

The Rebuilt Life: Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1

Surveying the Passage;

The story of Nehemiah is the kind from which great Hollywood epics are made. It has everything: the struggle between good and evil; a hero who stands head and shoulders above his contemporaries; villains galore who oppose every righteous act and use every evil means to thwart the intended outcome; and a happy ending that ushers in a new beginning for the people of God. Like Ezra, Nehemiah represents a picture of Christ in his ministry of restoration. He was willing to give up a comfortable high ranking position in order to identify with the predicament of his people. He came with a specific call and mission from God, and he remained prayerfully dependent upon Him to complete his task.

The Book Profile

The history of the Jewish nation began with Abraham in approximately 2,000 B.C. However, Israel came into prominence as a nation 1,000 years later under the rule of three kings: Saul, David, and then his son Solomon, who became known as the greatest king of his time. Sadly, during the last part of Solomon's life, he had compromised so much with the world that God judged him for it by declaring that the kingdom would be torn from his son (1 Kings 11:12).

Upon Solomon's death, Israel became a divided kingdom: ten of the tribes referred to as Israel migrated north to Samaria; the other two tribes—called Judah—went south, settling in and around Jerusalem. When the nation was divided, the people reached their lowest point in history, and absolute chaos resulted.

God then judged Israel in 722 B.C. when Assyria invaded, and the Northern kingdom ceased to exist. The land of Judah remained a nation for more than 300 years, but in 586

B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem and all of Judah, taking the people captive. This period of Jewish history became known as the "Babylonian Captivity." 2 Chronicles 36 records that the invaders tore down and burned the house of God—the Temple—and the protective wall surrounding Jerusalem. What was at one time the splendor of Israel lay in complete ruins, the armies of Babylon carrying off all the treasures of Judah along with the remnant of survivors. **2 Chronicles 36:20 (NKJ)** reads: **"And those who had escaped from the sword he [King Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon, and they were servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia."** God's people were chained together and marched the 800 miles to Babylon, where they lived as they had centuries before in Egypt-like slaves. That's the bad news!

The good news is that God didn't forget His people—He had a plan and a purpose to accomplish. His plan included King Cyrus of Persia and King Darius, who ruled the neighboring Medes. Together these two rulers invaded Babylon, forcing the surrender of Nebuchadnezzar's armies. Then God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus (2 Chronicles 36:22) to write a declaration stating that God had appointed him to build the Lord a house in Jerusalem. In doing so, he allowed the people to return to the city that had been destroyed 70 years earlier. This period has been referred to as the "Second Exodus." The return of the Jews to their homeland took place in three phases under the leadership of three different men.

Zerubbabel led the first group, followed by the second group, led by Ezra, some 80 years later. By that time, Cyrus had died, and King Artaxerxes came to the throne. Thirteen years later, the third group of Jews returned under the leadership of Nehemiah.

Ezra and Nehemiah shared the same historical background, and at one time, the book of Nehemiah was considered the "second book of Ezra." The book of Ezra is the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem, while the book of Nehemiah is the reconstruction of the wall around the city. The Temple was completed under Ezra's leadership but was left without the protection of a wall until God called Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and lead the people to rebuild. It is Nehemiah's account—his personal journal of that project that is the focus of our attention. As you have time this week, you may want to read the first seven chapters of the book of Ezra.

The book of Nehemiah takes the reader to the end of the historical account of the Old Testament, approximately 400 years before the birth of the Messiah. The book's theme is the challenge to rise and rebuild the wall in spite of the tremendous opposition encountered from without and within, a task that was completed in only 52 days! The book can be divided into two primary parts: (1) the reconstruction of the wall (chapters 1-7) and (2) the restoration of the people (chapters 8-13).

The Author Profile;

Nehemiah was the son of Hachaliah, mentioned only twice in the book: in chapter 1:1 and 10:1 in the genealogy. Nehemiah's name in Hebrew is *Nehemiah*, meaning *Comfort of Yahweh*. God's hand was mightily upon this humble yet strong man to bring about restoration to His people and glory to His name. As cupbearer to King Artaxerxes 1, he held a position of great importance and influence. In that role, he received the coveted trust and confidence of the king as one of his closest advisors.

Many characteristics distinguished Nehemiah as a great man, and throughout the book, he is portrayed in three very different roles. In the opening verses, he is the **cupbearer** to the king; about midway through the story, he takes on the role of **builder** for the people; in the last third of the book, we find him assuming the governor's role city and the surrounding areas of Jerusalem. His first two roles no doubt prepared him for his last and most challenging role as governor, including the inward spiritual work of reviving and reforming the people once again resettled within the city's protective wall. This task would involve years of Nehemiah's godly example and leadership.

Day One: Exploring the Text

Read **Nehemiah 1:1-11**

Breaking News!

What turns your head and captures your attention as you open the newspaper or turn on the evening news? Is it the world situation? Or the day's stock report? Or perhaps the latest sports update? Whatever your preference, think of how you would feel if you asked about your family and suddenly saw or heard on the latest news bulletin that your relatives were barely getting by, eking out a living in the poorest conditions imaginable, unprotected from evil influences, and your family name was the object of scorn and ridicule. It's hard to relate to what Nehemiah must have felt when he heard the news his brother brought him, but slipping our feet into Nehemiah's sandals helps us to try.

The Jews living in the land at the time were such a small remnant that they had to adapt themselves to the culture around them. Their intermarrying and political ties only made the situation worse. No longer were they living as the "people of God." Their former choices had brought upon them consequences that were hard to bear.

1. Why do you think Nehemiah asked about the surviving Jews in Jerusalem?

It's been said that no true Jew ever completely forgets Jerusalem because it was the place designated by God where His name would forever be honored. Nehemiah heard the words "great distress" and "reproach" used to describe his people there. The Hebrew word for *great distress* means *misery* and *calamity*. The Hebrew word for *reproach* means *sharp, cutting, penetrating, or piercing*. This told Nehemiah that the Jews he asked about were in a very vulnerable position. They were under constant verbal attacks from their enemies meant to intimidate and wear them down.

2. What 4 things does Nehemiah do upon hearing Hanani's report?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
3. What do you learn about the kind of man Nehemiah was from his reaction to the report?
4. The month of Chislev mentioned in verse 1 corresponds to our calendar months of mid-November to mid-December. The month of Nisan mentioned in 2:1 corresponds with our calendar in mid-March to mid-April. How long does this tell you that Nehemiah prayed before receiving an answer from God

5. What is **your** first response when you hear unpleasant news about those you know and love? How quick are you to identify yourself with the problems you hear about? Do you react by saying, "gee, that's too bad" and go on about your business, or do you begin praying and look for opportunities to get involved?

a. On a scale of 1 - 10 (1 being marginally interested and 10 being fully involved), circle your usual response:

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

6. What does the Bible have to say regarding your interest in others?

a. **1 Corinthians 10:24**

b. **Romans 12:13**

c. **Galatians 6: 10**

If you find that you have a hard time identifying with the needs of others, you will also find it hard in the coming weeks to understand why Nehemiah acted the way he did. You'll find it even harder to understand and fulfill the purpose God has for you in this life. Would you like to come closer to God's perspective on the matter? God's Holy Spirit makes it possible for you to love others as He loves them.

If you have never prayed and invited Jesus Christ into your heart to be your Lord and Savior, but you would like to, you have the opportunity to do so right now. Just bow your head and pray the following: ***"Lord Jesus, come into my heart. I confess that I'm a sinner in need of your forgiveness and cleansing. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to live a life that is pleasing to You. I thank you for coming inside and that I am born again; in Jesus name, Amen. "***

If you prayed to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, tell your group leader or church pastor about it today. You're now on the path God foreordained for you to walk in the newness of life with Him!

Brick Upon Brick: (Memory verse—begin today to build it into your heart and mind.) ***"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me. " Isaiah 6:8 (NASB)***

Day Two:

Nehemiah's Prayer

Successful navigation through the Christian life requires a balanced blend of **prayer** and **action**. We see both modeled for us in the life of Nehemiah. One glance at the obstacles facing Nehemiah allows us to understand why prayer was so important to him. First, he was eight hundred miles away from the desire of his heart—Jerusalem—and even by today's standards of transportation, that is a considerable distance. Second, he was employed by an unbelieving king who relied on Nehemiah for everyday matters, so why would he be inclined to let him leave? Third, he had no resources or manpower on hand to do anything to alleviate the conditions of God's people in Jerusalem. So, he resorted to the one powerful means he did have at his disposal: **prayer!**

How far away are you from realizing your heart's desire? Do obstacles appear to be blocking your way? Does there seem to be nothing you can do about the situation? Read through Nehemiah's prayer again in verses 4-11.

1. Summarize what Nehemiah says about each of the following in his prayer:

- **God**

- **God's promises**

- **God's people**

2. A close look at Nehemiah's prayer brings to light several elements that are an essential part of effective praying: (1) *praise and adoration of God for who He is*; (2) *confession of all sin*; (3) *praying God's promises back to Him*; (4) *being available to answer the need*. Which of these elements do you see evident in verses 5-11?

V. 5:

V. 6:

V. 7:

V. 8:

V. 9:

V.10:

V.11:

The importance of prayer as a priority cannot be overstated in terms of our needs and the needs of others. The great preacher, Alan Redpath, left a lesson for all believing Christians to heed: "*You never lighten the load unless you have first felt the pressure in your own soul. You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they are.*" Nehemiah certainly felt the pressure in his soul and realized what he was asking God to do.

3. Think about a situation either you are facing right now or someone you know is facing. Ask yourself the following:
 - Have I felt the pressure in my own soul?
 - Have my eyes been opened to see things as they really are?
 - Has God made me aware of a need and put a desire on my heart to be available to meet the need?
 - Have I talked with Him about it?

The point is until you can say *yes* to these questions by spending time *with* God, God won't mightily use you. When you exhaust your own resources and abilities, then and only then do you come to the boundless resources and limitless power of God to accomplish things on your behalf. He delights in doing the impossible! He is waiting to listen to your request. Nehemiah was quick to call out to God for help whenever he needed it. He was most often found in the *kneeling position* when facing problems. How about you—are you comfortable in the kneeling position? It has been said that *your knees don't knock when you kneel on them!*

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Deeper Discoveries-Adding Words to the Wall

It's time to gather your tools together—whatever resources you have on hand and get ready to dig! Start with a good dictionary and then move into other resources: a Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, encyclopedia, and additional Bible translations. If you're new to Bible study, you probably won't have many of these in your library, but start with what you do have and add on as you are able. Your library of resources will grow as you grow.

If you're not used to praying, then you may not be aware of the various aspects that are part of the prayer process. Several were mentioned in yesterday's lesson: *praise*, *confession*, *supplication*, and *availability* to meet the need. Today we'll take a closer look at two aspects of Nehemiah's prayer that should be an ongoing vital part of every believer's prayer life: *fasting* and *confession*.

1. Write a definition for the word *fasting* (v. 4) using the resources you have on hand:

Feasting was always an essential part of Jewish life, but *fasting*—going without food for a period of time was just as important. The purpose of fasting is to show humility and sorrow and to realize dependence upon God. In Old Testament times, garments of sackcloth, ashes sprinkled on one's head, unwashed hands, and leaving the head unanointed were signs that a person was observing a fast.

When Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit following His baptism, He fasted for 40 days and nights, gaining victory over temptation. He left instructions for His followers about the way we are to fast.

2. Read **Matthew 6:16-18** and finish the following:

- When you fast, do not _____
because _____
- But when you fast, do _____
so that _____
- ... And your Father who sees in secret _____

Notice in these verses that Jesus did not say *if* you fast, but rather *when* you fast. It was a forgone conclusion to Him that His followers would fast. Doing so regularly in conjunction with prayer draws us into deeper dependence upon God and tells Him we are serious about our prayers. It also gives us an increased ability to trust Him and understand His will.

3. Using your resources, write a definition for the word *confess* (V. 6):

The word **confess** means to be in agreement with God over the wrong that has been committed—to share His perspective on the sin; to have a hatred for it because it separates a person from fellowship with Him. God forgives when you confess with your mouth what is present in your heart. It allows you to clear out the rubble that doesn't belong there. Daily confession allows a person to maintain a right relationship with God.

4. Read **1 John 1:8-10** and finish the following:

- **If we say we have no sin** _____
- **If we confess our sins,** _____

- **If we say that we have not sinned** _____

This same *word—confess—can* also be an expression of thanks to God for His nature and work in our lives. Take time during your lesson today to practice this word using both its meanings.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Nehemiah-Man of Priorities

Nehemiah is a model example of leadership. But what made him God's man of the hour? Lest we look at his great abilities and think we can't relate, we need to read between the lines and realize that he was a layman who didn't get to choose his circumstances or his place of service. His position at the palace was one of privilege and luxury, but his call to service took him to devastation and poverty. Who but the man or woman of God would ever respond to such a call? Keep your eyes open to the similarities between you and Nehemiah, between his lot in life and yours, between his call to service and what God has spoken to your heart.

We'll have many opportunities in the next few weeks to observe the character qualities of Nehemiah's life. This week the most obvious to us (and not this week only) is the priority he placed on prayer. We can learn from his example the importance of developing a strong, healthy prayer life. A few of the reasons why it is important are evident in our chapter this week: see how many you can relate to.

- ***Prayer focuses our attention on God the One who is greater than we are.***
- ***Looking to God enables us to see things clearly.***
- ***The heart becomes quieted in His presence, releasing fear and anxiety.***
- ***We can identify with the needs of others around us.***
- ***Prayer activates our faith! Time with God enables us to trust Him.***

1. As Nehemiah focused on God, what perspective of God did he have? v. 5
2. How often did he pray to God? v. 6
3. What came clearly into focus the longer he prayed? vv. 6-7
 - a. As you read through Nehemiah's prayer, does he sound confident or worried? Please comment.
 - b. In verses 6-7, how does he identify with the people he prays for?
4. What is the specific request that moves him into action? v. 11

- a. What does it mean to **fear God's name**?
 - b. What specific request does Nehemiah make on his own behalf?
5. Why do you think Nehemiah mentions—almost in passing, that he was the king's cupbearer? v. 11

We'll see in our next lesson that what seemed impossible to Nehemiah apart from God became a definite reality with God in the picture.

6. What is that reality according to **Proverbs 21:1**?
- a. How does this reality give you hope today in the midst of your situation?

For review: can you say that all of the following apply to you;

- **Praising:** Do you spend time daily worshipping God for who He is?
- **Confessing:** Are you in the habit of keeping short accounts with God?
- **Fasting:** Is this a regular habit of your Christian life?
- **Serving:** Are you available for God to use you when and where He chooses?

Selah (Pause and think about it.) Have you noticed any similarities this week between:

- ❖ Nehemiah's circumstances and yours?
- ❖ Nehemiah's call to service and what God has spoken to your heart?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these prayers at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer for a heart that listens to God and cares for others;

God wants you to care for His people the way He does. You can if you simply ask Him.

A prayer for the fulfillment of God's promise;

Take one of the promises found in your chapter this week and pray it back to God, asking Him to make it real in your life.

A prayer for God's perspective on priorities;

Does it seem to you that you are often taking two steps forward and three backward? If so, it may be because your priorities are not in the right order. Ask God to help you.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

The Rebuilt Life:

Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 2

A Look Back.

Nehemiah occupied the trusted and important position of cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia (464-423 B.C.). This king was the son of Xerxes, making him the stepson of Queen Esther, who ascended to the throne of Persia when the previous queen was deposed by her husband due to a public act of disobedience (see Esther 1-2).

She was one of many young girls in the realm summoned to the royal palace (the same royal palace where we first meet Nehemiah serving), given months of beauty treatments, and then placed in the royal harem with the other hopefuls vying for the opportunity to become the next queen. Esther quickly became the favorite of all who knew her, and the king selected her as his new queen. Being a Jew, Esther's nationality was kept secret until an evil plot by a high-ranking official of the king to exterminate the Jewish race forced her hand. After three days of desperate prayer and fasting, and through a series of shrewdly planned meetings, the plot was exposed, and the Jew's enemy was put to death.

Esther became queen approximately 60 years after the Jews had returned to Jerusalem. Following her coronation and the promotion of her uncle, Mordecai, to the position of Prime Minister, the Jews of the land enjoyed a great deal of prestige at the Persian court. It is thought that Esther was likely still alive and in a very influential position in the palace when Ezra and Nehemiah both made their journeys to Jerusalem. She perhaps even influenced King Artaxerxes' great favor upon Nehemiah and the Jews in allowing them to return and rebuild.

Day One: Surveying the Passage

In Nehemiah 1, we discovered that when prayer is the priority, and a person begins to be comfortable on their knees, things start to happen. God plants a seed of desire in the heart, making way for His plan to be unfolded and His purpose to be fulfilled.

This week in Nehemiah 2, we are given a front-row seat from which to view what happens when God hears and answers prayer. We see Nehemiah receive great favor from the hand of King Artaxerxes. He is granted permission to return and rebuild the walls. He is provided abundant resources and armed guards for the journey. He is handed letters of reference and the authority to act as governor of Judah

Open your study each day with a word of prayer.

Read all of **Nehemiah 2:1-20**.

Carrying a Burden

Carrying a burden can be, at times, a weighty matter, particularly when it's a matter of the heart. Through four long months, Nehemiah carried out his duties in the palace while carrying a burden on his heart. Think about it-all during those months as he worked, he prayed, and as he prayed, he wept, waited, and watched for his opportunity. One day the king noticed the countenance of his cupbearer and inquired about it. This was risky, for monarchs of this day were always sheltered from anything or anyone that might cloud their mood or cause them unhappiness. Had the king so desired, he could have had Nehemiah banished or killed.

1. The king asks Nehemiah a series of three questions. What are they, and what is Nehemiah's **initial** reaction to each one?

- The king's question (v. 2): Nehemiah's reaction (v. 2):

- The king's question (v. 4): Nehemiah's reaction (v. 4):

- The king's question (v. 6): Nehemiah's reaction (v. 6):

Nehemiah couldn't be sure whether the king's reaction would be one of the thumbs up or thumbs down. He had only an instant to offer up an emergency prayer, but he had confidence in that prayer because it was backed by four months of prayer and fasting.

2. When facing a crisis, do you have the confidence to believe that God will respond kindly to your request? How does Hebrews 4:16 say you are to approach God?
- a. The word **boldly** in the previous verse means to have *freedom of speech*. Are you exercising your freedom of speech? Does it bolster your confidence?

Not only did Nehemiah pray about his opportunity for four months, but he also planned and prepared for it. He was ready to act the moment God opened the door.

3. Perhaps you're carrying a burden today. Considering *your* present circumstances, *how* are you applying each of the following as you await God's answer?
- *Praying—*

 - *Planning—*

 - *Preparing—*

Although you may not be sure of how the person in authority in your particular situation may react, you can be sure that God is working all things to your good in the matter. Are you prepared and ready for your open door?

Nehemiah implemented each aspect of the above three-step process as he carried his burden on his heart. If you are not already praying, planning, and preparing, you may want to include these steps in the future. They will help you think through what needs to be done and be ready when the call comes!

Brick upon Brick: (Memory verse) "So they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' Then they set their hands to this good work " Nehemiah 2:18b (NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text Faith that Asks

Read **Nehemiah 2:1-10** for review.

How good are you at following directions or utilizing a roadmap or blueprint? Do you appreciate the learning process of those that have preceded you and equipped you in one way or another? The *whole counsel of God*—the Bible—is God's master blueprint for His people to follow. It is all we need to reach our destination safely; because it is God breathed, it is our sufficiency and enabling for successful service.

Nehemiah realized he was God's instrument for His own purpose. He was aware and burdened by the fact that God's people were suffering because they were not following His Word. He took that burden, that desire, to the Lord and then got involved to change things. He was not afraid to ask for what he needed!

1. It's one thing to give to a worthy cause—to contribute out of one's resources for a humanitarian purpose; it's another thing altogether to step into the equation and become involved. How much was Nehemiah willing to give? v. 5
 - a. What, in your estimation, made Nehemiah so willing to go?

When you're convinced that God has chosen you and you've heard His call, you can have the confidence of knowing that He will also enable you to do what He requires.

2. Take a moment to meditate on **I Corinthians 10:11**—it applies to you today.
 - All of these things happened as examples; they were written for you. Do you feel a sense of responsibility in knowing that you have an important role to play in God's great scheme?
 - Are you able to repeat the words of **Nehemiah 2:5**, "*I ask that you send me*"?

