
Forward

This book covers the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. We start with Esther and learn that God has a plan and a purpose for each of us. He is fitting our lives into His master plan like pieces of a puzzle. Then we celebrate the rebuilding of the Temple with Ezra who teaches us that God gives us power to do things His way in spite any opposition we might get from our enemies. Finally, we join Nehemiah as he oversees the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. We learn that prayer is powerful and has wonderful results and that God will give us peace in our hearts when we experience trials.

I have designed these lessons to enable you to teach the Bible expositionally. The idea is to have the kids read the passages in their own Bibles and the teacher explain the scriptures and give good practical applications that are age-appropriate. My goal is to ensure that children learn that God's Word is exciting and meaningful and that teachers teach sound doctrine!

Even though I've scripted the lessons, I don't expect teachers to read my lesson materials verbatim to the children as they teach. My lessons are meant to provide the details you need to get background information and some suggestions for child-oriented personal application. Once you know and understand the Bible lessons for yourself, you'll be ready to teach your class.

The two-column layout of this book is designed so that you can copy and cut the pages in half to fit into your Bible. When the children observe that you are teaching right out of the Bible, rather than from a

curriculum book, it validates God's Word and gives your teaching more authority.

You will discover that there is not always a Craft or Game idea suggested in each lesson. When I've had a good idea that really seems to support the lesson objectives, I've included it. But I have another handbook called *Tips and Tricks — Making Children's Bible Lessons Come to Life* that gives lots of suggestions for activities that will help reinforce your lesson and teach the memory verse. (This is available from my website:

<https://www.freechildrensministrylessons.com/>)

Use the Teaching Schedule to help you organize your teaching rotation.

I pray that you will use these lessons for God's glory by teaching the Bible as an entire plan by a systematic and connected study of the Word.

Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14)

Sheila Scroggins

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Teaching Schedule

Date	Teacher	Lesson	Memory Verse
		Esther, Queen of Persia (Esther 1-2)	<i>"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you," says the Lord, "Thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)</i>
		Haman's Wicked Plot (Esther 3-4)	<i>Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44 NIV)</i>
		Mordecai's Plan (Esther 5-6)	<i>A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor. (Proverbs 29:23)</i>
		Esther Saves God's People (Esther 7-8)	<i>Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)</i>
		The Temple Rebuilt (Ezra)	<i>Don't fret because of evildoers ... For evil people have no future... (Proverbs 24:19a, 20a NLT)</i>
		Nehemiah's Burden (Nehemiah 1:1—2:8)	<i>The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results. (James 5:16 NLT)</i>
		Nehemiah's Perseverance (Nehemiah 2:9—4:23)	<i>Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. (Colossians 3:15a NLT)</i>
		Nehemiah Discerns Falsehood (Nehemiah 6:1—7:4)	<i>"For with God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1:37)</i>
		The People Rejoice (Nehemiah 8:1—12:43)	<i>Let them praise the LORD for His great love and for the wonderful things He has done for them. (Psalm 107:8 NLT)</i>

Esther, Queen of Persia

(Esther 1-2)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Have you ever asked yourself, “Lord, what is Your plan for my life?”

From the moment you were born God has had a plan for your life. He has chosen you to take part in the work of His kingdom.

Today we’ll learn about an orphan girl named Esther. When her mom and dad died and left her all alone, she probably wondered what would happen to her. But God had a wonderful plan for her life! Listen today as we learn how Esther became the Queen of Persia through some very unusual circumstances.

Opening Prayer

Father, it is exciting to know that You have a plan and a purpose for our lives. Encourage us to read our Bibles and to talk to You every day so that we might know what Your plan is so that our lives will bring You honor and glory. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” says the Lord,
“Thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

Lesson

Toward the end of the Old Testament times, King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took the children of Israel captive. He marched them 900 miles to Babylon, which is present day Iraq.

The Israelites were enslaved there for 70 years. Towards the end of their captivity, the Babylonian kingdom was taken away from Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson, and it was divided between the Medes and the Persians. (Remember the story when Daniel saw the handwriting on the wall?)

Some years after that there was a young girl named Esther. Both her parents had died and she was raised by her cousin, a man by the name of Mordecai who was like a father to her. He worked in the Palace of King.

Now Xerxes was the king of Persia. [Teacher, some translations of the Bible say his name is Ahasuerus. Xerxes is the Persian form of his name and Ahasuerus is the Hebrew form of his name.] His kingdom stretched from India to Ethiopia. It was a huge empire, so he had seven princes who each looked after a section of the kingdom.

In the third year of his reign he held a great feast for all of his princes. He wanted to show off his beautiful palace and his riches. This party lasted for six months!

Let’s read about it.

Esther 1:3-4

In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. He invited all the military officers of Persia and Media as well as the princes and nobles of the provinces. (4) The celebration lasted 180 days—a tremendous display of the opulent wealth of his empire and the pomp and splendor of his majesty.

Boy, that must have been some party! It lasted six months!!!

Esther 1:7

Drinks were served in gold goblets of many designs, and there was an abundance of royal wine, reflecting the king’s generosity.

For 6 months, everyone ate, drank, and was merry.

Then on the final day, when the king was feeling high, half drunk from wine, he told his servant to bring Queen Vashti to him. He wanted to show them his beautiful wife.

Esther 1:11

to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman.

But Vashti didn’t like the idea of being put on display.

Esther 1:12

But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.

It was very bold of Vashti to refuse the King! He was angry and upset and didn't know what to do. No one had ever refused him! So, he consulted with his lawyers. He never did anything without their advice because they knew Persian law and the king trusted their judgment.

So he asked his advisors what he should do about this situation. He wanted to know what penalty the law provided for a queen who refuses to obey the king's orders.

Here's what the king's advisors said,

Esther 1:16-17

Memucan answered the king and his nobles, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also every noble and citizen throughout your empire. (17) Women everywhere will begin to despise their husbands when they learn that Queen Vashti has refused to appear before the king.

The king's advisors thought the king should punish Vashti severely or all the wives in the empire would start to disobey their husbands. They suggested to the king he get rid of Queen Vashti.

Esther 1:19

"So if it please the king, we suggest that you issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that the king should choose another queen more worthy than she.

The king thought this sounded like a good idea so he made a royal decree.

Now, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, once a king made a law, no one could ever change it – not even the king, himself!

But after King Xerxes' anger cooled off, he realized he would never see Vashti again and he began to be sorry. He missed her.

So, his officials suggested that they run a beauty contest and let the king choose the most beautiful girl to take the place of Vashti.

This naturally pleased the king very much, and he put the plan into immediate effect.

When Mordecai heard about this beauty contest, he decided to enter Esther in to it. After all, she was a very beautiful girl. But before he sent her, he gave her a warning. Because many Persians didn't like the Jews, Mordecai told her not to tell anyone that they were Israelites.

Esther was taken into the palace and put into the care of Hegai, who was in charge over all the girls. When Hegai saw Esther he was very impressed.

Esther 2:9

Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

Esther was given seven maids, a beautiful home to live in and one whole year's worth of beauty treatments.

Esther 2:11

Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her.

Finally, it was Esther's turn to be presented before the king.

Esther 2:17-18

And the king loved Esther more than any of the other young women. He was so delighted with her that he set the royal crown on her head and declared her queen instead of Vashti. (18) To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone.

Although she was an orphan, raised by her cousin, her remarkable beauty caught the king's eye and she was chosen to become the queen and to live in the royal household.

Esther 2:20

Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home.

When she was chosen as queen, the king did not know she was Jewish. The people of Persia were afraid of the Jews and marriage to a Jew was strictly forbidden in the Persian Empire. It would have been dangerous for her if anyone knew she was an Israelite. But God's hand of protection was on her.

Next week we'll learn that God's chosen people, the children of Israel, were in danger. They were about to be wiped out by the enemies of God. A wicked scheme had been launched against them.

But, as we continue the story, you'll see that God's plan placed Esther in the palace just at the right time.

God has a special plan and purpose for every life. You may not know or understand why things turn out the way they do, but you must learn to trust God. You might have to move to a new city or go to a new school. Perhaps it is so you will be there when a need arises, just like Queen Esther.

God had a plan to use Esther to protect His people. God has a plan for your life, too. He knows exactly what it will take for you to accomplish His will. As you devote your life to Him and seek to do His will, He takes care of the details, blessing you in the process.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that you do have a plan and a purpose for each of us. Help us not to be afraid when we can't see what You're doing or where You're taking us. Help us to have faith and trust in Your plan for our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Crowns

Have the children make and decorate crowns. As they work on them, talk about what it might have been like for Esther, an orphan girl, to go to the palace to live. Talk about the crowns we will one day be given when we get to heaven.

Game Center

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. King Xerxes (or Ahasuerus) held a great feast to show off his beautiful palace and his riches. How long did that party last? (6 months)
2. What did the king do on the final day of the feast? (He told his servant to bring Queen Vashti to him. He wanted to show her off to his princes.)
3. What did Vashti do when her husband asked her to come to the party? (She refused to come.)
4. When Vashti refused to come to the party, what did the King do? (He was angry. He asked his lawyers what to do.)
5. What did the king's advisors tell the king to do about Queen Vashti's disobedience? (They told him to punish Vashti by banishing her from the kingdom.)
6. But after the king's anger cooled off, what happened? (He began to be sorry he banished Vashti, he missed her.)
7. How did the king pick a new queen? (He ran a beauty contest.)
8. What did they do for Esther for a whole year before she was brought before the king? (They gave her seven maids, a beautiful home to live in and a year's worth of beauty treatments.)

9. Why did Mordecai tell Esther not to tell anyone she was a Jew?
(The Persians were afraid of the Jews.)
10. How can you know what God's plan and purpose is for your life?
(By reading the Bible and praying to Him.)

Haman's Wicked Plot to Kill the Jews

(Esther 3-4)

Pre-Session Warm Up

How do you react when someone is mean to you? Do you ever feel like getting back at them? Sometimes when we don't get our way, our feelings can be hurt and we want to take revenge on the other person by hurting them in some way.

Today our lesson is about a man who decided to kill a bunch of people because they hurt his feelings. That is never the way God wants us to react when we get our feelings hurt. God wants us to control our anger and to treat others with love and respect.

