

# **THE EXILE AND BEYOND**

**by Laura Sweet**

**Grades 3-4  
Year 2  
Quarter 3**



# **EZEKIEL'S VISION OF GOD**

## **Ezekiel 1**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students the great mercy and patience of God toward His rebellious people.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:8** - "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."

### **Lesson Background**

We begin our look at the period of Israel's exile in Babylon with Ezekiel, the prophet of the captivity. Despite repeated warnings from God, Judah continued in idolatry, and the Lord raised up the Babylonian empire to chastise and correct His chosen people. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, first invaded Judea in 605 B.C. and carried away the first group of captives (among whom was Daniel - see Daniel 1:1-6). Then in 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar came again and carried off a second group of exiles. These exiles were from the "upper class" of Judah, and Ezekiel was among them. He was allowed to settle in a colony of exiles in Babylon in the city of Tel-Abib.

The Jewish exiles, however, were still hard-hearted and refused to believe that God would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. They thought their captivity would be short-lived, and they had many false

prophets who told them this would be the case. The Lord called Ezekiel to tell them the truth they did not want to hear - that Jerusalem would be destroyed, the Temple razed, and that the captivity would last seventy years. Ezekiel's message was harsh until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Then his message became one of hope and reconciliation, as God assured the people that He would one day restore them to their land.

As we look at Ezekiel's vision of God this week, we will not attempt to explain all the symbolism involved in the chariot and the creatures and the wheels. Rather, we will focus on two main themes - the awesome glory of God and His mercy toward His people.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin your lesson this week by asking your students if any of them has ever seen something truly "awesome" - a sight that filled them with awe and wonder. Some examples might be Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon, a shooting star, an eclipse, the ocean, the mountains, etc. - no doubt your students will have some of their own ideas about what they consider to be "awesome." You might wish to share an experience that you've had to illustrate what you mean. "Our lesson this week is about a man who saw something truly awesome, so much so that the experience left him overwhelmed for seven days! His name was Ezekiel, and what he saw was a vision of God."

### **1. The Prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1-3)**

Discuss some of the historical background given at the beginning of the lesson to introduce your students to the prophet Ezekiel. Be certain they understand that the Lord was punishing Judah for its sin of idolatry and that Ezekiel was among the captives taken out of his homeland and forced to live in Babylon.

"Ezekiel was from a priestly family, but he couldn't enter the priesthood in exile. There was no Jewish Temple there, and therefore there could be no sacrifices. The worship of the Jews was centered around Jerusalem, but Ezekiel had been torn away from all that. He was not a free man, but was forced to live in a foreign land ruled by a king who did not know the Lord." Have students read Ezekiel 1:1-3, which introduces us to Ezekiel and his situation. Then explain that the rest of the verses in this chapter are Ezekiel's own description of the vision he saw by the river.

### **2. The Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)**

Ezekiel was privileged to have a supernatural experience - something that doesn't normally happen, but comes directly from God. He saw the heavens opened before his eyes, and he was given a vision of the glory of God Himself. He attempted to describe what he called "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (verse 28). As we look at his account of the vision, we will see him using words such as "appearance," "likeness," and "looked like" - Ezekiel found it difficult to describe what he saw in human terms because this was no ordinary human experience. We will look at some of the actual comparisons that Ezekiel made in this vision later with the lesson worksheet. Now we will attempt to describe in general terms just what Ezekiel saw.

### **A. The Windstorm (verse 4)**

Read verse 4 aloud in class. Have your students imagine a powerful, awesome thunderstorm. This windstorm was all of that and much more, surrounded with brilliant light.

### **B. The Creatures (verses 5-10)**

Read verses 5-10 aloud in class. These creatures are described as having two sets of wings, four faces, the hands of a man and the feet of a calf - obviously not the kind of creatures we are used to seeing on earth! In chapter ten Ezekiel calls these creatures *cherubim* - angels who attend the throne of the Lord.

### **C. The Wheels (verses 15-18)**

Now read verses 15-18. The wheels described here apparently intersected at right angles, allowing them to move in all four directions without turning. What we now have is an image of a divine “chariot” that moves all over the face of the earth, suggesting the omnipresence of God. The eyes in the rims symbolize God’s omniscience - He sees all and knows all things.

### **D. The Throne (verses 25-28)**

Read verses 25-28 aloud in class. Point out the physical description of the One on the throne, emphasizing words like “glowing fire,” “brilliant light,” and “radiance.” Also point out that Ezekiel never says he actually saw God; he says he saw “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God.” No one can actually see God and live (Exodus 33:20).

“God’s glory is so great that it can only be compared to glowing fire or brilliant light. No wonder Ezekiel fell down on his face; he was overcome by the vision. Later, in Ezekiel 3:15, we find out that the vision of God’s glory overwhelmed Ezekiel for seven days! The glory of God is so awesome that even a vision of it is hard for human beings to endure (other examples of God’s glory being unveiled are in Exodus 33:12-23 and Isaiah 6).

## **3. God’s Great Mercy to His People**

Ezekiel’s vision of God was a revelation of God’s glory, but it also expressed something else to Ezekiel and his fellow exiles. Up to this point, God’s glory had been associated with the Tabernacle, then with His Temple in Jerusalem. But the exiles were forced to live far from Jerusalem, and the Temple and the city would soon be destroyed. What would this mean to their faith? Had God given up on His chosen people because of their sin? Did He no longer care for them?

Ezekiel's vision of God was reassurance that the Lord was with His people, even in exile. He continued to extend His love and mercy to them, even while they were being chastised for their sins. The years of exile would be hard, but God would one day bring His people back to the land of Israel. Until that time, He continued to speak to them through His prophets and continued to protect them even in the midst of their captors.

## **Conclusion**

Assure your students that this is true of us today as well. If we are really God's children (that is, if we have come to Christ for forgiveness of sins and confess Him as Lord), then we can know that God will never, ever forsake us. If we sin against Him, He may have us suffer the consequences of our sin. But we must never fear to go to Him in repentance, and we must never fear that He has abandoned or forgotten us. Have your students turn to Romans 8:38-39, which remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Worksheet**

Have students turn to Ezekiel 1 and answer the questions on the worksheet as they look into this chapter. Note that some of these verses have more than one phrase describing the glory of God. You may wish to share the answers in class to see which phrases each child felt were important.

## **Related Music**

“What a Mighty God We Serve”; “Our God is an Awesome God”; “Holy, Holy, Holy” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #100).

## Student Worksheet

## Ezekiel's Vision of God

Ezekiel uses many words and phrases to describe his vision of the glory of God. Look up the following verses and write down some of these key words and phrases.

1:4 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1:13 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1:22 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1:27 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1:28 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:8** - "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."





# **EZEKIEL'S CALL**

## **Ezekiel 2-3**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students that both the preacher and the people have a responsibility to the Word of God.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:9** - "Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel."

### **Lesson Background**

The sovereignty of God and personal responsibility - the Bible teaches both. And both concepts can be seen throughout the book of Ezekiel; God is continually addressed as "Sovereign Lord," and we see Him to be totally in control of Israel and the other nations. Ezekiel's vision of God shows Him to be glorious, all-knowing and omnipresent. He is the Lord of all the universe.

But Ezekiel also teaches that we are held responsible for our actions, for our belief and unbelief. The Lord tells Ezekiel that, as His prophet, it is his duty to warn the wicked and urge them to repent. If Ezekiel fails to do so, he would be held accountable for their blood (Ezekiel 3:18). But once that message has been delivered to the wicked, they themselves are held responsible, "whether they listen or fail to listen" (Ezekiel 3:11). This idea of personal responsibility is developed more fully in Ezekiel 18, where we are told

repeatedly, “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:20). We are held accountable for our own sin, our own unbelief, and our own failure to repent.

As Sunday School teachers, we have the responsibility to warn our students and to call them to repentance. Our students have the responsibility of listening to what God says and responding obediently. The Lord is clear in Ezekiel about His desire and His willingness to forgive: “Rid yourself of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” (Ezekiel 18:31-32).

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin this week’s lesson by asking your students about some of the responsibilities they may have at home - keeping their rooms clean, recycling newspapers, feeding the dog, etc. Be certain that all of your students understand the term *responsibility*; a responsibility is something we are obligated or required to do. If we don’t live up to our responsibilities we will have to answer to our parents for not getting our work done, and there may be other consequences as well; for example, if someone forgets to feed the dog, the dog would go hungry and eventually get sick and die. “Everyone has responsibilities; Ezekiel had a special calling and a special responsibility to God’s Word.”

Review last week’s lesson - the vision of the glory of God that Ezekiel had while he was in exile in Babylon. Ask your students for specific details that they may recall about the vision; for example, the faces of the creatures, the wheel within the wheels, etc. Remind them that this vision was awesome and overwhelming for Ezekiel; at the end of chapter one we see him falling on his face before God. Now we will look into what God said to Ezekiel in this vision.

### **1. Ezekiel’s Call and Responsibility**

Read Ezekiel 2:1-3:3 aloud in class. Ezekiel was being called to be a prophet among the exiles in Babylon. This was a difficult job; the Lord told Ezekiel that He was sending him to people who were rebellious, obstinate, and stubborn. Still, Ezekiel had a responsibility to these people.

#### **A. A Responsibility to Go**

Several times in Ezekiel 2-3, the Lord says He is “sending” Ezekiel to be a prophet among the exiles or tells him to “go” to his countrymen in exile (Ezekiel 2:3; 3:4,11). Ezekiel was to identify himself as a prophet of the Lord so that the people would know “that a prophet has been among them” (Ezekiel 2:5). Have your students count how many times in chapter two the Lord commands Ezekiel not to be afraid; they might wish to underline this phrase in their Bibles.

## **B. A Responsibility to Speak**

Have your students read Ezekiel 3:10-11 and 3:26-27 aloud in class. Ezekiel had a responsibility to speak God's words to the people. In fact, to emphasize the importance of Ezekiel's message, God would make him incapable of speech at all other times. Ezekiel would only be capable of speaking when he had a message from God for the people (this condition was changed after the fall of Jerusalem, when Ezekiel's tongue was loosed so he could speak again - see Ezekiel 24:27).

## **C. A Responsibility to Warn**

Now read Ezekiel 3:16-21 aloud in class. Ezekiel is proclaimed a "watchman" for the house of Israel. A watchman was one who would stand on the city's walls to watch for enemies or messengers or to report on a battle being fought. Ezekiel, as Israel's watchman, was to warn people about their sin and tell them of God's judgment. If he failed to do so, the Lord would hold him personally responsible.