3. What specific things did Nehemiah request?
 - a. Verse 7:
 - b. verse 8:
 - c. verse 9:
4. What did King Artaxerxes give Nehemiah that he did not ask for in verse 9?
 - a. What was the reason these things were granted to Nehemiah? v. 8
5. Considering your situation, what is it that you specifically need to accomplish the task God has set before you? Will you ask Him right now?
6. Through what means and by what measure does God promise to provide for you?
 - a. **Ephesians 3:20**
 - b. **Philippians 4:19**

Acceptance of your part in God's work is accompanied by the allowance of everything you need to accomplish the task. Ask, and it will be given—and even more than you ask!

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Deeper Discoveries—Adding Word to the Wall

Read **Nehemiah 2:11-20** for review.

It would have taken Nehemiah and his party two to three months to complete their journey. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, they rested for three days before getting to work. Those three days were probably sleepless for the most part, and the daylight hours were spent meeting people, gathering data, asking questions, and evaluating the situation. Verse 15 says that during the night, Nehemiah inspected the walls and surveyed the damage.

1. Using the resources you have on hand, write a definition for the word *inspected*.

If you were to reference the word *inspected* in the original Hebrew, you would find that it means to *expect with hope and patience; to tarry, view, and wait*.

2. Why do you think it was important for Nehemiah to engage in this process alone?
 - c. Who was Nehemiah relying on to direct him? v. 12
 - d. Do you think that looking at the reality of the situation was *encouraging* or *discouraging* to him? Please explain.

Nehemiah did his homework thoroughly by initiating a secret survey while waiting and relying on God's leading. Then and only then did he face his greatest challenge, which was getting the people to catch the vision and sign up for the rebuilding process.

3. In spite of the discouragement around him and the low morale of the people, how did Nehemiah challenge them to get involved? v. 17
4. Using the resources you have on hand, write a definition for the word *reproach*.
5. What words did Nehemiah use to identify with the people in verse 17?

Words such as *reproach*, *disgrace*, *rebuke*, and *shame*, are labels that the people of God should not wear. It is here that Nehemiah put on the mantel of leadership and fully assumed the role, becoming an example for the people to follow.

6. Briefly cite some specific ways that Nehemiah planned and prepared for this wall-building endeavor.

Selah (Pause and think about it.) Have you noticed any similarities this week between;

- ❖ Nehemiah's planning and preparation process and your own?
- ❖ His demonstration of dependence upon God and your dependence upon Him?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Nehemiah—Man of Vision

Vision is the ability to see farther than others see, while leadership is the ability to take others farther than they would go on their own. Nehemiah encompassed both qualities. From him, we learn that if you point a finger to cast blame and criticize, you will undermine confidence and squelch motivation; if you identify with the people and the problem, you will build up and encourage motivation.

1. If you were one of the people living in Jerusalem amidst the rubble and turmoil, how do you think you would have responded when presented with Nehemiah's challenge? What would motivate you to get on board with his vision?

Nehemiah wasn't a man who would sit back and wait for something to happen on its own—he was a proactive leader—men and women of vision usually are. Before the people even had a chance to respond negatively, Nehemiah shared how God had already helped him.

2. Compare Nehemiah's words in verses 8 and 18 pertaining to the *hand of God* with the response of the people in verse 18b. Did they catch the vision?

With the determination to rise and build made evident to all, Nehemiah was giving notice to his enemies that the work would proceed.

3. What was the response of those who were against the plans? vv. 10 and 19
4. Nehemiah was undeterred by the opposition. To whom was he looking for the success of the project? V. 20 What was his final word to those opposing the work?
5. Perhaps this is an excellent time to take a personal inventory of things. Look over the following list and see if you can answer positively to these questions?

- Has God given you a vision of a work He wants to do in or through you?
- Have you done your *homework—prayed, planned, and prepared?*
- To whom are you looking for the success of the project?
- Have you encountered opposition along the way? How have you handled it?

Undertaking work for the Lord may mean that others around you—even well-meaning friends and family, may not appreciate your vision and determination. In those times of opposition, your confidence will come as you continue to look to God to supply what you need. The reactions of others are not your responsibility—leave that and them to God!

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar-
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer of self-examination;

How long has it been since you've taken a good hard look at your relationship with God? Ask Him to reveal any *cracks in the wall* that are obvious to Him but that you have overlooked.

A prayer for greater boldness;

Whatever you happen to be dealing with right now, God would have you face the facts and then confidently look to Him for the next step.

Will you lift that prayer?

A prayer for a right heart attitude;

Ask God to help you respond to any criticism you encounter in a way that will honor and please Him.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

The Rebuilt Life:

Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 3 and 4

Suppose someone were to write an article about your involvement in your church. Would the information be interesting to the reader and speak well of you, or would it be somewhat boring and critical? What would it reveal about the quality of your work and your ability to work well with others? In his book *Be Determined*, Warren Wiersbe writes: "**When it comes to the work of the Lord, there is no place for spectators or self appointed advisors and critics; but there is always room for workers**" (Cook Communication Ministries, 1992, p. 37).

Begin your study each day with a word of prayer.

Day One: Surveying the Passage

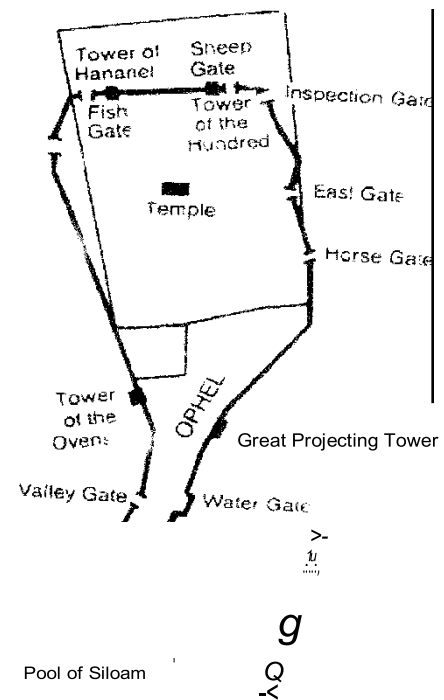
Workers on the Wall

The condition of God's city brought shame and reproach to His name. The plight of God's people had left them in poor, unprotected circumstances. Nehemiah faced a daunting challenge with great faith in God, and now the challenge to rise up and rebuild would require a large labor force and many resources.

Nehemiah kept a journal that chronicled the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. Here in Nehemiah 3, we see the results of his survey at night, picking up his pen to record on paper the names of those workers who answered the call. At first glance at this list may appear repetitive and perhaps even meaningless. Still, a closer look allows the reader to appreciate that each person's contribution to the work is significant to the overall success of the task

1. Read **Nehemiah 3:1-32**, recording your initial observations;
 - a. What does this chapter reveal about Nehemiah's plan?
 - b. What type of people were involved in the project?
 - c. Did you notice any similarities to God's people today?
 - d. Did everyone agree to become involved? Who didn't?

2. Take a few minutes to match specific individuals with their areas of service on the map at right.
3. Where is it that God's people (then and now) should begin working? v. 10



Think of the benefit to God's people if everyone acknowledged *home* as their first priority of service. (What about benefits to the church and even beyond to the world?)

4. Nehemiah evidently felt that one man's efforts merited a special mention. Who is he, and what is revealed about him in verse 20? (NASB is best.)
5. On a personal note, what is the most ambitious remodeling project you have ever undertaken? What lesson did you learn about yourself through the process?
 - Did you have help? If so, what did you learn about teamwork?
 - What do you want your work to reveal about you to others?

Remember that the purpose behind all work undertaken for the Lord must be the glory of God—not, the organization behind it, or the people involved. Jesus Christ fulfilled His purpose and left His followers motivating words to do the same: **"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work You have given Me to do"** (John 17:4 NKJ).

6. Do you have work to do for God? See **Ephesians 2:10**.
 Has He revealed to you His specific purpose?
 What will be your response?

Brick upon Brick: (Memory verse) **"So we built the wall . . . for the people had a mind to work."** (Nehemiah 4:6 NKJ)

Day Two: Deeper Discoveries—Adding Words to the Wall

Taking a closer look reveals that the focus of this week is first of all on **the building**—the process of what to use, where to start, and who to work alongside. The success of the worker's ability lay in the determination to follow a plan, stay focused on the goal, and work together through distraction or discouragement, keeping in mind that it is all for God's glory.

1. The word *built* is used six times in **Nehemiah 3 (verses. 1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 15)**. Looking at these verses, what stands out to you?
2. Using the resources you have on hand, write a definition for the word ***built***.

The literal translation for *built* means to *rebuild*. Author and preacher George Morrison state's: "***For the restoration process no new material was needed. In the debris of the ruined masonry lay all the material required ... and it seems to me that is always so when the walls of Zion are rebuilt***" (*Morning Sermons*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931, p. 249). In other words, new methods and materials do not guarantee the removal of the church's reproach. The deeper discovery is to be uncovered by going back again to the truths of Scripture that laid the foundation of faith in the first place. The believer needs to be aware of so-called "new ideas" and avenues of thought that may weaken and eventually erode the wall. If an idea isn't based on God's Word, it won't stand the test!

3. What stone of truth have you been able to ***recover*** through your study?
4. The word ***repair*** is used some thirty-five times in this text. Using your resources, write a definition.
 - a. What does your definition tell you about the wall?
 - b. Why were the gates of such great importance?

Locks and bars are mentioned five times, indicating not only the importance of *doing* God's work but also of *protecting* it. Locks and bars are used to protect from what is outside and also to keep safe what is inside. **2 John 8 (NIV)** states: "***Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.***"

5. What steps are you taking to not only protect yourself from the enemy but also guard and keep what is safe within?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

Building and Battling

Read **Nehemiah 4:1-23**.

Opportunities to glorify God will always be met with opposition. The moment you start to build, you will also begin to battle because the enemy-Satan and his demonic forces of evil do not want to see the Lord's work progress. The people in Jerusalem were used to living in the poorest conditions, left alone by their enemy. Still, when they turned to God for help and to each other to change their circumstances, the enemy suddenly reappeared.

The tactics the enemy uses to halt God's work can often become opportunities for growth as well as blessings for God's people. Placed in challenging circumstances, we can either choose to be better or bitter, thankful or critical, humble or rebellious. What Satan intends for evil, God intends for our good. When allowed, He uses the enemy's weapons as tools to further His work and develop our character.

1. In **Nehemiah 4**, list the tactics used to halt the work in the following passages. Then look up the references in God's Word to counter those tactics and briefly note them in the space provided.

Enemy's tactic

• vv. 1-6

• vv. 7-9

• v. 10

• vv. 11-23

Believer's Counter Tactic

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 -

Mark 14:38-

Ephesians 6:18

1 Corinthians 15:58 -

2. Which of the above counter-tactics is most helpful to you right now? Why?
3. Look up **2 Corinthians 10:4** and note what it says about our weapons and warfare.
 - a. Have you been able to pull down any strongholds lately?
 - b. Is anything keeping you from being "mighty in God"? Please explain.

Dr. Alan Redpath said of the Jews in Nehemiah's day that the reason they were successful in their work and in holding the enemy at bay was that they had a mind to work (v. 6), a heart to pray (v. 9), an eye to watch (v. 9), and an ear to hear (v. 20) (**Victorious Christian Service**, Revell, 1958; pp. 76-79). This combination allowed them to be victorious. If the same holds true for us today, then we too will be victorious. But let's face it, sometimes we can become our worst enemy! God warns every believer to be obedient in all things, lest Satan takes advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices (**2 Corinthians 2:9, 11**).

4. Is there an area in which God requires your obedience today? Would you note it here and write out your prayer request on page 7?

Disobedience can easily lead to discouragement, which can then hinder your attempts to rebuild those areas of your life that need attention.

Selah; (Pause and think about it.) Anyone working on a building site is required to wear a hard hat on the job. Which of the following hard hats do *you* wear most often?

- *Constructor*: making a positive contribution to build up and get the job done.
- *Destructor*: negatively tearing down what God's people are building up.
- *Obstructor*: deliberately placing obstacles in the path of those doing the work.
- *Interrupter*: causing ongoing problems for the workers that continue to bring things to a halt.

5. Are you helping or hindering the process? Do you perhaps need to change hats? What will help you make an immediate change?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Nehemiah—Man of Courage

Suppose you heard over and over as many as ten different times—that your enemies were going to pounce on you? The repetition of those words ringing in your ears would be disheartening. In the face of such discouragement, Nehemiah did not lose heart. He quickly took the appropriate action to remedy the situation. He countered the opposition's tactics by posting guards at the most vulnerable places on the wall and then arming Jewish families to fight together (v. 13). He didn't ignore the people's fear; he addressed it (v. 14), beginning first with the nobles, then the officials, then the rest of the people.

Courage is defined as the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear. It is fearlessness in the face of great peril. Many of us feel we lack this quality in our lives, but today's lesson teaches us that we can easily have it by basing our faith on three solid truths about the Lord: *who He is; what He's done in the past; what He's promised to do in the future*. We find all three in His Word.

1. What three things did Nehemiah tell the people to encourage them?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

The people had their eyes fixed on the rubbish around them instead of on the Lord. They could overcome their fear and fight the battle as they remembered Him. Good advice from the man looked to as a fearless leader. This is good advice for us today as well.

2. Take a moment to reflect on the following, sharing briefly on each one.
 - *I remember when God came to my defense*

 - *I remember from His Word that God says He is*

 - *I remember the specific word that He spoke to my heart*
3. Of what did Nehemiah assure the people? v. 20 Do you believe this truth applies to you in your present circumstances?
4. Read this promise in Scripture that Nehemiah might have been familiar with, and every believer should realize and claim: **Psalm 33:10-11**.
5. What further tactic did Nehemiah employ from that day on to alleviate fear and bolster confidence? vv. 16-18
6. Explain the significance of the **trumpet** in verses 18 and 20.
 - a. Can you think of why it might be good to have a **rallying point**?
 - b. Do you have Christians you can call upon when an emergency arises?
 - c. Have you thanked God and those individuals for standing with you? Have you got someone else's back covered for them?

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar—
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer for revelation;

Has God revealed His specific purpose for your life? Ask God to help you respond in obedience to His call

A prayer of examination

The workers on the wall held their weapons and wore their armor at all times; they removed their clothes only as they needed washing. Use **Ephesians 6: 10-18** to examine yourself—whether or not every part of your spiritual armor is in place and ready for battle.

A prayer for courage;

Remember again today who God is and what He's done on your behalf. Ask Him for a Scripture verse to strengthen your heart this coming week.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

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The Rebuilt Life:

Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 5

What happens when you notice your fellow workers turning the tables and working for their gain instead of the intended good and goal of the group? What are you supposed to do when you realize that certain individuals have become selfishly motivated, making personal profit their aim? Whenever we put ourselves at the center of the universe—begin calculating and basing our decisions on how it affects us first—we give the enemy at least a foothold, if not the victory.

Nehemiah faced attacks from the outside fearlessly. Now he would have to face an even more disturbing problem: selfishness from within the ranks. People were exploiting others for their own personal gain. Could this kind of internal strife be a problem for believers in the church today?

Begin your study each day with a word of prayer.

Day One: Surveying the Passage A Great Outcry!

Read Nehemiah 5:1-19

The present economic situation had given rise to a crisis among the Jews living in Jerusalem. This particular conflict did not happen overnight; it was brewing for a very long time and became so severe that there was a great outcry from the people.

The conflict facing Nehemiah was four-fold: some of the people were running out of food (V. 2); those who were able to eat were doing so by mortgaging their fields, vineyards, and their homes (V. 3); for some to keep their property they had to borrow from their Jewish brothers to pay their taxes to the king and those lending the money were charging exorbitant interest on the loans (V. 4); saddest of all, those without an income were forced to forfeit their property and sell their children into slavery (v. 5).

1. In a word or two, try to sum up the feelings of the people from verse 5.

There were some understandable, though unacceptable, reasons for conditions being what they were—many of the people—even those who were poorest—had committed themselves to the rebuilding project on the wall. To make matters worse, there was a famine, and some could not grow enough food for their families. Those who had an abundance were taking advantage of those who did not. Those who were able to raise crops on small farms fell victim to enemy raiding parties.

2. From your perspective of the text, explain Nehemiah's response in verse 6.

3. To better understand Nehemiah's righteous anger, take a closer look at the law God delivered to His people.
 - a. What limitation did God place on the Jews who loaned money to other Jews?
See **Exodus 22:25**

 - b. What was required of the lender if someone was unable to repay?
See **Leviticus 25:35-36** for your answer.

 - c. If an individual was to lose everything he had, requiring him to sell himself, how was the lender required to treat that man? **Leviticus 25:39- 41**

The above Old Testament passages spoke directly to the circumstances of the Jews in Nehemiah's day. His anger was justified not only because the people in Israel were exploiting their brethren but, even more importantly, they were violating God's laws. On the one hand, they were praying to God, asking for His gracious provision and help in building the wall (which He freely gave), while on the other hand, they were ignoring His laws. Their sin was not only against their brethren-it was against their God.

4. Read the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in **Matthew 18:21-35**. Can you think of a time in your life when God freely and graciously provided for you, while at the same time you did not respond in kind toward someone else?
 - Would you briefly explain it here in the space provided?

 - Would you be willing to admit that the wrong you committed was not only against the other person but also against God?

 - If the Lord has brought a situation to mind and you have not acknowledged it, would you bow your heart in prayer at this moment and ask His forgiveness?

Brick upon Brick: (Memory verse) ***"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others as better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests but also for the interests of others."***
(Philippians 2:3-4 NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text

A Great Assembly

Read **Nehemiah 5:6-13**

Anyone who's ever been in leadership knows that sooner or later, they will have to deal with conflict resolution. Some situations are easier solved than others, but if at all possible, we should make every effort to solve conflicts to benefit everyone involved. If we don't, things will most likely get worse.

The building project did not create the economic crisis; it only brought it out into the open as people's patience and priorities were being tested. No doubt it brought out the best in some and the worst in others, and by the time it was brought to Nehemiah's attention, it had become a very public matter, which is how Nehemiah would have to deal with it. Nehemiah's anger expressed in verse 6 was not a temper out of control; it was righteous indignation toward the oppression forced on his people by their fellow Jews.

1. According to verse 7, what was the very first thing Nehemiah did?

The words *I consulted with myself* (NASB) mean *my heart consulted within me*. The Hebrew translation means *to give one's self advice or counsel oneself*. In other words, he got in touch with his head and his heart, taking some time to carefully ponder what to do next. He was aware of his responsibility and his example. He would make sure he acted swiftly, but only after getting the right perspective on the matter.

2. In your own words, what do the following verses reveal about the importance of controlling one's anger?
 - a. **Psalm 4:4**
 - b. **Proverbs 16:32**
 - c. **Ephesians 4:26**
3. Have you ever dealt with the same kind of righteous indignation that Nehemiah felt? How did you handle it? Briefly explain your answer.
4. Nehemiah called a **great assembly** and spoke out publicly against what was going on. Whom did he speak out against? How did he rebuke them? v. 7
 - a. Of what did he remind them? v. 8

Nehemiah and some of the others were apparently using their own money to free some of the Jews from their pagan masters, and in turn, some of their own brothers were selling them back again to the Jews!

- b. What was wrong with what they were doing? What was at stake? V. 9
- c. What final, personal point did Nehemiah make in verse 10?
- d. What did Nehemiah ask them to do? What timeline did he give them? Was he asking anything that he was not already doing himself? V. 11

5. What kind of response did Nehemiah receive in verses 12-13?

To prove that they meant business and would follow through on what they had promised, Nehemiah asked them to take a public oath, detailing what consequences would befall them if they did not do as they had promised. Shaking off the robe was symbolic of an act of condemnation.

6. How did the collective assembly reply, and what did they all do together? V. 13

Nehemiah took a devastating crisis and turned it into an occasion of celebration. There was repentance on the part of the leaders, the people realized they could solve their problems by working together, and God received the praise and worship of all!

Selah (Pause and think about it.) Have you noticed any similarities this week between the internal strife Nehemiah had to deal with and a situation in your own life? Is there anything about his example that helps you in dealing with your problem?

Brick upon Brick: Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Deeper Discoveries-Adding Words to the Wall

" . . . The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" Nehemiah 5:9

One of the motivating factors behind Nehemiah's desire to become involved with God's people was the reality that God's city was no longer a magnificent testimony to His greatness; instead, it lay in shambles as a reproach to God's name. We looked at the word **reproach** in lesson 2 from the standpoint of what the people had to deal with because of their shame. This week we'll examine the act of *reproaching*—its effects and consequences.

- 1. Using your dictionary and other resources (you may want to look back to lesson 2, pg. 5 to reference the usage of the word as a noun), write a definition of the word *reproach* when used as a verb of action.