Opening Prayer

Father, forgive us for the times that we want to lash back at people who do us wrong. Teach us this morning that You are a loving God who is in control of everything that happens in our lives—even the bad things. Encourage us to be loving and kind to others, even when they do wrong things to us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
(Matthew 5:44 NIV)*

Lesson

Last week we began a study in the book of Esther. We learned that although Esther's parents died when she was a girl and left her as an orphan, she became the Queen of Persia through some very unusual circumstances.

After Queen Vashti refused to attend a banquet, God allowed Esther to gain the king's favor and King Xerxes chose Esther as his queen. As an orphan, Esther had no idea that God was going to raise her up to a position of power and authority. But He had plans to use Esther to save His people from doom.

We learned that no matter what kind of curves life throws at you, God is able to accomplish His will in your life if you are willing to follow Him. You can trust that He has a plan and a purpose for your life.

We pick up the story today shortly after Esther had become the queen. One day as Mordecai, Esther's cousin, was on duty at the palace, two of the king's guards became angry at the king and plotted to kill him.

Mordecai heard about it and passed on the information to Queen Esther, who told the king.

Esther 2:23

When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was all recorded in The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign.

Mordecai was a hero! He saved the king's life and the two bad guys were hung. But this matter was soon forgotten. But, don't *you* forget about this good deed that Mordecai did, because you will see later that God will use Mordecai's bravery to bring about the salvation of His people.

Meanwhile, the king appointed one of the princes in his empire by the name of Haman to be the prime minister of his kingdom. He became second in command. Only the king himself had more power than Haman.

Esther 3:2

All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect.

The king commanded that everybody bow down to Haman to pay him respect whenever he passed by. They were to worship him as if he were a god. But Mordecai did not bow to Haman. Mordecai was faithful to the one and only true God. He was not about to bow down before anyone except God.

This made Haman angry at Mordecai.

Esther 3:5

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage.

Haman wanted to get revenge and punish Mordecai for refusing to honor him. When people told Haman that Mordecai was a Jew, Haman decided to not only punish Mordecai; he wanted to harm all the Jews living in the king's empire. He felt that putting them all to death would be a good way to take care of them!

So Haman approached the king about this matter.

Esther 3:8-9

Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, "There is a certain race of people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king's interest to let them live. (9) If it please the king, issue a decree that they be destroyed, and I will give 10,000 large sacks of silver to the government administrators to be deposited in the royal treasury."

Haman offered to give the king about \$20,000,000 in silver if he'd pass a law that gave the people the right to kill every Jewish man, woman and child living in the Persian Empire.

What made Haman so angry when one man refused to kneel before him? He was full of pride! Haman's pride was so out of control that he decided to make not only Mordecai suffer, but all of Mordecai's people as well.

When you think too highly of your own importance, you allow pride to take control of your life. Then it is easy to become vengeful and try to hurt others. Vengeful pride causes a person to say and do things that deeply hurt other people. Haman's pride was so out of control that it caused him to want to destroy a whole nation of people.

The king approved of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews.

Esther 3:11

The king said, "The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit."

The king told Haman to keep the money and do whatever he wanted to the people. Two or three weeks later, Haman called in the king's secretaries and dictated letters to the governors and officials throughout the empire. These letters were signed in the name of King Xerxes and sent into all the provinces of the empire.

The Jews were God's special people through whom He would one day send a Savior to take away the sins of the world. Since before the foundations of the universe, God had planned to come to Earth in the form of a man through the Jewish people.

You and I know that God came as the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life, then He willingly died on a cross, giving His life's blood in payment for our sin. The Jews were God's chosen people. Yet Haman wanted to destroy the Jews! When Mordecai learned about Haman's wicked scheme, he was heart sick. Mordecai could have gotten angry and tried to get Haman before Haman could pull off his plan.

Mordecai may have felt that circumstances were out of control for the Jews. Couldn't God prevent this terrible thing from happening? Maybe you've felt that way at times. Sometimes we look at things happening in our lives—someone is mean to us, hurts our feelings, steals something from us—and we think that God is not in control. But even when we can't understand or clearly see how God is at work, we can trust that He is and be thankful.

God is always caring for His people and controlling the events of their lives. Nothing that happens is ever a surprise to God. Though we may not understand the reason something happens, we can praise God that we are never out of His care and control.

God carefully oversees even the smallest happening in nature. He sees when a sparrow falls out of a tree. How much more concern He has for people—especially for those who are His children!

The Jews were God's special people, and even though it may have seemed to Mordecai that their circumstances were out of control, God was at work on their behalf.

The Jews were shocked when they heard the horrible news of what was going to happen to them. They could not understand what they had done wrong. They felt they had no hope.

Esther 4:3

And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

Esther sent a servant out to find out from Mordecai what in the world was happening.

Esther 4:7

Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.

It was a frightening, depressing time to be a Jew in the Persian Empire. Mordecai told Esther, "You must stand up for us and plead for our lives with the king!" But, Esther was afraid to do that.

Esther 4:11

"All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days."

Anyone who went into the king's inner court without his invitation was doomed to die unless the king held out his golden scepter. (A Scepter is a short rod held by a king or queen to show that he or she has the most authority and power.) The king had not called Esther to come to him in more than a month. So, she was afraid.

Mordecai told Esther not to keep quiet at a time like this.

Esther 4:14

If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

Mordecai was saying, "Who knows but that you became queen just for this reason?!"

Next week we will continue the story of Esther. We'll find out if she had the courage to stand up for God's people.

Closing Prayer

Father, help us to never be like Haman so full of pride that we say and do things that hurt other people. Help us to learn to control our anger and to be loving and thoughtful towards others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

"King, May I?"

Play a game like, "Mother, May I?" where whoever is "it", is the King with a crown and a scepter. Make the scepter out of a card board wrapping paper tube covered in gold paper. (You can wrap a small ball in gold tissue paper and stuff the ends of the paper into the tube to make the top of the scepter.) The King grants a child to take a turn. The child asks the King for permission to step, hop, skip, crawl, or however he or she chooses to advanced towards the wall behind the King. The King approves the request by tapping him/her with the scepter. If the child answers the review question correctly the King taps the child again with his scepter and the child then advances forward.

For example, the King taps a child, the child asks, "King, may I take 2 steps forward," the King grants permission by tapping the child with the scepter. Then the child must answer the question correctly. If he/she does, the King taps the child again with the scepter to grant permission to advance. The first child to touch the wall behind the King is the winner.

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. What heroic thing did Mordecai do for the king? (He overheard two bad guys plotting to kill the king and he was able to stop them from doing it.)
2. Who did the king appoint to be the prime minister of his kingdom? (Haman.)
3. What did the king command everyone to do when Haman passed by? (The king commanded that everybody bow down to Haman to pay him respect.)
4. Why didn't Mordecai bow down to Haman? (Mordecai was faithful to the one and only true God. He wouldn't bow down before anyone except God.)
5. What was Haman's reaction to Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him? (Haman wanted to get revenge and punish Mordecai for refusing to honor him.)
6. What was Haman's wicked scheme? (To wipe out all of the Jews; not just Mordecai.)
7. What made Haman so angry when one man refused to kneel before him? (He was full of pride!)
8. Why do we say that the Jews are "God's Chosen People"? (The Jews were God's special people through whom He would one day send a Savior to take away the sins of the world.)
9. What did Mordecai tell Esther to do? (Go see the king and plead for the lives of the people.)
10. Why was it scary for Esther to approach the king? Wasn't she the queen, after all? (Anyone who went into the king's inner court without his invitation was doomed to die unless the king held out his golden scepter.)
11. What is a *scepter*? (A Scepter is a short rod held by a king or queen to show that he or she has the most authority and power.)
12. How did Mordecai encourage Esther to go see the king even without an invitation? (He said, "*Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.*")

Mordecai's Plan

(Esther 5-6)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, print the word *Pride* on a card.] Who can tell me what this word means? Have you ever met someone that brags about himself? A person that is full of pride is often a *show-off* -- someone that is always trying to draw attention to himself. Or someone that is conceited and selfish.

[Fold sides of card back showing only the *I*.] The heart of prides is *I*. Pride is when I am more important than anyone or anything else.
[Fold sides of card out showing only "*RID*."] God says that you and I as Christians need to get "*rid*" of pride. If we don't, pride can ruin our lives.

A man in our Bible lesson today learned that pride is a very dangerous thing! He was an important servant to the king of Persia—and he knew it!

Opening Prayer

Father, we are born with a "want to" to do things our own way. We have to learn how to be thoughtful of other people. Teach us through this lesson this morning how important it is for us to get rid of our pride so that we might love others and treat them with respect and honor. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.
(Proverbs 29:23)

Lesson

Review

For the past two weeks we have been learning life lessons from the book of Esther.

1. What do you remember about Esther? (She was an orphan, raised by her older cousin, Mordecai, who was like a father to her. She became the Queen of Persia.)
2. How did Esther become the Queen of Persia? (The King had a beauty contest and choose her to be his queen.)
3. Who was Haman? (The wicked man the king had appointed to be the prime minister of Persia.)
4. Why did Haman want to kill all of the children of Israel? (Because Mordecai wouldn't bow down to him.)
5. When Mordecai told Esther to go to the king and beg him to save the lives of her people, the Jews, why was Esther afraid to go to the king? (She hadn't been invited and the penalty for going before the king without an invitation was death, unless he held out his golden scepter.)

But Mordecai told Esther, if she kept quiet at a time like this, she and all of the Jews would be killed. So, she decided to risk her life and go to the king. She said, "*If I die, I die.*" (See Esther 4:16)

Continuing the Story...

Esther 5:1

On the third day of the fast, Esther put on her royal robes and entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance.

I'm sure that Esther walked very slowly to the inner court of the palace where the king was sitting on his royal throne. I bet she was trembling with fright. Would the king extend his golden scepter to her?

Esther 5:2

When he saw Queen Esther standing there in the inner court, he welcomed her and held out the gold scepter to her. So Esther approached and touched the end of the scepter.

King Xerxes was pleased to see Esther and he held out his golden scepter to her. Her life was spared! She touched the tip of the scepter and knelt before him.