"Ezekiel was God's prophet - His spokesman. Because of this he had a special job with special responsibilities, much like preachers and pastors have today. But the people also had a responsibility to the Word of God. Let's see what Ezekiel has to say about this."

## **2. The People's Responsibility**

Ezekiel was told to give God's message to the exiles. But how would the exiles respond? We see in chapters two and three that the people also had a responsibility to God's Word.

### **A. A Responsibility to Listen**

Over and over again we see the phrase repeated, "Whether they listen or fail to listen." Point this phrase out to your students in 2:5,7 and 3:11,27. This "listening" refers to more than just physically hearing the message; many of the exiles would hear Ezekiel's prophecy. This listening required a recognition that the message was coming from God.

### **B. A Responsibility to Obey**

Now look again at Ezekiel 3:16-21. Show your class that Ezekiel's job was to give the people God's message and warn them when they were doing wrong. But God was not going to hold Ezekiel responsible if the people failed to obey. He held each individual person responsible for his own actions. Those who received God's message, repented, and obeyed would live; those who refused to obey would die.

## **Conclusion**

It's time now for your students to examine their own responses to God's Word. "The pastor of our church has a responsibility to you and to the other people in this church - to preach God's Word as God would have him do. As your Sunday School teacher, I have a responsibility to teach you God's Word to the best of my ability. But what about you? Do you take God's Word seriously? Do you listen when the pastor is preaching and try to understand what he is saying? Do you pay attention in Sunday School? Do you read God's Word at home and try to live in a way that's pleasing to Him? Remember, you have a responsibility, too - to listen and obey His Word."

## **Worksheet**

Have students write "E" before the statements that describe Ezekiel, and "P" before the statements that describe the people (you should have 5 "E's" and 3 "P's").

## **Related Music**

"Make Me a Servant"; "Trust and Obey" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #672).

Some of the statements below describe Ezekiel and some describe the people to whom he was sent. Write “E” in front of the statements describing Ezekiel and “P” in front of the statements describing the people.

\_\_\_\_\_ Called to be a prophet among the exiles.

\_\_\_\_\_ “Obstinate” and “stubborn.”

\_\_\_\_\_ Commanded to be fearless.

\_\_\_\_\_ Given a scroll to eat.

\_\_\_\_\_ Responsible to speak God’s Word.

\_\_\_\_\_ Responsible to listen and obey God’s Word.

\_\_\_\_\_ A “watchman.”

\_\_\_\_\_ A “rebellious house.”

What do you think was the job of a “watchman” in Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Ezekiel was called a “watchman?” What was his job?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:9** - “Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel.”



# **THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students that God's Spirit and power bring life and hope.

## **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:10** - "But the official told Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.'"

## **Lesson Background**

Up until the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, Ezekiel's message was a solemn one of judgment. Once the disaster occurred, however, God gave Ezekiel a message of hope and healing. Yes, God had judged His people harshly, but He had not forsaken them despite their sins. The day would come when God would restore His people and bring them back to their homeland. Ezekiel had a vision of this national restoration in Ezekiel 37 - a vision of a valley of dry bones.

While this vision applied specifically to the Jews, it is also applicable to the human condition. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2 that we were all "dead in transgressions and sins." The dead have no hope or life within themselves. But the power of God and the Spirit of God can take even the spiritually dead and give

them life (in fact, dead men can't help themselves - they have no hope apart from the Holy Spirit's work in their lives). This week, we will talk about Ezekiel's vision, how it applied to Israel, and how God's Spirit also produces life in those who are dead in their sins.

## **Lesson Procedure**

You may begin your lesson in one of two ways. The first approach is to bring a dead plant to Sunday School from your home or garden (this needs to be a really dead plant, with no sign of life whatsoever). Set it in the middle of your teaching area and ask the children if any amount of sunlight, water or plant food can help this plant now. The answer is, of course, "no"; once the life is gone out of a living thing, there is no hope of bringing it back.

A second approach is to ask your students if they ever played "War" or "Cowboys and Indians" when they were little children. "If you've ever watched little children play 'War,' you'll notice that one child will shoot another child and that child will fall down and pretend he is dead. But five minutes later, he's running around again - apparently alive once more. Little children don't really understand what death is about - that it is forever. It's not until you're older that you understand that dead people don't come back to life. They stay, dead, don't they?"

The dead have no hope - or do they? Ezekiel was given a message of hope for a dead nation, and that's what our lesson is about today.

### **1. The Death of Israel as a Nation (Ezekiel 37:1-2)**

Remind your students that Ezekiel was called to be God's prophet to the exiles in Babylon during Israel's darkest hour. He spoke continually of God's judgment against Israel and told the exiles that God would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. The Temple itself would be ruined and the people would be scattered among the nations.

Most of the exiles refused to believe this message; such a catastrophe was unthinkable. God would never allow His people to suffer so! But Ezekiel's prophecies came true (as God's Word always proves true) and the unthinkable happened. Babylon conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the city and the Temple. Most of those who lived through the devastation were exiled. As a nation, Israel was dead.

Have your students turn to Ezekiel 37 and read verses 1-2 aloud in class. "After the fall of Jerusalem, God gave Ezekiel a message of hope for the people of Israel. Once again, Ezekiel had a vision. The Spirit of God came upon him, and he found himself in a valley filled with bones - dry bones that had been dead for a very long time. These bones were like the nation of Israel - dead, hopeless, and helpless."



## **2. The Vision (Ezekiel 37:3-14)**

Tell your students to use their imaginations as you read verses 3-14 aloud. What an eerie description this is, perhaps more like a nightmare than a vision to Ezekiel at first. But the news that the vision brings is good - good news for the nation of Israel.

After the vision is read, have your students recount the steps in which the dead bones came back to life. First the bones came together, then the tendons and flesh, then the skin. Last of all, the breath of life entered the dead men and they stood upon their feet. Explain to your students that the Hebrew word for “breath” may also mean “spirit.” It is the Spirit of God who brings life to these dry bones.

Now look at the promise given in verses 11-14. Jerusalem had been destroyed and the nation had been scattered. Those Jews who had survived felt like “dead men” - people with no country and no hope. But the Lord had promised to be merciful to them. Like a dead man coming out of his grave, the nation of Israel would be resurrected. The Lord would return His people to their land and make them a nation once again. His Spirit would be with them once again, and they would know that it was God’s merciful hand that had brought them back once more.

“What good news this was for the people of Israel! God wasn’t finished with them. It wasn’t the end. They had sinned and worshiped idols instead of the Lord, and the Lord was punishing them for this sin. But when the days of punishment were over, they would be returned to the land of Israel. They would be a nation once more.”

## **3. Made Alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5)**

“This is a wonderful promise made to the Israelites, but what does it mean to us? After all, we’re not Israelites. But the Bible says that we are dead, at least until we’re born again. Let’s look at Ephesians 2.”

Read Ephesians 2:1-5 aloud in class. Explain that when the Bible says we are dead in transgressions and sins, it doesn’t mean literally “dead”; after all, we are breathing and thinking and growing. It means we are spiritually dead - dead to God and His kingdom. We don’t live to please Him, we don’t know how to please Him, and we couldn’t please Him even if we did know how. We are dead in our sins - without hope, like the dry bones in Ezekiel.

But God can make us alive in Christ Jesus! “Remember how God’s Spirit blew into the dry bones and made them a living army? Well, God’s Spirit can make us alive, too. Because of His great love for us, God takes us while we are still dead in our sins and makes us spiritually alive in Christ. Now we know God. We want to please Him and learn His ways. And we know that we’ll be with Him forever, both in this life and in heaven when we die. It’s His Spirit that brings us life and hope.”

## **Conclusion**

Ask your students to examine their own hearts to see if they've been made alive in Christ. If they don't know the Lord, if they don't care about Him or think about Him or try to live to please Him, then they are probably still spiritually dead. They need to come to the Lord in repentance for forgiveness of their sins. Encourage any student with questions about his/her salvation to remain after class to speak with you.

## **Worksheet**

Have students number the sentences according to the order in which they occurred in the life of Ezekiel (Hint: Read all of the sentences through first, then decide which came first, second, etc.). The correct order should read 4,7,3,5,6,1,2.

## **Related Music**

“Where the Spirit of the Lord Is”; “Breathe On Me, Breath Of God” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #334).

## Student Worksheet

## The Valley of Dry Bones

Read the following sentences. Decide the order in which these things happened to Ezekiel and number the sentences in that order. Be careful - the sentences contain information from all three lessons on Ezekiel.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Ezekiel has a vision of the valley of the dry bones.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord gives Ezekiel a message of hope for Israel.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ezekiel is commanded to eat a scroll.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The bones come together, bone by bone, and are covered with flesh and skin.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Spirit of God gives the dry bones the breath of life, and they become an army.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ezekiel has a vision of the glory of God with four strange creatures and an amazing chariot.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ezekiel is called to be a prophet of God to the house of Israel.

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:10** - "But the official told Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.'"



# **THE CAPTIVES REMAIN FAITHFUL**

## **Daniel 1**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students the importance of being faithful to God, even in a sinful world.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:10** - “But the official told Daniel, ‘I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.’”

### **Lesson Background**

Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were faced with people and circumstances that pressured them to change. They were removed from their own country, removed from their families, and forced to learn the language and culture of a different society. Even their very names - names that honored the Lord - were changed to names that glorified the Babylonian gods of Bel, Aku and Nebo. Nebuchadnezzar believed that if he forced these young men into a Babylonian mold, good young Babylonian men would result.

But while he could change these captives’ names, he could not change their hearts! Daniel “resolved not to defile himself,” and he and his friends remained faithful to the Lord, even in the midst of a heathen,

sinful society. In many ways, our society today also tries to squeeze Christians into its “mold,” and our students need to learn, even at this young age, that it is possible to say “no” to what is wrong and remain faithful to the Lord. The temptations that they face now are only going to escalate as they get older. Let’s lay the foundation early and show them the importance of being faithful to God, even when the world around them wants them to do otherwise.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin your lesson this week by having your students imagine that they and their families were moving to Germany. “What would be different about life in Germany? What kinds of things would you have to learn?” Most of your students will remember that German is spoken in Germany, and they would have to learn how to speak and read German to get along well there. But remind them that other things would be different, too; there is a different money system in Germany, for example, and one would have to learn how much a German “euro” is worth. Distances and weight are measured in the metric system; there are many things that would have to be learned.