The Hebrew word means *cutting, penetrating, or piercing*. It is the idea of inflicting sharp, cutting words on someone. The outcome can be either positive or negative, depending on who is speaking and what is intended. In this case, the Jews were bearing the slanderous attacks of those who were their enemies.

2. We get a sense of the force behind the insults being hurled at the Jews as we read Nehemiah's prayer in **4:4-5**. What was the obvious intent of their enemies?
 - a. What does Nehemiah say was the affect of their insults upon the builders?
 - b. How does he ask God to respond to them—what does he ask God to do?

The reproach of these wicked men upon the people of God and the name of God carried devastating results. The fact that a man as tenderhearted as Nehemiah could pray as he did revealed the evil intent behind their words. Nehemiah's point in verse 9 is that the leaders of God's people bear greater responsibility and should walk before the Lord and the people in a way that does not give the enemies of God an opportunity or occasion for reproach. Job was a man who endured great trials and suffering for his faith, but he purposed to maintain such integrity in his life that his own heart would not reproach him as long as he lived (**Job 27:6**).

3. Can you think of anything in your life that would bring reproach to God's name?

Matthew 11:20 (AMPC) tells us that ***"He [Jesus] began to censure and reproach the cities in which most of His mighty works had been performed, because they did not repent [and their hearts were not changed]."*** In another passage in **Mark 16:14** (AMPC), after He had risen, Christ appeared to the eleven apostles and, ***"He reprovved and reproached them for their unbelief (their lack of faith) and their hardness of heart because they had refused to believe those who had seen Him. . . "***

4. What similarity/contrast do you see in the above verses?
 - a. What do you suppose was the Lord's intended outcome in the above instances?
5. Those who serve for God's glory are promised in Scripture that they will also have to suffer for God's glory. According to **1 Peter 4:12-16**, what should your perspective be when you are reproached for Christ's sake? Will you take comfort in these words today?

Brick upon Brick: Review this week's memory verse

Day Four: Nehemiah Man of Great Influence

Read **Nehemiah 5:14-19**.

Influence is the ability to motivate others to action. Nehemiah certainly had that ability, but it was not conferred upon him; he had to earn it. It starts with whole-hearted obedience to God, the result of which leads to integrity, initiative, involvement, and intercession. When a man's only agenda is to please God, his words will be backed up by the power of God!

Nehemiah viewed his position as governor as a trust from God; therefore, he didn't give in to the pressures or privileges of leadership that so often befall a less committed person.

1. As you read through today's passage, what stood out to you regarding Nehemiah's generosity?
 - a. How did his behavior differ from that of his predecessors?
 - b. How many were served from his table every day? What does this tell you about the degree of his influence?
2. Why did he not take advantage of the "perks" he was entitled to as governor?
V. 18
 - a. What other reason was more important to him? V. 15

Nehemiah did not take advantage of what was rightfully his; he used his own money to help those in need. He didn't let his popularity get the best of him; he stayed pressed to God and sensitive to the needs of the people.

3. What was Nehemiah able to ask God for with a clear conscience?

The Apostle Paul was another of God's servants who exerted tremendous influence during his lifetime, but he also did not allow himself to profit personally from the ministry. He, too, was self-supporting and distributed monetary donations to the people who needed them the most.

4. What did Paul learn about depending on God? **Philippians 4:11-12**

What great life lesson did he learn from verse 13 of the same passage?

5. Statistics show that the average person will influence some ten thousand others in his or her lifetime. What do you want others to remember about your influence?

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar-
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to be a peacemaker;

Everyone has to deal with conflict at one time or another, but every believer hopes that when it comes, they will be able to bring things to a positive, godly resolution. Ask God to help you to be His instrument for change.

A prayer to honor God's name;

If you were able to pinpoint an area of your life from day three of your lesson (pg. 5) that would bring reproach to God's name, ask Him to forgive you and to help you bring Him honor.

A prayer to be a godly influence;

Nehemiah had great integrity and great influence. He was able to ask God to bless him because of all the good he was able to do on behalf of God's people. Ask God today to help you do the same.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

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The Rebuilt Life:

Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 6

One of the marks of maturity in the Christian life is the confident ability to say no without having to explain your reasoning or worry about what others will think about you. Some people will never understand you or your reasons, so if you plan to be effective in your service for God, you must reserve the right to refuse and leave it at that.

How are you at handling intimidation? How do you react when others try to undermine your confidence? Have you ever had to take a strong stand for something you felt was right, no matter what anyone else thought about it? These are questions we'll consider in our lesson this week and, hopefully, we'll become resolved to follow Nehemiah's example.

Begin your study each day with a word of prayer.

Day One: Surveying the Passage

Operation Intimidation

Read **Nehemiah 6:1-19**

The ribbon-cutting ceremony was already in the planning stages; Nehemiah could see the end in sight! The fulfillment of a God-given task birthed in Nehemiah's heart, was almost a reality when the enemy stepped up his efforts to stop the work open opposition (chapters 4-5) didn't work, so now the enemy will try to bring things to a halt through a much more subtle series of attacks.

1. The latest series of attacks happened at a critical point in time. According to verse 1, when did the latest attack hit?
 - a. Why would the timing be potentially very discouraging to Nehemiah?
 - b. Have you ever nearly finished a project only to have disaster staring you down? How did it make you feel at the time?

Nehemiah was close to finishing the most important task the people of Jerusalem had seen in their entire generation! Suddenly he is faced with three attacks, all designed to induce discouragement and defeat. But God would use them to strengthen His servant.

2. What was the first attack? V. 2
 - a. Why might this attack appear harmless?
 - b. What was Nehemiah's response to this attack?
3. The messages kept coming-how many were there? How did he answer each one? V. 4

Selah; (Pause and think for a moment.)

- What work has God given you to do that's worthy of your full attention?

- Is there anything you can do in your "great work" to make sure that you do not become easily sidetracked? Prayerfully commit this to the Lord today.

Brick upon Brick: (Memory verse) **"Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."**
(Nehemiah 6:9b NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text

The Trap

Read **Nehemiah 6:1-9**

As we observe how to handle difficult situations, we see the example of a man who could not be deterred by anything or anyone. Why was Nehemiah able to stand every test handed to him? Because he was so convinced that God had called him to the task that he was not about to be sidetracked by any attempt to turn him away from the work

1. What was the second attack aimed at Nehemiah to halt the work? V. 5

The first attack was *personal*, between Sanballat, Geshem, and Nehemiah, but the second attack was *publicly open* for everyone to read.

2. Notice the tone of the words used in verses 6 and 7 by these men. What were the threatening remarks they made toward Nehemiah?
 - a. Why might the second attack be even more intimidating than the first one?

3. Put yourself in Nehemiah's sandals-which choice would be the most difficult for you? Please explain.

Have you ever noticed that you can't seem to identify the source of a rumor or confirm its accuracy? That's because rumors are meant to be hurtful and inflict harm on the intended victim.

4. According to **Proverbs 6:16-19**, what are the **seven** things God hates?
 - a. Three of the seven have one thing in common-what is it?
 - b. What does **James 3:5-10** say about this member of the body?
 - c. Is there any hope? Can you cite a Scripture that gives hope?

Sometimes, the best way to deal with verbal attacks is to ignore them; other times, they call for confrontive measures, which Nehemiah did in this case.

5. How did Nehemiah respond to these rumors? V. 8
 - a. What did he realize was happening? V. 9
 - b. What is his next step in verse 9, and what does he ask?
 - c. What do his actions once again reveal about his character?

Once again, Nehemiah took his hurt to God. No matter how strong you are, there will be times when the remarks and rumors generated by others will hurt you. When that happens, take the matter to God and ask Him to intervene on your behalf. If you must mention it to someone, let it be someone you can trust not to repeat the matter but simply agree to join you in praying about it.

Brick upon Brick: Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Deeper Discoveries —Adding Words to the Wall

The open letter brought by Sanballat's servant was an attempt to strike fear in the heart of Nehemiah. There was a public reading of slanderous remarks against him and threats accusing him of treason against the king, who trusted and supported him. When Nehemiah recognized and openly acknowledged what they tried to do, he answered these attacks and once more looked to his God, saying, ***"Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."***

1. Using your dictionary or other Bible resources, write a definition of the word ***strengthen***.

2. Using the results of your investigative process, try to briefly summarize what God's answer to Nehemiah's prayer would have meant to him.

3. When we find ourselves in a difficult spot, we know to turn to God and then to His Word to hear what He would say to us. Look up the following Scriptures that present a picture of how the Lord strengthens us. Think about what each one says and write out what it means to you personally.
 - Psalm 27:14

 - Psalm 138:3

 - Isaiah 35:3-4

 - 2 Timothy 4:17

4. What kind of opposition are you facing right now?

What have you learned in your lesson this week that will:

- Strengthen you to go on?

- Help you deal with the enemy's persistence?

- Allow you to know when to turn the other cheek (Luke 6:29) and when to resist the enemy and even fight back?

Nehemiah recognized what his enemies were trying to do-accuse him of treason-and with a clear conscience, he answered their attacks, taking the matter to God. We would do well to follow his example. Whenever and wherever the Lord's work is done to glorify Him, the enemy will rise and strike back. Usually, his most forceful attempts will immediately precede or follow a great spiritual victory on your part, so don't be surprised when it happens. When the Lord opens a door, His adversaries will walkthrough ahead of you to spread the same type of lies, rumors, and accusations they hurled at Nehemiah because that same enemy wants to stop you! Remember the words of Jesus: **"Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"** (Matthew 5:11-12).

Brick upon Brick: Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Nehemiah-Man of Commitment

Read **Nehemiah 6:10-19**

Have you ever noticed how relentless and ruthless your enemy can be? When one tactic doesn't work, he tries another until he can achieve his prime objective: to stop you in your tracks! But the Bible says we are not ignorant of his devices that we should be on guard at all times, ready for whatever comes our way.

Nehemiah's enemies tried various means to stop him, each becoming progressively more threatening to him personally. First, there was a personal request. Second, an open letter with accusations and, third, a warning for Nehemiah to run for his life!

1. Looking at the following verses, what was the intended evil outcome in each instance?
 - a. V. 2
 - b. V. 9
 - c. V. 13

In the last attempt to halt the work, Nehemiah was encouraged to seek refuge in the temple for his own safety, but doing so would have meant breaking God's law and ruining Nehemiah's reputation forever.

2. Nehemiah quickly and wisely perceived that this offer of safety was not from God's hand at all. Who planned it? V. 12
3. Once again, Nehemiah resorts to prayer. What does he ask this time? V. 14

Nehemiah's steadfast determination allowed him to proclaim in verse 15: "**Mission accomplished!**" In just fifty-two days, the wall was finished!

4. How did Nehemiah's enemies feel about this accomplishment? What were they forced to admit? V. 16

Can you imagine what Nehemiah and the workers on the wall must have felt as those last bricks were set in place? What a sense of fulfillment to know that the vision had become a reality in spite of the endless mockery, threats, accusations, and assaults from the enemy. What does God want us to take to heart from this story today? To know that it is impossible to do God's will-to pass those bricks from person to person-without attacks coming our way; but at the same time, when we stand firm, we are invincible in Him! He undertakes on our behalf when we are at the center of His will.

5. What can you remember as you stand firm during your own building process?

- a. **James 4:7**

- b. **1 Peter 5:8-9**

- c. **1 John 4:4**

6. What promise is found in **Philippians 1:6** for every believer to claim?

The Amplified Classic version of this says that right up to the time of the Lord's return, God will continue *developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you*. Will you let yourself be strengthened by this promise today and, through it renew your commitment to finish what you've started?

Brick upon Brick: Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five: **Applying the Mortar—
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer for strength;

Whatever task you are undertaking for the Lord, you will need His power to accomplish it. Ask Him today to strengthen you with His might through His Spirit in your inner being.

A prayer for bridling the tongue;

The tongue is the one member of the human body capable of doing great harm to the body of Christ. Ask God to help you control your tongue and remind you to carefully consider what you are about to say before you say it.

A prayer for finishing what you start;

Is it easy for you to complete projects, or do you most often start-stop and then repeat the process? Ask God to help you discipline yourself to follow through on your commitment to finish what you start.

Write out this week's verse from memory

Notes

The Rebuilt Life:

Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 7 and 8

Have you ever expressed a big sigh of relief or let out a shout of joy after an important project? Have you ever patted yourself on the back for a job well done? As you put your tools away, were you expecting life to return to normal once again?

The wall was rebuilt, the doors were fastened in place, and the people were congratulating themselves, ready to declare the monumental task finished-but was it really finished? Yes, they could set down bricks and mortar and put away their trowels and shovels, but Nehemiah knew the work was not finished. The broken-down walls were rebuilt; now, the people's broken-down hearts and lives needed restoring. Chapter 7 reveals the critical changes Nehemiah made to usher in the first spiritual revival in the lives of God's people.

Begin your study each day with a word of prayer.

Day One: Surveying the Passage

Passing the Baton

Read **Nehemiah 7:1-73**

It was now time to organize the community within the city's walls so that God's people could enjoy the abundant life God wanted them to have. The walls would protect the city; the organization within the walls would preserve and protect the quality of life for the people.

1. In verses 1-2, Nehemiah raised individuals to positions of leadership. What responsibility were they given?
 - a. What do you remember from an earlier lesson about Hanani?
 - b. What do you learn in verse 2 about Hananiah? (Note: the citadel was a fortified building situated adjacent to the temple to guard it.)
 - c. What insight do you gain from their appointment about the qualities Nehemiah looked for in potential leaders?

2. Why do you think Nehemiah gave special instructions regarding locked gates and guards posted to watch them? V. 3

3. Refer again to the various instances when Nehemiah claimed that God was at work, engineering the circumstances to fit His purpose: 2:8, 12, 18; 6:16; 7:5. What is mentioned here in verse 5 that God put in Nehemiah's heart to do?

4. What discovery prompted Nehemiah to initiate a search through genealogical records? VV. 5-6
 - a. List the groups found in the record.

 - b. What happened to those who could not verify their ancestral roots? VV. 61, 64-65

 - c. Why do you think it was important to keep genealogical records for posterity?

(Note: we'll examine this topic in greater depth in **Day Two** of this week's lesson.)

Psalm 137 reveals that God's people did not have much reason to sing during their years in Babylonian exile. Imagine how different it would be for them upon their return to Jerusalem. Just think about how important it would become for them to have the opportunity to once again freely worship God with their fellow Jews!

5. Read through Psalm 137 to understand how these people must have felt when they were apart from God and their homeland. Then look at the verses here in chapter 7 where Nehemiah gave specific instructions that include the worship singers: VV. 1, 44, 67, and 73.
 - Why do you think worship plays an essential part in the community of faith?

 - How vital is worship to you as a believer in Christ?

 - Do you have reason to praise God today?

Brick upon Brick: (Memory verse) "... **Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.** " (*Nehemiah 8: 10b NKJ*)

Day Two: Deeper Discoveries—Adding Words to the Wall

Read through **Nehemiah 7** for review.

Do you ever wonder why there seems to be so much genealogy mentioned in Scripture? It must be important to God for us to know who preceded us and what they contributed.

1. Using your dictionary or other Bible resources, write a definition of the word *genealogy*.

Nehemiah points out that it is God who put it into his heart to start a register, and he found a previous record containing the names of those who went up to Jerusalem in the first return. If any Jew was unable to trace their lineage to a Jewish relative who existed before the exile, they were not considered genuine descendants and could not be counted.

2. Considering the exile and return to Jerusalem, why do you think it was difficult for some people to connect with family members from the past?
 - a. Why would it be particularly important for the religious leaders to establish a past connection?
3. How would the registration force the people to deal with their sin of mixing with the people of the surrounding nations? See VV. 63-65.

God called His people to be set apart to serve and worship Him, but time after time, they refused to do so. He allowed them to be exiled to Babylon and then engineered the timing and circumstances of their return once again to their homeland. In renewing their covenant with Him, they renounced their former sin and committed themselves to walk in obedience to His word.

4. Have you ever been personally concerned about discovering and protecting your family history? How far back can you identify Christians as relatives?
 - a. Perhaps you're a first-generation Christian in your family. How does knowing that you will be in someone's Christian family tree affect you?

Whether or not you can trace your ancestral heritage, if you're a believer, you have one in Christ—a spiritual one that counts for all eternity!

- ❖ Go back and read through **Matthew 1**, and trace your spiritual genealogy. Record your thoughts.

Selah; Can you claim the following verse as your own today: **"Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever. For they are the rejoicing of my heart" (Ps119:111 NKJ)**. Thank the Lord for giving you the past as a remembrance and a guide for the future.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

The Power of the Written Word

Read **Nehemiah 8:1-12**

Chapter seven revealed that the reconstruction project was finished, and the people had moved into their homes. They were organized, well protected, and well-governed, but still, something was missing. Nehemiah realized that what happens on the inside of the wall is just as important as the wall itself.

1. According to verse 1, who gathered, where did they meet, and for what purpose?
 - a. What did Ezra proceed to do for the better part of an entire day? V. 3
 - b. What was the heart attitude of the people at this time? V. 3
 - c. What took place when Ezra opened the book? V. 5
 - d. What did Ezra and the people join in doing together? V. 6
 - e. Who took turns helping the people understand what they were hearing?
V. 7

Verse 8 says: **"So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading."** Remember, these were Jews who came to Jerusalem from Babylon. They were Jews by birth, but they were raised in a Babylonian lifestyle with foreign customs. They were hearing God's words from a Hebrew text, which was difficult for them to understand. Ezra and the trained scribes **gave the sense** (verse 8), unlocking the understanding of Scripture passages.

2. Even before they understood God's Word, they had respect for it. What different postures did the people assume in verses 5, 6, and 7?
 - a. What affect did the reading of the Word have on them? v. 9 After that, what was explained to them, and how did they respond?

The truth of God was revealed, and the people listened attentively and respectfully. It was explained so that all who heard it would understand. Then it was applied, and all who heard it responded. The depth of their conviction brought weeping and then rejoicing. They celebrated because they understood what had been made known to them. When you hear the Word of God going forth, do you give it your full attention? Are you respectful and even humbled by what you hear? Do you stand in awe or fall to your knees in worship, or perhaps even on your face in adoration as God speaks to you? Do you weep out of a deep sense of conviction; do you rejoice at what God has accomplished on your behalf? Do you know Him personally, and are you making Him known to others?

The remainder of your lesson today will be spent taking inventory on which aspects of the written Word are a priority to you. Think carefully and honestly before you answer, and pay close attention to what you write down; it will help you as you move forward in your walk with God.

On a scale of 1-10—with 1 meaning *almost never* and 10 meaning *consistently or daily*—evaluate *your* relationship with the Word; (Put your answers on the lined space below.)

_____ <i>Reading Scripture</i>	_____ <i>Studying the Word in-depth.</i>
_____ <i>Meditating on a passage</i>	_____ <i>Understanding what you're reading</i>
_____ <i>Memorizing verses</i>	_____ <i>Hearing the Word preached</i>
_____ <i>Obeying what it says</i>	_____ <i>Sharing God's Truth with others.</i>

- What did you learn about *yourself* from the above survey? What, if anything, would you like to change about your reading/study habits?

- **Psalm 119** is known as an acrostic praise of the Scriptures. (As you have time, you may want to read through this psalm in its entirety to appreciate its perspective on God's Word.) Read verses 1-40 and select a verse, noting its relevance to your life at this particular time.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Nehemiah—Man of Insight

Read **Nehemiah 8:9-18**

The way a man or woman of God handles their achievements and successes in life says a lot about their character. The relief of finishing a project and the joy of celebrating it can often be followed by a low point. Its over-the-effort is past—so now what?

Those who wear the title of a leader must be realistic and remain ready to transition from one season to the next without missing their cue. Nehemiah was a leader who recognized the seasons of change and made the necessary adjustments.

The leader's God uses most effectively understand that He uses some to initiate a project, and He adds others to the process to help keep it going. Some will have the vision to start—others will see it through to completion. Rarely do we start and finish a project on our own. Holding loosely to what God gives us leaves Him room to make adjustments along the way. We should expect Him to intervene and redirect whenever and wherever He chooses without insisting that it must be done our way. Being ***open-handed*** instead of ***tight-fisted*** about our service makes it unnecessary for Him to pry our fingers off when He says, ***"Time to let go!"***

1. Would you say that you are more open-handed (selfless) or tight-fisted (selfish) when it comes to something God asks you to do? If you're unsure how to answer, think about this: *how yielded are you when He wants to change direction or bring someone alongside you to help with the responsibility—how do you react?* (If you are a "Nehemiah" and God brought you an "Ezra," how would you handle it?)