Esther 5:3

Then the king asked her, "What do you want, Queen Esther? What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"

The king told Esther he would give her anything she wanted. But Esther was wise, she did not tell the king what she wanted right away. Instead, she invited him and Haman to a dinner party she planned. She wanted to be careful to follow the Lord's leading so that she chose the right time and the right way and the right words to say.

There is a lesson here for us, too. Sometimes we need to wait before we say things. Don't be too quick to speak out; wait for the Lord to tell you what to say and when to say it. And, trust that He will give you right words to say.

Well, both the king and Haman were very pleased to be invited to the queen's banquet. While they were eating, the king asked her again what she wanted.

Esther 5:6

And while they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "Now tell me what you really want. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"

Esther was still waiting on the Lord's timing...

Esther 5:7-8

Esther replied, "This is my request and deepest wish. (8) If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request and do what I ask, please come with Haman tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for you. Then I will explain what this is all about."

So, she asked the king and Haman to come to another dinner party.

Haman was very pleased that only he and the king had been invited to the queen's special banquets. But, as he left the palace, his joy suddenly turned to anger when he saw Mordecai. Mordecai still refused to bow down to him.

Esther 5:9

Haman was a happy man as he left the banquet! But when he saw Mordecai sitting at the palace gate, not standing up or trembling nervously before him, Haman became furious.

Haman was furious!

When he got home, he told his wife and friends how upset he was at Mordecai because he would not bow down to him. When they heard this, they told him to build a hang man's platform and have the king hang Mordecai.

Haman thought this was a great idea. He ordered the gallows to be built. Haman had planned that in the morning he would ask the king to hang Mordecai from it.

That night the king could not sleep. So, the king decided to have the royal record books brought in and read to him. He thought maybe that would help him fall asleep. As the servant was reading the record of the king's accomplishments, he read the story of how Mordecai had saved the king's life by telling the king of a plot to kill him.

Remember back in chapter 2 when I told you not to forget about the good deed that Mordecai had done? Way back before the king had appointed Haman to be the prime minister and told everybody they had to bow down to honor him, Mordecai had overheard two bad guys making plans to kill the king. He got word to the king and those two bad guys were stopped. Well, the story about Mordecai's good deed was written down in this book of records. But for some reason, the king had never rewarded Mordecai for his bravery. It was all but forgotten over time.

The king couldn't sleep that night and had his servant read the record book and when he got to the part about Mordecai's good deed, the king stopped him and asked:

Esther 6:3

"What reward or recognition did we ever give Mordecai for this?" the king asked. His attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him."

Well, it happened that Haman was just coming in to ask the king to hang Mordecai.

Esther 6:4

"Who is that in the outer court?" the king inquired. As it happened, Haman had just arrived in the outer court of the palace to ask the king to impale Mordecai on the pole he had prepared.

But before Haman could ask the king to kill Mordecai, the king asked Haman an interesting question:

Esther 6:6

So Haman came in, and the king said, "What should I do to honor a man who truly pleases me?" Haman thought to himself, "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?"

Haman thought the king was talking about him. He didn't know that the king really wanted to honor Mordecai for his bravery.

Esther 6:7-9

So he replied, "If the king wishes to honor someone, (8) he should bring out one of the king's own royal robes, as well as a horse that the king himself has ridden—one with a royal emblem on its head. (9) Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. And let him see that the man whom the king wishes to honor is dressed in the king's robes and led through the city square on the king's horse. Have the official shout as they go, 'This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honor!'"

The king thought this was a wonderful idea.

Esther 6:10

"Excellent!" the king said to Haman. "Quick! Take the robes and my horse, and do just as you have said for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the gate of the palace. Leave out nothing you have suggested!"

What an unexpected turn of events this was for Haman! The very man he had planned to put to death, he now had to proclaim as a hero. Haman was completely humiliated before his wife and friends. Haman's pride was ruining his life.

We all need to be careful not to let our pride ruin our lives. One way to guard against pride is to pray every day that God would help you please Him in your actions towards others—that you will treat them as you would want to be treated. Be willing to listen to your family and friends if they are trying to tell you to change your attitude. The Bible says that *"A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor"* (Proverbs 29:23)

How humiliated and angry Haman was to have to honor the very man he wanted to kill. But he had to do it because the king had commanded it. He would have to do to his worst enemy what he wanted the king to do for him. He even had to lead the horse around town himself! When it was over, he ran back to his home, totally ashamed.

Then suddenly, a servant of the king arrived and reminded him to come to the banquet Queen Esther had prepared.

Next week we'll pick up the story again to find out how Esther, a poor orphan girl who had become the Queen of Persia, was able to save her people, the Jews, from being wiped off the face of the earth.

Closing Prayer

Father, forgive us for times that we have had prideful attitudes. Help us to not be prideful like Haman was. We want to be humble, helpful, and kind to others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

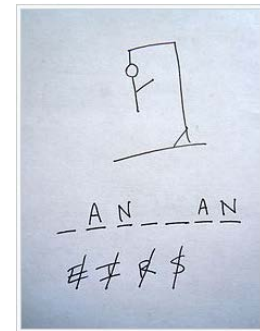
Craft Corner

Game Center

Hangman

Use the following phrases for a "hangman" game:

- Esther risked her life



- Haman plotted to kill the Jews
- The king held out his scepter
- Esther had a feast
- Haman was full of pride

Or, use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. Why was Esther nervous about going in to see the king? (He could have her killed for appearing before him without an invitation.)
2. What did the king do to show that Esther had found favor with him? (He held out the golden scepter.)
3. Did Esther tell the king what her request was right away? (No! She invited him and Haman to a dinner party, instead.)
4. Why was Haman so full of joy at being asked to the queen's special banquet? (He felt special and honored. He was full of pride.)
5. What changed Haman's joyful attitude at being invited to the queen's banquet? (He passed Mordecai who still refused to bow to him.)
6. What advice did Haman's wife and friends give him when they saw how bitter and upset he was? (They told him to build a hang man's platforms and have Mordecai killed.)
7. What happened that night when the king could not sleep? (The king told a servant to bring in the book of records to read to him.)
8. What did the servant read to the king from the record books? (The part about Mordecai warning the king about two palace guards who were plotting to kill the king.)
9. What question did the king ask Haman as he came into the palace to ask the king to have Mordecai killed? (He asked, "What would be a good way to honor someone you appreciate?")
10. Who did Haman think the king wanted to honor? (Himself)
11. Describe some of the ways Haman thought he should be honored. (see verses 7-9)
12. What was the unexpected turn of events for Haman? (The king told Haman that he wanted him to honor Mordecai in the way he described.)
13. What is one way to guard against having a prideful attitude? (Pray every day that God would help you please Him in how you treat others.)

Esther Saves God's People

(Esther 7—8)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, bring an unassembled picture puzzle to class.] Do you like putting puzzles together? I'm glad there is a picture of what the puzzle will look like when it's finished, because it reminds me that even though it may look like a mess while I'm trying to put it together, it will eventually form a beautiful picture. Did you know that your life and my life are like pieces of a puzzle that fit into God's master plan? He is working out all the events in your life to fit into His overall plan.

Sometimes we can't understand when things happen that don't seem to fit into what we think God's plan should be.

We've been going through the book of Esther and we've gotten to the point where every Jew in the whole Persian Empire is just about to be killed. The Jews must have wondered how their circumstances could ever fit into God's plan.

Opening Prayer

Father, life is like a puzzle. We can't see how all the pieces of our lives will fit together. Things often seem out of place. Things may not fit exactly right. But thank You that you do have a plan; that You are in control of everything that happens in our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Lesson

Review

- King divorces Vashti (1:1—22)

- Orphan Girl Becomes Queen. (2:1—20)
- Mordecai overheard a plot to murder the king, reported it, and his good deed was recorded in the king's record book. (2:21—23)
- The king promoted Haman to a powerful position and ordered people to kneel in respect to him. Mordecai angered Haman by refusing to bow in respect to him. Haman devised a plan to destroy him and all the Jews. (3:1—15)
- Mordecai urged Esther to go to the king and beg for mercy. (4:1—17)
- Esther risked her life and went before the king, but instead of begging him to have mercy towards the Jews, she invited him and Haman to a banquet.
- Proud Haman vengefully built a gallows on which to hang Mordecai; then waited for morning to get the king's permission to carry out his plan. (5:9—14)
- Meanwhile, that very night, the king couldn't sleep and had his record books read to him and discovered that Mordecai had never been rewarded for saving his life. (6:1—3)
- The king asked Haman how a special servant should be honored. Haman suggested an impressive ceremony, which he was then embarrassed to have to carry out for Mordecai (6:4—11)

Continuing the Story...

Last week we left the story right after Haman was so humiliated. How angry he was to have to honor the very man he wanted to kill! But he had to do it because the king had commanded it. He even had to lead the horse around town himself! When it was over, he ran back to his home, totally ashamed.

While he was there, a servant of the king arrived and reminded him to come to the banquet Queen Esther had prepared.

Esther 7:1

So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet.

Mordecai had urged Esther to go see the king so that she might beg him to spare the lives of the Jews. But Queen Esther still had not asked the king for mercy; she had been waiting for the perfect timing. The king knew there was something on Queen Esther's mind. Finally, during the wine course, he asked Esther what her request was.

Esther 7:2

On this second occasion, while they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "Tell me what you want, Queen Esther. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"

The king told Esther, *I'll give you anything you ask for, up to half my kingdom.* So Esther knew the timing was just right to ask him.

Esther 7:3-4

Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, I ask that my life and the lives of my people will be spared. (4) For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I could remain quiet, for that would be too trivial a matter to warrant disturbing the king."

Esther boldly told the king that there was a wicked plot to destroy the Jews. She told him that she and her people were doomed to destruction and slaughter. The king wondered what she was talking about. Who would dare such a thing?

Esther 7:5

"Who would do such a thing?" King Xerxes demanded. "Who would be so presumptuous as to touch you?"

Immediately, Queen Esther pointed her finger at Haman.

Esther 7:6-7

Esther replied, "This wicked Haman is our adversary and our enemy." Haman grew pale with fright before the king and queen. (7) Then the king jumped to his feet in a rage and went out into the palace garden.

Haman, however, stayed behind to plead for his life with Queen Esther, for he knew that the king intended to kill him.

The king was furious. He stormed out of the banquet hall in anger and walked into the palace garden to try and control his temper. Haman was afraid for his life.