“But let’s say you spent several years in Germany, and you learned how to speak and read the language and how to do things the German way - would that make you a German? No, you would still be an American (or Canadian) citizen, unless you chose to ask for German citizenship. But now suppose someone tried to force you to become a German against your own will; how do you think you’d feel about that?” Let students discuss this for a moment, then explain that this week’s lesson looks at four young men who were forced to live in another country, learn its language and customs, and even to change their names, yet they still remained true to themselves and to the Lord.

### **1. Daniel and His Friends Taken into Captivity (Daniel 1:1-7)**

Have your students turn to Daniel 1 and read verses 1-7 aloud in class. Explain that Babylon had gone to war against Jerusalem, and the Lord allowed them to take the city. Nebuchadnezzar took many valuable things out of Jerusalem, including some things from God’s Temple. He also carried off some people - in particular, some young men.

Have your students read verse 4 and describe what kind of young men were taken captive. “These young men - probably teenagers - were the very best in Jerusalem. They were part of the royal family and the nobility and were intelligent, healthy, and quick to learn. Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to serve him in Babylon, so he took them away from their families and their country and set about to make them members of *his* kingdom - Babylon.”

Point out that Nebuchadnezzar even changed the names of these young men to Babylonian names that honored Babylonian gods. He wanted these young men to forget about their lives in Judah and begin new lives in Babylon as members of his court.

## **2. Daniel is Determined to Remain Faithful (Daniel 1:8-14)**

Now read verses 8-14 aloud in class. Explain to your class that, as Jews, Daniel and his friends obeyed the special dietary rules that God had given His people; for example, God had told the Israelites that they were not to eat pork or other ceremonially unclean animals. Furthermore, the food and wine that Nebuchadnezzar was giving these young men had first been offered to idols. Daniel knew that eating such things would break God's commandments, and he was determined not to do so.

“It would have been easy for Daniel simply to accept the king's food and eat it. After all, he could reason, he really didn't have much choice in the matter. He was just a young man and a captive in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. What could he do if the king wanted him to eat this way? But verse 8 says that ‘Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.’ He decided he would not break God's commandments by eating things that were unclean or offered to idols. He showed good judgment by not rebelling against the king, but by proposing a test to the chief official.”

Have your students look at verses 12-14 and describe the conditions of the test. Why do they think the chief official agreed to this? Was this a reasonable thing for Daniel to ask?

## **3. The Lord Blesses the Captives' Faithfulness (Daniel 1:15-21)**

Now finish the chapter by reading verses 15-21 aloud in class. Note that God blessed Daniel and his friends in two ways. The first area of blessing involved the test itself; the young men did not suffer physically from their diet of vegetables and water, as the chief official feared they would. Instead, they seemed even healthier and better-nourished than the other young men who ate the royal food! Surely this was the Lord's way of honoring Daniel's determination not to defile himself with the king's meat and drink.

But the Lord also blessed these four young men with knowledge and understanding so that the king “found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah” (verse 19). These young men honored the Lord and put Him first in their lives, and the Lord prospered them in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. This was not the only time these men would have to stand up for their convictions and remain faithful to the Lord; all four would put their very lives on the line later in life to be true to Him. But their faithfulness here in their youth set the tone for the rest of their lives, and they always stayed true to their convictions.

## **Conclusion**

“It's not always easy to do what's right, is it? We live in a world where many people don't care about what God thinks or what God says. Already you've probably felt pressure from friends or schoolmates or even adults to do something you know is wrong. Maybe a good friend wanted you to help him cheat on a test. Or maybe you were with a group of kids who were being mean and teasing another child. Or maybe someone was trying to get you try something that's harmful to your body, like smoking or drugs. Sometimes

it's difficult to stand up and do what's right, but we need to be like Daniel. We need to say, 'I don't care what everyone else is doing or what other people think. I'm going to do what's right.' The Lord will give you the strength to say 'no' when you need to and He'll bless you for being faithful. We need to be true to Him, even in a sinful world."

## Worksheet

Have students determine the "mystery word" by filling in the missing words in the sentences and using the numbered letters to spell the word. The missing words are: *friends*, *court*, *wine*, *defile*, *test*, *healthy* and *all* (your students may need help spelling some of these). The mystery word is **faithful**.

## Related Music

"We Choose the Fear of the Lord"; "Dare To Be A Daniel!" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #579).



## Student Worksheet

## The Captives Remain Faithful

Find the Mystery Word. Fill in the missing words in the sentences below to tell the story from Daniel 1. Then use the numbered letters to discover the “mystery word.”

1. Daniel and his 3 \_\_\_\_\_ were taken captive in Jerusalem.  
1
2. They were brought to the \_\_\_\_\_ of King Nebuchadnezzar.  
7
3. The king wanted Daniel to eat his meat and drink his \_\_\_\_\_.  
3
4. Daniel resolved not to \_\_\_\_\_ himself with the royal food and wine.  
6 8
5. The chief official agreed to Daniel’s \_\_\_\_\_ and served the Jewish boys vegetables and water.  
4
6. Daniel and his friends seemed more \_\_\_\_\_ than the young men who ate the royal food.  
5
7. The king found these four young men to be ten times better than \_\_\_\_\_ the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom.  
2

**Mystery Word:**

\_\_\_\_\_   
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:10** - “But the official told Daniel, ‘I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you’”



# **NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM**

## **Daniel 2**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students that all true wisdom and insight come from the Lord.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:11-12** - "Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.'"

### **Lesson Background**

There are thousands of universities, schools and institutions that promise to give students training, knowledge, and a good education, but how many can promise to make a student wise? There is a great difference between learning and wisdom; a highly-educated man may be a fool when it comes to important matters, while an uneducated man may possess great wisdom. As Sunday School teachers, we believe the source of all true wisdom comes from the Lord, and we encourage our students to "get wisdom, get understanding . . . though it cost all you have . . ." (Proverbs 4:5,7).

The prophecy in Daniel 2 - the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream - pertains to the Babylonian empire and the three empires that followed it - the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The rock

that was cut out, but not by human hands, refers to Christ, and to His kingdom that will never be destroyed. For the purposes of this lesson, we will not get bogged down in the interpretation, but we will instead emphasize that Daniel's wisdom and insight into this dream came from the Lord alone (as he himself was careful to point out). May your students learn to look to Him for true wisdom and understanding.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin your lesson this week by asking your students if any of them enjoys listening to the weatherman on the radio or television. "These weathermen (or women) are often 'meteorologists,' which means they have studied the atmosphere and the different things that affect our weather and climate. By using their knowledge and their special instruments, they try to predict what our weather will be like for the next few days. But are they always right? No, quite often they are wrong. Only the Lord knows for certain what the weather is really going to be like because conditions can change so suddenly.

"Lots of people want to know what the future is going to be like, whether they are concerned about the weather, business opportunities, or have other concerns. But the future is a mystery that's known fully only by the Lord, although He does reveal some things to us in His Word. He alone is the source of all wisdom and knowledge. Daniel knew that; when he needed special wisdom and insight, he went to the Lord and it saved his life! That is what our lesson is about today."

### **1. Nebuchadnezzar's Impossible Demand (Daniel 2:1-13)**

Read Daniel 2:1-13 aloud in class. Explain that many pagan kings of that day (kings who did not know the Lord, but worshiped idols) had people in their court who were supposed to have special "knowledge" about the spirit world and the future. King Nebuchadnezzar had magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers in his court. These were his "wise men," and they helped him decide what to do as king (these kinds of advisors were condemned by God, since the source of their information was evil and demonic - cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-14). Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were also among the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar's court, but the source of their knowledge was the Lord, who gave them wisdom and understanding (Daniel 1:17).

One night Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him greatly and he called for his magicians and astrologers to appear before him. He wanted an interpretation for this dream, but only a true interpretation. He did not want one of these men to make up an interpretation, so he decided that he wouldn't even describe the dream to them. He demanded that his so-called wise men tell him both the dream and its interpretation.

This terrified the magicians and astrologers; if they knew the dream, they could at least lie about the interpretation, even if they didn't know its real meaning. The king, however, was determined to kill all of the wise men if none of them could tell him the dream! They protested, and told him that he was making an impossible request, which made the king even more angry. He ordered the execution of all the wise men in Babylon. This included Daniel and his friends, even though they hadn't been summoned by the king to interpret his dream.

## 2. Daniel Responds (Daniel 2:14-19)

Now read Daniel 2:14-19 aloud in class. Daniel was a “wise man” in the truest sense of the words, and we see his wisdom throughout this passage. After reading the verses aloud, ask your students to list some of the things that Daniel did wisely. The list may include the following:

- He spoke to the king’s officer with wisdom and tact. He didn’t panic when the guards came to execute him, but discussed the matter calmly and got his facts straight.
- He asked for time to interpret the dream. He didn’t rush into an interpretation or put himself on the spot.
- He asked the Lord to reveal the mystery to him. He knew the Lord alone had the interpretation to this dream, and He would have to reveal it in His mercy to Daniel if his life were to be saved.
- He asked his friends to pray with him.
- He praised the Lord when the answer was revealed to him by God.

Look at the praise that Daniel gave the Lord in verses 20-23, and especially at verses 21-22, in which he says that the Lord “gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things. . . .”

## 3. Daniel Interprets the Dream (Daniel 2:24-49)

Due to the length of this chapter, you will want to summarize the rest of the events for your students, pointing out some of the key verses as you go. Note first that Daniel gave the Lord the glory and the credit when he appeared before the king. Look at verses 26-28, in which Daniel declared that “there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.” Daniel wanted the king to know that it was not his wisdom that allowed him to discover the answer to the puzzle, but the Lord’s wisdom and mercy that revealed it to him.

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream itself can be summarized as follows: the king dreamed about events to come, about his kingdom and three other kingdoms that would rise after it. In his dream, a statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay presented a picture of those kingdoms. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a prophecy about what would happen to these kingdoms and He showed him that someday “the God of Heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed” (verse 44).

Be certain to look at king Nebuchadnezzar’s response to the interpretation in verses 47-49. He praised Daniel’s God and promoted Daniel to be the ruler of the entire province of Babylon. Daniel’s friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (called by their Babylonian names in verse 49) were also promoted at Daniel’s request.

## **Conclusion**

God knows all things, including the things that are to come, and therefore He is the source of all wisdom. If we want to be wise we will get to know His Word, in which He tells us what is happening today, what will happen in the future, and how we should live. And if we need wisdom for a particular situation, we can come to Him in prayer and ask Him to help us and show us the way. God's Word promises that "if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask of God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it shall be given to him" (James 1:5).