For one whole day, the people had listened to the Scripture being read to them. Then on the second day, they met again with Ezra to gain insight into the words of the Law. They had gathered their facts, and they were given the understanding; now, they wanted to apply what they learned to their lives. The word *insight* means to *be prudent* or wise, knowing how to manage the practical details of daily life. Possessing a vast amount of Bible *knowledge* is no guarantee you will live in a way that is pleasing to God. You must have the *wisdom* to accompany the knowledge in order to know *how* to apply it. We have a perfect example in today's passage.

2. Who went back on the second day to meet with Ezra? V.13
 - a. What did they find written in the Law? V.14
 - b. What did this feast represent? Read Leviticus 23:33-44
 - c. How long had it been since God's people celebrated this event?
V. 17
 - d. What did Ezra do each day during the eight-day celebration? V.18
3. The people had *gathered their facts*, they were *given the understanding*, and they *obeyed the word* of God. What does this tell you about the place the people were making in their hearts and lives for Him?

❖ *Are you a person of insight? Have you made room in your life for Him?*
"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)

Nehemiah was a man who knew his limitations, leaving room for God to bring alongside other spiritual individuals who would also use their gifts to bring God glory and His people instruction and insight. In the first six chapters of this book, God used Nehemiah to *reconstruct* the walls; in the last seven chapters, He used Ezra to *reinstruct* the people.

What about you? Have you discovered your place on the wall in God's plan? Do you know what your gifts are and where you belong? Are you perhaps a builder of the wall or a teacher of the Word? Spend a few minutes meditating on **Ephesians 2:19-22**.

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar—
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to understand your heritage in Christ;

Understanding who you are as a new creature in Christ will allow you to live life as God intended for it to be! You are accepted in the beloved; you are a part of the kingdom family. Ask God to help you fulfill your role in His divine plan.

A prayer to realize the power of the written Word;

If your relationship with the Word is not what it should be, now is the time to set that straight and make it your priority. Knowing and having insight into the Word lets you know your Creator and Maker as He knows you.

A prayer to fully surrender in the season where God has you;

God loves you and accepts you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way. Are you ready to accept the change He wants to bring into your life? Are you willing to yield to the pressure of His good hand upon you for that change?

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

The Rebuilt Life:

Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 9

One of the most blatant problems in today's society is the unwillingness to accept personal responsibility. Even when it comes to believers in the church, we know we should face up to our sin. We have every good reason to do it, but coming to grips with our sin and the sins of our family and coming clean before God is one of our greatest challenges!

Before us this week is the heartfelt prayer of the remnant of a people who realized they could not succeed without God's help, so they became genuine to the point of being transparent in an effort to reconnect with God and renew their covenant with Him. As you work through your lesson, ask yourself if you have ever been or whether you are willing today to be as genuine before God as these people were.

Begin your study each day with a word of prayer.

Day One: Surveying the Passage The Right Response

This was no doubt one of the most critical points in Israel's history, either before or after the exile. God's people were dead serious about their relationship with Him and being good stewards of what He had given to them and accomplished on their behalf. They followed Nehemiah's example of acting wisely by thinking things through and developing a plan for righteous living. Imitating him, they thoughtfully approached God in prayer, the longest prayer recorded in the Bible. Over a lengthy period of reflecting, confessing, and praising, they come to the conclusion that is recorded in the last verse of the prayer, verbally declaring their dependence upon God and acknowledging a new set of priorities they put down in writing, accompanied by their signatures.

A close look at this prayer reveals a lesson in Israel's history and can be separated into five periods: *God's greatness, mercy, and power displayed during the Exodus* (verses. 9-12) *during the months at Sinai* (verses. 13-19) *throughout the years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness* (verses. 20-21) *during the time of entering and possessing the Promised Land* (verses. 22-26) and *the period from the Judges through the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.* (verses. 27-31).

Read **Nehemiah 9:1-38**. Keep in mind from your initial reading that the focal point of the prayer is not the people or the wall, but rather God Himself.

1. From verse 1, describe the manner in which the people approached God.
2. From whom did the Israelite's separate? Why would this be necessary? V.2
3. How much time did they spend standing and reading from God's Word? How much time confessing their sins and worshipping the Lord? V. 3
 - a. How do you think this kind of devotion would affect a person's life?

Selah; How important to *you* is being open and honest before God?

Brick upon Brick: (Memory verse) **"But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."**(Isaiah 66:2b NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text The People Confess

God's character is closely connected to His will for His people. Studying to understand who He is, helps us know how to please Him. Read the passage of Israel's history again-this time, look for aspects of *who God is* and what *His will* is for you. If this is challenging for you, don't worry; just go for it and let Him stretch you!

The Exodus: Read VV. 9-12

- *What did you observe about the character and nature of God?*
- *What did you observe about the pride and foolishness of human beings?*
- *What lesson can you take from your observations and apply to your Christian walk?*

The months at Sinai: Read VV.13-19

- *What did you observe about the character and nature of God?*
- *What did you observe about the pride and foolishness of human beings?*
- *What lesson can you take from your observations and apply to your Christian Walk?*

The wilderness wanderings: Read VV. 20-21

- *What did you observe about the character and nature of God?*

- *What did you observe about the pride and foolishness of human beings (implied)?*

- *What lesson can you take from your observations and apply to your Christian walk?*

The Promised Land: Read VV. 22-26

- *What did you observe about the character and nature of God?*

- *What did you observe about the pride and foolishness of human beings?*

- *What lesson can you take from your observations and apply to your Christian walk?*

The Judges through the Exile: Read VV. 27-31

- *What did you observe about the character and nature of God?*

- *What did you observe about the pride and foolishness of human beings?*

- *What lesson can you take from your observations and apply to your Christian walk?*

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Deeper Discoveries--Adding Words to the Wall

Israel's prayer to God allows us to view certain aspects of God's character, such as His greatness, goodness, and graciousness on behalf of His people. Each aspect of God's marvelous character is on display for believers today, just as it was in Nehemiah's time. **Nehemiah 9:20** holds the key for realizing and experiencing God's fullness in our lives: *"You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them."* Have you sensed God's Spirit leading you? God wants us to know that He still instructs us by His Spirit. He still leads if we will only listen and follow.

1. Using your resources at hand, write a definition for the word *Spirit*. (Remember that we are not referring here to the spirit of man, but rather to God's *good Spirit—or the Spirit of God*. The New Testament refers to Him as the Holy Spirit, the Third *Person* of the Trinity who was sent following the resurrection of Jesus to inhabit every believer's life.)
2. The Bible speaks many times about God's Spirit. Jesus describes Him in **John 14** as the *Comforter-Helper-One called alongside*. Read verses 16-27 of this chapter and answer the questions that follow.

- For what reason does Jesus promise to send the Holy Spirit?

- Does everyone know Him? Who is able to know Him?

- Describe Him from your reading.

- According to these verses, what is His role in your life?

- What spiritual blessings do you receive from Him?

- What, specifically, does He promise about instructing you?

Jesus Christ promises, "**He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and-manifest Myself to him.**" (John 14:21 NKJ). He reveals Himself through His Spirit, who indwells each and every believer, bringing light and life to His written Word. Make yourself available to His instruction today. Let Him have access to every area of your heart.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Nehemiah—Man of Direction

Nehemiah knew from the onset of God's call that he had a commissioned purpose and a clear perspective. In his leadership role, he also soon discovered that he was confident in prayer and courageous in perspective. He had successfully led his people through a time of rebuilding and restoring what was lost due to their failure to live according to God's ways. He then led them through a time of repentance and confession that cleared the way for a new covenant relationship with God. He and the leaders of Israel understood the seriousness of making promises and signing contracts. Nehemiah would not let the people enter into their agreement lightly.

1. God's direction for Israel was clearly stated through the prophet Ezekiel while God's people were still in exile. Read His words in **Ezekiel 11:17-20** and summarize its meaning here.

It was in their reflection of their own history here in chapter 9 that God's people realized their need, declaring: *"And because fall this, we make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it"* (verse 38).

2. Take a moment to reflect on your own life history. Can you recall a lesson you learned that has continued to help you keep from repeating the same mistake? Please share your thoughts.
3. Have you paused long enough to consider the seriousness of your decision to walk with Christ and bear His name? If not, would you take that moment now and note what He ministers to your heart?

Nehemiah points out that *"because of all this"* (verse 38), God's people were ready to become serious about their relationship with Him. And just like those Israelites in Jerusalem, God's Word speaks to us in a similar way: **"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come"** (1 Corinthians 10:11 NKJ).

The old covenant described in the Old Testament was one of law between God and Israel. We are living in the new covenant of grace because of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. He offers to forgive our sins and make us right before God. This new covenant goes beyond Israel and Judah to include all the Gentile peoples of the earth, offering a way of forgiveness, not through animal sacrifice, but through faith.

4. Read the description of this new covenant in **Hebrews 8:7-13**. Summarize the heart of it here. Do you realize this covenant makes provision for you? Have you entered into this agreement with God?

It's always good to know where you're going, but once in a while, it's good to remember where you've been. Paul, the apostle, had complete confidence in the fact that God had called him to the position of an apostle, but he also never forgot how he referred to himself as *chief of all sinners!*

Like Nehemiah, Paul points us in the right direction in (**Philippians 3:12-14 NKJ**) where he says: ***“Not that I have already attained,^[a] or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have ^[a]apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** Paul is exhorting every believer to leave behind the sin-but always remember the effect it had on you!

Selah; Do you know where you're going? Are you letting Him take the lead? What has He shown you through your study today that you can apply to your life?

As you have time today, you may want to read through Paul's prayer for you and what is available to you in covenant agreement with God. You'll find it in **Ephesians 3:14-21**. There is space to record your thoughts if you wish to do so.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar -
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to confront and forsake sin;

Even in the church, it's easy in today's world to be satisfied with activities, programs, and methods, when what believers really need is holy living! No activity, program, or method can satisfy or fulfill a believer who is unwilling to confront and forsake their sin. Are you willing? Tell God about it.

A prayer to be instructed by God's good Spirit;

If you're not in the habit of watching for God's leading and listening to His Spirit's instruction, you can start that habit today. His direction for you is only a prayer away!

A prayer to enter into a new relationship with God;

Perhaps you are just discovering for the first time that God loves you and sent His Son to die for you so that you can have a living, vital relationship with Him. If you have not prayed the prayer to ask forgiveness for your sins and enter into a new life in Christ, you can pray it right now. Bow your heart before Him and ask Him to cleanse you and fill you with His Spirit, becoming your Lord and Savior. Believe it by faith!

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

The Rebuilt Life: Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 10 and 11

There are times in life when it's not only profitable but essential to maintain a balance between perspective and priorities. During these times, it's best to write things down. Good ideas have a way of floating in and out of our heads in random order; putting them down in black and white helps our thoughts to become disentangled. It also gives us pause to stop and consider what really matters. Significant life changes usually take place after we've become immersed in some serious reflection time.

Begin your study each day with a word of prayer.

Day One: Surveying the Passage Renewing the Covenant

Read **Nehemiah 10:1-29**

Eighty-four signatures were placed on an agreement that was carefully and thoughtfully prepared in demonstration of the people's determination to be different, and their promise meant something to them. It was their declaration to live to please God no matter how the rest of the world reacted.

1. Who signed the covenant, and in what order did the others follow suit? (List the *categories* of individuals present, not the names of each person.)

2. According to verse 28, what two things characterized the people whose names appeared on the document?

The individuals mentioned in verse 28 are those who separated themselves either by following the command to divorce their pagan spouses or those who remained in the land but did not intermarry with the heathen.

- a. The spiritual danger of mixed marriages was outlined in the original law given through Moses to the people in **Exodus 34:10-17**. Briefly state what it says.

3. With full knowledge and understanding of the gravity of their commitment, the people ratified the agreement. With what did they affirm it? V. 29

4. The first article of business in the agreement had to do with marriage. Since the parents controlled the marriages in this day, what promise did they make? V. 30

The practice of intermarrying with the surrounding nations is what led the people away from the Lord, resulting in Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant and, thus, the extreme importance placed on this particular promise.

5. As you look down the list throughout the remainder of the chapter, what are the things the Israelites were committing themselves to do? Briefly summarize the points in your own words.
 - V. 31
 - VV. 32-33
 - V. 34
 - VV. 35-37
 - Why do you think there was such an emphasis placed on *first things*?

6. Where were the tithes and offerings brought by the people to be kept? V. 38
 - a. Who would be supported by what was collected? V. 39
 - b. What promise was inserted into the agreement? V. 39

Selah; Do you remember a difficult time in your life that caused you to recommit your life to God? Do you need to make a recommitment now? Please share your thoughts.

Brick upon Brick; "We will not neglect the house of our God." (Nehemiah 10:39b NKJ)

Day Two: Deeper Discoveries—Adding Words to the Wall

God's Word is our gateway into the mind and heart of our Creator. It is in His Word that we find those precious and vital *words* imparted to us that guide our way in the Christian life. The Bible very clearly lays out God's priorities, and this week in Nehemiah 10, we're allowed to see two priorities very close to God's heart, *the home* and *the house of worship*, neither of which can be allowed to be neglected.

Read **Nehemiah 10:28-39** for review.

1. Using your resources at hand, write a definition for the word *neglect*.

The Hebrew word is *azab*, meaning to *loosen, relinquish, leave, forsake, leave behind, abandon*. When God's people turned their backs on His laws, they also abandoned Him. In time, it was only His mercy through His judgment that brought them back.

Entering into a new covenant with Him meant not only renewing their commitment but also reinstating His priorities. The very first principle addressed in the new covenant agreement emphasized the importance of *marriage* and *home*, indicating that this aspect of life had to have a high level of priority; it was not to be treated lightly. Likewise, the ending principle of the agreement had to do with the promise not to *neglect the house of God*.

2. Would you say that your *home* and *family* are among your top 10 priorities? What about your investment of time, energy & resources there—too little or too much? Please explain.

Note: Evangelist Billy Graham, in his book *World Aflame*, put it this way: "*The immutable law of sowing and reaping has held sway. We are now the helpless possessors of moral depravity, and we seek in vain for a cure. The tares of indulgence have overgrown the wheat of moral restraint. Our homes have suffered. When the morals of society are upset, the family is the first to suffer. The home is the basic unit of society, and a nation is only as strong as her home's.*"

3. Are you able to *indulge* your particular family members and, at the same time, hold the standard high when it comes to integrity, respect, and responsibility in your home? Are there areas you have neglected as a family? Will you set the example in your home and work toward making these changes?

In Nehemiah's day, the place of worship was the Temple-God lived there among His people. God abandoned this Temple when His people abandoned Him. But when Jesus Christ came to earth and died, the veil of the Temple was torn in two, split from top to bottom. Now God lives within every believer. Now the place of highest priority is the *inner man* where Christ dwells, where the Holy Spirit is building His temple.

4. What does **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** have to say about the *house of God*?

- Would you say that your *house* is currently in a state of *repair* or *neglect*?

- Is there a specific area the Lord has put His finger on that needs immediate attention? Will you be faithful not to neglect what He has shown you?

- What specific promise has God made to you in **Hebrews 13:5**?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

Any Volunteers?

People who live by the world's standards and values do not consider God's will or His leading when they decide where they will live and work, but Christians certainly should. Since everything we are and have belongs to the Lord—including our talents and gifts—surely He knows better than we do where we will be of the most useful in building His kingdom! Only God knows how to make all the pieces fit together for His glory.

Read **Nehemiah 11:1-36**

1. How did the Jewish people decide who would live in Jerusalem?

VV. 1-2

a. Can you think of a reason some might have for not wanting to live in Jerusalem?

b. Can you think of some of the jobs or positions that would need to be filled in the city?

2. If you had a part in this rebuilding process, would you prefer at this point in time to return to living and to produce crops in the farmlands or playing a supporting role in Jerusalem? Why?

The leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, and two things were used to move the people back. First, they cast lots to bring one out of ten back. These individuals came because they had to, not because they necessarily wanted to. Verse two says: "*And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.*" Among the nine-tenths who remained outside the wall were those who volunteered. The word *volunteered* in Hebrew means *to impel, to incite from within*. In other words, these people were stirred up, impelled by God to move back into the city, and they did.

3. There were other groups who willingly gave themselves to perform the necessary duties within the city walls. Let's look at who these individuals were.

- VV. 10-12: How many people volunteered for work within the house of God? These were those who gave themselves to the ministry.

- VV. 15-16: What did these men have oversight of?

Their work included handling civic affairs, judging disputes, and tending to public interests away from the house of worship.

- V. 17: What was this man known for? How would his involvement help the work effort?

- V. 22: What gift and position did Uzzi have in God's house?

4. How would the proper order established within the walls of Jerusalem affect those living on the outside?

Most of the names mentioned in this chapter did not become famous, but their gifts were a necessary part of God's plan, and they are remembered in Scripture for their contribution. God is always ready to use and bless individuals who willingly serve without concern about getting the glory. Are you such an individual? You have a place in building His kingdom that is yours alone—no one can do it for you. You are every bit as valuable as Uzzi and Mattaniah, and God is aware of your contribution.

5. Write out the words to **Hebrews 6:10**.

Look back on this verse occasionally or, better yet, commit it to memory and let it minister to you whenever you are tempted to think that you don't matter or your contribution is small compared to others.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Nehemiah-Man of Faithfulness

To fully appreciate what is happening in chapter 11, reread **Nehemiah 7:1-4**.

Once the wall was completed, Nehemiah himself set up a schedule for the city and set in place a security system. Everything was set for the city to be re-inhabited, but there were no people for one thing! During the captivity and up until Nehemiah's return (approximately 160 years), there was nothing but rubble within the broken-down walls. The people who were left had erected homes in the surrounding areas. Now it was time to reintroduce the population into the city systematically.

In chapter 11, we once again see Nehemiah's thorough attention to detail, as he supervises the orderly placement of the people to inhabit Jerusalem: *those who drew lots* and those who *volunteered*. Everyone would now submit themselves to a governor they didn't elect and officials they didn't know. There was a temple staff of over 800 men who ministered within the temple. The Levites undertook the duties outside and inside the temple, and there were the mighty men of valor. Then there had to be someone to lead the prayer service and singers to lead in worship. Each one had to know his place, and everything had to be done in an orderly fashion.

1 Corinthians 4:2 (NKJ) says, "**Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.**" The word *faithful* also means *trustworthy, sure, and true*.

1. Why would this be an essential quality for someone in Nehemiah's position?
 - a. Do you feel it is equally essential for *anyone* who serves God? Why?
2. Is *faithfulness* a quality that others would recognize in *your* service to God? Please share your thoughts.

If faithfulness is a quality that is lacking in your life, ask God to help you develop it. The success of your service depends on you being able to live up to what God has entrusted to you. Ultimately, your reward for serving God will not be based on your fame or applause; it will be based on your faithfulness to *be* and *do* all that God asks of you. Your reward will be hearing Him say: "**Well done, good and faithful servant**" (Matthew 25:23 NKJ).

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to become wholly devoted to the Lord;

Did you pray the prayer this week to recommit your life to the Lord? If not, would you like to pray it right now? Are there any other aspects of your life that you have not yet surrendered to Him?

A prayer to accept your responsibility;

Have you personally applied this week's memory verse to your life: *I will not neglect the house of my God*? Ask Him to show you any areas that you are neglecting.

A prayer to be faithful to what God has called you to do;

Do you place a high priority on faithfulness? Or is this quality lacking in your life? Be honest with the Lord about where you need help in this area.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

The Rebuilt Life:

Studies in Nehemiah

Nehemiah 12 and 13

Read **Nehemiah 12:1-26**

Remembering and rejoicing are two essential ingredients to commemorating a great work of God. Before writing about the celebration, Nehemiah pauses to remember those who had gone before and contributed. Nehemiah's generation, those who participated in signing the covenant, were already recorded for posterity in chapter 10. Here in the opening verses of chapter 12, we see Nehemiah remembering his predecessors by name. He begins by recording in his journal the first generation of leaders who returned with Zerubbabel (verses 1-9), then lists six generations of high priests (verses 10-11), and then the second generation of leaders listed by household names (verses 12-21). Finally, in verses 22-26, Nehemiah lists the chief Levites, citing once again the continuity of family responsibilities for the Temple service. Everything was in place for the pageantry and procession that was to follow.

Begin your study each day with a word of prayer.

Day One: Surveying the Passage Thanksgiving Day!

At long last, the people of God had come to realize that what really mattered in their lives was their relationship to the Lord. The wall had been rebuilt with much fear and trembling, but its dedication was the occasion for great joy and victory! They were giving thanks to God for His mercies in enabling them to complete the task, dedicating the city and themselves to God for His glory.