Esther 7:8

In despair he fell on the couch where Queen Esther was reclining, just as the king was returning from the palace garden. The king exclaimed, "Will he even assault the queen right here in the palace, before my very eyes?" And as soon as the king spoke, his attendants covered Haman's face, signaling his doom.

The king was enraged to see Haman fall upon the queen.

Just then one of the king's servants said, *"Haman just had a gallows built at his house so that he could hang Mordecai."* And the king ordered that they hang Haman on it! And Haman was taken out of the king's presence and hung immediately on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

That very day the king gave Queen Esther Haman's palace and all his property.

Esther 8:1-2

On that same day King Xerxes gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Then Mordecai was brought before the king, for Esther had told the king how they were related. (2) The king took off his signet ring—which he had taken back from Haman—and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed Mordecai to be in charge of Haman's property.

The king appointed Mordecai Prime Minister of the Persian Empire in Haman's place. Mordecai was now the second most powerful man in the Persian Empire.

But there was still trouble ahead for the Jews... Remember the command to kill all the Jews that Haman had tricked the king into passing? Well, that law was still in effect; not even the king himself could change that!

So, once again Esther goes to the king.

Esther 8:3-6

Then Esther went again before the king, falling down at his feet and begging him with tears to stop the evil plot devised by Haman the Agagite against the Jews. (4) Again the king held out the gold scepter to Esther. So she rose and stood before him. (5) Esther said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor with him, and if he thinks it is right, and if I am pleasing to him, let there be a decree that reverses the orders of Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, who ordered that Jews throughout all the king's provinces should be destroyed. (6) For how can I endure to see my people and my family slaughtered and destroyed?"

Esther begged the king to change the command to kill the Jews. The king couldn't change the law, but he could make a new law! In fact he tells Esther and Mordecai to write the new law themselves!

Esther 8:7-8

Then King Xerxes said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "I have given Esther the property of Haman, and he has been impaled on a pole because he tried to destroy the Jews. (8) Now go ahead and send a message to the Jews in the king's name, telling them whatever you want, and seal it with the king's signet ring. But remember that whatever has already been written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring can never be revoked."

Immediately the king's secretaries were called in and they wrote the new law which said that on the day that the Jews were supposed to be killed, they would have the right to defend themselves and kill all those who tried to harm them.

The day came when the Jews were supposed to be attacked. They fought back bravely and killed many of those who tried to destroy them, including all of Haman's sons!

After the fighting was over, Mordecai sent a message to all the Jews throughout the empire, telling them to set aside two days every year in memory of the great victory God had given them. It was God who worked out everything to make sure His people were not destroyed.

And every year Jewish people celebrate *Purim* to remember when Queen Esther and Mordecai saved the Jewish people from being wiped out and to praise God for guarding His people and saving them from the harm that wicked men plotted against them.

How wonderfully God had worked, moving people and events in just the right way to accomplish His plan. God is in complete control of all the events that happen in each one of our lives.

God knew exactly what He was doing. Because He protected the Jews, many years later Jesus was born to a little Jewish girl named, Mary. He lived a sinless life and died on a cross, and three days later he rose from the dead. Jesus was God, come to earth in the form of a man. He came to take the punishment that you and I deserve. He did it because He loves us and wants us to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Each one of our lives fits like a puzzle piece into God's master plan. He is working out all the events in your life to fit into His overall plan. Think of all the ways God leads you and protects you. Like a shepherd, He will direct the path of your life if you will just follow Him and do what He asks. We need to take time every day to praise God for His love and care for us.

Closing Prayer

Father, sometimes we don't see the big picture of life, like You do. We wonder what in the world You are doing and what Your will is for our lives. Studying Esther's life encourages us to believe that You are in control of all things; that You have a plan and a purpose for our lives. Help us to have faith and trust in You even if we can't see or understand why certain things are happening in our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Charades

Have the children form teams of 2 or 3 and act out some of the events from the story of Esther. See if the rest of the kids can guess what the scenario is.

- King Xerxes having a 6-month party and Queen Vashti refusing to come. (1:12)
- Esther receiving beauty treatments. (2:9)
- Esther in the beauty contest. (2:17)
- Haman walking by and people bowing to him; Mordecai refusing to bow. (3:2)
- Esther nervously walking in to see the king; the king extending the scepter. (5:1-2)
- Haman honoring Mordecai in the way he wanted to be honored (6:7-9)
- Esther pointing her finger at Haman and accusing him before the king. (7:8)
- Haman being hanged (7:10)

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the ways God showed His complete control over the events in Esther's life?
 - God arranged for Esther to become queen.
 - He placed Mordecai to hear the plot against the king.

- He caused the king to be unable to sleep.
 - He led the king's servant to read the record book with the account Mordecai's good deed.
2. What are some ways God has shown His love and protection in your life? How has He shown you that He cares for and controls the events in your life?

The Temple Rebuilt

(Ezra)

Pre-Session Warm Up

We have been learning about the time when the people of Israel were in captivity. [Teacher, review why the Israelites were in captivity...]

Over and over again, because of their unfaithfulness, God had to discipline His chosen people. Finally, He allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Israel and take the people into captivity!

When the Babylonians came in, they looted the Temple of all the valuable gold and silver things, then they burned Jerusalem and broke down the walls, and led the people 900 miles to present day Iraq where they became slaves to King Nebuchadnezzar.

While the people were still in captivity, God raised up Esther, a poor orphan girl, to become the Queen of Persia. God miraculously enabled her to save her people, the Jews, from being wiped off the face of the earth.

Today we will learn from book of Ezra about how the people of Israel finally return to the land after 70 years of captivity and slavery. The book covers about 100 years and the reign of 3 kings: Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes.

Opening Prayer

Father, teach us how to handle the spiritual warfare that comes against us when we set about doing Your will. Give us confidence in Your Holy Spirit power Who will help us remain faithful and true to You no matter what other people say or do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Memory Verse

*Don't fret because of evildoers ... For evil people have no future...
(Proverbs 24:19a, 20a NLT)*

Lesson

Our lesson this morning starts with King Cyrus making a public statement:

Ezra 1:2

"This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

It is amazing that this king of Persia, who wasn't even a Jew, realized that God was giving him the responsibility of building Him a Temple in Jerusalem in the land of Israel, 900 miles away!!

Cyrus told the Jews that anyone who wanted to go back to Jerusalem, could go. And, he let the people take the valuable items which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple at Jerusalem when he went in and demolished the Temple and led the people to Babylon. They were probably worth millions of dollars!

Ezra 1:7

King Cyrus himself brought out the articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods.

Not all the Jews returned to Israel, but those that did, went to work on rebuilding the Temple because they were so thankful to God for letting them return to their home land.

When the builders completed the foundation of the Temple, the priests put on their robes, blew their trumpets, clashed their cymbals, and praised the Lord!

Ezra 3:11

With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the LORD: "He is so good! His faithful love for Israel endures forever!" Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the LORD because the foundation of the LORD's Temple had been laid.

Can you picture the joy? The people sang praise songs and gave all the honor and glory to the Lord!

But the work of the Lord did not go without opposition from the enemy.

Ezra 4:4

Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work.

There were people who had been living in the land of Israel while God's people were away in captivity in Babylon those 70 years. These people didn't appreciate the fact that the Israelites were back! And, they did everything they could to stop the work of rebuilding the Temple. They even sent a letter to the new king of Persia, King Darius.

Here's part of one of the letters they sent to King Darius:

Ezra 4:12-13 [Teacher, read....]

"The king should know that the Jews who came here to Jerusalem from Babylon are rebuilding this rebellious and evil city. They have already laid the foundation and will soon finish its walls. (13) And the king should know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, it will be much to your disadvantage, for the Jews will then refuse to pay their tribute, customs, and tolls to you.

They were telling King Darius that if he allowed the Jews to rebuild their city, they would not pay taxes and the Persian Empire would suffer financially.

But God had this situation under His control, just as He always does!

Ezra 5:5

But because their God was watching over them, the leaders of the Jews were not prevented from building until a report was sent to Darius and he returned his decision.

The Jews were allowed to keep working on the Temple until they heard back from King Darius.

And, here's what Darius said:

Ezra 6:3-5

"In the first year of King Cyrus's reign, a decree was sent out concerning the Temple of God at Jerusalem. "Let the Temple be rebuilt on the site where Jews used to offer their sacrifices, using the original foundations.

Its height will be ninety feet, and its width will be ninety feet. (4) Every three layers of specially prepared stones will be topped by a layer of timber. All expenses will be paid by the royal treasury. (5) Furthermore, the gold and silver cups, which were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, must be returned to Jerusalem and put back where they belong. Let them be taken back to the Temple of God."

Darius reminded the people that King Cyrus (who reigned before him) had already issued the command to rebuild the Temple. He goes on...

Ezra 6:7-9

Do not disturb the construction of the Temple of God. Let it be rebuilt on its original site, and do not hinder the governor of Judah and the elders of the Jews in their work. (8) "Moreover, I hereby decree that you are to help these elders of the Jews as they rebuild this Temple of God. You must pay the full construction costs, without delay, from my taxes collected in the province west of the Euphrates River so that the work will not be interrupted. (9) "Give the priests in Jerusalem whatever is needed in the way of young bulls, rams, and male lambs for the burnt offerings presented to the God of heaven. And without fail, provide them with as much wheat, salt, wine, and olive oil as they need each day.

Darius told them to continue the work and that all expenses would be paid for out of the taxes he collects! He said the Jews were to be given whatever they needed, under penalty of death.

Ezra 6:11

"Those who violate this decree in any way will have a beam pulled from their house. Then they will be lifted up and impaled on it, and their house will be reduced to a pile of rubble.

So, the Jews continued their building project. And God protected them. Finally, the Temple was finished and there was great rejoicing among the people.

Now a new king, King Artaxerxes, was the king of Persian. (He was Esther's step-son.) And, about this time, Ezra came to Jerusalem from captivity.

Ezra is the one that wrote this book. He was a pastor; now that the Temple was rebuilt, he wanted to rebuild the hearts of the people.

They needed a pastor to teach them the ways of the Lord.

Ezra 7:10

This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.

Then, King Artaxerxes made a proclamation.