## **Worksheet**

Have your students look up the verses in Proverbs on the worksheet and fill in the missing words. These verses are taken from the New International Version, but the missing words are key words that will be the same in most translations (if your students do work with other translations, it might be helpful to read the verses aloud from the different translations for comparison and discussion).

## **Related Music**

"Our God is an Awesome God"; "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #38).

## Student Worksheet

## Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Fill in the blanks. The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about wisdom. Look up the following verses and fill in the missing words.

“The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but \_\_\_\_\_ despise wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:7).

“Get wisdom, get \_\_\_\_\_: do not forget my \_\_\_\_\_ or swerve from them” (Proverbs 4:5).

“For wisdom is more precious than \_\_\_\_\_, and nothing you desire can \_\_\_\_\_ with her” (Proverbs 8:11).

“A \_\_\_\_\_ man fears the Lord and shuns \_\_\_\_\_, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless” (Proverbs 14:16).

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:11-12** - “Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ‘Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.’”





# **THE FIERY FURNACE**

## **Daniel 3**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show your students that the Lord is able to save and keep His own.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:13** - “Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.”

### **Lesson Background**

In Daniel 3, it is interesting to compare the sovereignty of Nebuchadnezzar with the Lord’s supreme sovereignty. Nebuchadnezzar appears at first to be the one with all the power and authority. He has the image of gold built, he commands the government officials to bow before it, he decrees death for anyone who refuses to obey, and he gives the order for that decree to be carried out against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego know who the true Sovereign is; they know that His commands take precedence over anything Nebuchadnezzar decrees. While Nebuchadnezzar appears to have the power over life and death, it is interesting to note that his servants, who carry out his order to execute Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, receive death (verse 22), while the three Jews are saved from all harm in the midst of the fiery furnace! Truly our God is sovereign, with the power to save and keep His own.

Let's remind our students this week that they can trust the Lord with all their hearts, for He will never leave nor forsake His children.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin your lesson this week with a discussion about power and authority. "Who is the most powerful person in our country? Is it the President (or Prime Minister)? When the President signs a bill into law, should he expect the citizens of the U.S.A. to obey it? Yes, he should expect that any bill he signs into law will be obeyed.

"But what about the people in Japan; do they have to obey the laws of the United States? No, of course not. They have their own laws and they don't have to do anything the President says. They may do something he asks them to do out of respect and friendship, but not because they have to do it. In the same way, we don't obey the laws of England, France, Russia, or any other country in the world.

"But there once was a king who had sovereignty over most of the known world. When we say 'sovereignty,' we mean he was the chief or supreme ruler. He had the power and authority to make laws and to see that those laws were obeyed. His name was Nebuchadnezzar, and one day he made a terrible law that three Jewish men refused to obey."

### **1. King Nebuchadnezzar Sets Up an Image of Gold (Daniel 3:1-7)**

Read Daniel 3:1-7. King Nebuchadnezzar set up a huge image of gold (ninety feet high, which may have included the image's pedestal) and gathered all the government officials in the province to come to its dedication. Scholars believe the image may have been of the Babylonian god Nabu, after whom Nebuchadnezzar was named. In essence, by pledging allegiance to this image, the government officials would be showing their allegiance and loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, all those who did not bow before the image were to be thrown into a blazing furnace.

"Nebuchadnezzar wanted all of his government officials to bow before this idol. But three of his officials were Jews who served the one true God. These three men - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - knew they could never bow before the king's image. They knew that doing so would be a sin and would dishonor their God."

### **2. The Jews Refuse to Bow (Daniel 3:8-18)**

Now read verses 8-18 aloud in class. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (the Babylonian names for Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol. This infuriated the king (one can assume it was not because he was such a pious follower of his gods, but because they defied his direct command); look at verse 12, where the astrologers accused the Jews by saying, "[they] pay no attention to you, O king." Nebuchadnezzar summoned the three men and gave them one last chance to prove their loyalty to him by worshiping the image of gold. But in verses 16-18 the Jews stated firmly that they would not worship the image and asserted their confidence in the power of their God to save them if He chose to do so.

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew that the Lord is the only true God and that He had the power to save them, even from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. They were willing to put themselves in His hand whether He chose to save them or not. They would rather have died in the fiery furnace than dishonored their God.” (Note: Some of your students may wonder where Daniel was during this incident. Most believe Daniel was probably out of the country at this time, as he was now in a very high position in the kingdom. Daniel’s refusal to compromise in such instances is well documented on several other occasions, and if he had been there we believe he also would have refused to bow before the king’s idol.)

### **3. The Lord Delivers Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:19-27)**

Now read verses 19-27 aloud in class. Nebuchadnezzar exerted the full power of his authority by condemning the three men to death. In fact, his rage was such that he commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual! The Jews were thrown into the furnace while still in their fine robes and turbans.

But as Nebuchadnezzar stepped back to see his sentence carried out, he received the shock of his life. Not only did he see the three men walking around in the fire, “unbound and unharmed,” but he saw a fourth person with them. And this person’s appearance is not like an ordinary human’s; Nebuchadnezzar said he looked like “a son of the gods!” (Many scholars believe this to be an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ). The king immediately called Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego out of the furnace; they not only came out of the fire alive, but without any evidence of being in the fire at all. Even their clothes and hair did not smell sooty.

Even king Nebuchadnezzar was forced to praise the Lord at this deliverance. He sent a proclamation that no word could be spoken against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in his kingdom upon penalty of death. In verse 29 we read that Nebuchadnezzar said, “No other god can save in this way.”

## **Conclusion**

“Isn’t it wonderful to know that the God we serve has the power to save and keep His own? He is truly the sovereign one - the one with the power and authority to do as He pleases. And He cares about His children and promises always to be there with them, even as He was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.” Have students look up Isaiah 43:1-2. If we are Christians, the Lord has promised to protect and keep us throughout our lives no matter what we may encounter. Even in death, we know He has the power to save us from hell if we are trusting in His Son for salvation. He is a mighty God with the power to save and keep His own!

## **Worksheet**

Have students imagine that they were one of Nebuchadnezzar's advisors, and then describe what they saw when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace. Help students out with vocabulary, spelling, etc., as they write this down.

## **Related Music**

“Our God Reigns”; “You are My Hiding Place”; “How Firm A Foundation” (especially verses 2-4; *Trinity Hymnal*, #94).





# **NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S MADNESS**

## **Daniel 4**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students that God is sovereign over all things and that He does as He pleases with the kings and the people of the earth.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:14** - "So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days."

### **Lesson Background**

In last week's lesson, King Nebuchadnezzar had to admit the supremacy of the God of the Jews. In this week's lesson, he will come to see that the Lord is also sovereign in all the affairs of men and rules over all things, including Nebuchadnezzar. This realization comes only after Nebuchadnezzar is humbled by seven years of insanity, during which he lives like a wild animal. This certainly qualifies as learning a lesson "the hard way," and yet the end result has Nebuchadnezzar praising and exalting and glorifying the Lord and acknowledging Him as the King of heaven.

Because of the length of the material in this lesson, we will have to summarize some of the chapter rather than read it all aloud in class. The best place for this summarization will come when Daniel interprets the dream, for he repeats much of what has already been described. Lengthy passages and passages with

difficult names or words are sometimes best read by the teacher. However, we want to encourage our students to read the passages aloud in class whenever possible, and we want students who are not reading aloud to follow along in their Bibles no matter who is reading the text. Nothing gets one more familiar with one's Bible or brings the message home more clearly than reading the words oneself.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin your lesson this week by reviewing the term "sovereignty" as it was defined in last week's lesson. "When we say someone is 'sovereign,' we mean he is the chief or supreme ruler. He has the power and authority to do as he pleases, and to make the laws he wishes to make. Can anyone remember the king's name in Daniel who had sovereignty over Babylon? That's right, Nebuchadnezzar. But last week Nebuchadnezzar learned there was a God who was supreme over all other gods - the Lord, the God of the Jews. This week he will learn that the Lord is also his sovereign ruler, and that He does as He pleases with the kings and the peoples of the earth."

### **1. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and Its Interpretation (Daniel 4:1-27)**

Read Daniel 4:1-8 aloud in class. This chapter appears to be written as a decree or proclamation that king Nebuchadnezzar gave to the people of his kingdom concerning the experiences that had happened to him. Some of it is written in the first person, in Nebuchadnezzar's words, and some of it is written in the third person. As in chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that he recognized as being important; in fact, it terrified him! He told the dream to the wise men in his court, but none of them could interpret the dream. Finally, Daniel arrived and the king told him the dream (note the admiration and confidence that Nebuchadnezzar now had in Daniel).

Now read verses 9-19 aloud in class. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in which a great tree was cut down by the authority of heaven and a proclamation was made against it. Daniel was given insight by the Lord as to the meaning of the dream, and the interpretation disturbed him. At Nebuchadnezzar's urging, he told the king that he was the tree he saw in the dream.

Then summarize verses 20-27. "Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he was the great tree he saw in the dream. He had grown strong and his kingdom had spread throughout the land. But the Lord was going to cut down the tree by making the king insane for seven years. He would live as a wild animal and eat grass like the cattle. He would be outside of the palace, driven away from the people. These things would happen for seven years, and then the king would confess that the Lord is sovereign over all the kingdoms of men. Still, the Lord would leave the stump of the tree, and Nebuchadnezzar would be restored to his kingdom once he confessed that the Lord rules. Daniel urged the king to repent of his sins and do what was right in the hope that this would change the judgment of heaven."

### **2. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and Fall (Daniel 4:28-33)**

Now read Daniel 4:28-33 aloud in class. Evidently Nebuchadnezzar did not take Daniel's advice and repent of his wicked ways. Moreover, he was filled with pride; he gloried in his



accomplishments and refused to acknowledge the Lord's goodness and sovereignty in providing him with this kingdom. One year after his dream he utters these words, which show the extent of his ego and pride: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

The words were still on his lips when the Lord responded by bringing the prophecy to pass. King Nebuchadnezzar lost his sanity. He became like a wild beast and was driven away from the people. He ate grass like a cow and remained in this state for seven years.