1. Read through the next passage in **Nehemiah 12:27-47** and, as you do, write down the words you find that describe the worship of God's people at the dedication of Jerusalem's walls.

- Now go back and look once again at the observations you just recorded, making a note of the similarities describing your own worship experience.

This blessed day of dedication, which was full of joy and gladness, had touched the hearts of the people, so much so that they determined to be pure before the Lord.

2. According to verse 30, after the priests and the Levites purified themselves, what did they also purify? What does this tell you about their commitment?

In any work we undertake for God, our hearts and hands must be made pure if we are to be useful and He is to be pleased.

3. What does **Romans 12:1** teach about dedicating yourself to God? Have you presented yourself in this manner?

As the dedication ceremonies progressed, Nehemiah had the leaders of Judah come up on the top of the wall, where he appointed two great choirs (V. 31).

4. Briefly summarize what stands out to you in the following accounts. Try to picture in your mind the fun and laughter they must have shared.

VV. 31-37 Choir #1:

VV. 38-42 Choir #2:

5. Who does Nehemiah say is responsible for their joy? V. 43 Who else participated in the celebration?
6. What else was appointed and purified that day, and why? VV. 44-47 How did the people of Judah feel about those who served God?

Selah; Dedicating yourself to God does not mean giving one or two areas over to Him; it means giving everything: *your time, energy, resources, desires, goals, aspirations-literally every aspect* that has to do with daily living. If you carry through on this act of total dedication, you will allow it to permeate every area of your being. Are there still areas in your life where the Lord does not have complete control?

Brick upon Brick; "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1 NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text

Read Nehemiah 13:1-6

Nehemiah ruled as governor for twelve years in Jerusalem. He stayed on following the dedication of the wall to establish a strong government on behalf of the people. Verse 6 tells us that eventually, he went back to his original assignment as cupbearer to the king. We aren't told how long Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem (some scholars estimate it to be somewhere between 1-20 years), but his remarks in verse 4: "*prior to this*" and verse 6: "*during all this time*" indicate an apparent time lapse between chapters 12 and 13. We also learn from verses 1-5 that four great areas of wrong were being committed in Nehemiah's absence that needed to be addressed upon his return.

Get ready-today will be an exercise in problem-solving for you! This is one aspect of leadership that is necessary for those whom God uses mightily. Right now, pause and pray, asking God for His wisdom and discernment for each issue examined. Then sit back and take a lesson in how to handle difficult situations. For each problem Nehemiah encountered, you will be asked to determine the following: *identify the problem; determine how to deal with the wrong; assess how to work toward the solution*; and record Nehemiah's *prayer* where indicated. At the end of the exercise, you'll be asked for your comments.

- VV. 4-9 *Temple is cleansed*
According to the passage, how did Nehemiah;
 - Identify the problem?

 - Deal with the wrong?

 - Work toward the solution?

- VV. 10-14 *Tithes are restored*
According to the passage, how did Nehemiah:
 - *Identify the problem?*

 - *Deal with the wrong?*

 - *Work toward the solution?*

 - *"Oh my God, remember ... "*

- VV. 15-22 *Sabbath restored*
According to the passage, how did Nehemiah:
 - *Identify the problem?*
 - *Deal with the wrong?*
 - *Work toward the solution?*
 - *"O my God, remember . . ."*

- VV. 23-31 *Mixed marriages forbidden*
According to the passage, how did Nehemiah:
 - *Identify the problem?*
 - *Deal with the wrong?*
 - *Work toward the solution?*
 - *"O my God, remember . . ."*
 - *"O my God, remember . . ."*

- Take a moment to summarize what you learned about *problem-solving* and any insights you gained on *praying*.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Deeper Discoveries-Adding Words to the Wall

Everyone loves a parade--the excitement, pageantry, noise, laughter, music, singing, costumes, dancing, whatever it is that makes up the celebration-people love to laugh and rejoice! Nehemiah records it for us in chapter 12: *"Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with **gladness**, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres. So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem And on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy"* (vv.27-28, 43). It was meant to be an unforgettable day, and it was!

Can you picture it in your mind? They were with it—in the moment-enjoying a spirit of hilarity. They were loud in their expressions of joy. In fact, their joy was heard from far away. What about you? When was the last time you openly rejoiced in your thanksgiving to God? Are you smiling about it today—are you singing about it? When people look at you, do they see a happy heart? People are starved for joy, and when they see it expressed, it is like a magnet—they are drawn to it and encouraged by it.

1. Using your resources at hand, write a definition for the word *gladness*.

The original Hebrew definition for the word *gladness* means *gaiety, mirth, pleasure, and delight*. That adds up to nothing less than a celebration. In today's churches, we need more smiling saints spreading God's love with joy and laughter.

2. What does **Proverbs 17:22** say about the benefits of *joy*?

- a. What contrast do you find in **Proverbs 15:13**? Who would you rather be around?

Are you allowing the joy of the Lord to overflow from your life with gladness? In the upper room, Jesus left an encouraging word with His followers: "***These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full***" (John 15:11 NKJ). The word *full* means to *satisfy, accomplish, complete, and perfect*. The Bible teaches believers that *joy* is not dependent upon outward circumstances but rather on our *inward focus* upon Christ, who himself is the fulfillment of our joy. We can truly have inward joy no matter what our outward circumstances may be. And *this joy*, Jesus said, *no man can take from you!* Take a minute now to complete a little self-inventory on how you come across to others. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I exhibiting an attitude of joy and gladness to those around me?
- Does my behavior inspire others to want Christ in their lives?
- Do the people around me feel free to smile, laugh, and rejoice?
- Is there a good sense of humor evident in my service for God?
- Is there perhaps room for some change in this area?

If you are currently in a leadership position, it is even more vital that you reflect a smile and a cheerful disposition among those occupied in God's work. We take ourselves much too seriously and how easy it is to become intense, overly stern, and even oppressive in our dealings with others. If you have a tendency to be that way, try to remind yourself that the people under Nehemiah's leadership felt the freedom to laugh and rejoice. Maintaining a good sense of humor will help you to keep things in balance.

Day Four: Nehemiah—Man of God

In our study in the book of Nehemiah, we have looked at the life of a man who exhibited many qualities. We've seen him as a man of *priorities, vision, courage, influence, commitment, insight, wisdom, and faithfulness*. This week in chapters 12 and 13, we see Nehemiah go from remembering his predecessors to rejoicing with his people to righteous indignation for those who have no regard for the things of God. He was a man who had a word for every season and a solution for every problem. If there were a title that sums up the essence of the man, it would have to be *a man of God*. Did you happen to notice that no less than five times in chapter 12, he mentioned King David? He must have been a role model for Nehemiah. David's influence and greatness undoubtedly left an indelible impression on Nehemiah, and David was also known for being a man of God.

1. See if you can locate each verse where David's name is mentioned and what is remembered about him.

2. According to **Acts 13:22**, how is David remembered in Scripture?
 - a. If you know the story of David's life, you know he was not a perfect man. From the above description in **Acts 13:22**, what would it take to become this kind of man?

 - b. What are some similarities you could cite between David and Nehemiah?

The secret to both men's success was in their devotion to God and, consequently, God made them both great leaders. They held nothing back from Him—theirs was a complete surrender, a wholehearted consecration to God. As you look back on your life, do you see giving a little of yourself here and there? Or do you recognize a time when you decided to hold nothing back; you yielded yourself entirely to Him for whatever His will may be for you? Have you discovered that you are absolutely complete in Jesus Christ, that there is nothing you need at all apart from Him?

3. Close your study by reflecting again on your memory verse for this week: **Romans 12:1**. This time, however, include verse 2, writing it in the space provided. Would you make this your prayer today?

Day Five:

**Applying the Mortar
Sealing the learning process with prayer!**

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to consecrate your life to God's service;

Do you need a good dose of determination? This is your opportunity to tell God that you want to be set apart for His service-by any road you may have to travel and at any cost that is required of you.

A prayer to get rid of anything that needs to be thrown out;

Don't give the "Tobiahs" (or his belongings) any room in your life- get rid of that excess baggage- everything that hinders you and your witness for Jesus Christ.

A prayer to realize that you have the mind of Christ;

Anything is possible to the one that believes! You limit yourself by your own thoughts. Ask God to show you any areas of doubt that linger in your mind and keep you from becoming the person He wants you to be.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 1

Book Profile.

The book of Esther records how the Jewish people were protected and preserved from annihilation by the gracious hand of God—the sovereign controller of humankind's history. The author's identity is unknown, but the knowledge of Persian customs and etiquettes, and the familiarity of the palace, and the details of the king's reign, indicate that the author writing this story lived in Persia during this period. The book's timeline fits in between chapters six and seven of Ezra, between the first return of the exiles to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel and the second return led by Ezra. The story provides the only biblical account of the Jews who chose to remain behind in Persia rather than return to Palestine.

The events chronicled in the book of Esther take place in Persia during the reign of King Ahasuerus (his Greek name is Xerxes) between 486-465 B.C. The story opens in the king's winter palace at Susa. King Ahasuerus is giving a lavish, huge, six-month-long banquet for the nobles and officials of his realm—all 127 provinces—extending from India to the continent of Africa. As we will see, this king was a man of extremes whose actions were often contradictory and influenced by the manipulative attempts of his advisors. Historians refer to this particular banquet as the occasion of the king's planning for his next military campaign against Greece. He would suffer a humiliating defeat by the Greeks in 479 B.C. and would return home to seek consolation in his harem. What follows is a rather unusual beauty pageant that crowns a new queen and sets the scene for the drama that follows.

Esther is the only book in Scripture that does not make a direct reference to God. His name is not mentioned, but His handprint is everywhere, and though He is not visible, He is the main character throughout the story. His providential care and purpose for His people are evident at all times. A sinister plot by an avowed enemy of the Jews brings grave danger and possible extinction of the Jewish race. The newly crowned queen courageously counters the story with an intriguing twist of her own, resulting in an extraordinary deliverance of the people and the institution of the Feast of Purim, an annual reminder of God's faithfulness that is still celebrated today.

Key to Esther:

Do you ever wonder what difference, if any, your daily choices make in the overall grand scheme of things? If so, you will be encouraged through your reading of this book.

As you become acquainted with the heroine of our story, you'll find that she was an ordinary girl that God raised out of obscurity to become queen of the most powerful empire in the world. You will find yourself challenged, just as she was, to examine your life, stand up for righteousness, and make developing godly character a priority so that God can effectively use you for His purpose.

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

Sometimes the best way to take in a story is to read it in its entirety, from beginning to end. The book of Esther is short enough to read in just one sitting to today; read through Esther and then take a few minutes to record your initial observations below.

1. Name the main characters in the story, along with a brief description of each one.

2. What struck you the most about this story from your initial reading of it? Why?

3. Although God is not mentioned, how do you sense His presence at work behind the scene?
 - Name one of the ways God is currently working in your life right now to accomplish His purpose.

 - What can you do today or this week to cooperate with Him?

Memory verse: (Begin memorizing it today.) **"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28 NKJ)**

Day Two: Exploring the Text

A Prideful King

Read **Esther 1:1-9**

King Ahasuerus ruled over an empire that was so vast—127 provinces it took six months for all of the nobles and leaders of his realm to have their turn to sit in the great banquet hall. The purpose behind this elaborate celebration was to enlist the cooperation of everyone in order to attain an important military victory. This king had dreams of literally ruling the world. His immediate target was Greece, which his father, Darius I, had invaded but returned home in shameful defeat. He died before getting another opportunity, so now it was the son's turn to take revenge on behalf of his father. No doubt at this particular time in history, King Ahasuerus was the most powerful man on earth, believing that his ability to impress his royal subjects would guarantee his next attempt to obtain a one-world empire.

1. Where and when was the king holding court? vv. 2-3

2. Banquets are mentioned in this chapter. Who was invited to each one?
 - a. vv. 1-4
 - b. vv. 5-8
 - c. vv. 9

3. In your own words, describe how the palace garden was decorated. v. 6

4. We're told the drinks were served in uniquely different golden goblets. What was the law concerning drinking? v. 8

5. Queen Vashti also held a banquet for the women in the palace. If you had been a participant at these festivities, what effect do you think this kind of wealth would have on your perspective—would you be easily impressed or turned off by it? Please share your thoughts.

6. The king was able to show off all his wealth in 180 days. According to **Ephesians 2:7**, how long will it take for you to fully grasp the inexhaustible riches God has stored up for you? Who made all this possible?

Selah; Compare your wealth as a child of God to that of the king of Persia. What does this do for your heart attitude? Have you taken time this week to express your gratitude to the Lord?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

An Angry King

Read **Esther I: 10-12**

A vengeful, power-hungry, wealthy ruler is a potentially dangerous person-nothing can stop him short of divine intervention! Ahasuerus expected the whole world to sit up and take notice of his greatness. He was a man void of the spiritual understanding that "things" don't matter, but people do. This failure would result in hasty and costly decisions that would affect not only himself but also many others in the realm.

After seven days of celebrating, when the king's heart was "merry with wine," Ahasuerus commanded that Queen Vashti appear to be put on display for his drunken guests. But when she refused to come, at that moment, not only was she a disobedient wife to her husband, she was also a defiant subject to her king, and something had to be done.

1. What did the king want Queen Vashti to wear when she made her appearance?
V.11 Why do you think this was important to him at this moment in time?
2. When the queen refused to come, what was the king's response? v. 12
3. The king may not have compelled his guests to drink, which was commendable, but what kind of example did he set with his behavior?

4. What do the following verses have to say about anger?

Proverbs 16:32

Proverbs 25:28

- a. When you mix drinking and anger, what do you get? **Proverbs 20:1**
- b. From the above verses, what can you discern about the king's character?
- c. According to **Proverbs 15:1**, how could the king have responded?

Keep in mind that this is the man who wanted to rule the world but could not control his own spirit. What he was asking his wife to do was demeaning to her and entirely for his selfish pleasure. An intoxicated head added on to a prideful heart-led King Ahasuerus to a decision that he would greatly regret later.

His condition also made him vulnerable to the manipulative attempts of his advisors, which we will see in the remainder of our chapter.

5. The best way to avoid drunkenness is not to drink at all. What alternative does **Ephesians 5:18** have for the believer?

Are you filled with the Holy Spirit to the point that you speak to others in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord? Being Spirit-filled is the only way to control your emotions, guard your decisions, and find true joy in life.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

A Vindictive King

Read **Esther 1:13-22**

Everyone needs advice from time to time. The question is, when you do, where do you go, to whom do you turn? When King Ahasuerus needed advice, he turned to his seven "wise men," known for being astrologers, soothsayers, and even magicians. These individuals were not known for consulting with *heaven* but rather with the stars and using various divination forms.

1. What do verses 13-14 record about the men whose advice the king sought?

2. Why, specifically, was King Ahasuerus seeking their advice? v. 15
3. Who answered as spokesman for the advisers, and how did he exaggerate the situation? vv. 16-18
 - a. Why did he use exaggeration to influence the king-whose best interest was he promoting?

True wisdom involves correctly judging and then following the best course of action based upon the solid principles of God's Word.

4. Where does true wisdom start? **Proverbs 9:10**
 - a. How vital is wisdom? **Proverbs 4:5-9**
 - b. How can you get wisdom? What is the one requirement to obtain it?
James 1: 5
 - c. Have you asked for wisdom to help you select the best course of action for your present circumstances?
5. Describe the royal decree the king was persuaded to make. vv. 19-20

The king agreed to an irrevocable decree by sending letters throughout the kingdom. Exaggeration, manipulation, and fear were used on the part of the wise men; pride, anger, and vindictiveness were evident on the part of the king. All this added to the disposal of the queen and set for a new one to be crowned. Whatever your personal opinion of the actions taking place in our study, we must remember the bottom line: *God used the choices made and the circumstances resulting from them for His purpose and plan*, which we will see unfold.

Selah; You cannot control your circumstances, but you can control how you *handle them*. How are you choosing to respond to what is going on around you? If you haven't already asked God for wisdom, ask Him now.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five: Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer for a heart attitude that is pleasing to God:

Attitude is everything in the Christian life. A person with a bad attitude will find it easy to be angry at others, blaming someone else for their misfortunes; while a person with a good attitude will be more likely to accept responsibility for their actions-which do you have? Do you need to pray about making any changes?

A prayer/or being filled with the Holy Spirit;

A look at **Ephesians 5:18** reveals that every believer is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The words *be filled* literally mean *to be being filled*. You should be asking God *daily* to fill you and give you the wisdom you need.

A prayer for advisors who will give godly counsel;

If you have someone who will be honest with you and give you scriptural counsel in any situation, thank God for them. If you don't have someone, ask God to bring a person into your life who will help keep you on the straight narrow.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 2

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

"After these things ... " (Esther 2:1) After the king had returned home from the ill-fated war with Greece; after he became lonely for lack of a queen; after his anger had subsided, he remembered the decree that banished her forever (suggesting that he was transferring blame for the decision onto his advisers, which is what kings had a tendency to do). During the four years between chapters one and two, the king had led about 180,000 men into Greece, experiencing victory at the onset but ending in humiliating defeat. He had not yet had an opportunity to choose another queen, but now his advisors were about to suggest something that found favor with the king.

The predominant theme running throughout the book of Esther is the providential care of God. His providence seems a mystery to us, but it can be simply defined as *the will of our Creator as He is actively engaged in moving His Creation toward His designed purpose*. God sees the end from the beginning. He has a definite plan and purpose for His world and His people. He has been-is presently and always will be at work behind the scenes to bring this about.

Can you imagine God watches over the well-being of *each* of His children as if He had no one and nothing else to think about! Nothing happens to His own that does not pass through His hand first. We only see what is in front of us today, but God sees the end from the beginning, and He promises that everything-even the worst things in our lives will turn out for our good (**Romans 8:28**). Our study of **Esther 2** will reveal that absolutely nothing is left to chance in the life of God's children-His providential will is our ultimate end.

Read all of **Esther 2**.

1. Write down anything you notice from our story in which God's control of the situation can be discerned.
2. Does God work in secular or worldly places to accomplish His purpose? Share a modern-day example.

**Memory verse: "But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."
My times are in Your hand; (Psalm 31:14-15a NKJ)**

Day Two: Exploring the Text

The Beauty Pageant

Read **Esther 2:1-11**.

1. Summarize the plan the king's advisors presented to him in verses 1-4.

Word search; Using the resources you have on hand, do a word search on the word ***harem***. Briefly try to describe what life would have been like in a king's harem (i.e., what was the outlook for the future; would this group get along together; what hope did they have for living a "normal" life?).

2. Who is Mordecai, and how did he come to be in Shushan? vv. 5-7

Mordecai is identified as a Jew, a descendant of Kish the Benjamite, one of the Jews exiled to Babylon. When King Cyrus of Persia permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem, Mordecai chose to remain in Persia.

- a. Whom did he adopt? Describe her.

Esther's Hebrew *name is Hadassah-means* "myrtle," coming from the myrtle tree. This tree produces a white aromatic flower used in making perfumes. Her Persian name means "star," suggesting that she would rise from among her people.

3. Under whose supervision is Esther placed? What does he do for her? vv. 8-9
4. What does Mordecai instruct her not to reveal? v. 10 Why do you think he made this request?
5. How does Mordecai show his devotion to Esther? v. 11

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

Esther Becomes Queen

Read **Esther 2:12-18**.

At first glance, Esther doesn't seem to be queen material. She was orphaned and then adopted and raised by her cousin, a single parent; she was of the Jewish race, and she was encouraged to keep that news under wrap. Despite all the obstacles against her, she found great favor in the palace because God's grace was upon her. Each day as Mordecai came to pace in front of the women's quarters to enquire about Esther, she was dutifully inside going through her beauty regimen. The women vying for being the queen of Persia were required to dedicate themselves to a full year of beauty treatments before seen fit to be brought to the king. Only one would win the crown!

1. In your own words, describe the beauty treatments the young women underwent to prepare for their visit with the king. v. 12
 - a. When it was time for each young woman's turn, what was she allowed to take with her? v. 13
 - b. How long did each woman have to impress the king? v. 14

Once each woman had her turn with the king, she became his concubine (not his wife) and was added to his harem, never marrying and enjoying a normal life.

2. What did Esther request when it came time for her to visit the king? v.15
 - a. How would she have any idea of knowing what would please him?
 - b. How is she commended in verse 15? What does this tell you about her character?
3. What impression did Esther make with the king? vv. 17-18
 - a. How did he show his approval of Esther?

- b. Describe the celebration that followed.