Ezra 7:24

I also decree that no priest, Levite, singer, gatekeeper, Temple servant, or other worker in this Temple of God will be required to pay tribute, customs, or tolls of any kind.'

Remember, the enemies of the Jews wrote a letter to the king of Persia saying that if he let the people rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, the people would not pay taxes and the Persian Empire would suffer financially? Now God prompted the king of Persia to make a law that says no temple worker shall ever have to pay taxes. Isn't God good?

When God wants to get something done, nothing can stand in His way! God honored His people by enabling them to complete the Temple.

And, if you know that God wants you to accomplish something, He will give you everything you need to complete the job. Just stay true and faithful to God no matter what other people may say or do. He will give you the power of the Holy Spirit to do His will.

Closing Prayer

Thank You, Father, for always giving us the power to stay true and faithful to You no matter what other people may say or do. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Return from Exile Floor Game

The students will learn the story as they move through a life-size game board.

Materials List

- One large game dice
- Life-size game board (use construction paper as the "spaces")
- Game cards for each type of space on the game board – see below.
- Map of the Middle East.
- Several large garbage bags filled with crumpled up newspaper. (I used pillows from my bed!)
- A small pile of building blocks (or large Legos).
- Pictures of the ancient city of Jerusalem (to be torn up).

Play the Game

- Divide the children into two teams. If you have a large class, have the children pair up with someone on their team. To avoid congestion on the game board, start one team from one end of the path and the other team from the other end (they will have to pass in the middle) the first team who has a player that reaches the other end wins.
- Have a player from each team roll a die to see who goes first.
- Each child rolls one die to determine how many spaces to move forward.

- If a child lands on a Question Mark space, he must answer the question correctly, then move according to the instructions on the card. Play goes to the next player.
- If a child lands on the Cross or Exclamation Point space, he must perform the action on the card then move forward or backward according the instructions on the card. (If they have to leave this square to do an activity, have them keep track of the space that they were on.) Play goes to the next player.
- Players can ask for help in answering questions.

Return from Exile Game Cards

Question Mark Cards:

1. This story is found in which Testament of the Bible, Old or New? (Answer correctly and move ahead one space.)
2. Which book of the Bible is this story found in? (Answer correctly and move ahead two spaces.)
3. True or False: The Temple was rebuilt by people who had always lived in Jerusalem because they had never gone into exile. (Answer correctly and move ahead three spaces.)
4. Ezra was sent to teach the people about God's Word. (Tell us one thing that you know about God and move ahead one space.)
5. True or False: Ezra was a king. (Answer correctly and move ahead two spaces.) (False)
6. How did the enemies of God's people try to stop the work on the temple? (Answer and move ahead three spaces.) (They wrote a letter to the king.)

Cross Cards:

1. God remembered His people and helped them to return to their homeland. (Go to map and point to Israel, then move ahead one space.)
2. The first thing the people did was to rebuild the foundation. Then they would start rebuilding the temple so that they could worship God. (Raise your arms in the air and shout "Praise the Lord!" and move ahead two spaces.)
3. King Darius found the law King Cyrus had written, the people were allowed to finish building the Temple. (Stack some building blocks and then move ahead three spaces.)
4. The enemies of God's people were ordered to supply all the needs of the Israelites as they worked on the Temple. (Take the large bags and carry them across the room, then move ahead one space.)
5. God commanded the King Cyrus of Persis, who wasn't even an Israelite, to build a Temple in Jerusalem, 900 miles from where he lived. (Shout "Halleluiah!" and move ahead two spaces.)
6. King Artaxerxes made a law that no one working on the Temple had to pay taxes! (Jump up and down and say "Thank you, Lord!" Move ahead three spaces.)

Exclamation Point Cards:

1. God's people kept disobeying God and turning away from Him. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken away into exile and captivity. (Tear up the picture of the city of Jerusalem, and go back one space.)
2. The people were in captivity in a foreign land for 70 years. (Jump up and down 7 times—once for each 10 years of captivity, and go back two spaces.)

3. The enemies of God's people tried to stop the Israelites from rebuilding of the temple.
(Knock down the building blocks and go back three spaces.)
4. When the Babylonians came in, they took the valuable gold and silver things from the Temple, burned the city and broke down the walls, then marched the people 900 miles to Babylon.
(March in place 9 steps, then go back one space.)
5. The people were held in captivity in the land of Babylon.
(Run to map and point to Babylon, then go back two spaces.)
6. The enemies of God's people wrote a letter to the king of Persia telling him that if he let the Israelites rebuild the city, they would not pay taxes and the Persian Empire would suffer financially.
(Make an angry face and go back three spaces.)
7. Who was Ezra? (He was a pastor and had a heart to study the scriptures and to teach the people the ways of the Lord.)
8. How did it happen that the temple workers were ordered not to pay taxes? (The Lord prompted King Darius to issue a command that said the temple workers were not to have to pay taxes.)
9. How might someone try to stop you from doing God's work? (They might make fun of you or even threaten to do you harm.)
10. How does God make His will happen? (By the power of the Holy Spirit He can change the heart of anyone.)

Or, use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. Why did the children of Israel end up over in Babylon?
(They had not followed the ways of the Lord; they had been unfaithful.)
2. What is the book of Ezra about?
(The story of how the children of Israel finally return to the land after their captivity in Babylon to rebuild the Temple.)
3. Why was it that the king of Persia, who wasn't even a Jew, made a law that commanded the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the Temple? (God moved the heart of King Cyrus.)
4. What happened to all the valuable articles of gold and silver?
(King Cyrus returned them to the children of Israel.)
5. What did the enemies of God do to try to get the work to stop?
(The enemies of God came along and tried to discourage the building project. They sent letters to the king of Persia saying that if they rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, they wouldn't pay taxes.)
6. How did God see to it that the work on the Temple was not stopped? (He prompted the king to issue a command to continue the work and that he would pay for it out of the taxes he collected.)



Nehemiah's Burden

(Nehemiah 1:1—2:8)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Suppose you heard on TV about people who lost everything in a hurricane. What could you do to help them? [Teacher, let the children respond.] How about if you hear that someone was very sick or in the hospital? Maybe you know of someone that has been in a bad car accident. What could you do? The very best thing you could do is pray! What are some other things we could pray for others about? (Death in a family, financial needs, need to know Jesus.)

God is very pleased when you and I pray for others in need.

Today our lesson is about Nehemiah who knew the power of prayer. He wanted to go and help his people who were in great need. So he asked God to grant him favor with the king. And God made a way for him to go help the children of Israel.

Opening Prayer

Father, when we look around us we see people in need all over the world. Give us hearts of compassion for others who so desperately need Your love and care and wisdom and patience. I pray that You would make us instruments of Your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Memory Verse

The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results. (James 5:16b NLT)

Lesson

Our last lesson was about the book of Ezra. It tells the story of how the children of Israel finally returned to the Promised Land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

We learned that because the children of Israel were unfaithful to God, He punished the people by allowing the Babylonians to come against

them. The Babylonians came into Israel, destroyed Jerusalem and marched the children of Israel 900 miles over to what is present day Iraq where they became servants to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Eventually, the Babylonians were taken over by the Persians. Then, after 70 years of captivity, the children of Israel were finally allowed to return to their home land in Israel. Not all of the Israelites returned to Israel all at once. The first thing those who returned wanted to do was rebuild the Temple of God because they were so thankful to God.

But the children of Israel did not have a strong leader, they were disorganized, and the city of Jerusalem continued to lay in ruins.

Today's lesson is about Nehemiah. He was the cupbearer to the king of Persia and he lived in the royal palace. The cupbearer was a very important person in the courts of the kings. He was responsible for taste testing the king's food and drinks to make sure they were not poisoned by his enemies. Nehemiah was the king's *most* trusted servant. Since Nehemiah saw the king at every meal, he was often in the king's presence.

One day Nehemiah's brother came to visit him. He had just come from Israel and Nehemiah asked him how the people in Jerusalem were getting along and if they had rebuilt the city yet.

His report was not a cheerful one. He said, "The people are greatly troubled and the wall of Jerusalem is still torn down, and the gates are burned."

Nehemiah 1:3

They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

When Nehemiah heard this, he was very sad. He prayed to God that he might be able to help his people. Nehemiah knew the power of prayer.

Why had God allowed such terrible things to happen to His people and their city? God had told them, "You shall have no other gods before Me." But the people disobeyed God's commands and worshiped false gods.

Disobeying God is sin, and sin is very serious to God. The Jewish people had chosen to disobey God. They refused to do what was right, so God had allowed them to be taken captive, and the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed. God expects us to obey Him.

Hearing that the city was still in ruins, broke Nehemiah's heart. One day Nehemiah was in a big slump and the king asked, "*What's the matter, you look very unhappy.*"

Nehemiah 2:2

So the king asked me, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled." Then I was terrified,

Nehemiah was frightened because no one was to show sadness in front of the king. In fact, he could have lost his job in the king's court or even been killed for being sad in the king's presence. (Esther 4:2). But he told the king why he was so downcast.

Nehemiah 2:3

but I replied, "Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

So, the king asked Nehemiah what he could do to help. You see, he loved Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 2:4-5

The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven, (5) I replied, "If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried."

Nehemiah knew the power of prayer. Before he answered the king, he prayed to God. What do you think Nehemiah asked God? [Teacher, let the children respond.] He probably asked God for just the right words to say. He might have asked God to give the king favor towards him.

Nehemiah knew it was wise to pray to God *before* he said anything to the king. It's not good to speak out too quickly. Before you say anything to anyone you should ask God to give you just the right

words to say. Too often we speak out before we think what we're going to say. The Bible tells us that God will give us just the right words to say to people as well as the right heart-attitude. Don't be too hasty to speak out.

You can ask God to give you wisdom to know *what* to say and *how* to say it. You want to be sure that your attitude and actions are being led by His love. You also want to ask God to help you to be a patient listener, too.

Nehemiah wanted to help his people, so he prayed, trusting God to give him the words to say to the king. Then he asked the king to send him back to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city.

The king not only agreed to let him go, he gave him letters of introduction to all the rulers along the way, so that he would have a safe journey. You see, it took about three months to walk all the way back to Israel. And the king even offered to provide lumber to rebuild the walls and gates of the city. God moved the heart of the king to have mercy upon Nehemiah and the children of Israel.