"Nebuchadnezzar glorified himself. He praised himself. He thought he alone was responsible for all the good things that had happened to him. But the Lord was the one who decided that Nebuchadnezzar would be king of Babylon. The Lord delivered the other nations into his hands. The Lord was responsible for giving him this kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar refused to acknowledge this, so the Lord showed him just who was 'the boss!' Nebuchadnezzar may have been sovereign over Babylon, but the Lord was his sovereign. Nebuchadnezzar learned just how quickly he could lose everything."

### **3. Nebuchadnezzar's Restoration (Daniel 4:34-37)**

God in His mercy did not leave Nebuchadnezzar in this state of madness. In verses 34-37 the account returns to a first-person narrative, with Nebuchadnezzar retelling what had happened to him. Read these verses aloud in class and ask the following questions:

- What did king Nebuchadnezzar do when his sanity was restored? (He praised the Lord and glorified him.)
- What did he learn from this experience? (That the Lord is in charge of all the people and kingdoms of the world and He does just as He pleases.)
- What happened to Nebuchadnezzar after his sanity returned? (His kingdom was restored to him and he became even greater than before.)

"King Nebuchadnezzar had a difficult lesson to learn, and he learned it the hard way, didn't he? Do you think there are people today who are like Nebuchadnezzar - people who believe they've become successful or famous entirely on their own, without the Lord's hand in it at all? Certainly there are. The Lord may humble them as well. We need to remember who is in control of the whole world and of all the people, from the greatest to the smallest. We need to praise and thank Him for the great things He has done for us. And even when things don't seem to be going too well, we need to remember that He is in charge and we can put our confidence in Him to remember us and do what is best for us."

## **Worksheet**

Have students match the lessons that Nebuchadnezzar learned with the chapters in which he learned them. With some of the questions there may be some variance on how many chapters to include, but generally the answers should read: 3,1,4,2 and 4,3,4,2 and 4,4.

## **Related Music**

“Our God Reigns”; “Our God is an Awesome God”; “This is My Father’s World” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #111).

## Student Worksheet

## Nebuchadnezzar's Madness

King Nebuchadnezzar certainly has learned a lot of things in Daniel 1-4! Match the things that Nebuchadnezzar has learned with the chapters in which they occurred. Hint: In some instances, Nebuchadnezzar learned the same thing in two different instances, so the answer might include two chapters instead of one.

- Chapter 1 - The Captives Remain Faithful
- Chapter 2 - Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream
- Chapter 3 - The Fiery Furnace
- Chapter 4 - Nebuchadnezzar's Madness

### Chapter Number

### Nebuchadnezzar's lesson

- \_\_\_\_\_ Learned there was a God in heaven who could save his servants.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Found Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be ten times better than all the wise men in his court.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Learned to praise God for His goodness and greatness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Learned there was a God in heaven who could interpret dreams.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Learned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were servants of the Most High God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Learned to give God the glory for his kingdom.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Learned that God is the revealer of mysteries.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Learned that the Lord was his sovereign ruler.

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:14** - "So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days."



# **THE WRITING ON THE WALL**

## **Daniel 5**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students that the Lord judges those who set themselves against Him.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:15** - “At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.”

### **Lesson Background**

Some time passed between the events of Daniel 4 and Daniel 5, and we find that Belshazzar, the step-grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, has become the king of Babylon (the Aramaic term which is translated “son” can also mean “grandson,” “descendant,” or even “successor”). Nebuchadnezzar had been succeeded, after a period of conflict over the throne, by his stepson Nabonidus, who soon tired of the pressures of ruling and departed for a monastery in the desert, leaving his son Belshazzar to rule the kingdom as regent. At this time Daniel is about 80 years of age; he does not appear to have the high position he once held under Nebuchadnezzar, although his reputation is still known by some.

Nor does Belshazzar appear to be the ruler his grandfather was. Not only is he feasting and drinking on the eve of the fall of his empire (and the night before his own death), but the people of Babylon feel

oppressed by his rule. When the army of the Medo-Persians conquers the city, they are welcomed as liberators; palm branches are strewn in the way to welcome them. What a pitiful end to the glorious kingdom about which Nebuchadnezzar had once boasted! Belshazzar is divested of the kingdom and his own life almost before he knows what is happening. As Christ said in Luke 12:20, “But God said to him ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”

## **Lesson Procedure**

Introduce this week’s lesson by discussing something that has happened to everyone; we’ve all had our plans changed due to circumstances beyond our control. “Have you ever looked forward to something special, and then suddenly your plans had to be changed? Maybe you were looking forward to a baseball game and it got rained out. Or maybe you were planning to go to a friend’s birthday party, and then you got sick. It’s always disappointing when something good has to be cancelled or postponed.” Have students relate some experiences they may have had that are like this.

“But sometimes it works the other way, too; sometimes something we were dreading may be postponed. Maybe you had a spelling test at school, and then school was called off because of bad weather. Or maybe a trip to the dentist was cancelled and you felt relieved. The truth is, our plans, whether good or bad, sometimes get changed, and there’s not a thing we can do about it. These things are in the hands of the Lord.” Have students turn to James 4:13-16 and read these verses aloud in class. “These verses remind us that we don’t really know what’s going to happen in the future; only the Lord knows what really is going to take place. Our lesson this week is about a king who learned this lesson - a little too late.”

### **1. Belshazzar’s Feast and the Mysterious Fingers (Daniel 5:1-9)**

Share with your students some of the information in the Lesson Background concerning the passage of time between Daniel 4 and 5 and the new king of Babylon, Belshazzar. Then read Daniel 5:1-9 aloud in class. Point out the blasphemous use of the goblets from God’s Temple; Belshazzar and his court use these to praise the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.

Belshazzar had nothing on his mind that night but having a good time. Something very unexpected and terrifying happened that sobered him up quickly. The fingers of a human hand appeared (apparently without the rest of the body!) and wrote on the plaster of the wall! This terrified the king to the point that “his knees knocked together, and his legs gave way” (verse 6). While the king’s “wise men” (the enchanters, astrologers, and diviners) could see the writing, they couldn’t read it or tell what it meant. This terrified the king even more.

### **2. Daniel is Summoned (Daniel 5:10-17)**

Now have students read verses 10-17. Fortunately for Belshazzar, there was someone in the court who remembered Daniel and his reputation for interpreting dreams and solving mysteries. The queen, who may have been Belshazzar’s mother or grandmother, came into the hall and told Belshazzar to take courage and send for Daniel.

Daniel was by this time an old man. He does not appear to have held any position of authority in Belshazzar's court. But he was still the same Daniel; we see in verse 17 that he was unmotivated by greed and told the king he could keep his rewards for himself. Daniel would tell the king the judgment of God.

“Just before the handwriting appeared on the wall, Belshazzar showed nothing but contempt and disrespect to the God of Israel. He even used the goblets from God's Temple to praise the false gods of Babylon. But now that trouble had come, he had nowhere to turn but to the man of God. This happens to a lot of people; they give no thought or concern to God until trouble comes, and then they run to Him for help. Unfortunately for Belshazzar, it was now too late, for his time of judgment had come.”

### **3. The Judgment Against Belshazzar (Daniel 5:18-31)**

Have students read verses 18-23 aloud in class. Daniel began the pronouncement of God's judgment against Belshazzar by reminding him of the past. Daniel took the king back to the days when his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar ruled and reminded him of how God humbled him by giving him the mind of an animal for seven years. Nebuchadnezzar was restored to power only after he acknowledged that the Lord was sovereign over the kingdoms of men.

Daniel said Belshazzar was aware of this, but chose to ignore the Lord of heaven. He had praised and worshiped other gods and had set himself against the one true God - the God who held in his hand his very life and all his ways. How foolish! Belshazzar not only couldn't claim ignorance of the God of Israel; he had sinned in the very face of God in spite of everything he knew.

Now read verses 24-31 aloud in class. The day of judgment had come to Belshazzar. Daniel read the writing on the wall, and it was all bad news for the king. His rule was ended, and his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Belshazzar was killed that very night, and a new king, Darius the Mede, came to the throne of Babylon.

## **Conclusion**

“God's judgment came swiftly upon Belshazzar. He was aware of everything that had happened to his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, and still he refused to humble himself before the Lord. The very night he had planned his big party was the night in which he died.”

“God has promised to judge all evildoers - all who refuse to humble themselves and come to Christ for salvation. The Lord is merciful to us now, but the time is coming when all shall appear before him to be judged. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life - those who know Christ as their Savior - will escape God's wrath (Revelation 20:15). Don't be like Belshazzar, who refused to humble himself before God. If you are not yet a Christian, come to Christ today. Repent of your sins. Ask Christ for forgiveness, and have Him be the Lord of your life forever.” Remind your students that you will be available after class if any have questions about their salvation.

## **Worksheet**

Have students choose words from the Word Bank to complete the paragraph. The words are: *feast*, *temple*, *fingers*, *wrote*, *queen*, *kingdom*, and *killed*.

## **Related Music**

“Thank You, Lord (For Saving My Soul)”; “Call On The Lord While He May Be Found”; “Day of Judgment! Day of Wonders!” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #319).



## Student Worksheet

## The Writing on the Wall

Select the words from the Word Bank that will complete the paragraph (not all of the words are used).

King Belshazzar had a \_\_\_\_\_ . He and his guests drank from goblets from God's \_\_\_\_\_ . They were praising false gods when \_\_\_\_\_ mysteriously appeared and \_\_\_\_\_ a message on the wall. The king was very afraid, but the \_\_\_\_\_ remembered Daniel. Daniel was sent for, and he told the king that his \_\_\_\_\_ would be taken away and given to the Medes and Persians. That very night Belshazzar was \_\_\_\_\_ and Darius became the ruler of Babylon.

### Word Bank:

wrote                      warned                      Temple                      kingdom  
fingers                      feast                      servant                      killed                      queen

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:15** - "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food."



# **DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN**

## **Daniel 6**

### **Lesson Aim**

To display to the students Daniel's faith in God and his faithfulness to God as an example for us to follow.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:16** - "So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead."