Selah; Twelve months of beauty treatments, palace delicacies to feast upon, maidservants in attendance, elaborate clothes, accessories, and perfumes of her choosing; all in preparation for one night with the king. In your opinion, do you think that Esther was fearful or worried about her turn to see him? Please explain.

- Which is more important, *outward* or *inward* beauty? Why?
 - Personally speaking, would you say that you spend more of your time each day on *your appearance or character*?
 - Do you believe that a greater priority on *inward* preparation would equip you to handle a crisis better?
 - Is God showing you that you need to make a change in your priorities? If so, how?
4. According to the following, what is God's standard of beauty?
- Proverbs 31:30
 - I Peter 3:3-4

The effects of time and gravity will cause outward beauty to fade, but inward beauty will last forever. **"Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16 NASB).** The effects of God's Word and His Spirit continually bring refreshment and revitalization to the soul.

5. *Review this week's memory verse.* Share how it relates to the passage in our story today.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

Mordecai Discovers a Plot

Read **Esther 2:19-23**.

In today's study, we see that not only was God working behind the scenes to place a queen on the throne, and He also wanted a new top advisor in the palace. Mordecai will now appear from the background of the story out into the limelight.

1. Where is Mordecai found, and what is once again revealed to us about his advice to Esther? vv. 19-20

Previously, Mordecai could be found pacing outside the women's quarters; now, we see him *sitting within the king's gate*, implying that Esther may have used her influence to gain a government appointment for Mordecai. Which made communication between them much easier.

2. What did Mordecai overhear as he sat within the king's gate? vv. 21-22

- a. When he discovered the threat, what action did he take?

- b. What did Esther do with the information?

3. What was the result of the threat upon the would-be assassins? v. 23

- a. Was Mordecai's deed rewarded at this point? How was it remembered?

It would certainly seem as though Mordecai's good deed was worthy of a reward when it happened, and we will see further on that God is never late in honoring His own. Just when it seems that God may not be watching or listening or that He may have forgotten, He engineers the circumstances to set the record straight!

4. Is there a kindness you have shown on behalf of someone else, and no one knows about it? (Please note it in the space below.) If you haven't been recognized or rewarded, know that God has been watching and, when the time is right, He will reward you: **"And whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."**(Matthew 10:42 NASB).

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer for patience as God completes what He's begun in you:

To review, look again at the definition of God's providence on page 1 of your lesson. Can you see the hand of God unfolding His purpose as you work your way through this wonderful book? Can you also acknowledge His hand at work in *your* life? Would you tell Him that today?

A prayer for developing the inner beauty that never fades away:

God's standard of beauty for *you* is the (incorruptible *character*) **“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Peter 1:5-7 NKJ).** Ask Him to help you make His standard your standard.

A prayer to thank the Lord for wise counselors:

Mordecai instructed Esther as a father would his daughter, desiring the best for her. Hegai also gave her good advice, and she was careful to follow his counsel. God brought the lives of these individuals together in His providence to further His will. Have you thanked Him for those He has brought into your life to complete His purpose?

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 3

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

With two of God's people strategically placed in influential positions within the palace walls, life for the Jewish people appeared to be peaceful and secure. The heroine of the story-Esther-sat on the throne as queen. The hero-Mordecai-had just rescued the king from death and was sure to be rewarded for such a heroic deed. The villain-Haman in chapter three, is raised to a position of power and influence, above all the princes who were with the king. If this story were a fictional one being played out on a stage, we would expect to see Haman enter the scene wearing a long black cape and hat, sneaking across the stage to the hisses and boos of the audience. In fact, the story is true, and whenever the book of Esther is read aloud today during the Feast of Purim, as the name of Haman is mentioned, the audience responds appropriately with boos and hisses, shouting, "May his name be blotted out!"

The historical basis for the drama being played out between Mordecai (a Benjamite descended from King Saul) and Haman (an Agagite) goes back nearly a thousand years since the Jewish people left Egypt and were attacked by the Amalekites. God declared war on the Amalekites and first gave the order to Israel's King Saul to destroy them (**1 Samuel 15**), but he failed, and the crown was removed from him.

Because Saul did not fully obey God's command, some of the Amalekites remained alive, and one of their descendants-Haman-became determined to annihilate his forefather's enemy, the Jews.

1. Moses reminded the Jews of the declaration of war against the Amalekites before they entered the Promised Land. According to **Deuteronomy 25:17-18**, why did God declare war on Amalek and his descendants forever?
 - What promise did God give to His people in **Deuteronomy 25:19**?
 - The actual account of the battle is found in **Exodus 17:8-16**. Briefly explain what took place and what God pronounced on the Amalekites?

With animosity still smoldering in both their souls, the stage now becomes set for a showdown between Mordecai and Haman.

The Old Testament often speaks about God's people dealing with their enemies, usually those of foreign nations who worshipped false gods. In the New Testament, Jesus spoke of a new commandment, **"I say to you, love you enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."** (Matthew 5:44 NKJ).

2. The word *enemy* is defined as a *foe, adversary, or opponent*. Can you think of someone in your life that fits this description? (Please be discreet when sharing names aloud.)

3. Using the elements found in **Matthew 5:44**, think about what Jesus would have you do with each of the following.
 - *In what way can you presently bless this individual?*

 - *Is there something good you can do for them to show the Lord's love visibly?*

 - *Write out a sentence prayer for them.*

Memory verse: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."
(2 Timothy 3:12 NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text

Haman is Promoted

Read **Esther 3:1-4**

1. What command did the king give concerning Haman? v.1
 - a. How did all the people respond to the command? v. 2

 - b. How did Mordecai respond? What statement was he making by refusing to honor Haman?

2. How many times did the king's servants challenge Mordecai, and how did he respond to them? vv. 3-4
 - a. When he would not listen to them, who did they go to see? Why?

- b. What vital piece of information did they share with Haman?
- c. Why do you think Mordecai chose to reveal this information at this time?

The king's servants didn't appreciate that Mordecai dared to be different. They pressured him daily to conform, but he refused to honor a dishonorable man. Instead, his refusal to bow to Haman reflected his determination to honor God above all.

- 3. What promise is there for the one who honors God with their life? **Psalm 4:3**
 - Are you making good use of this promise today? How?

As our chapter opened, we were waiting to see Mordecai honored for saving the king's life. Instead, we see an evil man being honored. It's always disappointing to see wrong win over right and evil over good, but we must remember that the story isn't over yet-God is still on the throne and in control! He promises His help for those who fear Him and rewards for those who obey Him.

- 4. What does it mean to *fear the Lord*?

Proverbs 8:13

Proverbs 9:10

Proverbs 14:27

Psalm 19:9

- 5. What are some of the rewards for those who fear God?

Psalm 25:14

Psalm 34:7

Psalm 145:19

Psalm 147:11 (NKJ) states: "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy." If that describes you, then know that you are bringing Him pleasure today! Lift your hands to Him in prayer and bless His name.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

Death and Destruction Devised

Read **Esther 3:5-11**

Once Mordecai revealed he was a Jew, his life and the lives of his fellow Jews were put in mortal danger. Haman's anger toward Mordecai will now be the basis for what follows next.

1. How is Haman's anger described in verse 5?

The word *wrath* speaks of violent anger that is given to rage to bring vengeance on another—this type of anger, when unchecked, becomes settled in the mind. If not dealt with, it will eventually destroy its object.

2. Haman did not immediately act against Mordecai; instead, what did he plan to do? v. 6
 - a. How did he determine the time to carry out his plan? v. 7
 - b. How much time was there between casting the lot and implementing the plan? V. 7 Why would this be advantageous to the Jewish people?
3. How did Haman convince the king that his plan was a good one? v. 8
 - a. How did he sweeten the deal for the king? v. 9
 - b. What was King Ahasuerus' response? v. 10-11

Haman's rise to power gave him the opportunity to use his position to bring about death and destruction. But God's hand of providence is visible even in the casting of lots (the casting of Pur would eventually become the basis for the name of the Feast of Purim). This extra time allotted would give the Jews time to prepare. And Mordecai and Esther to come up with a plan of their own.

Selah; Aren't you thankful to know that your fate is not in the hands of another human being, that you belong to God and your times are in His hands? Take a moment to thank Him today for this truth.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

The Death Warrant

Read **Esther 3:12-15**

Haman's assessment of the Jews in verse 8 was partially correct in that they are *different from all other people*, but his other statement about not keeping the king's laws was untrue and meant to incur the king's wrath toward them. Mordecai had proven himself a loyal subject to the king by reporting the conspiracy against him. But the king took his signet ring and handed it to Haman with the instructions: "*do with them as seems good to you*" (verse 11). What seemed good to Haman was their total annihilation.

1. How far did Haman's evil decree extend? v.12
 - a. Who dictated the terms of the decree?
 - b. What evidence would make the people recognize the order came from the king?

No official document was considered valid without the seal of the king's ring, which was the equivalent of a personal signature.

2. In your own words, describe the fate awaiting the Jews. v.13
 - a. What motive did Haman add for the Persian people to turn against their neighboring Jews?

A copy of the written death warrant was issued as law in every province—to prepare them for that coming day.

3. As the couriers went out, what did the king and Haman do? vv. 14-15
 - a. What was the response of the people in the city? Why do you think they were perplexed?

The Jewish people have always been the object of ridicule and hatred throughout the centuries; their destruction has been attempted and then circumvented by God on numerous occasions. The persecution they have endured as God's chosen people has also been true of Christians, and for similar reasons. God's people have always been engaged in an ongoing spiritual conflict with the god of this world, Satan. Since the promised Messiah was to come through the Jewish race, Satan targeted them for extinction. Unsuccessful in his attempts, his continued goal is to accomplish the same wickedness against God's people today.

Like the Jews, Christians are distinct in their beliefs-set apart from the world to serve God. It is not that we *try* to become different; we *are* different because the Holy Spirit who lives in us is committed to making us like our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Jesus Himself warned His followers of the world's hatred. Read about this cause and effect in **John 15:18-27** and **John 16:1-3**.
 - a. Why does the world hate the Christian? vv. 18-19
 - b. Why do believers encounter persecution? v.20
 - c. How are those of the world able to treat God's people so wickedly? v.21

Jesus states in this passage that the Helper-Holy Spirit-coming into the life of the believer equips him/her to give witness to the reality of the Son of God, and it is He that will enable the Christian to endure and not stumble.

5. Are you currently facing a situation involving persecution? Are you fearful of the potential outcome to yourself or someone close to you? Please share your thoughts.

If you're facing a difficult situation right now, be encouraged by the words of Jesus: **"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"** (John 16:33 NKJ). The world will bring you *tribulations-meaning*, in other words: trials, distress, and frustration. But because of Him, you can be of good *cheer-take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted!* Why? Jesus says *I have overcome the world-I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it. For you* (Amplified version). Cause for praise, don't you think?

Review this week's memory verse

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer on behalf of your enemy:

At the end of *Day One* (Pg. 2) of your lesson, you were asked to pray for someone you believe to be your enemy. Lift to God the prayer you wrote out, and then be open in the days ahead for God to possibly use you to show them His love.

A prayer to fear the Lord and honor Him:

You learned in your lesson this week that for those who *fear the Lord*, God sends the Angel of His presence; He reveals His secrets; He fulfills your desires. Tell Him today what it is that you need most.

A prayer to endure persecution:

Your memory verse this week contains a promise that things will at times be difficult for you because you wear the name of Christ. Ask God for the power of His Spirit-the Helper-to assist you in taking a strong stand for your faith no matter what the circumstances.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 4

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

Please read **Esther 4**.

God, in His providence, makes amazing things happen when we make ourselves available to Him. Usually, we don't see it coming, but there will be a moment/time when circumstances present themselves to us, and we have a choice to make that ultimately will impact the lives of others. As Christians, we have the responsibility to continually be at our fittest spiritually so that when the crisis hits, we are ready to respond in complete obedience to what God would have us to do!

Several years have passed since Esther ascended to the throne, years of apparent well-being for God's people. As chapter four opens, Mordecai has discovered the plot wickedly devised by Haman, and now the time of joy and celebrating has turned into a time of mourning. We're not told how Mordecai came to hear the news or what his thoughts were when he found out, but it would seem that he realized the answer to this horrible dilemma might somehow be connected to Esther and her position as Queen of Persia. His immediate problem was how to get the news to Esther.

1. How did Mordecai's actions reveal his feelings about Haman's decree? vv.1-2

Sackcloth was usually made of coarse, rough animal hair and worn by mourners or the poorest people in an open demonstration of guilt or grief. To clothe oneself in sackcloth and sit in ashes was a symbol of great mourning.

- a. Where did Mordecai go? Why couldn't he go any further?

The gate mentioned here was not merely one of many gates into the city but the door to the palace itself. No one dressed in clothes of mourning was ever allowed to enter the king's presence. Doing so would result in a death sentence! Mordecai was not trying to attract the king's attention; he wanted Esther to take notice.

2. What was the response of the Jews in the provinces as they heard the news? v. 3
 - a. Do you think perhaps that Mordecai may have felt responsible? Please share your thoughts.

Mordecai was grieving because his people were under a death sentence due to the hatred of just one man. The Bible says that **hell and destruction are never full (Proverbs 27:20a NKJ)** and that **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and ^{is} desperately wicked.” (Jeremiah 17: 9 NKJ).**

3. According to **Jeremiah 17:9-10**, who searches out the human heart? What else does he do?

4. **Proverbs 6:16-19 (NKJ) These :“Six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him”.** These seven things are listed for you below. Take a moment to think about them and write down the possible resulting consequences to others in a few words.

- *A proud look*
- *A lying tongue*
- *Hands that shed innocent blood*
- *A heart that devises wicked plans*
- *Feet that are swift in running to evil*
- *A false witness who speaks lies*
- *One who sows discord among brethren*

Can you see why God would hate these things because of the destruction they bring? If you recognize any of the above manifestations in your own life, ask God to forgive you and help you to change your heart attitude. If you don't deal with these behavioral symptoms now, then in time, you may see a *Haman* emerging in your own life.

Memory verse: “...Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”(Esther 4:14b NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text

Esther Hears the News

Read **Esther 4:4-12**

Well-known British official Edmund Burke once said, *“All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”* Mordecai was a good man and did what he could; now it was Esther's turn.

1. How did Esther initially hear of Mordecai's distress? v. 4-6

- a. What did she send to Mordecai, and why did he refuse?
 - b. Whom did Esther then send, and what was he told to do?
2. What specific details did Mordecai relay to Esther? What proof did he present?
vv. 7-8
- a. What did Mordecai hope to accomplish in doing this?
3. Esther was honest in her reply but very hesitant initially to become involved. What word did she send back to Mordecai through Hathach? vv. 10-12
- a. How long had it been since Esther had been to see the king?
 - b. What was the penalty for breaking the law?

The king's throne room was off-limits to the majority of the people of Persia. Even the king's wife could not enter his presence unless he sent for her; otherwise, she too was placed under a death sentence. The only hope for survival was for the king to hold forth the golden scepter, the symbol of his power, authority, and favor.

- c. Why do you think Esther feared she might be unwelcome?

Selah; Because of Persian law, Esther had good reason to fear the consequences of going to see the king. Whatever situation you are facing right now, God invites you to come. **“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”** (Hebrews 4:16 NKJ)

- ❖ Are you taking full advantage of your *all-access pass*?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

The Right Response

Read **Esther 4:13-17**

A *correct response* involves knowing what to say and when to say it; there is a time to speak and a time to keep silent. Words of correction should be doled out and received back in the spirit with which they are given. If you're a *Mordecai* (an advisor) to someone, a rebuke given in love can be appropriate; if you're an *Esther* (someone who can initiate change), you need to listen to that word of exhortation and take it to heart.

It's obvious from Mordecai's words to Esther that he perceived she would play an instrumental role if God's people were to be saved. Sensing the desperateness of the hour, he spoke plainly to her.

1. Do you think that Esther believed she would escape the king's decree? vv. 13-14
 - a. What words did Mordecai use to assure Esther that the opposite was true?
 - b. What did Mordecai say would happen if she did not speak up?
 - c. If she chose not to become involved, what did Mordecai say would happen to her and her family?
2. What piercing question did he ask her to awaken her to the fact that her role as queen was not a coincidence?

Selah;

Are there ever coincidences in the life of a child of God? Please explain your answer.

We probably wouldn't be reading this story today—at least not with this outcome—if Esther had chosen not to allow God to use her. How sad if God had to find another person and pursue another course to accomplish His will. In tomorrow's lesson, we'll examine our role in God's plan and how He wants to use us *for such a time as this*. Close your study today with a time of heartfelt examination in preparation for the next step. Ask Him to cleanse you and make you useable, then trust—nothing doubting—His call for what is to come.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

I Surrender All

Read **Esther 4:13-17** for review.

Today in our story, we see Esther rise to the role of the heroine by humbling herself before God. She's had time to think about Mordecai's words and to realize that God may use her to deliver His people. She replies to Mordecai with a plan that involves both strategy and surrender. From this point forward, we see her assuming responsibility and taking the initiative.

1. What did Esther ask Mordecai to request the Jews to do on her behalf? v.16
 - a. What did Esther commit to doing, and who would support her?
 - b. What did she determine to do even though it meant breaking the law?

Fasting involves voluntary abstaining from food or drink for the purpose of praying (even though prayer is not specifically mentioned here). Prayer is the primary purpose of fasting in order to focus on God. It is an expression of earnestness and seriousness whenever important decisions are made. Jesus spoke to His followers about fasting in the context of *when* you fast, not *if* you fast-to Him it was as normal as breathing for every child of God.

- c. Are *you* making fasting and prayer a priority in your Christian walk?
2. What words did Esther use to reveal the degree of commitment she had to her people?
v. 16
 - a. According to her words, in whose hands was she placing herself?

Esther was literally laying her life on the line for her people. To commit such an act of sacrifice involves recognizing God and the *realization* of a greater purpose (God's providence). It is this same act that He asks of every disciple today.

3. You will most likely not be required to lay your life down in the literal sense as Esther was; your sacrifice will probably involve giving your life in service to others and placing their needs ahead of yours. Write out **1 John 3:16** in your own words.

4. Use the following checklist to determine if you are ready, willing, and able to follow in Esther's footsteps. Keep your answers short and to the point.

- *Do you recognize God is at work in your life?*
- *Do you realize that God is moving you toward a greater purpose than what you see at this moment in time?*
- *Do you acknowledge that your times are in His hands?*
- *How do you see His hand at work in your life right now?*
- *Is there something you are doing to hinder His work in you?*
- *Are you willing to lay your life down for your brothers and sisters in Christ, even though it may involve great personal sacrifice?*

5. What does Jesus Christ say about sacrificing for love's sake? See **John 15:12-13**.

Read **Philippians 2:5-11**, the ultimate example of humility and surrender. Do you fully understand why Christ made Himself of no reputation, took the form of a bondservant, and came in the likeness of men? Do you realize why the Creator of the universe humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death—even the death of the cross? It was all *for you!* He had you in mind when He surrendered who He was, where He was, and all that He possessed. If you haven't yet surrendered yourself to Him as Lord, would you like to today? Just bow your heart and repeat these words: "**Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner in need of You as my Savior. Please forgive me and cleanse me of my sin and come inside and be my Lord. I surrender myself to You everything, my all, just as You did for me, and I thank you for filling me with Your Holy Spirit so that I can walk in obedience to You and serve you for the rest of my life. Thank you for using me to draw others to You that they also might be saved, in Jesus name, Amen.**" If you prayed that prayer today and meant it in your heart, you are now a child of God. He has filled you and empowered you to live for Him!

Share with your leader or someone you trust if you have made this commitment. God bless you in your new walk of faith!

Day Five: Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to renounce what God hates and love what He loves:

We looked at the things in Scripture that God detests; we know that what He loves is His Word and His people. Ask Him to help you share His passion.

A prayer to avail yourself of full access to the Throne room:

How will you respond to God's open invitation to come *fearlessly*, *confidently*, and *boldly* into His presence? His grace, mercy, and help are available for whatever situation you are facing.

A prayer to surrender all to Jesus:

He's your *Savior* and your *Lord*, but are you holding something back from Him? Ask Him to search your heart and reveal anything that you are keeping from Him that would keep you from realizing your full potential in Christ.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 5

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

Please read **Esther 5**.

The firm belief that *our times are in God's hand* raises the expectation level to the point that we look for God to do something great in our lives, and so we should! The Bible teaches that **"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."** (Ephesians 2:10 NKJ). Esther wasn't living in a fantasy world; her title and position had brought her to the palace for a purpose that was greater than her own expectations, and along with that purpose, she had to deal with some cold hard facts. She was facing a situation that was insurmountable, impossible, and even life-threatening. She had absolutely no illusions about the risk she was taking and no doubt about the possible consequences. It was just the kind of situation God loves to engineer so that He can show Himself strong on behalf of His people!