Prayer is powerful. You can pray for your friends or for people you have never met. When you hear about others with needs, will you remember to pray for them? Our prayers have great power and wonderful results. Tell God exactly what the needs are and ask Him to take care of them. God is especially pleased when you ask Him to use you to help. Think right now of someone with a special need and ask God to help you pray for that person. Remember, the greatest need of any person is to know Jesus as Savior.

Closing Prayer

[Teacher, spend time in prayer with the children.]

Learning Activities

Activity Corner

To give the children experience in praying for others they don't know, bring a newspaper to class and look through articles together, and

discuss how you could pray for the people involved (victims of crime, natural disasters, accidents, wars; world, national, local leaders.) Have them choose one item to pray about through the week. Encourage them to look for God's answers.

Game Center

The following are two variations on the same game:

“Categories” Game Plan #1 – Review Questions

Divide the class into 2 teams. When it's a team's turn, 2 people come up. One is the “Questioner” and the other is the “Answerer”. They choose a category (Game Questions or Key Words) and a card from that category. Each card has a point value (such as: 1,000, 500, 400, 300, 200, 100, 50)

The “Questioner” asks the question; if the “Answerer” doesn't know the answer he can ask for clues. For every clue that he is given, 10 points gets knocked off the total.

For example, a couple from the same team picks a category card for 300 points. The Questioner asks, "How large was Gideon's army?" If the Answerer doesn't know, he can ask for a clue. The Questioner might say, "It was less than 1,000." And if the Answerer gets the right answer at that point their team gets 290 points.

Only provide one question per point value. Once it has been taken, the next contestant who picks that category has to take one of the other valued questions.

Question suggestions: See below

“Categories” Game Plan #2 – Key Words

Divide the class into 2 teams. When it's a team's turn, 2 people come up. One is the “Questioner” and the other is the “Answerer”. They choose a category and a card from that category. Each card has a point value (such as: 1,000, 500, 400, 300, 200, 100, 50)

Each card has a word on it. The “Questioner” gets 30 seconds to get the “Answerer” to say that word.

For example, a couple from the same team picks a category card for 300 points. The “Questioner” picks a card that says, “Esther” on it. He begins to give the “Answerer” clues, such as, “This woman became the Queen of Persia; she was raised by Mordecai” and so on.

The “Questioner” cannot say any of the words on the card. If time is up before the right word is given, they get no points.

Only provide one question per point value. Once it has been taken, the next contestant who picks that category has to take one of the other valued questions.

Key Word suggestions: “Letters and Lumber”, “Ruins”, “Cupbearer”, “Temple”, “Jerusalem”, “Babylon”, “Pray”, and “Sin”.

Or use the following review questions in another game of your choice:

1. Why did the children of Israel end up over in Babylon? (They had not followed the ways of the Lord; they had been unfaithful.)
2. What did the Babylonians do to the temple of God in Jerusalem? (They burned it and broke down the walls.)
3. Nehemiah was the king's “cupbearer.” What was a cupbearer? (The one responsible for taste testing the king's food and drink to be sure it wasn't poisoned.)
4. What bad news did Nehemiah's brother bring from Jerusalem? (That the people were greatly troubled and the wall of the city was still torn down and the gates burned.)
5. What did Nehemiah do before he spoke to the king? (He prayed.)
6. What do we call it when we disobey God? (Sin)
7. What was it that broke Nehemiah's heart? (Hearing that the city of Jerusalem still lay in ruins.)

8. What should you ask God for before you speak out to people?
(Wisdom; for the right words to speak, the right heart-attitude.)
9. What did the king of Persia give Nehemiah to help make his long journey to Jerusalem a safe one? (Letters of introduction to all the rulers along the way.)
10. What did the king of Persia give Nehemiah to help with the building project? (Lumber)
11. According to our Memory verse today, what do our prayers have?
(Great power and wonderful results.)

Nehemiah's Perseverance

(Nehemiah 2:9—4:23)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Have you ever been afraid? If you were in danger, you would be. Can you think of some things that cause you to be afraid? [Teacher, let the children respond.] Perhaps you might hear your parents arguing, or maybe you've been laughed at, or you have a big test coming up at school. Sometimes we can be afraid of the dark, thunder and lightning storms, big scary dogs or bullies at school.

Nehemiah was about to leave the safety of the king of Persia's palace and travel many miles to Jerusalem. Was he afraid? What would happen when he arrived? Would God protect him from the enemies?

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You that You are always with us. Teach us this morning that we never need to be afraid. Help us to always trust in Your love and care for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Memory Verse

*Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.
(Colossians 3:15a NLT)*

Lesson

Last week we learned that after getting the news that the people of Jerusalem were in trouble and that the city was still laying in ruins, Nehemiah was broken hearted. He wanted to help God's people.

Nehemiah was the king's most trusted servant. He was the king's cupbearer. His job was to taste test the king's food and drink to make sure it didn't have any poison in it. It seemed impossible that Nehemiah could leave the king's service. He was a slave and didn't have the right to just walk out on his job. So, he prayed and asked God to give the king a heart of compassion towards him.

Last week we learned that prayer is powerful and has wonderful results: the king not only gave him permission to return to Jerusalem, but he gave Nehemiah letters of introduction and a royal escort so that they could travel in safety. It would take nearly three months to make the journey; they would have to walk over 900 miles to get to Israel.

Finally, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. And, he was immediately met with opposition. There were two men, Sanballat and Tobiah, who were angry that *anyone* would want to rebuild Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 2:10

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel.

Ever since the beginning, people have hated the Jews and have come against them all through the ages.

Nehemiah didn't seem to be upset or frightened by these enemies. He had a job to do, and he would not let this problem stop him.

If you have trusted Jesus to be your Savior, **God gives you peace in your heart even when you have problems.** [Teacher, recap some of the things the children talked about during the Pre-Session Warm Up.] Peace is the quietness that Jesus gives you deep in your heart. God loves you, and He would not allow these problems to come unless He wanted you to learn an important lesson. God wants you to learn more about Him, His love for you, and His power to help you. When you put your trust in God to help you with a problem, you will have peace in your heart. Nehemiah trusted in God; therefore, he was not frightened or upset by the enemies.

Three days after Nehemiah got to Jerusalem, he went out secretly at night to inspect the walls and gates of the city.

Nehemiah 2:13-15

After dark I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal's Well, and over to the Dung Gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates. (14) Then I went to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but my donkey couldn't get through the rubble. (15) So, though it was still

dark, I went up the Kidron Valley instead, inspecting the wall before I turned back and entered again at the Valley Gate.

Nehemiah was shocked by what he saw. Such utter ruin! Such awful desolation! It seemed hard to believe that almost ninety years after the first captives had returned to rebuild the temple that there should still be all this mess and so little done to rebuild the walls of the city. The next day he went to see the city officials.

Nehemiah 2:16-17

The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the Jewish leaders—the priests, the nobles, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. (17) But now I said to them, “You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!”

Then Nehemiah encouraged the people to rebuild the walls. He assured them that God would be with them.

Nehemiah 2:18

Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king. They replied at once, “Yes, let’s rebuild the wall!” So they began the good work.

As word spread that the walls of Jerusalem were going to be rebuilt, new hope filled every one's heart. But the enemies of the Jews made fun of their decision.

Nehemiah 2:19

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab heard of our plan, they scoffed contemptuously. “What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” they asked

But Nehemiah kept encouraging the people, telling them that God would make sure they succeeded.

Nehemiah 2:20

I replied, “The God of heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will start rebuilding this wall. But you have no share, legal right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.”

So, they began the huge job of rebuilding the walls.

Nehemiah had a great plan. He split the people into groups and divided up the wall into sections. He gave each group one section of the wall to work on. This way everybody had something to do and was responsible for a part of the work. And so it was, all around the city. Priests, rulers, doctors, shopkeepers, carpenters—everybody was busy, doing his best. Old men, young men, mothers and daughters, all did their part. Boys and girls were fetching and carrying and doing all they could to do help, too.

With so many people working together it wasn't long before the wall began to take shape. Some mixed mortar, others lifted stones, and still others set the stones in place and others went to get the building materials.

I bet some of the families were keeping an eye on their neighbors to see how fast they were building their section. I wouldn't be surprised if some groups were having some friendly competition with each other to see who could build the most wall in a day. And, I'm sure they helped each other when things got difficult. Some of those stones were very big and heavy.

Now, it's a strange thing, but whenever anybody tries to do some great work for God, somebody else tries to stop it. So it was with the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

No sooner had Nehemiah gotten all the people working on the job that the enemies of God's people started to fuss about it.

Nehemiah 4:1-3

Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, (2) saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, “What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they're doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a

single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?"

(3) Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, "That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!"

Nehemiah asked God for help and then he kept on building.

Nehemiah 4:6

At last the wall was completed to half its height around the entire city, for the people had worked with enthusiasm.

Then Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem were gathering an army to attack the city and knock the wall down again.

Friendly Jews out in the country sent word that these enemies planned to creep up through the piles of rubble that were not yet cleared away and pounce on the builders to kill them and stop the work.

Nehemiah 4:12

The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, "They will come from all directions and attack us!"

Nehemiah acted at once. He ordered everybody to drop their building tools and stand out on the wall with swords, spears, and bows ready to meet the attackers.

Nehemiah 4:13

So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows.

Then Nehemiah told the people to have courage and not be afraid:

Nehemiah 4:14

Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, "Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!"

Nehemiah was not afraid because he knew that God had the power to take care of this problem situation. God wants you to know **God will give you peace in your heart even when you have problems.** You must be careful not to allow circumstances or problems that come into your life to take away the quietness (peace) Jesus wants you to have in your heart.

The Bible says, *Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts* (Colossians 3:15). Instead of thinking about the things that make you afraid, such as big dogs, a dark room, or kids who make fun of you, remember to think about God—who He is and what He has done—in your heart. Nehemiah had peace because he knew God had the power to take care of this situation.

And God answered their prayer and protected them. When Sanballat and his men, crept up to attack the city, they saw the half-built wall lined with armed men, and they turned around and ran away!

But, from then on, Nehemiah never felt quite safe. He knew that those ruffians might return. So, he gave orders that half the people should go on with the building while the other half stood guard. As an extra safeguard every builder carried his sword by his side as he worked.