### **Lesson Background**

Perhaps you read a children's book about Daniel or have seen flannelgraph that depicted a young Daniel being thrown to the lions. While this is perhaps done to appeal to children, it is not true to the biblical account and really does a disservice to the story. Daniel was a very old man when he was thrown to the lions - most likely in his eighties. He was not a courageous young man in the prime of life daring to take on the den of lions, but rather a courageous old man who calmly obeyed his Lord, willing to trust himself to God whatever the outcome might be. For Daniel, this was how he had always lived his life, as we shall see when we review many of the situations he and his friends had already been through. Daniel is a wonderful example of someone who lived his life "by faith from first to last" (Romans 1:17); the man who stood up for what was

right when he was a teenager continued to stand as an old, old man. His faith is truly an example for all of us to follow, as we will encourage our students to do this week.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin your lesson this week by reviewing all the situations Daniel and his three friends (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah) endured in the land of Babylon. Your students (with a little help from you, perhaps) should recall the following:

- Stood up for their beliefs and declined to eat the king's food (Daniel 1).
- Rescued from death when the Lord gave Daniel the interpretation of the king's dream (Daniel 2).
- Rescued from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3).
- Watched God's judgment fall on Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar (Daniel 4-5).

“Daniel and his friends certainly saw God work in their lives in Babylon. He protected them, saved them from death, and dealt with the kings of Babylon. By the time of this week's lesson, Daniel was a very old man, but he once again had an important job in Babylon. But we find he was once again in a place of danger from which only the Lord could rescue him.”

### **1. Daniel's Enemies and Their Plan (Daniel 6:1-9)**

Read Daniel 6: 1-9 aloud in class. After the fall of Belshazzar and the Babylonian Empire, Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, probably as a provincial ruler under the Persian emperor Cyrus. Once again Daniel found himself in a position of power and influence; he was made one of three administrators who ruled over all of the other officials of the kingdom. He served the king so well that Darius planned to make him the chief administrator and set him up over the kingdom. Unfortunately, in the world of politics, having power almost guarantees having enemies, and Daniel was no exception. The other government officials were jealous of Daniel and his influence, so they looked for means of charging him with wrongdoing in order to bring him down. But Daniel was a godly, conscientious, hard-working, and dedicated servant of the king. Point out to your students the response of these men in verse 5: “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God!”

Have your students describe the plan of Daniel's enemies in their own words. Point out that this plan flattered the king and set him up like a god. This appeal to the king's vanity worked, and he signed into law a decree that stated that anyone who prayed to anyone but him for the next thirty days would be cast into a den of lions. Since Daniel's enemies knew that he would continue to pray to his God no matter what the law stated, they felt they had the perfect plan to get rid of Daniel.

## **2. Daniel's Faith in God (Daniel 6:10-16)**

Now read Daniel 6:10-16 aloud in class. The trap had been set, and Daniel's enemies waited "as a group" to see what he would do. Daniel knew the edict had been published but refused to change his ways. He not only prayed to the Lord, but he prayed three times a day, with his window open looking toward Jerusalem. Prayer was not an optional thing for Daniel. It was an important part of his daily life. One might sooner ask him to give up food or sleep or breathing; it was something he could not do without.

"Do you think it might have been tempting to Daniel to at least pray in secret, when no one was looking? Just for the thirty days? Daniel refused to change his daily habit of prayer, even for the thirty days. He had faith in God and he knew God could deliver him, even from the lions' den." You might point out that Daniel was a Jew in a high government office, and the other exiled Jews in Babylon would have been aware of his position (we see this was the case in Ezekiel 14:14). Perhaps Daniel continued to pray as he did to set an example for the other Jews in the kingdom so that they would continue to serve the true God without fear.

When Daniel's enemies (again, "as a group") brought the charges against Daniel, the king became greatly distressed. Now it was apparent that this appeal to his vanity was merely a trap set for Daniel, and he had been duped by his own administrators. He worked to find a way around the law to save Daniel from the lions, but he was trapped by his own authority to throw Daniel in the den. In the end, both he and Daniel knew that his only hope was to be rescued by the Lord (verse 16).

## **3. God's Faithfulness to Daniel (Daniel 6:17-28)**

Now read verses 17-28 aloud in class. As Daniel was thrown to the lions, we see how truly upset the king was over this situation. Perhaps he blamed himself for Daniel's situation; we see that he was unable to sleep while Daniel was in the lions' den, and that he called out to Daniel "in an anguished voice" in the morning.

And then we see that he was "overjoyed" to hear Daniel's reply! "My God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions" (verse 22). We read that Daniel was lifted from the den without a wound "because he had trusted in his God" (verse 23). God was faithful to Daniel and saved him from the lions. Once again, Daniel became a witness to God's power and sovereignty, as the king issued a decree calling for all to fear and reverence the God of Daniel who "rescues and saves."

## **Conclusion**

"Daniel should be an example to us. It's not always easy to stand up for what's right and do what pleases the Lord. Certainly Daniel couldn't have found it easy with those lions waiting for their dinner! But God was faithful to Daniel. He had the power to protect and keep him, and He has the power to protect and keep us, too. Let's remember, the next time we do what's right and we feel all alone, that the Lord is with us. He watches out for us and He will bless us for doing what is right."

## **Worksheet**

Have students find and circle the nine lions that are surrounding Daniel in our Word Search.

## **Related Music**

“Seek Ye First (The Kingdom Of God)”; “Daniel Was A Man Of Prayer”; “Dare To Be A Daniel”  
(*Trinity Hymnal*, #579).

The lions are surrounding Daniel! See if you can find and circle nine lions in this Word Search. The lions are up and down, sideways, and straight across.

L L N I L O L I O N  
L I O N O L I N N L  
I L D A N I E L O N  
O L L O N O I I L L  
N L I N O N L O N I  
N L I O N L I N L O  
L O I N O L L I O N

Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:16** - "So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead."





# **ESTHER THE QUEEN**

## **Esther**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show your students that God works sovereignly through human events to accomplish His own purposes.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:17** - "To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."

### **Lesson Background**

Read the book of Esther this week in its entirety to prepare for this lesson. Much has been made of the fact that God's name does not appear in this book; in fact, the entire book seems almost "secular." But it is very clear as one reads Esther that God is in control of all the events that occur, and that He is bringing the situations and people together to accomplish His purpose - in this case, to save the Jewish nation from destruction. There is no other way to account for the many "coincidences" that eventually lead to Haman's doom and the salvation of the Jews.

It will be impossible to take our students through the book of Esther chapter by chapter in the time frame of a Sunday School lesson. Therefore, we will summarize some of the events for our students and

concentrate on chapters 4 and 5, where Mordecai calls upon Esther to act on behalf of her people. These chapters highlight both God’s sovereignty over human events and Esther’s responsibility to speak to the king. Like Daniel, Esther is placed in a position of making a choice between remaining comfortable in the king’s palace or risking her life to do what is right. Like Daniel, she makes the right choice and sees God’s deliverance, both for herself and for her people.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Have students turn to the book of Esther and begin by explaining that the events recorded in Esther take place in Persia sometime after Daniel’s death. “This week we’re going to learn about a woman named Esther. Like Daniel, she held a position of influence in the palace. Like Daniel, she was Jewish, although she was born an exile in Persia. And, like Daniel, she had to put her life on the line to do what she knew was right.”

### **1. Esther is Made Queen of Persia (Esther 1-3)**

Explain to your students that the king of Persia, Xerxes, was looking for a new queen; the former queen, Vashti, had disobeyed his command to appear before his nobles and had embarrassed him, so he had her removed from his presence. To find a new queen, the king’s advisors suggested a “beauty contest” of sorts (actually more of a “tryout camp,” but your students don’t need to be told this); all the beautiful young girls in the kingdom were to be rounded up and brought to the palace. The girl who pleased the king the most would be selected as the new queen of Persia.

The king appointed commissioners to bring the beautiful girls to the palace. One of the girls who was selected was a Jewish woman named Hadassah, or Esther. Her cousin Mordecai, who had raised her when her parents died, was an important official in the king’s court. Esther was brought into the king’s presence, and she pleased the king more than any of the other young girls. The king chose Esther to be his queen! But Mordecai had warned Esther not to tell anyone that she was Jewish; perhaps he feared she would make enemies if her nationality were known. So Esther was quiet about her family and her religion, and every day Mordecai would walk in the courtyard near her quarters to find out how she was doing.

But there was another man in King Xerxes’ court who hated Mordecai. He hated Mordecai so much that he wanted to kill all the Jews for Mordecai’s sake! His name was Haman, and he was the king’s second-in-command. Haman was so powerful that he convinced the king to allow him to issue a decree against all the Jews. This decree stated that all the Jews - young, old, women and children - were to be destroyed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. This decree was posted in all of the provinces of the kingdom. The Jews were to be destroyed!

### **2. Mordecai Calls Upon Esther to Act (Esther 4-5)**

Now read Esther 4 aloud in class. Esther was unaware of the king’s decree until she learned about it from Mordecai. Mordecai called upon Esther to speak to the king on behalf of her people.

But Esther was frightened. The king's law stated that if anyone came to him without being summoned, that person would be put to death! The only exception was if the king held out his royal scepter to the individual who appeared before him unsummoned. Esther wasn't sure the king would hold out his scepter to her. She hadn't been summoned to appear before him for thirty days, and perhaps she had fallen out of his favor.

Mordecai's answer in verses 12-14 is very important; have your students pay special attention to it. Mordecai was aware that Esther was not the Jews' only hope. He knew God was sovereign and could save the nation in another way. But he also knew Esther had a responsibility to God and to her people to act now and speak to the king. He even suggested that perhaps God had brought Esther to the throne for this very reason.

"Esther knew what she must do. She also knew it might mean losing her life to try to do it. But she told Mordecai that she was willing to try to talk to the king. She asked Mordecai and all the Jews in the capital city to fast for her, as she and her maidens would do. She resigned herself to God's will in the matter when she said, 'If I perish, I perish.'"

Now read Esther 5:1-8. Esther appeared before the king and the king extended his gold scepter to her, sparing her life. Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet she had prepared for them. This set into motion her plan to entreat the king to spare her life and the lives of her people.

### **3. The Events That Followed (Esther 6-10)**

Provide your students with a summary of the rest of the book of Esther; be certain to include the following information:

At the second banquet that Esther prepared for the king and Haman, she revealed to the king that she was Jewish and that Haman had plotted to kill all the Jews in the kingdom. The king was furious with Haman and ordered his execution. Haman's property was given to Esther, who gave it to Mordecai to manage. At Esther's request, the king allowed Mordecai to write a new decree, giving the Jews the right to assemble together and defend themselves against all attackers. When the day came for the Jews to be destroyed, they were ready and turned the tables on their enemies. They overpowered and killed thousands of their enemies throughout the provinces. The king gave Mordecai an important position in the palace, eventually making him his second in command. And together, Esther and Mordecai wrote a decree to all the Jews in Persia, calling them to celebrate each year on the day when the Lord delivered them from their enemies. This celebration is called Purim, and Jews still celebrate it every year to this day. It is a very happy, festive celebration.

