign his laws.

When the king held out the golden scepter, it meant that he would honor the request of Esther. Then Esther stood up and explained her request to the king. The law written by Haman had ordered the death of all of her people. Now Esther asked the king to reverse the commandment of Haman. Esther said that she could not enjoy her life if her people were destroyed because of

the law that Haman had written before his own death. In fact she could not endure the thought of seeing all of her people killed. Here we see that Esther had a tremendous concern for her people. She was willing to do whatever was necessary to save them alive.

7. Read Esther 8:1-6 and write what kind of a letter Esther suggested that the king should order written.

8. Explain why Esther now took further action and made a suggestion to the king that would save the lives of the Jews.

9. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life from the concern of Esther for her people.

The king answered that he had hanged Haman because of his evil plan to destroy the Jews. Then the king said that he had given the ring that sealed the commandments of the king to Mordecai. As a result, Mordecai was given permission to write a law about the Jews exactly as it pleased him. Once Mordecai had written a law that would protect the Jews from their enemies, Mordecai was to seal that law with the ring of the king. Once Mordecai sealed that law there was no way that anyone could change it. It would be a law that was a law according to the Medes and the Persians. Such a law could not be changed by anyone.

10. Read Esther 8:7-17 and write who was called to the palace.

11. Explain why the king told Mordecai to write a letter exactly as it pleased him to reverse the law written by Haman.

12. Explain why you think that the king told Mordecai to write the letter rather than the king writing it himself.

The scribes were called so that a new law could be written about the Jews. This law was to be sent to every one of the one hundred twenty-seven countries that were controlled by the king of Persia. These countries stretched from India to Ethiopia. The law was also to be written in all of the languages that were spoken in these various countries. Everyone in the entire empire was to know about this law. This was the only way that the Jews could be protected from the law that had been written by Haman. Here we see that the Lord had provided a way for His people to be protected from the plans which their enemies had devised to destroy the Jews.

13. Read Esther 8:7-17 and write what the Jews in every city were to do to protect themselves from the first law.

14. Explain why the king wanted the new law published in every one of the countries that were controlled by the king of Persia.

15. Explain what lessons you learn for your own life about the fact that the Lord will carry out His plan regardless of the plans of others.

The law of Haman was still on the books and could not be changed because it was the law of the Medes and the Persians. However, this new law gave the Jews permission to gather together and fight against any people that tried to destroy them. The new law also gave the Jews permission to take all of the property of their enemies as their reward. These things were all to happen on the day that Haman had originally chosen as the day that all of the Jews would be killed. Then the messengers went out to take this law to every country in the empire of Persia.

16. Read Esther 8:7-17 and write how the people in the city of Shushan felt when they heard about this new law.

17. Explain why Mordecai wrote the new law so that the Jews would all know that they were allowed to gather themselves together to fight against any enemies that tried to destroy them.

18. Explain why you think that the law said that this law was to be carried out on the day that Haman had originally chosen as the day that all Jews would be killed.

Mordecai was given royal robes by the king because of his new position. He was also given a crown of gold. Everyone could see that the king wanted to honor and respect the Jews instead of destroy them. As a result, the entire city of Shushan was filled with joy and gladness. The

Jews were also filled with joy and gladness. As this message was carried to the various countries that were controlled by Persia, there was also joy in each of these countries. Many people even joined the Jews when they saw the way that the Jews were being honored. Here we see that the Lord had totally changed the attitude of the people toward the Jews because of the fact that Esther had made a choice to plead for her people.

19. Read Esther 8:7-17 and write what the Jews had to celebrate this new law that came from the king.

20. Explain how the faithfulness of Esther saved her people from the evil plans of Haman and their other enemies.

21. Explain why you think many people wanted to join with the Jews when they saw the way that the Jews were being honored by the king.

The day came that had been set for the Jews to protect themselves from their enemies. Then the Jews in all of the cities of the Persian Empire gathered together to protect themselves from their enemies. As a result, all of the people were afraid of the Jews. All of the government officials throughout the empire joined with the Jews because they were afraid of Mordecai. Mordecai was gaining more and more influence in the palace of the king. All of these government officials were hearing about the influence that Mordecai was gaining. As a result, these government officials did everything possible to help the Jews.

22. Read Esther 9:1-19 and write what the Jews did to their enemies on that day that had originally been set for the destruction of the Jews.