Nehemiah 4:16-17

But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The leaders stationed themselves behind the people of Judah (17) who were building the wall. The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon.

The work continued from sun up to sun down, and no one left at night; they stayed to defend the city together. It only took fifty-two days to build that great wall, because all the people worked together and God was with them.

God was right there to help them. He is with us to help us with our problems, too. **God will give you peace in your heart even when you have problems.** [Teacher, review the Memory Verse.]

When you are afraid, instead of thinking about your problems, keep your mind on God—His love, His power, and the fact that He is always with you. If you do, you will have God's peace in your heart.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that as we put our trust in You to help us with a problem, You give us peace in our heart. Help me to remember the verse for today so that I won't be afraid. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Have the children make a large heart and print the Memory Verse on it. Encourage the children to take this home and put it where they can see it every day to remind them they can have God's peace in their heart at all times.

Game Center

Against a Wall

1. Have each child find a partner.
2. Give each child a stack of paper cups.
3. One child will be the "*wall-builder*" and attempt to build a wall.
4. The other partner will stand about 7 feet away and will be the "*cup-thrower*". Every 10 seconds the *cup-thrower* will attempt to knock the wall down by throwing a paper cup at the wall.
5. Talk it over. *Ask*:
 - a. How did the *cup-thrower* affect the progress of the *wall-builder*?
 - b. How do you think the Israelites felt as Sanballat and Tobiah kept making problems for them?
 - c. Why do you think the Israelites kept building anyway?
6. Switch roles and play again.
7. Finish by working on the wall together!

Or, use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. What was it that Sanballat and Tobiah did when they heard that Nehemiah had come to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? (They became angry that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.)
2. What does God give you in your heart even when you are in danger? (Peace on the inside.)
3. What is Peace? (It is a quietness that Jesus gives you deep in your heart.)
4. How did Nehemiah encourage the people to work on the wall? (He reminded them that God was with them.)
5. What was Nehemiah's plan for building the walls around Jerusalem? (He split the people into groups and divided up the wall into sections. He gave each group one section of the wall to work on.)
6. What did Nehemiah do when Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem gathered an army to attack the city and knock the wall down again? (He had everybody stand out on the wall with swords, spears, and bows ready to meet the attackers.)
7. After Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem and their army turned around and ran away, what did Nehemiah order the workers to do? (He gave orders that half the people should go on with the building while the other half stood guard. As an extra safeguard every builder carried his sword by his side as he worked.)
8. How long did it take for them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? (52 days.)
9. What can you do when problems bring fear to your heart? (Decide to think about God—His love, His power, His presence—and the peace of God will fill your heart.)

Nehemiah Discerns Falsehood

(Nehemiah 6)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Has anyone ever tried to bully you into doing something wrong? Or, have you ever had a “friend” tempt you to disobey? Today we will learn how Nehemiah handled the bullies he had to deal with.

Opening Prayer

Father, help us to take a stand for You to do the right thing even when others are making fun of us. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

“For with God nothing will be impossible.” (Luke 1:37)

Lesson

We have been learning about Nehemiah. Even though he was a Jew, he had been born in the land of Persia, where he lived in the royal palace serving the king as a slave. Does anyone remember what his job was? He was the cupbearer. Who remembers what that was? His job was to taste test the king’s food and drink to make sure it wasn’t poisonous. That made Nehemiah the king’s most trusted servant.

One day his brother came from Israel and gave him the bad news that the people of Jerusalem were in trouble and that the city was still laying in ruins. This broke Nehemiah’s heart; he wanted to go back to his homeland to help God’s people.

We learned that prayer is powerful and has wonderful results: the king not only gave him permission to return to Jerusalem, but he gave Nehemiah letters of introduction and a royal escort so that they could travel in safety.

Once Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, Nehemiah was shocked by what he saw. Such utter ruin! Such awful desolation! Soon he began the huge job of rebuilding the walls.

But no sooner had Nehemiah gotten all the people working on the job that they were met with hostile resistance. There were three men (Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab) who were angry that anyone would want to help the Jews rebuild Jerusalem.

When these three men gathered an army to attack the city and knock the wall down again, Nehemiah acted at once. He ordered everybody to drop their building tools and stand out on the wall with swords, spears, and bows ready to meet the attackers.

Last week we learned that Nehemiah was not afraid because he knew that God had the power to take care of this problem situation. And just as God was right there to help Nehemiah, He is with us to help us with our problems, too. God will give you peace in your heart even when you have problems.

We pick up the story today when the children of Israel had finished building the wall around Jerusalem. The whole city was enclosed. There was nothing left to do but hang the gates on their hinges. But, who should turn up to give them a hard time again? Let’s see...

Nehemiah 6:1-2

Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies found out that I had finished rebuilding the wall and that no gaps remained—though we had not yet set up the doors in the gates. (2) So Sanballat and Geshem sent a message asking me to meet them at one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But I realized they were plotting to harm me,

These three enemies of the children of Israel invited Nehemiah to meet with them in a village some distance from Jerusalem. But, Nehemiah was not that easily taken in. He knew they were trying to get him to leave the building project so that they could knock the wall down again while he was away. So he sent back this word:

Nehemiah 6:3

so I replied by sending this message to them: “I am engaged in a great work, so I can’t come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?”

Nehemiah knew that he was doing what God had called him to do and nothing was going to get him off the track.

Four times Sanballat sent his messengers asking Nehemiah to come down to the plain of Ono, and four times Nehemiah said, "I can't do it!"

When God gives you a job to do, you need to stick to it no matter what other people say or do. When you are tempted to do wrong, you should say what Nehemiah said, "I can't do it!"

Then Sanballat's messengers came a fifth time. This time they brought a very nasty message.

Nehemiah 6:5-7

The fifth time, Sanballat's servant came with an open letter in his hand, (6) and this is what it said: "There is a rumor among the surrounding nations, and Geshem tells me it is true, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are building the wall. According to his reports, you plan to be their king. (7) He also reports that you have appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim about you, 'Look! There is a king in Judah!' "You can be very sure that this report will get back to the king, so I suggest that you come and talk it over with me."

Sanballat's letter said that if he didn't come down to the plain of Ono he would tell the king of Persia that the children of Israel were planning a rebellion against him and were going to set Nehemiah up as king in Jerusalem. These were bold-faced lies about Nehemiah! And they were threatening to report them to the king of Persia, the very man that Nehemiah was so faithful to as his cupbearer.

These enemies would do almost anything to keep Nehemiah from doing what God wanted him to do in Jerusalem.

Our enemy, Satan, tries to keep us from obeying God, too. But if you are part of God's family, the Holy Spirit gives you power to say "No" to Satan. Sometimes Satan uses other people to try to discourage us from following Jesus. They might try to get you to do or say things that are not pleasing to God, or they might tease you for wanting to obey God and do the right things. Satan will try over and over again to get you and me to sin. But the Bible says, "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37) God has much more power than Satan.

Remember, He is always there to help you say "No" to sin. He wants you to follow His ways.

The enemies continued to try to stop Nehemiah from doing what God wanted him to do. But God was with Nehemiah to give him strength and wisdom. Nehemiah refused to meet with them; he would not turn from the work God had given him to do.

Nehemiah 6:8-9

I replied, "There is no truth in any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing." (9) They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So I continued the work with even greater determination.

Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab were telling lies. They were going against God. Nehemiah boldly rebuked them and told the people they were just trying to frighten them.

Then another guy tried to trick him. This time it was supposedly a "friend" of Nehemiah's.

Nehemiah 6:10

Later I went to visit Shemaiah son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home. He said, "Let us meet together inside the Temple of God and bolt the doors shut. Your enemies are coming to kill you tonight."

Shemaiah pretended to be Nehemiah's friend. He said he wanted to protect him from the enemies who planned to attack him during the night so he suggested they go hide in the Most Holy Place in the temple. But, only a priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place in the temple. Anyone that went into the Most Holy Place of the temple who was *not* a priest would surely die (Numbers 18:7). And Nehemiah was not a priest. But Nehemiah knew it was a trick. He knew they were just trying to scare him and he refused to give into fear by running and hiding.

Nehemiah 6:11-13

But I replied, "Should someone in my position run from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won't do

it!” (12) I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. (13) They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me.

God helped Nehemiah to see that it was a trick, and he refused to give into the fear and stop the work God had given him to do. He carried on with the task trusting that God would protect him. At last the wall was finished and the gates were all set in place.

Nehemiah 6:15-16

So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. (16) When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.

Our enemy, Satan, attacks and tries to get us to do wrong and to get us off the track of following God, but we can win against Satan by refusing to sin. Nehemiah finished the work in 52 days all because he had the faith and courage to keep on doing the good work God had given him to do.

Nehemiah prayed when he was unsure, when he was scared, and when he needed God’s strength. What can we pray for today?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, help us to call upon You for the strength and power of the Holy Spirit so that we can trust You even when life is hard. We want to please You by following Your ways and bringing Your name honor. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Make construction paper “brick” shapes and have the children write one word of the Memory Verse on each “brick”. Let them glue their “bricks” onto another sheet of construction paper or card stock to “build” a wall that will help them remember this week’s verse.

Encourage the children to decorate their “wall” by drawing pictures of Nehemiah and the Israelites working together.

Activity Center

Yummy Wall Building Project

Allow the children to construct a “wall” with Graham crackers and frosting or peanut butter. Have fun working together, then enjoy eating it!

Memory Verse Activity

Bring actual tools, or make paper “tools”, and write a word of the Memory verse on each tool. Let the kids arrange the tools in order to form the memory verse. Share how Nehemiah and God’s people did something that everyone else thought was impossible.

Game Center

Lesson Story Wall

Preparation:

- Make “bricks” out of paper bags. Fill the “bricks” with crumpled newspaper and fold down the tops and tape shut. (Or, use shoeboxes.) Make one “brick” for each story strip.
- Make story strips using the sentences below.
- Tape or glue each story strips onto the front of a “brick”.

Procedure:

- Give each student a “brick” and have them read their story strip out loud.
- Have students work together stacking the “bricks” in order.