## **Conclusion**

"The Lord was in control of all the events that we've learned about this week in the book of Esther. Even though the situation appeared desperate, He had brought Esther to the throne so that she might speak for her people. God worked through Esther to save all of the Jews. Our God is sovereign! Let's be willing, like Esther, to let Him use us for His own purposes. Let's be willing to follow where He leads and do what He wants us to do."

## Worksheet

The lives of Daniel and Esther have many similarities, and this week's worksheet is a comparison and contrast between these two Bible heroes. Have students write "E" by the sentences that are true of Esther, "D" by the sentences true of Daniel, and "B" by the answers that are true of both.

## Related Music

"Our God is an Awesome God"; "He Leadeth Me" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #600).

Some of the sentences below are true of Daniel, and some are true of Esther. Some are true of both. Write “**E**” in front of the sentences that are true of Esther, “**D**” in front of those true about Daniel, and “**B**” in front of those true of both.

\_\_\_\_\_ Could understand dreams and visions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Was silent about being Jewish.

\_\_\_\_\_ Had a powerful position in the palace.

\_\_\_\_\_ Was known to be very beautiful.

\_\_\_\_\_ Risked death to do what was right.

\_\_\_\_\_ Had a cousin who worked for the king.

\_\_\_\_\_ Was brought to Babylon as a teenage captive.

\_\_\_\_\_ Had three friends who worked for the king.

\_\_\_\_\_ Has a book in the Bible that bears his/her name.

**Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:17** - “To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.”



# **REBUILDING THE TEMPLE**

## **Ezra 1-3**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students God's great mercy as He brings the Jews out of exile and back to Jerusalem.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:18** - "At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar."

### **Lesson Background**

The seventy years of exile are finally over for Israel, and the Jews return to their homeland in this week's lesson. God has not forsaken His people, but mercifully moves the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of their God.

It is thrilling to see just how literally and completely the Scriptures are fulfilled in this return of the exiles. In Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah prophesied before the fall of Jerusalem that the captivity would last seventy years. "I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness . . . This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jeremiah 25:10-11). And Isaiah the prophet speaks of king Cyrus by name in his prophecy! "Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple,

“Let its foundations be laid”” (Isaiah 44:28). Even as God is planning Israel’s chastisement for her sins, He is also declaring her future restoration. What a merciful God He is! Let’s try to impress upon our students the greatness of God’s mercy this week and thank Him for His mercy and grace toward us.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin this week’s lesson by reviewing the events in some of the lessons we’ve had this quarter. You might use some of the following questions:

- Why had God allowed His people to be taken into exile? (Because of their continual sin, especially idolatry.)
- What country had conquered Judah? (Babylon)
- What happened to Jerusalem? (The city was destroyed, and so was God’s Temple.)
- What happened to the Jews who survived the war with Babylon? (Many were taken captive and exiled to live in other lands.)

“God had warned Judah many times, through many prophets, to repent of her sins and return to Him. Judah refused, and so the Lord punished her severely. But the Lord did not turn His back on His people. He was merciful to them. When we say that God shows ‘mercy,’ we mean that He is willing to forgive and He has the power to forgive. He treats His people with kindness and compassion. As we look at the book of Ezra this week, we see that the long exile is over! God is bringing His people back to their homeland, and His Temple will once again stand in the city of Jerusalem.”

### **1. Cyrus Allows the Exiles to Return to Judah (Ezra 1:1-7)**

Read Ezra 1:1-7 aloud in class. Explain that this Cyrus, king of Persia, is the Cyrus who captured Babylon the night that King Belshazzar had seen the writing on the wall. God moved Cyrus’ heart to allow the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple of their God. He proclaimed that any Jew who wished to might return to Judah. (Some of the Jews had made new lives for themselves in their exile and might not wish to return. But the Lord moved the hearts of many to return, many of them young men and women who had been born in exile and had never even seen the Jewish homeland.) Cyrus commanded the neighbors of these Jews to assist them with gold and silver and livestock for the cause. Cyrus himself returned the Temple articles that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away - some 5,400 articles of gold and silver.

“This was the day the Jews had been waiting for! Their exile had lasted seventy years, but now the Lord was bringing them back home. Once again they would have their own country. And they would be able to offer sacrifices to their God and worship in His Temple!”

The exiles returned with about 42,360 people, besides their male and female servants. Some of those who returned had been very young when they were taken into exile and were now old men and women. How glad they were to be returning to their homeland!



## **2. The People Rebuild the Altar (Ezra 3:1-6)**

Now have your students read Ezra 3:1-6. The Jews were returning to a land where they literally had to begin all over again. Jerusalem was little more than a desolate pile of rubble; the walls of the city and the great Temple were completely destroyed. Where should they begin in all of this mess? They began by rebuilding the altar and offering the sacrifices required by the law of God once again.

“For seventy years no sacrifices had been offered on behalf of the Jewish people. These sacrifices were important, because they were made on behalf of the sins of the people. They pointed to the hope of the coming Messiah, who would one day give Himself for the sins of His people. So the first thing the returning Jews did was to rebuild the altar and begin offering the sacrifices required by the law of God.”

## **3. The Foundation of the Temple is Laid (Ezra 3:7-13)**

Finish Ezra 3 by reading verses 7-13 in class. Once the altar was rebuilt, the next job the people had to unite to do was to rebuild the Temple of God. This was part of the directive that Cyrus gave the Jews as they left to return to Judah. The Jews gave much money for the rebuilding of the Temple; Ezra 2 tells us that 61,000 drachmas of gold were given as well as 5,000 minas of silver. The Temple had to be built in accordance with the law of God, so the priests and Levites were put in charge of the work to see that it was done correctly.

Once the foundation of the Temple was laid (that is, the base of the walls), the people celebrated with praise and thanksgiving. The priests sounded the trumpets and the sons of Asaph sang praises to God. But while most of the people shouted for joy over the beginning of the reconstruction, many of the older Jews, who had seen the glorious Temple of the old days, wept at the comparison. This Temple, they realized, would never equal the beauty of Solomon’s Temple. Even though God, in His mercy, had brought the exiles home, they still had lost much by their previous years of sin.

## **Worksheet**

The worksheet is really the “application” part of this lesson, as we look at the ways that God has shown His mercy to His children. Have students look up Psalm 103 and read verses 8-18. Then help them answer the questions on the worksheet. Some of the words that describe God’s mercy in this psalm are love, compassion, gracious, slow to anger - your students may have additional suggestions. Some of the things God has done for us: He doesn’t treat us as our sins deserve, He removes our transgressions from us, He has compassion on us, etc. Finally, the psalmist suggests we praise God or thank Him for His great mercy.

## **Related Music**

“Behold, What Manner of Love the Father”; “Bless the Lord, O My Soul”; “Thy Mercy and Thy Truth” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #60).

## Student Worksheet

## God's Great Mercy

Psalm 103 is a beautiful psalm about the great mercy of God. Read verses 8-17 and answer the following questions.

What are some words in this psalm that are used to describe God's mercy?

---

---

---

What are some of the things God has done for us that show His great mercy and love?

---

---

---

Now read verse 1. What does the psalm writer suggest we do when we think of God's great mercy?

---

---

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:18** - "At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar."



# **REBUILDING THE WALL**

## **Nehemiah 4,6**

### **Lesson Aim**

To show students the importance of doing God's will despite opposition.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:19** - "The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service."

### **Lesson Background**

This week's lesson concentrates on the events of Nehemiah 4 and 6, as Nehemiah encounters opposition from Israel's enemies, who seek to stop the work on the wall. But it would be beneficial for you to read the first three chapters of Nehemiah as well, both for the background on this lesson and for personal instruction. The story of Nehemiah's great desire for Jerusalem's reconstruction, his courage before the king of Persia, and his determination to get through a seemingly impossible task makes enjoyable and inspiring reading. While Nehemiah 3 may seem less significant, as it lists the workers and their places at the wall, this should also be an encouragement to us. All jobs done for the Lord's glory and according to His will are acknowledged as important by Him, whether they involve physical and tedious labor or perilous and exciting work. Like the workers listed by name in Nehemiah 3, God knows your name and He knows what you are doing out of love for Him.

As we near the end of the quarter, try to encourage your students to recite all of their memory verses as one complete passage. This will be easier for some than for others, but most will be surprised and proud of how many verses they can say after studying them this quarter.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin your lesson this week with a discussion about forts and fortresses. Perhaps you can locate a picture of a fort from a book or encyclopedia to show your students what a fort looks like. Or perhaps you or some of your students have visited one of the many reconstructed forts that we have throughout the country. Or, if you live in the north, perhaps some of your students have constructed a “snow fort.” Tailor the discussion to fit your experiences and class situation, but draw the students’ attention to the need for a fort to have *strong* walls. A fort, after all, is basically a walled enclosure to keep enemies out and keep the people within the fort safe.

“But when we talk about Jerusalem after the exile, we are talking about a city that lay in ruins. The walls of the city were completely broken down. There was no protection from the enemy. There was no way to keep the families who lived in Jerusalem safe. Getting the walls of the city rebuilt was of the utmost importance, but it was a huge task. And Jerusalem had enemies who did not want to see the wall rebuilt and who would oppose any who took on the job. But there was one man who was determined to have the walls of the city rebuilt, and he had faith that God would see His people through the task. That man was Nehemiah.”

### **1. Nehemiah Comes to Build the Wall (Nehemiah 1-3)**

Let’s give our students some background information on Nehemiah (drawn from Nehemiah 1-3) to help them understand the work he came to do. Nehemiah was a Jew who lived in Persia and served the Persian king as the royal cupbearer. One day some Jews who had recently returned to Jerusalem came to him and told him about the terrible condition of the city. The walls were broken down, the gates were burnt down, and the people living there were in danger. This news troubled Nehemiah greatly, and after praying to the Lord, Nehemiah asked the king’s permission to return to the city to rebuild the walls. The king granted his request and sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem with some supplies, soldiers, and letters for safe passage. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem as the new governor and rallied the people to work on the wall. The people enthusiastically began to repair the city wall and gates.