23. Explain why Mordecai was gaining more and more influence in the palace of the king.

24. Explain why you think that all of the government officials quickly realized the importance of helping the Jews.

In the city of Shushan five hundred of the enemies of the Jews were killed. In addition, the ten sons of Haman were also killed. The king called Esther and told her what had happened in the city of Shushan. Then the king asked her if she had any further requests. The king promised that he would grant any further request of Esther. Then Esther asked if the Jews in Shushan could have a second day to destroy any enemies that remained. She also asked if the bodies of the ten sons of Haman could be hung on the gallows that Haman had built. The king granted both of these requests of Esther and ordered those things to be done.

25. Read Esther 9:1-19 and write how many men were killed in Shushan on the second day.

26. Explain why Esther asked if the Jews could have a second day to destroy any enemies that remained in the city of Shushan.

27. Explain why you think that Esther also requested that the ten sons of Haman should be hanged on the gallows that Haman had built.

The Jews were able to destroy many of their enemies that wanted to eliminate the Jews. Throughout the empire a total of seventy-five thousand people were killed. There were all people that had hoped to destroy the Jews. Although the Jews were allowed to take the possessions of their enemies, they Jews did not do so. After the Jews had destroyed their enemies, they had a time of great rejoicing. They proclaimed the fact that the next day there would be a great feast to celebrate their deliverance from their enemies. They also sent presents to each other as a way of sharing their joy. Here we see that the Jews were able to express their thankfulness for what the Lord had done for them.

28. Read Esther 9:1-19 and write what the Jews in the villages made the fourteenth day of the month Adar.

29. Explain how the Lord protected His people from the enemies that had wanted to destroy them.

30. Explain why you think that the Jews did not take the possessions of their enemies even though the law allowed them to do that if they chose.

Mordecai then sent a letter to the Jews telling them that they were to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as a yearly feast to remember how the Lord had delivered the Jews from their enemies. God had turned the sorrow and mourning of the Jews into a time of great joy. As a result, God wanted His people to remember how the Lord had protected His people from their enemies. Sometimes we forget the way that the Lord has blessed us in our own lives. We also need to remember what the Lord has done for us. When we remember what the Lord had done, this helps us to develop an attitude of thankfulness.

31. Read Esther 9:20-32 and write what the people were to send to one another on these days of celebration.

32. Explain why the Lord had the Jews establish annual feasts to help them remember what the Lord had done for them in the past.

33. Explain why you think that it is also important for us to remember what the Lord has done for us in the past.

The Jews still remember this feast today. It comes during the month of December. As a result, this is still a time when the Jews exchange gifts with one another. When Haman had plotted against the Jews, we read that he had cast Pur (a lot) to determine what day to destroy the Jews. For this reason the Jews called their celebration to remember their deliverance from death the Feast of Purim. This is the only place that this particular feast is mentioned in the Bible. If it were not for the book of Esther, we would not know the reason for this feast. However, this book helps us to understand why this is a very important day for the Jews.

34. Read Esther 9:20-32 and write how long the Jews were told that this feast was to be observed.

35. Explain why this is the only book in the Bible where the Feast of Purim is mentioned so that we know the reason for the feast.

36. Explain why you think that the Jews decided to send gifts to one another at the time of the Feast of Purim.

This feast was not to be forgotten by the Jews. Instead it was to be an annual reminder of the fact that God had delivered His people from all of their enemies. Then Mordecai sent a second letter to all of the Jews throughout the land of Persia to remind them to keep this feast annually. Here we see the importance of remembering what the Lord had done in the past. With this letter Mordecai also sent a message of peace and truth to the people. This letter was to remind the Jews that they were not to forget this feast and what the Lord had done to preserve them.

37. Read Esther 9:20-32 and write who helped Mordecai write this second letter to the Jews to remind them to keep this feast annually

38. Explain the purpose of the Feast of Purim in your own words.

39. Explain why you think that Mordecai and Esther also sent a message of peace and truth with the message to remember this feast.

As we come to the end of the book of Esther we read about the greatness of Mordecai during the reign of King Ahasuerus. The records of the way that the king advanced Mordecai are written in the official records of the nation of Persia. Mordecai became next in importance to the king of Persia. He also had great respect among the Jews. All of the Jews looked to him as a great leader. The reason that Mordecai had this great respect by the people was due to the fact that he was more concerned about the needs of his people more than he was concerned about his own needs. This is the same attitude that we should have as Christians.

40. Read Esther 10:1-3 and write what Mordecai spoke to all of those who were his descendants.

41. Explain why the Lord chose to honor Mordecai by giving him a position of great influence and also caused the Jews to have a great respect for him.

42. Explain why you think that it is important for each of us as Christians to also have a greater concern for the needs of others than we have for our own needs.

Now reread Esther 8:1-10:3 and write down the three most important lessons that you learned from these chapters.