Do not make this a race against other students. They need to work together to accomplish the task. After they have done it the first time, you can have them try it again, racing against the clock. Or, you can

challenge them to see how many times they can stack all the “bricks” in the right order within a certain time period, such as 5 minutes. Or, find out how long it takes to stack all the “bricks” without any falling down.

Story Strips:

- The Children of Israel were rescued from slavery in Egypt by Moses.
- Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land.
- The Israelites were unfaithful to God and began to worship other gods.
- The Israelites were captured by Nebuchadnezzar and marched 900 miles to Babylon into slavery.
- King Cyrus of Persia told Ezra and the rest of the Israelites they could leave Persia.
- 42,000 Israelites went back to Jerusalem with Ezra to rebuild the temple of God.
- Jerusalem’s walls were torn down in a fight and Nehemiah was very sad about it.
- The King of Persia sent Nehemiah and the supplies he would need to fix the walls in Jerusalem.
- Some people in Jerusalem didn’t want to help the Israelites rebuild the walls and tried to cause trouble.
- Nehemiah organized the people who wanted to rebuild the walls and had them always ready for any trouble.
- The people rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem in 52 days because they all worked together.

Or, use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. Who was Nehemiah? (He was Jew, born in Persia, who worked at the royal palace as the king’s cupbearer.)
2. What did Nehemiah come to Jerusalem to do? (Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.)
3. What did Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab do to the children of Israel as they worked on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem? (They opposed the work; mustered an army to attack the people and knock down the wall.)
4. What invitation did Sanballat extend to Nehemiah? (To come meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono to talk.)
5. What was the nasty message Sanballat’s messenger’s came with fifth time? (Sanballat’s letter said that if he didn’t come down to the plain of Ono he would tell the king of Persia that the children of Israel were planning a rebellion against him and were going to set Nehemiah up as king in Jerusalem.)
6. What does our enemy, Satan, try to get us to do? (Sin against God by not following His ways and thinking, saying, and doing things that displease God.)
7. What helps us to say “No!” to sin? (The power of the Holy Spirit.)
8. How do you get the power of the Holy Spirit? (You ask God for it.)
9. How did Nehemiah’s so-called “friend” try to trick him? (He said that the enemies were trying to kill him and suggested that he run into the Most Holy Place of the temple to hide.)
10. What would have happened to Nehemiah if he had run into the Most Holy Place of the temple to hide? (Anyone that went into the Most Holy Place of the temple who was not a priest would surely die.)
11. How did God help Nehemiah to know that Shemaiah, his so-called “friend” was trying to trick him? (God gave Nehemiah wisdom and understanding.)

12. How long did it take the children of Israel to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? (52 days.)
13. What was it about Nehemiah that kept him on task to finish the job? (Faith and courage to not fall into sin and get derailed from the good work God had given him to do.)
14. What can we learn from the way Nehemiah responded to his enemies? What should you do when people say bad things about you or try to get you to stop following God's ways?
15. How do we need to be like those who helped Nehemiah rebuild the wall around Jerusalem?

The People Rejoice

(Nehemiah 8:1—12:43)

Pre-Session Warm Up

What do you do when you are happy? Smile? Jump up and down? Shout? One thing I like to do is sing. But whether I sing or not, the people around me know when I am happy. They can see it on my face and by the way I act.

As our lesson begins today, the people are very happy. Something special is happening.

Opening Prayer

Father, give us thankful hearts today as we consider the many ways You have blessed us. We want to show You our appreciation for all You have done for us. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Let them praise the LORD for His great love and for the wonderful things He has done for them. (Psalm 107:8 NLT)

Lesson

We have been learning about Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah continued the story that began in Ezra. The Israelites had been carried to Babylon because they had stopped worshipping God and started following after false gods. After 70 years of captivity, the people were finally allowed to come back to their home land.

They were so thankful to God for letting them come back to Israel, the first thing they did when they got back, was rebuild the temple so they would have a place to praise and worship God.

Ezra was a pastor and had a heart to study the scriptures and to teach the people the ways of the Lord. He came to Jerusalem right after the Temple had been rebuilt because he had a heart to help rebuild the people spiritually.

Meanwhile the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins. Then, some 13 years later, Nehemiah came to Jerusalem from Babylon to help rebuild the city walls. Jerusalem needed the walls to protect all the Israelites from their enemies.

Many times as Nehemiah led the building project, the enemies of God's people tried to get him distracted from the job so they could come in and tear the walls down again.

Today we pick up the story after the last stone had been laid and the last gate hung in place.

The people gathered together in the street and asked Ezra to read to them from the scriptures, the Word of God. Everyone stood and listened as Ezra read from the scriptures.

Nehemiah 8:5

Ezra stood on the platform in full view of all the people. When they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet.

These people were thankful to hear God's Word. The Bible tells us that God created a beautiful world for us to live in, that He sent His Son to die on the cross, that He forgives sins and that He is preparing a place—heaven—where we will live. We all need to remember to thank God often for giving us His Word because it reminds us of all He has done for us. The Bible says, "*Let them praise the LORD for His great love and for the wonderful things He has done for them.*" (Psalm 107:8). Don't you think that God has been good to you? Each and every day we should thank God for what He has done for us.

Ezra and the people praised and worshiped the Lord as they heard His Word.

Nehemiah 8:6

Then Ezra praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people chanted, "Amen! Amen!" as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

As they heard His Word, they bowed down and worshiped Him. How thankful they were to God for His goodness to them.

It says that as the Word was read to them, that the priests moved among the people to explain it to them.

Nehemiah 8:8

They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.

That's like I do. We read the Word together and I help you understand what it means.

Suddenly something strange happened. Many people began to cry.

When they heard God's Word read, they were reminded of their sin and the many times they had disobeyed God's Law. They felt so bad some began to weep.

How do you feel way down in your heart when you know that you have sinned? It was because of sin that Jesus died on the cross. Because He loves you and me, He came and took the punishment for our sins. He gave His blood when He died so that you and I could be forgiven. Sin is a very serious thing to God. When these people realized the seriousness of disobeying God's laws, they cried.

But Nehemiah encouraged them to go home, eat, give to the needy, and rejoice. This was not a day for sadness; it was a day to celebrate the goodness of God!

Nehemiah 8:10

And Nehemiah continued, "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!"

Then Nehemiah made plans for a special dedication of the wall. Invitations were sent to the people in all the nearby villages. Nehemiah wanted everybody who could sing, or play musical instruments to be there for it was going to be a day of great rejoicing.

And what a day it was! Everybody was there. Men, women, and children from far and near poured into the city. With pride and joy they gazed up at the newly built wall and the beautiful new gates.

Then the procession began. Priests and Levites walked ahead. After them went two great companies of princes giving thanks. They went up to the top of the wall of the city. Half of the people marched one way and the other half went the other way.

While some people were on top of the wall, others were at the bottom. When all were in their right places the priests lifted their trumpets and blew a triumphant blast. Then the singers began. And how they sang! They all joined together, praising God and thanking Him for what He had done for them.

The Bible says the children of Israel rejoiced.

Nehemiah 12:43

Many sacrifices were offered on that joyous day, for God had given the people cause for great joy. The women and children also participated in the celebration, and the joy of the people of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

The people on top of the wall and those on the bottom were praising God together. This verse reminds us that you boys and girls are not too young to praise Him. We should all remember to thank God often for what He has done.

Can you think of something God has done for you? [Teacher, let the children share things they are thankful for—answers to prayer, parents, country, friends, God's Word, church, teachers.] You should think about what God has done for you and then take time each day to pray and thank Him. You can also show your thanks to God by telling other people about the good things God has done for you. God's Word says we are to offer praise to God continually (Hebrews 13:5).

Let's thank Him right now for one special thing He has done for you.

Closing Prayer

[Teacher, allow each child to say “Thank You” to God for something.]

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Have each child make a “Thank You” card to God, writing about or drawing a picture of several things for which they are thankful. They can take the card home as a reminder to praise God each day.

Game Center

Memory Verse Review

Preparation:

- Make “bricks” out of brown paper lunch bags by stuffing a piece of newspaper into a bag, folding the opening of the bag closed, stapling it shut and securing with packing tape.
- Using the Memory Verses from all four lessons in Nehemiah, make seven “bricks” for each verse, including a brick with the scripture reference.
- Write each of the verses in a different colored marking pen onto the seven “bricks”. So, for example, you would have a red verse, green verse, blue verse, and a purple verse.

Play:

- Before you begin, review the memory verses.
- Divide the class into four teams according to the colors. So, for example, you would have a red team, green team, and so forth.
- Scramble the “bricks” into a big pile in the middle of the room.
- On “Go!” have the teams find their verse and put it into the correct order.

- The first group to complete their verse is the winning team.
- Re-scramble the “bricks,” give the teams a new color and try it again, playing the game four times, so that each group of kids has an opportunity to work with all four of the verses.
- Add to the challenge by timing teams to see if they can work faster each time.

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

1. Tell me about Ezra? (Who was he and where did he come from?) (He was a pastor and had a heart to study the scriptures and to teach the people the ways of the Lord. He came to Jerusalem right after the Temple had been rebuilt because he had a heart to help rebuild the people spiritually.)
2. What did the people ask Ezra to do? (To read the scriptures.)
3. What was the first thing the people did when they heard God’s Word? (They praised and worshiped the Lord.)
4. Why should we be thankful to God for the Bible? (Because it reminds us of all He has done for us; about His goodness. It tells us all about His plan of salvation—that He forgives sins and that He is preparing a place—heaven—where we will live.)
5. What did the priests do as Ezra read the scriptures to the people? (They moved among the people and explained it to them.)
6. What did the people suddenly do when they heard Ezra read? (They cried because they were reminded of their sin and how often they had disobeyed God. They felt so bad they began to weep.)
7. How does it make you feel way down in your heart when you know that you have sinned?
8. When Nehemiah saw the people crying what did he tell them to do? (Go home, eat, and give to the needy and to rejoice. He told

them that this was not a day for sadness; it was a day to celebrate the goodness of God.)

9. Nehemiah made plans for a big celebration to dedicate the wall. Tell me about that day. (Everybody who could sing, or play musical instruments was there to lead the people in rejoicing and celebrating. They had a parade around the wall—half the people went one way and the other half of the people went the other way. They all began to praise the Lord together with trumpets and singing.)
10. What is one thing that you are thankful to God for?