### **2. Opposition from the Enemy (Nehemiah 4)**

Now have your students turn to Nehemiah 4. You’ll be reading the entire chapter aloud in class, but you’ll be listing the acts of opposition against the reconstruction while you are reading. On a chalkboard or large piece of paper, draw a dividing line down the middle. On the left side write, “What Israel’s Enemies Did,” and on the right side write, “Nehemiah’s Response.” Then after reading each act of opposition, have your students describe the act and Nehemiah’s response while you write it down. At the end of chapter 4, your board (or paper) will look something like this:

<b>What Israel's Enemies Did</b>		<b>Nehemiah's Response</b>	
1.	Made fun of the workers	1.	Prayed and kept working
2.	Plotted to fight against the workers	2.	Prayed, posted a guard, and kept working
3.	Spread rumors of attacks	3.	Encouraged and armed the people, and kept working

### **3. Nehemiah is Threatened (Nehemiah 6:1-16)**

Like most bullies, Tobiah, Sanballat and the other enemies of Israel backed off once they discovered that Israel was ready to fight. They did not wish to take on all of the Jews, so they concentrated on getting at Nehemiah himself, feeling that if they could take care of the leader, the work on the wall would stop. Read Nehemiah 6:1-16, but stop to discuss and list the acts of opposition against Nehemiah.

- Nehemiah's enemies plotted to harm him. In verses 1-4 we see that Nehemiah's enemies tried to get him to meet with them under the pretense of "discussing" the reconstruction, but with the intent of harming him. Nehemiah refused to be distracted from the work. He believed their desire to talk was insincere, and merely an attempt to stop or slow down the work.
- Nehemiah's enemies threatened to spread lies about him to force him to meet with them. Nehemiah was shown a letter from Sanballat that accused him of conspiring to revolt against the king of Persia. He tried to frighten Nehemiah into stopping the work out of fear that the king might think he was a traitor. Again, Nehemiah refused to be intimidated. He flatly declared that Sanballat was lying about him and prayed that the Lord would strengthen him for the work.
- Nehemiah was told to run to the Temple for safety. Finally, Nehemiah's enemies paid one of the Jews to warn Nehemiah to flee into the Temple to save his life because men were supposedly coming to kill him. Since Nehemiah was not a member of a priestly family, entering the Temple building would have been against God's law, and therefore a sin. Nehemiah's reputation and standing as the leader of God's people would have been tarnished. Nehemiah refused to flee, and the work continued.

In verses 15-16, we read that the work on the wall was completed in 52 days (less than two months). This feat was so amazing that it caused Israel's enemies to fear; even they knew that such a thing could not be done apart from the help of Israel's God!

## **Conclusion**

Living God's way and doing what He wants us to do isn't always easy. Like Nehemiah, we may find that some people don't like the way we do things and will try to stop us from doing what is right. Perhaps

they will tease us about the way we act or the things we say. Perhaps they may try to bully us around, like Tobiah, Sanballat and the others tried to bully Nehemiah. We need to remember to stand firm like Nehemiah and not pay attention to their teasing, lies or threats. If we stand true to our Lord, He will help us to do what is right.

## **Worksheet**

For this worksheet, you will need scissors, glue, and another piece of paper for each student. Have the children cut out each “block,” and then arrange the blocks in the correct order to form a sentence about today’s lesson (the first word and last word are numbered to help with this). Then the students can glue the blocks into the shape of a wall, four blocks high and four blocks long, to remind them of the wall in today’s story. (The sentence should read, “Evil men tried to stop Nehemiah, but God kept him safe and the wall was built.”)

## **Related Music**

“The Battle is the Lord’s”; “Onward, Christian Soldiers” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #572).



## Student Worksheet

## Rebuilding the Wall

Cut out the blocks below and “build” a wall with them by arranging the words to make a sentence about today’s lesson. (The first word in the sentence and the last word in the sentence are numbered for you!)

<sup>1</sup> EVIL	BUT	KEPT	WALL
AND	MEN	STOP	NEHEMIAH
TRIED	TO	HIM	SAFE
GOD	WAS	THE	<sup>16</sup> BUILT

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:19** - “The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service.”



# **RETURNING TO GOD**

## **Nehemiah 8-10**

### **Lesson Aim**

To give our students a working, biblical definition of the term *repentance* and an understanding of its importance in the Christian's life.

### **Memory Verse**

**Daniel 1:20** - "In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."

### **Lesson Background**

*Webster's Dictionary* defines repentance as "feeling such regret over an action, intention, etc., as to change one's mind." But when the Bible speaks of true repentance, there is much more involved and implied by the term. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* defines repentance as "that inward change of mind, affections, convictions, and commitment, rooted in the fear of God and sorrow for offenses committed against Him, which, when accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ, results in an outward turning from sin to God and His service in all of life." For our third and fourth grade students, we will simplify this definition to say that repentance is a deep sorrow for sins that causes us to turn away from the wicked things we have done and turn to God and what He wants us to do.

We live in a time when the importance of repentance is downplayed or altogether ignored by many in “evangelical” circles. Often a sinner is told that all he needs to do is “ask Jesus to come into his heart” or “invite Jesus into his life.” We want the children in our churches to understand that they need a Savior because they are sinners, and only Jesus can give them a right standing before God. We want them to understand that repentance is necessary for the new birth; it is, in fact, a gift from God Himself (Acts 11:18). As we shall see in our lesson this week, the Israelites in Nehemiah 8-10 show us a picture of what true repentance is all about. Let’s use this opportunity to help our students understand what repentance is and why it is important in our Christian lives.

## **Lesson Procedure**

As we begin this lesson, review with your students Israel’s past sin of idolatry, for which reason the Lord allowed Babylon to conquer her and lead her people into exile. Review also the last two lessons dealing with Israel’s return to her homeland and the reconstruction of the wall of the city to set the stage for this week’s lesson.

“The Israelites had returned to their country, but would they also return to their wicked ways? Nehemiah, Ezra and the other leaders of Israel wanted to make certain that the people would follow the Lord their God according to His Word. Now that the people had settled in the land, they call an assembly of all the Jews. All of the people came to Jerusalem - the men, women, and children who were old enough to understand - to hear Ezra read from God’s Law.”

### **1. Ezra Reads from God’s Law (Nehemiah 8)**

Read Nehemiah 8:1-6 aloud in class, then skip down to read verses 9-12. As Ezra read the law to the people, it became clear to them just how far short they had fallen of God’s standard of holiness, both as a nation and as individuals. Verse 9 tells us that the people began to weep and mourn while they listened. Point out to your students the sorrow that the Israelites felt for their sins. “They knew that their sins had grieved the heart of God and they were sorry for their sin. God had been right and just to punish them by allowing Babylon to come and conquer them, for as a nation they had not been living as God’s people. Now they wanted to make a new start and live in a way that would please their Lord.”

Their grief was so great that Nehemiah came to admonish them not to weep, because it was a sacred day and a time for rejoicing. He and the Levites calmed the people and sent them to celebrate the day with feasting and joy. In verse 12 we read that the people celebrated “with great joy because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.”

### **2. The Israelites Confess Their Sin (Nehemiah 9)**

After the public reading of the law of God, the Israelites celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles according to God’s Word. Then, on the 24th day of the month, the nation once again came together in Jerusalem, this time for a day of mourning and repentance. Read Nehemiah 9:1-3 aloud in class. Explain to your students the following terms:

- Fasting - To fast is to go without food for a certain period of time to devote yourself to prayer and worship. In this instance, the fasting was also to signify sorrow over sin and repentance.
- Sackcloth - This is a garment of coarse, uncomfortable cloth that the Jews wore when they were in mourning.
- Dust on their heads - Another symbolic act to show sorrow and mourning. Mourners often threw dust or ashes upon their heads.

After the Israelites had confessed their sins as individuals, the Levites came before the people and prayed aloud, confessing before the Lord their sin as a nation. The beautiful prayer of Nehemiah 9:5-38 is too long a passage to read in class (although you should read it in preparation for teaching); you can summarize it for your students by saying that the Levites reminded the people of God's faithfulness to them despite their rebellion and sins against Him. They reminded the people that they were taken into captivity because they had not worshiped the Lord as they ought to have done and did not follow His commands. The Israelites had been unfaithful, while the Lord had always remained faithful and true. If you have time, you might read verses 32-37 of the prayer, which summarizes what the Levites said.

### **3. The Israelites Promise to Follow the Lord (Nehemiah 10)**

At the end of chapter 9 we see the leaders, the Levites, and the priests making a promise - and affixing their seals to it - to follow the Law of God. Nehemiah 10 has a list of names of the people who signed the pledge and what the pledge stated. Among other things, the people pledged not to marry others outside of the nation of Israel who worshiped idols. They promised to observe the Sabbath and the holy feasts and to bring their offerings to the Lord. And they promised not to neglect the house of the Lord.

“The Israelites had learned their lesson. They had repented of their sin. They were sorry for the wicked things they had done and they had confessed those things to the Lord. They had pledged to turn from those things and live now for the Lord, doing only those things that would please Him. Israel had not just returned to her homeland; now, as a nation, she had turned back to God.”

## **Conclusion**

Have your students look at their own lives. Do they know that they are sinners - that they have done things that have dishonored or displeased the Lord? Have they ever been sorry for the things they have done? Have they ever come to Christ in repentance, asking Him to forgive their sins and promising to serve Him instead? If they haven't, they need to recognize their need of the Savior and His forgiveness in their lives. Encourage any student with questions about his/her salvation to remain after class to discuss this with you.

## Worksheet

This week's worksheet reviews some of the people we've learned about this quarter. Have students read the sentences and write the name of the person each sentence describes in the blank provided. The answers should read: Daniel, Belshazzar, Esther, Nebuchadnezzar, Nehemiah, and Ezekiel.

## Related Music

"Cleanse Me (Search Me, O God)"; "Amazing Grace" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #460); "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #629); "What Can Wash Away My Sin?" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #307).

## Student Worksheet

## People of the Exile

Below are the names of some of the people we've learned about this quarter. Read the sentence and write the name of the person it describes in the blank following the sentence.

Ezekiel

Daniel

Nebuchadnezzar

Esther

Belshazzar

Nehemiah

1. "I was gifted by God to understand dreams, visions, and mysteries of all kinds."

\_\_\_\_\_

2. "I saw the writing on the wall the night my kingdom came to an end."

\_\_\_\_\_

3. "I risked my life to appear before the king to save my people."

\_\_\_\_\_

4. "I went mad and lived like an animal until I confessed that God is ruler over all."

\_\_\_\_\_

5. "I came to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city."

\_\_\_\_\_

6. "I saw a valley filled with dead, dry bones come to life."

\_\_\_\_\_

### Memory Verse

**Daniel 1:20** - "In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."