Esther's life was in God's hand when she fully surrendered and uttered the words, *"If I perish, I perish!"* Her life was in His hand those three days while she and the Jews fasted and prayed. Her life was in His hand as she put on her royal robes, dressing in all her queenly splendor as she prepared to go uninvited before the king. The time of inward spiritual preparation allowed Esther to have the confidence to move forward.

Can you relate to Esther's predicament? Have you found yourself facing an impossible situation where it seems that all the odds are stacked against you? God would have you to know that, like Esther, **"In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."** (Isaiah 30:15 NKJ) Would you hit that pause button today and allow Him to minister to your heart? Read on:

1. Invest some time today in quiet preparation for what is yet ahead of you. Look up the following passages in Scripture and let them instill in you the encouragement God's Word supplies. After pondering each verse for a few minutes, jot down what the Lord ministers to your heart about *who you are*, *who He is*, and *what you have* as the result of your relationship with Him.

Psalm 23:1-3

Psalm 46: 10a

Psalm 46:5

Zephaniah 3:17

2. Sum up in a sentence or two what you learned about God from these verses.

- What did you learn about yourself?

- What, specifically, did God show you that will help you take the next step with confidence?

This world can be a scary place at times, so much so that the Lord Jesus had specific words for His followers: **“Behold, I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves; be wary and wise as serpents, and Harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16 NKJ)**. Wisdom dictates that you walk circumspectly (carefully), with your eyes focused on the Lord. Be obedient to the next thing He asks of you, knowing that He has your best interest at heart.

Memory verse: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10 NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text Esther Takes the Next Step

Read **Esther 5:1-6**

After three days of fasting and praying, Esther prepared herself to enter the palace by putting on her royal robes (5:1); literally, the Hebrew reading is, *she put on her royalty*, no doubt to remind the king that she was his queen.

1. Where did she go to make her entry? v. 1

- a. Describe where the king was sitting.

- b. How did King Ahasuerus respond to Queen Esther's entrance? v. 2

- c. What gesture did Esther make to show she received the king's favor?

Whenever the king held out the golden scepter to an individual, he was extending pardon to nullify the death sentence for unauthorized entrance into his presence.

This was the first answer to the many prayers on Esther's behalf.

- 2. What did the king ask to show that Esther had not only his favor but also his interest?
v. 3
 - a. To what extent was the king willing to grant her request?

- 3. Her immediate response to the king's question was a simple request, what was it?
v. 4

Can you imagine how Esther must have felt as she continued to realize God's answer to her petitions? Certainly, it was over and above what she had expected. So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared (verse 5), but she was not out of the woods yet!

Esther was about to realize some things about God that she did not have the opportunity to know before. Placed in circumstances that were not of her choosing, she chose to let God have His way. Sometimes it is only through adversity that we really come to know who He is. When we experience times that He is all we have, we realize that He is all we need!

Selah; Are you in a difficult spot right now? Are you getting to know God in a deeper way? The lesson He wants to teach you is found in **Zechariah 4:6**. What is it?

- ❖ When you reach the point where you realize you cannot do it in your own strength, to what extent does God promise to provide for you? **Ephesians 3:20** Will you take a moment to thank Him?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

Esther's First Feast

Read **Esther 5:6-8**

Esther carefully selected the right words at the right moment and, though it may seem to us that she delayed her purpose, she had sought God's timing to make her request and was working towards that end. Because Esther was dependent on God's guidance, she did what she thought was best at that moment. When we rely upon Him, we can trust those moments when we feel it is right to wait, whether or not we can explain it at the time. Don't forget, while this scene was being played out, behind the scene, Mordecai and the rest of God's people were continuing to pray for God's intervention.

1. What question did the king again ask of Esther? v. 6

The king repeated his willingness to grant Esther almost anything she wanted. Rather than exposing Haman's plot too early, Esther did something else.

2. When did she promise to tell the king her true request? v. 7-8

Esther and Haman each had a strategy for getting what they wanted, though they were polar opposites! Haman occupied himself with manipulation and power plays while Esther exercised patience and planning. **Proverbs 16:32 (NKJ)** says, **He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.** From a spiritual perspective, patience will get you much farther than power will. And God will always honor the self-control that is exercised through patience.

3. What does **James 1:2-4** have to say about the virtue of patience?
 - a. What is ultimately gained through patience?
 - b. What do these verses say about the perspective you should have?
4. What does **1 Timothy 6:11** have to say regarding patience? To what degree are you pursuing this quality?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

The Plot Thickens

Read **Esther 5:9-14**

In the game of life, when somebody wins, somebody else loses-it has to be that way. Haman now comes to the forefront of our story, and things begin to heat up! Leaving Esther's banquet with a glad heart, Haman stumbles upon Mordecai, sitting in his usual place at the king's gate.

1. What was Haman expecting Mordecai to do as he approached him? vv. 9-10
 - a. How did Mordecai defy Haman?
 - b. What happened to Haman's joy at this point? What did he do?

Haman's pride was damaged, but he didn't attack Mordecai; instead, he retreated to his home to be with his wife and friends. He knew his plans for destruction were already in motion, and he no doubt looked forward to not having to see Mordecai in the future. Esther's strategy of including Haman at the banquets had lulled him into a false sense of security.

2. Who else did Haman call for, and what did he do next? vv. 11-12
 - a. What evidence of pride is there in his words? Be specific with your examples.
 - b. Why do you think Haman felt he had to boast after seeing Mordecai?

After sharing everything he was proud of, Haman put himself on the same level as the king by saying that he was the only one apart from the king that Esther had invited to the banquet.

3. What warning does the Bible give about the danger of pride and a haughty (arrogant, conceited, self-important, overconfident) spirit? **Proverbs 16:18**

We will see the reality of this truth come to full fruition shortly!

4. Use **James 4:6**, contrast pride with humility.

- ❖ The root cause of anger is pride, and, left unchecked, it will lead to jealousy, envy, and even malice. Using the resources you have on hand, define the word *malice*. From your investigation, what kind of damage will it produce?

To "control" his anger problem, Haman surrounded himself with like-minded people who would understand him. But instead of dealing with his anger and coming to some resolution, he let bitterness and malice take over.

5. What should a person do when facing the problem of uncontrolled anger?
Ephesians 4:31-32 (If these verses apply to you, take steps to deal with this today.)
6. Instead of helping Haman with his anger management, his wife and friends only added more fuel to his fire. What advice did they give him? v. 14
 - a. How did they think Haman would feel after Mordecai hung on the gallows?

Did you notice how contagious bitterness can become? Once unleashed, it can quickly become transmitted from one person to another like a wildfire. Haman, pleased with the advice of his friends, had the gallows erected. The height of fifty cubits was the equivalent of seventy-five feet! It was deliberately designed to be a prominent fixture that would generate a great deal of attention and make a strong statement.

Pride, anger, jealousy, envy, and malice all played a role in Haman's ultimate destruction. It's easy to look at these sins when reading about someone else's life, but lest we overlook what may be lurking in our own hearts, we would do well to examine ourselves before moving on any further. Take a moment and ask God to show you if any of these tendencies are visible to Him. Record what He speaks to you and then humbly deal with them in prayer.

Review this week's memory verse

Day Five: Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer for faith to take the next step;

Whatever it is that you are facing, this moment before making your next move—take time to prepare your heart. Ask God to give you the confidence in Him to take the next step.

A prayer for patience through the trial;

James 1:4 (NKJ) says: **“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be ^{to} perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”** When you ask God for patience, you are asking Him for steadfastness and persistence, the ability to bear the trial without grumbling.

Ask Him, and then **let** Him complete the work in you.

A prayer for putting away all anger;

When God asks you to put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice, He asks you to replace them with *kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness*. Tell Him you need His help to forgive as He (in Christ) has forgiven you.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 6

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

Please read **Esther 6:1-14**

Haman left Esther's banquet in high spirits because he was invited to attend along with the king. On the way home, when he encountered Mordecai, who did not tremble in his presence, he was filled with indignation. When his wife and friends suggested he build a gallows on which to hang Mordecai, Haman was more than pleased to have the gallows made. The height of seventy-five feet was exorbitant and in keeping with Haman's pride and his obsessive desire for revenge. With his pride dealt a blow, he soothed his anger by contemplating how Mordecai would die.

Haman liked the attention he was paid (by everyone except Mordecai), but, in truth, he hadn't done anything to merit it. He was only revered because the people of the kingdom were commanded to pay him homage. Haman's sense of honor appears more tied to his wealth and ambition, more in *what he had* and *who he knew*, rather than in what he'd accomplished. He was being honored, but he wasn't an honorable man.

1. Using the resources you have at hand, write a definition of the word *honor*.

2. Scripture has much to say about honor and many examples of those who merit the accolade. According to the following verses, how does the book of Proverbs say honor is obtained?
 - a. **Proverbs 3:13-16**

 - b. **Proverbs 11:16**

 - c. **Proverbs 13:18**

 - d. **Proverbs 15:33**

 - e. **Proverbs 20:3**

 - f. **Proverbs 21:21**

- g. Do others see any of the above qualities exhibited in your life?

Honor can mean to pay respect to those in authority over you; it can also refer to the tribute paid to a person based upon their reputation or accomplishment; it can also mean the reward conferred upon deserving individuals.

In **Hebrews 11**, we have the recorded account of those great men and women of faith who were honorably mentioned for their righteous deeds. As you have time today, read through this chapter and consider what these individuals endured. **Hebrews 11:39 (NKJ)** says, " **And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise.** "For God had better things in mind for us that would also benefit them, for they can't receive the prize at the end of the race until we finish the race. "

Selah; The full reward of these great men and women is yet to come, pending the finish of *your* race and that of your fellow believers. How does that thought encourage you today? Please share your thoughts.

Memory verse: Jesus said, "**If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.**"(John 12:26 NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text

God's Perfect Timing

Read **Esther 6:1-3**

What's the best cure for insomnia? Some people turn on relaxing music, others turn to mindless TV, and some grab a book sitting on the nearby shelf. That's what King Ahasuerus did. On the same night of Esther's first banquet, unable to sleep, the king called for the record book or the chronicles of memorable deeds and notable events. He no doubt thought that a good read of an elaborate log of his reign would put him fast asleep, but that isn't what happened. As the books were opened and he listened, he heard the recounting of a familiar event that roused his interest.

1. What story did the king hear that caused him to halt the reading? v. 2

2. What question did the king ask his servant concerning Mordecai? v. 3
 - a. What was the servant's reply?

It was unusual nothing was done to honor Mordecai for saving the king's life, for Persian monarchs often used rewards to maintain the loyalty of their subjects. In retrospect, the king realized that failing to honor Mordecai was a terrible oversight. He probably also realized that Mordecai had not petitioned him as a reminder, which was common in those days. With his sense of pride and dignity stirred up, the king felt that such a deed should no longer go unrewarded.

3. **Esther 6:1** says, "***That night,***" the king could not sleep. Recall from 5:14 what else was going on that night. Was it a coincidence the king could not sleep? Who was behind the scenes orchestrating the timing of the events?

God can direct the sleep pattern of the king as well as direct his servant to read the specific text containing Mordecai's good deed. Just when it seems that time may be running out, God steps in and does the unexpected! During *that night*, the king realized that he was still on the throne because of Mordecai. Suddenly this previously unnoticed Jew is the king's top priority.

4. Do you ever have cause to think that God is not concerned about you or your situation? Are you ever tempted to think He will not come through with the answer or the provision you need? What does **Ecclesiastes 3:1** have to say?

Providentially, God selected this as the moment for the king to honor Mordecai; had it been earlier, the circumstances would have been quite different. God is not bound by the minutes and hours in a day as we are; He operates from infinity. The timing of His entrance is His choice and for His purpose, but He is never late! He may not be early by our standards, but He will always be there at the exact moment He is needed to intervene on your behalf.

- 5 The king of Persia kept a detailed log containing the events of his reign. Did you know there is a *Book of Remembrance* written in the Lord's presence? According to **Malachi 3:16**, whose names are recorded there?

Are *you* someone who fears God and loves to think about Him? If so, this is what God has to say to you in **verse 17-18 of Malachi 3**: "**They shall be Mine,**" says the LORD of hosts, "**On the day that I make them My jewels and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.**" Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him." God makes a distinction between those who are His and those who are not. Let His words encourage you today.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

Mordecai is Honored

Read **Esther 6:4-11**

A sleepless night revealed to King Ahasuerus that the man who saved his life had not yet been acknowledged or rewarded. This oversight had to be rectified, but before the king took any action, he sought the counsel of his closest advisor.

1. What question does the king ask? v. 4-5
 - a. Who was the first to arrive at court the next morning?
 - b. Why had he come so early to the palace?

When the king was made aware of Haman's presence, he asked to see him at once.

2. How did the king phrase his question to Haman? v. 6
 - a. Who was the king thinking of honoring?
 - b. Who was Haman immediately thinking about at this moment?
3. Realizing what would satisfy his own pride, how does Haman suggest honoring the one who delights the king? vv. 7-9

Haman could have suggested wealth, position, or power, but his imagination quickly began to envision the glory he could have for himself if he were dressed in the king's royal robes. He could picture the splendor of the parade in his mind and hear the accolades of the people ringing in his ears.

4. What is the king's immediate response? v. 10-11

- a. Describe what you think must have been going through Haman's mind at this moment.
- b. Now, try to describe what Mordecai might have been thinking.

As far as Haman was concerned, this wasn't how the story was to be played out! Talk about humiliation! From what we know of Haman, this had to be the worst assignment he could have imagined—the absolute opposite of the picture he had painted in his mind. How excruciating it must have been for him to hold on to the reins of that horse and lead him up and down the city streets, honoring his enemy in precisely the way he wished to be honored himself. He is a reminder that *"It is a worthier thing to deserve honor than to possess it"* (Chuck Swindoll). Haman tried to hang on to what wasn't rightfully his.

On the other hand, Mordecai never petitioned the king for recognition; he didn't seek retribution against Haman for his wicked decree; he never even spoke out against the man. He pleaded his cause to the queen and then waited to see how God would intervene. What an example he is of God's servant abiding in Him.

5. **Psalm 91** depicts a beautiful picture of the safety of abiding in God's presence. Read through this psalm and jot down what you learn about:
 - *God:*
 - *yourself:*

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

Haman's Wife Predicts His Downfall

Read **Esther 6:12-14**

In reading through the account of our story, it's worth noting that Mordecai seems to remain silent. He doesn't gloat over the sudden turn of events, and he doesn't rush out to read his own press clippings. The honor he received didn't go to his head. Haman, however, is devastated.

1. Where did Mordecai go after this? v. 12
 - a. Where did Haman go? Why?

Remember the last time Haman went home to his wife and friends? He bragged about how great he was and how the king had advanced him above all his other servants. This time his wife and friends could say nothing to comfort him.

2. When Haman told his wife and all his friends what happened, what did his wife predict?
v. 13
 - a. What did this observation of the situation confirm for them all?
 - b. What happened next while they were still talking with him?

Their observation led to the belief that God was on the side of the Jews and that their enemies would not prevail against them! They were right on target with their prediction: **"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:2-3 NKJ).

Haman no doubt saw himself as a victim of his circumstances; he didn't blame himself for all that *had happened to him*. Human nature often doesn't accept responsibility for behavior, but a godly character will.

Selah; Have you found yourself promoted to a position that brings you honor and popularity? Do you find that you are held in high esteem by others? Are you still comfortable serving at the king's gate, or do you think you deserve to move into the palace? Please share your thoughts.

3. In **2 Timothy 2:20-21**, we have the description of approved and disapproved workers. Read these verses carefully and answer the following.
 - a. What type of vessels are there?
 - b. What must a person do to be a *vessel for honor*?
 - c. What kind of work is this person prepared for?
 - d. What are *you* currently doing to ensure you are a vessel fit for the Master's use?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five: Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to wait for God's perfect timing;

You know that God sees your circumstances-He knows what you are going through. You know that He cares about you and has your best interest at heart. Tell Him that you won't rush ahead of Him or lag behind; but you'll await His perfect timing.

A prayer to praise God;

What are you thinking about God today? What would He find recorded next to your name in His Book of Remembrance? Tell Him how you feel about Him.

A prayer to become a vessel of honor;

Do you serve to please God or to please others? God is not impressed with our efforts when we serve to call attention to ourselves or to be commended by those around us. Tell the Lord you want to be a vessel fit for His use, prepared for every good work.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 7

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

Please read **Esther 7:1-10**

Has a sudden turn of events ever caught you by surprise? Day-to-day living may proceed at a normal pace, and then suddenly, something unusual and surprising turns the course of events into something dramatic and unexpected. What a difference twenty-four hours can make! For Esther, what was about to unfold was the answer to days of fasting and prayer; for the king and Haman, this sudden turn was completely unexpected and unequalled.

In our last lesson, we saw Mordecai honored while Haman was humiliated, leaving the reader on a note of optimism. Things were beginning to look up for God's people. This week in our story, we will see God directly intervening on behalf of His people for His own purpose and glory.

As the second banquet approaches, Esther realizes it is time to break her silence. Esther already had two opportunities to speak up: first when she approached the king, and he held out the golden scepter, and then at the first banquet when he asked her a second time what she wanted; but she wisely discerned that the time was not right. Once again, the three are present: the king, the queen, and the prime minister. The stage is now set, the principal parties are in place, and the moment has arrived to speak out.

1. When you find yourself in a crisis, how do *you* usually respond? Are you as sensitive as Esther? Do you know when to listen and when to speak up? Do you rush to judgment and react with panic in your eyes and voice? Or do you patiently wait to see what will happen next? Please comment.

Esther was in a desperate situation, but she kept her emotions in control and her spirit in check. This can sometimes be very hard for us to do as we wait for God to come to our rescue. Whenever we perceive what appears to be a delay of God's answer or His coming, it is hard for us to believe that things will work out well.

It isn't until events have passed and He breaks the silence by intervening on our behalf that we see He was there all the time!

In the mystery of God's sovereignty, He can be trusted. The question is: *can you be trusted with His silence?* Or will you only believe if He gives you the visible answer?

2. If you're in a difficult situation today, look to Him. Get into His Word by looking up the verses below. Keep these in front of you to remember as you're waiting for the answer to come.

a. **2 Timothy 1:7** (Write out the verse.)

- What did you learn about God?
- What did you learn about yourself?

b. **2 Corinthians 5:7** (Write out the verse.)

- What did you learn about God?
- What did you learn about yourself?

c. **Matthew 7:7-11** (Summarize the verse.)

- What did you learn about God?
- What did you learn about yourself?

Selah; Look over this list of "do's" and "don'ts" and put them into practice as they apply to you:

- ✓ **DO** take time to tap into the Scriptures that minister comfort to your heart and insight to your mind.
- ✓ **DO** remember to pray them back to the Lord.
- ✗ **DON'T** rush into making impulsive decisions and actions you may regret later on.
- ✗ **DON'T** talk too much to the people around you. If you are maturing in your Christian walk, you'll demonstrate by your behavior that God can trust you with His silence.

Memory verse: "To everything *there is* a season,

A time for every purpose under heaven: ... A time to tear, and a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak."

(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7)

Day Two: Exploring the Text

A Time to Speak

Read **Esther 7: 1-4**

The king and Haman respond to Queen Esther's invitation by arriving at the second banquet. The word in Hebrew for *banquet* literally means *drinking*, hence the phrase: *the banquet of wine*. This was usually a time for celebrating a special guest or event.

1. What question does the king ask Esther, and what does he promise her? How many times has he made her this promise? v. 2

2. What words does Esther use to place herself at the king's mercy? v. 3
 - a. What two requests does Esther make of the king?

Esther was wise to choose her words carefully, humbling herself before the king in an effort to please him with her request.

3. Up to this point in time, Esther had kept her heritage a secret (2:20). How does she now reveal who she is? v. 3
 - a. Why does she say she is making this request? V. 4

 - b. How would she have reacted if she and her people were sold into slavery rather than condemned to die?

 - c. Esther used specific words to describe her fate and that of her people. What were those words? Who originally authored them? See **Esther 3:13**.

Esther, in her defense, used the specific words her opponent used in writing up the death warrant against all the Jews. She didn't need to embellish her words to make her point.

- d. How does Esther state that there was a financial motive behind the proposed annihilation? Why would this not be beneficial to the king? v. 4

4. Share about a time when you set things straight by using the truth of a situation to solve it rather than resorting to gossip and hearsay.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

A Time to Judge

Read **Esther 7: 5-7**

Esther assumed her role as queen, taking the initiative and speaking out to save her people. Today we'll look at the king's reaction to her news and the outcome for all the parties involved.

1. What three things did the king demand to know? v. 5

2. How did Haman respond to being identified as the enemy of the queen? v. 6
 - a. What word did Esther use to describe Haman's actions?

3. What was the king's reaction to Queen Esther's revelation? v. 7
 - a. Where did Haman turn to plead for mercy?

 - b. What did he think was about to happen?

What Haman had decreed against the Jews was turning on his own head. God's word promises in **Galatians 6:7 (NKJ) "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."** Haman perceived that evil was now determined against him by the king. His only hope was to plead for mercy.

King Ahasuerus angrily retreated to the palace garden to be alone. This impulsive, unpredictable monarch hesitated, taking time out to think before he acted. Was he angry over the fact that he had signed his own wife's death warrant? Was he embarrassed at having appointed such a man as Haman to the office of prime minister? Would he look the fool for it? Or was he concerned about how to rescind an irrevocable law that would wipe out a nation when it had his royal approval? Perhaps it was all of the above!

4. When provoked to anger, what are some of the advantages of taking a "time out"? Do you employ these benefits at critical moments? Please share your thoughts.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

A Time to Die

Read **Esther 7: 8-10**

The prophecy of Haman's wife and friends was now being fulfilled (6:13). Haman had already recognized that the king determined evil against him. His only hope was that Queen Esther would intervene on his behalf.

1. While the king was outside in the palace garden, what had happened to Haman?
v. 8
 - a. Upon the king's return, what did he accuse Haman of doing?
 - b. What happened immediately afterward?
2. Esther's enemy had now become the king's enemy. God's word says a similar thing about God's children. Look up **Exodus 23:22** and write it here in your own words.

King Ahasuerus was blind-sighted to what was so evident to everyone else. The confusion and state of mourning that permeated his city when the decree was handed out had escaped his attention. He was out of touch with what was happening around him.

What about you? Are you in touch with what is happening around you? Are you keenly aware of what those closest to you are going through? The Bible warns about letting the heart become hardened over time to the reality of things.

3. **Matthew 13:14-15** illustrates the result of hardheartedness. Summarize these verses in your own words.

- ❖ Does the above passage describe *you* in any way? In hearing, do you *understand*? In seeing, do you *perceive*? Or has your heart grown dull over time? If the Holy Spirit has put a check of conviction in you as you work through this part of the lesson, don't turn away until you deal with what He has revealed. Otherwise, you'll continue to grow harder to the things of the spirit. Jot down what God has shown you and spend some time in prayer.

A veil was thrown over Haman's face (7:8), pronouncing his death sentence.

4. Next, who makes an observation, and what does he say? v. 9

Harbonah's announcement is, in a way, a second accusation against Haman. It was the revelation that he was intentionally making an attempt on the life of one of the king's benefactors-Mordecai-the man who saved the king's life.

5. When the king found out about the gallows, what did he command? v.9
 - a. Describe what happened next? v.10

We see here the devastating effect that pride has on its victims as it turns into jealousy, then envy, followed by the desire for revenge, and ultimately, death and destruction. We may wonder why evil sometimes prospers, and the wicked get ahead in life. We're puzzled by their prosperity and success. The writer of the book of Psalms felt the same way until he went into the sanctuary of God and understood the real fate of those who appear to capitalize on their wicked imaginings and deeds. If you've been the intended victim of someone else's wicked scheme, or you've stood back and wondered why they so often get ahead, the Lord would have you know and understand what His Word says about it.

6. Read through **Psalm 73** and then give some thought to the following.

- What did you learn about the ungodly?
- What did you perceive about God?
- How will this understanding affect *your* perspective?

What a difference twenty-four hours can make! The very passive queen is now in control of herself and taking the lead. The easily fooled king is now very much informed. The enemy who was honored by the king is now the object of the king's wrath. The gallows built for a humble Jew now holds the body of the Jew's enemy! We're told in **1 Corinthians 4:5 9 (NKJ):**

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the ⁱⁿcounsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." He alone is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present! What a difference our God can make! We should not attempt to predict how, when or where He will appear, but always be looking for Him to come!

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to speak out;

God wants you to have the wisdom to know when to speak out and when to keep silent. It is always in season to speak the truth in love, particularly when you see an injustice taking place. Ask Him to put His words in your mouth and His passion in your heart.

A prayer to judge between right and wrong;

It's impossible to put a good face on evil. You must call it what it is! Ask God to help you make a clear distinction between right and wrong and to evaluate and make your decisions on that basis properly

A prayer to know God's will in your circumstances;

You've realized through your study how important it is to wait on God's perfect timing not to go ahead of Him or lag behind. Ask Him to help you see His hand in your circumstances and to be content where He has you right now.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

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Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 8

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

Please read **Esther 8:1-17**

Days, weeks, and months passed with the Jews noticing the growing anti-Semitic sentiment across the land which Haman had set in motion. They heard the jeers and sarcastic remarks hurled at them, resulting from the destructive law written for all the land. Day after day, God's people were living under the horrible threat of annihilation. Did they talk about it family to family, friend to friend? How would they be able to face such a fate? What did they tell their children? Was there any hope of escaping their impending doom?

Then, when Esther appeared on the scene, everything changed-the tables were turned! Suddenly, overnight, the avowed enemy of the Jews was hung on the gallows intended for Mordecai, while Mordecai was raised to replace Haman as Prime Minister of the land. Another edict was about to be written that would give God's people the hope of a way out. This new legislation would provide for the Jews to fight against those who attacked them and use self-defense against their aggressors.

Once again, Esther petitions the king on behalf of her people. She implores the king to remove the decree and remove the heavy burden on her heart. It is literally her intercession at the throne that would save her people! Her example should encourage every one of God's people to come to His throne and intercede on behalf of those who are still in desperate need of His intervention.

Is there a heavy burden on your heart today for someone's circumstances-or, perhaps your own? Before we look at the action taking place in our chapter this week, take a moment to look at what Scripture says about the prayer life of those who desire to make a difference in this world.

Colossians 4:2 (NKJ) says:" Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving."

1. Using the resources you have at hand, define the words highlighted in the above verse. Indicate which aspects are vital parts of *your* prayer life.

✓ *Earnest*—

✓ *Unwearied*—

✓ *Steadfast*—

✓ *Alert*—

✓ *Intent*—

✓ *Thanksgiving*—

2. In doing the above word study, what overall insight did you gain about having a prayer life that impacts the lives of others? Are there changes you could make to become more effective?

C. H. Spurgeon once said, *"Prayer pulls the rope down below, and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give only an occasional jerk at the rope. But [she] who communicates with heaven is the same who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might."* One person devoted to prayer can make a difference in this world! Prayer is the key that unlocks the power of God—not by getting our will done in Heaven, but God's will done on earth!

**Memory verse: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."
(Hebrews 4:16 NKJ)**

Day Two: Exploring the Text

Read **Esther 8:1-8**

Haman's pronouncement as a traitor meant that his entire estate reverted back to the crown.

1. To whom did the king bestow all of Haman's property? v. 1
2. What did the king give Mordecai? What did Esther give him? v. 2

The king could have kept all of Haman's property and wealth for himself; he chose to give it to Esther. At this point, she became a very wealthy woman! But instead of letting it go to her head, Esther speaks from her heart.

3. Describe Esther's demeanor as she speaks to the king. v. 3

- a. What request does Esther make concerning Haman's edict? v. 5
 - b. What reason does she give for her request? v. 6
4. What was the king's immediate response to Esther in verse 4?
- a. How does the king assure her of his support? v. 7
 - b. What solution does the king offer Esther? v. 8
Explain why you think this would be an effective remedy for the situation.

King Ahasuerus promoted Esther to queen and Mordecai to the position of prime minister. Both obtained great honor and authority throughout the realm's one hundred and twenty-seven provinces!

- 5. According to **Ephesians 2:4-7**, to what position has God raised *you*?
- 6. Complete the illustration below by filling in where indicated;
What you once were **What you are now in Christ**

John 8:34-36

Romans 6:11

Ephesians 2:3; 5:8

Ephesians 2:12; 1:11

Ephesians 2:19

Selah; Remember, *you* are in the process of a continual *makeover* that will ultimately transform you into His image. Write a summary sentence of what you were before Christ and what you are now in Christ.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text

Read **Esther 8:9-14**

Haman was now out of the picture, but the plan he set in motion remained very much alive. The document detailing the Jews' destruction, which the king had sealed with his ring, could not be revoked. Nevertheless, to counteract the first measure, King Ahasuerus gave Esther and Mordecai the freedom to write another proclamation, which would supersede the previous one.

1. When were the king's scribes summoned to record the new law as stated by Mordecai?
v. 9
 - a. Who were the recipients of the new decree?
 - b. What assurance did they have that everyone would receive and understand it?
 - c. In whose name was the document authorized? v. 10
2. What were the Jewish people allowed to do? vv. 11-12 (Look again at 3:13 and 7:4 for review.)
3. How far did this decree extend? vv. 13-14
 - a. What understanding would the Persian people have when they received the document? What effect do you think this would have on them?
 - b. Why were the couriers commanded to hurry the process along?

Mordecai didn't have time to waste. The swiftest horses were selected to get the word out to the farthest regions in the least amount of time. Mordecai was permitted to use the king's name to get the needed results.

There is a growing sense among the people of God today about the urgency of the hour do you sense it? There is no time to waste! Perhaps you don't realize it, but you are given permission to use His name for what you say and do in His service as someone who loves the Lord. His name and His resources are at your disposal.

4. Look up the following references and summarize what there is in the Lord's name:

- **Matthew 18:20**

- **Mark 9:38-41**

- **Luke 9:48**

- **John 1:12; Acts 4:12**

- **John 14:26**

- **Colossians 3:17**

5. Why does God answer the prayer lifted up in the name of Jesus? **John 14:13-14**

Jesus' words to His followers in the last days are, "**And you hold fast to My name.**" (**Revelation 2:13**). In your service, whenever you ask something in His name, be sure that as the answer comes, you also give Him the glory!

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Exploring the Text

Read **Esther 8:15-17**

What began as a mere hope on the part of the Jews then became an earnest prayer and now a glorious reality. As the news throughout the realm, Mordecai goes out from the king's presence.

1. Describe the change in Mordecai's apparel witnessed by the people. v. 14

Mordecai had gone from wearing the sackcloth and ashes of mourning to the borrowed robes of the king as Haman led him through the streets of the city and now to the official royal robes prepared especially for him. All of the things that Haman had schemed to acquire were given to Mordecai as gifts because he was deserving of them.

2. What was the response of the Jews in Shushan when they saw Mordecai? v. 15
 - a. What four words are used to describe the Jew's response to Mordecai's appearance? v. 16
 - b. What did this change represent to them?
 - c. How did the Jews celebrate as the news spread? v.17
3. What spiritual change took place as the result of the decree? Why? v. 17

As the realization of the news set in, great fear fell upon the people of the land, resulting in many becoming Jews. What the enemy meant for evil, God intended for good.

No doubt many people marked this date-June 25, 474 B.C.-with a star on their calendars. What began as an ordinary day turned out to be one that none of them would ever forget: Haman was executed, Esther inherited a fortune, Mordecai was promoted to the prime minister, a new decree was issued that caused a great celebration, and there were many new converts to Judaism!

4. Time is the most precious commodity we have, as we've witnessed in our story. How you use the time you're given each day can make all the difference in the world. What should you take to heart from the following Scripture:

- **Proverbs 27:1**

- **James 4:13-14**

- **Psalm 90:12**

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17 NKJ). How clear is your understanding of His will for your life? Are you using your time wisely?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer to become an effective prayer warrior;

Are you someone who is bold in prayer? Is something holding you back? If you know of an area you can change or something you can let go of to become more effective in your prayer, give it to the Lord today.

A prayer of thanksgiving for who you are in Christ;

Looking back at what you once were to what you are now in Christ helps you to view things from God's perspective and to develop a grateful heart for God's providence in your life. Write a prayer of thankfulness for the person you are becoming.

A prayer to know God's will in your circumstances;

A person who walks circumspectly is someone careful and purposeful in the steps they take. Does this sound like you? Ask God to help you walk in a manner worthy of your calling in a way that pleases Him.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

Esther

In the Providence of God

Lesson 9

Day One: Exploring the Text

As the final scene in our story has played out, we realize that God had occupied a major role in it all. It is His providential care that has brought an orphaned Jewish girl to the throne, a humble Mordecai into prominence as prime minister, and the people of God to victory over their enemies. It's the happy ending every reader hopes for. There is reason to celebrate God's love and care for everyone that belongs to Him.

The issuance of Haman's death decree (chapter 3) brought grief to the city of Susa, but now Mordecai's adulation brings great joy and celebration. The Jews were hopeful of their deliverance when they saw Mordecai coming out from the king's presence wearing royal robes and a golden crown. There was joy, gladness, feasting, and a holiday proclaimed everywhere. The message spread throughout the city and in every province. Many people of other nationalities became Jews for fear of their right to defend themselves (8:17).

Please read **Esther 9:1-10**

1. On the day the enemies of the Jews hoped to overpower them, what ended up happening? v. 1
 - a. How did the Jews execute their plan? v. 2
 - b. Why was no one able to withstand them?
2. Who helped the Jews? What motivated them? vv. 3-4
3. How did the Jews win victory over their enemies? vv. 5-10
 - a. How many in the citadel were killed? Who was among them?
 - b. What tells you the Jews were not after material gain? v. 10

In reading the account of the "slaughter and destruction" wrought by the Jews on those who hated them, we must remember that God's people did not initiate the hostility—they were not the aggressors. They had been threatened by utter annihilation, and the vengeance they carried out was in self-defense. These Jews showed tremendous restraint in killing only those who were a threat to them and not laying a hand on the plunder. They had the freedom to take the spoils, but they didn't; they had the freedom to kill women and children, but they didn't. They stopped at defending themselves.

4. Using the resources you have at hand, write a definition for the following:

- *vengeance*:
- *vindicate*:

The words *vengeance* and *vindicate* convey different meanings but come from the same Latin word—*vindicare*. Vengeance is a passion that is out of control, while *vindicate* refers to God's action when defending His people. In our story, we've witnessed the aftermath of a king that is out of control; now, in chapter 9, we see God's people inflicting just punishment by using restraint or self-control.

5. What, again, is the person like that exhibits no self-control? **Proverbs 25:28**

- a. What are the advantages of exercising self-control? **Proverbs 14:29; 16:32**
- b. What makes self-control possible for every believer? **Galatians 5:22-23**
- c. What responsibility does every Christian have? **2 Peter 1:3-6a**.

Selah; If you look for God to vindicate you—to come to your defense—then you must also be willing to use self-control in dealing with others. When others observe your behavior, would they say that you have self-control?

History records that God's people have always been able to identify with one another in their experience of His deliverance. The Jews in Persia identified with Mordecai in his victory, and Christians today identify (in a far greater way) with Jesus Christ as our Savior. We know Him as Victor—His triumph is our triumph!

Memory verse: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NKJ)

Day Two: Exploring the Text The Jews Destroy Their Enemies

Please read **Esther 9:11-19**

Drastic times call for drastic measures! King Ahasuerus must have been surprised to learn how many men were killed in Susa alone, not to mention the rest of the provinces. Esther realized, however, that the danger wasn't over. One day for the Jews to defend themselves was not enough. The king granted her another request, and Esther seizes the moment.

1. How many men did the king say died in the city, the thirteenth day of the month of Adar? vv. 11-12

2. What does the king say to let Esther know she had obtained his favor?

In asking Esther on previous occasions for her request, the king was willing to grant it up to half of the kingdom. Notice this time; he does not place any limit or restriction on what he will do.

3. What two requests does Esther make of the king? Why? vv. 13-14

4. How many more men were killed the following day-the fourteenth day of the month of Adar in the city of Susa? vv. 15-16
 - a. What was the total throughout the provinces?

 - b. How did the Jews again exercise self-control?

God's people deliberately restrained from seizing the property belonging to the men they had killed. Instead, they left everything to the surviving women and children.

5. When did the Jews in the provinces rest from the battle and celebrate their victory? How did they celebrate? vv. 17 and 19
 - a. When and how did the Jews in the city rest from the battle and celebrate? v. 18

Even though the Jews were given the freedom to retaliate, they continually resisted the temptation to go too far.

6. The Old Testament book of Proverbs lays out instructions on what the heart attitude is *not* to be for God's people. Summarize the teaching of the following:

- **Proverbs 20:22**
- **Proverbs 24:29**

The New Testament provides instruction about the heart-attitude you *should* have as a believer in Christ. What do you learn from each of the following verses:

- **Matthew 5:7 and 39**
- **Luke 6:36**
- **Romans 12:17-21**

How do you deal with the human desire to get even? The next time you're mistreated and tempted to retaliate, remind yourself of what you just read. If that doesn't grip your heart, take a few minutes now to meditate on **Isaiah 53:1-10**. How has God's mercy affected *your* life?

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: Exploring the Text The Feast of Purim

Please read **Esther 9:20-32 and 10:1-3**

One of the reasons the book of Esther exists is to explain how and why the festival of Purim became a part of Jewish life. Every year, a month before Passover, the Jews celebrate this deliverance. It is a day to remember and enjoy a feast-to have fun, dress up in costume, and send gifts to one another. The term *pur*, which means *lot*, is most likely Assyrian, referring to Haman's casting of lots to determine on which day he would attack the Jews. The Jewish people called the feast *Purim* to remind them of the lot intended for their destruction but instead led to their miraculous deliverance. On the thirteenth day, in the month of Adar, they destroyed their enemies (**9:16-17**); and on the fourteenth day, they rested and celebrated with much joy

1. There are three main factors to consider regarding the Feast of Purim:
 - a. What was the purpose of Mordecai's letter, and who received it? vv. 20-22
 - b. How did the Jews propose to adopt Mordecai's directions? vv. 23, 27-28
 - c. For what purpose did Esther and Mordecai write a second letter? vv. 29-31; and 10:1-3 How would Mordecai's advancement add credence to the document?

There are several lessons the festival of Purim can teach us, the most important being that we, as God's people, should remember His delivering grace—the gift of our salvation through the death of our Savior Jesus Christ.

- **Resting;** Jesus encouraged His followers to occasionally "*Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest*" (Mark 6:31). The Lord's Day, Sunday—for the believer and is meant to be a day to stop work and remember what God has done for us by worshipping Him.
- **Feasting;** The coming together of the body of Christ around the Communion table is to be a special kind of feasting. **Acts 2:42 (NKJ)** says that the believers in the early church "**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**" We feast (spiritually) as we partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of His saving work on our behalf.
- **Celebrating;** Both the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper are meant to be a commemoration of His great love for us both give us an occasion to celebrate and rejoice! Our praises and thanksgiving should be the overflowing expression of our joy for all that He means to us! In addition, we gladly bring our tithes into the storehouse of the sanctuary to be used to help those in need and to spread the message of the Gospel.
- Are all three of the above in evidence in your life? Please share your thoughts.

We cannot live the Christian life as we ought without remembering the Cross as the focal point of our deliverance! The message it contains is simple but profound; every child can understand and accept it, but none can ever fully plumb the depths of its meaning! The fact of our redemption affects every part of our daily lives, and the more we come to embrace it, the more humble and grateful we become.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Four: Reviewing the Book

It's always helpful to take a look back to see how far you've come through your commitment to study God's Word. You began your study in Esther with a "big picture" perspective, and today you'll end with a look at what you've gained from this wonderful book. Prayerfully consider the territory you've covered and answer the questions below.

1. What personal life application have you taken to heart from your study of Esther? How will it help you in future situations?
2. What Scripture memorization meant the most to you and why?
3. Give one example of how your faith has grown.
4. What new insight did you gain about God that has enlarged your perspective and understanding of Him?
5. What is the next step God has asked you to take in your walk with Him?
6. In which particular chapter of the story did God's hand seem most evident to you? Why?
7. Briefly note what *you* learned from the main characters in the story:
 - Esther:

 - Mordecai:

 - King Ahasuerus:

 - Haman:

 - Vashti:

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer for self-control when wronged;

Do you need help to control your temper when wronged or offended? Are you willing to ask for God's help? Tell Him about it today.

A prayer to extend mercy to others as you have received it;

As you meditated on **Isaiah 53**, was your heart touched with all the Lord was willing to endure on your behalf? Would you be willing to extend mercy to others in the same measure you have received it from the Lord? Let Him know how you feel

A prayer to rest, remember, and celebrate;

Are you taking advantage of all the Lord has appropriated for you? If not, confess it here and tell Him you want to fully participate in your remembrance of Him.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes